

Comments on “Taking stock of the 2016 work program and 11th IGF and suggestions for 2017 and 12th IGF”

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CDT is pleased to submit these comments on IGF 2016 and provide suggestions for the way forward for the IGF and further success in Geneva in December 2017.

A) Taking Stock of 2016 programming, preparatory process, community intersessional activities and the 11th annual IGF: What worked well? What worked not so well?

Overall, IGF 2016 was one of the most rewarding IGFs to date. The workshop and session content was varied and compelling, the location and facilities generally excellent. The hospitality shown by the Mexican government and the people of Guadalajara contributed significantly to the success of the IGF.

We wish to highlight two important components of the IGF that should be further emphasized in the future:

1. The continuity of the Best Practice Forums and their growing relevance and utility to the broader community.

As CDT mentioned in the [closing ceremony](#), the BPFs provide the ability to have ongoing and evolving discussions, and to build trust between stakeholders, in areas of critical importance to the future of the Internet. In particular, the BPF on Cybersecurity has proven itself to be a useful and welcome space in which to share information on best practices, and technology and policy developments, etc. The BPF has also brought together a range of generalists and experts who would not necessarily meet nor converse on such issues given that security discussions tend to take place in silos and be relatively closed. More broadly, the BPFs and associated intersessional dialogue and work between IGFs is invaluable and its relevance will only increase.

2. The critical focus on new and pressing issues.

It is important that the IGF focus on new and upcoming issues as much as it does the persistent challenges. The range of workshops that specifically addressed or touched upon the Internet of Things, Big Data, Artificial Intelligence, technological innovation and the implications for policy, human rights, society and economy more broadly was welcome and we trust that this forward-looking approach will be continued. Issues such as these will shape the Internet for years to come – the IGF is an appropriate space for discussions to take place between stakeholders on these matters given the implications for the evolution of the Internet.

We note that ongoing dialogue on these emerging issues is essential. While BPFs may not be suited as a space for intersessional work on emerging issues, consideration could be given as to whether some other construct might be useful to ensure that the community continues to engage on these matters between the IGFs.

We also wish to raise two issues that, while mundane, are important:

1. The scheduling of workshops in rooms that were far too small.

This restraint on convening space resulted in the need to turn people away from popular sessions. If the facility does not have adequate spaces then the overall schedule should be adapted accordingly – with session types that do not require bigger rooms being assigned the smaller ones.

2. The lack of an open, inclusive gala or other event sponsored by the host country.

While no official welcome reception took place, there was a privately hosted event on the same day that was open only to invited participants, which was not in keeping with the spirit of openness that characterizes the IGF. The community was disappointed with this “mix-up”.

B) Suggestions for improvements in 2017 (programming, preparatory processes, community intersessional activities and improvements for 12th annual meeting)

As noted above, the IGFs continue to grow in strength. And yet there is a widely recognized concern that their relevance to all stakeholders and to the Internet ecosystem writ large needs to be addressed. The focus of the following comments is less on IGF 2017 specifically and more on how the global IGF can be further strengthened and made more relevant during this new 10-year mandate:

1. The need for a clearer and more credible thematic and substance focus.

The IGF has suffered in the past in terms of its theme selection. Every year there is such an effort to craft an all-inclusive theme for the IGF that the final construct often ends up being largely meaningless. This reflects poorly on the IGF and can contribute to deterring participation.

As CDT mentioned in the closing ceremony, the IGF needs to take a leadership role in linking and demonstrating the importance of the Internet to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, a suggestion also mentioned by many of those who spoke in the same session. CDT suggests that the IGF agree to address three SDGs at each IGF going forward, and to dedicate workshop and session time and space to having substantive discussions on how the Internet can contribute to the SDGs through policy, innovation, technology, community engagement, and other approaches. Aligning with the SDGs will encourage greater linkages with important work that is occurring at all levels, from national development agendas to the UN, and will, as UNDESA’s Juwang Zhu suggested in the closing session, “make sure that what the IGF is doing ... is mainstreamed into the work on SDGs.”

As we have noted above, increasing the relevance of the IGF to all stakeholders, and particularly policy makers, will increase its success over the 10-year mandate. Aligning with, and substantially contributing to the discourse on the SDGs, is an obvious way to do so. It will show that the IGF is determined to address issues of critical importance to the broader global community and particularly governments.

2. The importance of greater linkages to the work and priorities of the national and regional IGFs.

This is a perennial recommendation but CDT remains convinced that this is essential for the future of a strong IGF. The global IGF needs to take national and regional IGF issues into account as the global agenda is being built so that national and regional priorities are appropriately accounted for. Internet policy issues and challenges that are raised by national IGFs should feed into the appropriate regional IGFs and, in turn, feed into the global IGF agenda. This will help demonstrate that the global IGF can be responsive to the questions and concerns that are arising in a variety of national and regional contexts.

3. An empowered MAG, CSTD improvements and a Special Advisor.

Finally, on organizational issues and responsibilities: CDT has called for an empowered MAG in the past yet the MAG seems unable to evolve. The MAG needs to spend less time on being a programme and workshop management committee and look to more important and pressing issues, including the IGF's future relevance and success, and the implementation of the long standing [CSTD WG recommendations](#). Conscientious and dedicated persons have joined the MAG to make the IGF more representative, responsive and relevant, and mechanisms for them to be able to do so should be further explored.

And then there is the role of the Special Advisor to the UN Secretary General. This is a role that many recognize as essential, one that was critical to the IGF's positioning and success in the UN system in its early years. CDT would argue that as the IGF focuses on the SDGs such a role will become all the more important. We were pleased to hear UNDESA's Zhu state in the closing ceremony that "specific requests about the appointment of the special adviser for S(ecretary) G(eneral)" will be conveyed "back to the SG's office." We urge the Secretary General to pursue this appointment with alacrity.