

**INTERNET SOCIETY'S COMMENTS ON THE HIGH-LEVEL PANEL ON DIGITAL COOPERATION:
THE AGE OF DIGITAL INTERDEPENDENCE REPORT**

The Internet Society appreciates the opportunity to comment on the report of the Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on Digital Cooperation, *The Age of Digital Interdependence* (June 2019).

We have supported the Panel's efforts from the beginning of its work, although we have expressed concerns about the lack of transparency in its composition, and the need for clarity in its mandate. We are encouraged to see that the Panel has drawn inspiration from various stakeholders' contributions worldwide, and we hope this approach will continue as the Secretary-General turns to the challenging task of implementing the Report's recommendations.

In this submission, we specifically examine the Chapter 4 – Mechanism for Global Digital Cooperation and its Recommendations 5A and 5B. While the Report addresses technologies in general, our submission focuses on the Internet as the driving force of many of the changes the Panel was mandated to address.

Comments on the Recommendations 5A and 5B (includes IGF Plus)

The Internet Society believes that existing digital cooperation mechanisms need to be improved, and collaborative approaches are the best way where technology is concerned¹. Therefore, we appreciate the Panel's call for mechanisms to '*become more holistic, multi-disciplinary, multistakeholder, agile and able to convert rhetoric into practice*'.

While we agree with the overall idea of the six general gaps identified by the Panel, it is important to stress that:

- When digital technology and digital cooperation issues do become a priority in political agendas, they often focus on problems rather than opportunities. The risk is that they be used to justify more interventionist regulatory approaches that may impact negatively technology and society.
- Barriers to participation in various digital cooperation arrangements are not unique to this environment. They tend to reflect 'offline' realities. It is important that policymakers therefore focus on the root causes of the problem.
- There is a need for better cooperation between and among stakeholders, and to reduce overlapping efforts.
- Rather than creating new Internet governance mechanisms, we believe it is important to strengthen existing ones.

¹ See: "*Let's reform the IGF to Ensure its Healthy Future*", published on 17 March 2018, and available at: <https://www.internetsociety.org/blog/2018/03/lets-reform-igf-ensure-healthy-future/>



The Internet Governance Forum Plus Model

The Internet Society has been closely following and supporting the IGF since its inception. While the Panel's proposal for an IGF Plus is interesting, it also raises some questions.

We believe that now is the time to strengthen the IGF rather than reinventing new mechanisms. The objective should be to deliver more tangible outcomes, while not transforming the IGF into a negotiating body². The IGF could have a useful "dispatch function", i.e. identifying where issues can be further discussed in other relevant fora.

The Panel suggests that new mechanisms such as an *Advisory Group*, a *Help Desk* and a *Cooperation Accelerator* be created to better operationalize the IGF. We would recommend furthering the discussion with the IGF community to better understand and define these functions, in detail.

Another proposal that has caught our attention is the idea that the IGF Plus could provide 'multi-stakeholder and multilateral legitimacy' at the same time. In trying to be both, an IGF Plus may arguably be forced to make unreasonable compromises in negotiating outcomes, and might not, at the end, do either very well. We recommend clarifying this ambiguity and putting in place safeguards to ensure the IGF remains entirely multistakeholder.

The multistakeholder approach to governing the Internet has indeed demonstrated its value over the past years³. Processes such as the NETmundial meeting, the WSIS+10 Review High-Level Event, and the successful transition of the IANA functions, are clear illustrations of this value. They can be used as a source of inspiration to further develop the IGF Plus concept.

In order to serve as the main forum for setting the global Internet governance agenda, the IGF also needs to increase its value to all stakeholders, and to enhance government and private sector engagement. This should be one of the key drivers of the Implementation Team, working in collaboration with all stakeholder groups.

The Internet Society is looking forward to pursuing the dialogue around the future of the IGF.

² See: "A World Without the IGF", published on 19 April 2019, and available at: <https://www.internetsociety.org/blog/2019/04/a-world-without-the-igf/>

³ See: "Why the Multistakeholder Approach Works", available at:

<https://www.internetsociety.org/resources/doc/2016/internet-governance-why-the-multistakeholder-approach-works/>