FEEDBACK FROM THE UNITED KINGDOM GOVERNMENT ON THE INTERNET GOVERNANCE FORUM 2016-17

The UK Government expresses its deep gratitude to the Mexican Government, the organising committee and all the volunteers involved in the convening of the first Internet Governance Forum since the renewal of the mandate by the UN General Assembly in December 2015 for ten years. By assembling over 2000 stakeholders form over 80 countries in a single annual global multi-stakeholder event with many more participating and following remotely, IGF11 event was an important re-statement of the value and power of multi-stakeholder engagement and interaction of a diverse range of intersecting business, governmental and civil society representatives, technical experts, parliamentarians and academics.

The UK Government’s delegation at IGF11 comprised four senior policy experts and the cyber policy lead at the British Embassy in Mexico City. We endeavoured through internal coordination to participate in as wide a range of IGF issues as possible and the following comments and set of proposals in response to the request for feedback on IGF11 and the preparation for IGF12 draws on the views of all members of the delegation.

Media Communications

Given the scale and import of the IGF’s programme, we believe there was a failure in the lead up to and at the IGF event to ensure there was appropriate media mainstreaming of the core messages about why the IGF is taking place. The media profile of IGF11 was as a consequence very low in our view. It must be more widely understood by the media and all users and beneficiaries of the Internet that the IGF is a critical global forum and is the essential place to be for anybody with an interest in the Internet and the digital economy – whether as an innovator, a personal or a corporate user, a technical expert or leader in delivering services over the Internet, a defender of human rights online, or a government policy maker who can only do his/her job though engaging with the global community of experts. The IGF is for everyone – in person or as remote participant - to contribute to the evolution of the Internet for the benefit of users worldwide and to ensure its positive impact on social and economic development is maximized.

**UK Proposal**: The IGF Secretariat and the MAG must pay much more attention therefore to the **IGF’s communications and media strategy** so that the IGF’s outputs and transformative impacts are recognized in the mainstream spheres of social and economic activity. Daily reporting of IGF sessions is valuable and necessary but the media planning should anticipate the kind of **headline announcements** at the IGF on for example security or rights that are then going to be picked up by the mainstream broadcasting and Internet media worldwide.

Advocacy of the IGF in the political/diplomatic and media fora underpinned by strategic long term planning, is crucial for mainstreaming the importance and relevance of the IGF and for agreeing the overarching objectives and high level questions during the next 10 years of the IGF. The UK Government recommended in 2010-14 that the independent post of Special Adviser to the UN Secretary General on Internet Governance should be filled following the departure of Ambassador Nitin Desai. We now **support the appointment of a successor Special Adviser whose principal tasks would be to plan the IGF strategy for the next 5 years** including: confirmation of the annual hosts during this period; completion of the implementation of the CSTD recommendations on improving the IGF; reviewing the process for question and theme-setting.

The UK contribution to the DESA Retreat in July 2016 set our views on strategic planning and instituting a question-setting process to be conducted in parallel with bottom-up workshop programme-setting: <http://www.intgovforum.org/cms/documents/igf-meeting/igf-2016/takingstock/793-contribution-to-the-retreat-on-advancing-the-10-year-mandate-of-the-internet-governance-forum/file>

IGF11 Venue

The UK government delegation found the facilities and catering at the PALCCO to be generally excellent. The voucher system for meals generally worked well. There was very good signage which helped with locating the workshop rooms spread across the complex at different levels. This took a while to become familiar but the event volunteers at IGF 11 were extremely helpful and informative in assisting with directions throughout the 5 days of events. The centrally located meeting point was very effective but the external open spaces seemed largely under-used - in particular the large open catering area on the lower level which might have been allocated for highly interactive sessions. The excellent live music there would have benefitted from larger audiences.

Another specific challenge for event planning is the high number of parallel sessions at the IGF and ensuring that all the rooms have sufficient capacity. As at previous IGFs, some rooms at the PALCCO proved to be too small and could not accommodate a high number of participants: a reminder that careful planning is needed for assessing which workshops would be higher profile and have specific requirements accordingly including ensuring effective remote participation.

The convenience for stakeholders contemplating an intense day’s engagements of shuttle connections directly with their hotels cannot be under-estimated. We did not understand why our designated hotel (the Riu Plaza) along with several others did not have shuttle connections to the distantly-located PALCCO.

Improving the diversity of stakeholder participation

The UK Government which is a donor to the UN Trust Fund for the IGF is concerned about a number of problems relating to the diversity of participation at the IGF.

i. *Private Sector*: as the number of workshop and similar events proposed by civil society representatives and the number of participants form civil society in the IGF event has continue to rise which is welcome, it is apparent that the number of business representatives has fallen despite increasing recognition that all business sectors will need to embrace transformative change during the periods of the IGF mandate as a result of new technologies such as Internet of Things, 5G and artificial intelligence.

**UK Proposal**: The MAG should analyse the reasons for the downturn in participation and develop a strategy for correcting this. A programme of business sector advocacy during March – November should be developed that includes incorporation in the NRI agendas, business stakeholder networks (including those facilitated by governments) and leading business and industry federations.

ii. *Governments*: Although the number of governments with representatives at IGF11 was higher than in previous years, we feel that this was not matched by the volume of their contributions in discussions from the floor. As a result it seemed that certain vital perspectives were missing from debates, and there was little affirmation of the IGF’s role as the unique opportunity within a global dialogue for national governments to understand or hear perspectives from the multi-stakeholder community.

We believe therefore that the IGF should prioritise increasing the active involvement of governments, particularly governments from the global South in view of the now more widely recognised linkages between growth of the Internet-based digital economy and the the Sustainable Development Goals. Because of the Geneva location of the IGF12 venue, there is a greater opportunity than in previous years for increased participation by policy experts from governments from the global South. This unprecedented opportunity must not be missed.

**UK Proposal**: The MAG should initiate discussions with governments very early on in the preparatory process for IGF12, including by sending **formal invitations to governments** early in the year both directly and through the **national missions at the UN in Geneva** where governments from all regions have representation inviting attendance at **a preparatory outreach event to be held in early summer. At this event, the Government members of the MAG should present at on the main themes and opportunities for participation.**

*iii. Youth*: The IGF process has made great advances in ensuring that young people are present and speaking at the IGF. That is extremely important: they are as much representative of the Internet now and its future as are the leading experts taking the critical decisions. The MAG needs to recognise more decisively in its IGF vision and planning that young people are often the key drivers in the Internet market and that they are aware of both the policy and technology issues. While not speaking from positions of incumbent leadership in Internet business sectors or government or non-governmental bodies, we believe that young voices have much to offer at panel discussions across the board at the IGF.

**UK Proposal**: Main session organisers and individual workshop proposers should be asked by the MAG to make very effort with the help of the NRIs and Youth fora to secure young contributors. The MAG generally must ensure the contributions of young speakers are more comprehensively integrated in the IGF programme and not limited to a separate track or session for young people.

IGF11 Programme

Overall the IGF11 programme was richly diverse in the number of issues that were discussed at the IGF. However, despite the best efforts of the Secretariat it was noted that there were some same subject session clashes, possibly as a result of the relatively high number of sessions on some specific topic areas. This seems to be a persistent problem with the IGF: the MAG with the help of workshop proposers needs to exercise rigorous control over the programming in order to avoid time clashes and enable participants to navigate a coherent thread on related topic sessions throughout the 4-day programme.

**UK Proposal:** If there is a high convergence of similar workshop proposals on a particular theme (e.g. at IGF11: freedom of expression, Internet rights, norms and gender issues) **sessions should under the direction of a MAG member coordinator be combined into one or maximum 2 sessions**. If necessary to retain inclusivity of different but related aspects of the issue, the length of the session could be extended so as to define a sequence of separate but intersecting questions under the one headline theme. We believe that this would also obviate the risk of lack of cross-fertilization of issues and practice with individual key experts having to move from session to session to repeat essentially the same views or position, as was noted in some cases in Guadalajara.

We also suggest that in order to maximize coherence and inclusiveness **a half or a full continuous day** **should be allocated to major themes** rather than spreading sessions piecemeal across the full IGF programme. This would also likely encourage more participation at the venue by stakeholders who find attending all 4 days to cover their specific area of interest to be challenging if their access to financial resources is limited and the balance with other work commitments outside the IGF difficult to sustain.

Contribution of National and Regional Initiatives (NRIs)

IGF11 proved to be an important breakthrough for raising the profile of the many national and regional IGFs (NRIs) which have sprung up in the wake of the global IGF. Enormous credit goes to Marilyn Cade and Anja Gengo for all the extensive preparation and coordination that this required. The scale of participation in the plenary session on regional and national IGFs underlined how the fully open and inclusive non-decision taking multi-stakeholder forum has secured its rightful place in Internet policy evolution in an ever-increasing number of countries worldwide.

**UK Proposal**: Many commonalities and shared priorities emerged in the reports from the NRI representatives during the plenary session and we propose that the **next plenary phase for the NRIs at IGF 12 stage should aim to link the NRI outputs from 2016-17 to specific themes in an experience-sharing and problem-solving discourse in concentric roundtable format with a moderator with roving microphone.**

This format would in our view generatemuch more audience interaction than was possible at the NRIs main session at IGF11 with its large panel-based format. This would need careful staging in order to retain the spirit of inclusiveness that was demonstrated in Guadalajara but we believe that the NRIs plenary session has in this way more achievable potential to disseminate successfully the experience gained in localised situations for the benefit of communities worldwide. It is important therefore **to retain a dedicated IGF Secretariat person to oversee all NRI issues at the IGF.**

Furthermore if correctly channelled, the experience of the NRIs has the potential to be incorporated and contribute to workshop sessions throughout the IGF programme. This would also serve to maximise geographical diversity of workshop panellists and active participants in many more workshops. A first step would be for **potential IGF workshop organisers to consult the programmes of NRIs and encourage them to reach out to the facilitators of sessions with similar themes** in a mutually supportive and integrated way.

Workshop sessions

Many of the IGF11 workshops were arranged with panels of invited experts whose perspectives were broadly in line with each other: they may well have fallen into the overly-managed trap of attracting participants who were already interested in the issue by virtue of sharing common perspectives with the other panellists. This led in some cases to the creation of an echo chamber and risked participants leaving the session with the conclusion that the multi-stakeholder community is of one mind on a given issue.

**UK Proposal**: with the aim of generally avoiding such re-affirmation in favour of fostering scope for resolution, we believe that the MAG should address this risk by **encouraging the organisers of workshops to bring together differing and diverse perspectives in a more interactive format**, enhanced with a roving microphone in the room, with the explicit aim of:

1. introducing and analysing the range of views;
2. agreeing common ground;
3. defining key points of unresolved difference. All this should be reported as outcomes with a forward inter-sessional look beyond the IGF.

**UK Proposal**: The MAG should provide **stronger rules of conduct and guidance to workshop proposers on how to structure interactive sessions** with guidance on:

1. a limit to the number of panellists;
2. time-limited “scene-setting” short presentations by panellists prior to the major part of the session being devoted to interactive dialogue triggered by the moderator setting questions (where necessary in a more provocative role of “devil’s advocate”);
3. preparatory outreach by the organisers to potential non-panel attendees that ensures cross-community participation so that a range of perspectives is provided by youth participants, business experts, government policy makers, technical and academic experts.

Breakout sessions

Break-out sessions within workshops were a welcome innovation in providing focus and tasking participants to address specific challenges\*. The sessions that worked best started with an overview of the themes by a panel, with panel members then leading breakout sessions on their subject of expertise before acting as rapporteur feeding back conclusions back to the wider room. The small intimate nature of the breakout groups which took place off camera without requiring individuals to “take the microphone” encouraged a franker exchange than possible in more formal settings. It is also vitally important for the moderator to be familiar with the issue being discussed.

**UK Proposal:** We believe that this format for break out sessions is a strong template for the MAG to promote for adoption by most workshops at IGF12.

*(\*Examples of such successful workshops with titles that succinctly set the aims for participants were WS96: Free expression & Extremism: an Internet Governance Challenge and WS208: Inclusive Responses to Intentional Internet Disruptions.)*

Presentation of IGF tangible outcomes

The IGF programme would benefit from more coherent integration of the best practice fora outcomes and next billion(s) access report from the inter-sessional work - the volunteer coordinators of which deserve enormous credit - and the agendas of the workshops most directly to the inter-sessional topics. At IGF11 there seemed to be two unstructured but intersecting tracks of workshops and the BPF for example on security.

**UK Proposal**: The MAG should plan the linkages between the BPFs with workshops and other IGF events directly relevant to the topics of the BPFs. Reporting at the wrap up conclusion of the IGF should make clear how the link ups either serve to advance the focus of the continuing BPFs or complement the winding up of the “task done” BPFs.

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