



IGF

**EXPERT GROUP
MEETING ON THE
INTERNET
GOVERNANCE
FORUM,
BACKGROUND PAPER**

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DESA EXPERT GROUP MEETING ON THE INTERNET GOVERNANCE FORUM, 30 MARCH TO 1 APRIL 2022

BACKGROUND PAPER

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INTRODUCTION

This paper has been prepared to support discussions at an Expert Group Meeting (EGM) on the Internet Governance Forum (IGF), organised by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), which is to be held in New York from 30 March to 1 April 2022.¹

The EGM has been convened to consider how the IGF ‘can contribute to advancing digital cooperation and implementing proposed initiatives’ in the context of the Secretary-General’s *Roadmap on Digital Cooperation* and his report *Our Common Agenda*, ‘within the broader context of the ongoing process on strengthening and improving the IGF as a space for global multistakeholder discussion on Internet policy issues.’² It therefore relates both to the work of the IGF itself and to the broader goals of the United Nations.

The background paper is structured as follows.

Part One sets out the context for discussions, focusing in turn on:

- the origins, mandate and evolution of the IGF;
- proposals concerning digital cooperation made in the *Roadmap*, *Common Agenda* and related UN documents; and
- a brief summary of the trajectory of digital development since the IGF’s establishment.

Part Two of the paper summarises discussions, comments and observations, including inputs submitted to the EGM, concerning the relationship of the IGF with digital cooperation and the dynamics of the IGF itself. To facilitate discussion at the EGM, Part Two is structured along the lines set out in its agenda.

PART ONE - THE INTERNET GOVERNANCE FORUM

The EGM is asked to consider ways to strengthen and improve the IGF as a space for global multistakeholder discussion on Internet policy issues. The following paragraphs summarise the origins, mandate and evolution of the Forum.

The IGF was established as an annual, global multistakeholder forum, organised under the auspices of the United Nations, in order to consider public policy issues relating to the governance of the Internet. It has since become a broader process, including intersessional activities and national events, to address those issues.

ORIGINS AND MANDATE

A forum for this purpose was first proposed by a Working Group on Internet Governance (WGIG) that was convened by the Secretary-General in 2004, between the two phases of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS). WGIG envisaged a forum that would be ‘open to all stakeholders from all countries,’ which might be ‘reinforced by regional, subregional and national initiatives and supplemented by open online mechanisms for participation.’³

¹ This paper has been prepared on behalf of DESA by Dr David Souter, with support from the IGF Secretariat. The views and opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect those of the United Nations Secretariat. The designations and terminology employed may not conform to United Nations practice and do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the Organization.

² <https://www.intgovforum.org/en/content/igf-expert-group-meeting>

³ <https://www.wgig.org/docs/WGIGREPORT.pdf>

The proposal for a forum was adopted by the second WSIS session in 2005, and articulated in its *Tunis Agenda for the Information Society*.⁴ That agreement asked the Secretary-General to consider a range of options for modalities and convene a first meeting of the IGF in 2006 which would be ‘multilateral, multi-stakeholder, democratic and transparent, ... build on the existing structures of Internet governance [and] have a lightweight and decentralized structure...’

WSIS also adopted a ‘working definition’ of Internet governance (sometime referred to herein as IG) as ‘the development and application by governments, the private sector and civil society, in their respective roles, of shared principles, norms, rules, decision-making procedures, and programmes that shape the evolution and use of the Internet.’⁵

The IGF was envisaged in the *Tunis Agenda* as a forum for discussion which ‘would have no oversight function and would not replace existing arrangements, mechanisms, institutions or organizations, ... would be constituted as a neutral, non-duplicative and non-binding process, [and] would have no involvement in day-to-day or technical operations of the Internet.’⁶ Its full mandate can be found in Annex 1.

The Secretary-General established a Multistakeholder Advisory Group (MAG) of around 40-50 individuals, from diverse stakeholder backgrounds but with a plurality from governments, to develop and deliver the event.⁷ A small Secretariat, now responsible to DESA, was established in Geneva. The MAG and Secretariat have remained relatively unchanged since 2006, with MAG membership refreshed each year by roughly a third by the Secretary-General.⁸ MAG working groups have addressed a number of issues relevant to the EGM.

The first meeting of the IGF was convened in 2006 as a three-day meeting, with the equal and undifferentiated involvement of participants from all stakeholder communities. Discussions were structured through plenary sessions and workshops that considered issues clustered on the themes of access, openness, security and diversity.

EVOLUTION

This template for the annual meeting has continued through fifteen subsequent iterations that have been hosted in countries around the world, each with an overall generic theme and several sub-themes. These annual meetings have been broadly consistent in structure with the first meeting but there has been evolution over time, particularly through the development of intersessional work that has shifted the Forum from being an annual event towards a collection of activities undertaken through its annual cycle. This is sometimes referred to as an IGF ecosystem.

These activities can be clustered in two groups:

- The first national IGFs appeared within the first two years of the global IGF’s existence, replicating its multistakeholder discussion-based format, on a simplified basis, in their national Internet environments. There are between 130 and 150 national, sub-regional, regional and youth IGFs (NRIs), organised nationally/regionally but conforming to broad principles that have been agreed through the Secretariat.⁹

⁴ <https://www.itu.int/net/wsis/docs2/tunis/off/6rev1.html>

⁵ *ibid.*, para. 34.

⁶ *ibid.*, para. 77

⁷ The MAG’s terms of reference are at <https://www.intgovforum.org/en/content/mag-terms-of-reference>

⁸ Although terms are annual, MAG members normally serve for three years.

⁹ https://www.intgovforum.org/en/filedepot_download/3568/480

- Three models of topic- or theme-based multistakeholder groups are now included in intersessional activity. These work virtually through most of the annual cycle but hold open sessions at the annual meeting.
 - Dynamic Coalitions (DCs), initiated at the inaugural Forum in 2006, are subject-based, autonomous groups established by interested individuals from diverse stakeholder backgrounds that explore specific issues, with or without producing formal outputs. 22 are currently in operation.¹⁰
 - Best Practice Forums (BPFs), initiated in 2007, provide spaces for the exchange of information, discussion of good practice and development of relevant resources including formal reports for discussion at the annual event. They are limited in number, to topics chosen by the MAG, and enjoy some Secretariat support. BPFs for 2022 are concerned with cybersecurity and with gender and digital rights.
 - Policy Networks (PNs), initiated in the 2021 cycle, respond to the WSIS mandate, the High-Level Panel report on Digital Cooperation's proposal for a 'policy incubator' within IGF+ (see below), and the Secretary-General's *Roadmap* (likewise) by seeking to build an 'in-depth expert view on broad Internet governance topics of global population's interest.'¹¹ They are also limited in number, to topics chosen by the MAG, and also benefit from Secretariat support. PNs for 2022 are concerned with meaningful access and with Internet fragmentation.

The annual event has also been extended to include a series of 'Day Zero' activities, organised by diverse parties, and, in 2021, a Preparatory and Engagement Phase held over preceding weeks.

COVID-19 contingencies required the 2020 Forum to be held virtually, while that for 2021 was implemented on a hybrid basis, combining virtual and face-to-face activity.

The IGF's initial mandate was for a five-year period, from 2006-2010. This mandate was renewed for a further five years by the General Assembly in 2010, and then for the ten-year period from 2016 to 2025 by the General Assembly in 2015. Its further renewal will be considered by the General Assembly (GA) in 2025 in conjunction with its twenty-year review of WSIS (WSIS+20).

Discussion of improvements and IGF development

The evolving role and structure of the IGF have been discussed in many fora since 2006, including both United Nations entities and external fora such as the 2014 NETmundial conference¹² and the Global Commission on Internet Governance (2014-2016).¹³ The following paragraphs are concerned with UN discussions.

When renewing the mandate in 2010, the General Assembly drew attention to 'the need to improve the Forum, with a view to linking it to the broader dialogue on global Internet governance,' with particular attention to enhancing the participation of developing countries, exploring voluntary options for financing, and improving the modalities of the preparatory process and work of the Forum Secretariat.¹⁴

¹⁰ <https://www.intgovforum.org/en/content/explore-dynamic-coalitions>

¹¹ <https://www.intgovforum.org/en/content/policy-networks>

¹² <https://netmundial.br/>

¹³ <https://www.chathamhouse.org/about-us/our-departments/international-security-programme/global-commission-internet-governance>

¹⁴ General Assembly resolution A/RES/65/141, <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N10/521/00/PDF/N1052100.pdf>

A Working Group on Improvements to the IGF was established by the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) through the Commission on Science and Technology for Development (CSTD). Its 2012 report made recommendations for improvements in five areas (which all feature on the EGM agenda):

- shaping the outcomes of IGF meetings, through more tangible outputs and greater visibility;
- improving working modalities, including improvements to the preparatory process, the structure and working methods of the MAG, and measures to strengthen the Secretariat;
- increased funding;
- more expansive and diverse participation, including efforts at capacity development; and
- stronger links between the IGF and other Internet governance-related entities.¹⁵

The General Assembly supported these recommendations and called for their ‘accelerated implementation’ when it renewed the mandate for a ten-year period in 2015, referring in particular to the need for ‘progress on working modalities and the participation of relevant stakeholders from developing countries.’¹⁶

DESA’s Funds-in-Trust project document for the IGF, developed following the GA resolution, defined the objective of IGF activity in the ten-year period to 2025 as being ‘to achieve understanding, through multi-stakeholder dialogue, on key elements of Internet governance as defined in the *Tunis Agenda ...*’ with four ‘expected accomplishments’:¹⁷

- *Creation of an enabling environment for multi-stakeholder policy dialogue related to the key elements of Internet governance.*
- *Enhanced collaboration among key organizations dealing with different Internet governance issues in support of the Information Society and development goals.*
- *Exchange of information to foster the sustainability, robustness, security, stability and development of the Internet.*
- *Strengthened capacity of developing country stakeholders to participate effectively in Internet governance arrangements.*

It reaffirmed the goals identified in the CSTD working group report, emphasising ‘outreach to all relevant stakeholders,’ multilingualism, ‘improved interaction and communication with other Internet governance-related entities and processes’ and ‘extensive and innovative use of Internet technologies for remote participation and collaborative online work.’

DESA organised a retreat in 2016, similar in structure to the present EGM, to discuss the IGF’s performance to date and scope for improvements.¹⁸ The retreat discussed a wide range of issues including the nomination process, role, structure and performance of the MAG; participation and engagement; capacity development; funding; intersessional activities; and the capture and dissemination of IGF outputs. It called for an implementation plan to be developed for the CSTD recommendations (above) which ‘should be capable of adapting to changes in the IGF environment, moving out of ‘comfort zones’ which may cease to be relevant as the environment evolves.’

¹⁵ https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/a67d65_en.pdf and https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/a67d65corr1_en.pdf

¹⁶ General Assembly resolution A/RES/70/125, https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/ares70d125_en.pdf

¹⁷ https://www.intgovforum.org/multilingual/index.php?q=filedepot_download/4099/516

¹⁸ <http://www.intgovforum.org/cms/documents/igf-meeting/igf-2016/812-igf-retreat-proceedings-22july/file>

Many of the observations made at the retreat have resonated in subsequent discussions.

The MAG responded to these developments by establishing working groups on New Session Formats (2016-2017), IGF Improvements (2017-2019), IGF Strengthening and Strategy (2020) and Strategy (2021); Communication and Outreach (2017), Outreach and Engagement (2018-2020) and Outreach, Engagement and Communications Strategy (2021); a Multi-Year Strategic Work Programme (2017-2018); Fundraising (2018-2019); Workshop Review and Evaluation (2018) and Workshop Process (2019-2020); Language (2020) and Hybrid Meetings (2021).¹⁹ The MAG Working Group on Strengthening and Strategy has discussed many of the issues raised in the *Roadmap*. It published a range of suggestions in 2021 looking towards a more ‘inclusive’, ‘strategic’, ‘impactful’ and ‘sustainable’ IGF.²⁰

A number of changes have been made to the IGF’s structure and modalities since the mandate renewal in 2015 including the establishment of Policy Networks, the introduction of high-level and parliamentary tracks during the annual Forum and the publication of ‘IGF messages’ at the end of annual meetings. Reviews have been undertaken of the work of Dynamic Coalitions and Best Practice Forums, and studies undertaken of participation in the Forum and its capacity development activity.

In 2020, in his *Roadmap for Digital Cooperation*, the Secretary-General announced the intention to establish a multi-stakeholder high-level body – later named the IGF Leadership Panel. Its terms of reference say that it is to be ‘a strategic, empowered, and multistakeholder body, to address strategic and urgent issues, and to highlight Forum discussions and possible follow-up actions, in order to promote greater impact and dissemination of IGF discussions.’²¹

DIGITAL COOPERATION

The EGM is asked to consider ways in which the IGF can contribute towards achievement of the digital cooperation goals set out in a series of recent UN documents. The following paragraphs summarise relevant sections of these documents.

The Secretary-General’s agenda for digital cooperation reflects the growing centrality of the Internet, and the need to integrate digital development into all aspects of the United Nations’ activities and goals, including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted in 2015 in the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*.²²

In its 2015 review of WSIS, the Assembly recognised the importance of the Internet to the development of all aspects of human society.²³ The resolution adopted following its review reiterated commitments to overcome digital divides and to harness information and communication technologies for development, reaffirmed recent declarations concerning the equal application of human rights online and offline, acknowledged the need to build confidence and security in the use and take action against the abuse of digital technologies, and discussed challenges of investment and Internet governance.

The Secretary-General developed ideas concerning digital cooperation and the IGF in his address to the 2018 meeting of the Forum. He suggested in this that it should become multidisciplinary as well as multistakeholder, drawing on expertise from diverse disciplines including rights, law, economics, ethics and social sciences as well as from technology. He encouraged the IGF to ‘include and amplify the weak and missing voices’, including women, the young and elderly, local communities and the governments of

¹⁹ <https://www.intgovforum.org/en/content/mag-working-groups>

²⁰ https://www.intgovforum.org/multilingual/filedepot_download/11159/2418

²¹ <https://www.intgovforum.org/en/content/terms-of-reference-for-the-igf-leadership-panel>

²² <https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda>

²³ https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/ares70d125_en.pdf

developing countries, and to find ways of increasing its influence and impact.²⁴ The relationship between multistakeholder institutions such as the IGF and multilateral decision-making bodies has also received growing attention.

HIGH-LEVEL PANEL ON DIGITAL COOPERATION

In 2018, the Secretary-General established a High-Level Panel on Digital Cooperation, whose twenty members represented diverse stakeholder and regional communities, experience and perspectives.

In its 2019 report on *The Age of Digital Interdependence*,²⁵ the Panel pointed out that, while ‘most current mechanisms of digital cooperation are primarily local, national or regional[, ...] digital interdependence ... necessitates that we strengthen global digital cooperation mechanisms to address challenges and provide opportunities for all.’ It stressed the value of multistakeholder cooperation in addressing issues such as an inclusive digital economy and society; human and institutional capacity; human rights and agency; and trust, security and stability.

Drawing on consultation inputs, the Panel found that there was ‘a great deal of dissatisfaction with existing digital cooperation arrangements: a desire for more tangible outcomes, more active participation by governments and the private sector, more inclusive processes and better follow-up. Overall,’ it suggested, ‘systems need to become more holistic, multi-disciplinary, multi-stakeholder, agile and able to convert rhetoric into practice.’ The Panel proposed three options for improving governance and building digital cooperation for the future:

- a ‘distributed co-governance architecture’, which would build on the experience of existing Internet governance institutions;
- a ‘digital commons architecture’, reflective of international governance mechanisms for space, the sea and climate change; and
- a proposal which it described as ‘Internet Governance Forum plus’ (IGF+), that would build on and develop the IGF as a lead instrument for digital cooperation.

This IGF+ approach, the report suggested, could address the lack of actionable outcomes in the IGF’s current structure by ‘working on policies and norms of direct interest to stakeholder communities.’ Four specific components were identified as part of this approach – an ‘Advisory Group’ based on the MAG; a ‘Cooperation Accelerator’ to build cooperation with other relevant entities; a ‘Policy Incubator’ to identify and address policy gaps; and an ‘Observatory and Help Desk’.

OPTIONS FOR THE FUTURE OF GLOBAL DIGITAL COOPERATION

The outcomes of a consultation process on these options were summarised in a paper on Options for the Future of Global Digital Cooperation, prepared by the Office of the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General and the Governments of Germany and the United Arab Emirates in 2020.²⁶ This noted a general preference for the IGF+ approach, adding that there was ‘overall agreement that the discussions at the IGF are of great value, but there is also a need for more concrete, actionable outcomes.’ It concluded that The IGF+ should enable such outcomes ‘while remaining a discussion body at its core,’ and summarised some implications of this thus:

²⁴ <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/speeches/2018-11-12/address-internet-governance-forum>

²⁵ <https://www.un.org/en/pdfs/DigitalCooperation-report-for%20web.pdf>

²⁶ https://www.global-cooperation.digital/GCD/Redaktion/EN/Downloads/options-for-the-future-of-global-digital-cooperation.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=2; referred to subsequently as the 2020 Options Paper

More inclusivity of the IGF+ and its annual meetings will necessitate concerted efforts. Measures are not limited to, but should include dedicated funds to participants from the Global South, remote participation technology, clear and transparent rules and criteria for the selection and regular rotation of members of IGF+ bodies, in particular the Multistakeholder Advisory Group, as well as the monitoring of inclusivity by the IGF+ Secretariat.

ROADMAP FOR DIGITAL COOPERATION

The Secretary-General followed up the Panel's work and the consultations reported in the Options paper by issuing his *Roadmap for Digital Cooperation* in 2020.²⁷ The *Roadmap*, which reaffirmed that 'digital cooperation is a multi-stakeholder effort,' identified actions across eight themes which it envisaged should 'accelerate global digital cooperation, seizing on the opportunities that are presented by technology – while mitigating the risks –' with the aim of facilitating progress towards the SDGs. These themes are concerned with:

- 'achieving universal connectivity by 2030';
- 'promoting digital public goods to create a more equitable world';
- 'ensuring digital inclusion for all, including the most vulnerable';
- 'strengthening digital capacity-building';
- 'ensuring the protection of human rights in the digital era';
- 'supporting global cooperation on artificial intelligence';
- 'promoting trust and security in the digital environment'; and
- 'building a more effective architecture for digital cooperation'.

The Secretary-General announced in the *Roadmap* that he would appoint an Envoy on Technology to advise the senior leadership of the UN on technology trends and guide strategy within the United Nations, act as 'an advocate and focal point for digital cooperation,' and guide implementation of the *Roadmap*.²⁸

On digital cooperation, the *Roadmap* noted that:

*The existing digital cooperation architecture has become highly complex and diffused but not necessarily effective, and global discussions and processes are often not inclusive enough. This situation is exacerbated by the lack of a common entry point into the global digital architecture, which makes it especially hard for developing countries, small and medium-sized enterprises, marginalized groups and other stakeholders with limited budgets and expertise to make their voices heard.*²⁹

The Secretary-General expressed support for seven measures to make the IGF 'more responsive and relevant to current digital issues':³⁰

(a) Creating a strategic and empowered multi-stakeholder high-level body, building on the experience of the existing multi-stakeholder advisory group, which would address urgent issues, coordinate follow-up action on Forum discussions and relay proposed policy approaches and recommendations from the Forum to the appropriate normative and decision-making forums;

²⁷ <https://www.un.org/en/content/digital-cooperation-roadmap/>

²⁸ *ibid.*; <https://www.un.org/techenvoy/>

²⁹ <https://www.un.org/en/content/digital-cooperation-roadmap/>, para. 67

³⁰ *ibid.*, para. 93

- (b) *Having a more focused agenda for the Forum based on a limited number of strategic policy issues;*
- (c) *Establishing a high-level segment and ministerial or parliamentary tracks, ensuring more actionable outcomes;*
- (d) *Forging stronger links among the global Forum and its regional, national, subregional and youth initiatives;*
- (e) *Better integrating programme and intersessional policy development work to support other priority areas outlined in the present report;*
- (f) *Addressing the long-term sustainability of the Forum and the resources necessary for increased participation, through an innovative and viable fundraising strategy, as promoted by the round table;*
- (g) *Enhancing the visibility of the Forum, including through a stronger corporate identity and improved reporting to other United Nations entities.*

The first item on this list provides the basis for the imminent appointment of the IGF Leadership Panel.

Our Common Agenda

The Secretary-General presented a report entitled *Our Common Agenda*³¹ to the General Assembly on the UN's 75th anniversary, in 2021, setting out his 'vision on the future of global cooperation and reinvigorating inclusive, networked, and effective multilateralism.'³² It looks toward a Summit of the Future, which should seek to 'forge a global consensus on what our future should look like, and how we can secure it.' This summit is scheduled to be held in 2023.

The need to 'improve digital cooperation' is one of 'twelve commitments' outlined in the report, ranging from inclusive and sustainable development to international security and human rights. 'Digital commons' are identified within this context as 'a global public good.'

More specifically, the report proposes that 'the United Nations, Governments, the private sector and civil society could come together as a multi-stakeholder digital technology track,' ahead of the Summit of the Future, to prepare a Global Digital Compact:

This would outline shared principles for an open, free and secure digital future for all. Complex digital issues that could be addressed may include: reaffirming the fundamental commitment to connecting the unconnected; avoiding fragmentation of the Internet; providing people with options as to how their data is used; application of human rights online; and promoting a trustworthy Internet by introducing accountability criteria for discrimination and misleading content. More broadly, the Compact could also promote regulation of artificial intelligence to ensure that this is aligned with shared global values.³³

Associated with this, the report declares that 'it is time to protect the online space and strengthen its governance.' The report urges the IGF 'to adapt, innovate and reform to support effective governance of the digital commons and keep pace with rapid, real-world developments.'³⁴

³¹ https://www.un.org/en/content/common-agenda-report/assets/pdf/Common_Agenda_Key_Proposals_English.pdf

³² <https://www.un.org/en/un75/common-agenda>

³³ https://www.un.org/en/content/common-agenda-report/assets/pdf/Common_Agenda_Report_English.pdf, para. 93

³⁴ *ibid.*

THE TRAJECTORY OF DIGITAL DEVELOPMENT

Participants in the EGM are requested to consider the role of the IGF and digital cooperation in the light of rapid evolution in digital development and the Internet and Internet governance ecosystems. The following paragraphs briefly summarise aspects of that evolution that have changed the context for the IGF between 2006 and 2022.

The Internet today is very different from that at the time the IGF was established in 2005/2006, not just in technology and services but also in pervasiveness and impact. Aspects of this have been covered in the Secretary-General's annual reports to CSTD on WSIS implementation, in CSTD's five- and ten-year reviews of WSIS implementation,³⁵ and many other sources.

Particularly significant developments, which have altered the characteristics of the Internet and the range of issues discussed at IGF meetings since 2005/6, include:

- the growth in the number of Internet users, from an estimated one billion people in 2005 to some five billion (over 60 *per cent* of world population) today;³⁶
- inequalities in Internet access and use ('digital divides') and consequential inequalities in the impacts of the Internet, in particular those between developing and developed countries and between women and men, with further impacts on access to resources and opportunities that affect the SDGs;
- continued rapid growth in the capacity and capabilities of Internet and other digital technologies;
- the rapid growth in capabilities and use of mobile devices, which have become the predominant mode of Internet access for many users since the establishment of the IGF;
- the transition, for many users, from narrowband to broadband services, enabling a far wider range of services including audio and video-streaming;
- the predominance of the World Wide Web and social media as principal forms of access to the Internet for business and individual users, and the increasing sophistication and capability of these and other services available to users;
- the growth of electronic commerce and electronic government, with increased delivery of public services and business activity online, and growing interdependence within the international economy;
- the emergence of cloud computing and the Internet of Things, leading to rapid growth in the volume of data traffic, the role of data centres and data management;
- the concentration of many Internet services, data management and much digital business activity in a relatively small number of global corporations, which have become among the world's most powerful businesses; and
- the continued rapid pace of innovation in digital technology in general, of which the Internet forms part, particularly in areas such as artificial intelligence that are expected to have transforming impacts on many, if not most, aspects of society, economy and culture.

The Internet's expansion and extended role in broader aspects of economy, society and culture has intensified the importance and complexity of the interface between Internet governance and other areas of international public policy since 2006. This has been particularly notable in connection with:

- sustainable development, including implementation of the SDGs;

³⁵ *e.g.* https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/a76d64_en.pdf. The ten-year review is at https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/dtlstict2015d3_en.pdf

³⁶ <https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Pages/stat/default.aspx>

- human rights, including issues concerned with freedom of expression, information and mis/disinformation; privacy and surveillance; and equality of access and opportunity;
- security, including cybersecurity, cybercrime and cyberconflict; and
- environmental implications of the Internet, including its relationship with climate change.

These impacts of the Internet and digital development more generally, including opportunities and risks associated with them, have increasingly preoccupied public policy discussions, reaching beyond Internet-specific bodies:

- to an ever-growing range of intergovernmental and multistakeholder fora concerned with digitalisation and its impacts; and
- to the work of established intergovernmental fora concerned with broader issues of public policy such as human rights and sustainable development.

The importance of digitalisation and the Internet to the development of society has been reinforced by the COVID-19 pandemic.

PART TWO: ISSUES AND PERSPECTIVES ON IGF IMPROVEMENTS IN THE CONTEXT OF DIGITAL COOPERATION

As noted in the introduction, the EGM has been convened to consider how the IGF ‘can contribute to advancing digital cooperation and implementing proposed initiatives’ in the context of the Secretary-General’s *Roadmap on Digital Cooperation* and report *Our Common Agenda*, ‘within the broader context of the ongoing process on strengthening and improving the IGF as a space for global multistakeholder discussion on Internet policy issues.’³⁷

This Part of the paper contextualises and summarises observations and comments relating to issues on the EGM agenda, in particular concerning the role and structure of the IGF, its relationship to digital cooperation, and improvements to its working methods and modalities. These observations have been drawn from a variety of sources, including:

- reports, documents and outcomes of meetings described in Part One;
- reports and documents published by the IGF, its intersessional activities, and working groups established by the MAG;
- contributions to the online consultation initiated by DESA ahead of the EGM; and
- academic and other papers commenting on IGF development.

The following subsections follow the order of the EGM agenda. This begins with the role of the IGF in relation to digital cooperation, and then considers improvements to the IGF in relation to that agenda. Many of the issues discussed below are interlocking and cross-referential.

INTRODUCTION

The IGF’s mandate provides the starting point for discussion of its role and structure. It is set out in Annex 1.

The *Tunis Agenda* declared that the Forum would meet periodically, that it would be ‘multilateral, multi-stakeholder, democratic and transparent,’ that it would ‘build on the existing structures of Internet

³⁷ <https://www.intgovforum.org/en/content/igf-expert-group-meeting>

governance’ including their multistakeholder character, and that it would have a lightweight and decentralized structure.’

The announcement of this EGM, set out in Annex 2, identified a number of expected outcomes including recommendations on:

- ‘how the IGF can “adapt, innovate and reform” its work and contribute to implementing proposed initiatives dedicated to advancing digital cooperation and creating an ‘open, free and secure digital future for all;’ and
- ‘how to operationalise recurring proposals regarding IGF strengthening and improvement.’

Relevant excerpts from the *Tunis Agenda* and the EGM announcement introduce each of the following subsections. These then identify and briefly summarise issues, comments and proposals for adaptations, innovations and reforms that have emerged from the sources listed above, including inputs to the consultation for this meeting.

Overarching themes

Ten broad themes can be identified that concern the IGF’s overarching character and/or cut across specific topics on the agenda. These will be relevant to most agenda sessions. They include the following:

1. THE PURPOSE OF THE FORUM

The IGF’s mandate makes clear that the Forum should be a discussion space, without decision-making powers but with the capacity to ‘identify emerging issues, bring them to the attention of the relevant bodies and the general public, and, where appropriate, make recommendations.’ Many comments suggest that one of the Forum’s principal values derives from the opportunity it gives for participants to exchange information and share experience, develop ideas and discuss options with diverse stakeholders in a less pressured, non-decision-making environment before proceeding to fora which contribute to decision-making (a role that is sometimes called ‘probouleutic’). Alongside this, however, there have long been calls for the Forum to become more ‘results-oriented’, develop ‘concrete’ or ‘actionable’ outputs, make recommendations where it can and thereby achieve greater influence and impact.

2. MULTISTAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Multistakeholder participation has been a hallmark of the IGF, as of other IG bodies, powerfully established by the *Tunis Agenda* and reinforced in the 2015 renewal of its mandate. It has been interpreted in the IGF as the equal participation of individuals regardless of stakeholder status, rather than the equal representation of stakeholder communities. Concerns have often been expressed, however, about the balance of participation between (and within) stakeholder communities, particularly about a perceived reduction in government and private sector participation, and about gender representation. Some also address the need for the Forum ‘to engage not just with Internet specialists but with a wide range of stakeholders,’³⁸ especially as it reaches beyond technical to wider societal debates. This echoes the Secretary-General’s call for the IGF to become more ‘multidisciplinary’.

3. PARTICIPATION OF DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

³⁸ Quotation from Nitin Desai in the IGF publication for 2008, https://www.intgovforum.org/multilingual/filedepot_download/3367/6

The equal participation of all countries, developing and developed, has been a particular concern raised in UN fora including the GA review of the IGF mandate. The concentration of Internet development and resources in developed countries leads to concerns that the distinctive needs and priorities of developing countries will be under-represented. This risk is reinforced by the high costs of participation in the expanding range of Internet decision-making bodies. UN and other fora have encouraged the IGF to identify ways of ensuring that developing country voices – from governments, the private sector, civil society and the technical community – are fully integrated in both main and intersessional activities.

4. EVENT OR ECOSYSTEM?

The IGF began as a periodic, in practice annual, event, with its management structured accordingly. It has subsequently developed a range of intersessional activities, which many now consider as important as the annual event, building an ‘IGF ecosystem’ with a year-round character rather than that of a single annual event. Many comments and suggestions for improvements are concerned with the relationship between the annual event and this wider, year-round ecosystem, in particular with the desirability of integrating annual and intersessional activities more holistically, improving the effectiveness of interactions between them, and the management requirements needed to effect this.

5. GLOBAL AND NATIONAL/REGIONAL

The IGF began as a global event, but the annual event is now accompanied by a large and growing number of national, regional and youth events (NRIs), now approaching 150,³⁹ that are autonomous but function on similar principles to the global Forum. NRIs present opportunities to broaden the scope of participation, particularly for those who cannot afford to travel to the annual event. Indeed, many of those who participate in IGF activities now do so primarily or entirely at NRIs rather than the global meeting. Some feel, however, that NRIs are still seen as less important than the main meeting and that their work is poorly represented in the annual meeting. Many comments and suggestions for improvement are concerned with the relationship between NRIs and the global Forum, the desirability of building the capacity and contribution made by NRIs, and the desirability of stronger linkages between them and the annual meeting.

6. ADMINISTRATION AND FINANCE

The administrative and financial structures for managing the IGF were established in its early days, before the development of intersessional activities, in accordance with the *Tunis Agenda's* requirement for a ‘lightweight and decentralised structure.’ The MAG was established to develop the programme for an annual conference rather than to oversee an ecosystem. Funding for the Forum is ex-budgetary within the UN system, making it reliant on voluntary contributions.

Many discussions over the Forum’s lifetime have concerned the adequacy, suitability and sustainability of these arrangements for the much more complex ecosystem that has since evolved. Some have suggested the need for clarification or updating of the original administrative structure. Some have argued that a more holistic approach, with stronger leadership drawing links across the range of IGF activities, is needed to fulfil the mandate and achieve greater external impact. These issues have increased resonance in light of the proposed evolution from IGF to IGF+ and the introduction of the Leadership Panel.

7. SCOPE

³⁹ https://www.intgovforum.org/en/filedepot_download/252/21159

The working definition of Internet governance adopted in the *Tunis Agenda* refers to ‘the development and application ... of shared principles, norms, rules, decision-making procedures, and programmes that shape the evolution and use of the Internet.’ This largely concerns technical dimensions of the Internet (at one time called ‘narrow’ Internet governance), though also referencing ‘use’ and thereby impact. The IGF mandate, derived from the same document, refers to ‘public policy issues related to key elements of Internet governance in order to foster the sustainability, robustness, security, stability and development of the Internet.’⁴⁰ In practice, from the outset, the IGF has discussed not just technical Internet governance, but a wide range of public policy issues impacted by the Internet, including issues of access and equality, human rights, sustainable development and the environment. These are considered appropriate for IGF consideration throughout the IGF community.

The range and nature of digital technologies has expanded greatly since 2006, including technologies and innovations such as artificial intelligence that are related to but not driven by the Internet. This has raised issues concerning the extent to which these broader digitalisation and digital technologies and impacts in general fall within the scope of the Forum, and the interaction that the IGF should have with digital governance in those fields. This is particularly relevant to the role of the IGF+ in delivery of the Digital Cooperation agenda as a whole.

8. CONTINUITY AND FOCUS

From its outset, the IGF agenda has enabled discussion of a wide range of issues derived from a ‘bottom-up’ consultation within the IGF community. There have been an increasing number of suggestions that the annual meeting could achieve more impact by focusing on a smaller range of issues annually within a multi-year programming framework. These suggestions are often associated with proposals to enhance interactions between intersessional activity and the annual meeting, and for the Forum to produce more ‘results-oriented’ and ‘actionable’ outputs. Reorientation of the Forum on these lines would require adjustments to the ways in which the MAG develops the programme for the annual meeting, and increased resourcing of the Secretariat.

9. COMMUNICATIONS

Concerns about limited visibility of the IGF in the wider IG and public policy communities – a key component in enabling impact – have been expressed since the first mandate review in 2010. Many comments have regretted that the work of the IGF is insufficiently understood or recognised outside the IGF community because there is little capacity available within the Secretariat to publicise activities and outputs, develop media contacts and interest, or engage in outreach activity. Comments have suggested, *inter alia*, the potential value of developing a systematic communications strategy, which could be linked to multi-year programming; further strengthening of the website (a new website has recently been implemented); and greater use of social media.

10. ASSESSMENT

It is always easier to measure inputs to a process than it is to measure outputs, outcomes and impacts, particularly where the latter are intangible (such as the influence that individuals’ participation in the IGF may have on their subsequent engagement in decision-making fora). Some have expressed concern that the IGF does not have adequate metrics in place to assess quantitative activity (such as for participation), let alone its impact in reaching the wider Internet community and/or influencing outcomes in other IG and public policy fora. More metrics would help the Leadership Panel and the

⁴⁰ <https://www.itu.int/net/wsis/docs2/tunis/off/6rev1.html>, paras. 33 and 72.

MAG to improve the IGF and also contribute evidence to the General Assembly review of the mandate in 2025.

DAY 1

SESSION 2 - THE ROLE OF THE IGF IN RELATION TO THE *ROADMAP FOR DIGITAL COOPERATION* AND *OUR COMMON AGENDA*

The IGF mandate calls on the Forum to ‘discuss public policy issues related to key elements of Internet governance in order to foster the sustainability, robustness, security, stability and development of the Internet.’

The EGM announcement seeks recommendations from the meeting concerning ‘how to improve the alignment of IGF activities with the action lines included in the *Roadmap*’ and the IGF’s role in ‘ensuring multistakeholder engagement and providing inputs in developing the Digital Compact’ proposed in the *Common Agenda* report.

CONTEXT

Most discussion in the IGF community regarding the *Roadmap*, since its publication, has concerned its implications for the IGF itself. Less attention has been paid to the role the IGF can play to support increased digital cooperation and implementation of the *broader* goals set out in the *Roadmap* and *Common Agenda* documents.

Relevant statements from the *Roadmap* and *Common Agenda* are included in Part One above. A distinction can be drawn here between the role of IGF in relation to the *Roadmap*, which is concerned primarily with digital cooperation (digital access and inclusion, digital capacity-building, rights and security in the digital environment *etc.*), and the *Common Agenda*, which is concerned with broader goals of international security, human rights and sustainable development, including the SDGs.

The General Assembly will consider renewal of the IGF mandate in 2025 as part of its twenty-year review of WSIS. The Forum’s potential role in relation to the wider digital cooperation agenda, and the achievement of other UN goals including SDGs, are sure to feature prominently in that discussion. The pending decision on mandate renewal therefore poses some constraints on longer-term commitments that can be made by or through the IGF before a decision has been taken on it.

Issues arising from discussions and consultations

Issues raised concerning the Digital Cooperation Agenda can be summarised as follows:

1. Developing an IGF contribution

The Leadership Panel will have responsibility ‘to address strategic issues’ for the IGF. It will need to consider how the Forum can most effectively contribute to implementation of the *Roadmap* and *Common Agenda*.

2. The role of IGF in relation to digital development

The *Roadmap for Digital Cooperation* includes eight areas of proposed activity. As listed in Part One, these include ‘achieving universal connectivity by 2030’; ‘promoting digital public goods to create a more equitable world’; ‘ensuring digital inclusion for all, including the most vulnerable’; ‘strengthening digital capacity-building’; ‘ensuring the protection of human rights in the digital era’; ‘supporting global cooperation on artificial intelligence’; ‘promoting trust and security in the digital environment’; and ‘building a more effective architecture for digital cooperation’.

All of these issues have been discussed within the IGF community, and some discussion on the *Roadmap* itself took place at the 2021 annual meeting. One suggestion is that outcomes from past discussions (e.g. from 'IGF messages') could be compiled to provide a starting point for an IGF contribution and a framework for further discussion in the annual meeting, NRIs and intersessional activities, which might lead to more substantive outputs in due course. It has been suggested that some themes within the *Roadmap* may be appropriate topics for BPFs or PNs.

3. THE ROLE OF IGF IN RELATION TO THE *COMMON AGENDA*

The IGF has been concerned from its inception with the impact of the Internet as well as its technology and services. Issues concerning human rights, development and the environment have featured on the main meeting's agenda. The Secretary-General has encouraged greater exploration of these issues through multi-disciplinary collaboration.

The *Common Agenda* identifies twelve areas of action for reinvigorated multilateralism, which it summarises thus: to 'leave no-one behind'; 'protect our planet'; 'promote peace and prevent conflicts'; abide by international law and ensure justice'; place women and girls at the centre'; 'build trust'; 'improve digital cooperation'; 'upgrade the United Nations'; 'ensure sustainable financing'; 'boost partnerships'; 'listen to and work with youth'; and 'be prepared'.

The IGF is not resourced to address all of these issues, but could consider what contribution it might make towards specific themes. It has been suggested, for instance, that the Forum could draw authoritative figures from other communities of expertise – in Internet-impacted fields such as health and education – into dialogue to stimulate cross-sectoral discussion and foster collaborative thinking at the annual meeting and in intersessional activities. NRIs could also play a part in building understanding of the different experiences of the Internet and impacts in different societies.

4. THE GLOBAL DIGITAL COMPACT AND THE SUMMIT FOR THE FUTURE

The Summit for the Future is scheduled for September 2023. The *Common Agenda* proposes preparation before then of a Global Digital Compact, addressing issues which have been discussed within the IGF (and many other fora).

There will be only one annual meeting of the IGF before the Summit, that which is to be held later this year. If the Forum is to make a specific contribution to the Compact it will need to do so through that meeting. There has been relatively little discussion of this yet within the IGF community, but the MAG has taken the decision to align the sub-themes of IGF 2022 with the key areas envisioned for the Global Digital Compact. The Leadership Panel and the MAG will need to consider further the ways in which the Compact and the Summit should be addressed in the schedule of activity for 2022.

SESSION 3 - THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE IGF WITH INTERGOVERNMENTAL, INTERNATIONAL AND OTHER DECISION-MAKING BODIES

The *Tunis Agenda* clarified that 'The IGF would have no oversight function and would not replace existing arrangements, mechanisms, institutions or organizations, but would involve them and take advantage of their expertise.'⁴¹ The IGF mandate calls on the Forum to:

⁴¹ <https://www.itu.int/net/wsis/docs2/tunis/off/6rev1.html>, para. 77

- *facilitate discourse between bodies dealing with different cross-cutting international public policies regarding the Internet and discuss issues that do not fall within the scope of any existing body;*
- *interface with appropriate intergovernmental organizations and other institutions on matters under their purview; and*
- *promote ... the embodiment of WSIS principles in Internet governance processes.*

The EGM announcement seeks recommendations concerning ‘improvements ... to the format and work of the Forum ... to improve links with decision-making fora,’ and addressing ‘how the IGF should work with various decision-making and discussion fora in the expanding field of digital development.’

CONTEXT

The range of external decision-making bodies that are relevant to the Forum’s work has grown over time. It includes, *inter alia*:

- other Internet governance entities, including standard-setting bodies and those concerned with the management of critical Internet resources (*e.g.* IETF, ICANN, RIRs, W3C);
- UN agencies, commissions and initiatives concerned with information, communications and technology-related issues (*e.g.* ITU, UNESCO, CSTD, OEWG);
- UN and intergovernmental entities concerned with issues substantially affected by the Internet (*e.g.* HRC, UNCTAD, regional commissions and specialist agencies, OECD);
- the rapidly growing and now very extensive range of formal and informal international fora concerned with aspects of digital governance and the impact of the Internet;
- temporary discussion and decision-making bodies, such as commissions, that are established to deal with specific topics at specific times;
- global and regional business associations and multinational corporations; and
- international civil society organisations concerned with aspects of Internet governance and the impact of the Internet, including human rights and sustainable development.

Some of these entities share the IGF’s multistakeholder character while others are multilateral or commercial. National governments and regulators also make decisions with substantial impacts on the Internet in their own jurisdictions, which are relevant to IGF.

Issues arising from discussions and consultations

Issues raised concerning the relationship with external decision-making bodies, and suggestions to address these, can be summarised as follows:

1. BIDIRECTIONALITY

Much discussion in this context concerns ways in which IGF discussions and outputs can have an impact on decisions in external bodies. It is also recognised, however, that effective partnerships are bidirectional: that participation by external bodies in IGF activities helps to inform discussions at the Forum and adds substance to potential outputs.

2. PARTICIPATION

It is recognised that active participation by decision-making bodies in the annual meeting adds credibility and authority to the IGF, particularly if participation is at senior level. The high-level and parliamentary tracks offer opportunities to develop interactions between senior figures in decision-making bodies and other stakeholder communities. The main meeting agenda offers some

opportunities (such as Open Forums) for international decision-making bodies to inform participants about their roles and set out their priorities. The MAG could explore their impact and potential further, though concerns have sometimes been expressed that sessions of this kind could undermine the multistakeholder character of the Forum or be used to influence rather than just inform the IGF.

Engagement with decision-making bodies is thought to be important throughout the IGF ecosystem. It is felt, for instance, that NRIs should encourage participation by national and regional IG entities in their deliberations.

3. OUTREACH

The range of relevant decision-making bodies is large, growing and in flux. Some important bodies play a constant role in IG (such as ICANN and IETF), while others are more or less significant at different times, while others again (such as independent commissions) may have short-term significance. Some decision-making bodies participate actively in IGF activities, while others have been largely absent. This is true of national and regional bodies in NRIs as well as international bodies in the global IGF.

It is recognised that the IGF's limited resources suggest a need for strategic prioritisation. As well as those that are highly significant to IG in general, if the IGF strengthens its issue focus (see below), it is suggested that the Forum should prioritise outreach to decision-making bodies that are particularly relevant to its issue focus areas, and/or topics where outputs are anticipated. A communications strategy (see below) would be relevant to this.

4. LIAISON

Some attempts have been made to build liaison between MAG members and international decision-making bodies. Liaison will in future be a function of the Leadership Panel, and will need to be discussed therein. One suggestion has been that individuals within the Panel could be charged with taking lead liaison responsibility for the IGF with specific international bodies.

SESSION 4 / DAY 2 SESSION 1 - THE DEVELOPMENT OF IGF OUTPUTS AND OUTCOMES

The IGF mandate calls on the Forum, *inter alia*, to:

- *identify emerging issues, bring them to the attention of the relevant bodies and the general public, and, where appropriate, make recommendations;*
- *help to find solutions to the issues arising from the use and misuse of the Internet, of particular concern to everyday users; and*
- *publish its proceedings.*

The EGM announcement seeks recommendations concerning 'improvements ... to the format and work of the Forum ... to develop effective and influential outputs.'

CONTEXT

The nature of appropriate outputs from the IGF has been debated since its early days. It arises from an inherent tension between the requirement that it should be a discussion forum without a decision-making role but that it should nevertheless 'identify emerging issues, bring them to the attention of the relevant bodies and the general public, and, where appropriate, make recommendations.'⁴²

⁴² *ibid*, para. 72(g)

This tension has led to prolonged discussions about the desirability of the IGF producing more ‘tangible’, ‘results-oriented’ and ‘actionable’ outputs that can feed into decision-making processes, leveraging the IGF’s unique status as a multistakeholder discussion forum. These discussions could be said to focus on two words from the mandate:

- when and how is it ‘appropriate’ for the Forum to make ‘recommendations’;
- and what type of ‘recommendations’ are thought to be ‘appropriate’.

Current documentary outputs from the IGF include:

- background material on the IGF website;
- the Guide to Issues and Themes that has been published prior to the annual meeting in the last two years;
- the IGF Summary Report (formerly the Chair’s Summary) of discussions issued at the end of each annual meeting;
- the ‘IGF messages’ issued alongside this summary since 2017, which are derived from reports by session organisers that are then compiled by the Secretariat and subject to community review;
- reports from BPFs and PNs (which can be regarded as outputs from the IGF itself);
- outputs from Dynamic Coalitions (which can be regarded as outputs from parts of the IGF ecosystem);
- outputs from the parliamentary track;
- outputs from events organised by the Secretariat (including a youth summit);
- reports from NRIs;
- reports commissioned by the MAG and of MAG working groups; and
- transcripts of proceedings (published volumes of which originally also included essays on various aspects of the IGF and themes).

In addition to outputs from within the IGF, written outputs are produced by members of the IGF community, reporting on IGF activities and making use of IGF materials and discussions. These include outputs from Day Zero events.

The IGF also has a wider range of ‘intangible outputs’ including the networks and multistakeholder connections developed amongst participants through the IGF and its activities, and the contribution which IGF discussions make to the thinking and decision-making of participants in their daily work and other fora.

Issues arising from discussions and consultations

Issues raised concerning outputs, and suggestions to address these, can be summarised as follows:

1. IMPACT

The underlying concern of much discussion is the impact that the IGF has had or should/could have on decisions made elsewhere. Has it, for instance, shaped discussions in ICANN, or helped in the development of principles, norms and standards? Has it influenced discussions in the General Assembly or the ITU? Has the exchange of experience led to better outcomes in national Internet environments? Have multistakeholder partnerships emerged from work within the IGF’s ecosystem which have reached beyond the IGF itself? Measuring these kinds of impact is difficult because it depends not just on written outputs but also on intangibles.

2. FOCUS

The IGF discusses a wide range of issues. It has been suggested that this lacks focus and that the Forum would have greater impact if it addressed a narrower range of issues each year, integrating intersessional and main meeting activity. One suggestion in this context is that it might focus on issues that are outwith or cut across the decision-making responsibilities of other IG bodies, so exploiting the IGF's uniqueness as a multistakeholder discussion forum without duplicating work in other entities.

A 2018 paper for the MAG⁴³ suggested seven criteria for identifying appropriate issues: that they should:

- be globally relevant;
- require action in the near future;
- enjoy a high level of consensus *before* selection;
- link to existing IGF work and stakeholder priorities;

and that they should not:

- be overly sensitive to (m)any stakeholders;
- be overly technical; or
- duplicate work being done elsewhere.

3. TARGET AUDIENCES

To be influential, outputs need to address the needs of their target audiences and be effectively communicated to them. It has been suggested that existing outputs – including ‘IGF messages’ – have been oriented more towards the IGF community itself, or to those with a general interest in IG, and that different approaches, focused on specific institutions or decision-making processes and those that participate in them, are required for the Forum to increase its influence. Suggestions on this advocate careful selection of target audiences, with recommendations selected for relevance and reports couched in the kind of language that is familiar to and could readily be used by policymakers. These comments are relevant not just to ‘IGF messages’ and other potential outputs from annual meetings, but also to reports from BPFs, PNs and DCs.

4. ANNUAL PROCESS

The process of developing substantive outputs must itself have substance. Many comments reflect on the desirability of building substance through discussions over a period of time (whether single or multi-year), involving contributions from intersessional activities (and perhaps from NRIs), facilitating agreement through draft reports (which may stem from intersessional activities), and structured discussion at the annual meeting (during a preparatory phase, in background documentation, through dedicated tracks for discussion of issues with planned outputs, leading to agreement on appropriate output documents and recommendations). Some have suggested that the Forum might commission independent research to facilitate discussion or develop its reports (which would require funding).

5. DELIBERATIVE PROCESS

The process of developing substantive outputs needs to be representative of diverse stakeholders and perspectives. The MAG working paper cited above identified four relevant criteria for this: inclusiveness (both online and offline), balance (with safeguards against dominance by vested

⁴³ https://www.intgovforum.org/multilingual/filedepot_download/5075/1257

interests), accountability and outcome-orientation. Other comments suggest the desirability of principles for the authorship and agreement of reports. (Existing guidelines for DC reports require that they reflect not just consensus but also dissenting views.)

6. TYPES OF OUTPUT

There is no desire within the IGF community to move towards the kind of negotiated texts that are familiar within the UN system. Most comments in this area have been concerned with identifying the issues and types of output that could achieve authoritative consensus and actionable and tangible outcomes. Types of output that have been suggested include analysis of issues (including different perspectives) and potential impacts (on different communities), definitions of consensus goals, identification of options, compilation/reporting of good/successful practice, recommendations on process (how other IG and international entities might address the issues, including multistakeholder engagement), and recommendations on substance (where there is clear consensus).

7. QUALITY OF OUTPUTS

It is recognised that the quality of outputs is an important determinant of the extent to which they will be read and used by decision-makers. Quality, in this context, includes the authoritativeness of analysis and recommendations, concision in writing, presentation and style (*e.g.* using language that reflects policymakers' priorities and can readily be used in policy reports). Consistency across a range of outputs also affects expectations.

There has been criticism of lack of analysis and focus in the IGF Messages compiled from reports by session organisers at the end of recent annual meetings. The Katowice Messages, for instance, list 57 bullet points that Forum sessions thought ought to be addressed. This is a useful record for participants and others in the wider IGF community but lacks the underpinning analysis, priorities and prescriptions or recommendations that are likely to interest policymakers.

8. COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

Concerns about the visibility of the IGF and outputs have been expressed since the first mandate review in 2010. Comments suggest that a comprehensive communications strategy is needed to grow the impact of the IGF in an environment where it must compete for attention with many other fora that now issue reports and make recommendations about the Internet. The Leadership Panel is expected to 'support the visibility of the IGF' and 'promote IGF outputs' within its strategic remit, and it is suggested that a communications/outreach strategy will be central to that role. Specific suggestions include further improvements to the website and more extensive use of social media, both of which would require additional resourcing for the Secretariat.

DAY 2

SESSION 2- THE ROLE OF INTERSESSIONAL BODIES

The IGF mandate does not explicitly refer to intersessional activity, which only emerged after its first meeting. However, it calls on the Forum, to 'facilitate the exchange of information and best practices, and in this regard make full use of the expertise of the academic, scientific and technical communities,' advise stakeholders on the availability and affordability of the Internet in the developing world,' 'discuss, inter alia, issues relating to critical Internet resources,' and 'help to find solutions to the issues arising from the use and misuse of the Internet.'

The EGM announcement seeks recommendations from the meeting concerning ‘improvements ... to the format and work of the Forum ... to strengthen focus [and relevance] in order to achieve goals relating to links with decision-making fora and the production of effective and influential outputs.

Context

Intersessional activities have evolved since 2006 in a relatively *ad hoc* manner, with several different models being implemented. Two main types of activity take place between sessions of the annual Forum - discussion groups concerned with particular topics or themes; and National, Regional and Youth IGFs. These are considered separately below. .

Issues arising from discussions and consultations

General issues raised concerning the role and performance of intersessional bodies, and suggestions to address these, can be summarised as follows:

1. The relationship between intersessional activities and the annual Forum

As discussed below, the overall structure of the annual meeting, with main sessions and workshops, has remained close to its original form. Reports from intersessional activities have been fitted into that structure rather than the structure being revised to reflect the transition of the IGF from annual event to ecosystem. Many comments have called for a more holistic approach to the IGF ecosystem, with greater recognition of the contribution that intersessional work now makes to the IGF as a whole, and stronger integration of intersessional activity with the main meeting.

2. The quality and consistency of intersessional outputs

While there are guidelines concerning the organisation of intersessional activities, the production of reports and other outputs is largely left to the organisers and participants. Some concern has been expressed about the variable quality of outputs. Some of these are intended to stimulate debate within the IGF while others are intended to inform and influence the wider world. It is suggested that greater consistency of style and presentation would increase their influence.

DYNAMIC COALITIONS, BEST PRACTICE FORUMS AND POLICY NETWORKS

Three models of intersessional activity draw together participants from within the IGF community to explore and (usually) report on issues of collective interest.

- Dynamic Coalitions (DCs), initiated in 2006, are self-generated autonomous groups that explore specific topics with or without producing formal outputs. Just over twenty are currently active. They operate on principles of open participation (membership, mailing lists and archives) and are authorised by the Secretariat on the strength of a written statement, action plan, mailing list and participation of diverse stakeholder representatives. Most continue over multiple IGF cycles. DCs collaborate through the DC Coordination Group which considers common principles and potential synergies.⁴⁴ They receive very limited Secretariat support but are unlimited in number and only required to submit annual reports outlining their activities. Output documents, if issued, are required to reflect minority and dissenting views.
- Best Practice Forums (BPFs), were initiated in 2007, responding to Article 72(d) of the *Tunis Agenda* which requires the IGF to ‘facilitate the exchange of information and best practices,’ and reintroduced after a hiatus in 2014. Their objective is ‘not to develop new policies or practices, but rather to collect existing good practices, share positive and negative experiences, and flag challenges that require

⁴⁴ <https://www.intgovforum.org/en/content/dc-coordination-activities>

additional multistakeholder dialogue and/or require the attention of policymakers, including in specified decision-making bodies.’⁴⁵ This is similar to the role envisaged for an ‘Observatory’ in the High-Level Panel report. The IGF website states that they ‘typically work on less controversial topics for which the debate has sufficiently matured to make way for some general consensus in the community and the focus of discussions has shifted to implementation.’⁴⁶ Topics are selected by the MAG, but BPFs determine their own working methods. Some have continued for more than one IGF cycle.

- Policy Networks (PNs) were initiated in the 2021 cycle in response to the High-Level Panel’s proposal for the IGF+ to include a ‘policy incubator’, and build on a 2015-2018 workstream on ‘Connecting and Enabling the Next Billion(s)’. They are expected to identify the ‘status quo and current issues including the policy gaps, existing capacity and conditions, local specificities, good and bad practises and possible ways forward through actionable activities led by identified implementation parties.’⁴⁷

The summary report on the 2021 IGF meeting described the role of BPFs and PNs thus:⁴⁸

PNs and BPFs outputs intend to contribute to an understanding of global issues and good practices, and to serve as a resource to inform policy discussions, standards development, business decisions, as well as public understanding, awareness, and discourse.

Both are limited in number, address topics selected by the MAG, receive significant support from the Secretariat, and are required to produce written outputs. PNs in particular can be seen as fulfilling the ‘policy incubator’ role proposed in the High-Level Panel report on Digital Cooperation.

Issues arising from discussions and consultations

A review of the work of Dynamic Coalitions was prepared by the DC Coordination Group in 2021.⁴⁹ This defined them as ‘multistakeholder, bottom-up and self-organised groups that work to deepen the understanding and analysis of Internet policy issues, to identify specific policy problems and to provide targeted policy solutions.’⁵⁰

The report demonstrated considerable variety in DCs’ work. Some have formal terms of reference and/or formal structures; others not. Some produce output documents (reports, compilations of good practice, sets of principles), but others don’t. Most work is done by mailing list, supported by sessions at the annual IGF.

The report noted that most DCs ‘experience challenges with membership engagement’ and many are heavily dependent on their coordinating groups. Many think that more should be done to promote their work within and beyond the IGF, and feel that collaboration/liaison with the MAG has been limited and could be strengthened. The report recommended the development of guidelines on the production of DC outputs, incorporation of DC work in development of the annual programme by the MAG, and involvement of DCs in developing more substantive outputs from the IGF.

⁴⁵ https://www.intgovforum.org/en/filedepot_download/3405/2270

⁴⁶ https://www.intgovforum.org/multilingual/filedepot_download/3405/2270

⁴⁷ https://www.intgovforum.org/en/filedepot_download/11138/2528

⁴⁸ https://www.intgovforum.org/en/filedepot_download/223/20706

⁴⁹ https://www.intgovforum.org/en/filedepot_download/186/18941

⁵⁰ These are listed at <https://www.intgovforum.org/en/content/explore-dynamic-coalitions>

A BPF on BPFs was commissioned by the MAG and reported in 2020.⁵¹ This suggested that the goal of BPFs should be updated to read as follows (proposed addition underlined):

The objective is not to develop new policies or practices, but rather to collect existing good practices, share positive and negative experiences, and flag challenges that require additional multistakeholder dialogue and/or require the attention of policy-makers, including in specified decision-making bodies.

It recommended that links between BPFs and the annual programme should be strengthened by chartering them for several years rather than on an annual basis, aligning their work more closely with the annual programme, and improving liaison with both the MAG and other IG bodies working on BPF themes.

ISSUES RAISED CONCERNING THE ROLE AND PERFORMANCE OF THESE INTERSESSIONAL ACTIVITIES, AND SUGGESTIONS TO ADDRESS THESE, CAN BE SUMMARISED AS FOLLOWS:

1. FORMATS/MODELS

Intersessional activities have evolved since 2006 in a relatively *ad hoc* manner. BPFs and PNs are determined by the MAG while DCs are autonomous. Comments suggest that all can/should contribute to the development of IGF outputs, but that there is lack of clarity about the differences between the different models, and about their overall relationship with the annual meeting, including their accountability. Suggestions have been made to bring greater consistency to the work of DCs – for instance through a standard charter – but comments also value their autonomy and independence.

2. SELECTION OF TOPICS

The MAG selects the themes for BPFs and PNs, while DCs are self-selecting. Comments have called for more integration between the work of intersessional activities and themes/issues chosen for the annual meeting, in order to encourage more effective outputs from both. One way of doing this would be for the MAG to select themes and then commission BPFs and PNs to address them on an annual or multi-year basis.

3. REPRESENTATIVENESS AND LEVEL OF ENGAGEMENT

The assessments of DCs and BPFs (above) and other comments have raised concerns about the representativeness of participation in intersessional activities, including the representation of women, developing countries and different types of expertise, and of different perspectives on the issues being considered. Concern was also expressed in the assessments about levels of engagement by members of intersessional groups, with the work of some found to be heavily dependent on a few individuals. It is suggested that diversity is crucial to the perceived legitimacy of intersessional outputs, and that this could be damaged if any came to be seen as dominated by particular interest groups.

4. QUALITY AND CONSISTENCY OF OUTPUTS

BPFs and PNs are expected to produce reports, though the form of these may vary according to the nature of the issues they address and the modalities they choose to follow (for instance, outputs may analyse issues or they may be compilations of ‘good practice’). DCs may or may not publish outputs. It is recognised that depth and quality of analysis, discussion of options, language and presentation are relevant to the seriousness with which reports will be taken by decision-makers. It has been suggested that more consistency in the production of outputs, and the use of language that can be used by policymakers, might facilitate discussion at the annual meeting and increase impact in the wider community.

⁵¹ <https://www.intgovforum.org/en/content/bpf-on-bpfs>;
https://www.intgovforum.org/en/filedepot_download/3405/2212

5. DISSEMINATION OF OUTPUTS

All BPFs to date have completed reports, which have been published on the IGF website. The BPF on BPFs noted, however, that ‘There is no clear strategy to promote and disseminate BPF outputs.’ Dissemination of outputs is linked to the relationship between BPFs and outputs arising from the IGF as a whole, and to discussion of an appropriate communications strategy for these. DCs have indicated that more could be done – by themselves and by the MAG/IGF Secretariat – to promote their outputs.

6. MAG AND SECRETARIAT SUPPORT

BPFs and PNs receive significant support from the Secretariat, but Secretariat support for DCs is limited. Efforts have been made to build liaison between individual MAG members and BPFs/PNs, but reports suggest this has had limited success, partly because of the time commitment required of (volunteer) MAG members. The Secretariat provides support to the DC Coordination Group, while one MAG member has acted as liaison to this. If intersessional activities are to be more effectively integrated with the annual meeting and output production, it is suggested that the MAG (and perhaps the Leadership Panel) will need to play a more substantive role, and that the Secretariat will require additional resourcing.

NATIONAL, REGIONAL, SUB-REGIONAL AND YOUTH IGF INITIATIVES (NRIS)⁵²

NRIs are described as ‘organic and independent formations that are discussing issues pertaining to Internet Governance from the perspective of their respective communities, while acting in accordance with the main principles of the global IGF.’⁵³ They are expected to provide full reports on their preparatory work and meetings to the global IGF.

There are currently approaching 150 NRIs, distributed as follows:

- 96 national IGFs, of which 31 are in Africa, 12 in the Asia/Pacific region, 21 in Latin America and the Caribbean, 15 in Eastern Europe, and 17 in Western Europe, North America and Oceania
- 20 are regional IGFs (mostly supranational but occasionally subnational); and
- 34 are youth IGFs (mostly national but some regional).

Bi-monthly meetings of NRI coordinators are convened by the Secretariat, and a coordination session is included in the agenda for the annual/global meeting. An annual work plan has been developed for 2022,⁵⁴ as the successor to a plan last year.

ISSUES ARISING FROM DISCUSSIONS AND CONSULTATIONS

Issues raised concerning the role and performance of NRIs and suggestions to address these can be summarised as follows:

1. STATUS

NRIs were not part of the original structure for the IGF but began to emerge shortly after its inception. They have become the principal means of engagement for many participants in the overall IGF ecosystem. Some regional IGFs have developed substantial structures of their own, including partnerships with other international entities, intersessional activity and, in at least one case,

⁵² A background document on NRIs, prepared for the EGM, is at https://intgovforum.org/en/filedepot_download/252/21171

⁵³ <https://www.intgovforum.org/multilingual/content/igf-regional-and-national-initiatives>

⁵⁴ https://www.intgovforum.org/en/filedepot_download/52/20789

intersessional meetings. Comments suggest that their status in the IGF ecosystem has been insufficiently recognised, and that greater value could be derived from creative ways of incorporating their work with that of the global Forum and intersessional activities.

2. FOCUS

NRIs are diverse in character, because of their diverse orientation, the different Internet experience of different countries/regions, and the ways in which their organisers tailor them to their communities. Some NRIs focus primarily on local (national/regional) issues, while some focus more on the contributions they can make towards the global IGF. Comments have both valued this diversity and considered whether more consistency, building on experience and ‘best practices’, might strengthen networking. It has also been suggested that NRIs could gather inputs on annual meeting themes and thereby contribute towards global Forum outputs (see below).

3. Integration with global meetings

Many comments suggest the need for stronger integration between NRIs and the annual meeting, with increased opportunities for substantive dialogue. NRIs are expected to provide written reports to the IGF Secretariat, but these are not widely disseminated. (A compendium of written NRI reports was published in 2021 and 2022.⁵⁵) While there is a main session in the annual meeting devoted to oral reports from NRIs, and some collaborative sessions are organised by them, many comments suggest that these provide insufficient time to build on the rich experience of NRIs and enable them to contribute substantively to annual meetings.

Given the large number of NRIs it would be difficult to increase the time available for NRI reports substantially within the meeting agenda, and so, it has been suggested, alternative ways of building engagement ought to be explored. One suggestion is that NRIs should be invited to discuss national/regional contexts or priorities in one or more of the issue themes selected for the annual meeting or for BPFs and PNs. If they were to do so in their annual meetings and/or intersessional activity, reports from them could increase the evidence base and add substance to IGF outputs.

4. RELATIONSHIP WITH INTERSESSIONAL ACTIVITY

There have been calls for more cooperation between NRIs and intersessional activities, and the Secretariat has facilitated dialogue between NRIs and BPFs to explore collaboration.⁵⁶ One suggestion concerns the possibility of adding a mid-year session to an NRI’s annual cycle (analogous to the annual intersessional meetings of CSTD and already implemented by the European NRI EuroDIG), which could be used to address the issues that are being investigated by BPFs and PNs.

5. CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

It is recognised that NRIs can play a significant role in capacity development within their territories, for example through information sessions at their meetings, and through preparation of background information on Internet issues and national Internet environments. Regional IGFs can/do work with regional IG Schools. An overall IGF capacity development strategy (see below) could take advantage of these opportunities, for instance through guidelines for capacity development activity and identification of learning resources.

6. RESOURCING

⁵⁵<https://www.intgovforum.org/content/nris-compendium>

⁵⁶ https://www.intgovforum.org/en/filedepot_download/7507/2118

NRIs can request procedural and other support from the IGF Secretariat. An NRI toolkit has been produced (on how to establish and organise an NRI)⁵⁷ and guidelines have been offered to assist in engaging governments and parliamentarians, organising remote hubs and conducting sessions at the global meeting. Small financial grants are available to support some NRIs. It is recognised that proposals to increase support for NRIs would require increased resourcing for the Secretariat and/or from donors to specific NRIs.

SESSION 3 - THE ANNUAL MEETING OF THE IGF

The IGF mandate says that the Forum should ‘meet periodically, as required’ to ‘discuss public policy issues related to key elements of Internet governance in order to foster the sustainability, robustness, security, stability and development of the Internet.’ The *Tunis Agenda* invited the Secretary-General to ‘examine a range of options for the convening of the Forum, taking into consideration the proven competencies of all stakeholders in Internet governance and the need to ensure their full involvement,’ and to report to UN Member-States on the operation of the Forum. The Secretary-General subsequently established the MAG and Secretariat to support the IGF, which falls within DESA’s administration within the UN system.

The EGM announcement seeks recommendations concerning ‘improvements to the format and work of the Forum’ and ‘how to operationalise recurring proposals regarding IGF strengthening and improvement.’ The EGM agenda asks for consideration, *inter alia*, of the work of the MAG in programme development, multi-year programming, the meeting’s issue focus, its relationship with intersessional activity, and a hybrid format.

Context

The annual meeting has been held in different locations worldwide since 2006, with the exception of 2020 when it was held online because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The format has evolved but remained broadly consistent with that of the first meeting in 2006: generally a four-day event (plus a preliminary Day Zero and other prior activities), with an overarching theme and several broad subsidiary themes, arranged in plenary (‘main’) sessions and a variety of simultaneous workshops and other session formats, culminating in the publication of a chair’s summary and (since 2017) “IGF messages”.

The primary purpose of the MAG, elaborated in its terms of reference,⁵⁸ is to advise the Secretary-General on the organisation of the annual meeting and the development of its programme, including organisation of main sessions and selection of workshops. This has generally taken place, since the early years of the IGF, through an annual cycle of up to three face-to-face meetings and around twenty online meetings. The cycle begins with a stock-taking of the previous year’s event and open consultations, followed by the adoption of a main theme and subsidiary themes, selection of workshops according to agreed criteria, and other organisational preparations for the annual event. The MAG is also expected to support intersessional work, including the selection of topics for BPFs and PNs, and to ‘promote the work of the IGF amongst all stakeholders.’⁵⁹

Issues arising from discussions and consultations

Issues raised concerning the annual meeting, and suggestions to address these, can be summarised as follows:

1. DEVELOPMENT OF THE ANNUAL PROGRAMME

⁵⁷ https://www.intgovforum.org/en/filedepot_download/3568/480

⁵⁸ <https://www.intgovforum.org/en/content/mag-terms-of-reference>

⁵⁹ *ibid.*

The development of the annual programme is the primary purpose of the MAG, as set out in its terms of reference. The scope of this role – whether, as suggested at the 2016 retreat, it is primarily a programme committee or a steering committee – has long been discussed within the IGF community.

In practice, the MAG has developed annual programmes mostly within precedent set by those of previous years, much of its work being concerned with the selection and validation of workshop proposals according to their relevance to IG and IGF themes, stakeholder diversity and other criteria. Some comments suggest that this focus on workshop selection, given the large number of proposals that must be considered, has been time-consuming for MAG members (who participate on a voluntary basis); some that it has inhibited attention to the structure and cohesiveness of the programme as a whole, and that more effective use could be made of MAG members' time and expertise in addressing more strategic issues (such as issue focus, integration of intersessional activity and multi-year programming).

While the format of the IGF is broadly popular, some have suggested that the MAG has also been unduly cautious in re-evaluating the structure, and/or that it has added new session types and formats to the programme without sufficient evaluation of their effectiveness, resulting in a collage of insufficiently distinct types of session..

There has been growing concern that the large number of both themes and sessions dilutes focus at the annual meeting. "Fewer sessions with deeper discussions" have been advocated, notably during stocktaking on the 2021 event. Comments suggest that fewer thematic tracks would enable stronger thematic development across the programme as well as more substantive outcomes (see below).

2. DELIVERY

Comments on the delivery of annual meetings are routinely gathered through consultation and stocktaking processes undertaken by the MAG at the start of annual cycles. In addition to points raised elsewhere in this subsection, recent stocktakings and other comments have included suggestions for achieving:

- greater cohesion between workshops and main sessions;
- more clarity in the style and purpose of different session types, and a reduction in the number of these (which has proliferated since the beginning of the Forum);
- more diversity in speaker panels (which are sometimes dominated by familiar faces);
- more opportunity for contributions from the floor;
- more space for NRIs, and for youth inclusion, within the annual programme; and
- more evaluation of participation during workshops in order to identify potential improvements to the contribution that they make.

3. MULTI-YEAR PROGRAMMING

There has been growing support in recent years for suggestions that the IGF should move from single-year to multi-year programming. These suggestions generally derive from recognition of the IGF's evolution from an annual conference into an ecosystem that includes intersessional and national/regional as well as annual, global activity, and from the repeatedly-expressed objective of securing more substantive and tangible outcomes.

Multi-year programming, it is suggested, would facilitate more detailed and authoritative work on selected issues and thereby more influence from the Forum into decision-making spaces. Other comments have suggested that it would enable the Forum to focus on a narrower range of issues

within each annual meeting, increasing the depth of discussion and enabling sequencing of themes. It would also be possible, with multi-year planning, for outputs from one year to be further developed through intersessional activity, becoming inputs for further consideration at the subsequent annual meeting.

Developing a multi-year programme would require coordination between the strategic role of the Leadership Panel and the operational role of the MAG, and variation to the way the MAG currently develops annual programmes.

The scheduled review of the IGF mandate in 2025 potentially constrains multi-year programming since the current mandate does not extend beyond that year.

4. ISSUE FOCUS

The MAG currently selects a number of themes for the main meeting annually. These are generally broad in character. Those for 2021 were divided between main focus areas (economic and social inclusion and human rights; universal access and meaningful access) and cross-cutting and emerging areas (emerging regulation; environmental sustainability and climate change, inclusive internet governance ecosystems and digital cooperation; and trust, security and stability) though comments suggest that the distinction between these was unclear. Discussion around themes in the MAG is not directly linked to intersessional activity.

There has been extensive discussion in recent years about the desirability of adopting a clearer and more limited focus for each annual meeting. It is suggested that focusing on fewer themes but stretching these across the range of annual activity – including PNs and BPFs as well as the annual meeting – would enable more systematic development of outputs with substantive recommendations oriented towards the needs of policymakers. This is closely related to multi-year programming, including the possibility of themes being determined for several years ahead and, where appropriate, continuing through more than one annual cycle.

Related suggestions include the continued production of a guide to issues and themes (of the kind published in 2020 and 2021), building on intersessional work, within the annual programme; the commissioning of independent background reports on selected issues; workshop clusters contributing to discussion at main sessions; and processes integrating work by different parts of the IGF ecosystem to achieve authoritative outputs.

Strengthening the issue focus would require some rethinking of the ways in which the MAG assesses workshops and interacts with intersessional activity. Some are concerned that this might undermine the ‘bottom-up’ character of programme development.

5. HIGH LEVEL SESSIONS

High-level sessions have been included in the programme for a number of years, and are considered valuable in encouraging participation by senior policymakers from all stakeholder groups, including government and business. The high-level track at annual meetings is co-organized by the UN and the host government. Some feel that it is not well-integrated in the programme and suggest that stronger integration of the high-level track would increase its value to the IGF and to participants.

An extended parliamentary track was included in 2021, based on earlier meetings and roundtables in 2019 and 2020, and has been commended for its potential to extend the reach of IGF into national decision-making fora. In 2021 this track focused on principles that should underpin digital legislation. Assessment of its impact would be valuable.

6. REMOTE PARTICIPATION AND HYBRID MEETINGS

Remote participation has been a feature of the annual IGF from early days. While useful in enabling participation by those unable to attend in person, implementation has been criticised for offering only limited or partial engagement in sessions. Remote hubs, which bring remote participants together in one location, have improved the virtual experience in some countries/regions.

The COVID-19 pandemic required the 2020 meeting to be virtual, and the 2021 meeting to be delivered as a hybrid event, with modalities that enabled much more equal participation by physical and virtual participants. The total number of participants appears to have increased as a result, though virtual participants may have attended fewer sessions per head. Virtual and hybrid events have also been held by NRIs, though there has been no general assessment made of their experience.

It is generally expected that future annual meetings will be hybrid and there is strong support for this within the IGF community. It is assumed that the organisation of these hybrid meetings will learn from and build on experience in 2021, recognising both the value of physical participation for networking and the importance of virtual participation for inclusion and diversity. (The stocktaking report on the 2021 meeting noted that ‘While there was near-unanimous agreement on the virtues of going hybrid, it was said that networking events do not work in a hybrid format, for organizational rather than technical reasons.’⁶⁰) Comments have emphasised that operationalising hybrid meetings will require investment in resources, including more resilient online services, better facilities for networking, and the promotion/marketing of virtual participation.

SESSION 4 - THE ROLE OF THE LEADERSHIP PANEL

The proposal for a Leadership Panel, initially described as a Multistakeholder High Level Body (MHLB), emerged from the Secretary-General’s *Roadmap*. The EGM announcement seeks recommendations concerning its implementation.

Context

The Leadership Panel will consist of ten members. Nominations have been sought from the IGF community and names of members will shortly be announced⁶¹. The Panel will elect its own chair. Meetings will be attended *ex officio* by the MAG chair and the Tech Envoy. The terms of reference for the Panel⁶² require it to:

- [provide] *strategic inputs and advice on the IGF;*
- [promote] *the IGF and its outputs;*
- [support] *both high-level and at-large stakeholder engagement in the IGF and IGF fundraising efforts; and*
- [exchange] *IGF outputs from the Forum with other stakeholders and relevant fora and [facilitate] the feeding of input of these decision-makers and fora to the IGF’s agenda-setting process, leveraging relevant MAG expertise.*

⁶⁰ https://www.intgovforum.org/en/filedepot_download/249/20746

⁶¹ <https://www.intgovforum.org/en/content/internet-governance-forum-leadership-panel-call-for-nominations>

⁶² <https://www.intgovforum.org/en/content/terms-of-reference-for-the-igf-leadership-panel>

In order to avoid functional overlap between them, the terms of reference state that the Panel and the MAG 'will function as distinct entities, but with close linkages and continuous efforts to promote collaboration and cooperation within the IGF:'

Recognising the relevance of existing IGF structures and activities, the MAG will continue to lead on the IGF annual work programme and the global forum. The Panel will contribute strategic inputs to the programme-setting and support the visibility of the IGF consistent with the responsibilities and functions described above. The Panel will also provide high-level input and promote IGF outputs. This will not substitute but rather complement and support similar and ongoing efforts by the MAG.

Issues arising from discussions and consultations

There has been considerable discussion within the Internet community about the principle and operational modalities for the Leadership Panel. Issues raised include the following:

1. The role of the Leadership Panel

Many commentaries and assessments of the IGF have been concerned with the need for it to become more cohesive in its work and influential in its impact. Recent years have seen increasing desire for a stronger leadership platform which can address perceived deficits in these areas and ensure that the IGF maintains and builds on its unique role, as a multistakeholder discussion forum with the power to convene debate and help to build consensus on contentious issues. Some members of the IGF community, however, have expressed concern that a leadership platform might detract from the 'bottom-up' approach that they believe has been important to the IGF's success to date.

2. The relationship between the Panel and the MAG

It is generally recognised that the relationship between the Panel and the MAG will be crucial to the success of each. This has not yet been detailed. Comments point to the importance of clarifying the roles that each will play as 'distinct entities ... with close linkages', to arrangements for liaison, and to 'cooperation and coordination' in areas such as multi-year programming (if adopted) and the production and promotion of outputs. Some have suggested that this will require revisiting the terms of reference for the MAG as well as agreeing terms of reference for the Panel.

3. The role of the IGF within the UN system

The *Roadmap* envisages increased scope for the IGF within the Digital Cooperation agenda set out in the Secretary-General's *Roadmap* (see above). Strategic responsibility for this will lie with the Panel. Questions have been raised about how the Panel will interact with the wider IGF community in developing its strategy.

4. The relationship between the Panel, and the annual meeting and IGF outputs

It is unclear at present how the Leadership Panel will engage with the annual meeting – for example whether it will be responsible for any sessions in the programme, and how it will interact with the established high-level and parliamentary tracks. This will need to be addressed before the 2022 meeting.

There is general agreement, discussed above, that the IGF should engage more strongly with other IG entities and promote IGF outputs amongst them. Strategic responsibility for this – including the promotion of outputs – will substantially engage the Panel. Questions arise about whether and how the Panel will engage with the development of outputs.

5. Resourcing

The introduction of the Panel will add to pressure on the Secretariat. Concerns have been expressed about the impact of this on other IGF activities, and the scope for securing the additional funding that will be required.

DAY 3

SESSION 1 - THE FUNDING OF IGF ACTIVITIES

The Tunis Agenda said that the IGF should have a 'lightweight and decentralised structure,' but made no explicit reference to funding.

The EGM announcement seeks recommendations about ways of 'ensuring sustained and regular funding to support the IGF and the IGF Secretariat.'

Context

The IGF has been supported by voluntary contributions, in cash and kind, from a variety of stakeholders. Contributions are paid into a Trust Fund, administered by DESA, which supports the Secretariat, travel costs of MAG members and some annual meeting participants from developing countries, and work to support intersessional activities and NRIs. Some 11 governments, 15 businesses, 12 Internet governance entities (including registries) and a number of other organisations contributed financially to this Fund in 2021, some also making contributions in kind.⁶³

Host governments bear the majority of costs of annual meetings.

The Secretariat works with DESA, the MAG and host governments to deliver the annual Forum and provides support to intersessional activities. In future it will also support the Leadership Panel, whose terms of reference say that additional donations will be sought to facilitate its work and travel by Panel members from developing countries.

Issues arising from discussions and consultations

Issues raised concerning funding, and suggestions to address these, can be summarised as follows:

1. OVERVIEW

There is general support within the IGF community for the 'lightweight and decentralised structure' established at WSIS. It is generally accepted that the Forum should be funded from voluntary contributions rather than the UN budget – though it should be noted that many IGF participants, and potential donors, may be unaware that it receives no budgetary support. It is recognised, however, that reliance on voluntary funding is inherently insecure, as well as raising questions about the expectations of donors and the accountability of the Forum within the UN system and to the IGF community.

2. SECRETARIAT RESOURCING

It is generally felt that limited funds have constrained the range and depth of work that can be undertaken by the Secretariat. Many comments describe the Secretariat as under-resourced, over-worked and having limited capacity, as a result, to do much that would currently be valuable. The number of BPFs and PNs is restricted by resource constraints, while very limited support can be

⁶³ <https://www.intgovforum.org/en/content/donors-to-the-igf-trust-fund>

provided to DCs. It is felt that the Secretariat lacks the resources required to reach out to under-represented groups, build relationships with the burgeoning range of new IG initiatives and promote IGF outputs. There is therefore concern that, without additional funding, it will be unable adequately to support additional activity (of the kind described above, including the Leadership Panel) or develop a more holistic approach across the Forum's ecosystem.

3. FUNDING OF PARTICIPATION

The other funding challenge that is frequently discussed concerns participation. Attendance at the annual IGF is expensive, and beyond the reach of many would-be participants from developing countries, less well-funded civil society organisations and SMEs. Some participation bursaries have been made available by a variety of donors over the years. There has, however, been consistent concern that unequal access to funding by would-be participants leads to unequal representation of stakeholders, particularly from developing countries. Improvements to remote participation and the introduction of hybrid delivery (below) will have some mitigating impact, but this challenge will remain.

4. FURTHER FUNDING

The limitations posed by funding have long been considered problematic. The CSTD working group on improvements to the IGF in 2012 made recommendations that the IGF should 'encourage increased voluntary contributions,' for instance by explaining the fundraising process more clearly; 'enhance accountability and transparency,' for instance by presenting annual financial reports and timely reports to donors;' and 'acknowledge host country and in-kind support more fulsomely.

Recent comments on funding suggest the need for diversification as well as growth in voluntary contributions. Suggestions made include:

- the appointment of a professional fundraiser who could work with the Secretariat;
- the development of a financial needs assessment, associated with a multi-year programme of activity, which could be used as part of an appeal to donors;
- outreach to (more) private sector businesses within the Internet and Internet-related sectors; and
- appeals for funds for specific (hypothecated) purposes, such as bursaries to support participation by individuals from under-represented groups.

SESSION 2 - OUTREACH, ENGAGEMENT, PARTICIPATION AND CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

The *Tunis Agenda* declared that the Forum should be established 'for multi-stakeholder policy dialogue' and that it should be 'multilateral, multi-stakeholder, democratic and transparent' in its working and function.

The IGF mandate says that the IGF should 'strengthen and enhance the engagement of stakeholders in existing and/or future Internet governance mechanisms, particularly those from developing countries,' and 'contribute to capacity building for Internet governance in developing countries, drawing fully on local sources of knowledge and expertise.'

The EGM announcement seeks recommendations aimed at 'growing the engagement of those stakeholders who are currently unengaged, with a view to expanding and diversifying participation in the IGF processes.'

Context

The *Tunis Agenda* established that the IGF should be a multistakeholder forum and recognised in particular the role of governments, the private sector, civil society, intergovernmental and international organisations, and the academic and technical communities.⁶⁴ In addition to this multistakeholder taxonomy, the General Assembly has drawn attention to the importance of ensuring full and equal participation of developing countries. The IGF community has emphasised the need for gender equality, accessibility to its activities for those with disabilities, and to remote participation to include those unable to attend the annual meeting for financial or other reasons.

Data sets on participation numbers for the annual meeting are imperfect, and relate to registration rather than level of activity.

A preliminary study of participation conducted in 2021, which was based on limited and mostly registration data, suggested that:

- Participation in the annual meeting has grown over time.
- The location of the meeting has a significant effect on geographical participation.
- There has been growth in online participation (as online facilities have improved).
- Participation from developing countries has improved, but that from Least Developed Countries (LDCs) has been consistently low.
- The gender balance in registrations has improved over the years and is now close to even.
- Civil society participation is greater than that of other stakeholder communities.
- Government participation rates are stable, but are stronger in some regions than others.
- Private sector participation is uneven, with under-representation of smaller businesses.

Much less information is available on participation in intersessional activities and NRIs.

Issues arising from discussions and consultations

Issues raised concerning outreach, engagement and participation, and suggestions relating to these, can be summarised as follows:

1. DATA AND METRICS

There are significant weaknesses in the data sets available for assessing participation in the IGF. The parameters for data gathering and reporting have at times been inconsistent, and there is insufficient granularity to explore levels of participation within regions or stakeholder groups. If the IGF is to understand participation in the annual meeting more fully, it is suggested, metrics need to be developed and monitored to improve its quantitative and assess its qualitative aspects.

Available data derive primarily from registration at the annual meeting. The provisional report mentioned above and other comments recognise, however, that ‘meaningful participation’ cannot be measured by registration rates alone but is also determined by levels of engagement (such as differences in the numbers of sessions attended and in active involvement in those sessions as platform or floor speakers) and perceptions of participation (whether individuals feel their involvement has been invited, welcomed and recognised).

⁶⁴ <https://www.itu.int/net/wsis/docs2/tunis/off/6rev1.html>, para. 35

2. PARTICIPATION IN THE ECOSYSTEM

Participation in the annual meeting can no longer be taken as equivalent to participation in the IGF.

Many people now participate in IGF activity through NRIs. More systematic data gathering on quantitative and qualitative participation in NRIs would build a better understanding of participation in the IGF community.

Intersessional activities are also fundamental to the modern IGF, and likely to become more so if proposals to develop outputs are agreed. Representative participation in BPFs, PNs and DCs is an important factor in validating outputs. Concerns have been expressed that some intersessional activities are highly dependent on small coordinating groups. More information on this would be valuable.

3. INTERSECTIONALITY

Most discussion about participation has focused on inclusive and representative multistakeholder engagement. It has always been recognised, however, that this is only one dimension of inclusion and representation. The participation of developing countries and participation by gender have been widely discussed and raised concerns since the IGF was formed. Efforts have been made to address these but they continue to feature prominently in comments from the IGF community and international agencies.

Other aspects of participation that have raised concerns include geographical (regional and sub-regional) participation, the participation of young people, indigenous peoples, ethnic minorities and marginalised communities, people with disabilities, minority language speakers, *etc.* Different perspectives on Internet governance issues are also significant. These aspects are relevant to NRIs as well as to the global meeting. Understanding intersectional inequalities is also important in this context.

4. MULTISTAKEHOLDER PARTICIPATION

Concern has been expressed that imbalanced stakeholder participation could undermine the IGF's unique contribution to IG. Concerns have been expressed about under-representation of governments (particularly from some regions) and of business communities (particularly SMEs).

Attention has also been drawn to the need to reflect diversity *within* stakeholder groups – for example, to engage government departments that use the Internet as well as those that are engaged in IG and ICTs; to engage businesses across the range of Internet activity, not just larger businesses or those concerned with infrastructure and online services; to engage businesses on the demand side of the Internet, such as those in retail and financial services as well as those on the supply side; and to engage a wider range of civil society organisations from a wider range of countries.

The Secretary-General has also spoken of the need for the IGF to include a wider range of expertise in its deliberations, including economists, social scientists, ethicists and others who are primarily concerned with the impact of the Internet. Nitin Desai, Special Adviser to the Secretary-General, raised this from the start of the Forum in an essay following the first annual meeting:

What the IGF provides a forum where people and groups, who do not normally meet together, enter into a structured and constructive conversation. Its success must be measured by the extent to which it engenders changes in the actions and policies of bodies which do have formal decision-making authority. So far the focus has been on connecting with those most directly involved in managing the Internet infrastructure. But the impact of the Internet extends to many areas of policy beyond Internet

*and Telecom management. The challenge is to create a space that draws in an increasingly wider class of participants.*⁶⁵

5. DEVELOPING COUNTRY PARTICIPATION

The need to ensure equitable developing country participation is fundamentally important. As mentioned earlier, the concentration of Internet development and resources in developed countries leads to concerns that the distinctive needs and priorities of developing countries will be under-represented. This risk is reinforced by the high costs of participation in the expanding range of Internet decision-making bodies. This issue affects all stakeholder groups, and registration data suggest that it is particularly problematic for potential participants from Least Developed Countries.

Bursaries and fellowships have been provided to support travel by some participants. While this is valuable, comments suggest that it is only one aspect of enabling developing country participation. Comments suggest that it is also necessary to monitor and facilitate participation in intersessional activities. Increased attention to the work of NRIs would enhance another route towards engagement.

6. REMOTE PARTICIPATION

Remote participation has been enabled at annual meetings since the early days, but there have been criticisms of its implementation over the years. Remote hubs which offered remote participants collective access at a shared location are generally felt to have improved remote participants' experience. The hybrid meeting held in 2021 forced the IGF to introduce much more powerful modalities for virtual participation. Although it is recognised that these had flaws, this has enabled lessons to be learnt, and most members of the IGF community seem to expect future meetings to be hybrid. It is recognised that this needs to reach far beyond engagement in sessions at the annual meeting, to facilitate networking and sharing of experience, which will require innovation and investment.

7. LANGUAGE

Although the IGF is nominally multilingual, and machine translation is available, the large majority of participants in the annual meeting and intersessional activity participate in English. It has been suggested that this marginalises non-English speakers and cultures. While simultaneous interpretation is available in the main room at annual meetings and for remote participants, there has been criticism of its quality. It has also been suggested that IGF outputs should be routinely translated into all six UN languages (translation to date has been made possible by volunteers within the IGF community).

SESSION 3 - CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

The IGF website states that the Forum 'contributes to capacity building, allowing ... stakeholders to build knowledge and skills that will facilitate their participation in existing Internet governance institutions and arrangements.'⁶⁶ The IGF community has been concerned with capacity development in two contexts:

- a) capacity development on Internet governance for policymakers and other stakeholders; and
- b) capacity development that enables individuals to participate more effectively in the IGF itself.

A number of activities are listed on the website including workshops (recently including a partnership with Microsoft focused on safe digital transformation); financial grants to NRIs and resources concerning ways

⁶⁵ https://www.intgovforum.org/cms/hydera/IGFBook_the_first_two_years.pdf

⁶⁶ <https://www.intgovforum.org/en/about#about-igf-faqs>

to engage with the Forum; collaboration with schools and activities for young people; and work with parliamentarians.⁶⁷

Issues arising from discussions and consultations

Issues raised concerning capacity development, and suggestions relating to these, can be summarised as follows:

1. INTERNET GOVERNANCE IN GENERAL

Capacity development for policymakers and other stakeholders is undertaken by many organisations. It is explicitly undertaken by some NRIs. A number of regional (and more recently national) Internet Governance Schools have emerged that are independent from the IGF. These participate in a Dynamic Coalition.⁶⁸

A review of the IGF's role in capacity development was undertaken in 2019. This suggested that capacity development within the Forum should 'not only be about the nuts and bolts' of the Internet itself, but also 'aim to connect Internet governance issues with outcomes that affect the lives and work of people and institutions who are not part of the Internet governance ecosystem in a narrow sense.'⁶⁹ Given resource limitations, it suggested the development of an annual capacity development action plan, with a framework for activity that could be undertaken through collaboration with other IG-oriented organisations (such as ISOC, ICANN and the Internet Governance Schools), and include structured work with groups such as parliamentarians.

Other suggestions include encouraging DCs and other intersessional activities to prepare capacity development resources among their outputs.

2. PARTICIPATION IN THE IGF

The IGF has paid attention to capacity development for new participants and to orient participation in forthcoming meetings.

- Annual meetings have included orientation sessions on Day Zero, while the 2021 renewal included an extensive Preparation and Engagement phase of online meetings prior to the meeting, which included capacity development objectives.
- Since 2020, a Guide to Issues and Themes has been prepared ahead of the annual meeting to assist both in orienting new participants and guiding discussions.
- Discussions around capacity development were initiated by the MAG chair in 2020. A series of capacity development events addressing issues of cybersecurity was undertaken (with donor support) ahead of the 2021 annual meeting.⁷⁰

Some sessions within annual meetings have focused on building expertise of key stakeholder groups. The parliamentary track in 2021, for instance, focused on principles for digital legislation with the aim of enhancing lawmakers' expertise and understanding of digital issues.

⁶⁷ <https://www.intgovforum.org/en/content/igf-capacity-development-0>

⁶⁸ <https://www.igschools.net/sig/>

⁶⁹ 'A draft framework for capacity development for the Internet Governance Forum,' 2020.

⁷⁰ <https://www.intgovforum.org/multilingual/content/our-digital-future>

Comments suggest that more activities along these lines would help to orient new participants in meetings and encourage more participation in the future. Other suggestions include the inclusion of IGF capacity development sessions in the programmes of NRIs, which have been pioneered in 2021.⁷¹

⁷¹<https://www.intgovforum.org/en/content/igf-capacity-development-workshops>

ANNEX 1- EXTRACTS FROM THE TUNIS AGENDA FOR THE INFORMATION SOCIETY CONCERNING THE IGF⁷²

67. We agree, *inter alia*, to invite the UN Secretary-General to convene a new forum for multi-stakeholder policy dialogue.

...

72. We ask the UN Secretary-General, in an open and inclusive process, to convene, by the second quarter of 2006, a meeting of the new forum for multi-stakeholder policy dialogue—called the *Internet Governance Forum* (IGF). The mandate of the Forum is to:

- a. Discuss public policy issues related to key elements of Internet governance in order to foster the sustainability, robustness, security, stability and development of the Internet.
- b. Facilitate discourse between bodies dealing with different cross-cutting international public policies regarding the Internet and discuss issues that do not fall within the scope of any existing body.
- c. Interface with appropriate intergovernmental organizations and other institutions on matters under their purview.
- d. Facilitate the exchange of information and best practices, and in this regard make full use of the expertise of the academic, scientific and technical communities.
- e. Advise all stakeholders in proposing ways and means to accelerate the availability and affordability of the Internet in the developing world.
- f. Strengthen and enhance the engagement of stakeholders in existing and/or future Internet governance mechanisms, particularly those from developing countries.
- g. Identify emerging issues, bring them to the attention of the relevant bodies and the general public, and, where appropriate, make recommendations.
- h. Contribute to capacity building for Internet governance in developing countries, drawing fully on local sources of knowledge and expertise.
- i. Promote and assess, on an ongoing basis, the embodiment of WSIS principles in Internet governance processes.
- j. Discuss, *inter alia*, issues relating to critical Internet resources.
- k. Help to find solutions to the issues arising from the use and misuse of the Internet, of particular concern to everyday users.
- l. Publish its proceedings.

73. The Internet Governance Forum, in its working and function, will be multilateral, multi-stakeholder, democratic and transparent. To that end, the proposed IGF could:

- a. Build on the existing structures of Internet governance, with special emphasis on the complementarity between all stakeholders involved in this process – governments, business entities, civil society and intergovernmental organizations.
- b. Have a lightweight and decentralized structure that would be subject to periodic review.
- c. Meet periodically, as required. IGF meetings, in principle, may be held in parallel with major relevant UN conferences, *inter alia*, to use logistical support.

⁷² <https://www.itu.int/net/osis/docs2/tunis/off/6rev1.html>

74. We encourage the UN Secretary-General to examine a range of options for the convening of the Forum, taking into consideration the proven competencies of all stakeholders in Internet governance and the need to ensure their full involvement.

75. The UN Secretary-General would report to UN Member States periodically on the operation of the Forum.

76. We ask the UN Secretary-General to examine the desirability of the continuation of the Forum, in formal consultation with Forum participants, within five years of its creation, and to make recommendations to the UN Membership in this regard.

77. The IGF would have no oversight function and would not replace existing arrangements, mechanisms, institutions or organizations, but would involve them and take advantage of their expertise. It would be constituted as a neutral, non-duplicative and non-binding process. It would have no involvement in day-to-day or technical operations of the Internet.

ANNEX 2- EXTRACT FROM THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE EGM⁷³

About the Expert Group Meeting (EGM)

The Internet Governance Forum (IGF) was established in 2006 following the World Summit on the Information Society and has evolved through sixteen annual iterations and developed activities, including intersessional work and national and regional initiatives (NRIs).

Recent years have seen advancements in the discussions around Internet governance and digital cooperation approaches, highlighted in the [United Nations Secretary-General's Roadmap on Digital Cooperation](#) (2020), and the recently released United Nations Secretary-General's report on the Our Common Agenda. These documents make reference to the IGF, as well as to other potential activities and initiatives dedicated to advancing digital cooperation, such as the proposal for a Digital Compact highlighted in [Our Common Agenda](#). These discussions have evolved within, and interacted with, a broader context of challenges and opportunities including the rapid development of new digital technologies, progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals, and the global crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In this context, a two to three-day expert-level working retreat is proposed by the United Nations Secretariat for **30 March - 1 April 2022 in New York** to consider how the IGF can contribute to advancing digital cooperation and implementing proposed initiatives in this area, within the broader context of the ongoing process on strengthening and improving the IGF as a space for global multistakeholder discussion on Internet policy issues.

The expected outcomes of the retreat include (but are not limited to):

A. Recommendations on how the IGF can “adapt, innovate and reform” its work and contribute to implementing proposed initiatives dedicated to advancing digital cooperation and creating an ‘open, free and secure digital future for all’. These recommendations – which should take into account the availability of resources – could cover:

- 1. What improvements can be made to the format and work of the Forum in order to strengthen focus, relevance and improve links with decision-making fora, and develop effective and influential outputs?*
- 2. How to improve the alignment of IGF activities with the action lines included in the Roadmap for Digital Cooperation (para 93a)?*

⁷³ <https://www.intgovforum.org/en/content/igf-expert-group-meeting>

3. *What role could the IGF play in ensuring multistakeholder engagement and providing inputs in developing the Digital Compact proposed in Our Common Agenda report?*
4. *How the IGF should work with various decision-making and discussion fora in the expanding field of digital development.*

B. Recommendations on how to operationalise recurring proposals regarding IGF strengthening and improvement, in areas such as:

1. *Implementing the IGF Leadership Panel*
2. *Growing the engagement of those stakeholders who are currently unengaged, with a view to expanding and diversifying participation in the IGF processes;*
3. *Ensuring sustained and regular funding to support the IGF and the IGF Secretariat.*

...