

UK COMMENTS: TAKING STOCK OF IGF 2023 AND SUGGESTED IMPROVEMENTS FOR IGF 2024

The UK welcomes this opportunity to offer feedback on the 2023 UN IGF

Summary

The UN 2023 IGF in Kyoto was an excellently organised, well attended, and successful IGF. Japan expended considerable resources in organising an IGF that had more physical participants than any previous Forum, along with inclusive virtual participation. It attracted a wide and diverse range of stakeholders (many of whom were new to IGF) who enjoyed over 300 sessions covering the Internet Governance landscape. The Ministerial sessions were of high quality and discussed important issues including AI, the UN GDC and the WSIS+20 Review process. It was also very beneficial to hear from Parliamentarians and the IGF Leadership Panel.

The preparatory process was (as ever) expertly coordinated by the IGF Secretariat, in conjunction with the MAG, with a record number of applications for Workshop and other sessions.

In terms of substantive discussions, the discourse on AI probably topped the agenda, though we did perceive (as articulated below) that there were too many (over 50) sessions on AI. Concerns were also raised on the G7 focus on AI; given the global nature of the IGF.

Looking ahead to the UN IGF in 2024 we would, as detailed below, like to see an enhanced role for the MAG in selecting sessions (with perhaps a reduced variety of sessions offered) and a stricter criterion for Open Forum and main plenary sessions.

Detail

(i) Participation, Stakeholder diversity

While there was a relatively good level of regional and stakeholder diversity in Kyoto, we observe that the IGF would be further strengthened by empowering greater participation from developing countries. We think the Leadership Panel has an important role to play here as does the MAG. We would also look to see better linkages between the output of regional IGFs, not least those in Africa, and the main global IGF programme.

We recognise the various travel bursaries that were generously offered for the IGF in Kyoto and look forward to an enhanced provision for the UN IGF in 2024.

(ii) Overall Programme and participation

There was a diverse and wide range of sessions, covering many different Internet Governance issues, including those with a global significance, such as the Global Digital Compact (GDC) and the WSIS+20 Review process and perennial issues such as data governance and cyber security. It was also positive to see sessions hosted by UN bodies and governmental bodies (such as ITU, UN CSTD, OECD and Council of Europe) and by other business and civil society bodies.

There were though concerns raised that the optics of opening the multistakeholder IGF with a meeting and negotiation of a 'western, government-led group (the G7) did not send a positive message about diverse stakeholder input.

(iii) Logistics; practical arrangements and hosting

The arrangements and logistics put in place by Japan were exceptional, including an excellent venue, great hospitality, and a varied social programme. Communications worked well, allowing a true hybrid environment. The meeting rooms were well equipped with excellent space for bilateral and other side meetings. Even small, but important arrangements (for example the provision of metro passes) were well appreciated.

(iv) Preparatory process, MAG role

The preparatory process was, in general, very efficient. The MAG process, in terms of selecting main themes, in light of the stakeholder input, was timely. The Call for proposals was also timely and efficiently managed.

We are, however, concerned at the diminishing role of the Multistakeholder Advisory Group (MAG) in terms of the overall programme. While we recognise the important role it plays in working on the main themes and Workshop planning and selection, we saw in Kyoto that there were more sessions chosen by the Secretariat and the host than the MAG itself. We think that the MAG role (as agreed by UN) as the programme authority needs to be strengthened with oversight of (at least) Town Hall and Open Forum sessions. This would allow greater cohesion (and less duplication) between Workshops and other Sessions. We also think the MAG, working with the host; should have enhanced oversight of High-Level track and the Opening and Closing sessions.

Overall, we believe that there has to be a reduction in the number of parallel tracks, with a stricter criterion for, and a number limit on, Open Forum and Town Hall sessions. This would hopefully ensure reduced duplication on themes (as we saw with AI this year) and potentially allows some more non-conflicted sessions for (for example) the main Leadership Panel session.

(v) IGF Leadership Panel

We recognise the important role the Leadership Panel is playing and their contribution to the IGF in general and, in particular, to the Kyoto Forum.

Looking ahead; we would, though, be looking forward to enhanced coordination between the Leadership Panel and the MAG to maximise their contribution to the overall programme objectives.

(vi) Dynamic Coalitions

We recognise the important work of Dynamic Coalitions within the Internet Governance Forum (IGF), not least as a valuable space for collaboration and discussion on important and pertinent IG issues; this being clearly demonstrated in Kyoto.

We would, though, suggest a more formal approach to both the creation and continuation of DCs to ensure the work they take forward continues to be relevant and of global significance. As such we would welcome some form of accreditation process which would help to recognise those DCs taking forward work in both an inclusive and collaborative manner.

(vii) Looking ahead to UN IGF 2024

The IGF in 2024 may well be the last before the UNGA discussions on the WSIS+20, which will, inter-alia, discuss the continuation of the IGF beyond 2025. It will, therefore, be important to involve a wide range of stakeholders in the IGF so there can be informed discussion later in 2025.

Of potential importance will be;

- (i) Ensuring that the messages, outputs and experiences from the numerous regional, national and youth IGFs in 2024 are fully taken account of in the global UN IGF;
- (ii) Consideration (by MAG) of having briefing / capacity building sessions in advance of the IGF (in a similar way to ICANN);
- (iii) Clear articulation of messages from the global IGF ahead of UNGA discussions.

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