

## EXPERT GROUP MEETING ON THE INTERNET GOVERNANCE FORUM

NEW YORK, 30 MARCH TO 1 APRIL 2022

### SUMMARY REPORT OF THE MEETING

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The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) convened an Expert Group Meeting (EGM) on the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) from 30 March to 1 April 2022. The Meeting was hosted by the Mission of the Government of Finland in New York.

The meeting was convened, in the context of the Secretary-General's *Roadmap for Digital Cooperation* and report on *Our Common Agenda*, to consider:

- how the IGF can contribute to advancing digital cooperation and implementing proposed initiatives related to it; and
- the ongoing process on strengthening and improving the IGF as a space for global multistakeholder discussion on Internet policy issues.

The meeting was attended by invited experts from developing and developed countries and from diverse stakeholder groups concerned with Internet governance and the IGF including governments, international and intergovernmental organisations, the private sector, civil society and the technical community.

The agenda was structured through a series of sessions exploring different aspects of its theme. These began on Day 1 with discussion of the role of the IGF in relation to the Digital Cooperation agenda and the development of 'actionable' outputs; continued on Day 2 with discussions, in the light of those held on Day 1, of the IGF's plenary and intersessional activities and the future roles of the Leadership Panel and the MAG; and concluded on Day 3 with discussion of fundraising, outreach and capacity development.

This short report lists the observations and suggestions made during each session on which there was significant consensus. A longer version of this report includes more detail concerning discussions at the Meeting.

#### **Introduction**

The EGM held detailed and active discussions on each item on its agenda, beginning with the framework for digital cooperation identified by the Secretary-General and, in that light, considering how the IGF can most effectively contribute to digital cooperation, improve and develop its own work, and establish partnerships and directions for the future.

Participants recognised that the Internet has changed markedly in the seventeen years since the mandate for the IGF was established at WSIS, and that the Forum needs to adapt, innovate and reform in response to this. Critical changes since that time relate not just to the technology and services that constitute the Internet, but to its increasingly pervasive reach; its impact on economy, society and culture; its effects on relations between government, business and the citizen; and its relationship with further innovations in digital technology, such as artificial intelligence. International discourse on these issues is increasingly concerned with the interface between the Internet and other areas of public policy, and with risks as well as opportunities. It now takes place within a much larger range of institutions and decision-making fora than was the case when the IGF was founded.

It was generally recognised in the Meeting that the modalities established at the Forum's outset have served it well, and that its model of multistakeholder dialogue has been both successful and influential. It was also recognised that these modalities need to evolve. The Forum itself has changed over the years, transitioning from an annual conference to an ecosystem that includes intersessional activities and regional and national fora alongside its global meeting. There have been a number of discussions over the past decade concerning possible improvements to the IGF, especially concerned with the call for it to develop more substantive outcomes. There has been increased focus recently on finding ways for the Forum to become more coherent and cohesive, taking a more holistic view of its various components and leveraging these for greater impact. The emergence of the Digital Cooperation agenda and the introduction of the Leadership Panel provide an opportunity for the IGF community and stakeholders to reflect on how it should develop and revitalise, and implement improvements, ahead of the scheduled mandate review in 2025.

### **Observations and suggestions**

The following observations and suggestions arose from the discussion.

#### **1. The role of the IGF in relation to the *Roadmap for Digital Cooperation and Our Common Agenda***

1. The IGF is an ecosystem and should act as a platform for stakeholder engagement on implementation of the *Roadmap* and development of the Global Digital Compact (GDC). Steps towards this would include consultation within and beyond the IGF stakeholders and could include aggregation by the Forum of inputs from diverse organisations.
2. The NRIs should be invited to support this process, in order to enable comprehensive local input, by conducting their own consultations and discussions on their own agendas.
3. The Secretariat should consider what existing outputs from the IGF ecosystem could contribute towards the GDC, and how this contribution might be realised.
4. The annual meeting in 2022 should focus on the GDC, building on the MAG's decision to align the agenda with its five focus areas. The MAG should consider how to facilitate this, in order to encourage more focused discussions, leading to more substantive messages of particular relevance to the GDC.

#### **2. The relationship of the IGF to intergovernmental, international and other decision-making bodies, including those within the Internet governance ecosystem and those in wider global governance**

1. The MAG should consider the needs of other organisations and decision-making bodies, within and beyond the Internet, when deciding its agenda. To achieve this, it should identify/map organisations and decision-making spaces that are particularly relevant to its work and prioritise the development of relationships with them.
2. Stronger interactions should be built with other UN and international entities, including the General Assembly, the Executive Office of the Secretary-General, the Office of the Envoy on Technology, lead agencies within the UN Group on the Information Society (UNGIS) that facilitate the implementation of WSIS outcomes, and the Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development. IGF outputs should be communicated to the UN entities and consideration given to how these can disseminate them and raise the visibility of the Forum with Member States.

3. The Leadership Panel should play a leading role in promoting IGF outputs and building relationships with senior staff including those in government and business communities, not least by encouraging participation by senior personnel in the annual meeting's high-level and parliamentary tracks.
4. The work of the Leadership Panel should, as resources permit, be supported by a dedicated member of the Secretariat staff with responsibility for liaising with decision-making bodies and enhancing the Forum's visibility.
5. The annual IGF meeting should consider including an additional special track for judges, lawyers and law enforcement specialists.

### **3. Development of outputs and expected outcomes that will facilitate the extended role of IGF in the international decision-making ecosystem**

1. The MAG supported by the Secretariat should plan strategically to develop outputs that address issues which matter to decision-making bodies, on which it can make a substantial contribution (building on its unique multistakeholder character and ecosystem), and consider how to build consensus towards actionable recommendations. This goal relates to consideration of issue focus and multi-annual programming (see below).
2. Outputs should be focused on the needs of target audiences. A limited number of concise messages, focused on programme themes, should be prepared at or following the end of annual meeting. These should be forwarded to the Secretary-General for the attention of the General Assembly, and separately addressed to Internet governance entities and senior decision-makers. The Leadership Panel could play an important role in ensuring that IGF message reach these intended targets. More authoritative, evidence-based supporting outputs are appropriate for policy advisers and for subject experts.
3. The development of outputs should involve all parts of the IGF ecosystem, including discussions and participants in NRIs as well as the main meeting and intersessional activities, in order to maximise the value of experience within the IGF community.
4. The Secretariat should map outputs that have already been prepared, identifying those that could be used now to contribute to decision-making processes and to the GDC.
5. The MAG should consider what outputs might result from IGF discussions when structuring the annual agenda. It should encourage session organisers to have the scope for potential recommendations and outputs in mind when planning sessions. The meeting programme should be structured in ways that build momentum towards outputs (see session/theme 7).
6. A new communications strategy should be developed to enhance the visibility of the Forum, including the promotion of outputs/messages. This could include new dissemination mechanisms such as senior-level and "ambassadorial" endorsements, policy briefings, seminars and additional website content. Modalities should be included to enable impact assessment.

### **4. The IGF ecosystem**

1. The IGF should describe itself as an ecosystem rather than as an annual conference that has accrued associated activities. This will recognise the importance of intersessional activities and NRIs.

2. MAG and Leadership Panel terms of reference should pay more attention to the wider ecosystem. Named members of the MAG and Panel should take lead responsibility for liaison with intersessional activities and NRIs.
3. Intersessional activities should be integrated in the work of the annual meeting. They should be offered enhanced opportunities to contribute to main sessions and other programme components, rather than being directed into siloed sessions that focus on their own activities.
4. Intersessional bodies and NRIs should be invited by the MAG to play a more substantial role in developing the annual programme.

**5. The role and work of intersessional bodies, including dynamic coalitions (DC's), best practice forums (BPF's) and policy networks (PN's)**

1. The MAG should commission BPFs and PNs and encourage DCs to focus on issues related to the main themes of the annual meeting. With multi-year programming, this could enable iterative dialogue between the annual meeting and intersessional activity which would enhance the quality of outputs.
2. Intersessional activities should establish focal points responsible for reaching out to potential participants within and beyond the IGF community, including UN bodies, in order to engage them with their work.
3. Modalities should be identified to strengthen the work of Dynamic Coalitions, including procedures for their establishment; responsibilities to the IGF stakeholders; guidelines for participation and deliberation; and quality standards for the work they produce. This would help to validate the work presented by DCs and facilitate their contribution to IGF outputs. Appropriate models may be available from other Internet governance bodies such as ICANN.
4. The Secretariat should seek to raise awareness of intersessional outputs through the website, social media and other communications.

**6. The role and work of national, regional, sub-regional and youth initiatives (NRIs)**

1. The MAG should consider ways of enhancing the participation of NRIs at the annual meeting. It was suggested, for example, that they might be invited to contribute more substantially to the development and/or delivery of main sessions rather than focusing primarily on a collaborative session.
2. MAG and Leadership Panel members should be encouraged to play an active part in their communities' and regions' NRIs. At least one member of the MAG and Panel should take lead responsibility for liaison with NRIs.
3. NRIs should be encouraged to discuss some or all of the forthcoming annual meeting's selected themes/topics in the year before each annual meeting, and to submit observations concerned with national experience to that meeting.
4. More attention should be paid to networking between NRIs to share experience. A common platform, for instance, could be developed for coordination of youth NRIs.

**7. The annual meeting of the IGF, including multi-year programming, hybrid format and issue focus in programme development**

1. Future annual meetings should be hybrid, with attention paid to enabling equal participation by online and face-to-face participants. This will require further improvements in the Forum's online facilities and innovative approaches to facilitating networking. Adjustments to cater for time zones will need to be considered. The technical community may be able to assist in developing appropriate modalities.
2. The MAG supported by the Secretariat should develop a multi-year programme, integrating the annual meeting with intersessional activity and, where appropriate and desired, with NRIs. This could include iterative dialogue between successive annual sessions and intersessional activities, allowing the latter and NRIs to participate more effectively in output generation. The Leadership Panel should work with the MAG in developing this programme.
3. Within this context, the MAG should focus each annual meeting on a smaller range of more specific topics, concerned with issues of importance in international decision-making on the Internet and impact of the Internet. These should be selected following consultation with the IGF stakeholders, discussion with other stakeholders including UN agencies, and input from the Leadership Panel. There should be opportunities for emerging and urgent issues to be added to the programme if required.
4. The MAG should invite proposals for workshop and other sessions to be submitted on these selected topics, thereby enabling greater focus to be achieved across the programme. Session types should be reviewed and consolidated, and opportunities taken to experiment with modalities like 'open space'. There should be dialogue between the MAG and session organisers throughout the period between session approval and the annual meeting, to ensure quality of delivery and maximise the contribution that all sessions make to the Forum as a whole.
5. More attention should be paid to integrating the high-level and parliamentary tracks with main and other sessions. In particular, the high-level track could be moved from the beginning of the meeting to the end, when it would be informed by discussions in main and other sessions that had already occurred and contribute to the finalisation of messages and other outputs. The Leadership Panel should actively encourage participation in these tracks.
6. The MAG should focus on broad programming issues and revert much of the responsibility for workshop validation to the Secretariat.
7. The technical community could assist in supporting technical implementation of the meeting, including improvements to the website display of the programme, search functions, and adjustments to the modalities of online participation.

#### **8. The Leadership Panel, the MAG and the place of the IGF within the United Nations system**

1. The development of a constructive, cooperative and complementary relationship between the Leadership Panel and the MAG should be a priority. This will require clarification of the responsibilities of each, and of the Secretariat in relation to them, defining what each body does and does not do, and establishing modalities for collaboration. The chairs of the Panel and MAG will need to establish effective liaison arrangements.
2. The Leadership Panel should focus on its strategic roles in relation to strategic and urgent issues, the engagement of high-level personnel including those from government and business, the promotion of IGF outputs, and fundraising. Members of the Panel could act as

'ambassadors' for the IGF. They should engage with the whole IGF ecosystem, including NRIs, and should be invited to participate in MAG meetings.

3. The Leadership Panel should, in future years, comment on strategic priorities for the Forum's annual meeting before the MAG begins to work on programme design. Collaboration on strategic and programme aspects of the 2022 meeting, with its focus on the digital cooperation agenda, could be crucial in determining the effectiveness of the IGF's contribution to the GDC and should be prioritised once the Panel is established.
4. The MAG's terms of reference should be reviewed, on their own terms and in relation to those of the Panel, perhaps with the assistance of a MAG working group. More clarity should be introduced concerning MAG members' responsibilities, including the MAG's engagement with intersessional work. MAG working groups could assume responsibility for activity in areas such as capacity development.
5. The Secretariat should resume responsibility for some aspects of programme development currently undertaken by the MAG, particularly workshop evaluation, in order to free MAG time for more proactive developmental work, such as that concerned with issue focus, multi-year programming, the integration of the main Forum and intersessional work, and preparation of outputs. Additional resourcing for the Secretariat will be required for this.
6. The MAG should consider ways of engaging all MAG members more effectively in its discussions. More should be done to assist new MAG members to participate in meetings, particularly where they are not experienced Forum participants. The expertise of former MAG members could help in this regard. Experienced current MAG members should avoid acting in ways that dominate discussion.
7. Past experience of the IGF – and/or NRIs – could be made a requirement for selection as MAG members. Eligibility for annual renewal could be associated with demonstrated active participation in MAG work.

#### **9. Funding of IGF activities including the IGF Secretariat**

1. The IGF needs a clear fundraising strategy, to bring more financial sustainability to the Forum and enable the Secretariat to meet expanding responsibilities including those related to the Leadership Panel.
2. The Leadership Panel should play a significant role in fundraising, leveraging the senior status of Panel members to encourage more governments and other stakeholders to make contributions to the Trust Fund.
3. The Forum should seek to diversify funding sources, for instance by approaching development banks, national development agencies and foundations for funding for specific activities, and by encouraging small donations
4. The Secretariat should provide more information about income and expenditure, including quarterly or half-yearly reports to donors and the wider IGF community.
5. DESA should review the bidding process for countries to host the annual meeting to improve visibility, clarity, openness and hosting criteria, including financing arrangements.

#### **10. Modalities to extend outreach, engagement and participation in the IGF**

1. The Leadership Panel should encourage high-level participation in the annual meeting. Members of the Panel could act as “ambassadors” for the IGF, encouraging participation from within their regions and stakeholder groups and from decision-making bodies in which they participate.
2. The MAG should consider whether the high-level track should be moved to the end of the annual meeting so that it can focus on outcomes from previous discussions and contribute to the development of IGF messages/outputs.
3. The annual meeting agenda should include headline speakers whose presence would attract participation from a wider audience.
4. More detailed assessment should be made of participation in IGF activities, including active engagement in annual meeting sessions, intersessional activities and NRIs. NRIs should be encouraged to act as channels for input to the annual meeting from under-represented groups.
5. The Leadership Panel, MAG and Secretariat should develop a communications strategy for the Forum aimed at building awareness and disseminating outputs. This would benefit from professional public relations support. DESA and the Office of the Envoy on Technology could support and promote the work of the Forum within the UN system.
6. The MAG should consider innovations in the annual meeting structure that would be attractive to under-represented groups, such as “hackathons” and sessions concerned with the impact of the Internet on particular sectors or public policy issues (such as climate change). This also applies to NRIs.

#### **11. Strengthening the IGF in relation to capacity development**

1. The Secretariat should work with other organisations that already offer capacity development programmes on Internet governance (including the Schools on Internet Governance) to add maximum value with limited resources.
2. The Secretariat should provide information and access links to capacity development resources through its website. Capacity development experiences could also be shared online.
3. Capacity development initiatives concerned with participation in the IGF itself should recognise the needs of diverse audiences, seeking to maintain the engagement of established as well as new participants, and reaching beyond the governance of the Internet to include its impact on other areas of public policy.
4. The global meeting and NRIs should discuss and communicate priorities for capacity development to other stakeholders.
5. The Secretariat should consider other options for capacity development, including internships and the establishment of an alumni network.

#### **12. Follow-up and implementation**

1. The Leadership Panel and the MAG will need to work rapidly, with DESA and the Secretariat, to establish cooperative working modalities that will enable them to initiate the Panel’s work, implement proposals from the EGM and develop the IGF’s contribution to the GDC.

2. This will require clarification of the relationship between the Panel and the MAG, including review of terms of reference.
3. The MAG should determine modalities for the work of the 2022 meeting in relation to the *Roadmap* and the GDC, encourage contributions to discussion of this theme from intersessional fora and from NRIs, and invite session proposals from the IGF community related to it. It should also consider modalities for the preparation of an output document related to the Compact.

## Conclusion

The EGM started from the premise that the IGF should do more than maintain its current role and level of activities, but respond to the changing Internet and Internet governance environment and achieve greater impact from its work. The observations and suggestions listed in this report stem from the desire of Meeting participants to fulfil those goals.

A number of clear priorities can be identified.

- In the immediate term, the Forum needs to establish effective collaboration between the Leadership Panel and the MAG, enabling it to implement improvements along the lines identified by the Meeting. Participants recognised that the quality of the relationship between the Panel and the MAG will be crucial to achieving progress towards a more impactful IGF.
- In the short term, the MAG, with support from the Leadership Panel, needs to ensure that the 2022 annual meeting enables the IGF to make an effective contribution to development of the Global Digital Compact which is to be presented to the Summit of the Future in 2023. Participants recognised that the quality of the IGF's contribution to this will affect perceptions of its ongoing value to digital cooperation.
- In the longer term, participants agreed, the Forum needs to build more coherent collaboration within the ecosystem that has evolved around its annual meeting, intersessional activities and NRIs, leading to more authoritative discourse and to the production of actionable outputs which will have more substantial impact within the United Nations and in international decision-making fora concerned with the Internet and its impact on society. Its ability to achieve this will have substantial influence on the scheduled review of the Forum's mandate by the General Assembly in 2025.

Participants recognised that substantial work towards these goals had been realised in recent years, and were optimistic that their suggestions would enable them to be achieved. While some of those suggestions would require additional funding, which should be sought as a priority, others were cost-neutral and could be implemented quickly. The short time now available between the EGM and the 2022 Forum should encourage all stakeholders to progress improvements with a sense of urgency.