Taking Stock of IGF 2020 and Suggesting Improvements for IGF 2021

Mark W. Datysgeld, Brazil, Academia/Private (Governance Primer Consultancy)
Ron Andruff, USA, Private (ONR Consulting Inc.)

Taking Stock of the IGF 2020: programming, outputs, preparatory process, community intersessional activities and the event itself: What worked well? What worked not so well?

General concerns

Preparatory process (timeline, call for workshop proposals, workshop selection, MAG meetings etc.)

It is admirable that the event managed to transition to an online format, and given the limitations presented, the preparatory process was sensible. Workshops with overlapping or overly similar themes continued to be an issue, and our recommendation is that instead of attempting to merger those, **the MAG should instead ask proponents to further narrow down the focus of their proposals, so as to create more distinction even among similar submissions**.

IGF 2020 overall programme structure and flow (in particular the four thematic tracks: data, environment, inclusion and trust)

The imposition of thematic tracks is arbitrary and their benefit could not be observed during the 2020 edition of the forum. The IGF should be able to accommodate debates around any given theme that different communities find relevant, regardless of whether they fit into these baskets. The end result is that proponents force the theme that they feel the need to discuss to vaguely conform to the baskets, and this is not particularly useful to anybody.

Also, **the overspecific nature of the "environment" track remains questionable**. The level of engagement with the track was minimal in terms of submissions, particularly in a year was driven by more pressing concerns over global health and a different manner of sustainability. **Meanwhile, "digital business", which saw great interest with themes such as "the future of work", was denied its own track**, in spite of it being a topic that is in ever higher demand given our global situation.

Community intersessional activities and NRIs

Community intersessional activities (Best Practice Forums, Dynamic Coalitions) and National, Regional and Youth IGFs

The online format does not favor these initiatives, which benefit immensely from the networking opportunities and collaborations that originate from the traditional model. As such, we believe that their impact was unfortunately lessened during the 2020 edition. **There is need for a higher degree of integration of the intersessional activities with the IGF event itself**.

IGF 2020 programme content: please comment on the content, speakers and quality of discussions

Programme content (workshops, main sessions, high level sessions, open forums, other sessions, speakers)

It is still unclear what purpose the Main sessions serve, as has been the case in previous years. This year there were some triumphs, with a few sessions having a clear focus and bringing relevant speakers to discuss hot issues that in the end better informed the community, such was the case of the "Trust" Main session. This is the format that should inform future efforts by the MAG.

On the overall, it is commendable that the community pulled through and still managed to deliver high-quality Workshops. It is important to appreciate this in face of the global scale of our community and the effort which had to be put by all involved parties for this to come together.

Networking sessions

The process to schedule these sessions was unclear and the way they were carried out by their organizers was too disparate, with some of them turning into mini-Workshops. This did not allow these important additions to consolidate as assets of the online variant of the forum.

How do you see the IGF 2020 programme content from a gender perspective?

We are favorable to the practice of striving for gender parity in the IGF programme, whenever possible. This practice, as far as we are aware, was observed during the virtual edition of the forum.

Other concerns

IGF 2020 participants

Private sector and government participation needs to continue to be stimulated, as the absence of these actors was as noted as had been the case in the previous recent face-to-face meetings. The presence of all stakeholders is necessary for legitimate to be achieved in these processes.

IGF 2020 communications, outreach and outputs

The generation of an outputs document is valuable and desirable, and should continue to be pursued. However, it is still not sufficiently publicized. We acknowledge and appreciate that more effort has been put into this task, but the UN should make full use of its network for these documents to find their way to the general press and other exogenous actors.

IGF 2020 logistics (website, schedule, registration, access and use of online platform, security etc.)

For the third year in a row, we would like to highlight that the IGF's website remains problematic and insufficient. This point in particular seems to be lost on the organizers, and even though we are aware that funds have been donated by government actors with the goal of remodeling the website in the near future, **there is need to bring in the community into the process and leverage its resources** so that whatever comes out of that reform is compliant with our needs.

Incremental changes have not been able to address core issues. Community members commonly cite problems with an inability or confusion in performing even basic tasks, or in finding information that they need. **Current design practices and standards are the least that can be expected from the website of a forum intended to debate the Internet**. This should be a top priority, especially under the current situation.

Any other comments on the IGF 2020

None at the moment.

What are your suggestions for improvements for IGF 2021?

Preparatory process (timeline, call for workshop proposals, workshop selection, MAG and Open Consultations meetings etc.)

More leeway should be given in relation to the necessity of listing all speakers upon submission of session proposals. For example, a listing of "Speaker from GRULAC" can

be more effective in promoting diversity than giving session organizers the incentive to place someone who they are unsure will be able to participate, who may be replaced late in the process, but that will increase their diversity score.

Also, given the pace in which the Internet generates and absorbs change, a subject that was irrelevant during the first semester of a year can explode in demand during the second semester. To account for this, **a very abridged call for lightning talks with looser requirements should be made later on in the year**, so that individuals or small groups of up to three people can get together to expose hot issues to the community.

Community intersessional activities (Best Practice Forums, Dynamic Coalitions) and National, Regional and Youth IGFs

Ideally intersessional groups should present the outcomes of their discussions on Day Zero, laying the groundwork for further debate during the main event by the broader community. Also, **when documents are generated by intersessional groups, the UN should make an effort to advertise and promote those**, provided that the quality of the documents meets a certain standard of quality.

Overall programme structure and flow (types of sessions, schedule structure etc.)

The "digital business" track should be reconsidered for inclusion in the main program.

Programme content (workshops, main sessions, high level sessions, open forums, other sessions, speakers)

The way Main sessions are organized should be rethought. Some options for the MAG to consider: A) employ them to expose the community to less beaten or traditional themes that are still relevant to Internet Governance, opening doors to new debates; B) focus on engaging with the intersessional groups, to provide them with a bigger stage to discuss the outcomes of their projects.

IGF 2021 participants

The people who list themselves as a "**Resource Person" should receive more exposure on the IGF's website**. This is a resource that too few members of the community know about and that can help leverage the participation of more stakeholders. For example, a note could be included in the submission form explaining this feature and inviting session organizers to try it out. It would have zero cost and could potentially generate favorable outcomes.

How could we improve the quality of participation at the IGF 2021?

If the event ends up taking place online, **webinar mode is not a good default for Workshops which are not Main sessions**. The community needs to be able to see each other and interact. **Problematic attendants need to be handled by means of moderation**, not at the cost of all other attendants.

Any other comments on the IGF 2021? Please be free to add suggestions for the overall IGF 2021 planning process, intersessional activities, cooperation mechanisms, annual meeting etc. You are welcome to comment on possible improvements of the IGF as it pertains to the United Nations Secretary-General's Roadmap for Digital Cooperation.

The continuation of the vision that the IGF is something fairly ad-hoc does not fit with the scope of the issues being addressed. To establish a proper functioning environment that would be able to deal with the massive challenges that lie ahead requires not only commitment from the stakeholders, but **the UN itself needs to evaluate what its role is in an IGF environment, including starting to dedicate funds to the IGF and its projects**. While it should not be made into a specific agency, it should also not be something appended to the UN on an ad-hoc basis either.

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