# Taking stock of the 13th IGF and suggestions for the14th IGF

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The contributions presented in this document are based on my participation on 8 Workshops over the course of 3 years, as well as having acted as local staff during the 2015 edition of the event in João Pessoa, as part of the remote broadcasting team. The document attempts to reflect a Latin American position coming from the private sector perspective, but at the end of the day it by and large represents my personal take on the event and what its strengths and weaknesses are.

## A) Taking Stock of 2018 programming, outputs, preparatory process, community intersessional activities and the 13th annual IGF: What worked well? What worked not so well?

The concept of **streamlining the event, investing in less Workshops that are more focused, and attempting to avoid thematic overlap are all good ideas**. These ideas need to be further evolved, as the involved parties continue to look towards ways in which the community can accomplish more in less time. There is certainly value in directing attentions towards one or two strong Workshops about a given subject instead of diluting interest over the course of several sessions that lose steam and engagement as the event progresses. It is important, however, to keep an eye for nuances that might turn similar proposals into radically different discussions of equal value. This should be a proactive concern of the MAG.

Also, **sub-themes are a great addition to the core logic of the IGF**, and need to be given much more consideration going forward. While during the preparatory process there was a lot of emphasis on them, at the actual event there was a certain lack of awareness about the sub-themes by the general public. These need to be featured in a notable and ideally searchable way, so that participants can more easily find discussions that fit their skillsets or that they would like to learn more about. This is definitely a positive addition made by the event's organizers.

The **delay in the choice of a venue for the event proved quite harmful** in as series of ways. While it is clear that this came out of adversity and not some choice taken by the organizers, at the same time, it does not make it less problematic. The reason I would like to emphasize is: it is difficult to coordinate global travels for actors who are not among the list of event regulars, and thus have a harder time finding funding or justifying absence from their occupations. This forces Workshop organizers to rely on participants

they know will be present for sure, while leaving potential interesting contributors out of consideration.

Speaking from personal experience, as someone who made a real attempt at getting together speakers who are not so regularly featured on the program for my Workshop, it was difficult to overcome the late announcement of the venue. Since there wasn't even a region clearly defined, many issues were encountered because different employers and institutions will have varied policies related to travel, including only funding participants to go to certain regions. This was also a problem for exhibitor booths, and even representatives of smaller governments. On the overall, every conceivable effort should be undertaken to avoid that this does not happen again in future editions.

On the subject of Workshops themselves, there is case to be made about some having **too many panelists**, which is something that needs to be looked into more seriously by the MAG. While in theory the organizer can slice up the time in just the right way for all of those present to be able to speak, this is not how Workshops play out in reality. A hard limit should sit at around 7 people at most post-selection, because even if there is a hard cut of 5 speakers during selection, this does not carry on to the actual panels. This should apply for Main Sessions as well. While including as much representation as possible is good, it should not come at the expense of leaving some session without time for interaction from the general attendants, or even leaving some speakers unable to say anything due to time constraints, as has been observed in the past.

To finish off, **the absence of a formal Day Zero was problematic**, as it is a valuable opportunity for people to better organize themselves, talk to some of their peers in person before the proceedings start, and also get a feel for the venue and the host city. While it is comprehensible that in this edition the time was quite compressed, future IGFs should not skip this day that is so vital for coordination and for certain side events to fit in a logical way into the schedule.

**B) What suggestions for improvements could be made for 2019? (Please focus on programming, the outputs preparatory processes, community intersessional activities and improvements for the 14th annual meeting and beyond.)**

**Assembling Workshops should be a different affair altogether.** The people who list themselves as a "Resource Person" should be properly tagged by skills, experience, region, and so on, in a way that organizers can fine-tune the search for capable panelists that lie outside of their circle of social or work interactions. This would also enable more dynamic ways to bridge people that have something to offer but are not exactly in a position that advertises their abilities to the Internet Governance community.

The related section of the IGF's website should to be remade into an interactive format that allows for the organic discovery of panelists, really working diversity from the inside out instead of the other way around. For example, it might not be so much that an organizer might be trying to exclude speakers from the GRULAC region, but simply their network might not reach qualified people from that region. A proactive approach should be undertaken in making these connection processes easier and richer if our community is really committed to uniting people of dissimilar backgrounds to discuss matters.

On a different but important subject, the situation of **the assignment of Rooms to Workshops was very far from ideal** in the 2018 edition of the event, more so than in previous years. It was a normal occurrence for small rooms to be assigned to Workshops that generated great interest, leaving people out in the corridors waiting for some chance to get inside, while other sessions that did not drive as much interest but had some factor that led them to be assigned more spacious rooms remained largely empty. A more in-depth study of how to better correlate Rooms and Workshops should be a priority.

### C) How could the IGF respond to the recommendations made by the UN Secretary-General during his speech at the IGF 2018 Opening Ceremony?

At the core of the Secretary-General's speech, there is a message about how there is a need for the community to **deepen the cooperation and participation of actors, and while this might seem like an obvious assertion, it in fact needs to be given much more consideration than it currently is**, due to the way that balance is currently being approached, which is not sufficient to generate meaningful outcomes.

The participation of everybody at all times is key. Private sector participation is important; government participation is important. These are actors that integrate the Internet Governance arrangement and exert key functions within it, but it is in no way uncommon for them to be: A) deemed less important than civil society, under the argument that those have a bigger need to have their voices heard and B) to be at the center of criticism and tough questioning when they are present in Workshops, much more so than academics and civil society.

To point A, one needs to ask a question: civil society needs to be heard by whom? If a session does not have all stakeholders present, then maybe the people that need to hear or interact with certain matters the most will not be there to do that. Sectorial balance is very often taken as the least important of the balancing factors, and it is not uncommon to see Workshops that exhibit good distribution between region, gender, and so forth, but fail to include private and government actors.

To point B, this is becoming a self-reinforcing cycle: private and government actors are often met with great force and openly opposed to a degree that they understand that

their presence is not desired, which thus leads them to not be there anymore. This is a systemic problem that needs to be addressed at all levels, from the bottom to the top of the Internet Governance ecosystem. The community needs to reconcile with how to keep all stakeholders present and desiring to participate, or the entire regime might be steered in undesirable ways, as discussed in Section D.

### D) How could the IGF respond to President Macron's "call for action" made during his speech at the IGF 2018 Opening Ceremony?

Mr. Macron starts from the principle that Internet Governance and the IGF have a problem because the outputs that come out of these processes need to be stronger in order to address the multitude of issues faced by the population with access to the global network, and the way he proposes solving this issue is by putting States at the forefront, in a more multilateral fashion that would rely on the input from other stakeholders, but at the end of the day it would be States that would be at the driver seat.

**This is problematic in the sense that it assumes that by sitting the representatives of most of the world's governments in a room and getting them to talk, one would achieve better results than the ones currently produced by the multistakeholder community.** ICANN is an example of what these government dynamics might look like with its Governmental Advisory Committee (GAC), and the situation there is that they often have a difficult time coming to hard conclusions, such as was the case during the IANA Stewardship Transition, in which they were the last group to be able to deliver a position, and there was still much dissatisfaction as it happened.

Clearly, Mr. Macron's proposal has a much more focused approach which would rely on having the European Union (EU) as the main player, presumably under France's leadership. Several of the recent laws coming out of the EU have forced the remainder of the world to be mindful of them, such as were the cases of the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the EU Copyright Directive, and the results coming out of those processes seem pretty clear: certain European players get a voice, others don't, laws get passed and anybody who wants to have a healthy relationship with the EU needs to obey. They affect the entire globe, but only certain European representatives get a say in it. This community has been attempting to balance out the USA's power to do this from the very start, only to now have been blindsided by the EU doing exactly the same.

I will assume that this is not a path that we, as a community, want for Internet Governance, so what I suggest we do in order to attempt to close this gap is that the concept of the IGF as a mere discussion space needs to be taken one step further. While this was indeed its founding principle, and several members of the community hold it as

the most important of the event's functions, the Internet has changed greatly since the IGF's inception, and new approaches need to be thought of.

**While there is no need for hard outcomes to start being produced left and right, it would certainly be beneficial if the community would work towards producing a yearly official document outlining key discussions and narratives, pointing out to what was the focus of the event and what drove participant's interests, so that those looking at the IGF from the outside can have a clearer view of what its discussions are without needing to dive into a pile of session reports. This and other strategies that would be aimed at giving more solidity to the event are essential if we, as a community, intend to keep it relevant and strong at a global level.**

## E) What other organizations/disciplines should the IGF be collaborating with and how/to what purpose?

The **ICANN** and **IETF** communities, while often present at the event in great strength, are at the same time disjoined from the main proceedings in many ways. This might be due to a perception that since they already have dedicated spaces for their discussions, those are not particularly a priority at the IGF. This might actually be true, so what I proposed here is not a larger presence of these themes in terms of Workshops, but rather that a firmer communication is established between the IGF community, organizers and these institutions.

The need for broader discussions that incorporate all aspects of Internet Governance has never been more real, and working together with these technical but still policy-oriented bodies is a key part of forming a more structured approach to this ecosystem moving forward. While community members do have an important part to play, it does fall more on the shoulders of the leaders of the IGF process to try to better address this dissonance, and create viable paths for sturdier interaction.

## F) The Secretary-General set up a High-level Panel on Digital Cooperation (HLPDC) to "identify good examples and propose modalities for working cooperatively across sectors, disciplines and borders to address challenges in the digital age"

While I do not have extensive comments to make about this matter, I do think that if the HLPDC is to be taken seriously by the community, its messaging needs to be clear and widespread. No effort should be spared in divulging it to all by means of diversified channels and influencers, in such a way that it does not feel like a parallel process, but rather a compliment to the other activities being performed around the IGF.

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