UK Government 2023 IGF Open Forum: A bottom-up approach: IG processes and multistakeholderism

Key Takeaways
Multistakeholder processes have seen success and increasing use over the last two decades, but not all processes branded as multistakeholder have been meaningfully inclusive. Those engaging in the WSIS+20 review process, particularly member states must go beyond referencing the importance of multistakeholderism, and shape a process that includes stakeholder mapping, welcomes diverse participation and understands distinctions between expertise.

Call to Action
Preparation will be key for WSIS+20 Review process to achieve meaningful multistakeholder participation. This must consider how to create multiple channels for stakeholder input and discussion, including holding regional meetings to prepare, which should reflect local contexts and regional priorities. Preparations should also leverage mentorship and sponsorship to empower and amplify participation from those new to the IG space.

We must look creatively at our resources to ensure an inclusive WSIS+20 Review process. This ranges from large scale activities where appropriate, such as concerted efforts from UN bodies to outreach to a diverse range of people using new and creative methods to raise awareness, all the way to individual actions from stakeholders to facilitate inclusion, like organisations convening groups of stakeholders to prepare for and participate in WSIS+20.

Session Report
Session context
The UK’s Open Forum articulated why the multistakeholder model is essential to Internet governance, highlighted the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) +20 Review process as an important UN process for the multistakeholder community to engage with and asked participants to brainstorm ways to make the WSIS+20 Review process fully inclusive to multistakeholder participation. The forum built on the UK’s IGF 2022 Lightning Talk ‘Renewing the WSIS mandate: the Internet and its governance beyond 2025’, the recording for which can be found on YouTube.

Summary
Participants explained that multistakeholder processes involving Internet governance have seen success and increasing use over the last two decades, but not all processes branded as multistakeholder have been meaningfully inclusive. Indeed, sometimes the word...
multistakeholder is used inauthentically, to describe processes that are not meaningfully inclusive, in order to capitalise on the positive and trusted reputation of ‘multistakeholder’ processes as a gold standard for consultation. To address this, participants stated that those engaging in the WSIS+20 review process, particularly member states, must go beyond referencing the importance of multistakeholderism, and shape a process that includes stakeholder mapping, welcomes diverse participation and understands distinctions between different types of expertise.

In addition, WSIS+20 established a clear recognition of different stakeholder groups. Since 2003, participants remarked that groups of Internet governance stakeholders have not been shown to be fixed over time, and that groups are not homogenous. Looking forward, to have fully inclusive processes, the nuances of relevant stakeholder groups need to be recognised, accommodated and welcomed.

Practical barriers to participation including costs of engaging, visas and not enough notice given of timelines were raised. Participants noted that mentorship and sponsorship schemes could help address these points and encourage newcomers to become involved with the WSIS+20 review process.

Participants agreed that preparation will be key for WSIS+20 Review process. As such:

- We must consider how to create multiple channels for stakeholder input and discussion, including holding regional meetings to prepare, which should reflect local contexts and regional priorities. Preparations should also leverage mentorship and sponsorship to empower and amplify participation from those new to the Internet governance space.

- We must all look creatively at our resources to ensure an inclusive WSIS+20 Review process. This ranges from large scale activities where appropriate, such as concerted efforts from UN bodies to outreach to a diverse range of people using new and creative methods to raise awareness, all the way to individual actions from stakeholders to facilitate inclusion, like organisations convening groups of stakeholders to prepare for and participate in WSIS+20.

**Next steps**

The 2024 Commission on Science and Technology for Development (CSTD) is expected to set out timelines and milestones for the WSIS+20 Review process that will include opportunities for multistakeholder participation. A Report for the WSIS+20 process will be
written for the CSTD looking ahead to WSIS post 2025. Governments in particular will need to create opportunities for meaningful multistakeholder participation as part of this timeline, and will need to raise awareness of opportunities to participate across stakeholder groups.