

**UNITED NATIONS COMMISSION ON SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY  
FOR DEVELOPMENT**

**Working Group on Enhanced Cooperation**

**Amendments/additional recommendations to document  
"Compilation of recommendations contained in contributions from WGEC  
members and Observers to the two guiding questions agreed during the first  
meeting of the WGEC"**

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# **Platform for Intergovernmental Dialogue on Internet-related Public Policy linked to the Internet Governance Forum**

Working document submitted to the CSTD Working Group on Enhanced Cooperation (WGEC)

Submitted by Anriette Esterhuysen, Association for Progressive Communications, April 2017

## **The problem**

The number of spaces and processes for discussion of different internet-related public policy issues has proliferated in recent years, yet there is currently no platform or space where governments can meet regularly, and have a broad discussion on internet-related public policy matters informed by their own concerns.<sup>1</sup> At the same time many specialised intergovernmental agencies are dealing with internet-related issues, such as the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), the Human Rights Council (HRC) and UNESCO, to mention a few. Regional intergovernmental bodies also increasingly addresses internet-related issues.

This presents a challenge in particular for governments from developing countries, which have limited resources to engage in multiple fora and have to be selective in where they engage.<sup>2</sup> And it is a challenge that will only grow, because the internet is in fact not a single entity – it is distributed and diverse, touching more and more aspects of daily life. This is reflected in the increasing volume and diversity of emerging internet-related public policy issues.

It is neither possible, or, in our view, advisable for one international body to deal with all internet-related public policy issues. But what is clearly needed is an information-sharing and open discussion platform for governments that responds to their stated needs without undermining respect for an inclusive and multistakeholder approach to internet governance.

Currently the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) could potentially act as this open discussion platform for governments. However, successful as it is, its strengths lie in its multi-stakeholder nature. Governments can benefit enormously from participating in the IGF, but it is not a substitute for a platform where governments can engage with one another as governments. Nor has it successfully attracted a sufficiently high number and diversity of governmental participation.

## **The solution**

The Association for Progressive Communications (APC) proposes a platform for intergovernmental dialogue on internet-related public policy linked to the IGF. Such a platform can:

- Facilitate government-to-government discussion on internet-related public policy issues;
- Enable governments to have access to cross-cutting internet-related public policy debates, challenges and opportunities;

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1 Other stakeholder groups face a similar challenges and APC also supports mechanisms that address these, but we have focused this particular contribution on the challenges that developing country governments face.

2 It is very common to see diplomatic missions in Geneva, especially for LDCs, that have only two or three diplomats to cover the work of 95 UN agencies and related international organizations. There are also key intergovernmental organizations relevant for internet-related public policy outside of Geneva, such as the OECD, the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL) and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.

- Brief them on what issues are being dealt with by various policy fora around the world;
- Support sharing information in a systematic way to ease coordination and collaboration between existing institutions and processes, particularly to link national and global processes; and;
- Strengthen government participation and engagement in the IGF itself.

Such a platform would not:

- Be a policy-making space;
- Constitute a new agency or intergovernmental body;
- Widen the mandate of any existing UN agency or intergovernmental body or process; or,
- Duplicate the work of any existing process.

This platform would enable governments to have future-oriented discussions with one another, and informed by other stakeholders through the link with the IGF, to get a full view of internet-related developments in various fora that have policy implications. It would enable governments to go to one place to get a fuller picture of what internet-related policy discussions are happening, to be briefed on outcomes of processes, such as, for example, IGF Best Practice Forums. It will make it easier for them to make more informed decisions on where to engage in order to be influential on the issues that matter most to them. It will also help clarify where there are gaps, with important issues not yet being addressed anywhere. This would build on the work already started by the CSTD Working Group on Enhanced Cooperation (WGEC) and the Commission on Science and Technology for Development (CSTD), specifically its mapping of international internet public policy issues.<sup>3</sup>

## **How the intergovernmental platform would work**

Our proposal is that the platform would consist of an annual dialogue for governments held on an annual basis, back-to-back with the IGF. An intergovernmental working meeting can be convened on the sidelines of each of the IGF's Open Consultations to engage in dialogue on a work programme for the annual meeting. The annual dialogue does not necessarily need to be institutionally attached to the IGF. It could be attached to another UN body such as CSTD but be convened in partnership with IGF secretariat.<sup>4</sup> The institution hosting the platform could also become responsible for facilitating the sharing of information and providing States support on engaging in internet policy spaces. Existing efforts to link an internet governance information clearing house to the IGF secretariat could make this easier and more sustainable.

We see this platform as a discussion space and not a policy-making space. Rather than creating a new institution, we view the forum as a platform that could be convened for governments by governments alongside existing processes and in collaboration with the multistakeholder IGF. This annual forum needs to be open to other stakeholders, but it should primarily be a space for governments, thereby responding to the explicit need that has been expressed by governments throughout the debate on enhanced cooperation.

## **Possible outputs of this platform**

- Proposals for agenda topics that can be addressed to the CSTD, the IGF MAG, and other spaces where internet-related public policies are discussed.
- Informal feedback on the outputs of IGF Best Practice Forums.
- Identification of areas in which governments feel there is a need for research or capacity development.

<sup>3</sup> [http://unctad.org/meetings/en/SessionalDocuments/CSTD\\_2014\\_Mapping\\_Internet\\_en.pdf](http://unctad.org/meetings/en/SessionalDocuments/CSTD_2014_Mapping_Internet_en.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> In determining the appropriate institution to house this platform, we refer to the "Characteristics of a Successful Mechanism" that Nick Ashton-Hart identifies in his paper "Solving the International Internet Policy Coordination Problem". (May 2015). Global Commission on Internet Governance, Paper Series: No. 12. [https://www.cigionline.org/sites/default/files/no12\\_0.pdf](https://www.cigionline.org/sites/default/files/no12_0.pdf)

- Identification of possible gaps in internet-related public policy making and proposals for where such issues can be discussed.

## **Broader context**

It is APC's view is that enhanced cooperation should aim to improve and democratise the governance of the internet at all levels, not only to establish more equitable influence for and among sovereign states. Our understanding of enhanced cooperation, based on both the Tunis Agenda and the outcome of the 10-year review of the World Summit on Information Society, is that it refers to both governments and other stakeholders.

We feel that there is a need to address the participation of government, because governments have specific responsibilities with regard to public policy, and the current system has gaps, which makes it difficult for some governments, especially those from developing countries, to influence those spaces. Governments certainly do not have the sole responsibility with regard to internet related public policy, which is why we are also actively working to strengthen existing mechanisms, making them more inclusive, transparent, and accessible to all stakeholders.

The IGF has been enormously successful in many respects. But it has not succeeded in providing this type of 'government to government' discussion space. The proposed platform should not detract from important efforts to strengthen the IGF; instead we see it as a response to the gap some governments are experiencing in terms of lack of access to and influence in internet-related public policy spaces. We realise that such a platform might not address all the challenges that the WGEC aims to address, and is not a substitution for efforts to enhance the participation of all stakeholders, but we see it as:

- Incremental in that it responds to stated needs by developing country governments while also strengthening an existing UN-based space, the IGF as well as the work of CSTD;
- Laying the groundwork for increased coordination amongst all stakeholders around internet-related public policy; and
- Suitable to the application of the characteristics of enhanced cooperation that the WGEC is trying to build consensus on.