

Internet Governance Forum

A commentary on the first meeting

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The final meeting of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) in November 2005 in Tunisia saw the creation of the Internet Governance Forum (IGF), a “multistakeholder” space where diverse groups of stakeholders could engage in dialogue—but not policy-making— around the questions of Internet governance.

The specific need to involve a diverse groups of stakeholders has not emerged—at least not to the same extent—as in previous discussions on information and communications technologies. The history of the Internet’s development and its evolution have meant that the Internet has primarily been the domain of academia, business and civil society (including the technical community), with governments looking for a way to get more involved. The notable exception, of course, is the United States government, whose Advanced Research Project’s Agency is the Internet’s birthplace. The U.S. Department of Commerce remains involved in one aspect of Internet governance, the management of domain names and addresses. It does so through a Memorandum of Understanding with the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN), and against a backdrop of considerable criticism from other governments and the business community.

The second phase of WSIS brought about an understanding that Internet governance is a much wider concept than the operations of ICANN. The Internet poses a variety of legal, policy and business challenges throughout the realms of international trade; the use of common resources; development of technology, networks and services; and efforts for global development,¹ concerning, for instance, international taxation; cybersecurity; consumer protection; ubiquitous networks; management of knowledge; and others. The most relevant of the current issues concerning these challenges are presented in Table 1.

International trade	Use of common Internet resources	Development of technology, networks and services	Applications for equitable, sustainable global development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ E-commerce ➤ Taxation ➤ Revenue sharing ➤ Internet exchange points (IXPs) ➤ Intellectual property rights (IPRs) ➤ Cybersecurity and data protection ➤ Cybercrime ➤ Internet and international telecommunication regulations (ITRs) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Domain name system (DNS) ➤ Registries and registrars ➤ Regional root servers ➤ Multilingual domain names (addition of non-ASCII characters) ➤ Management of country code top-level domains (ccTLDs) and generic top-level domains (gTLDs). ➤ Private vs. public legal instruments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Financing infrastructure ➤ Mobile broadband, ubiquitous networks ➤ Internet protocol version 6 (IPv6) ➤ Migration to IP-based networks ➤ Universal access ➤ Internet content regulation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Financing services and applications ➤ National e-strategies ➤ E-education, e-government ➤ Network-based applications ➤ Knowledge repositories ➤ Consumer protection (privacy, spam, fraud)

Table 1. A selection of current issues in Internet governance.

¹ MacLean, Don M. “Herding Schrödinger’s Cats: Some Conceptual Tools for Thinking about Internet Governance: Background Paper for the ITU Workshop on Internet Governance.” Geneva, 26-27 February 2004, p. 13.

The original version of the above table was presented in an article by Don MacLean, a member of the Working Group on Internet Governance.² The group was set up by the UN Secretary General to assist delegates to the World Summit on the Information Society by developing a working definition of Internet governance, identifying the public policy issues involved and to suggest how the various stakeholder groups (namely governments; intergovernmental and international organizations; civil society; and the private sector from around the world) can work together.³ Among other things, the Working Group on Internet Governance identified the following set of issues as some of the most pressing in the debate:

- the role of the U.S. government in the management of domain names;
- global interconnection costs;
- lack of multilateral mechanisms to ensure stability of the network and security of infrastructure services and applications;
- lack of efficient tools to prevent cybercrime and prosecute for online crimes; and
- the absence of agreement over definitions and desirable options for dealing with spam.

They also concluded that significant barriers exist to multistakeholder participation in international governance mechanisms, underlining the great significance of this problem in the Internet context. Many traditional areas of international governance suffer from a lack of transparency, a lack of openness and a lack of diversity among the stakeholders involved. Participation costs are often prohibitive for those from remote areas, developing countries, civil society organizations and small and medium-sized enterprises. Access to materials produced by intergovernmental and international organizations is frequently restricted. For governments from developing countries, an additional concern is the lack of a global mechanism through which to get involved in multistakeholder decision-making related to the Internet. The Athens meeting of the Internet Governance Forum, held from October 30 to November 2, 2006, sought to address these specific concerns in a number of ways.⁴

Style and Format

The style and format were markedly different from those of a traditional UN meeting. Since the Forum has no decision-making mandate, it was relatively easy to open participation to anyone who demonstrated a basic understanding of the issues, and to place the focus squarely on dialogue. The Secretariat discouraged the use of PowerPoint presentations and made speeches possible only by a video stream shown in the venue hallways. All 36 proposals for workshops submitted by civil society, business, academia and government delegates were approved, and these ran concurrently to the five panel sessions held in plenary. Attendance to each of the sessions was open to all delegates and a sincere effort was made to make remote participation possible through chats, video and e-mail. Overall, the event ran with few glitches.

Themes

The plenary sessions focused on the themes of openness, security, diversity and access. Among others, the session on openness examined questions of:

- a) freedom of expression and responsibility to limit that freedom;
- b) intellectual property rights (IPR) and the opportunities the Internet provides for increasing access to knowledge through innovative IPR frameworks;

² See MacLean, 2004, p. 14. The changes made to MacLean's table include additions of the words "and data protection," "addition of non-ASCII characters," "and gTLDs," "content" in Internet content regulation, "e-education" and "e-government." Acronyms ISPs, IXPs, ITRs, ccTLDs, gTLDs, and IPv6 were resolved.

³ MacLean, 2004, p. 1.

⁴ Internet governance is in many ways different from other spheres of international governance, most notably in that it is the governments who are seeking increased participation in an area led by the technical community and the private sector. This difference, however, does not diminish the outstanding success of the Athens meeting of the Internet Governance Forum.

- c) the role and responsibility of the private sector in respecting human rights (specifically, Microsoft and CISCO were asked about their Chinese operations and questioned on the role their technologies play in state-sponsored censorship activities); and
- d) treatment of knowledge produced with support from public vs. private funds

Dialogue in the **security** session was dominated by an interesting discussion on the options for authentication and identification online, the roles of user choice and education vs. technical security solutions, and the role of legal tools for enhanced security, with a specific focus on the Cybercrime Convention. Public vs. private approaches and the need for best practices were among the other issues raised.

The panel on **diversity** was only one of a number of sessions focusing on multilingualism as a driving requirement for maintaining diversity of online content. The case was made that the digital divide may be shrinking, but that the linguistic and content divides are persistent and growing. The role of the UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity was mentioned as a possible tool for increasing multilingual content, as was multistakeholder cooperation among agencies like UNESCO, the International Telecommunications Union, ICANN and others.

The need to produce audio-visual content to address the needs of people with disabilities and low levels of literacy was discussed both in the diversity and access sessions. The panel on **access** discussed a possible policy of “universal access,” market structures to stimulate investment and the role of open standards, wireless technologies and pricing models in expanding access to the Internet. The role of national governments was also examined, and participants seemed to agree that that access depends on further capacity building.

IISD's participation centered around two themes: 1) young people and emerging issues in Internet governance; and 2) the linkages between Internet governance and sustainable development.

1) IISD participated in organizing the **emerging issues** session, a panel of young people from Brazil, South Africa, Turkey, Greece, Nigeria, Malaysia, India and Romania. Panelists chose to place the focus on issues of access in developing countries, distinguishing between technical access to the Internet and the ability to use the technology to meet the communication needs of their countries. The Nigerian participant called for recognizing access to the Internet as a basic human right, a comment that stirred a debate on whether people are entitled to access or should earn it through individual effort. The audience members were invited to participate in the same capacity as the panelists, and they chose to raise the issues of gender divides within the digital divides, and the need for capacity building across the issue areas discussed in previous sessions. Online safety for children and the change in education opportunities the Internet brings were discussed in detail. A clear message coming out of the session was that there is a need to include young people in the IGF process going forward. IISD continues to support youth participation in the IGF. We recently helped organize the international e-consultation "Decoding Internet Governance" held in December 2006 with young people from around the world.

2) IISD's Heather Creech participated in the workshop entitled "Greening Development through ICT and Civic Engagement," organized by BlueLink Bulgaria, a member of the Association for Progressive Communications (<http://www.apc.org>). The session report, available at http://www.intgovforum.org/Workshop_reports.php, notes that:

"The workshop focused on the development and use of policy and institutional mechanisms that employ Internet and ICT instruments to strengthen the capacity of civil society for participation in decision-making. A case example of an international policy instrument was presented at the workshop – the UNECE Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters. The convention, referred to as the Aarhus Convention, sets institutional and policy examples which bridge the gap between environmental sustainability and information society. ICTs featured little in Millennium Development Goals' (MDGs) review by the Millennium Project, and barely in UNDP's Human Development Report. The impact of ICTs for sustainable development also received scant attention during WSIS. Coordination between these two major international policy processes needs improvement."

Additionally, IISD's Maja Andjelkovic participated in a training session on Internet governance negotiations offered by the Diplo foundation. We look forward to continuing to work with groups like the APC and Diplo on integrating sustainable development principles into Internet governance.

Box 1. IISD at the first meeting of the Internet Governance Forum.

Workshops, encouraged by the secretariat to present "multistakeholder" perspectives, focused on a wide range of issues, including spam; access to knowledge and freedom of expression; building human and institutional capacity on Internet governance; content rights and regulations from gender and development perspectives; equal access on the Web; Internet infrastructure; Internet as a tool for transparency; technical and policy challenges in management of domain names; internationalized domain names; and multilingualism on the Internet. Workshops dedicated to enhancing multistakeholder participation in ICT policy-making, exploring a framework convention on the Internet, and identifying the intersections of sustainable development and Internet policy were also held. A notable outcome of the IGF Athens meeting is a series of "dynamic coalitions" on a diverse range of topics, including

- freedom of expression and access to knowledge;
- StopSpamAlliance;

- privacy;
- open document standards;
- Internet bill of rights;
- framework convention; and
- travel funding.

These coalitions are meant to be based on multistakeholder cooperation and to provide for a working space between annual meetings. A list of dynamic coalitions, their partners and activities will be made available at the IGF Secretariat [Web site](http://www.intgovforum.org/Dynamic%20Coalitions.php) At <http://www.intgovforum.org/Dynamic%20Coalitions.php>.

Most of all, the first meeting of the Forum was an “outstanding success” because its structure allowed for true openness and ease of participation for all stakeholders, unparalleled by any other UN meeting of this type. The significance of the event lies in the model it offers to future international multi-stakeholder policy fora.

Steve Vosloo, one of IISD’s young researchers who explored local content as the point of convergence of Information Society and Sustainable Development policies in South Africa (see http://www.iisd.org/pdf/2005/networks_dev_connection.pdf), was also present at the IGF meeting in Athens. In his article for the Communications Initiative he writes that

“All of this may sound over-enthusiastic, but one must remember that the UN system moves slowly. For civil society and business to be given equal status to government is indeed a revolution in this system. According to Murali Shanmugavelan, an IGF panelist and head of the Information Society project at Panos London, ‘It’s conceivable that the UN may be forced to apply a similar approach to other global policy discussions.’”⁵

Vosloo, like many others, sees the inaugural meeting of the IGF as a successful launch into uncharted waters when it comes to multistakeholder participation. As plans unfold for subsequent meetings in Rio in 2007, India in 2008 and Egypt in 2009, it will be up to the participants to determine whether the model survives the experimental phase and provides a blueprint for multistakeholder engagement in other international arenas.

For its part, IISD looks forward to focusing its work on: a) supporting the participation of young people in the Internet Governance Forum; b) examining the nature and impact of non-negotiated outcomes in international fora, including, for instance, the IGF’s “dynamic coalitions”; c) articulating the connections between Internet governance and sustainable development; and d) exploring how governance models emerging in the Internet governance context can be helpful for sustainable development.

⁵ See <http://icommons.org/2006/11/15/the-internet-governance-forum-a-step-in-the-right-direction/>

Appendix A: Transcript of Chair's Summary of the Emerging Issues Session

Source: <http://www.intgovforum.org>

CHAIRMAN TSANAKAS: Thank you. A lot of issues have been raised, so it is very hard for me to summarize all the views that have been heard here. I just try to put the most important issues that have been raised. First of all, we have been -- we have heard a little about access control. That is becoming more important as online content outpaces traditional non-electronic media content education has been considered of paramount importance for all the people, and for best exploitation of the impressive technological developments that are still appearing in the IP and electronic communications world.

Flexible intellectual property rights issues have been also of paramount importance that guarantee and secure creativity and at the same time preserve accessibility for the vast majority of the young users. The preservation of the sustainable development via sustainable innovation is also very important and should be served by the educational system of our societies. The best practices and successful models of creating novelty products are very important to be taught at the -- in a systematic way in all the stages of education. Another issue, another point is that there still exists fears that the digital divide is not shrinking, but instead it is widening, in all the aspects of the divide, digital divide, in both regional scale, in social scale, and also in -- at the gender scale. So, universal access to the Internet may be considered to be declared as a primitive human right for the next generation. Beyond access, we have to have the new culture of e-citizenship, and adopt democratic institutions for the new digital era. Also, the challenge of the safe access to the young children is very important for the children of all generations. And also, we have to admit that the views and the needs of the young people should be treated more seriously as they perceive the modern issues, the modern information technology issues and modern social issues in a rather different way than the earlier generations. I have to thank all the panelists for being here and expressing their views. And also, our superb moderator, and all of you who have been here and participated in this successful event. Thank you. [Applause]