Introduction

This note suggests some ideas about how to strengthen the IGF. We’re aware that the conversation about internet governance could cover much broader ground and people may not want to dwell upon the IGF or this aspect of it. But if there is an "IGF plus" element to the conversation these are our ideas.

As well as discussing the ideas it would be useful, if people are interested, in considering how we can take these ideas forward – what is it we can do as civil society to strengthen the IGF and secure greater government (and business?) support for the process. Who could we lobby; how should we promote these ideas; who is the target audience for any statement?

Where next for the IGF

The IGF was a compromise outcome:  an IGF non-decision-making Internet forum on the one side, balanced by a proposal for enhanced cooperation (ostensibly among governments although this is debated) on Internet public policy issues the other.

The IGF has come to play a very important role as the major multi stakeholder forum in which internet policy is discussed.  It provides a locus for discussion among the diverse stakeholders of the Internet eco-system – from technical governance bodies such as ICANN and IETF on the one hand to treaty bodies such UNESCO, the Human Rights Council, or WIPO, WTO on the other.

At Tunis the remit of the IGF was established to act as a deliberation body for all stakeholders to, inter alia, raise emergent Internet governance challenges and report on progress and solutions to existing governance issues, discuss the best approach to address governance issues and appropriate parties to address those issues, and *build* voluntary enhanced cooperation groups made up of institutions with mandates to address identified challenges.

Currently the IGF functions as a kind of meeting place for the main players in the internet ecosystem - a place to share and debate ideas in a multistakeholder format - though even in this environment debates are often siloed, in part because of the conflicting meetings and insufficient regional and stakeholder representation

The IGF now has a mandate to be more outcome-oriented from ECOSOC via the CSTD WG on IGF improvements.  This note builds on some of the key suggestions in the CSTD report published 16 March 2012 in the hope that it will further strengthen the IGF to give it more relevance, visibility and status - thereby going part way to meeting the desire of some governments for a stronger global policy process without establishing a form of regulation that would stifle development. This report is at <http://www.intgovforum.org/cms/Contributions2009/IGF%20imporvement.pdf>

Our view on this is as follows:

As a first step towards strengthening role of the IGF we would suggest small practical steps that would enable the IGF to build credibility through making its outputs relevant and useful. There is very real need for the the discourse and the product of the IGF to have value and relevance for all stakeholders and particularly governments. If this can be achieved we can consider whether the IGF could develop into a body with the standing to issue declarations/recommendations.

The recommendations for increasing the value and relevance of the IGF are three-fold:

1. Clarifying and refining the role and purpose of the Special Representative, the MAG and the secretariat.

There is a need for clearer leadership in the IGF. The appointment  of the long-overdue UN SecGen special representative (SR) who could speak to IGF concerns and act as the visible face of the IGF is essential.  The SR would be the Chair of the IGF and would produce a Chair's statement at the end of each event after consultation with the (reformed) MAG.

Currently the MAG continues to function as it did at the first IGF. An empowered MAG must have a role that is greater than event organisation/management, which is and should be the role of the secretariat. The MAG and the SR have to work hand-in-hand to ensure a balanced division of labour and representation.  The functioning and decision-making of the MAG can no longer be held up by single country representatives. A mechanism should be agreed so that final decisions are not “managed” by the SR or others.

Concrete steps to strengthen the role and purpose of the MAG could include the following:

1. MAG members to form IGF working groups on key issues of importance to the future of the IGF including: 1) the key issue of funding and budget (working with the IGF secretariat, UNDESA and other relevant parties), and, 2) communications/outreach (with a focus on how to communicate the outputs of the IGF and how to encourage participation in the IGF); additional WGs should be formed as the need arises
2. MAG members should adopt the role of Internet Governance Forum Focal Points – in other words acting as regional and/or national and stakeholder representatives and points of contact for those who are seeking to participate in the IGF

The secretariat needs additional funding to secure the resources to ensure the continuity and coherency of the day to day management of the IGF.

2 Building credibility and weight through relevant outputs, refining the workshops and other sessions

If the IGF is to have weight and standing in the international Internet governance space for all stakeholders then advocates, policy makers and others will want to know the issues under discussions are relevant, the experts brought knowledge and diversity of views, the discussion was valuable and rewarding, and that the challenge/issue/concern was addressed and that the proposed solutions were practical and credible.   Attendees at the IGF should be able to return to their country with some solutions that they can possibly use/implement.

The following outline key ideas that are elaborated on later in the text

* The subject/focus of the IGFs must be relevant to all parties;
* The workshops and panels, etc. must be focused on addressing real concerns, challenges or “wicked” problems and could include designated workshops for developing non-binding suggestions to address certain Internet governance issues.  A particular focus should be on addressing issues of practical consequence and of importance to specific stakeholders.
* The workshop outputs must be structured so that "recommendations" can be derived from the findings - "this was the challenge – and this is how the participants suggested or recommended it be addressed";
* The format of the workshop reports need to be standardized so that it is easy to  see what those "recommendations" are (and how they were arrived at).

Addressing policy challenges:

The practical relevance of the IGF needs to be reassessed and mechanisms put in place to ensure that the output of the IGF is relevant and useful to advocates, policy makers and others. The main focus of the IGF should be address policy challenges/problems/issues in multi-stakeholder deliberative processes that result in clear and comprehensive but succinct outputs that note the divergences and convergences of opinion on a given issue and, if possible, makes recommendations from the participants in those processes as to how the issue could be addressed. This problem/solution approach would allow for credible and useful outputs.

This would require the following changes: workshops subjects should clearly be framed in terms of addressing a specific policy/technical/other issues or concerns; an output form/template needs to be developed that allows for and reflects the opinions of the participants, their points of agreement and disagreement and provides an opportunity for a set of recommendations to be articulated. This approach would allow for a better reflection of the discourse and an output oriented report that would point to ways forward. Such reports should be short and concise (preferably no more than one page).

Another approach to strengthen the deliberative approach of the IGF would be to identify specific and or cross-cutting issues that require further work that could be forwarded to appropriate fora or organizations.  One requirement of the workshops might be that they identify where, whether nationally or internationally, their particular issue could be further worked on.  This would satisfy certain elements of the IGF’s mandate.

The IGF should also become part of an on-going policy research agenda on emerging issues and scoping of the same agenda for the wider policy community.  Linked to this the IGF through its workshops and other approaches could examine the products of research and explore evidence-based policy options.  This would require an appropriate multi-stakeholder process to define research needs and consider/debate research output.

With institutional capacity (and in particular a strengthened secretariat) the IGF could produce an annual report - a user-friendly, valuable report of the findings/outputs of the global IGFs. This would not be a compilation of reports, etc., but rather a substantive summary that would highlight the recommendations and findings from the IGF. Either a member of the secretariat or an outside resource would have to be secured for this important product/output. If resources permit it would be invaluable to have a report that does the same for the outputs of regional and national IGFs.

3. Building linkages between national, regional and global IGFs

There has been a proliferation of national and regional IGFs, yet apart from the reporting in session at the global IGF there are no linkages between the work and findings of the national and regional IGFs and the global IGF. There needs to be a greater recognition of the work that is accomplished at the national IGFs, and the regional and global IGFs should take the findings of these national IGFs into account in as they build their own programmes and focus. Policy issues that are raised by national IGFs should feed into the appropriate regional IGFs and, in turn, feed into the global IGF. Part of the process for determining the issue(s) focus of the global IGF should be based upon the issues that are important at national and regional levels.

The above is an overdue recognition of the important role that national and regional IGFs play in furthering discussion of Internet policy, capacity building and other elements that are essential to the Internet’s evolution and success around the globe.

In summary…

We have identified these 3 areas for improvement for the IGF – undoubtedly there are many more. We believe that if we can build the incremental value-add and relevance of the IGF for all stakeholders - in practical and useful ways - then we will see a measurable increase in the visibility and relevance of the IGF that will in turn lead to greater standing in Internet policy matters.