Internet Governance Forum (IGF) Reform Briefing Note
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Background

There is an Internet Governance Forum (IGF) meeting Sept. 2 - Sept. 5, 2014 in Istanbul, Turkey. The IGF is then up for a 5 year renewal at the UN General Assembly in New York.

One of the criticisms of the WSIS + 10 event was that not much really came out of it besides the Action Lines documents and discussion of vague goals. Related to that, there has been some debate over whether the IGF should reach binding decisions and take actions; on the Internet Society blog, they address this by stressing that the IGF wasn't founded to make decisions but to follow a "soft governance" model.[1] They feel that the ability to discuss policy issues without the pressure of reaching binding decisions is a useful model to follow.

NetMundial created a document to address what they hope to see in Internet Governance.[2] The document endorsed keeping the IGF as a place to share "lessons learned" and "disseminate good practices." They ask that the UN, through the IGF, track emerging internet policy issues and make sure that multistakeholder involvement is improved. They also ask for a 10 year renewal, instead of just 5 years.

The longer renewal length is also touched on by Patrick Ryan, Public Policy & Government Relations Counsel for Free Expression and International Relations at Google, in his document. He says that because Internet Governance is going to be an ongoing issue, it's disruptive to require the IGF to seek renewal from the UNGA every 5 years.

NetMundial also calls for more transparency, another topic touched on by Patrick Ryan. Currently all funding for IGF is from the UN, through Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), which can be slow & unwieldy. Proposed action: pursue crowdfunding, or funding via a non-profit. See also Tides/UN agreement, which is a model that enables crowdfunding; agreement was signed March 26,2014. There was a donor's meeting which was partially open to the public in Feb. 21, 2014, which is one step towards funding reform. Under financial transparency, rules and details on IGF trust-fund account are unknown.

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[1] http://www.internetsociety.org/blog/2013/11/value-not-making-decisions%E2%80%A6some-reflections
[2] http://content.netmundial.br/contribution/netmundial-content-submission-endorsed-by-nic-mexico/302

Ryan's transparency suggestions also include UN's selection criteria for Multistakeholder Advisory Group (MAG) appointments should be clear; each constituency group should share their process for making MAG recommendations. Before MAG members apply, they should know what the responsibilities & expectations will be. The MAG should create an orientation for new members, and release a charter. The site selection process should also be more transparent; see how ICANN, APRICOT or IETF processes work. Finally, Host Country Agreements are not public but should be, although a copy of the packet given to potential host countries is now available. It's available via a link in the "IGF Reform" document.

BestBits has an interesting questionnaire response (created to respond to the "CSTD Working Group on Enhanced Cooperation" Questionnaire).[3] Their question 6 answer discusses ways in which IGF could help address multistakeholder involvement in international policy issues that involve the internet.

From the **UN "Working Group on Improvements to the IGF"** document: Mostly states that due to "complexity & political sensitivity" and lack of agreement among member States that no proposals were agreed on during the time period covered.

From **Patrick Ryan,** top 5 reform areas:
1. Change 5 year cycle. 5 years is too short; leads to view as temporary

2. Find alternative funding for IGF

3. Improve transparency. Needed to help foster trust; several specific suggestions offered.

4. Create advisory board to improve multistakeholder access to administration & accountability. While IGF discussions are open to all stakeholders, the administration is not. An advisory board would help to correct this; could be modeled on ones from UN Sustainable Energy for All.

5. Hire permanent Special Advisor, make Interim Chair Permanent Special Advisor is a discretionary role that reports to the Secretary General; right now has to be a wealthy, retired person because it's an uncompensated role. IGF should create an endowed role. In addition, the MAG has an "Interim Chair" instead of a permanent one; having only a temporary chair means that world sees IGF as temporary group.

From Patrick Ryan, Future plans:

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[3] http://bestbits.net/ec/

1. IGF should focus more on helping national and regional IGFs and help facilitate information exchange among them.
2. IGF should also assist with exchange of information among groups working on education, open government, and so on.