

Best Bits 2014 steering committee report

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1. Introduction

This report has been prepared by the steering committee of Best Bits to record the work undertaken during 2014, and to provide an overview of the main joint activities of participants in the Best Bits network that continue into 2015. We offer this report for consideration.

Our previous report from 2013 is available on our website at <http://bestbits.net/wp-uploads/2014/08/2013-report.pdf>, and gives more detail about the background of Best Bits, which is omitted here to avoid duplication.

2. Activity

There are currently 393 subscribers to the main Best Bits mailing list, an increase of 100 on last year. The steering committee was appointed in 2014 following an election process overseen by volunteer Ian Peter, in which ultimately no vote was held because there was only one more applicant than there were positions on the committee, and there was a broad consensus to co-opt the remaining applicant to the committee and thereby to expand its size by one. As so constituted, the steering committee comprises of the following members:

- Andrew Puddephatt (Global Partners Digital, Europe region)
- Anja Kovacs (Internet Democracy Project, Asia-Pacific region)
- Deborah Brown (APC, US region)
- Carolina Rossini (Public Knowledge, Latin America-Caribbean/North America)
- Claudio Ruiz (Derechos Digitales, Latin America/Caribbean)
- Imran Ahmad Shah (Urdu Internet Society/Pakistan IGF, Asia-Pacific)
- Jeremy Malcolm (EFF, North America)
- Marianne Franklin (Internet Rights and Principles Dynamic Coalition, Europe)
- Nnenna Nwakanma (Web We Want, Africa region)

Although there is no formal hierarchy of roles within the steering committee, to assist their own internal functioning, the steering committee resolved during the year to have a rotating chair who would be responsible for calling and chairing teleconferences, and such other functions as the committee members might agree. The first and current chair is Andrew Puddephatt.

The steering committee held its first meeting on July 7, 2014 and they decided to hold roughly monthly calls thereafter, though time commitments of members have not permitted this schedule to be strictly upheld. Currently steering committee meetings are supported through WebEx hosting offered by APC, though we are still searching for a satisfactory open source alternative.

In the interest of transparency, the group decided to share summaries of their calls within 10 days of each of their meeting with the open list of the network members (though we not always met this aspirational standard, and will improve our efforts in this regard).

On August 31, 2014, Best Bits held its 2014 meeting in Istanbul, Turkey ahead of the 9th annual Internet Governance Forum (IGF) being held in the city September 2-5. The most recent steering committee conference call was held on December 16, 2014.

3. Outputs

The outputs of Best Bits are the joint interventions that participants have made on Internet policy issues, as well as the infrastructure of the network itself that supports the participants' engagement, information sharing and collaboration. These will be further detailed below.

3.1. Draft procedures

Best Bits procedures and decisions are adopted by rough consensus of the network's participants rather than by voting. The steering committee has been working since 2013 on improving these processes for the better function, representation and balance of the network.

During 2014, a group of volunteers' began to review the procedures, that had been collaboratively developed on a wiki on the Best Bits website, but have until now not been subject to a thorough review. This group has produced a revised set of procedures to be reviewed by the steering committee by 2 March, 2015 and sent to the wider Best Bits list that same month. The deadline for broader list comments would be set before mid-year, with the goal to launch the finalized and reviewed procedures this year.

The draft is currently accessible, and remains open for comment, at <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1upQz1JX8tnYFI2yJNaT9MuD2w3ZaPvUaNIT5U2hi6b8/edit>.

3.2. NETmundial civil society preparatory meeting

A coordination meeting was held as a joint initiative of Best Bits with the Association for Progressive Communications, Article 19, Center for Studies on Freedom of Expression, Center for Technology and Society (CTS/FGV), Derechos Digitales, Global Partners Digital, Instituto de Defesa do Consumidor (IDEC), Instituto de Tecnologia e Sociedade (ITS), ICANN's Non-Commercial Users Constituency (NCUC) and Web We Want.

The meeting was broadly acknowledged as having been a successful strategy for coordinating the presentation of civil society views over the following days of the NETmundial meeting. A record of the meeting including working documents is maintained at <http://bestbits.net/events/netmundial-coordination>.

3.3. Best Bits 2014 meeting

The objectives of the meeting were to move Best Bits forward from the NETmundial meeting that had been held earlier in the year, and to share analysis and strategy on a range

of key Internet policy processes that civil society groups plan to influence over the coming year. Through the shared outputs of this meeting and the indirect benefits of participation, there was an expectation of empowering civil society organizations and individual activists to create more informed, effective, inclusive and complementary advocacy outcomes, in which the public interest is better reflected in high-level policy discussions and in the outputs that these discussions produce. The Best Bits steering committee aimed to use this meeting to place Best Bits on a firmer institutional footing, in order to enhance its legitimacy as a broad-based civil society advocacy network and improve its long-term sustainability. The following are the summarized notes and outputs that came from the meeting:

- ***Highlights and tactics for IGF.*** Participants agreed that Best Bits is a proactive civil society platform for action-oriented discussion on Internet governance issues and that a consequent goal of the meeting was working towards more collaboration and proactive actions to create an “Internet we want”.

Some members of Best Bits invited to the upcoming High Level/Ministerial meeting being held at the IGF called for suggestions from participants on what, as civil society representatives at the High Level meeting, Best Bits wanted to discuss.

Civil society speakers who were also Best Bits participants also expressed their support to the IGF renewal for 10 more years, conditional upon reform of the IGF. At the same time, there was strong consensus on having more coordination and connection between regional IGFs and the global one. In this discussion, some participants discussed the different split in MAG members on this issue. It was agreed upon that at the opening ceremony, Best Bits civil society speakers should voice support for a permanent IGF.

- ***Discussing the NETmundial Initiative (NMI)*** . Participants discussed the possible outcomes for civil society including: developing best practices for multistakeholderism; developing roadmap annotation and project mapping based on the NETmundial outcome document; and, being an assistance platform to push back on ITU constitutional reform and expansion of ITU rule.

Similar to the Ministerial/High Level meeting, only a few representative members of civil society were invited to attend the NETmundial Initiative launch in Geneva before the IGF. Some participants at the Best Bits meeting voiced their concerns at civil society being a pawn that is being courted by the ICANN or other bodies want civil society to be in for optics or perceived legitimacy. Instead of being included from the beginning, some participants felt that this and other meetings have just been powerful people making decisions and then inviting civil society along. Both those who were invited and not invited to attend the NMI meeting in Geneva described it as having a lack of clarity, little discussion on substance, and *ad hoc* participation processes. While some participants criticized the lack of representation for civil society, others pointed to NMI and other initiatives as an opportunity for civil society to engage and shape the use of NETMundial outcomes in as many Internet governance processes as possible.

In reference to WEF, ICANN, the UN Human Rights Council and others, many participants discussed the need for civil society to define its “wants” in their processes, ranging from accountability to the influence civil society has on the processes. There was also discussion of the importance of not merely focusing on process, but more so on content.

- ***Policy slam.*** Participants made short presentations on a variety of topics: Civil society coordination group (Jeremy Malcolm); African draft Declaration of Internet rights and freedoms (Nnenna Nwakanma); Latin American learning platform (Francisco Vera/Claudio Ruiz); Multistakeholder definition – presentation of online discussion (Jeremy Malcolm); TPP and the impact of trade on IG (Burcu Kilic); Internet Ungovernance Forum (Niels ten Oover); Feminist principles for the Internet (Joy Liddicoat); Network of Centres case studies on multi-stakeholderism (Jeanette Hofmann); and, Preparing for ITU-Plenipot (Carolina Rossini, Matthew Shears, Natalie Green). An action item from this section was to invite a working group from the Best Bits platform to develop a collaborative strategy for submitting documents to the ITU.
- ***Follow up to WSIS+10 and tactics moving forward.*** This was a workshop led by Best Bits steering committee members Deborah Brown and Anja Kovacs. In talking about WSIS+10, both facilitators and the participants discussed the history of WSIS+10, including the Geneva Summit and Tunis Agenda. As noted by participants, the Geneva Summit was an instance where global civil society came together to discuss and work on Internet issues from a social justice and human rights agenda, thus becoming a communications rights movement. In talking about the Tunis Agenda, it was noted that development issues received little attention following the Tunis meeting and there was an increased emphasis on the role of governments, human rights, security, and surveillance.

The upcoming WSIS+10 Overall Review will be a two-day high level (possibly head of state) meeting at the UN General Assembly in December 2015. An intergovernmental preparatory process to be commenced in June 2015 will precede it. The UN Commission on Science and Technology for Development (CSTD) developed an open survey on the WSIS review due September 15, 2014, which will feed into a report that will also serve as an input. Participants’ completion of the survey was encouraged due to the lack of a formal role for civil society.

In the end, participants debated whether there will still be a WSIS in the future and whether it is either necessary or useful. The topic of civil society representation at high level and other meetings was discussed, and also the idea of developing a draft comprehensive document of Best Bits position.

- ***Best Bits way forward.*** Participants reviewed the pending work in the Best Bits operating procedures. With the availability of a Wiki and the help of some volunteers progress is expected, but more help is still required.

On staffing and funding, there was a discussion between the steering committee and participants on how to raise money to grant annual meetings support for those from developing countries, but it was noted that fundraising is difficult for Best Bits because Best Bits isn't an organization in the traditional sense. The suggestion was made to focus on applying for grants or for individual organizations to look at their own funding that could be applied to Best Bits.

The participants also discussed the need to create proactive agendas, share strategy and topics among Best Bits members and partners, and creating more formalized reports, such as two page briefings on issues. In the context of trade relations, it was also suggested that civil society start to develop more personal relationships with policy makers at Internet governance events and meetings.

Participants discussed Best Bits and civil society representation, legitimacy, and trust at high-level meetings and events. A consensus was made that if there is not enough time for Best Bits to fully address an issue and one member of the group is invited to speak or represent, there must be trust that the person will represent Best Bits values as much as possible. This includes keeping those interested in "process" and "substance" informed as well as looping in as many members in updates when possible.

At the end of the meeting, participants agree in a list of well done actions by Best Bits, including: Statements of principles, process, and police priorities; Coordinated approach to respond to new initiatives with points of commonality (NMI, WEF); Share in our communities, reassert our statements, remember you don't represent civil society but go to these meetings to show civil society's involvement. New ideas and improvements to implement in the future included: Developing deeper/broader positive agenda; Anticipating future issues to be addressed and groups that can help us be leaders; Funding for staff support; Honing foundational principles (to support NETmundial principles of human rights/multistakeholderism); Where and how to promote the previous point; Agreement to restate/urge key parts of these statements.

- ***Final Agreement.*** The steering committee ended by putting three propositions to the meeting for endorsement:
 1. To develop the statement of objectives on the Best Bits site to include an expanded set of overarching goals.
 2. To ensure that the strands of work identified at the meeting were followed up, that participation was invited from the platform but that once established working groups would be allowed to discuss strategy in confidence before sharing it with the wider list
 3. Work to strengthen and review working procedures in order to strengthen Best Bits objectives.

The proposal was supported by a majority of attendees with no recorded dissensions. As per point 2, four topics were chosen so far for increased collaboration and working groups.

1. IGF Renewal

- Volunteers include Cristiana G, Dixie H, Joy L, and Jeremy M.
- 2. Best Bits Procedures
Volunteers include Kevin B and Jeremy M.
- 3. ITU Plenipotentiary
Volunteers include Carolina R, Nnenna N, Joana V, Emma L, Anja K, and Cristiana G.
- 4. WSIS+10
Volunteers include Anja K, Deborah B, Nnenna N, and Cristiana G.

3.4. Best Bits 2014 meeting follow up

In its last conference call of the year, the interim steering committee made follow up of the agenda agreed in the annual meeting.

- **WSIS+10.** Global Partners proposed to circulate a questionnaire to the wider Best Bits platform to assess interest in contributing to the WSIS plus 10 process. It would gather information about:
 - Current levels of awareness/interest in the Process.
 - Priority areas that could form the basis of a potential civil society strategy for engagement.
 - Views on ways to engage in the process.
 - Views on the new proposed Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

The survey would be informed by a survey already carried out by the Association for Progressive Communications (APC). The survey would then feed into an informal working group on the WSIS process set up by the Best Bits annual meeting with the goal of developing a collaborative civil society position on the WSIS process.

- **NetMundial Initiative.** The steering committee briefly discussed the NMI where the question of civil society participation was disputed. The steering committee noted that there were not many strong candidates. It was understood that some of the Civil Society Coordination Group (CSCG) representatives were considering nominating themselves, which the Best Bits steering committee considered seemed inappropriate. Overall the steering committee felt that if good candidates did not present themselves for different regions that were a reflection of a civil society view of the process and that there should be no particular attempt to secure representation. The steering committee agreed to take no action other than to present this feedback to the CSGC, which was done accordingly.
- **ITU update on plenipotentiary.** Civil society representatives who attended the ITU plenipot already met to evaluate the conference and overall it was felt that the civil society representatives were more organized than they had been in the past and had worked well together. It was agreed that Carolina would prepare a short summary report in January 2015 to circulate to the wider list.
- **Fund raising.** It was agreed that a working group would prepare a concept proposal

for financial support to Best Bits to be discussed. March meeting would be an opportunity to follow up on fund raising.

3.5. WSIS+10 Overall Review – Information sharing and CS coordination event

On Monday, March 2, in Paris, a group of civil society organisations — Global Partners Digital (GPD), Association for Progressive Communications (APC), Center for Democracy and Technology (CDT), International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), Internet Democracy Project, KICTANet – in collaboration with the Internet Society (ISOC) and the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) will be holding a 1-day event focused on the WSIS+10 Overall Review. The Best Bits event platform has been used to facilitate this meeting.

The purpose of the event will be to raise awareness of the review process and to facilitate coordination and strategy development for effective civil society engagement. Part of the event will be dedicated to facilitating cross-community dialogue with representatives from the technical community, the business sector and governments. The event will be held on the margins of UNESCO's CONNECTing the Dots conference.

A briefing document prepared by Deborah Brown (APC) and Lea Kaspar (Global Partners Digital) is available at <https://www.apc.org/en/news/everything-you-need-know-about-wsis10-review>.

3.6 Statements

Seventeen joint statements or letters were issued by participants during 2014, garnering up to 60 endorsements (this for an open letter on the transparency of the ITU Plenipotentiary in Busan), but averaging closer to 20. The statements are archived on the Best Bits website at <http://bestbits.net/category/statements/>.

4. Website development

A new resource was added to the website experimentally in 2014, which is a brainstorming, collabowriting and voting tool called LiquidFeedback, available at <http://bestbits.net/lf/>. Although used to a limited degree in work on a definition of multi-stakeholderism, the tool appears to have been too complex to attract widespread usage.

Some additional website development (including a minor redesign of the site's template, which removed the blank space used for an event countdown) was conducted during early 2014. This ensured that the website, in particular the event handling functionality, was fit for purpose to handle the then-upcoming NETmundial meeting.

Otherwise there have been few changes, however the site continues to be used as a repository for background papers and reports of Best Bits affiliated and attended meetings, and the site's event calendar has been updated to include all major 2015 events.

During 2014 a number of background papers were contributed increasing the relevant

information available in our site. Among the background papers contributed during the year and highlighted on the site are:

- WSIS+10 Overall Review – Briefing note, by Deborah Brown and Lea Kaspar
- Concept Note – Freedom of Expression for Religious Freedoms
- Civil society key points for NETmundial meeting

Some new information was also added in the website's wiki section, including the beginnings of a new directory of other networks and mailing lists. The scope for further development of this resource is considerable.

5. Workstreams

Workstreams are proposed through discussion on the main Best Bits list or at one of our annual meetings. In the 2013 report, certain new workstreams began, but some of these have become inactive, whilst others have taken their place.

Some workstreams have also been diverted into unarchived, informal lists and cc groups.

- **Topic: General Best Bits discussion and coordination**

Workspace: “bestbits” mailing list (open membership, public archives), etherpad (for transient documents, no authentication), main website (for permanent documents, authentication required)

Outputs: Various, as set out in detail elsewhere in this report

Status: Active

- **Topic: Enhanced cooperation**

Workspace: “ec” mailing list (membership restricted to civil society, public archives)

Outputs: Developed a statement on enhanced cooperation for the CSTD Working Group on Enhanced Cooperation, ongoing liaison between Best Bits participants and members of the CSTD Working Group

Status: Inactive

- **Topic: Miscellaneous private discussion**

Workspace: “private” mailing list (membership restricted to civil society, private archives)

Outputs: None

Status: Has subscribers, but never used to date

- **Topic: Steering committee**

Workspace: “steering” mailing list (membership restricted to steering committee volunteers, private archives), and private etherpad

Outputs: Various, as set out in detail elsewhere in this report

Status: Active

- **Topic: Defining multi-stakeholderism and towards an IGF+**

Workspace: LiquidFeedback at <http://bestbits.net/lf/>, “bestbits” mailing list, contact persons Joy Liddicoat and Jeremy Malcolm

Outputs: Draft statement on multi-stakeholderism, and possible future Best Bits “quality seal”-style endorsement of multi-stakeholder processes (to be further discussed).

Status: Semi-active

- **Topic: ITU WTDC/Plenipot**

Workspace: <http://bestbits.net/itu-work-sheet/>, “itu” mailing list

Outputs: An engagement model or road-map that BB can use going forward

Status: Recently active

- **Topic: UN/WSIS+10/post 2015 agenda**

Workspace: <http://bestbits.net/wsis-work-sheet-2/>, “bestbits” mailing list

Outputs: Upcoming meeting in Paris on the sidelines of UNESCO CONNECTing the Dots

Status: Active

- **Topic: Cybersecurity/Seoul Principles/African Union Convention**

Workspace: <http://bestbits.net/cybersecurityseoul-principlesafrican-union-conventionotherwork-sheet/>, “best bits” mailing list

Outputs: None

Status: Inactive

- **Topic: Surveillance and human rights – track 1, engagement with private sector**

Workspace: Private cc list, contact point Ian Peter

Outputs: None known

Status: Inactive

- **Topic: Surveillance and human rights – track 2, engagement with technical community**

Workspace: Private cc list, contact point Pranesh Prakash

Outputs: None known

Status: Inactive

- **Topic: Surveillance and human rights – track 3, principles on privacy and surveillance for global IG processes**

Workspace: “bestbits” mailing list

Outputs: None known

Status: Inactive

- **Topic: NETmundial meeting coordination**

Workspace: “summit” mailing list (membership restricted to civil society, public archives)

Outputs: Statement of principles agreed at Bali meeting, appointment of four interim liaisons with Brazil organisers, and will review outputs of subsidiary working groups

Status: Completed/inactive

6. Financial report

Until now, the Best Bits network has been run without core funding to support its infrastructure or operations. Resources for the 2014 meeting were generously subgranted by

Global Partners & Associates from their project funding, and other organizations contributed in kind by paying travel expenses for delegates whom they individually supported. Administrative support was contributed in kind by Global Partners, Public Knowledge and EFF.

As of 2013, a balance of \$852 was being held for Best Bits by Access. This money was disbursed by them to Jeremy Malcolm in April to hold on account of future web hosting and development expenses. During the year \$457.00 was paid for website development including template redesign, \$88.20 was paid for website hosting, and \$54.95 for domain renewal (extending the domain until 2020). The balance held is therefore \$251.85.

A foundation has expressed interest in supporting Best Bits in the near future, but the steering committee has not yet settled on an approach, nor been able to marshal the resources to prepare a new concept note to the funder. This is to be taken forward during 2015. Meanwhile an intern at EFF, Maria Paz Canales, has made herself available to assist the steering committee.

7. Conclusion

2014 has been another year of progress for Best Bits, in which our most valuable contribution was probably helping to ensuring strong civil society participation at the historic NETmundial meeting. Our biggest challenge is to maintain our drive and energy moving forward, without a dedicated staff or budget, and with many other demands on the time of participants. With the consolidation of 2014 work this year, including hopefully the finalization of our operating procedures and a possible influx of funding during 2015, we look forward to the upcoming year with enthusiasm.

We thank all the participants for their trust and commitment, and reiterate our willingness to answer any questions and to receive any comments or feedback on this report.