



**Reflections from the Association for
Progressive Communications (APC) on the
10th Internet Governance Forum, João Pessoa,
Brazil, 10-13 November 2015**

*Association for Progressive Communications (APC)
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1. Preamble

The 10th annual Internet Governance Forum (IGF) was held in João Pessoa, Brazil, from 10 to 13 November 2015 with the overall theme of “Evolution of Internet Governance: Empowering Sustainable Development”. IGF 2015 came at a critical time, just one month before the United Nations General Assembly was to decide, through the WSIS+10 review, whether the IGF would have a future.

It also marked a homecoming of sorts. This was Brazil's second time hosting an IGF, and was the second time in two years that a major internet governance event had been held in Brazil, the first being the NETmundial Multistakeholder Meeting in 2014. The host country's experience in organising such events was evident, and the level of discussion was rich.

The Forum ended on 13 November, a day blackened by the terrorist attacks in Paris. Aside from the tragic loss of life, and the fear engendered, these attacks also marked a turning point in the European discussion on terrorism, from the emphasis on freedom of expression evident after the January 2015 attacks on Charlie Hebdo, to a discourse of greater securitisation and a crackdown on migrants and refugees. When reflecting on what was achieved at the IGF, we need to be steadfast in ensuring that violence such as this does not threaten the freedoms we have been working and advocating for here and elsewhere.

The renewal of the IGF's mandate for another 10 years is an excellent opportunity to strengthen the processes and outcomes of the Forum. Recommendations on ways to achieve this strengthening can be found in section four of this report.

2. What worked well

The venue and our hosts

The CGI.br (Brazilian Internet Steering Committee), the Brazilian government and all the local volunteers did a superb job of hosting what many think was one of the most successful IGFs to date. The active participation of the large youth delegation that CGI.br supported made a huge impact. They were very vocal and presented solid ideas as a constituency. Their request is clear: they want to be taken seriously.

Inclusion of gender-related issues

This was the year that the IGF got gender right. While progress has been made in successive forums, this year the IGF was very inclusive of gender-related issues. Gender was integrated and more visible across a greater number of sessions. It was particularly evident in the first session at the IGF dedicated to LGBT rights, and the launch of this year's Global Information Society Watch (GISWatch) report on sexuality rights and the internet. This was also the fourth year that the IGF implemented the Gender Report Card initiated by APC and prepared by the Gender Dynamic Coalition (DC) with support from the Secretariat. This sustained commitment is to be commended.

Intersessional work through dynamic coalitions and best practice forums: Consolidating outcomes

The IGF's use of intersessional work truly came into its own in 2015. Assigning Secretariat staff to the best practice forums (BPFs) complemented the voluntary work done by the Multistakeholder Advisory Group

(MAG) members and other volunteers. Throughout the year, the BPFs gathered key issues and best practices from diverse stakeholder groups. The resulting outcomes documents confirms that the IGF becoming more outcome-oriented.

Most significant for APC's work was the BPF on practices to counter abuse against women online, coordinated by APC Women's Rights Programme manager Jac sm Kee (in her capacity as a MAG member) with strong support from Anri van der Spuy of the IGF Secretariat. The BPF document went through several iterations that finally resulted in a 185-page report that consolidated definitions on this emerging critical issue. It also incorporated approaches to addressing this issue promoted by different stakeholder groups, from governments to the private sector to community-led initiatives. This outcome document demonstrates the value of the IGF as a multistakeholder policy dialogue space that facilitates conversation across different sectors and interests, as well as between and within different segments of the various stakeholder groups.

A further example of the value of intersessional work is the "Policy Options for Connecting the Next Billion" document, to be forwarded to related processes such as the UN General Assembly's Second Committee, which deals with issues relating to economic growth and development; the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) Council; and UNESCO.

The methodology to ensure that the work of BPFs is discussed at the IGF and beyond involved dedicated workshop sessions as well as a main session that linked the various BPFs to the main theme of the 2016 IGF. This proved an effective way of bringing broader stakeholder participation into the conversation.

However, it is important to note the potential presence of "bad actors" who may exploit the open characteristics of the BPFs to disrupt discussions rather than engage constructively. This raises questions around the tension between the need to create productive spaces where participants can engage without feeling that they are under threat or that their privacy is being violated, and the need to create open and transparent dialogue spaces. This issue became evident when the BPF on countering abuse against women online was subjected to a consolidated and sustained attack from October to December 2015 (elaborated in the BPF outcome document). The support from the MAG Chair and MAG members when this arose demonstrated the commitment to the processes and work of the BPF as a key part of IGF.

Dynamic coalitions also proved their worth and were well integrated into the IGF as a result of the dedicated encouragement of Markus Kummer. Several are extremely active, and we know of at least two that work and even meet intersessionally (network neutrality and internet of things). Others meet to take stock of achievements and identify next steps (internet rights and principles, public access and gender). We are pleased with the formation of new dynamic coalitions on community networking and on platform responsibility.

Improved main sessions

Main sessions were relatively successful in 2015. The main session on the NETmundial Multistakeholder Statement and the Evolution of the Internet Governance Ecosystem produced a document describing, with examples, the evolution of internet governance at national, regional and international levels. This document builds on the first NETmundial meeting in São Paulo in April 2014, and the pre-event to assess the process convened by CGI.br with APC and others at the 9th IGF in Istanbul. It addressed both (a) the principles for internet governance in the NETmundial Statement and (b) the NETmundial roadmap, as well

as places where improvements may be considered. APC hopes to see these NETmundial principles adopted by the IGF as a basis for internet governance – a step which is consistent with the IGF's mandate as stated in the Tunis Agenda.¹

The main session on the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) was a meaningful space for circulating thoughts and views on the ongoing WSIS+10 process. This is a case of a direct link between the IGF and the UN General Assembly, as the co-facilitators appointed by the President of the General Assembly for the 10-year review of WSIS attended a number of sessions at the IGF to gain input for the draft outcome document. This was an example of the importance of dialogue between actors in the various policy processes and the value of cross-fertilisation between them.

The main session on Human Rights was well attended and brought together a range of voices, from intergovernmental agencies to activists. It covered human rights, access and development, the right to freedom of expression, assembly and privacy, as well as emerging issues from a variety of political and regional perspectives. APC is pleased to see the return of the main session on Human Rights, as it gives this important theme the prominence it deserves.

Increased participation by UN agencies and staff

Both of these developments – the outcome-oriented nature and the main session on Human Rights – benefited from increased UN investment in the IGF space. The presence of Special Rapporteurs to the Human Rights Council, including the Special Rapporteur on freedom of expression and the Special Rapporteur on privacy, staff from the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights, UNESCO, the International Telecommunication Union and the Commission on Science and Technology for Development, regional UN economic commissions and other UN representatives was appreciated. They convened open forums, took the opportunity to meet with different stakeholder groups, and participated in workshops and main sessions to provide their input. This demonstrates the value of the IGF as a space to bring together different areas of expertise and roles for dialogue, as well as the prominence of human rights in internet policy discussions.

Further, the presence of the two co-facilitators of the outcome document of the UN General Assembly's 10-year WSIS review added a lot of value by giving the broader community of internet governance stakeholders the opportunity to offer input for what was largely an intergovernmental process taking place in New York.

We also appreciated the presence of Lenni Montiel, the United Nations Assistant Secretary-General for Economic Development in the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, and the time he took to meet with various stakeholder groups.

Pre-events and linked meetings

Once again the IGF was used as an opportunity for arranging linked gatherings, from project meetings to internet governance training sessions. For civil society, always faced by resource constraints, this is always enormously valuable.

¹World Summit on the Information Society. (2015). *Tunis Agenda for the Information Society*. www.itu.int/net/wsis/docs2/tunis/off/6rev1.html

Opportunities for civil society to reach policy makers

As always, the ability for civil society to meet with important sector and government players on a comparatively equal footing was useful. A number of APC members were able to engage with their governments in this setting.

The exhibition space

The space was central and dynamic. The highlight was the espresso bar and expert baristas provided by Regional Internet Registries. The Digital Security Clinic run by Access Now, which provided one-on-one consultations, was an excellent idea.

New topics, new voices, new ways of reaching out

The focus on access and economic rights was made evident through the emergence of new topics like autonomous community networks, taxation and trade that made it onto the IGF agenda; new workshop topics and new voices that enrich the process. Also adding value and depth were workshops on freedom of religion, community networking, and the public interest in internet governance. Once again the IGF demonstrated its capacity to grow in response to community interest.

The Community Networking workshop spawned a new DC on Community Connectivity. This will look at the potential of community networks to promote sustainable internet connectivity, with implications for freedom of expression and self-determination. It also indicates the responsiveness of the IGF as a process to engage with emerging issues on an ongoing basis.

The closing speech by civil society speaker Nadine Moawad² was one of the highlights of the IGF, and was quoted and shared on social media as a strong call to defend a free and open internet. "It is a time for us to be braver and to be bolder and to demand what we want to demand, what we believe is right, and to up our efforts to keep the internet an internet that we love, an internet that can transform our lives... Keep fighting for a free and open internet. If you are not going to fight for it, we are going to lose it."³

Lastly, the Diplo daily briefings provided informative and succinct summaries of the day's proceedings, complemented by infographics and visuals summarising important issues and information. These were both entertaining and very useful.

3. What did not work well

Heavy-handed response to local protesters

A major concern was the eviction of peaceful, silent protesters on the first day of the IGF. The forcible and unnecessary removal of the protesters by and under the supervision of UN staff goes against the principle of freedom of expression. As grassroots group Marco Civil Ja said in their statement, "This kind of repression is incompatible inside an event that is precisely discussing how to protect freedom of speech."⁴

²Nadine Moawad is the manager of the Sexual Rights Project of the APC Women's Rights Programme.

³Listen to the full speech here: <https://www.apc.org/en/news/keep-fighting-free-and-open-internet-if-not-we-are>

⁴ Netizen Report Team. (2015, 12 November). Netizen Report: UN Authorities Pluck Protesters from Global Internet Conference in Brazil. *Global Voices*. <https://advoc.globalvoices.org/2015/11/12/netizen-report-un-authorities-pluck-protesters-from-global-internet-conference-in-brazil>

Session formats that do not allow participation

Too many sessions had too many speakers which meant that there was not enough time for participation from the floor. The importance of engagement should be emphasised to all panels and chairs.

Scheduling sessions on the same topic in parallel

Some sessions on similar topics, such as hate speech and blasphemy, took place at the same time, diluting the number of participants in each session and resulting in people missing sessions of interest to them.

4. Suggestions going forward

APC is delighted that the IGF's mandate has been renewed for another 10 years. We see this as an excellent opportunity to consolidate the progress made and to further strengthen the IGF. Some concrete suggestions include:

- The 2016 IGF should continue to provide outputs that feed into other policy spaces: the MAG could map out relevant policy discussions that main sessions could feed into as part of the preparatory process.
- The CSTD Working Group on Enhanced Cooperation should make use of the IGF for public consultations.
- Conflicting sessions on the same topic or closely related topics should be avoided by developing a schedule that enables linked sessions to incrementally build on a topic, exploring it in different ways on different days.
- A system of tagging sessions as introductory, intermediary and advanced should be introduced.
- There should be an opportunity for protesters to present their concerns during the event.
- We recommend the continued strengthening of intersessional work, and for human rights-related thematic issues to be a consistent topic for one of the BPFs. This is especially important given the diverse areas encompassed by this theme and its pronounced relevance to internet policy discussions, as well as the capacity of the IGF to foster multistakeholder conversations while increasingly linking with other UN processes.
- We also recommend the continued development and strengthening of DC work as one of the primary platforms for intersessional work at the IGF, and linking this to one of the main areas of work for the IGF. Thought needs to be given to how the work of the DCs is shared and enables engagement with the broader IGF community, and the MAG and Secretariat should play a continued role to support this process.
- Given the renewed 10-year mandate, the opportunity should be taken to assess and evaluate the working processes of the IGF, including appointments of the MAG members and chair, their roles and mandate, platforms for participation and the principles underpinning them, how intersessional work links to the IGF work in a sustained way, and deepening the inter-institutional work within the UN as well as with other parts of the internet governance ecosystem. This could include using the outputs of the IGF to inform other processes.

- The Gender Report Card, despite being in its fourth year of implementation, remains external to the statistical work that the IGF Secretariat does to monitor diversity in participation. We recommend integrating it into the monitoring process, and engaging the support and participation of the Gender DC in this process.
- Finally, we recommend the selection of venues that are not too expensive to reach. João Pessoa was a wonderful location, but it was not easily accessible and for international travellers it was very expensive. This does have an impact on participation.

5. Acknowledgements

APC extends its appreciation to the Government of Brazil, to the one-and-only Hartmut Glaser, to everyone from CGI.br, and all the local volunteers for their generous and efficient hosting of the IGF. We also want to express our gratitude to the IGF Secretariat for their hard work and to Chengetai Masango for his leadership. A special thank you to Brian Gutterman and Anri van der Spuy for being there, in the background, providing invaluable support for some of the activities APC was responsible for. The success of the Best Practice Forum on countering abuse of women online is largely due to the efforts of Anri van der Spuy. Markus Kummer added to his already long list of contributions to the IGF by helping to elevate intersessional work.

Thank you also to UNDESA and other UN staff for their support and to the many donors who contribute financially. The IGF could not happen without the commitment of actors who sustain it financially. Interpreters, captioners and the remote participation team all play a key role which we acknowledge with appreciation. So do workshop organisers and the thousands of participants, onsite and online, who make the IGF the dynamic space it is.

We recognise the work of the MAG in preparing the event and want to express our admiration and thanks to Ambassador Janis Karklins for being such an adept MAG chair. If there is anyone who can actually “herd cats” it is probably Janis Karklins.

Finally, we would like to thank the IGF community for celebrating APC's 25th anniversary with us and for encouraging us to reinforce our commitment to keep the internet a free and open space and to work for democratic, inclusive and transparent internet governance.