1. Taking Stock of 2016 programming, preparatory process, community intersessional activities and the 11th annual IGF: What worked well? What worked not so well?

I followed several parts of the preparatory process online, as well as attending the IGF, also online. The thing that strikes me most of all is that apparently there is a continuing reluctance to use the tools that we are so eager to discuss in situ to empower us to participate. Many people watched the IGF but I wonder how many actually participated. A forum is surely intended as a discussion, an *exchange* of ideas? Language is probably the major obstacle to this happening. This year many of the remote moderators were mother tongue Spanish speakers. They did a GREAT job at facilitating interventions – this should not be taken as a criticism – but they had problems at times relaying interventions made in other languages. This reminded me of difficulties I have had when I have been the moderator and the intervention was in a language other than English, or from someone trying to intervene in English when that is not their usual language. My only suggestion for that is to enable text interventions directly from the chat room, but then also there needs to be a native speaker of the intervention language available. Here in Saint Lucia we were having very loud very heavy rain during that week which made speaking directly a problem. Others also have noisy environments. Or there may be bandwidth problems.

The Webex page wasn’t providing all of the information. The video was better from the streaming – if there are slides remote participants need to be able to see them too – and the captioning is essential. When all else fails the captioning seems to work. At one point I had captioning and streaming on my tablet and Webex on my laptop, but then I was lucky enough to have 2 devices and enough bandwidth.

I felt that there was an improvement in the in situ awareness of the remote audience. Interventions from remote participants were routinely included in most cases. Workshops with breakout sessions should be flagged on the agenda as unsuitable for remote participants. Issues were raised in the chat in some sessions about how to make a correct identification of remote participants, and about how to handle those who wished to be anonymous. Complete anonymity is impossible in situ because at least the face of the speaker is recorded, but can be better achieved online. There is also a question of in situ attendees intervening through the remote channel when they see this as a better opportunity to be heard.

B) Suggestions for improvements in 2017? (programming, preparatory processes, community intersessional activities and improvements for 12th annual meeting)

My comments here are mainly about remote participation. Based on my experience this year I would suggest that the MAG (and the Secretariat if possible) should designate someone each year to attend the IGF as a remote participant. This is very important if remote attendance is valued as it should be. I am involved with DCAD where the call of “nothing about us without us” is being re-emphasised. I suggest that remote participants should adopt the same slogan. It is difficult to realise the problems unless you are a remote participant, or at least someone dedicated to view things from a “remote participant” perspective. In the same way persons with disabilities have special needs that may not be obvious to those without disability. They also need to have someone in relation to the IGF who is looking at the IGF process from a “disability” perspective, preferably someone with a disability him or her self. By this time the IGF should have a clear picture of the main challenges it faces on behalf of interested parties who cannot attend the meetings in situ, who are impeded by some form of disability and/or whose language is not one of the UN languages, and particularly whose language is not English. These issues (and similar issues that others may identify) should have a place in the IGF intersessional work as well as in the agenda of the actual meeting. Connecting the next billion is not only a matter of running cables and broadcasting wifi!

It was disappointing that the advertised “flash sessions” were not accessible to remote participants.

It was disappointing that we are not yet able to attract popular attention beyond our own interest group. The IGF addresses issues as important as those at the WEF, but how can we infiltrate the media that reaches many of those not already converted? Imagine if the IGF could have the same sort of anticipatory publicity and coverage as the WEF!

Serendipity was kind to me again. Because of my husband’s illness I made no effort to look for funding this year, but decided to attend from home. Because of that I got a clearer view of the experience of the remote participant, which I hope I have communicated clearly enough for it to be useful.

Deirdre Williams

Saint Lucia

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