

Workshop 166: Enhancing Understanding: Facilitating Internet Governance Through Openness and Transparency

Wednesday, 28 September, 11:00-12:30, Conference Room 4

Background

The Internet Governance Forum (IGF) and other multi-stakeholder Internet governance processes have demonstrated the value of open, wide-ranging communication between the Internet's many stakeholder groups. Better understanding of the concerns of the various stakeholder groups is essential to creating effective and sustainable solutions to the increasingly complex issues presented by the global growth of the Internet.

These topics were initially explored in a workshop at the 2010 IGF, "Enhancing Transparency in Internet Governance". In this session, we hope to further consider the issues raised by panelists and participants in the 2010 workshop, and discuss practical strategies for developing a better understanding of the concepts and issues that relate to Internet governance.

Panelists

Athina Fragkouli, Legal Counsel, RIPE Network Coordination Centre (RIPE NCC)

Ang Peng Hwa, Director of the Singapore Internet Research Centre at the Nanyang Technological University

Maria Häll, Deputy Director, Division for Information Technology Policy, Ministry of Enterprise, Energy and Communications, Sweden [*Moderator*]

Bernadette Lewis, Secretary General of the Caribbean Telecommunications Union (CTU)

Rômulo Neves, Head of the Division for the Information Society, Ministry of External Relations, Brazil

Dele Olojede, Chair of the International Advisory Council to the Global Network Initiative (GNI)

Paul Rendek, Director of External Relations, RIPE NCC [*Moderator*]

Bill Smith, Technology Evangelist at PayPal

Jonathan Zuck, President of the Association for Competitive Technology (ACT)

Summary prepared by Chris Buckridge, RIPE NCC

Discussion Summary

The workshop began with a quick recap of some of the discussion held at last year's IGF in the "Understanding Transparency" workshop. Jonathan Zuck noted that transparency is a means, rather than an end, and that the motivation behind encouraging transparency is to make multi-stakeholderism work. The end goals are participation and accountability, and transparency alone will not achieve these goals.

Maria Häll noted her own experience with the ICANN Government Advisory Committee (GAC), and particularly the importance of understanding the roles of different entities in the multi-stakeholder model. She noted the value of platforms such as the RIPE NCC's Government Roundtables and the RIPE Cooperation Working Group, but a lack of understanding of different stakeholders' roles remains a key challenge.

Rômulo Neves spoke about the set of Internet governance recommendations recently produced by the IBSA (India, Brazil and South Africa) group. He argued that the three governments had produced a document in a transparent fashion, trying to take into account some inputs of other stakeholders. He noted that it is a priority to the Brazilian government to encourage acceptance of the multi-stakeholder model amongst other governments, including receiving comments from those stakeholders to review the cited governmental recommendations. He noted that understanding the Internet "ecosystem" is vital to contributing effectively to the discussion, and that better cooperation between stakeholders may serve to make each stakeholder group more efficient and effective.

Bernadette Lewis discussed the need for information and education to foster understanding, putting concepts and issues into language understood by all stakeholders. She noted the work that the Caribbean Telecommunications Union (CTU) has done in bringing together people from the important technical bodies to speak to other stakeholders, and argued that education at the government level is vital.

Dele Olojede suggested the need for "rules of the road" for transparency and privacy on the Internet. He noted that damage is done when governments act in the heat of the moment and without appropriate information - this can happen even in well-established democracies. The Internet has meant an erosion of restrictions on government action, but more transparency can help to remedy this, limiting the amount of damage that can be done and allowing society time to make the necessary corrections. In short, "rules of the road" would make it easier for citizens to raise hell.

Ang Peng Hwa differentiated between "transparency" and "translucency" (semi-transparency), and questioned how much transparency is desirable. It is possible to raise expectations of transparency as a cure-all, when it is not. Transparency does act to create trust, but can have downsides, particularly in terms of inhibiting internal deliberations. He argued for a golden mean of transparency (between a "black box" and a "fishbowl").

Athina Fragkouli outlined the work done by the RIPE NCC in facilitating discussions and bringing stakeholders into Internet policy development. She emphasized the need to look beyond the IGF to forums that are not "non-decision making" (such as technical policy-making forums), and encourage multi-stakeholder participation there as well.

Bill Smith reiterated the ultimate goals of lucidity and accountability, and argued that transparency should serve the purpose of making information "as simple as possible, no simpler". He also noted the importance of inclusivity and understanding the barriers that exist to participation in Internet governance processes. He pointed out that it is impossible to have all stakeholders present in discussions, and it is therefore the responsibility of those who can take part to represent all stakeholders and, to the extent possible, advocate for the common good.

Jonathan Zuck noted that while we talk about "constituencies", and often treat them as discrete entities, each constituency believes that they represent the same constituent: the "netizen". This constructs a confrontational system, but the range of different constituencies acts as a check against centralized control, ie. government, business and civil society keep each other honest. It also means that it is important to ensure that each constituency has broad representation and is accountable. Ang Peng Hwa cautioned that each stakeholder group has different goals, and may act against the larger interest. Dele Olojede concurred, noting that we cannot assume good intentions on the part of all governments, some of which actively work against the interests of their people.

Bill Smith argued that while an adversarial system can provide checks and balances, a more organic model, reflecting a mesh of views may better reflect the reality. He suggested that the IGF brings the kind of open discussion already fostered in the technical community to a multi-stakeholder environment.

Rômulo Neves, referring to the "fishbowl" concept, suggested a fishbowl with private rooms – private meetings and negotiations need to happen, but there can be transparency about when and why this is happening. Existing organizations need to be better at communicating in this way. John Curran, CEO of ARIN, noted that in relation to Internet number resources "openness" and "transparency" refer to the decision-making process, but this doesn't mean that every part of that process will be completely transparent.

Paul Rendeck noted that Internet governance is often a popularity contest, with stakeholders seeking to meet and influence as many people as possible. This has been successful for some stakeholder groups, but can be a disadvantage to others. It is important to be aware of this, and of how this is affecting Internet governance discussions and policy making beyond the IGF.

Bernadette Lewis emphasized the importance of imparting information in a systematic way (ad hoc methods are not sufficient), noting regional IGFs, events for capacity building, and conferences as examples of activities that the CTU has facilitated.

Paul Rendeck summarized the discussion, noting the general agreement on the need to understand the needs, expectations, concerns of other stakeholders. The

workshop discussion clearly recognized that there are limitations to what transparency alone can achieve. It is vital to continue building understanding through local forums and activities, and to identify the synergies that can exist between stakeholder groups, both globally and locally. Finally, it is clear that stakeholders need to be open to evolving their own role, based on interaction with other stakeholders.

Maria Häll closed by noting that it is vital for attendees to take the lessons learned at the IGF and the multi-stakeholder process back to their day-to-day business. She reiterated the point that each of us belong to more than one constituency, and noted work being done on these issues by other groups, including the Council of Europe and Association for Progressive Communications. There was consensus that a further follow-up event at the 2012 IGF would be useful, and efforts should be made to bring those other groups into the discussion at that time.

The Number Resource Organization (NRO)

Formed by the Regional Internet Registries (RIRs) to formalise their cooperative efforts, the NRO exists to protect the unallocated Number Resource pool, to promote and protect the bottom-up policy development process, and to act as a focal point for Internet community input into the RIR system.