IGF 2020/21 Proposal for a Policy Network on Meaningful Access

February 2021

Background

The [mandate](#)[1] of the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) calls for discussing digital public policy issues in order to foster sustainability, robustness, security, stability and development of the Internet and to facilitate discourse between different stakeholders. The Forum is further mandated to facilitate the exchange of information and best practices, strengthen and enhance the engagement of stakeholders in existing and future Internet governance mechanisms, particularly from developing countries, as well as to develop capacity.

The United Nations Secretary-General's [Roadmap for Digital Cooperation](#)[2] envisages a strengthened IGF with a view to making it more responsive and relevant to digital issues, and inter alia, foresees *"93.(e) Better integrating programme and intersessional policy development work to support other priority areas outlined in the present report"[3].*

The "policy network" proposed here aims to help achieve the goal of a strengthened and responsive IGF outlined in paragraph 93 through providing a platform for networking and collaboration around three of the priority areas outlined in the Roadmap: Global connectivity; Digital inclusion, and Digital capacity building. It will also build on the vast body of discussion and intersessional work that has taken place in the IGF since its inception on the theme of "access" which was a main theme at the IGF for many years.

In particular it will revisit the four phases of the IGF intersessional activity: [Policy Options for Connecting and Enabling the Next Billions](#), which from 2015 to 2015 operated as a community-driven process which produced a set of comprehensive output documents for all four phases.

This policy network will not duplicate the Roadmap-linked collaborations already underway and coordinated by UN agencies such as the International Telecommunications Union, the UN Development Programme. It will provide linkages between these efforts and the many stakeholders in the IGF who are undertaking related efforts as well as create opportunities for the voices of those who are affected by the lack of meaningful access to be part of policy debate and development.

Why "meaningful access"? For access to the internet to make a meaningful contribution to improving people's lives locally, for strengthening national economies, and more broadly to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, it has to be approached holistically. While access to infrastructure is critical, without this access being inclusive, sustainable and affordable, and linked to human capacity and relevant content that can make it so, it will not achieve its positive potential.

By giving this policy network this broader framing it can be a powerful focal point for various existing and proposed IGF intersessional activities and link these to the Digital Cooperation follow-up activity in the three areas mentioned above: global connectivity, digital inclusion, and capacity development.

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[1] Tunis Agenda for the Information Society: https://www.itu.int/net/wsis/docs2/tunis/off/6rev1.html
[2] https://www.un.org/en/content/digital-cooperation-roadmap/
[3] https://undocs.org/A/74/821 para. 93(e)

These include, to mention a few:

- The IGF Dynamic Coalition on Community Connectivity
- The IGF Dynamic Coalition on Internet Universality Indicators established in 2020
- The proposed Best Practice Forum on Local Content which has captured good practices that contribute to meaningful access since its inception, and in its proposal for 2021 aim to focus on the role of community networks in building local content.
- The work of the Best Practice Forum on Gender and Access which in the past has focused on access, and on capacity development and inclusion in the digital economy.
- The newly proposed Best Practice Forum on "Committed actions to make access to the Internet sustainable and affordable for everyone". As this BPF proposal includes a broad and multi-year programme, after consultation with the MAG members who developed it, it is suggested that it be integrated into the PNMA discussed here and that the MAG members who proposed this BPF join the PNMA's working/steering group.

Proposal

It is proposed to establish a second pilot of the Roadmap's suggested intersessional policy development work in the form of a "policy network on meaningful access" (PNMA), alongside the already established Policy Network on Environment and Digitisation (PNE).

The PNMA would focus on assessing and gathering good practices and policy recommendations already discussed at the IGF; identify what the key barriers are to these not being implemented and facilitate networking among actors from all stakeholder groups that are concerned with the topic.

The particular focus of the PNMA would be decided with the involvement of the IGF's Multistakeholder Advisory Group (MAG), related IGF Dynamic Coalitions, NRIs and BPFs, the global community's input, and through collaboration with follow up actions linked to the UN SG's Roadmap on Digital Cooperation. Provisional objectives are outlined below, but these would need to be validated once the PNMA has been established.

Objectives

The prime objective of the PNMA would be to bring together the different stakeholders already within the IGF community and beyond, in particular those that are part of the follow up on the UN Secretary General's Roadmap for Digital Cooperation.

Possible activity areas:
- Revisit the existing body of good practices and policy recommendations that have emerged from IGF-based deliberation and intersessional work on meaningful access, starting with the outputs of the Internet Society supported PCENB.
- Collaborative analysis on what the current barriers are to achieving meaningful access and to known good practices not being implemented.
- Gather and analyse existing policies and concrete actions that have been taken in their sectors that have succeeded to make the Internet universal and affordable for all.
- Mapping out a set of recommendations for action.

Implementation process
Working group. The PNMA would build on the IGF's existing network of contacts and aim at engaging stakeholders not traditionally present in the IGF discourse. It would involve the institutions that have expressed support for the proposed BPF on "Committed Actions to Make the Internet Sustainable and Affordable for All".

It would be led by a dedicated working group[4] of stakeholders that gather and assess critical barriers to meaningful access, good practices and eventually provide recommendations. Its membership would include leading intergovernmental and international organisations, UN member states, parliaments, research academic institutions, leading actors in the field from civil society, the technical community and the private sector as well as from national, regional and youth IGFs (NRIs) and other stakeholders whose work is relevant for the PNMA. Existing IGF Dynamic Coalitions and BPFs will be included.

Research will be carried out to globally map the stakeholders that could be members of the working group, using the proposals made by MAG members in the BPF on Committed Actions as a starting point. A contact database will be built. Among these contacts, those having the strongest work focus and achieved impact and results would be invited to be members of the above-described working group, while all others would be informed about the work and invited to contribute to the consultation processes and other mechanisms established by the working group *(e.g. including providing feedback to the draft output document produced by the working group).*

In addition to a balance across stakeholder groups and disciplines, the working group would be regionally and gender-balanced and would include stakeholders from developed and developing countries. It is advised that the working group is composed of between 15 and 30 members.

The working group would work under the facilitation of the IGF Secretariat, while having a few interested members of the MAG and the MAG Chair, as liaisons with the full MAG and their respective stakeholder groups and networks. A neutral editor *(expert consultant under the supervision of the IGF Secretariat)* would act as penholder. The IGF Secretariat, as a neutral process facilitator, would conduct outreach and reflect discussions and decisions into a unique output document. The IGF Secretariat would support the working group to liaise with relevant helpdesks and observatories for providing relevant information, expertise and advice. The overall substantive process would be based on broad community consultants.

Community consultations. The process for gathering inputs would be bottom-up, open and continuous throughout the IGF 2021 preparatory process. Inputs would be gathered through the resources of the working group in addition to a community's input. All working group meetings would be open to the community for a broader discussion. The community will be able to communicate inputs through different outreach forms, ranging from surveys, monthly webinars and online meetings, bilateral meetings etc. During each of the face-to-face IGF 2021 Open Consultations[5], the group would update the broader community on the progress made and seek for feedback.

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[4] Term could be also the cooperation network
[5] Usually, two to three meetings are hosted in Geneva, Switzerland.

Also, the network of the 131 national, regional and youth IGF initiatives ([NRIs](https://www.intgovforum.org/multilingual/content/igf-regional-and-national-initiatives))[6] would be invited to provide feedback to each phase of the output document work, as well as to the final version of the output document. The NRIs would be invited to designate one or two liaison resource persons for this process. The liaisons would be the key communicator between the local communities of the NRIs and PNMA. This would also help raise awareness on the local/NRIs levels and equip stakeholders with knowledge and experience to independently continue work on meaningful access to the Internet.

Particularly, the PNMA would have close linkages with the IGF's high-level and parliamentary tracks, that would receive the output document for their collective round-table consultations organised at the annual IGF 2021 meeting. These discussions would provide a feedback to the document and aim for developing a follow-up actionable recommendations.

Finally, as mentioned above, in regard to the para 93 of the Roadmap, the PNMA results could also be put forward for discussion within the envisioned multistakeholder high-level body (provided that it is established before the IGF 2021 meeting).

Output document. The proposed structure of the output document could reflect the local specificities, identify issues, gather and elaborate on best practices and conclude with a set of recommendations. It will be agreed by the working group. The work would be carried out through regular online meetings and decisions made on the basis of a consensus. The goal would be to have its proposed policy approaches and recommendations relayed from the IGF to the appropriate normative and decision-making fora, and be broadly disseminated to the community.

The final output document would be presented at the IGF 2021 annual meeting[7] in Poland, ideally in the framework of an IGF plenary session.

Impact strategy. On the basis of the above-mentioned contact database, those entities whose work is significant for raising awareness or which have decision-making power will be identified and invited to consider endorsing the recommendations developed by the working group and integrating them into their work *(e.g. governments could discuss implementation of the recommendations in cooperation with technical communities and businesses; universities could integrate the recommendations in their curriculums etc.).*
As said above, the output document would also be communicated to the IGF 2021 high-level and parliamentary tracks that would further be invited to develop collectively agreed actionable recommendations during their round-table discussions at the annual IGF 2021 meeting and follow-up steps.
Also, the PNMA will cooperate with the NRIs on the output document's follow-up actions. The NRIs will help to build a database of all processes and entities that could make a difference in terms of awareness raising and decision making. The IGF Secretariat would map the regional and international processes that could endorse the document's recommendations and integrate them into their work.
Further, the recommendations could be presented and explained in dedicated webinars or at larger local and global community-meetings, to raise awareness and foster understanding of the matters covered by the document.

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[6] https://www.intgovforum.org/multilingual/content/igf-regional-and-national-initiatives
[7] Meeting date to be confirmed (current indications are in favor of early December 2021).

This project is a pilot within the IGF and in order to achieve its impact, it would need a continuous effort. The IGF 2021 cycle will be the 'setting the foundations' process for building a firmer, more impactful process and stronger cooperation networks, long-term.

Illustrative proposal for the possible composition of the Policy Network on Meaningful Access Working Group and for broader network of contributors (balanced group of up to 30 members)[8]	
Region	**Entity**
International/Global	- UNDP - ITU - Internet Society - UNESCO - Alliance for Affordable Internet (Web Foundation) - Association for Progressive Communications - Commonwealth Technology Organisation - Regional Internet Registries (also mentioned below) - Mozilla Foundation - Microsoft - Network Startup Resource Center - IEEE
Africa	- African Union Commission - PRIDA - AfriNIC - Governments - African Telecommunications Union - Regional community network associations - Internet Society - UNECA - Research Internet Africa
Asia – Pacific	- UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific - Governments - APNIC - Governments - Regulators - Regional community network associations - LiRNE Asia (research body)
Eastern Europe	- Governments - Regulators

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[8] The final list of up to 30 members to be selected on the basis of a careful research and work activity and contribution.

	● Research and academic institutions
GRULAC	● United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean ● LACNIC ● Internet Society ● Governments ● Regulators ● Regional community network associations ● *Research institutes and academic institutions*
WEOG	● UN European Economic Commission ● Internet Society ● European Commission ● Governments ● Regulators

Timeline

October 2020	● Map stakeholders for outreach and possible representatives for the working group
November 2020	● Organise an open briefing session during the IGF 2020 in November to introduce the project and announce the 2021 work plan
December 2020	● Work timeline & methodology ● Final objectives ● Forming the working group
January 2021	● MAG to communicate advice on the particular substantive focus ● Host the first online meeting to agree on the substantive focus, annual timeline and work methodology ● Brief mapped stakeholders for outreach on work plan and invite to contribute ● Consult the NRIs on cooperation mechanisms
April 2021	● Host 1st update webinar
June/July 2021	● The first draft presented at the 2nd Open Consultations
September 2021	● Host 2nd outreach webinar
October 2021	● First draft released for a feedback from the community and NRIs
November 2021	● The final outcome document presented at the 16th IGF in Poland ● Document's recommendations discussed at the high-level and parliamentarian tracks' sessions

	● High-level stakeholders and parliamentarians to host round-table discussions at the IGF 2021 and agree on implementable actionable follow-up recommendations
December 2021	● Follow-up dissemination of the document ● Focused outreach toward the new multistakeholder high-level body on the final output document, its recommendations and recommendations from the IGF 2021 annual meeting (provided it is established) and planning next steps on follow-up action

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