

African Debate on Internet Governance

Summary of discussions

Introduction

The debate on Internet Governance was launched on 7 May 2005 by the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) upon request from the Chairperson of the African Ministerial Committee on ICT, H.E. Hon. A. Kan-Dapaah, Minister of Communication of Ghana. It run for 3 weeks in several African lists composed of 544 subscribers moderated by ECA staff and the African members of the WGIG.

The debate took into account the African Position adopted by the African Regional Conference for the WSIS held in Ghana from 2-4 February 2005, which recommended an international participatory Internet Governance system which would harmonize technical and policy issues related to Internet Governance for the benefit of the global community. This should translate in practical terms to:

- Lower Internet connection costs
- Affordable hardware and software
- Regional Administration of root server system
- National administration of country code top-level domains (ccTLDs).

Using the questionnaire developed by the WGIG secretariat, African stakeholders debated the various issues and came up with positions based on the needs of the continent.

When analyzing the various responses and proposals, it was evident that the participants spoke in one voice in the majority of issues. The summary of the contributions is below:

I. Process/Function 1: “Forum function”

There was unanimity on the need for an additional body which would not only serve as a multi-stakeholder discussion forum, but would also proffer policy advice albeit in a participatory manner. Indeed, according to the participants the world needed a more democratic representativeness at the level of the Internet Governance. The current model of Governance presents advantages certainly, but is not any more in accordance with geopolitics globalization. Notably for the following reasons:

- Globalization of the Internet and thus crosscutting situation of the

- problems. The governance actors cannot master the various aspects
- The decisions cannot necessarily work everywhere
 - Non objectivity (too influential presence of operators)
 - The organizational and functional model of governance is obsolete
 - Far too much Lobbying

All the countries of the world built and are still building the Internet, thus this common support should be managed as a universal good.

The new organizational model of governance should take into account regional and sub-regional specificities in terms of level of development, culture, needs, constraints etc. Other functions of this body could include that of serving as a coordinating linchpin among the different entities involved in the various aspects of Internet management (e.g. security, peace etc) and inter-governmental bodies including the UN.

This body would therefore address all issues related to the Internet within the confines of the available expertise and should be anchored at the UN.

The modalities for financing this body could entail soliciting for subscriptions from beneficiaries and bodies involved in the Internet management and administration field.

On the structure of this entity there was general consensus that the ideal structure could be in the form of a multi-stakeholder alliance/Board of appointed or elected public, private, civil society members and individuals taking into cognizance geographical representation. Membership tenure could be for a fixed 4/5year term under the possible supervision of the proposed anchor, the UN. Partnerships and coordination would be required with existing organizations and institutions which could also play a role as multi-stakeholder alliance members.

II. Process/Function 2: “Oversight function”

The governance of Internet is not about the simple management of IP addresses, but about taking decisions related to the general functioning of Internet whether it is in term of regulation in its widest sense or technical adaptations.

The oversight function could include issues such as policy advice, arbitration, monitoring, audit and communication. The general consensus was that the proposed new body should not only take over the Governmental oversight functions of the DNS and root server system administration, but all other areas of activity under the oversight of the USG. This oversight function through this new body should not only be applicable to ICANN, after the termination of the MoU in 2006, but also post 2006.

This new body should also replace the Government Advisory Committee (GAC) and take over its responsibilities and activities.

III. Process/Function 3: Functioning/coordination of existing institutions

Although the functioning of existing institutions is in some way in line with the WSIS principles, enhanced multi-stakeholder participation is key to addressing important issues relating to local content/languages, security, universal access, affordability, resolution formulation processes etc. The activities of existing institutions could be coordinated through this new body and inter-agency cooperation guidelines could be developed through the creation of new models via the current WSIS process thus avoiding the need for tasking any existing institution with this role. The UN ICT Task Force or its replacement (The Global Alliance on ICT and Development) , which has played a key role in the WSIS process and has a key multi stakeholder dimension could take the lead in defining the cooperation function at the global level in cooperation with the ITU and the UN Regional Commissions at the regional level.

Existing institutions should in line with the WSIS principles

- Improve their awareness and communication plans
- Allow more participation by addressing the language barrier issue
- Open up for wider discussion on issues relating to content/language, security, universal access, affordability etc
- Ensure stakeholder participation in the resolution formulation process and multi-stakeholder partnerships

IV. Process Function 4: Functioning/coordination at the national level

It becomes of paramount importance that Governments aligns their national decision-making processes with international Internet governance arrangements through participation in global activities thus enriching the consultative process. “The Internet Governance Space: Exploring the Core Issues from Africa’s Perspective” commissioned by ECA and the UN ICT Task Force during the Accra Regional Conference on the WSIS indicates that the following issues should be tackled with the participation of all, including the African stakeholders: “multi-lingualization of Internet naming systems, spam , dispute resolution, affordable and universal access, social dimensions and inclusion, Voice over IP (VOIP), e-commerce, e-government, e-education, consumer, user protection and privacy, unlawful content and access protection, intellectual property rights, cultural and linguistic diversity, education and human capacity building, national policies and regulations among others”. This can be achieved

by organizing fora on Internet Governance at the Global, regional and sub-regional levels.

Lessons relating to multi-stakeholder models could be drawn from organizations such as the UN ICT Task Force, ICANN, UN Regional Commissions, the ITU and Regional Internet Registries etc.