

Comment to the WGIG Open Consultation Meeting

by Izumi Aizu

Individual Internet User

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Now I like to express my personal opinion, as an individual user of the Internet, not as a secretariat of Internet Governance Task Force of Japan.

First, I just want to support and appreciate what the Government of Singapore said. I will explain why in the following comments. I am a member of ICANN's AtLarge Advisory Committee or ALAC, one of three members from Asia Pacific region. ALAC is designed to facilitate individual user participation to ICANN's policy development, based on local and regional user organization participation and outreach. I have been involved with this ICANN'S "AtLarge" activities right after US Government entered into MoU with ICANN in November 1998. In fact USG almost imposed to implement this open membership to ICANN as a condition to grant this MOU.

On the one hand ICANN has been far more open to direct user participation than many existing international, intergovernmental or private-sector led bodies from the very beginning. I mean ITU or IETF.

It offers a very good model for multi-stakeholder participation. It also offers some good lessons to learn about the pros and cons of user participation mechanisms. I would not to consume too much details of what happened around ICANN.

But on the other hand, ICANN has also its own challenges, in terms of user participation. In the beginning AtLarge was not there, but as US government mandated ICANN to start the membership, ICANN tried to implement membership namely AtLarge, with its rights to elect 9 of 19 board members through global election. I was selected as the Membership Advisory committee to design the membership.

That global election happened in 2000 as a great experiment, but with some complication, this election and AtLarge participation to the decision making at the Board level was reviewed and finally denied in the Reform process in 2002 to 2003, and thus AtLarge became just an advisory – with the assumption that Regional bodies will form its organizational basis constituted from local AtLarge organizations.

Vittorio Bertola, a member of WGIG and Civil Society IG Caucus is the chair of this AtLarge Advisory committee. But personally, this AtLarge advisory structure is working not as effectively as many expected. There were strong protest and resentment from the civil society when ICANN decided to terminate the global election and since then many Civil society organizations are not interested in ICANN activities. Until recently.

WSIS and WGIG gave new light to the role of Civil Society in Internet governance. I feel WGIG is exercising much more multi-stakeholder approach, inclusive to both the civil society and our friends from the developing countries participation, thanks to the UN and its member states who agreed this very innovative framework.

While I truly respect and recognize the legitimate role of governments in public policy areas, with the new animal of the Internet which empowers poor and weak individuals or users like us, well-designed, direct and effective participation of the citizens, globally, not only from the developed parts of the world but also from the developing and Least developed economies, is essential and should be applied to not only ICANN to improve its internal structure, but also many other for a such as ITU, WIPO or IETF who may handle the Internet public policy issues or decisions that affect global public good.

Civil society will act as an effective counter force against dominant commercial interest, or the danger of excessive and top-down interventions of government to achieve more harmonious and effective coordination and cooperation as a whole.

I hope WGIG will take more serious look at the role of users and citizens in this new and exciting challenge of finding the right balance for new global governance mechanisms. And I think the Civil society itself should take more serious actions for its responsible and accountable participation.

Thank you very much.