



## **Contribution to the Secretary-General's Roadmap on the High-level Panel on Digital Cooperation and Roundtable 5A/5B on Digital Cooperation Architecture**

*Association for Progressive Communications (APC)  
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The Association for Progressive Communications (APC) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Secretary-General's Roadmap on Digital Cooperation and reiterates its support for the follow-up process of the recommendations from the UN High-level Panel on Digital Cooperation. Effective and viable ways to shape, sustain and strengthen global digital cooperation are paramount not only for universalising digital inclusion but to mobilise collective intelligence and the potential of multistakeholder collaboration and action to respond to the persistent and emerging challenges in the digital age, including the environmental crisis. In the coming years, the use, development and evolution of information and communications technologies (ICTs) should be decisively aimed at contributing to ensuring the full enjoyment of human rights online and offline at all levels, counteracting the weaponisation of the internet and other digital technologies, and establishing all the necessary measures to strengthen civic spaces, democratic processes and institutions.

With decades of experience being engaged and helping to facilitate stakeholder participation and input into international internet governance processes, with an emphasis on participation from countries in the global South, we are convinced that multilateralism and multistakeholderism are both necessary and can coexist, and that both must be strengthened. Consequently, we strongly support strengthening the IGF Plus model as the basis for establishing accountable, inclusive, participatory and effective global digital cooperation among all stakeholders. We believe the mandate and the structure of the IGF offers the most suitable basis to facilitate further work on policies and norms.

Going forward, we would like to underscore some aspects that would contribute to strengthening the IGF process:

- Greater political commitment of all stakeholders to participate, particularly governments. We recommend the establishment of a platform for intergovernmental dialogue on internet-related public policy, as a discussion space (not a decision-making one),<sup>1</sup> linked to the IGF in a way that relates to the thematic focus of the IGF in terms of policy issues and topics as well as to the outcomes of the intersessional work. Such platform can: a) facilitate government-to-government discussion on internet-related public policy issues; b) enable governments to have access to cross-cutting internet-related public policy debates, challenges and opportunities; c) brief them on what issues are being dealt with by various policy forums around the world; d) support sharing information in a systematic way to ease coordination and collaboration between existing institutions and processes, particularly to link national and global processes; and e) strengthen government participation and engagement in the IGF itself.
- A more outcome-oriented process. Inputs coming from the IGF each year are substantive and reflect the evolution of the internet governance agenda and approaches to specific themes and issues. It is necessary to discuss ways to optimise the use of those inputs. A more outcome-oriented IGF would have strong potential to make a meaningful contribution to digital cooperation.
- Strengthened thematic focus as a basis for follow-up actions. Identification of key strategic policy issues with a more specific, precisely defined focus, early in the year, would lead to: a) a more focused programme and yearly event; b) more effective intersessional work and the establishment of continuity or follow-up actions; and c) clearer messages oriented to inform and feed other global internet policy and internet governance processes. Bridging the gap between discussions in the IGF and decisions made in other relevant processes is key.
- Strengthened cooperation mechanisms between the global IGF and the national and regional IGF initiatives (NRIs). Streamlining the IGF agenda to regional and national processes would be an effective way to establish better links between the different levels, but ensuring, at the same time, that the NRIs have the necessary autonomy and independence to run their processes with their own identities and mechanisms to respond to the particularities and realities of the countries and regions.

<sup>1</sup>Our proposal is that the platform would consist of a dialogue for governments held on an annual basis, back-to-back with the IGF. An intergovernmental working meeting can be convened on the sidelines of each of the IGF's Open Consultations to engage in dialogue on a work programme for the annual meeting. The annual dialogue does not necessarily need to be institutionally attached to the IGF. It could be attached to another UN body such as the Commission on Science and Technology for Development (CSTD), for example, or even the United Nations Group on the Information Society (UNGIS), but be convened in partnership with the IGF Secretariat. The institution hosting the platform could also become responsible for facilitating the sharing of information and providing states support on engaging in internet policy spaces. Existing efforts to link an internet governance information clearing house to the IGF Secretariat could make this easier and more sustainable. Possible outputs of this platform include: a) proposals for agenda topics that can be addressed to the CSTD, the IGF MAG, and other spaces where internet-related public policies are discussed; b) informal feedback on the outputs of IGF Best Practice Forums; and c) identification of areas in which governments feel there is a need for research or capacity development.

- Dedicated resource mobilisation structure. Ensuring predictability and reinforcing the Trust Fund is an essential step towards the sustainability of the IGF process and the strengthening of the institutional capacity and political leadership of the IGF Multistakeholder Advisory Group (MAG) and the IGF Secretariat.
- More effective IGF intersessional work (Best Practice Forums, Dynamic Coalitions). These existing elements of the overall IGF process have already come quite a long way towards implementing the proposals in the IGF Plus model to establish a Cooperation Accelerator, Policy Incubator and Observatory and Help Desk. Existing experiences of different stakeholders should be taken into account to contribute to this process. For instance, APC has had very positive experiences with the Gender and Access Best Practice Forum,<sup>2</sup> which produced groundbreaking recommendations on how to address online gender-based violence in 2015 and 2016, and with the Dynamic Coalition on Community Connectivity,<sup>3</sup> which has contributed to building a worldwide movement of community-based local internet access providers.

The following concrete actions could contribute to implementing some of the aspects mentioned above:

- Mapping UN-wide activities on digital issues so that IGF activities can more consistently and effectively feed into and inform other discussions at the UN and intergovernmental forums. This would contribute to enabling the IGF to serve as the “connective tissue” among UN discussions.
- Consolidating the policy development role of the IGF (through the incubators) so that the IGF has clear value for states.
- Thinking outside the box in relation to consensus building. Adopting fresh and innovative approaches for consensus building in order to get buy-in and support from UN member states and other stakeholders is critical. If sufficient consensus is not established early on with regard to points of disagreement, it will haunt us for years to come.
- Reaching out to groups that have concerns about the multistakeholder approach or that can make concrete recommendations on the implementation of the multistakeholder approach.

### **About APC**

APC is an international network of civil society organisations founded in 1990 dedicated to empowering and supporting people working for peace, human rights, development and protection of the environment, through the strategic use of information and communication technologies (ICTs). We work to build a world in which all people have easy, equal and affordable access to the creative potential of ICTs to improve their lives and create more democratic and egalitarian societies.

<sup>2</sup><https://www.intgovforum.org/multilingual/content/bpf-gender-and-access>

<sup>3</sup><https://www.intgovforum.org/multilingual/content/dynamic-coalition-on-community-connectivity-dc3-0>