

Meeting Summary: WSIS 20-Year Review, Digital Governance and Internet Governance Challenges

UK Stakeholders and WSIS+20 Review

Meeting Information

- Date: 4th December 2024
- Location: London
- Attendees: N/A - Chatham House Rule

Summary of Key Points

(Produced with support from AI assistant so for guidance only)

1. WSIS 20-Year Review and Future Digital Governance

- **WSIS 20-Year Review**
The WSIS 20-Year Review focuses on evaluating the progress and impact of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) since its inception. It aims to assess the current digital landscape, align with Sustainable Development Goals, and address new challenges and opportunities.
- **Digital Development and Governance**
Discussion on how digital development has evolved over the past 20 years, its impact on economies and societies, and the need for updated governance frameworks to address current and future challenges.
- **Consultation and Stakeholder Input**
Emphasis on the importance of globally diverse and fresh stakeholder input in shaping the future of digital governance, highlighting the need for inclusive and forward-thinking contributions.

2. Coordination and awareness efforts in Internet governance and technical infrastructure.

- **Coordination Group Formation**
The formation of a coordination group was initiated a year ago to address the urgency of contributing to the UN dialogue and GDC. The group was set up quickly to bypass lengthy ICANN processes, focusing on open sharing and collaboration.
- **Technical Layer Awareness**
The importance of the technical layer of the Internet was emphasized, highlighting its critical role in maintaining Internet functionality. Efforts were made to communicate this to diplomats and stakeholders.
- **ICANN Community Discussions**
The ICANN community has been actively discussing domain name abuse and resource allocation. There is strong momentum to address these issues, with a focus on mobilizing community efforts.

Conclusion

1. The coordination group was successfully established, with a mailing list including participants from over 50 countries.
2. The narrative of the technical layer as the foundation of the Internet has been effectively communicated in various government meetings.
3. The community is committed to continuing discussions and addressing domain name abuse.

3. Internet Governance and WSIS Engagement

- **UK Government's Approach to WSIS**
It is believed that the UK government views WSIS as a significant agenda item, focusing on Internet governance and digital development. It aims to maintain the principles of a free, open, secure Internet while addressing global challenges.
- **Engagement in WSIS+20**
Strategic engagement in WSIS+20 is important, with collaboration across all stakeholder groups needed to influence multilateral negotiations, including bottom-up lobbying by in-country civil society groups to influence their governments.
- **Call to Action for Internet Governance**
The urgency of proactive engagement in Internet governance processes was highlighted, with a focus on timely input to influence outcomes.

Conclusion

1. The UK government appears to support a permanent mandate for the Internet Governance Forum and aims to strengthen its effectiveness.
2. There is a need for coordinated advocacy and engagement with decision-makers to shape outcomes.
3. Immediate action is required to ensure effective participation in governance processes.

4. Engagement and Influence of the Technical Community in Global Digital Governance

- **Technical Community Engagement**

The discussion focused on leveraging connections with country code operators and IP addressing spaces to engage underserved regions. The aim is to address concerns about digital inequality and ensure consistent messaging from the technical community to governments.

- **Challenges in Consultation Processes**

A speaker highlighted the difficulties in participating in consultation processes due to outdated information and erratic deadlines. Collaboration within the technical community is essential to share resources and provide effective input.

- **Multi-Stakeholder Engagement**

The importance of multi-stakeholder engagement was emphasized, with praise for DSIT's inclusive approach. The technical community felt listened to, even if not all inputs were agreed upon by the government.

- **Global Influence and Positive Proposals**

The need for the global north to present positive proposals rather than just preventing action was discussed. Listening to developing countries and addressing their perceptions of being unheard is crucial.

5. Challenges and considerations in international digital governance processes

- **WSIS Plus 20 Review and GDC Comparison**

Discussion on the similarities between the WSIS Plus 20 review and the GDC, with concerns about repeating past issues and the need for government commitment to learn from previous experiences.

- **UN System Tensions**
Concerns about conflicting messages within the UN system regarding the centralization of the GDC and WSIS processes, and the potential impact on stakeholders.
- **IGF and Multi-Stakeholder Processes**
Discussion on the relevance of the IGF and the influence of big tech in decision-making, questioning the effectiveness of multi-stakeholder processes.
- **Technical Community's Role**
Debate on the technical community's responsibility in explaining Internet protocols and the impact on policy and human rights considerations.
- **WSIS+20 Process Prioritization**
Discussion on the need to identify the most important principle to preserve in the WSIS+20 process, with concerns about divergent views within the community.

6. Internet Governance and Multi-Stakeholderism

- **Transparency and Multi-Stakeholderism**
The discussion focused on the importance of transparency in local operations and the role of multi-stakeholderism in Internet governance. It was noted that while multi-stakeholderism is not a solution for everything, it is crucial to identify where it is effective and necessary.
- **Challenges in Internet Governance**
The conversation highlighted ongoing challenges in Internet governance, including the need to engage with larger tech groups and address issues like DNS abuse. There was a call for honesty about the limitations of multi-stakeholderism and the need to engage with broader Internet issues.
- **Positive Agenda for WSIS**
Participants emphasized the need for a positive agenda going into WSIS, recognizing the achievements and potential improvements in the current framework. The importance of involving the developing world and addressing government concerns was also discussed.
- **Negotiation Strategies for WSIS**
The discussion covered negotiation strategies for WSIS, including the risks of drawing red lines and the importance of framing issues as opportunities rather than being negative. The need to adhere to principles like transparency and inclusiveness was highlighted.

- **Connectivity and Inclusiveness**

The need for a positive agenda that focuses on community-centered connectivity and inclusiveness was discussed. This approach aims to unite various stakeholders and address the digital divide.

Other Points Arising

1. The need for updated governance frameworks to address current and future digital challenges remains unresolved, posing a risk to aligning with Sustainable Development Goals and effective governance.
2. The risk of outdated action lines and mandates not aligning with current digital realities and Sustainable Development Goals poses a challenge to effective governance.
3. Further discussion is needed on how to effectively engage less represented voices.
4. The need for a coordinated approach to engage middle ground countries in WSIS negotiations remains unresolved, risking exclusion from UN governance processes if timely action is not taken.
5. The effectiveness and limitations of multi-stakeholderism in Internet governance need further discussion, with ongoing challenges such as DNS abuse and engagement with larger tech groups posing risks if not addressed.