

Workshop Documentation

UN High-Level Report –
discussing Architectures for
global digital Cooperation



Robert Bosch
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Neue



Verantwortung

Introduction

The High-level Panel on Digital Cooperation was convened by the UN Secretary-General to advance proposals to strengthen cooperation in the digital space among Governments, the private sector, civil society, international organizations, academia, the technical community and other relevant stakeholders. Its work resulted in a [report](#) published in June 2019. The report contains three models to advance the discussion on further development of institutional structures to advance global digital cooperation within a multistakeholder framework. The first model envisions a ‘commons’ approach with coordination by UN agencies. The second model is a distributed architecture which builds on existing mechanisms. The third model enhances and extends the multistakeholder IGF.

The Robert Bosch Foundation and Stiftung Neue Verantwortung (SNV) jointly convened a diverse group of stakeholders from Germany with expertise in tech policy, human rights and Internet Governance to discuss the three global cooperation architectures from the Digital Cooperation Report on October 23, 2019. Three members from the High-level panel, Catherine Mulligan, GovTec Lab (UCL London), Nanjira Sambuli, World Wide Web Foundation, and Nikolai Astrup, Minister of Digitalisation Norway, as well as Fabrizio Hochschild, UN Under-Secretary-General and Special Adviser on the Preparations for the Commemoration of the Seventy-Fifth Anniversary of the United Nations also spoke at and participated in the workshop.

Based on a discussion of strengths and weaknesses of the three models the workshop participants came up with recommendations for the further development of each governance architectures. We are documenting the main outcomes of the workshop below and hope that they can provide useful input for further discussion on how to advance digital cooperation globally. Concise descriptions of each architecture can be found in chapter 4 “Mechanisms for Global Digital Cooperation” of the report.

Model 1 Digital Commons Architecture

Opportunities

- *Appeal of the Commons Concept:* The Commons is a powerful concept around which global digital cooperation can be organized. It emphasizes the linkage between shared resources (global connectivity and (open) digital technologies) and governance (commons cannot exist without institutions and governance).

- *Linkage of digital commons with SDGs:* Digital technologies are not an end in itself but rather a toolkit to reach broader social, economic, and political goals. This makes the linkage of the Digital Commons Architecture with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) so powerful.

- *Based on a Multi-Stakeholder Approach:* Effective governance of the commons has to involve all stakeholders. This makes the commons concept very well aligned with the multi-stakeholder approach to Internet governance.

Challenges

- *Defining the Commons Concept:* The commons concept for digital cooperation lacks clarity. References to climate, space and the sea do not work well or are even misleading. The hardware infrastructure on which the global Internet sits falls under national jurisdiction and is often privately owned. Data and digital technologies are immaterial goods that cannot be exhausted like natural resources.
- *Capacity to participate:* It is broadly accepted that many stakeholders lack resources and capacity to meaningfully engage and participate in global governance fora. However, to make this participation worthwhile and meaningful, powerful actors (whether governments or global corporations) need to give up power and allow for meaningful outcomes and implementation of agreed-upon norms.
- *Enforcement mechanisms:* The proposed architecture still lacks meaningful mechanisms for enforcement of basic rules that should govern the global digital commons.

Recommendations

- *Further Development of the Digital Commons Concept:* The further development of the Digital Commons Concept should make clear how it relates to and differs from the concept of the common good. The relationship of the Digital Commons to the pursuit of SDGs needs to be further elaborated and clarified. It should be emphasized that commons only function with governance or otherwise lead to “tragedy of the commons”.
- *Learn from rich History of Commons Governance:* Lessons from the rich history of commons (successes as well as failures) should inform the debate about further development and refinement of the digital commons architecture. This will also help to clarify how the digital commons differs from other commons such as the high seas. Particular emphasis should be put on crisis moments in commons which have often served as a catalyst for action (climate change).
- *Take the Capacity Challenge seriously and think about Convergence:* Empowerment of weak or underrepresented stakeholders is crucial. But it is at least as important that currently powerful actors (governments, global tech corporations) create space for meaningful deliberations and cede authority so that binding rules for the governance of the digital commons can emerge.
- *Address the Enforcement Problem:* The governance model will be toothless without any enforcement mechanisms. There is a need for a definition of roles for stakeholders and institutions within the architecture, especially the question who is supposed to define rules for what. Be creative about enforcement - only those stakeholders that cooperate with the commons governance should fully benefit from the commons.

Model 2 Distributed Co-Governance Architecture

Opportunities

- *Fosters consensual norm building*: multi-stakeholder networks can figure as norm entrepreneurs and contribute to a wider norm acceptance, which can help to reemphasize core values and principles for digital cooperation beyond and across specific issues.
- *Stronger output orientation*: As the development of norms is decoupled from their practical implementation, enforcement is not necessarily an obstacle to the creation of shared principles. Further, as the model is building on existing structures and issue-specific expertise, it is more output oriented than the IGF, which could increase its reputation and visibility.
- *Flexibility through decentralization*: since the cooperation networks are horizontally self-organized, the architecture is open to involve actors from various sectors into the process. It also allows more flexibility and scalability of the process, as new topics or trends can easily be addressed by the structure.

Challenges

- *Lack of resilience*: due to its decentralized architecture, the model leaves room for (mis)interpretation and is not resilient against bad faith actors. Further, it lacks an overarching strategic purpose and holds the risk of losing sight of the big picture by focusing too much on specifics.
- *Enforcement mechanisms*: Despite the coordinative role of the support platform and the global forum, the large number of players and networks may make it difficult to establish widely accepted norms. Since the model lacks legally-binding elements and enforcement mechanisms, there are no guarantees that norms will be translated into regulation or other forms of implementation.
- *Lack of adequate diversity and representation*: as participation in digital cooperation networks is voluntary, only those with sufficient capacity and adequate resources will participate. Another challenge is the difficulty to ensure that all involved stakeholders have equitable opportunities in cooperation, mobilization and agenda-setting. Moreover, the architecture does not ensure equal representation of perspectives, especially marginalized stakeholders may not be included in the process.

Recommendations

- *Make it concrete*: by prioritizing specific issue areas, for which the need for a global approach is already accepted, the model could gain in leverage. Taking other multilateral initiatives as examples, such as the SDGs, it is advisable to avoid a set-up that is too broad and abstract in order to have an impact.
- *Define role for governments*: in order to increase the commitment of governments to enforce norms, they should have a designated role in the architecture, which could be facilitated by the UN. Also rewarding mechanisms for openness and good governance in digital cooperation could be implemented to incentivize government action.
- *Create awareness campaigns*: past experiences with the IGF point to the importance of raising awareness for international digital cooperation. Therefore, the ac-

tivities should be accompanied by a communication strategy, including advocacy and brand-building. This can help to attract more stakeholders to join the networks, increase support from civil society and bring content into national agendas.

- *Deliberation and inclusion by design*: in order to simplify the coordination processes and still include diverse actors, deliberate consultation structures are recommended. Deliberation formats can figure as digital public utilities, and help underrepresented groups, private sector players and civil society to articulate their interests and allow legitimized coordinators to represent them in multi-stakeholder processes. Under the condition that sustainable funding and capacity-building structures are given, structured deliberation could address issues of inclusiveness without overloading the architecture.
- *Infuse political will*: the lack of enforcement mechanisms implies that political will is necessary to implement norms. By increasing the legitimacy of a multi-stakeholder process, political will of governments could be strengthened. The following mechanisms should be taken into account: i) consensus on the distinct roles of governments in the process, ii) acceptance of developed norms by policy-makers, iii) impactful implementation, iv) balanced participation & perspectives of stakeholders, v) visibility to raise acceptance by public, vi) include control and transparency mechanisms.

Model 3 Internet Governance Forum Plus

Opportunities

- *Builds on existing structures*. The model builds on existing structures that have been used and recognized for deliberations on digital policy by a variety of stakeholders. The core bodies and institutions proposed by this architecture are already in place and thus do not be built from scratch like in the other architectures. Weaknesses of the current model are addressed with some concrete reform proposals and suggestions for additional institutions.

- *Diversity and Multistakeholderism*. The IGF Plus is open for all stakeholders to bring outcomes. The substructures allow for diversity.

- *Unique forum for deliberations*. The IGF is a unique forum for global deliberations. It is seen as a place for open discussions with different stakeholders without the end goal being to achieve a regulation. This creates opportunities for sharing viewpoints. With the new framework, it has the potential for more actionable outcomes but still allows for those open deliberations to be held. It is also seen as a strength that it is intersessional and not just a one-time event.

Challenges

- *Diversity and Multistakeholderism*. Some stakeholders are not involved yet because they do not have the capacity or required institutional knowledge.

- *Funding is not sustainable*. Funding is not clear yet. There are also no incentives communicated.

- *More bodies, fear of silos and fragmentation*. The risk with setting up more bodies is to create silos in between those structures. In the absence of clear-cut divisions among

the different formats, there is a risk of the fragmentation of tasks. Those bodies need an effective design, in order for those groups not doing more of the same.

- *Focus on “actionable outcomes” may backfire.* As “actionable outcomes” are not defined, the risk is to end up in a legitimacy debate around what those outcomes mean for different stakeholders. This may hinder open discussions.

- *Accessibility.* In the current system there are structural inequalities, such as resources and intransparency that hinder stakeholders from participating. The IGF Plus model does not address those. There needs to be ways of including non-state actors from non-democratic countries as well as a better connection to the local government level which shapes policies on globally relevant topics.

Recommendation

- *More than an event?* IGF Plus needs to update its framing and branding in order to convey more clearly what its aims, structures and processes are and further what will change to achieve “actionable outcomes”.
- *Setting expectations.* Stakeholders need to know what to expect from this cooperation architecture and understand why they should participate. The current IGF is known by those who participate but many important stakeholders do not know the IGF and therefore do not use it as a global forum to cooperate on digital policy issues with other stakeholders.
- *Need for more clarity on the proposed new institutions.* Examples of such clarity could be: IGF+ Policy Incubator aims to analyse trends globally in order to make different stakeholders aware of an issue that is not just affecting them but is a concern worldwide. This awareness could lead to topical working streams where different stakeholders can get involved in order to align their actions, such as campaigning together, sharing best practices on policy making etc. In order for this to be successful, the IGF Plus needs to ensure that their structures allow for more concrete discussions that could be continued in specific working groups.
- *Brand discussions towards issues and working on topics that are of global “common concern” and “specific”.* This could be done by creating clear pledges, such as goals for Internet Governance which could be connected to the SDGs. In order to get more stakeholders on board, there could be pledging exercises on Internet Governance Goals and consider giving them more relatable names. That can then be further developed and implemented. This would also assist stakeholders that are not familiar with terms such as internet governance and do not make the connection right away that the issue they are working on is something that is discussed in this forum.
- *Take some elements of other architectures to complement the IGF Plus model.* The network of networks idea could be a complementary element of the IGF Plus model as it could assist the work streams foreseen for IGF Plus by creating a process on connecting and managing different stakeholders that work on the same topics around the world.

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About Stiftung Neue Verantwortung

Think Tank at the intersection of technology and society

The Stiftung Neue Verantwortung (SNV) is an independent, non-profit think tank working at the intersection of technology and public policy. In order to guarantee the independence of its work, the organisation adopted a concept of mixed funding sources that include foundations, public funds and corporate donations. The core method of SNV is collaborative policy development, involving experts from government, tech companies, civil society and academia to test and develop analyses and new ideas on how governments can shape the technological transformation to benefit society at large.

About Robert Bosch Stiftung

The Robert Bosch Stiftung is one of the major foundations in Europe that is associated with a private company. Through our work, we have followed the legacy of Robert Bosch for over 50 years, continuing his commitment to social and societal causes in a contemporary form.”

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