

Internet Society Questionnaire on Multistakeholder Governance

Report and Summary

October 2013

Background and Context


The frameworks of Internet governance are highly intertwined with the so-called “multistakeholder model”. The term, “multistakeholderism” does not owe its existence to the Internet, however. First used in the context of environmental governance and sustainable development, multistakeholder participation emerged as a key concept for Internet governance through the two phases of the World Summit in Information Society (WSIS). Some time between 2003 and 2005, the Working Group on Internet Governance (WGIG) – a multidimensional and diverse group tasked “to investigate and make proposals for action, as appropriate, on the governance of the Internet [...]” – introduced the term, which later became integrated in the Tunis Agenda in the form of a working definition of Internet governance:

“Internet governance is the development and application by governments, the private sector and civil society, in their respective roles, of shared principles, norms, rules, decision-making procedures and programmes that shape the evolution and use of the Internet”.

Despite its origins, “multistakeholderism” is currently synonymous with Internet governance arrangements, mainly due to the Internet’s ability to be a platform where political, economic and social issues are being deliberated. At the same time, placing Internet governance under a multistakeholder model has provided the opportunity for new forms of cooperation that allow a diverse set of stakeholders working closer than ever before. This is significant insofar it establishes a minimum level of inclusiveness that other traditional forms of governance do not necessarily adopt. In the context of Internet governance, the manifestation of multistakeholder participation has been in the form of the Internet Governance Forum (IGF), an annual conference that has no decision-making power, but has the power to encourage opinions, form policy proposals, shape discussions and influence national, regional and international governance structures.

Before multistakeholderism emerged as a widely-shared proposition to Internet governance, the term used to describe current structures was “private-sector leadership”. However, given the increasing attention and interest Internet governance was receiving over the years, WGIG consolidated it, identifying clearly the need for “a global multistakeholder forum to address Internet-related public policy issues”.

In the meantime, the technical community, although not expressly referring to it as such, has been operating under multistakeholder principles almost since its first series of Request for Comments (RFC). It was for this reason, amongst others, that in 2012, a set of organizations including the Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF), the Internet Society (ISOC), the Internet



Architecture Board (IAB), the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) and the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE) released a Joint Statement of Affirmation confirming that Internet standards are to be developed and implemented through a set of principles, including transparency, due process and cooperation, reflecting this way the foundation of multistakeholder governance.

Over the years, it has become evident that “multistakeholderism” is not a static concept; on the contrary, it is in constant transition. Part of this transition is the idea of “enhanced cooperation”, a term originally used in the European Union to denote a process of advanced integration and cooperation amongst EU Member States. In the context of Internet governance, however, the term was introduced at the conclusion of WSIS II in Tunis in 2005 as part of a political compromise that allowed all parties to claim victory: those who wanted to keep current multistakeholder Internet governance arrangements in place and those who wanted to change them. Unfortunately, the term is highly fluid and vague. Currently the notion of “enhanced cooperation” is under exploration by the UN Committee on Science and Technology (CSTD), which produced a questionnaire and asked for community input. The analysis of the CSTD questionnaire is expected in the beginning of November 2013.

So, where are we today? Multistakeholderism (and notions, like “enhanced cooperation” ingrained as extensions of its meaning) continue to evolve alongside the Internet. After a decade since the first WSIS process in Geneva, “multistakeholderism” is being used consistently, albeit discretionally, by users, non-governmental and intergovernmental organizations, the private sector and other interested parties when seeking to advance their positions. To an extent, this has been a welcoming deliberative process. However, as we move closer to the ten years WSIS review, a more robust understanding of the multistakeholder principles and norms is required.

Seizing this opportunity, the Internet Society launched a multi-phased process seeking to understand better how the Internet community is viewing multistakeholder governance and the associated notion of “enhanced cooperation”. This project is one component of the Internet Society’s broader initiative focused on the open and sustainable Internet. While the Internet has proven its success from economic, development, technological, and societal perspectives, its continued growth as a multistakeholder platform cannot be taken for granted. The Internet Society strongly believes that to ensure a sustainable Internet, the Internet must maintain its core characteristics of open, global and interoperable technical standards for innovation; open access and freedom of expression for all users; openness for business and economic progress; based on a collaborative, inclusive, multistakeholder governance model.

The first phase, which included a questionnaire and stayed open for two months (August 2 – September 30, 2013), asked questions under three broad thematic areas: (i) Multistakeholder governance; (ii) Enhanced cooperation; and, (iii) Challenges ahead.

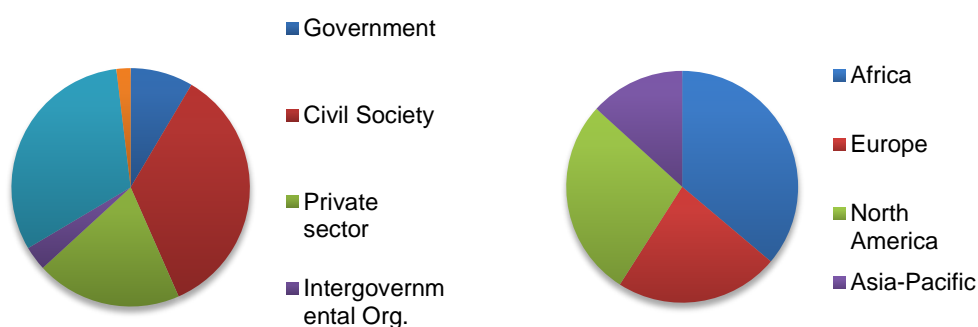
A full analysis of the questionnaire can be found below, however some of the key findings include:

- Management of and responsibility for the Internet is vested on a combination of actors.
- Internet governance is of great importance.
- Multistakeholder governance is the only way forward for Internet governance.
- The working definition of Internet Governance is a good starting point.
- Improvements on the definition of Internet governance should focus on three aspects, namely *clarity*, *comprehensiveness* and *precision*.

- The compatibility between multistakeholder principles and “enhanced cooperation” continues to be a significant question. Whereas the process of “enhanced cooperation” has in the past been presented as a threat to multistakeholderism and a return to intergovernmental forms of governance, the respondents tend to think that “enhanced cooperation” could be an opportunity to strengthen and improve multistakeholder governance.

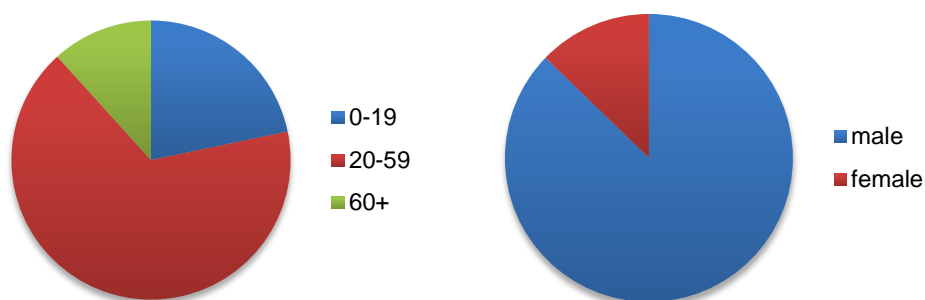
During the two (2) months of the questionnaire being open, approximately 300 individuals from more than 50 countries and a variety of stakeholder groups participated.

Figure 1: Information on participants (1): repartition by stakeholder groups and geographical region.



The scope of responses was broad and included experts and non-experts in Internet governance, as well as over 70 non-ISOC members. On the whole, respondents offered a mix of everyday perceptions of Internet governance and of experts' reflections about multistakeholder processes.

Figure 2: Information on participants (2): repartition by age groups and gender



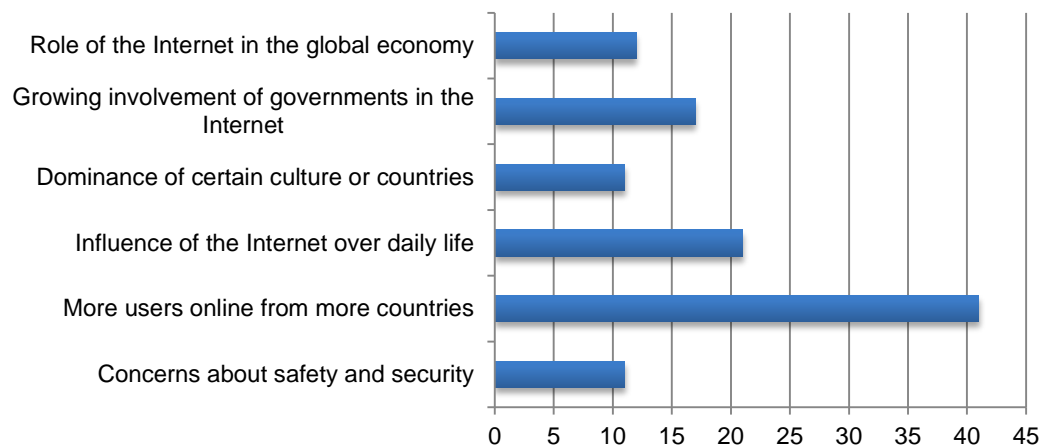
Following completion of this phase, the Internet Society will be launching phase II of the study – a call for scholarly and academic papers. Using as an umbrella the notion of ‘multistakeholderism’, researchers will be asked to submit research outputs on a variety of issues ranging from tracking the historical evolution of multistakeholder governance, identifying the parameters of “enhanced cooperation”, discussing the role and impact of the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) as well as the way different institutions define and implement “multistakeholderism” and the potential impact this has in the overall Internet governance landscape.

Analysis of the Questionnaire

A More Global and Vital Internet

Internet governance has evolved since the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS). As more organizations have started to participate in the IGF over the years, many of the original structures had to be reconsidered. In this regard, the respondents noted the increasing number and geographic diversity in the Internet governance space. The geographic shift in Internet users creates new and emerging issues, such as the need for development, the management of cultural and linguistic differences as well as issues of physical infrastructure, which may require the attention of national, regional and international bodies. In addition, the growing importance of the Internet in the economy and in the daily lives of most people has intensified concerns about security and safety amongst governments as well as in the general public. One thing that was apparent from the questions was that respondents are generally aware of the key Internet organizations in their own country and have precise ideas concerning the role of international bodies.

Figure 1: Main factors affecting change in the Internet governance landscape



When it comes to who is in charge of the Internet, the majority of the respondents view a combination of several types of actors responsible for the management of the Internet, including Governments, private companies, the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN), the United Nations, and individual users. Overall, respondents agree that Internet governance is of great importance. As one respondent noted: “our livelihood and increasingly our lives depend on a well- functioning Internet.” Some even went as far as to compare the Internet to vital resources such as air and water.

Thematic Area I: Multistakeholder Governance

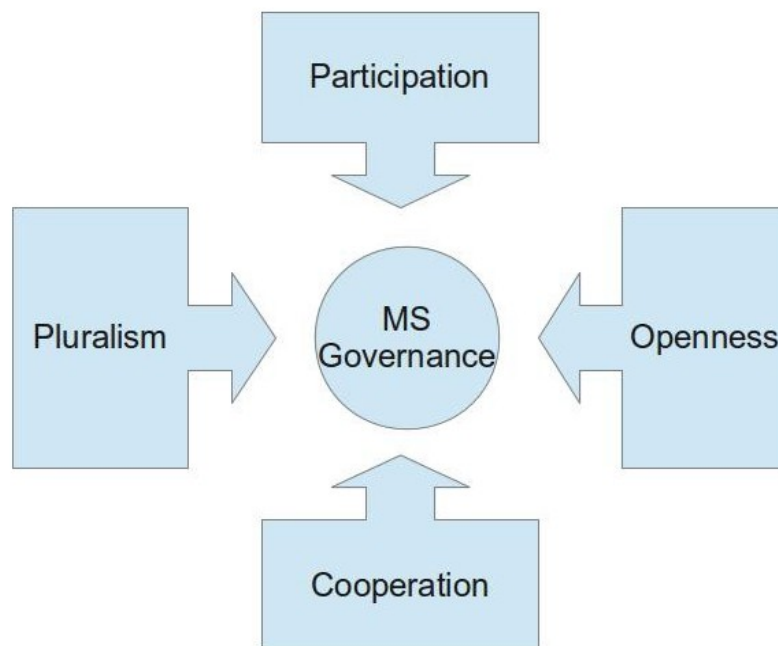
One of the objectives of the questionnaire was to solicit opinions and ideas about multistakeholder processes in the realm of Internet governance. Given the diversity in geography and the variety of stakeholder perspectives, no unique appraisal of multistakeholder governance emerged from the answers. However, some trends can be highlighted.

Generally, there is full awareness of the multistakeholder model and a strong support of its principles and values (see fig. 2). However, there is the feeling that in implementing the multistakeholder governance, there still is room for progress. Some suggestions were made in order to improve multistakeholder processes.

A: Strong Support of Multistakeholder Governance

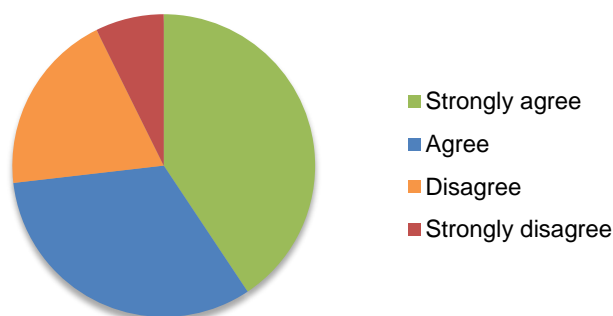
In general, respondents viewed multistakeholder governance as the optimal choice for Internet governance and as the most efficient way to promote democratic values. They see multistakeholder participation as the best way to include the various constituencies and opinions on issues related to Internet governance. They insisted that stakeholders should be able to act on an equal footing. The most positive aspect, according to the respondents, is the inclusion of civil society, which was traditionally excluded from formal governance processes.

Figure 2: Principles and values associated with multistakeholder governance



On this basis, when asked whether multistakeholder processes are inclusive and representative of the diverse constituencies, respondents tend to believe they are. Generally, respondents viewed multistakeholderism as the only way forward for Internet governance.

Figure 3: Multistakeholder processes are inclusive and representative of the diverse constituencies.



B: Towards a More Concrete Definition of Multistakeholder Governance

The working definition of multistakeholder governance is included in the Tunis Agenda:

“Internet governance is the development and application by governments, the private sector and civil society, in their respective roles, of shared principles, norms, rules, decision-making procedures, and programmes that shape the evolution and use of the Internet.”

The majority of respondents endorse this definition. However, they think that definition could be improved on three levels:

1. **Clarity.** For some of the respondents, more concrete objectives and aims should be agreed on and concrete steps and cooperation processes should be delineated. The definition should reflect the practice of multistakeholder governance rather than provide a theoretical framework of principles. Some of the respondents noted that the Tunis definition is written in diplomatic language and would like to see a definition that is just “plain English”. A very small number of participants also suggested the need to introduce concrete conditions for multistakeholder processes in order to balance the size of the participating groups or to provide funding and resource support for civil society.

2. **Comprehensiveness.** It was noted that intergovernmental organizations are not mentioned in the definition in spite of their crucial role. Some participants highlighted the need to better define each stakeholder group in order to ensure a more encompassing participation (for example a framework for the inclusion of small and medium sizes enterprises within the private sector stakeholder group). Others recalled that governments should be representing the views and expressing the interests of civil society. For some, the role of hackers in the process of imagining the future of the Internet was crucial. Finally, several criticized the fact that individual users are not included in the definition, claiming that the needs of individual users should be the ultimate objective of Internet governance.

3. **Precision** of the phrase “in their respective roles”. Some of the respondents suggested that this phrase should be deleted in order to avoid endless debates about its interpretation and to allow focus on concrete issues. A more widely-shared view was the need to consider the definition of “their respective roles” *a priori* rather than during multistakeholder processes.

Table 1: Main challenges in the implementation of multistakeholder governance emerging from the responses.

Challenge	Solution
Efficiency	Power to make recommendations
	Visibility/communication of the results
Inclusiveness	Increased participation of actors from developing countries
	Funding solutions (esp. for civil society representatives)
	Focus on end users of the Internet
Equality	Funding solutions
	Capacity-building
	Truly bottom-up processes

Thematic Area II: Enhanced Cooperation

Another important objective of the questionnaire was to gather opinions and reflections on the “enhanced cooperation” process that is part of the Tunis Agenda and is currently being evaluated by a group of experts within the CSTD environment. It is expected that “enhanced cooperation” will become an important element of the Internet governance discussion in the coming years.

Two different perspectives have emerged regarding “enhanced cooperation”: in the first one, respondents see “enhanced cooperation” as an attempt by the United Nations and/or governments to take over the Internet at the expense of existing multistakeholder arrangements. In the second one, which comprised of the majority, the respondents viewed the process of “enhanced cooperation” as an opportunity for Internet governance and the development of multistakeholder practices.

Table 2: Two visions of “enhanced cooperation”

Enhanced Cooperation as “UN Takeover”	Enhanced Cooperation as an Opportunity
Intergovernmental governance vs. multistakeholder	Development of the multistakeholder model
	Focus on end users
Governmental control	Commitment by governmental authorities
	More internationalized governance
More power for authoritarian regimes	Improved efficiency
	Focus on Human Rights

The polarization of the debate since WSIS between supporters of the multistakeholder model and supporters of intergovernmental arrangements has fostered an opposition between “enhanced cooperation” and multistakeholder governance. However, most respondents have a positive view of “enhanced cooperation” as involving more actors, or potentially focusing on crucial issues such as Human Rights and development. In this latter view, “enhanced cooperation” could become part of “multistakeholder engagement” aimed at the development of an improved governance model for the Internet. For example, one participant offered that “enhanced cooperation” could be “one way to balance an array of forces within the multistakeholder model [...] leading to practical and visible results”.

Thematic Area III: Challenges Ahead

A significant number of respondents wondered about the future of Internet governance. Some view Internet governance as part of the overall crisis in economic and political structures. These respondents felt that surveillance scandals and the rise of authoritarian regimes in global Internet politics are indicative of the caution that should be exercised when discussing the future of Internet governance. To this end, some respondents raised awareness about possible risks for the future of the Internet and its governance:

1. **“Balkanization”**: Several respondents expressed their concerns over the possible emergence of national and regional Internets as a direct consequence of surveillance practices exercised by governments; they also indicated that “balkanization” is possible due to the mistrust between governments. The majority of responses indicated that due to the diverging interests amongst governments and the unilateral domination of the U.S government, “balkanization” of the Internet and the creation of national or regional Internet governance bodies is a possible scenario for the future of Internet governance.

2. **(Inter-) governmental Takeover**: Another concern expressed by the respondents was a governmental - or intergovernmental - takeover of the Internet and its management. Under this view, multistakeholder processes are threatened by a growing involvement of governments and intergovernmental organizations in Internet governance. According to some respondents, “enhanced cooperation” illustrates the attempts by governments and intergovernmental organizations to “take over” the Internet. Some even foresee the transformation of the Internet into a surveillance network, where privacy and freedom of expression would not be respected.

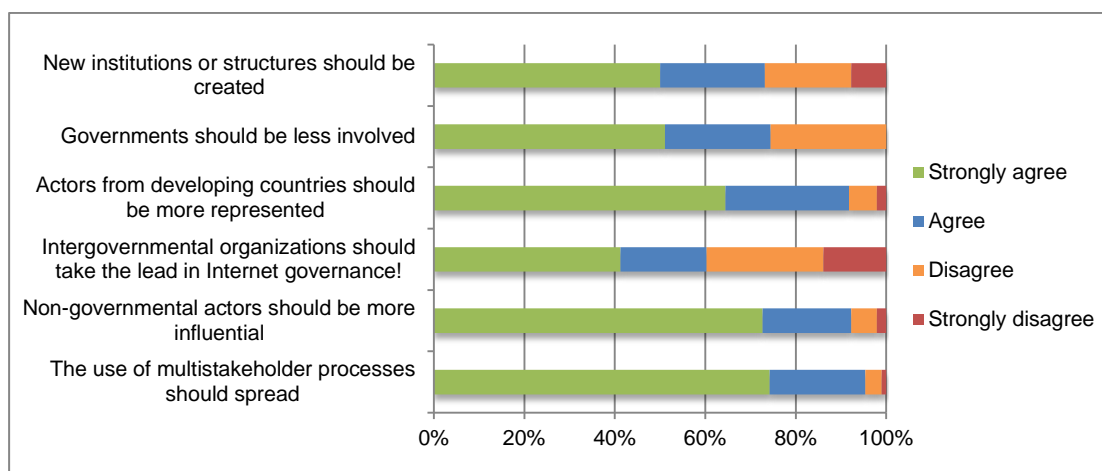
3. **Capture**: Some of the respondents focused on the dangers of capture of Internet governance processes by some stakeholder groups, such as large corporations. According to their view, the future of Internet governance might be determined by the inequalities amongst stakeholders.

Searching for the Way Forward

Respondents did not limit themselves to the description of the challenges ahead. They also provided workable solutions that could be implemented in the existing structures as well as through the process of “enhanced cooperation”.

Some respondents expressed their hope on progress in terms of access and more active participation in Internet governance processes. In their view, as more and more actors continue to get involved in Internet governance, participatory mechanisms will inevitably improve and become more efficient. However, some point to the fact that multistakeholder meetings will be harder to manage with more participants. Transparency, accountability and openness will be challenged by the increased size of the forums.

Figure 4: How should Internet governance evolve in the coming years?



Finally, a set of recommendation for a positive future for Internet governance were put forward by the respondents and included:

- the establishment of a better **democratic base** and model for multistakeholder processes. Accountability of representatives and transparency of the processes are also necessary.
- the improvement of **decision-making mechanisms**. Outcomes should be made clearer, for example with the adoption of recommendations or best practices;
- the focus should switch from governance institutions to **individual users**. Individual users should feel that their concerns and interests are represented in Internet governance processes. Protection of human rights and protection of Internet users should become the main objective of Internet governance;
- the improvement of multistakeholder **preparatory processes** -- these should become more open;
- the enhancement of **participation**. Participants from civil society and developing countries face serious challenges when trying to participate in global processes. Funding is a key element to address the participation gap, but account should also be taken of cultural and language barriers;
- people should be **informed and educated** about the importance of Internet governance discussions. This could further allow the identification of common global interests for all users.

These principles illustrate the importance of **enhanced multistakeholder processes** for the future of Internet governance. They prove the commitment of participants to the principles of multistakeholder governance but further illustrate the necessary improvement of its implementation. They clearly indicate that many individuals and organizations have an interest in the future of Internet governance. These preliminary results can be crucial for the coming discussions on Internet governance and could help enlighten participants at the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) and beyond.

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