Recommendation 5A/B

Options for the Future of Global Digital Cooperation

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A. Introduction

The office of the Special Adviser to the UN Secretary-General as well as the Governments of Germany and the United Arab Emirates were tasked as "Champions" to facilitate the follow-up process on Recommendation 5A/B of the UN High-Level Panel on Digital Cooperation's Final Report.

With the help of Key Constituents and stakeholders, the Co-Champions have conducted extensive multi-stakeholder consultations across the globe on the topic of mechanisms for global digital cooperation. This Options Paper presents their results. More information on the consultation process can be found in the Annex to this Paper and on the website "global-cooperation.digital".

The Options Paper is an important milestone; this milestone lies neither at the beginning of the journey to improved global digital cooperation, nor at its end. It is tailored to take the discussion forward with the presentation of concrete ideas. Many options outlined in this paper are not mutually exclusive and have much potential for combination. Some suggestions need further discussion and elaboration. With his Roadmap for Digital Cooperation the UN Secretary-General has provided important guidance in this regard, setting out his recommendations for concrete action and his intent to move the agenda forward with the overall aim to connect, respect, and protect the online world.

The Co-Champions are optimistic about the future of global digital cooperation. The consultations have not only demonstrated that stakeholders are actively engaged, but also that there is broad consensus regarding the gaps in current global digital cooperation and numerous solutions to address them. Not too much weight should be given to the labels of certain proposals, the underlying consensus on their content and goals is far more important.

The Co-Champions are convinced that the initiative of the UN Secretary-General and the work of the High-Level Panel on Digital Cooperation have created a momentum for improvements which calls for timely action. The Co-Champions are committed to the aim of Recommendation 5A/B to achieve better global cooperation and prepared to support the Secretary-General in his next steps as appropriate.

B. Summary

This summary should give its readers a clear indication of those options for the future of global digital cooperation which enjoy wide support and have – thanks to their practical applicability and compatibility – the best prospects for short-term implementation. It should highlight options for next steps.

The consultations on Recommendation 5A/B have confirmed that the institutional framework for better global digital cooperation should be based on the current IGF. The Internet Governance Forum should become an Internet Governance Forum + (IGF+) with a straightforward and transparent structure which accounts for other fora working on digital issues. At the same time, the IGF+ should also use the strengths of the Co-Governance model and the Digital Commons Architecture, i.e. the preservation of a bottom-up approach and the focus on more actionable outcomes, and include elements of these models.

More inclusivity of the IGF+ and its annual meetings will necessitate concerted efforts. Measures are not limited to, but should include dedicated funds to participants from the Global South, remote participation technology, clear and transparent rules and criteria for the selection and regular rotation of members of IGF+ bodies, in particular the Multistakeholder Advisory Group, as well as the monitoring of inclusivity by the IGF+ Secretariat.

To overcome the silos between technical knowledge, civil society and policymakers and to connect internet governance fora, the IGF+ needs a dedicated structure, namely the cooperation accelerator as proposed by the High-Level Panel on Digital Cooperation. The work of the cooperation accelerator could be supported by liaison officers at the IGF+ and other fora. Moreover, the institutional links between the IGF+ and the UN should become closer, for instance by associating the IGF Secretariat with the Office of the United Nations Secretary-General, in line with the interest of Member States to address cross-cutting issues arising from the development of digital technologies.

The IGF+ should produce more concrete and actionable outcomes, e.g. policy recommendations and/or outcome reports of the annual IGF+ meeting, while remaining a discussion body at its core. There are tools at hand to facilitate the transformation of the IGF and address concerns about a shift towards more concrete outcomes. New approaches could be developed and tested at the next IGF+ (sandbox-approach), for instance, for the development of concrete policy recommendations, potentially using elements of the Distributed Co-Governance (CoGov) model. Streamlining the IGF+ annual meetings, by reducing the number of sessions per day, multi-year IGF+ planning and by reorganizing the program around a limited number of specific issues, will also improve outcomes.

Once there are more concrete outcomes, these need to be fed into decision-making bodies. There is potential to build on and strengthen the existing Dynamic Coalitions and Best Practice Fora for this purpose, instead of creating a new structure, like the policy incubator. Moreover, dedicated sessions at the annual IGF+ meeting on the work of decision-making bodies and reporting between different bodies could be equally beneficial.

There are already good practices at the IGF to ensure a high level of governmental engagement which should be expanded. These include a high-level leaders segment at the annual IGF+ and a parliamentarian track. At the same time, it will remain important that leaders from all stakeholder

groups and all geographical regions take part in any high-level leaders segment. There is also room to conceptualize the mandate of the UNSG's Envoy on Technology in a way which would ensure a personal and institutional overlap between the UN Tech Envoy and the IGF structures and also heighten governmental interest.

The relevance of a future IGF+ will also depend on stronger leadership, a task which could be taken on by a high-level leadership group in addition to the Multistakeholder Advisory Group, as already pointed out in the Secretary-General's Roadmap for Digital Cooperation. The leadership group should feature multi-stakeholder representation and have a manageable size.

There are many good proposals to ensure the IGF+'s visibility, including, first and foremost, a professional and targeted communications strategy. There was broad support for continued active participation of the UN Secretary-General and the host country's head of state or government.

The need for more guidance in the complex internet governance universe could be satisfied by an observatory and a help desk as suggested by the High-Level Panel on Digital Cooperation. However, they have to account for the existing bodies which provide help and information. Thus, the observatory and help desk could be a central entry point for information requests and requests for help. An observatory could build a "database of accredited databases". A help desk could be a focal point which would forward requests for help to appropriate entities.

Last but not least, there is the question of funding: Without adequate and reliable financial resources there will be no IGF+. Almost all the valuable ideas, outlined in this Options Paper, ultimately depend on it. It will be vital to establish a professional and dedicated fundraising structure. Contributions need to account for the potency and responsibility of donors, including the private sector. More active engagement of the UN in fundraising would also be invaluable. The Co-Champions request all stakeholders, in particular the private sector, to reconsider the importance of good internet governance and make matching pledges for contributions.

C. Options

I. A New Digital Cooperation Architecture: Evolution of the IGF

A focal point of the discussion was the institutional architecture of improved global digital cooperation. The [Report of the HLPDC](#) proposed three models, the Internet Governance Forum + (IGF+), the Distributed Co-Governance model (CoGov), and the Digital Commons Architecture (DCA).

The stakeholders' feedback on this issue had much common ground. Stakeholders wish to build on existing structures, avoid duplication and keep structures as simple as possible; they prefer an *ambitious evolution to a revolution*. Also, some actors stated that there are already recommendations to improve the IGF which still need to be implemented, e.g. by the 2017-2019 MAG working group on IGF improvements.

During the consultations, the trend which had already started to emerge during the IGF 2019 in Berlin was confirmed: The Internet Governance Forum + (IGF+) received by far the most support to serve as a starting point to organize the future of digital cooperation. But it also became apparent that many actors would like to include elements of the Distributed Co-Governance model (CoGov) and potentially also of the Digital Commons Architecture (DCA).

They noted that the strength of the CoGov concept lies in its horizontal structure which brings in more focused expertise that is likely to lead to better outputs and inclusion of different networks, including developing countries, smaller organizations, and the private sector. Its stronger horizontal dimension would help to maintain the bottom-up nature of the IGF, while the "network of networks" would support greater cooperation.

Regarding the DCA, its focus to put norms at the centre of the discussion was considered a major advantage by some stakeholders.

Accordingly, while the IGF+ digital cooperation architecture should serve as the basis of any reorganization of global digital cooperation, it will be important to adapt the model to incorporate the strengths of the CoGov and DCA models. The proposals presented in the following sections II.-X. provide some guidance for this task.

II.   Inclusivity

Stakeholders consider inclusivity as <u>one of the biggest challenges and most important goals of improved digital cooperation</u>. In the interest of good leadership and legitimacy, inclusion needs not only an increase in quantity but also in quality. Inclusion has to broaden among different sectors, with a special focus on expanding to governments (with adequate geographical representation) and the private sector (from small companies to multinational corporations) so that the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) can speak with a strong voice for the whole of the global digital community.

Many discussions around inclusivity focused on the composition of global digital cooperation bodies. Stakeholders agreed that there need to be <u>concerted efforts to achieve true and inclusive multi-stakeholder representation</u>, including,the private sector, governments, professional experts from all areas and marginalized groups.

Proposals for inclusivity which enjoy wide support and deserve particular attention:

To facilitate participation:

- Increase dedicated funds to participants from the Global South to enable their participation in IGF meetings and other relevant fora.
- Introduce new or improve existing digital formats for participants to effectively join remotely.

To monitor inclusive representation:

- Install an external and independent evaluation mechanism that monitors progress on adequate representation across all stakeholder groups under the supervision of the IGF Secretariat.

Alternative proposals and additional suggestions for further discussion and elaboration:

To ensure an inclusive agenda:

- Tailor the agenda to the interests and needs of developing countries, in particular least developed countries (LDCs), small island developing states (SIDS), landlocked developing countries, as well as small and medium-sized enterprises
- Include important, but so far not sufficiently included topics, such as climate change and sustainable development.
- Simplify application procedures for IGF session proposals; provide clear criteria and a more transparent evaluation process for sessions.
- Include affected stakeholder groups in the whole decision-making process, from agenda-setting, to discussion, and implementation.

To facilitate participation:

- Introduce participants' fees of which a percentage is dedicated to enabling the participation of participants from the Global South.

To monitor inclusive representation:

- Lay down clear and transparent rules for selection and regular rotation of members of institutional bodies, in particular the Multistakeholder Advisory Group (MAG), which

consider factors like gender, age, representation of all stakeholder groups and geographical balance

III.   Strengthening Cooperation and Coordination

In light of the already very high number of existing fora for digital cooperation as well as the complexity of the overall internet governance structure, stakeholders are very conscious of the need for improved coordination and cooperation. They stressed the need to <u>overcome the silos between technical knowledge, civil society and policymakers.</u> Existing coordination structures should be taken into account and used.

Moreover, there was <u>universal strong support for strengthening the role of initiatives on a regional and national level as well as meaningful youth engagement</u>, including National Internet Governance Fora, Regional Internet Governance Fora (NRIs) and youth IGFs. Global discussions need to be informed by local and regional inputs. This will also be a tool for more inclusivity.

Proposals for cooperation and coordination which enjoy wide support and deserve particular attention:

- Create a new dedicated structure with strong organizational links to the IGF, i.e. the cooperation accelerator as described by the HLPDC. The cooperation accelerator should have members with multi-disciplinary expertise and should receive organizational support by the IGF Secretariat. It should monitor the work of different bodies on cross-cutting digital issues, identify a lack of cooperation and, where necessary, facilitate issue-centred cooperation across a wide range of institutions, organisations and processes, to strengthen cooperation and coordination.
- Establish the function of permanent liaison officers in IGF and other fora to simplify exchange between them.
- Ensure direct institutional links to the UN by associating the IGF Secretariat with the Office of the United Nations Secretary-General (UNSG) and including UN representatives in the MAG.

Alternative proposals and additional suggestions for further discussion and elaboration:

- Mandate the MAG to take on the task of strengthening cooperation and coordination and avoid thereby the creation of another structure. For this, it has to be ensured that multi-stakeholder representation in the MAG is guaranteed and its members have excellent connections, adequate financial resources and organizational support by the IGF Secretariat.
- Introduce a two-step approach in which tech and policy community discuss individually to address specific challenges and then come together to develop joint (policy) solutions.
- Establish a formal way of feeding input of NRIs into annual IGF.

IV.   More Actionable and Concrete Outcomes

There is overall agreement that the discussions at the IGF are of great value, but there is also a <u>need for more concrete, actionable outcomes.</u> Relevant and timely discussions rarely find their way into the policy making process at all levels, from the local to the international.

Many ideas were put forward in this regard. No stakeholder wanted the IGF to become a treaty-making forum, but there was <u>controversial and in-depth discussion about what kind of output</u> a digital cooperation structure should generate to inform decision-making bodies.

Proposals for more actionable and concrete outcomes which enjoy wide support and deserve particular attention:

On the format of outputs:

- Have the IGF propose soft law or norm-building instruments, for instance policy recommendations, so that governments and companies have a greater incentive to participate.
- Introduce reports, drafted e.g. by an independent organization as during previous IGFs, which formulate outcomes of the IGF and its thematic tracks describing consensus and areas of difference. Relevant reports could position the IGF as a reference point on Internet Governance issues for a global audience.

On the process of output creation:

- Create new and innovative mechanisms to work on new proposals, similar to the "Request for Comments" procedure, which allow the whole community to comment on and express their position towards new ideas.
- Create a sandbox at the IGF for developing and testing innovative approaches, for example for the development of concrete recommendations. If tested successfully, concepts could become permanent features.
- Reduce number of sessions per day at each IGF, in order to allow for more in-depth discussion.

On content:

- Introduce multi-year IGF planning to strengthen long term focus and consistency of IGF.
- While keeping bottom-up approach for feeding in topics, reorganize IGF around a limited number of current or emerging specific issues, instead of broad areas of work.

Alternative proposals and additional suggestions for further discussion and elaboration:

On the format of outputs:

- Keep the status quo. The IGF should remain a discussion body which allows for openness and creativity without the pressure to negotiate formal decisions.

On the process of output creation:

- Create more continuity. Digital cooperation should be discussed at more physical and virtual meetings throughout the year.
- Strengthen intersessional work.

V.   Forging Links Between Discussion and Decision-Making Bodies

Stakeholders have stressed the need to <u>create links between discussion bodies, such as the IGF, and entities which make decisions about internet governance issues</u> which allow for communication and feeding in of results both ways. This demand is closely related to the call for more concrete and actionable outcomes. However, it was separately addressed by many proposals and therefore deserves special consideration. In addition to the proposal to establish the function of permanent liaison officers in the IGF and other fora, mentioned above, stakeholders had many other suggestions to strengthen links between discussion and decision-making bodies.

There were intensive discussions about the creation of a <u>policy incubator </u>(i.e. a new group with members from all stakeholder groups and organizational support by the IGF Secretariat), which could, as described in the report of the HLPDC, be requested to analyze perceived regulatory gaps and, if necessary, form coalitions to make regulatory proposals, and thereby assist with creating missing links between discussion and decision-making bodies. However, there was general agreement that the work of existing policy-making groups should not be duplicated and instead better linked to the IGF.

Proposals for stronger links between discussion and decision-making bodies which enjoy wide support and deserve particular attention:

On establishing a policy incubator:

- Rather than establish a new structure, further develop the Dynamic Coalitions and Best Practice Fora which already organize intersessional work and produce recommendations and best practice proposals. They should be given a clear mandate, working procedures and principles and receive more resources and administrative support by the IGF Secretariat. The work of the Dynamic Coalitions and Best Practice Fora has to be complemented by other initiatives to link discussion and decision-making bodies.
- Use help desks to complement work for more actionable outcomes by promoting norms devised by the new digital cooperation structure/the policy incubator/dynamic coalitions and offer assistance to governments, companies etc. to help with implementation.

On communication between different fora:

- Have dedicated sessions at the IGF on the work of decision-making bodies and invite members of decision-making bodies to participate.
- Introduce reporting between the IGF and decision-making bodies in both directions and invite decision making bodies systematically to present their work at the IGF.

Alternative proposals and additional suggestions for further discussion and elaboration:

On establishing a policy incubator:

- Instead of developing existing structures, establish a new dedicated structure like the policy incubator, as proposed by the HLPDC, to incubate policies and communicate policy recommendations to decision-making bodies.

- Keep the status quo. The existing Dynamic Coalitions and Best Practice Fora within the IGF do not need further development, nor is it necessary to create a new separate structure, like the proposed policy incubator, for the development of more concrete outcomes.

On communication between different fora:

- Open a communication channel between NRIs at country level and the policy incubator to improve national policies.
- Communicate outcomes across the UN system and to other important international processes.

VI.   Stronger Leadership

There was also significant demand for stronger digital cooperation leadership. It was noted that the legitimacy of the leadership very much depends on the leadership group's expertise and inclusivity including criteria and rules for multi-stakeholder membership. At the same time, some stakeholders expressed their concern regarding stronger leadership. They cautioned that the bottom-up and flexible nature of the current IGF must not get lost.

The proposal for more leeway in terms of human resources and finances, mentioned above, could also constitute an element of stronger leadership.

Proposals for stronger leadership which enjoy wide support and deserve particular attention:

- Introduce a high-level leadership group similar to an executive committee and in addition to the MAG (which would continue to focus on organizational tasks). The high-level leadership group would have a limited number of members to ensure operability and effectiveness, feature multi-stakeholder representation (including business leaders and academia) and could provide input on IGF outcomes and create links to other fora, and support the MAG with strategic inputs for the program. This suggestion would correspond to the "strategic and empowered multistakeholder high-level body" mentioned in the SG's Roadmap for Digital Cooperation.

Alternative proposals and additional suggestions for further discussion and elaboration:

- Rather than a new structure, give the MAG a stronger leadership role considering that it is an existing, trusted and functioning body. This MAG should have a manageable size and feature high-level multi-stakeholder representation (including business leaders and academia).
- Establish reporting of the leadership group to the Secretary-General.

VII.   Placing Digital Cooperation Issues at the Top of the Political Agenda

Stakeholders generally welcomed recent attempts, in particular at the IGF 2019 in Berlin, to increase government awareness and participation at the IGF as the right way forward to place digital cooperation issues higher on the political agenda. The importance of digital topics needs to be reflected by <u>adequate governmental involvement</u>. The quality of the IGF outcomes as well as their acceptance by policy-making bodies depend on it. Likewise, more concrete and qualitative IGF outcomes as well as a strengthened IGF profile will generate more attention by governments.

Stakeholders also stated that an <u>Envoy on Technology</u> could contribute to placing digital cooperation issues at the top of the political agenda. In the meantime, the UNSG has concretized in his Roadmap on Digital Cooperation that the Envoy will be appointed in 2021 and fulfill an advisory as well as advocate and focal point function for digital cooperation. With this in mind, it appears reasonable to ensure synergy between the UN Envoy on Technology and the IGF structures.

Proposals for increasing governmental involvement which enjoy wide support and deserve particular attention:

- Continue a high-level leaders segment at the IGF with strong links to other parts of its program; this segment should be linked to the enhanced MAG structure referred to under point VI.
- Continue and enlarge the parliamentarian track at IGF.
- To complement high-level leaders segment introduce regular meetings (at least once a year) of a smaller group of leaders from stakeholder groups at head of organization level to accelerate coordination on urgent issues and provide input.
- Send out personalized IGF invitation letters from the UNSG's office to high-ranking government officials.

VIII.   Providing Transparency and Guidance in a Complex System

Stakeholders stressed the need for increased transparency on processes and systematic guidance to navigate through the various layers and platforms of internet governance, in particular for actors with limited resources. In this context, stakeholders generally welcomed the idea of the observatory and help desk proposed in the IGF+ model, but wished for further clarification regarding their structure and functions. In this context, stakeholders also took note of existing mechanisms to provide help, collect, analyze and share information, such as the International Telecommunication Union measuring the Information Society reports, the Geneva Internet platform or databases by the UN Institute for Disarmament Research and UNESCO. Given the fact that the help desk and observatory would have similar functions, there might also be potential to merge them to a single structure.

Proposals for transparency and guidance which enjoy wide support and deserve particular attention:

- Create an observatory which would provide a central entry point for information requests and create a "database of databases". This "database of databases" could take the form of a Website which would collect information on accredited initiatives, databases and observatories.
- Create a help desk which would act as a universal first contact point, give out information and forward requests for help to appropriate entities, but would not take over itself the work of entities which provide help.

Alternative proposals and additional suggestions for further discussion and elaboration:

- Form a network of existing structures providing help and oversight which could cooperate with the IGF Secretariat instead of creating a new structure.
- Provide clear procedural rules on the selection processes of various bodies so that there is an understanding about how to participate meaningfully.

IX. Greater Visibility of a Global Digital Cooperation Architecture

There was universal agreement among stakeholders that measures should be taken to <u>enhance the visibility of a global digital cooperation structure</u>, including through creating a strong corporate identity. Greater visibility will have positive effects on governmental involvement and the willingness of other bodies to cooperate. High-level participation in the annual IGF or its bodies, as mentioned above, would also enhance visibility.

Proposals for greater visibility which enjoy wide support and deserve particular attention:

- Build a high-quality, clear and easily-accessible website under the supervision of the MAG.
- Implement a professional and targeted communications strategy under the supervision of the IGF Secretariat and MAG.
- Continue UNSG and host country head of state or government participation as seen at the IGF 2018 in Paris and the IGF 2019 in Berlin.
- Introduce a regular "state of digital cooperation" address by UNSG at the IGF.
- Improve the IGF's corporate design to strengthen corporate identity under the supervision of the IGF Secretariat.

X.   Adequate Funding and Fair Distribution of Resources

There was universal agreement <u>that adequate and sustained funding is indispensable</u> to unlock the potential for improved digital cooperation, and is at the same time a major concern. Most stakeholders wish to continue with the <u>current IGF Trust Fund as a basis for funding</u>. It was noted that an improved digital cooperation structure, producing inclusive, visible, relevant and actionable outcomes, would increase the readiness of stakeholders, in particular governments, to provide funding.

Proposals for funding which enjoy wide support and deserve particular attention:

- Establish a dedicated and professional fundraising structure within the IGF Secretariat.
- Increase funding, with particular attention to the contributions of actors which profit from services and activities offered via the internet, in particular large companies.
- Ensure that funding mechanisms account for the potency and responsibility of donors, including the private sector, as well as the risk of undue influence. As part of this, the IGF Secretariat should openly track the raising and allocation of funds.
- Introduce a system of continuous and ad-hoc financial contributions. Ad-hoc contributions could support specialized projects and tracks. This could take the form of a funding menu for stakeholders, in particular states, which allows them to tailor their continuous and ad-hoc financial contributions according to their resources, interests and needs.
- Introduce a membership fee with exemptions for marginalized groups, small civil society organizations as well as small and developing countries.

Alternative proposals and additional suggestions for further discussion and elaboration:

- Increase UN funding for the IGF.
- Have a transparent and fair distribution of funds between the global activities and the IGF Secretariat as well as the local and national initiatives.
- Give the IGF Secretariat / MAG a real margin of manoeuver in terms of human resources and finances.

D. Annex: The Open Consultations on Recommendation 5A/B

The Co-Champions' open consultations in accordance with Recommendation 5A/B of the HLPDC on updated mechanisms for global digital cooperation were supported by many stakeholders and around 30 "Key Constituents", stakeholders with a special interest and expertise in the issue of Internet Governance including Governments, civil society, academics, technologists, and the private sector.

The global community itself has been and is key to finding better structures for global digital cooperation. The consultations had the ambition to make those voices heard by gathering a broad variety of expertise and ideas and by involving a diverse, inclusive and regionally balanced spectrum of actors. The consultations were designed taking account of the discussions which had already taken place regarding Recommendation 5A/B and therefore aimed at adding an additional layer of understanding and concrete ideas.

These extensive consultations were organized by stakeholders, Key Constituents and the Co-Champions themselves and reached over 100 countries. They included discussions at the IGF 2019 in Berlin, three virtual roundtables with the Key Constituents, four physical discussions on the margins of stakeholder meetings, the global virtual stakeholder discussion convened by Missions Publiques with participants from more than 80 countries from all continents, two virtual consultations at the African Union Commission and the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean and Internet & Jurisdiction Policy Network Regional Conferences 2020, two virtual consultations with Member States of the African Telecommunications Union and the League of Arab States as well as the submission of more than 30 written contributions, many of which summarize the results of further extensive stakeholder consultations.

Additionally, to support inclusiveness and transparency, the Co-Champions set up the website "global-cooperation.digital" as a focal point for information about the entire follow-up process, especially about its discussions, upcoming and past initiatives, and to publish written feedback.

It was certainly a challenge for everybody to quickly adapt the open consultations to the restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic and to switch from physical stakeholder meetings across the globe to virtual consultations. But it was also a reminder of the great possibilities associated with digital technologies as well as the need to improve global digital cooperation.

Many thanks go to all contributing stakeholders, including Special Adviser to the UN Secretary-General Fabrizio Hochschild, his office, and the Key Constituents, for taking the time, sharing ideas and giving organizational support. Thanks to their help, the consultations process did not only generate concrete ideas for the future of global digital cooperation, but had a value in itself. It gave a glimpse of how future deliberative processes might look like.