Power Dynamics in Internet Governance: Case of the Internet Governance Forum

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Declaration

Herewith I declare that I clearly understand §11 of the Academic Regulations and that the submitted paper is accepted by the OSCE Academy in Bishkek on the understanding that it is my own effort without falsification of any kind. I declare that I am aware of the consequences of plagiarism or/ and cheating.

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ABSTRACT

This research study investigates the dynamics of power shifts within global internet governance, with a particular focus on the influence wielded by individuals and experts from developing states. The central research questions explore how these individuals, acting as representatives of various stakeholders, shape the global agenda and engage in political struggles within the Internet Governance Forum (IGF). The hypothesis posits that individuals from the developing world can exert substantial influence on global internet governance through active engagement in multistakeholder platforms like the IGF.

A significant facet of this thesis centers on the role and impact of National and Regional IGF Initiatives (NRIs) in shaping agendas across different governance levels. The study investigates how individuals and stakeholders initially exert their influence at the national level, progress to the regional level, and eventually extend their impact to the international stage. NRIs are recognized as pivotal platforms where discussions on internet governance occur within individual nations and regions, and this research seeks to uncover the mechanisms by which these discussions contribute to shaping national, regional, and international internet governance agendas.

Moreover, the research explores the ripple effect of local and regional dialogues within NRIs, analyzing how the ideas, perspectives, and policy recommendations generated within these initiatives gain momentum and influence broader international internet governance discussions and decisions. This includes an examination of the pathways through which individuals and groups transition from local and regional engagement to becoming influential voices on the global stage.

By scrutinizing the role of NRIs and multistakeholder engagement in this context, the research aims to illuminate the mechanisms that empower individuals and stakeholders to navigate the intricate landscape of internet governance. It highlights the progressive expansion of their influence from the national to the regional and international levels. Ultimately, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how grassroots participation and multistakeholder collaboration shape the development of inclusive and effective frameworks for internet governance in an ever-evolving digital landscape.

Employing a qualitative case study approach aligned with social constructivism, this research delves into the dynamics of the IGF as a non-binding, multistakeholder forum for informed policymaking. Data collection involves semi-structured interviews with representatives from nation-states, intergovernmental organizations, civil society, and the private sector, supplemented by participant observation at the IGF 2023 Kyoto. Documents such as official IGF reports, meeting minutes, and transcripts of IGF Kyoto 2023 sessions are analyzed. The study comprises interviews with 20 key informants, conducted both during and after IGF 2023, with regular participation at the IGF Secretariat meetings during an internship from July to October 2023. Data analysis combines content analysis and thematic analysis to identify patterns in discourse, practices, and stakeholder perceptions.

This research contributes to the understanding of how individuals, particularly from developing states, can actively engage in global internet governance through existing national and regional IGF initiatives. By tracing the influence from local to international levels, the study sheds light on how grassroots participation and multistakeholder collaboration contribute to the development of inclusive and effective frameworks for internet governance. The findings offer practical insights into enhancing individual involvement in shaping internet governance agendas, contributing valuable perspectives to the ongoing discourse on inclusive and participatory global governance in the digital era.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AI   Artificial Intelligence

ARPA   Advanced Research Project Agency

BPFs   Best Practice Forums

CSTD   Commission on Science, Technology, and Development

DCs   Dynamic Coalitions

DCCG   Dynamic Coalition Coordination Group

GDC   Global Digital Compact

HDI   Human Development Index

ICANN   Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers

ICTs   Information and Communication Technologies

IoT   Internet of Things

ISOC   Internet Society

ISP   Internet Service Provider

IGF   Internet Governance Forum

ITU   International Telecommunication Union

MAG   Multistakeholder Advisory Group

NGO   Non -governmental Organization

NRI   National and Regional Internet Governance Forum Initiatives

PNs   Policy Networks

UN   United Nations

UN DESA   United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs

WGIG   Working Group on Internet Governance

WSIS   World Summit on Information Society

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Internet governance has been largely researched and tied to technological determinism and supremacy of the United States and organizations such as Internet Society (ISOC) and Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) that largely influenced the internet policy setting. Within the scope of this research internet governance refers to a set of principles, norms,rules and procedures that guide the behaviour of actors in the policy area. [1] Regime theorists have largely focused on the role of organizations in formulating the policies connected to internet governance, which are subdivided into several periods 1) development of the internet and technical standards, 2) commercial internet 3) global regulatory arrangements.[2] Historical juncture periods influenced the way in which internet governance was studied. However, little attention has been paid to the role of individuals in formulating those policies, and even less attention to the individuals from the developing world.

In their study of what civil society is and who represents civil society at IGF Nadia Tjahja points out to the coordination entities that also include internet governance unique organisations such as the Internet Society's local chapters. IGF Dynamic coalitions, Regional IGFs, and National IGFs. [3]

In the historical context of the WSIS the journey of non-state actors towards making their voices heard and garnering credibility has been marked by a rapid process of institutionalization. This phenomenon is mirrored in the NRIs where these entities are organized collectively to amplify their impact and ensure meaningful participation in the broader internet governance landscape.

As highlighted by Epstein, the formation and dynamics of the Working Group on Internet Governance (WGIG), established shortly after the WSIS were significantly shaped by the strong personalities of its group members. Key figures such as Nitin Desai, the chair of WGIG, Markus Kummer, the WGIG executive coordinator, along

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[1] Czempiell, Rosenau James and Otto. Governance without Government. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

[2] Radu, Roxana. Negotiating Internet Governance. Oxford University Press, 2019.

[3] Tjahja Nadia, et al. What is civil society and who represents civil society at IGF? An analysis of civil society typologies in internet governance.

with other group members played pivotal roles in not only creating WGIG from scratch but also in giving it a distinct structure and direction.[4]

Nitin Desai underscored the unique composition of the group, emphasizing that its members were present in their individual capacities but had been carefully chosen to ensure a balance across regions and interest groups. This deliberate selection aimed to reflect a diversity of perspectives within the group. Markus Kummer further characterized WGIG as a collection of individuals hailing from different geographic, cultural, and professional backgrounds. These members, each possessing distinct outlooks on life, varied ideas, and diverse ways of interacting, came together with a shared purpose, ultimately coalescing into a cohesive group.

Internet governance is a complex domain and despite the term "internet" being treated as a single unit, it is vital to deconstruct it into several blocks that could shed light on the understanding of its governance. Historically, the evolution of the internet meant the interconnection of computers for sharing information. The technical community at the Advanced Research Project Agency (ARPA) developed open standards and protocols that allowed instant connectivity among the network of computers.[5] It laid the foundation for the modern internet. This project was developed by the United States Department of Defence in late 1960s and early 1970s. The largest part of critical Internet resources was initially placed on the United States territory and control over it was retained by the US government.[6] This is the root cause of the argument of Western determinism, and majority of the claims that internet is governed by the United States takes its roots in this fact.

Once the internet expanded globally legal issues came into the spotlight such as the protection of intellectual property rights. Right after the digital economy boom came into place in 1990s more internet governance issues were focused on the protection of those rights.[7] Digital advertising, encryption of the signatures, secure transactions were a major part of the discussion efforts in an economy that was largely digitalizing.

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[4] Epstein, Dmitry. The making of institutions of information governance: the case of the Internet Governance Forum, 2013
[5] DeNardis, Laura. Protocol Politics: The Globalization of Internet Governance. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2009.

[6] Ibid
[7] DeNardis, Laura. Global War for Internet Governance. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014.

In the mid-2000s a major shift occurred in the development issues that were connected with access to the Internet, as well as providing the same type of protection of human rights both online and offline. Topics such as privacy, data protection, and freedom of expression came into a vivid existence. As internet was created as an information sharing tool and it was not protected from security challenges. First cyber viruses became a hot topic in 1990s but gained prominence in the post-Cold War period.[8] Since then civil liberties continue to lead the global internet governance agenda while being discussed on the majority of the internet governance platforms. Internet of Things (IoT) and Artificial Intelligence (AI) topics are now hot on the agenda. Attempts to pass legislation on Artificial Intelligence are already taking place in different parts of the world from South Korea to the European Union.

As it can be seen the internet governance topics evolved over time to reflect the realities of a maturing domain. As the internet is not regulated by a single actor, practices should be looked at from the multistakeholder level. This research aims to explore the role of individuals in the policy formulation and their pathways for involvement in internet governance by scrutinizing the power dynamics present within the Internet Governance Forum (IGF), a non-binding multistakeholder forum for internet policymaking.

Considering the landscape of Internet governance discussions, the question of efficiency and effectiveness in platforms or institutions dedicated to addressing Internet governance issues is indeed a complex one. During the interview, Kummer rightly noted the structured nature of entities like ICANN, IETF, and the IGF, with ICANN being particularly well-organized.

RESEARCH RATIONALE

I resonate with the acknowledgment of the internet community as a natural space for individual participation. Avenues for individual participation are present and they provide an academic, technical, policy-making angle for engagement. However, there are practical barriers highlighted during the discussions with experts, such as attendance fees. In my work I focus on IGF's role as a platform for open dialogue that

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[8] Markoff, John. "Killing the computer to save it." 2012.
https://www.nytimes.com/2012/10/30/science/rethinking-the-computer-at-80.html.

allows individuals to be part of the discussion at the national and regional level. I reflect on the effectiveness of existing structures and the challenges faced by individuals in contributing to Internet governance discussions. While recognizing the significance of platforms like the IGF, the need for more inclusive avenues for individual participation in certain governance processes remains a critical consideration.

The evolution of the IGF is intricately woven into the broader narrative of Internet governance, marked by the unfolding tensions among various stakeholders. In the early 2000s, as governments began showing an increasing interest in Internet governance, a significant debate unfolded regarding the legitimacy and authority governing policies in this globally significant arena.[9] This discourse highlighted the clash between the decentralized, bottom-up model advocated by network-centered approaches and the more nation-state focused and hierarchical decision-making processes supported by the state-centered approaches. Global debates on Internet policy culminated in the United Nations-sponsored World Summit on Information Society (WSIS) held in 2003 and 2005[10]. What initially began as a meeting centered on socioeconomic development and information technology swiftly transformed into a significant international discourse on Internet governance, shedding light on the global nature of Internet-related policymaking and the unconventional notion of authority in this informal decision-making process.

Two crucial outcomes emerged from the WSIS. Firstly, it recognized and defined a more substantial role for non-state actors in global communication policymaking. By the early 2000s, many policy decisions were already being shaped by non-governmental institutions with a strong private sector presence, such as the IETF, ICANN, and regional and national registries. The WSIS formalized the concept of 'multistakeholderism,' allowing representatives from public interest advocacy groups, business associations, and other interested parties to participate alongside governments in intergovernmental policy deliberations[11] (Mueller, 2010).

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[9] Epstein, Dmitry. The making of institutions of information governance: the case of the Internet Governance Forum, 2013

[10] Epstein, Dmitry. The making of institutions of information governance: the case of the Internet Governance Forum, 2013

[11] Mueller M.I. Networks and States: The global politics of internet governance, 2010.
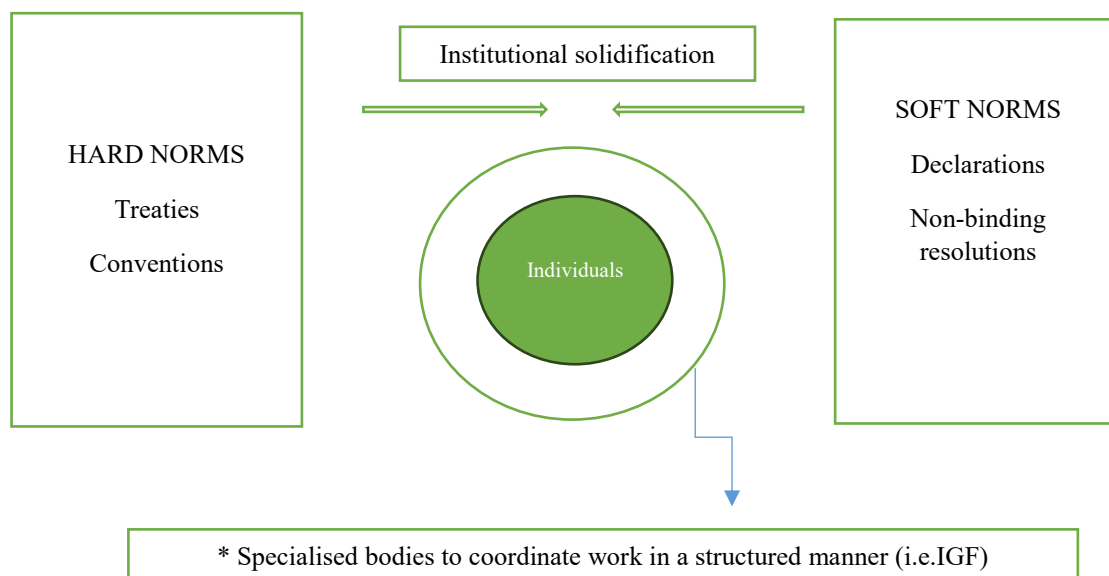
Secondly, WSIS negotiations aimed to address the challenges posed by this unorthodox balance of power but resulted in limited substantive decisions. The legitimacy of ICANN and fundamental disagreements about the roles of state and non-state actors in Internet governance remained unresolvable. As a tangible outcome, the WSIS established the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) as a non-binding forum for multistakeholder Internet public policy discussions.

Since its inception, the IGF has become a platform for discussions between different cultures of authority within the Internet community and the intergovernmental apparatus. It serves as a stage for enacting diverse normative schemes based on varying worldviews, cultural, national, and institutional identities. Despite criticisms and weaknesses, the IGF continues to attract participants and donors, with its mandate extended by the UN in December 2010 until 2024. From a historical perspective, the IGF's journey illustrates the ongoing processes of negotiating governance principles for a unique and complex information system, providing valuable insights into the historical institutionalization of governance for distributed information systems. When analysing rules of the game, different actors come into play: state and non-state, formal and informal. Roxana Radu subdivided the Internet governance instruments into hard and soft ones.[12] Laws in internet regulation carry different weight and obligations. Treaties and conventions are put at one end of the spectrum while declarations and non-binding resolutions are put at another end. In between these two she places specialized bodies that refer to expert communities that formulate the strategic frameworks, and set global agenda and plans of actions.[13] Therefore, in a sense, Internet Governance exists through performers. I further continue the argument and look into individuals that participate in the middle of the spectrum, namely in the IGF and the National and Regional IGFs (NRIs). A visual representation of it can be found in Table 1. The scheme was formulated based on previous research. Individuals were added by me in the middle of the institutional solidification process to analyse their role in the internet governance processes.

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[12] Radu, Roxana. Negotiating Internet Governance. Oxford University Press, 2019.

[13] Radu, Roxana. Negotiating Internet Governance. Oxford University Press, 2019.

Table 1

This research argues that individuals from both developed and developing world play a crucial role in influencing global internet governance discussion through a multistakeholder platform. The role of individuals is usually perceived not in connection with their professional affiliation, or citizenship, but rather on the bureaucratic and historical presence in discussions and participation in policy formulation.[14] The social capital is built up with the time that an individual spends in the professional circle of Internet governance experts.

Still, the current Internet governance landscape fails to facilitate full participation of individuals from developing nations as was mentioned during IGF Kyoto 2023 sessions. Sessions containing keywords such as "fragmentation", "digital divides", and "inclusion" amounted to 50 at the main IGF in 2023.[15] Definition of a developing nation is derived from the Human Development Index (HDI) which is a summary measure for assessing "long-term progress in three basic dimensions of human development: a long and healthy life, access to knowledge, and decent standard of living."[16] HDI is used to underscore the idea that the primary criteria for evaluating a country's development should be centered on its people and their capabilities, rather than solely on economic growth.

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[14] Radu, Roxana. Negotiating Internet Governance. Oxford University Press, 2019.
[15] IGF 2023 Outputs, session transcripts.
[16] UNDP Human Development Report

The literature review highlights the lack of systematic understanding of how governance works in practice in relation to the internet and how the dynamics of groups in the field of internet governance are influenced by a small number of active participants who set the rules for the larger, less involved membership.[17] The research aims to fill this gap in understanding by examining the power dynamics present within the IGF and the role of individuals/experts from the developing world in decision-making. Internet governance is a complex domain whose structural and functional aspects have long been studied. The functional perspective focuses on the exercise of power through formulated practices, decision-making, and institutional design.[18] On a structural level, theories of global governance address complex interconnections and power relations among actors by analyzing underlying ideologies, as well as market transformations.[19] Interconnections are sometimes difficult to observe and remain an understudied topic of informal governance, which includes networks, partnerships, and multi-level governance. Therefore, tracing individuals behind influential proposals, new initiatives, regional and international projects that later consolidate into powerful institutional forms is the aim of the current research.

In the context of the current research, "influence" can be defined as the capacity of National and Regional IGF Initiatives and individuals to bring about meaningful changes, developments, or impacts within the field of internet governance. This influence extends beyond traditional legislative actions and includes various outcomes, such as the establishment of new policies, the creation of internet governance schools, the formation of strategic partnerships, capacity building initiatives, advocacy efforts, and the promotion of norms, principles, and best practices. Influence, in this context, reflects the ability of NRIs and their founders to shape the landscape of internet governance, foster multistakeholder collaboration, and drive positive advancements in the digital realm, thereby contributing to the development of inclusive and effective internet governance frameworks.

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[17] Radu, Roxana. Negotiating Internet Governance. Oxford University Press, 2019.

[18] Czempiell, Rosenau James and Otto. Governance without Government. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

[19] Shields Stuart, Ian Buff and Huw Macartney. Critical International Political Economy. Houndsmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.

The research will be guided by the following research questions: ***How do individuals/experts from developing states influence the global internet governance agenda?***

The central premise of this hypothesis posits that ***individuals, particularly those from the developing world, wield the potential to shape global internet governance***. This influence is envisioned through active engagement on multistakeholder platforms like the Internet Governance Forum. Thus, the power of individuals is examined, as is the demonstration of the emergence of new standards and norms within the IGF.

The research aims to add a missing piece to the picture that depicts internet governance mostly with sovereign states, businesses, civil societies, and intergovernmental organizations. This missing piece are the **individuals**, or the internet community, whose perspective is necessary to understand who influences the current internet governance agenda. The research aims to contribute an essential component to comprehending internet governance by exploring the role of individuals through their involvement in discussions without favouring either technological determinism or technologist supremacy of a particular entity or state. Instead, the research will scrutinize the power dynamics present within the Internet Governance Forum (IGF), a multistakeholder forum for information policymaking that is non-binding. Particular emphasis will be placed on National and Regional IGFs that are held throughout the year ahead of the Annual IGF.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholars examining the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) as a multistakeholder entity have offered a range of analytical responses. Some view it as one of the most important experiments in institutional innovation in the global policymaking environments in recent history because it emphasizes open participation and the involvement of non-state actors in policy debates.[20] Others view it as a red herring in the internet governance process because it lacks substantive decision-making authority, which renders the IGF little more than a talk shop[21] Both perspectives make a valuable contribution to the study of the internet governance, and raise a series of important questions.

One key aspect of global governance theory is the notion of multilateralism. Multilateralism emphasizes the importance of collective decision-making and rule-setting among states and other stakeholders.[22] It promotes the idea that no single state can address global challenges alone and that solutions require the involvement and collaboration of multiple actors. International organizations, such as the United Nations, the World Trade Organization, and regional bodies, play a crucial role in facilitating multilateral cooperation and providing platforms for dialogue and negotiation. Thus, Internet Governance Forum (IGF), being one of the pioneer organizations employing the multistakeholder approach is analysed.

Internet governance, a dynamic and multifaceted domain, is shaped not only by established institutions and powerful states but also by individuals who emerge as norm entrepreneurs. The concept of norm entrepreneurship within the context of internet governance, with a specific focus on the role of individuals, particularly those from the developing world is paid particular attention throughout the research. By drawing insights from the literature and research the aim is to elucidate how norm entrepreneurs contribute to the evolution of norms in internet governance and explore the potential for individuals, even from resource-constrained regions, to influence this global arena. Norm entrepreneurs play a pivotal role in challenging existing norms, shaping new

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[20] Mathiason, John. Internet Governance. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203946084, 2008.

[21]DeNardis, Laura. "The Emerging Field of Internet Governance." Oxford Handbooks Online, 2013.

[22] Sinclair, Martin Hewson and Timothy J. Approached to Global Governance Theory. State University of New York Press, 1999.

ones, and navigating the complexities of internet governance. According to Kettemann, norm entrepreneurs are individuals or entities that actively engage in the promotion, establishment, and internalization of norms related to the use and development of the internet.[23] Their influence extends beyond the formalized structures, contributing to the normative order of the internet. This aligns with the discussions of the scholars where the normative landscape is portrayed as a result of continuous interactions among diverse actors.[24] In the literature, norm entrepreneurs are characterized by their ability to frame issues, garner support, and drive normative change. [25]

Understanding who possesses the resources and capability to initiate, advocate for, and uphold normative change, and identifying the conditions under which this transformation occurs, is crucial for advancing discussions on governance reform in the digital realm. Examining governance practices through the lens of normative aspirations has become a necessity in numerous internet policy processes, yet it has not garnered the attention it merits in academic literature. The emergence and socialization of ideas regarding suitable digital behavior within diverse internet communities, along with the roles played by various promoters of norms and their interactions, are the areas that are constantly being explored.

As a fundamental concept within the social constructivist research paradigm, norm entrepreneurship serves as a valuable framework for comprehending the dynamics of change in internet governance. This framework delves into the intricate interactions between the inherent power of norms and the constraints imposed by the roles and identities of their advocates. Once proposed by entrepreneurs, norms undergo a process of socialization within broader communities, observable through the analysis of custodians' participation in various forums and their involvement in various forms of resisting change. [26]

Normative change is a complex process involving phases such as emergence, acceptance, and internalization.[27] Norm entrepreneurs play a crucial role in defining

[23] Kettemann, Mathiason. The normative order of the internet: A theory of rule and regulation online. Oxford University Press, 2020.
[24] Radu, Roxana et al, Normfare: Norm entrepreneurship in internet governance, 2021
[25] Kavalski E. The struggle for recognition of normative powers: Normative power Europe and normative power China context.
[26] Radu, Roxana et al, Normfare: Norm entrepreneurship in internet governance, 2021
[27] Finnermore and Sikkink, International norm dynamics and political change.

and establishing standards of behavior, which gradually gain influence within the community through relevant networks. Their end goal is to create practices that are eventually taken for granted by their communities. Norm entrepreneurship in internet governance is not confined to a specific geographic location or set of actors. Instead, the role of norm entrepreneurs from various backgrounds, including representatives of states, private companies, and civil society is recognized. This sheds light on how normative change processes take place within the broader international context and the role of individuals in this process.

Furthermore, there is a new approach by Radu to examine the role of individuals and networks.[28] She points out the area of further research in the domain of bureaucratic processes and individuals that shape new rules of the game. The dynamics of groups in the field of internet governance are influenced by a small number of active participants who set the rules for the larger, less involved membership. These key individuals become social and cultural leaders who have a significant impact on the relationships formed with new members.[29] Being accepted as a full member of the community requires following a clear path that involves gradually adopting the community's practices and language. The growth of internet governance communities is closely tied to the process of creating guidelines and codes of conduct for newcomers, with modelling being the main tool used to shape the community.[30]

To bridge the gap between established members and new arrivals, newcomer programs are introduced such as fellowships and internships.[31] These programs not only teach the practices but also involve newcomers in ongoing discussions to encourage regular participation. Through these experiences, newcomers can become practitioners themselves. In technical groups, inclusion is crucial to ensure that standards are useful and satisfactory for those who will use them. Multi-stakeholder processes are also crucial to community-building, and fellowships such as the ones from ICANN and ISOC are structured to support these processes.[32] Similarly, there are lessons learned

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[28] Radu, Roxana. Negotiating Internet Governance. Oxford University Press, 2019.

[29] Ibid
[30] Ibid
[31] IGF Website
[32] Radu, Roxana. Negotiating Internet Governance. Oxford University Press, 2019.

from older NRIs that are passed on to other NRIs in the region and beyond, as mentioned by interviewees of the current research.

Personal relationships formed through these programs increase trust among stakeholders. Unlike meetings with binding outcomes, the annual gatherings of the IGF and of the WSIS Forum provide a relaxed atmosphere that encourages informal discussions and consultations.[33] This provides additional opportunities for actors from developing world enter the scene.

IGF derives significant advantages from its status as a UN process, particularly in terms of its formal equality. The research has further affirmed that the UN support lends a sense of legitimacy, prompting governments in various countries to treat the IGF with greater seriousness. This heightened seriousness is notably reflected in increased government participation at the national IGFs, underlining the influential role of the UN backing in shaping the level of engagement in Internet governance discussions on both national and global scales.

Historically, the development of the internet's technical standards and protocols has been an open and most importantly a voluntary process, with an expanding community encouraged to participate at different levels. The expansion of knowledge and the effort to promote a consistent vision are reflected in shared practices. Various communities have worked on documenting their progress and influence since their formation.[34]

The need for cooperation to make the network function has led to the integration of different cultures and perspectives in solution-oriented activities. The distinct etiquettes of interaction have started to merge as an unchanging core group regularly negotiates around round tables in different locations such as annual IGF meetings. The resulting system of norms and rules is a hybrid that combines diplomatic procedures, private logic, and public interest discourses. Further in the research, the discourse of developing world inclusion will be researched in more detail.

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[33] Radu, Roxana. Negotiating Internet Governance. Oxford University Press, 2019.

[34] Antonova, Slavka. "The Global in the Internet Governance Regime: Fora, Stakeholders, and Policy Networks." 2007.

Roxana Radu further identifies three key phases in the evolution of the internet governance and the corresponding governance patterns that emerged during each phase. The first phase (1970s to 1994) was characterized by informal governance and focused on technical standards. The second phase (1995-2004) saw the globalization of the internet, which was closely linked to an increasing role of private actors and a market-oriented approach. The third phase (2005-2015) brought global regulatory arrangements to the forefront, privileging cross-sectoral partnerships.[35]

Her analysis suggests that in the post-2015 era, a limited number of companies and states hold a stronger position, leading to clashes over the fundamentals of governing the field. Thus, the role of smaller "newcomers" as she labels them grows.[36]

As the internet governance sphere is a mature regime, it is now being shaped leading to numerous researchers focusing on a diversity of issues that make up the regime or set of rules and principles that guide the behaviour of actors in this area. However, the focus of this research focuses on the role of individuals as pointed out for further analysis by academics as Radu.

Milhorance's study on the policy network in Brazil provides a valuable foundation for understanding how nonstate actors' ideas diffuse within formal coalitions of state and nonstate entities. The dynamics of such diffusion are critical in the context of international organizations where the interplay between state and nonstate actors shapes policy narratives and directions.

Drawing parallels to Milhorance's examination of formal coalitions, NRIs can be seen as structured platforms where formal discussions and collaborations occur.[37] In the context of NRIs, where the diversity of stakeholders and the complexity of internet governance challenges demand innovative solutions, the role of informal connections becomes particularly intriguing. Unlike formal coalitions, which often have predefined structures and processes, NRIs embrace a more flexible and inclusive approach. This flexibility may provide fertile ground for informal connections to thrive, fostering a culture of collaboration and idea exchange beyond the confines of formal discussions.

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[35] Radu, Roxana. Negotiating Internet Governance. Oxford University Press, 2019.

[36] Radu, Roxana. Negotiating Internet Governance. Oxford University Press, 2019. (Milhoranc 2020)

[37] Milhorance C. Diffusion of Brazil's Food Policies in international organizations,2020.

As individuals within NRIs engage in discussions, workshops, and policy-making processes, personal relationships established during coffee breaks lead to collaborative initiatives like regional IGFs or Internet Governance Schools.

In conclusion, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of how individuals within NRIs engage and shape the normative order of the internet through collaborative and interconnected processes.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Despite the common use of the term "Internet" as a single entity in everyday conversation, it is important to understand that this complex network is actually composed of several different areas of governance. These areas cover a wide range of aspects, including technical specifications and socio-economic elements. As understanding of the Internet has progressed, it has become clear that issues related to infrastructure and standards are now seen as matters of public interest, regardless of the specific governing authority involved. While there is still a separation in the work of relevant institutions, it has become challenging to analyze the Internet without closely examining its various interconnected components.

Within the current research, the global governance theory is used to understand and analyze the complex processes and structures through which global issues are addressed and managed. It recognizes that traditional forms of governance, primarily based on state-centric approaches, are insufficient to tackle the challenges posed by globalization and interconnectedness.[38] Instead, global governance theory emphasizes the need for collaboration, cooperation, and coordination among various actors, including states, international organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and multinational corporations.

At its core, global governance theory recognizes that global problems such as climate change, poverty, terrorism, and pandemics transcend national borders and require collective action. It emphasizes the interdependence of states and the need for shared responsibility in addressing these challenges. In this view, global governance refers to the structures, institutions, norms, and processes that facilitate cooperation and coordination among diverse actors at the global level. Internet recently becoming a global phenomenon global governance theory lens deconstructs and assist in explaining major developments.

At the core of the theoretical foundation lies the **global governance framework** that offers a comprehensive perspective on international cooperation, emphasizing the involvement of diverse actors beyond traditional state-centric models. Given the

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[38] Sinclair, Martin Hewson and Timothy J. Approached to Global Governance Theory. State University of New York Press, 1999.

inherently multistakeholder nature of NRIs, the global governance theory serves as an apt framework for understanding the collaborative dynamics within these forums.

Multistakeholder Dynamics:

Global governance Theory aligns with the multistakeholder principles inherent in NRIs. These forums bring together representatives from governments, civil society, the private sector, and technical communities. The theory allows us to scrutinize the interactions, negotiations, and power dynamics among these diverse stakeholders. Through this lens, the complexities of decision-making and norm development within the multistakeholder model are scrutinized.

Policy Networks and Informal Connections:

Within the global governance theory, there is a recognition of both formal and informal networks that contribute to global governance. In this study, the understanding is extended to the informal connections that may serve as conduits for the flow of ideas within NRIs. By employing this theoretical lens, nuanced relationships and networks that play a crucial role in shaping internet governance discourse are examined.

Norm Entrepreneurship:

Another concept of norm entrepreneurship is analyzed within the framework of the global governance theory. Those are the individuals or groups shaping norms and policies at the global level. Participants within NRIs can be viewed as norm entrepreneurs actively contributing to the development and diffusion of norms in the field of internet governance. This framework enables to identify and analyze the role of these actors in influencing the trajectory of internet governance discussions.

Power Dynamics:

Power dynamics among actors involved in global governance processes is also looked at through the global governance theory. The research extends this exploration to NRIs, aiming to understand how power relations, both formal and informal, influence the adoption of ideas and decisions within the multistakeholder model. This lens provides insights into the dynamics that shape the influence and impact of certain actors within NRIs.

Inclusivity and Legitimacy:

The theoretical framework acknowledges the emphasis on inclusivity and legitimacy within NRIs. Global governance theory aids in examining how these principles are manifested or challenged within the multistakeholder model. By scrutinizing the inclusivity and legitimacy of discussion processes, a contribution to a deeper understanding of the functioning of NRIs is made.

Methodological Implications:

In conclusion, the global governance theory stands as a robust and versatile theoretical framework for the research on individuals within NRIs. It offers a holistic perspective on the interconnectedness of actors and collaborative processes in the realm of internet governance. By employing this framework, the contribution to nuanced insights into the multilayered dynamics that characterize NRIs is made. It advances our understanding of how these forums shape the global discourse on internet governance at the same time involving individuals from the developing world into the process.

METHODOLOGY

The research design for this study is a qualitative case study approach, which involves an in-depth investigation of the dynamics of the IGF as a non-binding, multistakeholder forum for informed policymaking. The framework applied in the research is consistent with social constructivism, which assumes that no single reality exists and that meanings and representations are always shared or collectively formed[39]

Data for this study was collected through semi-structured interviews with individuals, including representatives from nation-states, intergovernmental organizations, civil society groups, and the private sector as well as participant observation at the IGF 2023 Kyoto. Documents analyzed included official IGF reports and output messages, meeting minutes, and transcripts of IGF Kyoto 2023 panel discussions and sessions. Interviews were conducted with 20 key informants, based on their representativeness of different stakeholder groups. The interviews were conducted during IGF 2023 in Kyoto and via video conferencing in the following months. Interviews and participation at the IGF Secretariat meetings were conducted on a regular basis as part of the internship that the author undertook at the IGF Secretariat from July – October 2023.

Data analysis involves a combination of content analysis and thematic analysis. Content analysis was used to examine the documents collected, with a focus on identifying patterns in the discourse and practices of different stakeholder groups. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the interview data, with a focus on identifying key themes and patterns in the perceptions of individuals involved in the internet governance processes. The analysis is guided by the research questions and involves analysis of IGF documents and outputs, as well as observation at the weekly meetings at the Secretariat, and meetings with the Host Country 2023 (Japan). The findings of the study are presented in a comprehensive narrative, supported by quotes and examples from the data collected, and are discussed in light of their implications for the broader field of Internet governance.

One major limitation of the research is the reliance on document analysis and interviews to understand the power dynamics within the IGF. While these methods are

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[39] John A Huges, Wesley W Sharrock. The Philosophy of Social Research. Longman, 1997.

useful for providing insights into the opinions and perspectives of key players within the IGF, they may not capture the full extent of power dynamics at play. For example, there may be informal networks and relationships that are not captured in official documents or interviews as mentioned by Roxana Radu in her book. Yet, involvement in the discussions in a role of the observer at the regular policy network meetings, multistakeholder advisory group meetings, IGF secretariat meetings provided an opportunity to see the "hats" that different individuals were wearing while participating in discussions.

Another limitation is the sample size for interviews. While I had access to the MAG advisory group, NRI coordinators and other stakeholder groups through an internship at the IGF Secretariat, the individuals and experts interviewed may not be representative of the entire population of individuals from developing nations participating in the IGF. This could result in a biased understanding of power dynamics and perspectives within the IGF. Additionally, the availability of individuals for interviews may be limited, as many had other commitments or refused to participate in research.

These limitations are particularly significant when it comes to understanding governance issues in developing nations. The voices and perspectives of individuals from these nations are often underrepresented in discussions of Internet governance, which can lead to policies that do not adequately reflect the needs and perspectives of these nations. Without a comprehensive understanding of the power dynamics and perspectives at play within the IGF, it is difficult to ensure that policies are equitable and effective for all stakeholders. Given these limitations, I also used participant observation during the IGF Kyoto 2023 and coordination meetings of NRI, as well as participation at the regional and national IGFs in 2023.

CHAPTER II: Internet Governance Forum

The Internet Governance Forum (IGF) serves as a global platform where stakeholders come together to engage in discussions related to public policy matters concerning Internet governance. The establishment of the IGF resulted from a significant outcome of the United Nations World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), which mandated the United Nations Secretary-General to organize this forum on July 18, 2006.[40] The IGF's original mandate, as outlined in paragraphs 72 to 78 of the Tunis Agenda, was extended for an additional decade through a resolution passed by the UN General Assembly on December 16, 2015 (Resolution 70/125), titled "Outcome document of the high-level meeting of the General Assembly on the overall review of the implementation of the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society."[41]

In terms of its institutional support, the IGF is administered by the IGF Secretariat, which operates under the auspices of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA). The annual IGF meeting's program is developed by the Multistakeholder Advisory Group (MAG), whose members are appointed by the UN Secretary-General. In 2022, an IGF Leadership Panel, also composed of members appointed by the Secretary-General, commenced its work alongside the MAG. To date, eighteen IGF meetings have been hosted by various governments, with the latest annual IGF meeting hosted by the Government of Japan in Kyoto on 8- 12 October, 2023.

Annually, the IGF delves into a range of prominent discussion topics, each raised by various stakeholder groups. These topics serve as focal points for deliberation and exploration within the IGF's multistakeholder framework. Diverse parties, including governments, civil society organizations, private sector entities, and technical experts, actively participate in shaping the agenda and contributing to these discussions. Dynamic coalitions, National and Regional IGF initiatives, Multistakeholder advisory Group, Policy Networks, Youth Networks are actively involved at and in-between annual meetings.

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[40] IGF Website
[41] United Nations General Assembly Resolution, Session 17, 16 December 2015

These annual discussion topics reflect the dynamic nature of Internet governance and encompass a wide array of issues. They may include matters related to cybersecurity, digital rights and freedoms, access to the Internet, online privacy, emerging technologies (such as artificial intelligence and blockchain), data governance, and the impact of the Internet on social, economic, and cultural aspects of society. The bottom-up approach in the theme selection process for global IGF is particularly significant in terms of awareness raising and ensuring the active participation of individuals from the developing world. By soliciting input from a diverse range of stakeholders, including those from regions with varying levels of technological development, the IGF strives to create an inclusive platform where voices from all corners of the globe can contribute to shaping the agenda. This process is instrumental in raising awareness among individuals in the developing world about the intricacies of internet governance, fostering a sense of ownership, and empowering them to actively participate in discussions surrounding the future of the digital landscape.

Through open consultations and engagement initiatives, the IGF not only gathers insights from established players in the internet governance space, but also seeks to amplify the voices of those who may have historically been underrepresented. This emphasis on inclusivity not only enriches the discussions by incorporating a wider array of perspectives but also serves as an educational and awareness-building mechanism, enabling individuals from the developing world to become integral contributors to the global dialogue on internet governance. In doing so, the IGF not only shapes policies and agendas but also acts as a catalyst for knowledge dissemination and capacity building in regions where digital literacy and awareness are key components of empowerment.

Being part of an NRI within the IGF provides individuals with a valuable awareness that they can contribute to shaping the agenda for 2024 already. Members of NRIs, whether they participate as private individuals or representatives of organizations, governments, or specific stakeholder groups, are aware of the significant role they can play in the broader discourse on internet governance. This awareness is essential as it empowers individuals to actively engage in discussions, provide input, and influence the direction of policies and frameworks that govern the internet.

In 2023 the IGF has identified "The Internet We Want - Empowering All People" as its overarching theme.[42] This theme reflects the forum's commitment to creating an inclusive and empowering digital environment for everyone. To further delve into this theme, the 18th annual IGF program revolved around the following sub-themes:

- AI & Emerging Technologies
- Avoiding Internet Fragmentation
- Cybersecurity, Cybercrime & Online Safety
- Data Governance & Trust
- Digital Divides & Inclusion
- Global Digital Governance & Cooperation
- Human Rights & Freedoms
- Sustainability & Environment.

During the IGF 2023, more than 300 sessions/workshops and conferences took place with participation of more than 9000 people both online and onsite which ensured representation of individuals from virtually any part of the world.

Despite the persistent existence of digital divides that leave approximately 2.6 billion people unconnected to the internet, the imperative for the next phase extends beyond mere connectivity. Bridging the digital gap is not solely about physical access; it is equally about inclusivity and the active involvement of those who have been historically marginalized. As efforts intensify to bring the unconnected online, it is vital to recognize that the ultimate goal is not just connecting individuals but fostering an environment where their voices are heard, valued, and actively incorporated into the broader discussions shaping the digital landscape.

Connecting the unconnected is a pivotal first step, that was mentioned throughout the messages at IGF 2023 in Kyoto. However, the subsequent phase revolves around empowering these individuals to actively participate in the discourse on digital inclusion. This means not only providing the infrastructure for access but also addressing the nuanced challenges that may impede meaningful engagement. It involves promoting digital literacy, ensuring the availability of diverse and locally

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[42] IGF Website

relevant content, and dismantling barriers that could hinder the unconnected from contributing to the ongoing dialogue on the internet's role in society.

Involving the previously unconnected in the conversation is not just an ethical imperative but a strategic one. The diverse perspectives, experiences, and needs of these individuals enrich the discourse on digital inclusion, leading to more comprehensive and effective solutions. Through the NRIs, educational programs, or digital literacy campaigns and internet governance schools, the focus should extend beyond connecting the unconnected to empowering them as active contributors, ensuring that the next chapter for them in internet development is shaped collaboratively and inclusively.

As part of the internship at the IGF Secretariat the author was involved in the compilation of the output messages for the Global Digital Governance and Cooperation sub-theme. A clear and resonant message emerged regarding the imperative to elevate the visibility and profile of the IGF to ensure participation of individuals from different stakeholder groups, and countries.[43] The consensus underscores the necessity for an effective outreach strategy, recognizing that enhancing the IGF's visibility is crucial for it to sustain its role as a central hub for constructive dialogue and collaboration. A heightened profile is seen as instrumental in attracting newcomers- individuals and engaging diverse groups in actively shaping the future of Internet governance. This overarching goal of increased visibility aligns with the understanding that a more inclusive and widely recognized IGF will better serve the global community in navigating the complexities of digital governance.

Furthermore, the output messages emphasize the critical need for adequate funding and resources to address the multifaceted nature of Internet governance which is discussed further in the chapter. The recognition is clear that entities like IGF play a pivotal role in involving individuals from the developing world, fostering collaborative efforts and discussions on a global scale. To effectively support active newcomers involvement, sufficient funding is deemed essential.

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[43] IGF 2023 Output Messages

Intersessional Forums and role of individuals

As previously mentioned in addition to its annual meetings, the IGF community engages in year-round discussions through three primary types of intersessional forums: Policy Networks (PNs), Best Practice Forums (BPFs), and Dynamic Coalitions (DCs). These forums play a vital role in deepening our understanding of internet governance and shaping the policies and practices that govern it.

Policy Networks (PNs) emerged in 2021 with the aim of scrutinizing existing situations and current challenges within the internet landscape. They systematically identify policy gaps, assess available capacities, consider local contexts, and evaluate both favorable and unfavorable practices.

The Policy Network on Internet Fragmentation at the IGF 2023, focused on raising awareness of fragmentation on technical, policy, legal, and regulatory levels. It also established a framework classifying fragmentation into three layers: Internet user experience, Internet Governance and coordination, and technical architecture. The discussion shifted from attempting to define fragmentation to acknowledging diverse perspectives and the need for multi-stakeholder discussions. The interaction and overlaps between these layers were emphasized.[44]

Rosalinda Kenny Birch presented findings related to governance and coordination. Fragmentation at this layer is seen in unclear mandates, exclusivity, and lack of coordination, leading to siloed discussions.[45] The multi-stakeholder working group, tasked with addressing the complex issue of fragmentation, brought together diverse perspectives as the group itself consists of number of individuals with different backgrounds.

According to the findings of the PN this type of fragmentation primarily emerges from the poor interactions between global internet governance and national bodies.[46] Lack of inclusive coordination among these entities results in tangible fragmentation. This can manifest through isolated or redundant discussions, excluding specific groups and leading to decisions made without consensus from the multi-stakeholder community. Individuals possess limited time and financial resources to

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[44] IGF Kyoto 2023, Plenary Hall, Policy Network on Internet Fragmentation.
[45] Sheetal Kumar, et al, Output Report
[46] Ibid

participate in discussions/conferences engagements. Continually perpetuating this intricate landscape may lead to the exclusion of people from discussions if they lack the resources to fully engage in emerging bodies and spaces.

Another aspect involved duplicative mandates, where an internet governance body's mandate is unclear or may overlap with another body, fostering competition for legitimacy or causing confusion.[47] This, in turn, makes it challenging for individuals to discern when and where to engage in specific conversations. Improving coordination among existing internet governance bodies is crucial to addressing perceived or real gaps in these spaces. Therefore, experts noted that coordination between these bodies is necessary to tackle fragmentation. Additionally, to prevent isolated public policy discussions on internet governance, they proposed that all internet governance bodies fully include stakeholders, fostering meaningful multi-stakeholder participation on an equal footing.

Lastly, discussions at the PN on Internet Fragmentation 2023 revolved around enhancing their collaboration with national Governments. This aligns with PN 2022 analysis, emphasizing a reciprocal relationship. National governments, when considering proposed legislation, can gain valuable insights by engaging in discussions with global internet governance bodies, obtaining crucial information and feedback in the process.48 Concurrently, individuals from the developing world have an opportunity to voice their concerns through NRIs, serving as a more accessible entry point for active participation and representation in global internet governance discussions. This approach ensures a more inclusive and diverse representation of perspectives, fostering a comprehensive and meaningful dialogue on internet governance matters.

Best Practice Forums (BPFs) provide open platforms for IGF community members to exchange experiences and gather existing and emerging best practices in addressing internet policy issues. The outputs of BPFs are invaluable resources that enhance our understanding of global best practices. They also inform policy

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[47] IGF Kyoto 2023, Plenary Hall, Policy Network on Internet Fragmentation.
[48] Policy Network on Internet Fragmentation. Webinar "What does internet fragmentation mean to you?"

discussions, influence standards development, guide business decisions, and stimulate awareness and discourse. In 2022, two BPFs carried out substantial work in

Cybersecurity and Gender and Digital Rights tracks. The forum focused on identifying cybersecurity initiatives that amplify the voices of those most affected by cybersecurity events. Additionally, it examined the intricate relationship between norms and legislation in the context of cybercrime. While the second one critically assessed the impact of regulations from a gender justice perspective. It engaged with individuals affected by these regulations and scrutinized the effects of intensive regulation on the privacy and experiences of women and LGBTQI+ communities online.

Dynamic Coalitions (DCs), established since the inaugural IGF meeting in 2006, are open, multistakeholder groups dedicated to specific internet governance issues. Currently, there are 24 dynamic coalitions addressing various topics, such as internet rights, innovative approaches to bridging digital divides, accessibility, and child online safety. These coalitions coordinate their efforts through the Dynamic Coalition Coordination Group (DCCG), with support from the IGF Secretariat.

At the IGF 2022, twenty DCs conducted individual sessions, presenting their work and engaging in discussions on internet policy issues within their respective areas of focus. A key session titled "Our Digital Future: How IGF Dynamic Coalitions Support the Global Digital Compact" showcased how DCs contribute to the IGF's evolution as an "IGF+" and align with the principles of the Global Digital Compact.

National and Regional IGF Initiatives (NRIs)

NRIs operate as independent, multistakeholder networks discussing internet governance from the perspectives of their communities. They adhere to the core principles of the global IGF and currently comprise 160 recognized NRIs. At the 17th IGF in Ethiopia, over 100 NRIs actively participated, co-organizing seven sessions that explored various facets of internet governance, including access, data governance, child online safety, the forthcoming twenty-year review of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), and the role of the internet in democracy. These sessions emphasized the need for sustainability in stakeholder engagement, cooperation, and funding to enhance the stability of the Internet Governance ecosystem.

In this thesis, one of the focal points of investigation and research is the role and impact of NRIs in shaping agendas at different levels of governance. Specifically, the thesis delves into how individuals and stakeholders have the opportunity to exert influence initially at the national level, then progress to the regional level, and eventually extend their influence to the international stage.

Furthermore, the research delves into the ripple effect of these local and regional discussions, analyzing how ideas, perspectives, and policy recommendations developed within NRIs can gain traction and influence broader international internet governance discussions and decisions. It seeks to understand the pathways through which individuals and groups transition from local and regional engagement to becoming influential voices on the global stage.

As a result of preliminary findings this work analyses the historical and contemporary dynamics of National and Regional IGF Initiatives, with a focus on the factors influencing their activity levels, origins, and financial sustainability. NRIs play a pivotal role in shaping internet governance discussions, both at the local and global levels. This study investigates whether the activity of specific NRIs has motivated others in the region to become more active in global agenda setting, and examines the roles of individuals, as opposed to governments or corporations, in founding NRIs. Furthermore, it explores the financial challenges faced by NRIs and their impact on growth and participation in agenda setting.

The research identifies instances where the establishment and active participation of specific NRIs have inspired other countries or regions in Africa to create their own initiatives. This domino effect demonstrates the influence of early NRIs on the growth and engagement of subsequent ones. The research findings reveal a compelling narrative of how the establishment and active involvement of specific NRIs in Africa have triggered a domino effect, motivating other countries and regions to initiate their own NRIs. This phenomenon underscores the far-reaching impact of early NRIs on the growth, engagement, and diversification of subsequent initiatives within the African continent which can be replicated in other parts of the world which see limited to no participation in internet governance discourse.

IGF Website, NRIs Map, Accessed December 5, 2023
(https://www.intgovforum.org/en/content/national-and-regional-igf-initiatives)

🔴Regional IGF   🟩 Youth IGF   🔵National IGF

🟡 Number of IGFs held in the region   🔵 Number of IGFs held in the location

One notable aspect of this domino effect is how early NRIs, through their active participation in global and regional internet governance discussions, have catalyzed regional and national engagement. As these early NRIs became recognized voices

within the global internet governance ecosystem, they served as advocates for the importance of local and regional perspectives in shaping global internet policies. In Kummer's words, "Once an NRI in any state sees steps of other individuals they think if they can do it, we can do it as well," encapsulates the essence of his belief in the replicability and scalability of these approaches across regions, contributing to the effectiveness and inclusivity of Internet governance discussions. The inception of the IGF served as a catalyst and inspiration for individuals or groups in various countries to recognize the need for multiple forums to address the complexity of internet-related issues. While transcending national boundaries, these discussions also encapsulate local nuances. The Caribbean IGF, being the pioneering initiative, sparked a spillover effect as other regions observed their success and began contemplating similar endeavors. "Indeed, Africa stands out with the highest number of NRIs, showcasing not only quantitative strength but also vibrant and impactful discussions", says Gengo in her interview. The region's success may be attributed to several factors, including a well-established regional IGF that received substantial institutional support from the African Union. This backing provided a stable foundation for the forum's growth.[49] Moreover, Africa grapples with unique challenges, prominently the digital divide, making discussions on internet governance particularly relevant. The continent has witnessed an unparalleled transformation in its digital economy, marked by significant investments in mobile connectivity. This evolution is readily apparent in the proliferation of E-banking, E-pay systems, and other technological advancements.[50] The rapid embrace of digital solutions in Africa reflects a collective recognition of their potential to address societal challenges, including poverty and resource management issues such as water scarcity.

Yet, some regions do not necessarily experience spillover effects of the NRI. Sultanov Talant suggest that the lack of active growth in grassroots initiatives in Central Asia can be attributed to the region's diversity, both in terms of its internal differences and varying government structures.[51] The diversity within Central Asia makes it challenging for grassroots initiatives to flourish uniformly across the region. Sultnanov

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[49] Interview with Anja Gengo, IGF Secretariat, NRI focal point
[50] Ibid
[51] Interview with Talant Sultanov, MAG member

points out that despite appearing as a single region to the global community, there are significant differences among the countries, especially in terms of governance.

He emphasizes the impact of different government structures on the level of digitalization and civic engagement. Some countries in Central Asia are described as more democratic, fostering active involvement in Internet governance, while others are more authoritarian, limiting civic activity and discussions on various topics, including the Internet.

The disparity in internet connectivity and prices within Central Asia is attributed to government policies rather than geographical features. Sultanov provides an example of two similar countries with drastically different internet situations – one with cheap and accessible internet due to liberalized telecom policies and private sector involvement, and the other with expensive and poor internet due to state control of the telecom sector.[52]

It is assumed that Central Asia's diversity requires global efforts to encourage active participation in internet governance discussions. However, some non-internet-related conditions, referring to broader political and societal factors, hinder development in these countries. Overall, addressing the diverse political and governance landscape is crucial for fostering grassroots initiatives and internet development in Central Asia.

Anja Gengo, IGF Secretariat NRI focal point expresses a dual perspective – both personal and professional – in lauding the IGF as an effective and efficient platform. The effectiveness stems from the IGF's ability to facilitate discussions on topics prioritized by the global community. Its efficiency is attributed to its capacity to include diverse stakeholders, ranging from high-profile decision-makers like ministers and CEOs of technological companies to young students and academic community. This diversity, in terms of participants, is seen as a significant strength that contributes to a holistic and well-rounded discussion. A key aspect of the IGF's success in her opinion lies in its meticulous approach to inclusion and equal treatment. The platform is hailed for its careful tailoring of processes to ensure that all stakeholders are included and treated as equals. This means that, regardless of their position in the hierarchy – be

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[52] Interview with Talant Sultanov, MAG Member

it a government official or a student – participants engage in discussions on an equal footing. The emphasis on equal treatment underscores the commitment to fostering a democratic and open dialogue where ideas, regardless of their source, are given due consideration.

Early NRIs, by virtue of their experience and engagement, have acted as knowledge hubs and capacity-building centers. They have shared best practices, lessons learned, and insights gained from their participation in global discussions. This knowledge transfer has not only encouraged the establishment of new NRIs but has also empowered these initiatives with the tools and expertise needed to effectively participate in global agenda setting. A vivid example is involvement of Nigerian NRI representatives on consultations of the government on their perspectives in regards to the drone regulations and legislation. These presentations are not merely informative but also interactive, fostering a two-way exchange of knowledge and perspectives between the state and individuals involved within the NRIs. The Nigerian NRI offered insights into the potential socioeconomic benefits of drones while addressing concerns related to safety, privacy, and regulation.

The influence of early NRIs extends beyond inspiring new initiatives; it also fosters a culture of multistakeholder collaboration. As new NRIs emerge, they often seek guidance and collaboration opportunities with established initiatives. This collaborative spirit helps bridge the gap between various stakeholders, including governments, civil society, academia, and the private sector, facilitating inclusive and informed discussions on internet governance issues.

Gengo mentions in the interview that in 2023 she had the privilege of participating in various regional IGFs, both in person and online, including national, subregional, regional, and youth IGFs. She emphasized the considerable presence of government entities as a distinctive feature of recent NRIs. The case of the Asia Pacific regional IGF stands out, where both the host country, Australia, and other countries from the region, were well represented. This evolving dynamic not only reflects the regional diversity in participation but also presents a valuable opportunity for individuals to be heard by their respective governments, shaping and influencing internet governance discussions.

Moreover, the impact of early NRIs on subsequent initiatives is not limited to replication but extends to the diversification of agendas and priorities. While inspired by the foundational work of earlier NRIs, new initiatives often bring their unique perspectives and regional-specific concerns to the table. This diversity of agendas enriches the overall discourse on internet governance and ensures that a wide range of issues are addressed. The influence of early NRIs contributes to the strengthening of regional cohesion in internet governance. As countries within a region establish NRIs and collaborate with their neighbors, they collectively amplify their influence in regional and global discussions. This unity enables them to advocate for common interests and positions more effectively.

Jennifer Chung, a member of the Asia Pacific Regional IGF Secretariat, focused in the interview on identifying the strengths of the NRI network, comprising over 160 entities, and how these strengths can be leveraged in upcoming processes such as WSIS +20 and the Global Digital Compact (GDC). In her view, the key challenge is the establishment of effective channels for decision-makers to hear and understand individuals who can share their best practices, challenges, and discussions happening within each NRI forum.

An essential aspect highlighted by Chung is the need for decision-makers to participate in NRI meetings, experiencing first-hand the discussions on internet governance. Chung emphasized the importance of analyzing participation data and identifying missing stakeholders, both in terms of subregions and specific categories. The Asia Pacific Regional IGF, for instance, has undertaken initiatives like a stakeholder engagement committee to enhance inclusivity. Notably, co-locating events has proven successful in increasing exposure and cross-pollination of issues, providing a model for other regional or subregional IGFs to consider for sustainability.[53] She underscores the significance of these events by providing concrete examples: "This year we conducted four co-located events including NetThing Australia IGF, Pacific IGF, Asia Pacific Youth IGF."[54] She observes that such an approach facilitates cross-pollination of issues and broadens understanding, suggesting it as a viable strategy for the sustainability of subregional or regional IGFs.

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[53] Interview with Jennifer Chung, Asia Pacific NRI
[54] Ibid

Jennifer Chung also pointed out the significance of engaging decision-makers from the parliament track, as they play a crucial role in shaping regulations and laws. In her opinion the multiway dialogue creates a symbiotic learning relationship within the NRI network. She highlighted the Asia Pacific Youth IGF's efforts to facilitate an APAC youth leaders dialogue, emphasizing the need for the NRI network to leverage existing events that address similar issues and involve participants who may not typically attend NRI meetings. This strategy aligns with the goal of broadening dialogue and inclusivity within the diverse NRI community.

Some NRIs have increasingly adopted a strategic decentralization approach, opting to host meetings outside capital cities. Notable examples include the Brazilian, Italian, and Polish NRIs, which have chosen to host their meetings in various cities within their respective countries.[55] This decision represents a strategic move toward inclusivity, recognizing the diverse internet governance landscape and acknowledging the importance of engaging stakeholders from different geographic areas. By venturing beyond capital cities, NRIs employing this touring model ensure a more comprehensive and representative dialogue on internet governance issues.

Carlos Vera, Ecuador NRI Coordinator notes that one of the most challenging aspects for individuals from developing countries is enhancing collaboration with the governments of respective countries. In the interview he mentions that hosting major events in bigger countries like Japan or Brazil in Latin America or the United States might be financially more feasible, while smaller countries often face challenges in hosting such significant events, making it difficult for their governments to fully grasp the global landscape of these issues.[56] Therefore, in order to achieve more influence and sustainability, a key focus in his view should be made on fostering greater involvement and understanding with the government.

To sum up this research illuminates the significant impact of NRIs on shaping the discourse of internet governance. Through a detailed exploration of historical and contemporary factors, the study has revealed a compelling narrative of how early NRIs have acted as catalysts, inspiring the establishment of subsequent initiatives across the continent. This domino effect underscores the transformative influence of NRIs, not

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[55] NRI Coordination Session, IGF Kyoto 2023
[56] Interview with Carlos Vera, Ecuador NRI

only in inspiring replication but also in fostering a culture of multistakeholder collaboration.

The establishment and active participation of NRIs have not only triggered the inception of new initiatives but have also contributed to a regional and global dialogue on internet governance. The influence of these early NRIs extends beyond mere replication; it enriches the discourse by encouraging new initiatives to bring their unique perspectives and regional-specific concerns to the table. The diversity of agendas within the NRI network contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of internet governance issues and ensures that a wide range of issues are addressed.

Moreover, the research highlights the role of individuals and founders in the establishment and growth of NRIs. The study underscores the importance of early NRIs in serving as knowledge hubs and capacity-building centers, facilitating knowledge transfer, and empowering new initiatives with the tools and expertise needed to participate effectively in global agenda-setting.

As NRIs evolve, their impact on regional and global discussions becomes increasingly evident. The study showcases instances where NRIs have influenced decision-makers, bringing attention to the need for effective channels for policymakers to understand and engage with the discussions happening within each NRI forum. The emphasis on inclusivity, diverse stakeholder participation, and strategic decentralization in hosting meetings outside capital cities emerges as crucial factors contributing to the sustainability and effectiveness of NRIs.

To conclude this chapter, a comprehensive understanding of the dynamic role of NRIs in shaping internet governance, emphasizing their capacity to inspire, collaborate, and enrich the global discourse on issues critical to the development and governance of the internet was made. This analysis not only contributes to the existing body of knowledge but also offers insights that can inform future developments in the field of internet governance, showcasing the replicability and scalability of successful NRI approaches that include new participants across regions.

Role of Individuals within NRIs

Notably, NRIs are often initiated and driven by individuals rather than governments or corporations. Founders, often with prior involvement in internet governance, play a critical role in shaping the agendas and activities of NRIs. One striking characteristic of NRIs in Africa is the grassroots nature of their inception. Unlike some global policy initiatives that are government-driven or corporate-led, NRIs frequently emerge from the passion, commitment, and vision of individual founders who recognize the importance of internet governance and the need for local and regional dialogues. Many of these individual founders come to the NRI arena with prior involvement and experience in internet governance. They may have participated in global internet governance forums, worked in the tech industry, or been part of civil society organizations advocating for digital rights and inclusion. This prior engagement equips them with a deep understanding of the complexities and nuances of internet governance, making them well-positioned to initiate NRIs.

Back in the early 2000s a significant milestone was achieved when the first billion people gained access to the internet. Subsequently, discussions ensued about reaching the next billion, with some emphasizing the critical importance of addressing the last mile rather than focusing solely on automatic growth. Despite more than 60% of the world's population being online today, a substantial 2.5 billion people remain unconnected. The persistent issue of access underscores the ongoing need for discourse. For those without online access, it remains the primary challenge, says Markus Kummer.[57]

Once access is established, a cascade of other issues emerges. Various solutions, such as satellite access and initiatives like zero rating, have been implemented to bridge the digital divide.[58] Zero rating is a practice in the field of telecommunications and internet services where certain applications or services are not counted against a user's data usage or internet usage limits. [59] Essentially, it allows users to access specific content or applications without it affecting their data consumption or incurring additional charges. This approach is often employed by mobile service providers to

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[57] Interview with Markus Kummer, independent consultant specializing in Internet governance and policy, diplomat, serves at numerous boards of Internet Governance organizations (WSIS, ISOC, IGF)
[58] Ibid
[59] (Belli 2017)

make certain services more accessible and affordable to users, particularly in regions where data costs may be a barrier to internet usage.

These discussions operate on both global and national levels, facilitating the exchange of experiences and solutions. The IGF has proven adept at fostering collaboration, showcasing successes, and sharing best practices. Kummer in his interview notes that the early success of the IGF in promoting Internet exchange points is noteworthy. "I've heard positive feedback about workshops on setting up an Internet Service Provider (ISP), indicating that it's not as complex as rocket science and can be achieved with a $10,000 investment. However, colleagues involved in the field note that it's not the typical engineering that poses a challenge; instead, it's the social engineering required to ensure local collaboration." [60] Kummer recalled an experience from almost a decade ago when he was on a panel next to an individual from a small Pacific island. He shared how attending the IGF helped him learn about best practices, and by establishing an Internet exchange point, they achieved more affordable and improved Internet access on the island. This classic example demonstrates how sharing knowledge and solutions tailored to local needs can significantly enhance internet accessibility.

The IGF has played a pivotal role in bringing diverse stakeholders together, exemplified by instances where shared knowledge led to tangible improvements. Individuals are often the driving force behind the establishment of NRIs and actively shape their agendas and activities. They bring their insights, expertise, and passion to define the key issues that each NRI will address. These founders engage stakeholders from diverse backgrounds and popularise the issues on a larger scale, fostering a multistakeholder approach to internet governance.

The interviewees highlight a distinctive feature of the IGF – its year-round engagement. Unlike other forums that may be confined to annual events, the IGF's impact extends throughout the year. This extended engagement allows stakeholders to contribute to the dialogue, cooperate, create synergies, and form partnerships beyond the confines of the main event. The intercessional work undertaken by the IGF is portrayed as instrumental in outlining good practices, comparing them, and fostering

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[60] Interview with Markus Kummer, independent consultant specializing in Internet governance and policy, diplomat, serves at numerous boards of Internet Governance organizations (WSIS, ISOC, IGF)

collaboration. This commitment to ongoing engagement enhances the IGF's value by providing a continuous platform for stakeholders to contribute their inputs, creating tangible outputs that address issues at both global and local levels.
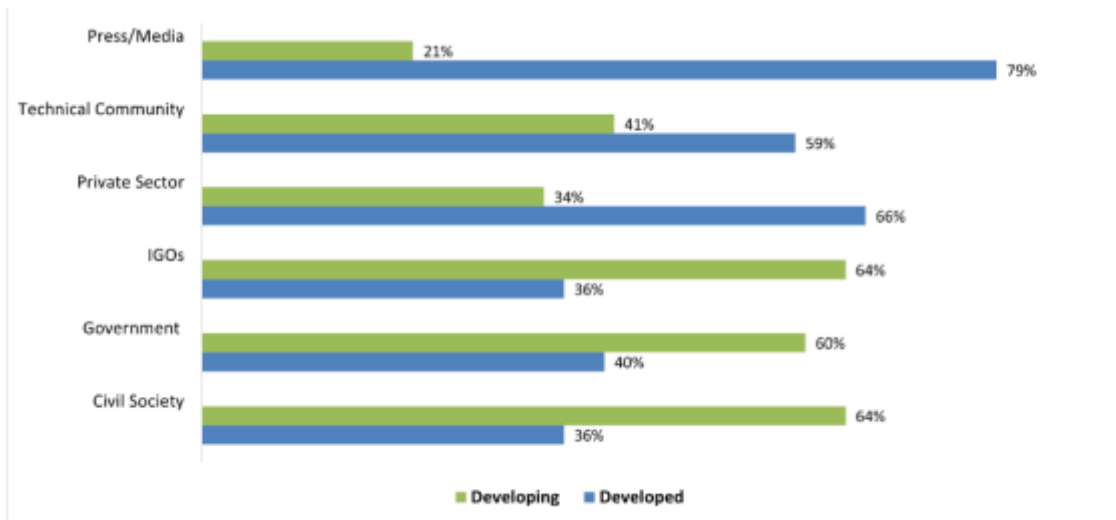
There are numerous platforms, initiatives, and processes dedicated to discussing Internet governance. The power of dialogue in these discussions is indeed invaluable. However, it's not common to find platforms where individuals from different levels and backgrounds can come together as equals to discuss priorities in a bottom-up process.

This is where the IGF proves to be exceptionally valuable. Unlike other processes that may involve specific targeted groups or focus on particular areas, the IGF allows diverse stakeholders to engage in discussions on issues of public policy related to the Internet. The (WSIS) is particularly noteworthy. In recent years, the WSIS has expanded its platforms, providing openness for everyone to join and participate in all sessions. While interactive elements allow engagement and questioning, the IGF stands out due to its continuous engagement throughout the year. Unlike the busy four or five days of intense stakeholder interaction, the IGF's intercessional work enables people to have a say and contribute to discussions, partnerships, and synergies year-round.

The IGF's intercessional work focuses on outlining both positive and challenging practices, comparing them, and facilitating learning among stakeholders. It aims to create a platform for consensus-based discussions, even when perspectives may differ. This ability to find a way forward through diverse viewpoints is a virtue of the forum, reflecting its success and efficiency over the years.

Today, the IGF's numbers speak volumes about its success, demonstrating that people consider the forum as their own ground. Kyoto 2023 IGF saw the record participation of more than nine thousand participants from 175 countries. [61] "They feel a sense of ownership, and during that particular time of the year, they believe they should be present to contribute to the discussions that shape the future of Internet governance", says Gengo.

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[61] (IGF Website n.d.)

Press/Media	21% (Developing)	79% (Developed)
Technical Community	41%	59%
Private Sector	34%	66%
IGOs	64%	36%
Government	60%	40%
Civil Society	64%	36%

■ Developing ■ Developed

IGF Website, IGF 2023 Participation statistics, Accessed December 5, 2023(https://www.intgovforum.org/en/content/igf-2023-participation-and-programme-statistics)

Regarding participation by the level of development of the country, based on the latest available HDI Index, there were about 53% from developed countries classified as "very high", and 47% from developing countries, not classified as "very high", with the stakeholder distribution as illustrated on the graph. The domino effect observed in the establishment and growth of NRIs underscores the significance of early initiatives in shaping the trajectory of internet governance engagement across the continent. Early NRIs not only inspired others to embark on their own internet governance journeys but also serve as mentors, knowledge-sharing platforms, and advocates for the importance of multistakeholder collaboration. As the influence of NRIs continues to expand, their role in shaping the global internet governance landscape becomes increasingly pronounced, ensuring that voices from diverse regions and backgrounds are heard and considered in shaping the future of the internet. Markus Kummer in the discussion noted that the presence of NRIs in one country has an impact on neighbouring countries. He emphasized historical importance of NRIs, which emerged about a year after the first global Internet Governance Forum started. He notes that "NRIs are platforms where local discussions meet global issues". Thus, he emphasizes the idea that discussing local problems first is more crucial before going global and regional and national initiatives provide the platform for individuals to be heard.

Kummer also stressed the role of remote participation hubs in creating an environment for shared interests and participation. These are places, often at technical universities, where people who can't afford to travel long distances come together to participate in the global IGF discussions. To explain the idea of hubs further, Kummer uses the example of public viewings during the 2006 European Football Championship. He emphasizes the sense of unity and how it can apply to watching something remotely with a group of people. Belonging to a larger group of people creates a synergy where individuals have opportunity to discuss issues relevant to their region and domain.

Overall, Kummer's discussion underscores the role of NRIs in local discourse and the crucial part played by hubs in connecting people globally. These hubs, located in various regions, show how successful models can be adapted and replicated. In essence, Kummer suggests that NRIs and IGF remote hubs not only facilitate local discussions, but also play a vital role in connecting people globally, contributing to the broader conversation on Internet governance.

Internet governance is analogous to a dynamic and evolving living organism, continuously undergoing transformations and adaptations. At the core of this evolutionary process are norm entrepreneurs, individuals or entities actively shaping and introducing new norms within the realm of internet governance. Among these norm entrepreneurs, National and Regional Internet Governance Forum (IGF) representatives emerge as influential contributors.

As during the WSIS the non -state actors were invited not only to the plenary as observers, but to also make brief interventions. It was a significant change from the traditional UN setting where governments were sole actors to make interventions.[62] Norms, which serve as the guiding principles and rules governing behavior and interactions in this ecosystem, are not static but rather dynamic entities that evolve over time.

Norm entrepreneurs play a pivotal role in driving this evolution by introducing, advocating for, and sometimes challenging existing norms. These entrepreneurs are individuals or groups with the vision and initiative to shape the normative order of the internet. They come from various sectors, including academia, civil society, industry,

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[62] Mathiason J, Internet Governance: The new frontier of global institutions, New York, NW: Routledege, 2009

or government, and actively engage in normative entrepreneurship by influencing the adoption and acceptance of specific norms.

Within this landscape, National and Regional IGF representatives stand out as norm entrepreneurs operating within the civil society domain. The National and Regional IGFs serve as platforms for multistakeholder dialogue, bringing together representatives from governments, civil society, the private sector, and the technical community. In this collaborative setting, civil society members, including IGF representatives, contribute significantly to the formulation and promotion of new norms in internet governance.

These representatives act as conduits for the voices and perspectives of diverse communities, reflecting the global and regional nuances of internet governance challenges. By participating in discussions, workshops, and policy-making processes, National and Regional IGF representatives engage in norm entrepreneurship. They actively contribute to the development and dissemination of norms that align with their communities' values and address emerging issues in the digital space.

Importantly, civil society's involvement ensures a more inclusive and diverse normative framework, considering the interests and rights of users, marginalized groups, and the broader public. The collaborative efforts within National and Regional IGFs, led by norm entrepreneurs from civil society, foster a bottom-up approach to norm creation, reflecting the diverse needs and concerns of different stakeholders in the internet governance ecosystem.[63]

National and Regional IGF representatives, as norm entrepreneurs play a crucial role in this process by actively contributing to the formulation and promotion of norms that reflect the values and interests of diverse communities in the ever-changing digital landscape.

Persistent and crucial issues within a specific country or region are elevated to the forefront of discussion through the collaborative efforts of National and Regional Internet Governance Forums (NRIs). These forums serve as vital platforms where stakeholders from various sectors, including governments, civil society, the private

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[63] Ibid

sector, and the technical community, come together to deliberate on pertinent internet governance challenges.

The NRIs play a pivotal role in identifying and addressing issues that hold significant importance within their respective territories. These issues can span a wide spectrum, ranging from digital rights and cybersecurity to access and inclusion. By placing these concerns on their agenda, NRIs ensure that local and regional perspectives are considered in the broader discourse on internet governance. Kummer in the interview raises a pertinent point regarding the importance of individuals aligning with specific communities or structured organizations. He underscores the common democratic process wherein participation often takes shape through organized consultations. He draws parallels with well-organized sectors in democratic countries, such as labor unions, business entities, and civil society organized through non-governmental organizations (NGOs) like Amnesty International or Article 19. Kummer acknowledges that, in democratic processes, individuals usually find a platform within organized groups to amplify their impact.

The conversation further delves into the dynamics of government legislation and the participatory channels available to individuals. Kummer illustrates the challenges faced by individual voices in the legislative process, emphasizing the prominence given to organized groups, especially in areas like human rights advocacy. He notes that, when governments prepare legislation, they often seek feedback during a consultative phase, giving more weight to the input of organized NGOs with a substantial track record. This, as Kummer explains, makes it more challenging for individual voices to be heard in structured processes.

Subsequently, the question at stake is the pathways for individuals, particularly from developing nations with limited exposure to the Internet governance agenda, to become part of established institutions or organizations. This query underscores the barriers faced by individuals in regions where Internet governance may not be as prevalent, shedding light on the need for accessible pathways for participation.

Once these issues are deliberated upon and discussed within the NRI, comprehensive reports are generated, capturing the essence of the discussions, key insights, and potential solutions. These reports serve as valuable documentation of the

collective intelligence and diverse viewpoints emanating from the multistakeholder discussions within the NRIs.

To facilitate broader accessibility and dissemination of this information, the reports are shared with the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) Secretariat. The IGF Secretariat acts as a central hub that compiles, organizes, and shares information on internet governance matters globally. By incorporating the data from NRIs into its repository, the IGF Secretariat contributes to building a comprehensive and up-to-date knowledge base.

The integration of NRI reports onto the IGF website ensures that the global community has direct access to firsthand information on the topics being discussed within different countries and regions. This accessibility fosters transparency and inclusivity, enabling stakeholders worldwide to stay informed about the diverse challenges and solutions emerging in various internet governance contexts.

The collaborative process between NRIs and the IGF Secretariat reflects the essence of multistakeholderism in internet governance. It acknowledges that the global community benefits from a rich tapestry of perspectives, experiences, and solutions originating at the local and regional levels. The NRIs, by contributing their insights to the global discourse, strengthen the overall fabric of internet governance, making it more responsive to the needs and realities of diverse communities.

In essence, the journey from local and regional deliberations to global accessibility demonstrates the interconnected nature of internet governance. NRIs serve as catalysts for surfacing crucial issues, and their collaboration with the IGF Secretariat ensures that the global community remains well-informed and engaged in the ongoing dialogue surrounding the evolution of the digital landscape.

National IGF Initiatives(103)

AFRICAN (34)

ASIA PACIFIC (15)

EASTERN EUROPE (16)

GRULAC (21)

WEOG (17)

IGF Website, List of NRIs according to the regions,

Accessed December 5, 2023(https://www.intgovforum.org/en/content/national-igf-initiatives)

In conclusion, this chapter delves into the multifaceted role of individuals within NRIs and their profound impact on shaping the landscape of internet governance. The grassroots nature of NRIs in Africa, often initiated and led by passionate individuals, underscores their pivotal role in inspiring and mentoring others, fostering a domino effect of internet governance initiatives across the continent.

The chapter also highlights the significance of early NRIs in addressing critical issues such as digital access and emphasizes the evolving nature of internet governance as a dynamic and adaptive system. The concept of remote participation hubs is introduced as a crucial element in creating shared environments for global discussions, enhancing inclusivity and connectivity.

Drawing parallels to a living organism, the chapter introduces the concept of norm entrepreneurs, with National and Regional IGF representatives identified as influential contributors. Their role in shaping and advocating for norms within the civil society domain, fostering inclusivity, and addressing the diverse needs of stakeholders is underscored.

The collaborative efforts of NRIs in identifying and addressing local and regional internet governance challenges are explored, with a focus on the crucial role played by individuals in aligning with organized groups for impactful participation. Additionally, the integration of NRI reports onto the IGF website is discussed as a key step in fostering transparency, inclusivity, and global access to diverse perspectives.

In essence, this chapter showcases the interconnected and collaborative nature of internet governance, where individuals, particularly within NRIs, play a central role in shaping the discourse. Their commitment to inclusive, multistakeholder dialogue contributes to a rich tapestry of perspectives, ultimately strengthening the fabric of internet governance to meet the evolving needs of our digital world.

CHAPTER III: FINDINGS

Overcoming challenges

Engaging meaningfully with the Internet governance agenda poses unique challenges for individuals, especially those from the developing world. As I delve into the landscape of National and Regional IGF Initiatives, it becomes evident that three primary challenges stand out prominently. The first challenge involves the crucial elements of awareness raising and capacity development. Many individuals may not be fully cognizant of the intricacies of Internet governance processes. While various initiatives, including IGF, work diligently to enhance visibility through regional and national events, a significant gap persists. It's not merely a matter of people being unaware that forums like the IGF exist; rather, the challenge lies in fostering a deeper understanding of how open and inclusive these processes truly are.

The second major challenge centers around the critical issue of funding. The financial constraints faced by individuals from developing nations present a formidable hurdle in their meaningful engagement with Internet governance. Limited resources can hinder participation in key events, limiting the representation of diverse voices. This financial constraint extends to aspects such as attending conferences, workshops, and other collaborative initiatives. Bridging this funding gap is essential for ensuring a more equitable and inclusive representation of perspectives, particularly from regions where economic challenges might otherwise impede active involvement.

The language barrier stands out as a significant challenge in the realm of Internet governance discussions. English, being the predominant language for these crucial conversations, poses a substantial obstacle for individuals from developing countries who may not be fluent in English. This linguistic disparity results in the exclusion of a considerable portion of the global population from actively participating in discussions that shape Internet governance policies and frameworks. The language-centric focus not only limits the engagement of individuals who do not speak English but also perpetuates a cycle where discussions are dominated by topics of interest to those already well-versed in technology and proficient in the English language. Overcoming this language barrier is essential for fostering a more inclusive and diverse representation in global forums, ensuring that the voices of communities with varying

linguistic backgrounds are heard and considered in the development of Internet governance initiatives.

Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach. Efforts must intensify to demystify the perception that meaningful contribution necessitates extensive prior knowledge. Creating targeted capacity development programs becomes imperative to empower individuals, enabling them to navigate these complex processes with confidence. Simultaneously, advocacy for increased funding and financial support mechanisms can play a pivotal role in breaking down economic barriers, fostering an environment where diverse voices, regardless of their origin, can actively contribute to shaping the global Internet governance agenda.

Awareness raising

Concerning the awareness raising, a significant portion of individuals might lack complete information regarding the existence of these processes. It's not that these platforms are invisible; rather, the challenge lies in how people perceive their accessibility and openness. Anja Gengo in her interview mentions that "in situations where established processes have a two-decade tradition, newcomers might feel daunted, unsure about how they can integrate into a landscape that seems to have a long-established dynamics."

Addressing this challenge requires a concerted effort to communicate the inclusive and welcoming nature of these forums. While stakeholders, including IGF Secretariat in the NRI ecosystem, diligently work on visibility through social and traditional media, there is a need for more targeted outreach. Individuals might be aware of the existence of forums like the IGF but may lack understanding on how to actively engage. Bridging this gap requires focused initiatives to convey the openness and friendliness of these platforms.

Furthermore, the challenge extends to capacity development, especially for newcomers who may hesitate to participate due to concerns about lacking familiarity with the processes. Efforts must be intensified to establish capacity development forums, enabling newcomers to quickly catch up, gain confidence, and participate

without reservations. Initiatives like the newcomers program in the African IGF are steps in the right direction.[64]

Additionally, the lack of institutional capacity poses a significant hurdle. Institutions need to be made aware of the importance of these processes and take ownership, ensuring representation before decisions are made. This is crucial not only for stakeholders but also for institutions like parliaments and courts, which should have a deep understanding of the technology and multi-stakeholder aspects before making decisions that impact policy and legislation. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive strategy that promotes accessibility, understanding, and active engagement in the dynamic landscape of Internet governance.

The discussions held at the IGF in Kyoto shed light on the importance of a wholesome dialogue with active participation of the developing world in the evolving landscape of artificial intelligence (AI) and cybersecurity. Dr. Mohammed Shabir resonated with the disparities present in our global society. He underscored the stark reality that, despite the aspirational ideals of inclusivity and accessibility in the digital realm, the developing world faces tangible hurdles.[65] These challenges range from infrastructural limitations to digital literacy concerns. The questions raised about technology transfer and the readiness of the Global North to share technological advancements highlighted a critical aspect—bridging the digital divide is not merely about access to tools but about ensuring equitable participation in the digital age.

During the interview Dr. Tatiana Tropina emerged as a pivotal voice, bringing a nuanced perspective to the discourse on artificial intelligence (AI) and role of developing world in the process. Her insights centered on the imperative to redefine the concept of fairness within the AI landscape. Tropina underscored that while guiding principles, such as fairness, transparency, and accountability, are crucial, they fall short in offering actionable methods to achieve these goals.

In the discussion Tatiana challenged the conventional understanding of fairness, advocating for a broader framework that transcends geographical and socioeconomic boundaries. Rather than limiting fairness to the context of developed nations, she called for a paradigm shift that considers the impact of AI on every community, irrespective

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[64] IGF Website, Newcomers Track
[65] AI Driven Cyber Defense: Empowering Developing Nations, IGF Kyoto Workshop

of their level of technological development. This inclusive approach aims to ensure that the benefits and protections offered by AI technologies are accessible to diverse populations globally. She also raised the same discussion during one of the IGF Kyoto 2023 workshops.

Tatiana's remarks resonated with the need to move beyond generic principles and delve into specific regulatory frameworks. She referenced initiatives like the Council of Europe's proposal for a global treaty on AI and the European Union's AI Act. These frameworks, according to Tropina, have the potential to become game-changers by providing a foundation for addressing issues related to human rights, fairness, and the ethical use of AI.

Dr. Tropina's call for redefining fairness in the realm of artificial intelligence holds profound implications for individuals from the developing world. By advocating for an expanded and inclusive notion of fairness, Tatiana aims to bridge the technological gap and ensure that the benefits of AI are not disproportionately limited to developed nations. Her insights resonate strongly with individuals in developing countries who often face challenges related to infrastructure, digital literacy, and accessibility. The emphasis on a global perspective in defining fairness underscores the need for tailored approaches that consider the unique socio-economic contexts of developing regions.

Financial Sustainability Challenges

Financial sustainability emerges as a significant challenge for individuals to engage in capacity-building, and participate actively in global internet governance discussions. While IGF adopts a hybrid approach, allowing anyone to participate online, it's crucial to acknowledge that not everyone has meaningful connectivity. The internet's affordability and accessibility vary globally, and not everyone possesses reliable devices. This is today's reality, and addressing these disparities is imperative.

Moreover, not everyone possesses the skills to navigate online platforms effortlessly. Clicking on Zoom, muting, unmuting, and participating may not be straightforward for everyone. Time zone differences further compound these challenges, as illustrated by the need for some participants, to rise at 3 or 4 AM for certain processes. It is a shared challenge for people around the world.

Additionally, while online participation is valuable, it falls short of capturing the full essence of on-site engagement. Drawing from my personal experiences in various international conferences, the true magic of connection, partnerships, and idea exchange often occurs during bilateral meetings or informal social events. Time constraints and packed agendas during online sessions limit flexibility, hindering the opportunity to meet people, experience their work, and understand their visions.

IGF Secretariat provides travel support, but it remains limited. I wholeheartedly agree with this perspective, reflecting on my experience in Kyoto. Meeting with MAG members and various stakeholders made it much easier for me to reach out to them later for discussions related to my research. The openness and willingness to engage were palpable in face-to-face interactions, and I acknowledge that it might have been more challenging if I were solely an online participant, unfamiliar whom to approach.

In the interview Poncelet Jokkolabs Banjul, Gambia NRI Coordinator emphasizes the need for a comprehensive approach to ensure participation of the individuals from the developing world in the internet governance agenda, using the example of Gambia's successful model where government, parliament, and local UNDP offices are actively engaged. He highlights the importance of securing government buy-in and budgetary support for sustained initiatives. In his opinion increased involvement of UNDP regional offices can amplify voices at the regional level. [66]

Emmanuel Vitus Agbenonwossi, Togo NRI Coordinator draws attention to a critical issue regarding funding for internet governance initiatives. He highlights the challenges faced by regional schools, specifically the South Africa School of Internet Governance, in securing the necessary financial support. According to Agbenonwossi, these schools, which serve as vital training grounds for future community leaders and youth advocates, lack the funding required for their sustainability.[67]

Emphasizing the importance of these regional schools, Emanuel underscores their role in training individuals who will play key roles in shaping internet governance conversations. He notes the scarcity of funding for such initiatives, which hinders their ability to continue providing valuable training opportunities. He also expressed

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[66] Interview with Poncelet Jokkolabs Banjul, Gambia NRI
[67] NRI Coordination meeting

concern that without a reliable mechanism for funding, the sustainability of these schools at the regional level becomes uncertain.

Recognizing the significance of training young people to lead in internet governance discussions, Emanuel stresses the need to find a solution to the funding challenges faced by regional schools. He sees this as essential for ensuring the continuity of these valuable processes and fostering the development of future leaders in the field of internet governance.[68]

English language as the point of entry

The language barrier emerges as the third pivotal factor influencing the limited growth of grassroots initiatives in the context of Internet governance, as asserted by interviewees. At the core of this challenge is the predominance of English as the main lingua franca for discussions related to Internet governance. The speaker underscores that the majority of people in developing countries do not speak English, thereby excluding them from these critical conversations.

This language-centric focus, according to the speaker, represents a significant hurdle and perhaps the most crucial impediment. The consequence is that individuals who do not speak English are effectively marginalized from discussions that shape Internet governance policies and frameworks. The language bias is perceived as a systemic barrier, excluding a substantial portion of the global population, particularly in developing countries.

Despite concerted efforts by the secretariat of the IGF to enhance diversity in terms of gender, geography, and sectors the language barrier remains a formidable challenge. While positive strides are acknowledged, Sultanov Talant anticipates that the actual discussions in forums like the IGF will continue to be dominated by topics of interest to those already well-versed in technology, often favoring discussions on advanced topics like artificial intelligence and the Internet of Things.

Sultanov posits that this dominance of certain discussions perpetuates a cycle, relevant only to already-connected communities with proficiency in English. The acute language disparities exacerbate the vulnerability of communities in landlocked, mountainous countries, or small island nations. While acknowledging the presence of

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[68] Ibid

voices representing these communities, he expresses skepticism about the adequacy of such representation.

In seeking potential solutions, interviewees agree that communities themselves need to become more active in representing their interests and needs. Increased involvement of national governments is also proposed, emphasizing that policymakers and decision-makers, who may be apprehensive due to tech-related concerns, need to play a more proactive role. Efforts at the grassroots level, including raising digital skills and awareness, are imperative. While acknowledging the potential role of the global community, Sultanov asserts that the responsibility lies significantly with the affected communities.

In essence, the language barrier emerges as a formidable challenge, reinforcing the imperative for a more inclusive approach that addresses linguistic diversity, empowers communities, and engages governments at both national and international levels. The call to action emphasizes collaborative efforts that extend beyond the global community, with a shared responsibility to bridge the linguistic gap hindering the active participation of diverse communities in discussions on Internet governance.

Newcomers' voices

It seems natural to acknowledge there is a distinction between those who have been part of the IGF for an extended period and those who are just entering the process, as confidence plays a crucial role in one's performance. These processes are complex and have a relatively long history. Individuals who have been involved with the IGF for an extended period likely feel more at ease speaking on certain issues than newcomers. However, it's essential to note that the length of involvement doesn't necessarily correlate with the value or impact of contributions. Newcomers, despite being in the process for the first time, often make significant contributions by getting inspired at the IGF and implementing initiatives in their communities, such as starting national IGFs or Internet governance schools.[69] These concrete contributions play a vital role in advancing the global Internet governance ecosystem. Thus, it may not be accurate to compare the contributions of long-time participants and newcomers directly. The

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[69] Interview with Anja Gengo, IGF Secretariat. NRI focal point

nuanced nature of this comparison becomes evident in discussions where newcomers may not feel as confident, especially when addressing topics like the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS)+20 review, which requires institutional knowledge spanning the past two decades.

The World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) is a two-phase United Nations summit that played a pivotal role in shaping global discussions on information and communication technologies (ICTs) and the broader concept of the Information Society. The first phase took place in Geneva in 2003, focusing on establishing a shared vision and adopting the Declaration of Principles.[70] This summit brought together representatives from governments, civil society, the private sector, and international organizations to deliberate on key issues, including digital access, ICT infrastructure, and the equitable distribution of digital opportunities.

The second phase of WSIS occurred in Tunis in 2005, aiming to translate the principles outlined in the Geneva Declaration into actionable strategies.[71] The resulting Tunis Agenda for the Information Society provided a framework for concrete steps to bridge the digital divide, ensure universal access to ICTs, and address the societal impact of technology. The WSIS process has had a lasting impact on global discussions surrounding internet governance, digital inclusion, and the integration of ICTs into the broader global development agenda. It remains a significant reference point for policies and initiatives aimed at harnessing the transformative power of information and communication technologies for the benefit of all.

The dynamics within the IGF are shaped by the interplay between experienced participants and newcomers. While those who have been part of the IGF for an extended period may naturally exude more confidence, drawing from their wealth of experience and familiarity with the intricacies of the forum and WSIS processes, newcomers bring a fresh and distinct perspective to the table. The value of these contrasting viewpoints lies in the comprehensive understanding they collectively offer regarding the current state of the IGF.

Attempting to compare the contributions of experienced participants with those of newcomers is a nuanced task, as it hinges on the specific context and situation under

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[70] International Telecommunication Union website
[71] Ibid

consideration. The complexity of IGF discussions, which span a wide array of topics related to internet governance, demands varied insights. Seasoned participants may feel more comfortable addressing certain issues, given their historical knowledge and institutional memory. On the other hand, newcomers, unencumbered by the weight of past discussions, can provide a real-time assessment of the IGF's relevance, reflecting the immediate concerns and perspectives of the contemporary digital landscape. Consequently, both groups play indispensable roles, contributing to the richness and diversity of discussions within the IGF.

Involvement into the global internet governance discussion

The call for reflection on the future of NRI comes at a critical juncture, with global political dynamics evolving and key processes, such as the WSIS+20 review in 2025, on the horizon. Ana Cristina Amoroso das Neves, Chair of the Commission on Science, Technology, and Development (CSTD) and Founder of the Portuguese NRI emphasizes the importance of this moment, urging collective brainstorming to strengthen the NRIs network, thereby contributing to a robust internet governance and the forum's ecosystem outlining individual and collective responsibility.[72] The impending review of the WSIS+20 in 2025 adds urgency to the discussion, aligning with broader processes like the Global Digital Compact and the UN Sustainable Development Goals. WSIS+20 is the review of the outcomes and progress made in the implementation of WSIS goals 20 years after the initial summit. The review is set to take place in 2025, marking two decades since the inception of the WSIS process. It provides an opportunity to assess achievements, address challenges, and set priorities for the future in the context of evolving global digital governance as well as sets the future for the IGF.[73]

Amidst this backdrop, Gengo encourages collaboration and reflection on the role of NRIs and individuals in shaping a stronger internet governance ecosystem. The focus extends to individual contributions and collective efforts that foster inclusivity and bridge the gap between local and global perspectives. In her opinion, the NRIs'

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[72] NRI Coordination session, IGF Kyoto 2023
[73] IGF Website https://www.intgovforum.org/en/content/wsis20-and-igf20-review-by-the-un-general-assembly-2025

unique position as a network of over 160 initiatives worldwide becomes a powerful force for informing governments about the significance and impact of these forums on shaping digital policies and strategies.[74]

Gengo's insights into the CSTD's roadmap for the WSIS+20 review highlight an ambitious plan involving open consultations, surveys, and synthesis reports. The involvement of various stakeholders, including governments, international organizations, private sectors, civil society, technical communities, and academia, underscores the multidimensional nature of internet governance. The active participation of NRIs in these processes is crucial, serving as a conduit to inform governments and advocate for the value of inclusive, multistakeholder discussions.

As NRIs play a pivotal role in shaping the narrative of internet governance, Ana's call resonates with the need to ensure that the network remains interconnected, sustainable, and influential in the broader global decision-making landscape. This moment calls for concerted efforts from NRIs to amplify their impact, especially in the WSIS+20 review, by effectively communicating their contributions to governments and stakeholders alike. The journey ahead involves collective action, strategic engagement, and a commitment to inclusivity to strengthen the NRIs network for the evolving challenges of the digital age.

Wakas Hassan, Pakistan Telecommunication authority representative and an active IGF member, notes from his personal experience the natural progression and path for the individuals. Initiatives like the School on Internet Governance in Pakistan provided him with a starting point.[75] There potential leaders at the national level were identified. This progression extended to regional and global levels, creating a pathway for the next generation of internet leaders. He mentioned that NRI expansive network serves as a platform for amplifying these voices. Their participation in national, regional, and global IGF facilitates grooming and showcasing emerging leaders on both regional and global stages.

Sateesh Babu, a IGF 2023 participant from India, supports the idea and sees progress made by national IGF initiatives in India over the past eight years. He

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[74] Ibid
[75] Wakas Hasan, Pakistan Telecommunication Authority

mentions that Indian School of Internet governance played a pivotal role in advocating for the establishment of the IGF, which was notably absent for an extended period.[76]

Sateesh mentions that Indian School of Internet Governance took the lead, actively involving individuals and urging the government's participation. Consequently, in the last two years, Indian IGF was successfully organised.[77] One significant outcome of the IGF has been the convergence of high-level ministers and individuals at the grassroots level onto a unified platform. Sateesh emphasizes the significance of this development, particularly considering India's vast size.

He also underscores the global disparity in the existence of multistakeholder structures driving internet governance and highlights the crucial role individuals play in this context. Notably, India's IGF has transformed into a multistakeholder entity, fostering discussions without an immediate focus on decision-making. Sateesh views this as a crucial step, considering that many countries lack robust multistakeholder frameworks akin to those seen in Brazil or the European Union. In his opinion Indian NRI is an important platform for future multistakeholder engagement, potentially progressing towards a phase where it can actively involve individuals in decision-making processes.

Talant Sultanov, IGF Multistakeholder Advisory Group Member, firmly supports the idea that involving individuals from the developing world through existing mechanisms is the most straightforward way to initiate the process.[78] He places significant emphasis on the continued backing of initiatives that fortify the multistakeholder model in internet governance. Sultanov underscores the imperative to identify underrepresented sectors and actively engage them in the internet governance process. In the discourse surrounding Internet governance, a compelling argument emerges for the active participation of individuals hailing from the developing world, particularly those residing in remote and vulnerable regions. Sultanov staunchly advocates for the integration of such communities into specific platforms, structures, or organizations that engage in discussions pertaining to Internet governance issues.

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[76] NRI Coordination meeting
[77] IGF Website (https://www.intgovforum.org/en/content/india-igf-0)
[78] Interview with Talant Sultanov, IGF MAG member

The crux of Sultanov's perspective lies in the ongoing efforts to bridge the digital divide by connecting the unconnected, particularly those situated in the "last mile" - the most challenging and hard-to-reach corners of developing countries. Emphasizing the vulnerability of these communities, he contends that they should not be relegated to the sidelines of global discussions. Instead, they should be brought to the forefront, becoming a pivotal focus in the discourse on Internet governance.

The metaphorical transformation of the "last mile" into the "first mile" encapsulates Sultanov's vision for prioritizing connectivity in the most difficult locations. By including and empowering the most vulnerable communities, the author argues, the groundwork is laid for more effective resolutions to Internet governance issues. Drawing from a practical example in Kyrgyzstan, where unconnected villages were successfully linked, he underscores the significance of initiating efforts in the most challenging locations.

The stance is grounded in the belief that connecting these hard-to-reach communities is a catalyst for change. By doing so, the private sector, government, and other stakeholders are left with no excuse to neglect or overlook these areas, debunking the notion that they are impossible to reach or involve. This approach, as demonstrated in the Kyrgyzstan's example, challenges the status quo, where traditionally, difficult locations are left unconnected for extended periods.

In the broader context of global discussions on Internet governance, Sultanov contends that issues related to the developing world, particularly the unconnected communities, are often overshadowed. He highlights the lack of representation and discussion concerning the challenges faced by these communities on international platforms. Thus, the call to action is clear: inclusivity is key, and the most vulnerable populations must be actively involved in shaping the trajectory of Internet governance discussions. Only by bringing their issues to the forefront can the global community ensure a more comprehensive and equitable approach to addressing the challenges of the digital era.

In addition, Sultanov highlights the inclusion of individuals, advocating for the implementation of mechanisms that not only encourage but also facilitate their active participation. Moreover, he stresses the paramount importance of disseminating the outcomes of local discussions and endeavors to systemize these results into

multistakeholder messages that contribute to the overall development and enhancement of the internet. These efforts in his view can be successfully implemented through National and Regional Initiatives. Sultanov's stance emphasizes practical and inclusive measures to involve individuals from the developing world, promoting a multistakeholder approach for the continued progress and development of internet governance through existing mechanisms and platforms.

Conclusion

In the landscape of global governance theory, the concept of norm entrepreneurship takes center stage, spotlighting the influence of individuals or groups in shaping norms and policies at a global level. Research delves into the realm of norm entrepreneurship within the context of NRIs exploring how these actors actively contribute to the development and diffusion of norms in the field of internet governance. Specifically, the intricate role of norm entrepreneurs is examined in influencing local agendas through national meetings, their impact on regional and global Internet Governance Forum and the nuanced dynamics that come into play at the individual level.

Norm entrepreneurs from the developing world within NRIs wield considerable influence in shaping local agendas through their active participation in national meetings. These gatherings serve as crucibles where ideas are exchanged, and policies are formulated to address the unique challenges and concerns specific to each nation. The individuals involved in these national meetings serve as catalysts, steering discussions towards the development of norms that resonate with the local context.

The influence of norm entrepreneurship extends beyond national boundaries, as the discussions and norms shaped at local meetings are transmitted to Regional and Global IGFs. This transmission process ensures the integration of diverse perspectives, effectively bridging the gap between local concerns and global governance. Individuals act as conduits, representing the intricacies of their respective regions on a broader stage, contributing to the ongoing discourse of global internet governance.

The effectiveness of individuals within NRIs is intricately tied to the initiative and their commitment. The advent of the internet has democratized participation, eliminating barriers related to physical presence. The major prerequisites for participation are a stable internet connection, proficiency in the English language, and an awareness of the open nature of platforms like NRIs. This has transformed norm entrepreneurship into a more accessible endeavor, dependent on the engagement and dedication of individuals.

The internet's democratization of participation has opened doors for individuals to actively engage in internet governance discussions. NRIs provide a unique opportunity for norm entrepreneurs as they transcend the limitations of ad hoc events.

Instead, they constitute a series of interconnected events and networks that remain active throughout the year. This sustained engagement allows individuals to build relationships, share experiences, and collectively work towards influencing internet governance norms.

Interviewees underscore the importance of being part of larger networks to amplify impact and ensure individual voices are heard. NRIs, by their nature, facilitate the creation of such networks. The continuous engagement throughout the year allows norm entrepreneurs to build relationships and collaborate with like-minded individuals globally, creating a stronger collective voice that resonates in the broader discourse of internet governance.

Norm entrepreneurship within NRIs emerges as a dynamic process, interwoven with the shaping of local agendas, influencing regional and global discussions, and fostering collaboration within larger networks. As the internet democratizes participation, the effectiveness of norm entrepreneurship rests on the shoulders of committed individuals. NRIs, acting as consistent and connected platforms, play a pivotal role in empowering norm entrepreneurs to actively contribute to the ongoing development and diffusion of norms in the field of internet governance. This chapter serves as a lens through which we explore the nuanced interplay between individual agency and collective influence within the ever-evolving landscape of internet governance.The exploration into NRI Initiatives provides valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities that individuals, particularly from developing nations, encounter in engaging with the global internet governance agenda. The chapters traverse the multifaceted landscape of Internet governance, delving into awareness raising, capacity development, financial sustainability, newcomers' voices, and the crucial role of these initiatives in global discussions. As we navigate through the voices of experts, and active IGF participants, a holistic understanding emerges, shedding light on the pivotal role of multistakeholder collaboration in shaping the future of internet governance.

The thesis explored the dynamic process through which NRIs serve as pivotal platforms for discussions and deliberations concerning internet governance within the context of individual nations and regions. It investigates the mechanisms by which

individuals and stakeholders participate in these initiatives, engage in dialogues, and contribute to setting national and regional internet governance agendas

The findings of the research present challenges faced by individuals in developing nations and demonstrate their multi-dimensional nature. The chapters highlight the hurdles of awareness and capacity development, emphasizing the need for targeted outreach and initiatives to demystify the intricacies of internet governance processes. Financial sustainability emerges as a significant barrier, hindering meaningful participation due to disparities in internet affordability, accessibility, and digital literacy. English language as the lingua franca of the Internet governance landscape also emerged as a hurdle of entry point for the individuals from the developing world. Overcoming these challenges requires concerted efforts to bridge the knowledge gap, provide financial support, and make internet governance more accessible to diverse voices.

National and Regional IGF Initiatives emerge as powerful platforms, acting as catalysts for meaningful discourse at local, regional, and global levels. The chapters underscore the vital role played by NRIs in surfacing and addressing persistent issues within specific countries and regions. These initiatives create spaces for recurring multistakeholder dialogue, ensuring that the diverse perspectives of governments, civil society, the private sector, and the technical community are considered in the broader discourse on internet governance. NRIs serve as conduits for the voices and concerns of different stakeholders, fostering a bottom-up approach to norm creation.

The IGF stands out due to its year-round involvement, a unique aspect that sets it apart from other forums typically limited to annual events. Its influence isn't confined to specific moments; rather, it spans the entire year. This prolonged engagement empowers individuals to actively participate in ongoing conversations, collaborate, establish synergies, and build partnerships beyond the primary event. The IGF's intercessional efforts play a pivotal role in defining best practices, conducting comparisons, and fostering collaboration. This steadfast commitment to continuous engagement enhances the IGF's significance, providing a sustained platform for stakeholders to contribute, yielding tangible results that address global and local issues.

Newcomers, despite facing challenges, bring fresh and distinct perspectives to the internet governance table. Their contributions, though different from those with

extensive experience, are valuable in advancing the global internet governance ecosystem. The chapters highlight the nuanced nature of comparing contributions between long-time participants and newcomers, emphasizing the need to recognize the unique impact of each group. Initiatives like Schools on Internet Governance play a pivotal role in identifying potential leaders and fostering their growth on both regional and global stages.

Moreover, financial sustainability emerges as a critical factor in ensuring active participation in global internet governance discussions. The chapters underline the need for collaboration with governments, emphasizing the importance of securing budgetary support for sustained initiatives. The experiences shared by NRI coordinators from different regions highlight the challenges faced by regional schools and underscore the necessity of finding reliable funding mechanisms for their sustainability. Collaborative efforts at the national and regional levels become imperative for navigating the financial challenges hindering meaningful engagement.

Additionally, the chapters provide a comprehensive view of multistakeholderism in action, where individuals from diverse backgrounds actively contribute to shaping the global internet governance landscape. The call for reflection on the future of NRIs aligns with the evolving global political dynamics and the imminent WSIS+20 review in 2025. The WSIS+20 review provides a significant opportunity for NRIs to amplify their impact, communicate their contributions to governments, and advocate for inclusive, multistakeholder discussions. The interconnectedness, sustainability, and influence of the NRIs network are crucial for navigating the evolving challenges of the digital age.

In examining the chapters collectively, the research question centered on understanding the challenges faced by individuals from developing nations in engaging with the internet governance agenda and identifying strategies for meaningful participation. The insights gained underscore the multifaceted nature of these challenges, ranging from awareness and capacity development to financial sustainability. The role of National and Regional IGF Initiatives emerges as a pivotal factor in addressing these challenges, providing platforms for diverse voices, empowering newcomers, and fostering collaboration. The research suggests that a

holistic and collaborative approach, rooted in multistakeholder principles, is essential for shaping an inclusive and responsive global internet governance ecosystem.

In conclusion, the journey through these chapters illuminates the dynamic and evolving nature of internet governance, where the voices of individuals, regardless of their background or experience, contribute to shaping the digital landscape. The future of internet governance lies in the collective efforts of diverse stakeholders, working together to overcome challenges, bridge gaps, and ensure that the internet remains a tool for empowerment, innovation, and inclusivity on a global scale.

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APPENDIX A

Description of the collected data

As per the established agreement, the interviews for this research project took place at the IGF 2023 venue in Kyoto on October 8 – 12, 2023. Furthermore, new contacts were formed during the Annual IGF, following which subsequent interviews were conducted online. These directions for the research have been shaped based on the insightful discussions held with Anja Gengo, the NRI focal point within the IGF Secretariat.

Data collection timeline

April- June 2023: Conducted a thorough literature review on internet governance, the multistakeholder approach, and the role of individuals/experts from developing nations in decision-making.

July – September 2023: Internship at the IGF Secretariat. Collected data through document analysis of past IGF meetings and conducted interviews with key stakeholders, including individuals/experts from developing nations and representatives from governments, civil society organizations, private sector entities, and technical experts.

September – October 2023: Analysed the data and identify power dynamics present within the IGF and the role of individuals/experts from developing nations in decision-making.

8 October – 12 October 2023 – Participated in the IGF annual meeting in Kyoto and conducted interviews onsite

November – December 2023: Subsequent interviews conducted online with IGF Kyoto contacts.

APPENDIX B

Growth of the number of National IGF Initiatives

2011 IGF Nairobi	2012 IGF Baku	2013 IGF Bali

African IGF	Nigeria IGF	Persian IGF
Arab IGF	Latin America and Caribbean IGF	Regional Internet Governance Forum of Azerbaijan
Asia Pacific IGF	Southern Africa IGF	Benin IGF
Caribbean IGF	Brazil IGF	Danish IGF
Central Africa IGF	Denmark IGF	Malta IGF
Commonwealth IGF	Finland IGF	German Youth IGF
East Africa IGF	Ghana IGF	Youth IGF (Asia Pacific)
European Dialogue on Internet Governance (EuroDig)	Netherlands IGF	IGF Latin American and Caribbean Regional Preparatory Meeting for the IGF (LAC IGF)
Latin America and Caribbean IGF	Netherlands IGF	Southern Africa IGF
Pacific IGF	Rwanda IGF	
Southern Africa IGF	Spain IGF	
West Africa IGF	Tanzania IGF	
Bangladesh IGF	Togo IGF	
Brazil IGF		
Cote d'Ivoire IGF		
Canada IGF		
Denmark IGF		did not submit NRI report/did not hold events
Finland IGF		reappear after some time of absence
Ghana IGF		newly added country
Germany IGF		
Italy IGF		
Japan IGF		
Kenya IGF		
Netherlands IGF		
New Zealand IGF		
Portugal IGF		
Russia IGF		
Rwanda IGF		
Spain IGF		
Tanzania IGF		
Togo IGF		
Uganda IGF		
Ukrainian IGF		
United Kingdom IGF		
USA IGF		
Youth IGF Project		
Youth IGF		

2014 IGF Istanbul 🇹🇷   **2015 IGF João Pessoa** 🇧🇷   **2016 IGF Jalisco** 🇲🇽

Mozambique IGF (Smart Dialogue on Internet Governance)

South Eastern European Dialogue on Internet Governance (SEEDIG)

Argentina IGF

Armenia IGF

Austria IGF

Bosnia and Herzegovina IGF

Brazilian Internet Forum

Belarus IGF

Bosnia and Herzegovina IGF

Brazilian Internet Forum

Belarus IGF

Croatia IGF

Chad IGF

Colombia IGF

Malta IGF

Mexico IGF

Paraguay IGF

Peru IGF

Swiss IGF

Zimbabwe IGF

Denmark IGF

Netherlands IGF

Afghanistan	Maldives
Albania	Mali
Bangladesh	Malta
Barbados	Mauritius
Bolivia	Moldova
Botswana	Namibia
Burkina Faso	Nepal
Cabo Verde	North Macedonia
Cameroon	Pakistan
Chad	Panama
Chi8na	Paraguay
Comoros	Peru
Costa Rica	Poland
Cote d\Ilvoire	Republic of Korea
	Saint Vincent and the Grenadines
Czhehch Republic	
Democratic Republic of the Congo	Senegal
Dominican Republic	Sevia
Ecuador	Sierra Leone
El Salvador	Slovenia
Estonia	South Sudan
France	Sti lanka
Gabon	Sudan
Georgia	Tanzania
Greece	Trinidad and Tobago
Guatemala	Vanuatu
Haiti	Venezuela
Honduras	Zambia
Hungary	
India	
Indonesia	
Japan	
Kazakhstan	
Kyrgyzstan	
Liberia	
Libya	
Madagascar	
Malawi	

2017 IGF Geneva 🇨🇭

2018 IGF Paris 🇫🇷

2019 IGF Berlin 🇩🇪

2020 IGF vIGF 🇺🇳

2021 IGF Katowice 🇵🇱

2022 IGF Addis Ababa 🇪🇹

2023 IGF Kyoto 🇯🇵

APPENDIX C

National IGFs map

IGF Website, NRIs Map, Accessed December 5, 2023

(https://www.intgovforum.org/en/content/national-and-regional-igf-initiatives)

🔴 Regional IGF   🟩 Youth IGF   📍 National IGF

🟡 Number of IGFs held in the region   🔵 Number of IGFs held in the location