

2014 Best Bits Meeting Report

INTRODUCTION

On August 31, 2014, Best Bits (BB) held its 2014 meeting in Istanbul, Turkey ahead of the 9th annual Internet Governance Forum (IGF) being held in the city September 2-5. The objectives of the meeting were to move Best Bits forward from NETmundial to share analysis and strategy on a range of key Internet policy processes that civil society groups plan to influence over the coming year. Through the shared outputs of this meeting and the indirect benefits of participation, there was an expectation of empowering civil society organisations and individual activists to create more informed, effective, inclusive and complementary advocacy outcomes, in which the public interest is better reflected in high-level policy discussions and in the outputs that these discussions produce. The BB steering committee aimed to use this meeting to place Best Bits on a firmer institutional footing, in order to enhance its legitimacy as a broad-based civil society advocacy network and improve its long-term sustainability. The following are the summarized notes and outputs that came from the meeting.

HIGHLIGHTS AND TACTICS FOR IGF

Before going into the main agenda, the Best Bits Steering Committee member Andrew Puddephatt explained the history of Best Bits to the participants. In talking about Best Bits, he discussed the conception of Best Bits as an proactive civil society platform for action oriented discussion on internet governance issues. Puddephatt also pointed to another goal of the meeting as working towards more collaboration and proactive actions to create an “Internet we want”.

In the opening session of the Best Bits meeting there was a discussion of the upcoming High Level/Ministerial meeting being held at the IGF that some members of BB were invited to including, Carolina Rossini and Nnenna Nwakanma. Those invited civil society members called for suggestions from participants on what, as civil society representatives at the High Level meeting, BB wanted the representatives to bring up.

The next topic of discussion was the renewal of the IGF mandate. Most agreed that it was in the best interest of the Best Bits to support IGF renewal for 10+ years. Some had varying opinions on whether the IGF should be made permanent and if permanence would limit opportunities for changes in structure, implementation, and discussions of its relevance/effectiveness. Some claimed not renewing the IGF would open a “pandora’s box” in which multistakeholderism would be damaged and it would hurt civil society’s role in Internet governance. At the same time, there was strong consensus on having more coordination and connection between regional IGFs and the global one. In this discussion, some participants discussed the different split in MAG members on this issue.

It was agreed upon that at the Opening Ceremony, BB civil society speakers should voice support for a permanent IGF.

Outside of the IGF, some time was spent discussing the NETmundial Initiative (NMI) and the possible outcomes for civil society including:

- developing best practices for multistakeholderism;
- developing roadmap annotation and project mapping based on the NETmundial outcome document; and
- Being an assistance platform to push back on ITU constitutional reform and expansion of ITU rule.

Similar to the Ministerial/High Level meeting, only a few representative members of civil society were invited to attend the NETmundial Initiative launch in Geneva before the IGF. Some participants at the BB meeting voiced their concerns at civil society being a pawn that is being courted by the ICANN or other bodies want civil society to be in for optics or perceived legitimacy. Instead of being included from the beginning, some participants felt that this and other meetings have just been powerful people making decisions and *then* inviting civil society along. Both those who were invited and not invited to attend the NMI meeting in Geneva described it as having a lack of clarity, little discussion on substance, and ad hoc participation processes. While some participants criticized the lack of representation for civil society, others pointed to NMI and other initiatives as an opportunity for civil society to engage and shape the use of NETMundial outcomes in as many Internet governance processes as possible.

In reference to WEF, ICANN, the UN Human Rights Council and others, many participants discussed the need for civil society to define its “wants” in their processes, ranging from accountability to the influence civil society has on the processes.

POLICY SLAM

The policy slam consisted of 9 10-minute presentations on a variety of topics from participants.

- Civil society coordination group (Jeremy Malcolm)
 - Last appointment was civil society closing speaker at IGF, Burcu Kilic
 - Next appointments will be NETmundial Initiative transitional steering committee members (discussion to go on list soon), and next IGF MAG members
 - See placeholder website <http://internetgov-cs.org>
- African draft Declaration of Internet rights and freedoms (Nnenna Nwakanma)
 - African Declaration: <http://africaninternetrights.org>
- Latin American learning platform (Francisco Vera/Claudio Ruiz)
 - RedLaTam: <http://www.redlatam.org>
 - Allows for increased information and contact sharing with regional activists.
 - Newsletter on digital rights in LATAM and the Caribbean: <http://www.digitalrightslac.net>
 - Mailing list: <https://lists.accessnow.org/listinfo/redlatam>
- Multistakeholder definition – presentation of online discussion (Jeremy Malcolm)
 - BB has created an online platform to experiment with group discussion and decision making: <http://bestbits.net/lf/>

- TPP and the impact of trade on IG (Burcu Kilic)
 - Free trade agreements being negotiated between the US and Asia-Pacific countries will impact Internet related issues such as IP, ISP liability, data localization, e-commerce, free flow of information, and services. Internet is now being discussed in a number of non-Internet governance for a.
 - Civil society is not formally involved in talks, other than occasional meetings
- Internet Ungovernance Forum (Niels ten Oover)
 - Turkish civil society made several proposals for the IGF, but all but one were rejected. Turkish civil society and global civil society took it as an opportunity to develop a forum on issues impacting Turkish civil society and activists called the Internet Ungovernance Forum. Will be held September 4-5: <https://iuf.alternatifbilisim.org/index.html#home>
- Feminist principles for the Internet (Joy Liddicoat)
 - In 2012, the Association for Progressive Communications (APC) held a global meeting on Gender, Sexuality, and the Internet in Malaysia. The goal was to “bridge the gap between feminist movements and Internet rights movements” to improve collaboration. Since then there’s been an active debate to create feminist principles for Internet. The principles for feminist principles for Internet governance will be launched at the IGF: <http://sched.co/1oxTPgX>
- Network of Centres case studies on multi-stakeholderism (Jeanette Hofmann)
 - Distributive collaboration governance and collaborative expertise increase the policy makers’ expertise.
 - Some case studies include BitCoin, Creative Commons, Marco Civil, CGI, NETMundial, water management in Ghana, and cyber security models
- Preparing for ITU-Plenipot (Carolina Rossini, Matthew Shears, Natalie Green)
 - A brief overview of the WCIT, the ITU plenipot, and ITU resolutions that may be debated or revised: https://docs.google.com/a/publicknowledge.org/document/d/1B4Hban7w_5QzIUk2C0wdULgafsrYJGNr7HvrQK0_R44/edit

An action item from this section was to invite a working group from the Best Bits platform to develop a collaborative strategy for submitting documents to the ITU.

FOLLOW UP TO WSIS+10 AND TACTICS MOVING FORWARD

This workshop was led by BB Steering Committee members Deborah Brown and Anja Kovacs. In talking about WSIS+10, both facilitators and the participants discussed the history of WSIS+10, including the Geneva Summit and Tunis Agenda. As noted by participants, the Geneva Summit was an instance where global civil society came together to discuss and work on Internet issues from a social justice and human rights agenda, thus becoming a communications rights movement. In talking about the Tunis Agenda, it was noted that development issues received little attention and there was an increased emphasis on the role of governments, human rights, security, and surveillance.

An interesting question posed by a participant was whether the WSIS is still active. This question received mixed responses from audience members and steering committee members alike. One participant discussed how a number of UN agencies, including UNESCO still actively work on action line such as e-learning, e-science, multilingualism, and access to information – action line items defined in the Tunis Agenda. Another participant noted the shift in the WSIS discussion from ICTs and infrastructure to specifically Internet-related topics. Another topic of discussion was the relationship between the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), access to ICTs and information, and WSIS. The timing of the end of the original MDGs (and adoption of new UN Sustainable Development Goals, SDGs) coincides with WSIS+10 and some voice concern of access to information, Internet, and ICTs not being represented enough in the SDGs. In regards to the SDGs increased efforts to reach out to non-Internet civil society actors to help push access to information in the new SDGs was suggested.

The upcoming WSIS+10 Overall Review will be a two-day high level (possibly head of state) meeting at the UN General Assembly in December 2015. It will be preceded by an intergovernmental preparatory process to be commenced in June 2015. The UN Commission on Science and Technology for Development (CSTD) has developed an open survey on the WSIS review due September 15, 2014, which will feed into a report that will also serve as an input into the Deborah encouraged participants to complete the survey due to the lack of a formal role for civil society:
<http://unctad.org/en/Pages/CSTD/WSIS-10yearReview.aspx>.

In the end of the WSIS discussion, participants debated whether there will still be a WSIS in the future and whether it is either necessary or useful. Some made the argument that BB should want WSIS to continue in order to provide as many spaces as possible to voice BB positions. Once again the topic of civil society representation at high level and other meetings was discussed, and the idea of developing a draft comprehensive document of Best Bits positions was discussed. In discussing important themes for the next twenty years, many participants debated the positives and negatives of pushing the NETmundial outcome document at all Internet governance meetings.

BEST BITS: WAY FORWARD

In the final section of the Best Bits meeting, the group reflected on the Best Bits 2013 Annual Report and the lack of a formal charter on BB operating procedures, as well as the lack of a working group to review the BB operating procedures. Now there is a Wiki available, and **Kevin Bankston has volunteered to help review the procedures, although more volunteers are needed.**

On staffing and funding, there was a discussion between the steering committee and participants on how to raise money to support annual meetings, support for those from developing countries, but the issue was raised on the difficulty of fundraising because BB isn't an organization in the traditional sense. The suggestion was made to focus on applying for grants or for individual organizations to look at their own funding that could be applied to BB.

The participants also discussed the lack of preparedness at NETmundial and strategies and tactics for working the "end game" at similar processes. A number of participants emphasized the need create

proactive agendas, share strategy and topics among BB members and partners, and creating more formalized reports, such as two page briefings on issues. In the context of trade relations, it was also suggested that civil society start to develop more personal relationships with policy makers at Internet governance events and meetings.

Throughout this discussion and the whole meeting itself, the issue of BB and civil society representation, legitimacy, and trust at high level meetings and events was raised. This sub-discussion focused on the times in which one or a couple of Best Bits members are chosen or nominated to represent civil society at a high level meeting or event and how to include other BB members and values. A consensus was made that if there is not enough time for BB to fully address an issue and one member of the group is invited to speak or represent, there must be *trust* that the person will represent BB values as much as possible. This includes keeping those interested in “process” and “substance” informed as well as looping in as many members in updates when possible. The issue of “substance” versus “process” and which the BB meeting should focus on was a recurring theme throughout the day. A related distinction was made by Steering Committee members of differentiating between a “Best Bits statement” and a “statement by Best Bits members”, which the former being according to the [Best Bits draft procedures](#) is an exceptional case, in which a large proportion of participants are physically present or otherwise actively express their views about a statement, and it appears that it enjoys full consensus of those participants.

Another recurring topic was whether BB should continue to be a public list. Some pointed to the open list as hindering in depth discussion on strategy and coordination, while others saw the BB open list as very important to BB.

At the end of the meeting, a list was compiled of things BB has done well, including:

- Statements of principles, process, and police priorities
- Agreed approach to respond to new initiatives (NMI, WEF)
- Share in our communities, reassert our statements, remember you don't represent civil society but go to these meetings to show civil society's involvement

In talking about new ideas and improvements, some ideas included:

- Developing deeper/broader positive agenda
- Anticipating future issues to be addressed and groups that can help us be leaders
- Funding for staff support
- Honing foundational principles (to support NETmundial principles of human rights/multistakeholderism)
 - Where and how to promote the previous point
- Agreement to restate/urge key parts of these statements
 - (where else can they be used? Use older statements and allow us to take leadership role at another meeting)

An action item that came out of this session was to develop an **IGF statement that focuses on NETMundial principles, the IGF renewal, and the current situation in Turkey**, led by Emma Llanso, Kevin Bankston, Joy Liddicoat, and input from Turkish civil society.

The Steering Committee ended by putting three propositions to the meeting for endorsement.

- 1. To develop the statement of objectives on the Best Bits site to include some overarching goals**
- 2. To ensure that the strands of work identified at the meeting were followed up, that participation was invited from the platform but that once established working groups would be allowed to discuss strategy in confidence before sharing it with the wider list**
- 3. Work to strengthen and review working procedures in order to strengthen BB objectives.**

The proposal was supported by a majority of attendees with no recorded dissensions. As per point 2, four topics were chosen so far for increased collaboration and working groups.

- 1. IGF Renewal**
Volunteers include Cristiana G, Dixie H, Joy L, and Jeremy M
- 2. Best Bits Procedures**
Volunteers include Kevin B and Jeremy M
- 3. ITU Plenipotentiary**
Volunteers include Carolina R, Nnenna N, Joana V, Emma L, Anja K, and Cristiana G
- 4. WSIS+10**
Anja K, Deborah B, Nnenna N, and Cristiana G

Outside of the in-person discussion, a number of participants engaged in a simultaneous online discussion on a pad. **For more in-depth notes, links, and commentary please read the following:**

<https://etherpad.mozilla.org/NnbQgXiv8Y>