Multistakeholderism and the Problem of Democratic Deficit[1]
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A problem of multistakeholderism

- Multistakeholderism is often understood as the embodiment of transparent, open, inclusive and thus democratic governance. Recently, some have argued that the label of multistakeholder approach may be used to conceal exclusive initiatives that only involve the participation of stakeholders and exclude non-stakeholders. Such an approach would strengthen the presence of more powerful stakeholders instead of broadening participation and balancing the power distribution among the different stakeholder groups. This is therefore leads to undemocratic governance. This submission looks into whether the problem is apparent or real and if it is real, then the possible solutions to address this issue.

What does multistakeholder mean

- The term "multistakeholder" had been used and understood loosely, even before the Working Group for Internet Governance (WGIG) report, as the inclusion of three stakeholder groups, namely government, private sector and civil society. The term had been used as far back as 1919 in the International Labour Organization[2] and also in the Agenda 21 of the 192 UN Conference on Environment and Development.[3] Meanwhile, according to Kummer[4], in the context of Internet governance, the term has been used in the Geneva Plan of Action (Point C. Action Lines, Sub-point C1 about the role of governments and all stakeholders in the promotion of ICTs for development[5] and in the document titled "Internet Governance: A Grand Collaboration" in a meeting of UN ICT Task Force for the preparation of WGIG. The Final Report of WGIG then reinforced the term by recognizing a gap in the inclusiveness of stakeholders during deliberations and hence proposed the formation of a global multistakeholder forum, which has become known as the Internet Governance Forum (IGF).
- The take-away message is that the multistakeholder approach was intended and understood as being inclusive and democratic because all potential participants would fall into one of the three broad groups of government, private sector and civil society.

Deliberative democracy as a solution

- This paper proposes deliberative democracy and particularly a deliberative system as a

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[1] This submission is drawn from a forthcoming book chapter in Ang, P.H., & Haristya, S. (forthcoming). Multistakeholderism and the democratic deficit. In W. Drake (Ed). The Working Group on Internet Governance: 10th anniversary reflections. Association for Progressive Communications.

[2] ILO. (n.d.). Origins and history. www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/history/lang--en/index.htm

[3] United Nations. (1992). Agenda 21. https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/Agenda21.pdf

[4] Kummer, M. (2013, 14 May). Multistakeholder cooperation: Reflections on the emergence of a new phraseology in international cooperation. Internet Society. www.internetsociety.org/blog/2013/05/multistakeholder-cooperation-reflections-emergence-new-phraseology-international

[5] WSIS. (2003). First phase of the WSIS: Geneva Plan of Action. WSIS-03/GENEVA/DOC/0005. www.itu.int/wsis/documents/doc_multi.asp?lang=en&id=1160%7C0

possible solution to the issue of democratic deficit in the global Internet governance. The specification of type of democracy in addressing any real world issues is important.[6] Otherwise, the understanding of what democracy is and the expectation of the actual practices can vary from one person to another. Deliberative democracy itself emphasizes the deliberation process to ensure all views to be publicly testable and thereby enhance the legitimacy of the output and process of the deliberation.[7] This type of democracy is probably more suitable in the fluid context of global governance where there is no such central established authority and system wherein the related actors need to deliberate in order to justify their decision or actions.

- Before further explaining the concept of deliberative system, there are at least two reasons the concept is especially worthy of consideration in the global Internet governance:

  1. The multistakeholder approach in Internet governance has been understood as occurring in a single forum, initiative or institution. The drawback to such an understanding is that the approach varies between one multistakeholder initiative and the nextanother.[8] This leads to inconsistencies and different understanding of the term in different fora, initiatives and institutions.

  2. The multistakeholder approach applies in both public and also empowered spaces. A public space is one where the public can discuss their views freely without resulting in any final outcome. Civil society groups have a large role here. An empowered space is a space that has the potential to produce an authoritative shared outcome from the discussions.[9] The largest role, because of the authoritative outcome, is often occupied by governments.

- A deliberative system consists of public space, empowered space, transmission, accountability, meta-deliberations and decisiveness. Public and empowered spaces have been explained earlier. Transmission is the mechanism that transfers public views into the empowered space. Accountability is for the empowered space to be held responsible for their decisions and actions to the public. Meta-deliberation is a mechanism to reflect the overall deliberation in both spaces. Decisiveness is the consideration and incorporation of public views into the decisions of empowered space.[10] A deliberative system enables us to see the relationship and influence of one multistakeholder initiative on another, considering that there are different degrees of linkage between each multistakeholder initiative and the decision-making entity.[11]

[6] Moravcsik, A. (2004). Is there a 'Democratic Deficit' in World Politics? A Framework for Analysis. Government and Opposition, 39(2), 336-363. doi: 10.1111/j.1477-7053.2004.00126.x

[7] Held, D. (2006). Models of democracy (3rd ed.). Cambridge: Polity.

[8] Gasser, U., Budish, R., & Myers West, S. (2015). Multistakeholder as Governance Groups: Observations from Case Studies. Berkman Center Research Publications No. 2015-1. http://ssrn.com/abstract=2549270

[9] Dryzek, J. S., & Stevenson, H. (2011). Global democracy and earth system governance. Ecological Economics, 70(11), 1865-1874.

[10] Ibid

[11] Hemmati, M. (2002). Multi-stakeholder Processes for Governance and Sustainability: Beyond Deadlock and Conflict. New York: Routledge.

- A democratic deliberative system consists of a diversity of deliberation sites, views, communication modes and also public decision-making procedures.[12] The first three elements refer to the inclusiveness of deliberative system by listening to diverse views. The last element implies there should be an appropriate mechanism of interaction between public and empowered spaces wherein the empowered space could be held responsive to public and that public views are to be taken into account and be a decisive consideration to decision making in the empowered space.[13] [14]

The limits: Democratic deficit is a bug but also a feature in global Internet governance

- There are two issues that might pose a hurdle to the creation of democratic global governance. First, there is the tension between democracy and globalization and between democracy and national sovereignty. Or in other words: the "trilemma" of globalization, national sovereignty and democracy.[15] Countries can only achieve two out of those three goals. In the Internet governance realm, states will try to hold their national sovereignty even as they aim for globalization. This implies democracy might be left behind. Second, is the tendency of democracy to conflict with globalization in a free market environment.[16] Such an environment tends to concentrate wealth and power. Those powerful states will uphold their national sovereignty and again democracy will be left behind.

Looking forward

The centrality of multistakeholderism in the future may be known from the answers to the following two questions:

- What is the model of democracy, which resonates with the multistakeholderism, that global Internet governance should take? A plausible answer is deliberative democracy because it is open in terms of accepting any concerned participants. However, there are questions of accountability, inclusiveness, and decisiveness that still need some theoretical and empirical works.
- Where is the IGF to be headed – to continue as a public deliberation space or attempt to be a form of empowered space? The latter is probably impossible because it would require much effort from stakeholders in the public and empowered spaces. Also there is reluctance on the part of some actors for the IGF to produce any output. If so, then the multistakeholder approach must play an even more—not less—central role to continue public discussions and forward it to the related empowered space.

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[12] Parkinson, J. (2012). Democratizing deliberative systems. In J. Parkinson & J. Mansbridge (Eds.), Deliberative democracy at the large scale (pp. 151-172). New York: Cambridge University Press.
[13] Dryzek, J. S., & Niemeyer, S. (2010). Governance Networks. In J. S. Dryzek (Ed.), Foundations and Frontiers of Deliberative Governance. Oxford University Press.
[14] Parkinson, J. (2012). Op. cit.
[15] Rodrik, D. (2001). How far will international economic integration go? Journal of Economic Perspectives, 14(1), 177-186.
[16] Ang, P. H., & Pang, N., (2012). Globalization of the internet, sovereignty or democracy: The trilemma of the Internet Governance Forum. Revue Française d'Études Américaines, 4(134), 114-127.