

Netizen Participation in Internet Governance

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I have been involved with "Internet Governance", or areas of global Domain Name system management since around 1996. I was the Secretary General of Asia and Pacific Association, which became the formal member of the Steering Committee of so-called IFWP, International Forum on the White Paper, a process which was a global effort to setup a new body to manage the DNS, upon receiving the call by the United States Government to "privatize" and "internationalize" the DNS management in an open and inclusive approach. We advocated the equal participation to the process and the body, eventually setup as ICANN, from Asia and Pacific regional viewpoints.

Today, I like to provide my proposal of putting the "Netizens" to the global governing framework of Internet we are tasked by WSIS process.

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There is WSIS Civil Society Internet Governance Caucus which has more than 60 individuals from most of the regions of the world and worked very hard to contribute to the Civil Society Declaration for the WSIS in its Internet Governance section. I suggest you to take the principles proposed there into serious consideration for the coming debate. It would be more appreciated if this group gets formal recognition and is invited as a group to the next phase of discussion including the Working Group under the Secretary General Koffi Anan..

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As we are all aware, we are facing the new kind of challenge for this Internet Governance.

The Internet made it possible to send and receive information from anyone's desktop, laptop, or even from mobile phones on the go, with minimal cost, very easily and instantly, to anywhere in the world, ignoring the geographic and institutional borders including that of the nation states. This fact poses trans-national challenges that are difficult to solve by applying the traditional "nation" based approaches

Frankly, most of the current International or inter-governmental organizations were designed in the industrial age and not ready to deal with these national or global issues as efficiently and effectively as we want. They are slow to identify the issues, slow to come-up with solutions, slow to agree each other, often constrained by national and bureaucratic borders, and too rigid to respond to the rapid, ever-changing technologies and their applications. When they come-up with legal framework against certain types of spams, the spammers are already well-ahead of the game creating new methods which is hard to trace and enforce. And this is just a small example of the large iceberg.

Therefore, there is a clear need to establish a new governance model in which, I think, the Netizens from the Civil Society will play a vital role, in cooperation with the government. International organizations, business sector and technical community.

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- Here is a diagram in which "self-governance" will take place. It is mostly carried by the collaboration of all stakeholders, business entities who are mostly provider of services, along with technologist who develop the technology and standard, as well as manage some administrative and management functions. Government can give legal and other policy framework but it is better for them and for us to ask them keep minimal involvement. Intergovernmental bodies and international organizations have their roles, as well.

- But what is necessary here is the participation of the Netizens. I will explain the reasons why, its merits and risks of excluding them in my remaining time.

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First and foremost, Internet is becoming everyday tool, or commodity, for most of us. In Japan, over 60% of population or 70 million people are now using the Internet one way or the other, and 70% of subscribers are now enjoying the high-speed broadband connection, which gives you "always-on" feature. Korea as you know has the highest penetration of the broadband, with 80% penetration to the household and the usage is very very high. China, now reached the number 2 place in terms of number of users

after the United States with 80 million people. The development of I-mode in Japan gave rise to use mobile phones to access Internet, opening up the age of Ubiquitous, or pervasive networking. As pointed out by many previous speakers, the Internet empowers ordinary citizen with tremendous power – sending thousands of e-mails to millions of people at a cost of few dollars, sending both positive messages as well as destructive viruses.

With this potential, million of users are facing, or creating societal challenges: in Japan, victims of online dating services with mobile or ordinary Internet is on the rise, targeting young women in schools, with more than 100 serious crimes a year. P2P file exchange is posing threat to commercial copyright holders, but it also is opening up new and creative way of sharing works among citizens. Compared with these, Domain Name and IP address management has far less serious problems, but we may face more challenges.

For any Internet governance model to work, it should fit with the reality of local and regional situation. As one of the few speakers from Asia Pacific, I like to bring attention the very divers situation of Internet development in our region, from highly developed places of Japan or Korea, to just in their infancy in Afghanistan, East Timor and Iraq, suffering from the wars and conflicts, or tiny economy of Bhutan and many other LDCs. Though Internet has been mostly developed by so-called “Internet community” in many Asian countries, similar to that of developed countries, I could say that governments play greater role in supporting the Internet in infrastructure and capacity building activities.

In the case of Asia and Pacific, there has been a very strong tradition of voluntary coordination and cooperation among the Internet community. Here are all the “AP” organizations working on different areas of Internet management, from address and Domain Name management to infrastructure development or spam or security matters. We have annual summit, just taking place right now in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, called APRICOT. This voluntary coordination is appreciated by governments but receiving no control, nor much financial support at all. It is working just fine.

As many speakers already mentioned this, I will not spend much time to explain these. Similar to Ms. Hassan of ICC mentioned, we should try to follow the governance model after the architecture of the Internet which is based on the layered structure. Functions of each layers are different, so the governance models should be. It is also necessary, however, to bring coordination among different actors at different layers together. The word “Netizen” was first coined by a 23-year old student, late Michael Hauben in New York in 1993. He was trying to identify the new residents of the network

community, from Net Citizen to Netizen. These active users were originally found in the technical community, but then it now has spread into the civil society at large. They are the main actor of the Information Society, as Prof. Shumpei Kumon of GLOCOM offered with the theoretical analysis that in the Information Society, the social games are played around the Intellectual values, not economic values like the industrial society. We see very active groups affecting the society like the slash-dot in US or 2-channel, its equivalent in Japan. We know many active political activities are generated from online forum, in Korea, where Netizen already became a common Korean term, affecting the outcome of the presidential campaign, or in China where people are now starting to use online forum to criticize the government (sometimes). The rise of Smart Mobs is illustrated by my friend Howard Rheingold in his book, showing positive and negative potential impact of using these cheap, open, mobile technologies.

Why then should we let Netizens to participate this global governance? First, for any democratic governance it is necessary to establish the Consent of the Governed, a basic principle of the governance. But we should go further more. The Netizens are the main actor of the Internet development, as they are the great inventor and innovator of such tools as WWW, Mosaic or Netscape, the browsers, Yahoo by David Filo and Jerry Yang, students at Stanford university, or ICQ or Amazon are also developed mainly by users. Missing them is like playing the football game without any top-notch players. Third, decisions around Internet governance will affect so many end-users directly. You need to listen to those who are affected by the decisions.

Netizens will act as watchdog, or functions to provide appropriate Checks and Balances system, to counter other interests. By involving them they will have more sense of responsibilities, too.

I also like to try to list some merits of having Netizens to participate.

First, Netizens have direct knowledge and rich experience of most issues caused by the use of Internet. If you are the parents, quite often your children know much better about using the Net than you are.

Second, Netizens are flexible, work more efficiently than many incumbent institutions where protocols and procedures take up too much time and act as barriers for timely decisions.

Third, Netizens are global citizens, not constrained by national boundaries. There are many communities of interest, spread globally, irrespective of geographic or other existing social boundaries.

Netizen participation will increase diversity. By making regional balance as compulsory, Netizens from all the regions of the globe will participate in the governance activities.

Netizens will counter economic balance, not dominated by large corporate interest, but adding non-profit, non-governmental forces. It will also provide cultural diversity, with multilingual environment. It will reduce the magnetization of the minority, too. By encouraging the Netizens to participate, affirmative efforts to listen to the minority groups, persons with disabilities, women in vulnerable situations, linguistic minorities, all will have more opportunities for their voices to be heard.

Netizens share the view with technical community that freedom at the edge of the network is the core value of the Internet. Traditional telecom operators, or mobile phone operators, on the other hand, may not necessarily share this vision and tend to “close” the network by inserting their central control that is convenient for the operators as well as many “passive” consumers. We are concerned that it may stifle the innovation and development of the Internet we have enjoyed so much so far.

There are risks of excluding Netizens from the global governance mechanism. If we only rely on technologists, they may lack the human viewpoints. If we rely too much on corporations, aspects of human rights might be compromised in the name of profit-making, e.g. in the case of privacy protection. And if we rely too much on government or bureaucratic mechanism, then we may face narrow “top-down” approach or closed decisions.

- In conclusion, we need to put Netizens for the self-governance mechanisms to work. This will help solve the dichotomy of private-sector only approach vs strong government involvement. It will create appropriate, more balanced structure. There are active Netizens in the developing parts of the world who will also enhance the balanced participation.

In order to make effective participation of the Netizens, their autonomous, distributed and collaborative network of networks is necessary to exist. Efforts at ICANN AtLarge is one such example, trying to be bottom-up, coordinated globally, based on subsidiarity principle, that addresses the local issues be solved locally first, seek for global solutions for only globally challenging issues. We also need self-certification mechanism in place that works.

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I have some suggestions and information to the upcoming process.

We should be really open and inclusive: We need to Involve more stakeholders from developing parts of the world, and people in the non-Western regions. We should also consider to reach out people with different backgrounds; people with disabilities, for example, into the main stream of the debate. For effective outreach regional meetings are essential to listen to these diverse voices, one you may not hear here in Geneva or in

New York. To show our commitment, we, ICANN ALAC with other constituencies are hosting WSIS Workshop at the coming ICANN Rome meeting next week. It will be on Mar 4, 11:00 – 12:30, and it is open to everyone. I hope many events like this will be organized to produce fruitful dialogue among us.