

Beyond permanence: Shaping the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) for strategic impact in the post-WSIS+20 Context

By Concettina Cassa and Anriette Esterhuysen

Reflections emerging from the MAG Working Group on IGF Strengthening and Strategy Webinar - 2 April 2026

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Executive Summary	1
1. Introduction	2
2. The IGF in a Changing Global Context	2
2.1 Anchoring the Evolution of the IGF in the WSIS+20 Outcome Document	3
3. Strategic Challenges Emerging from the WSIS+20 Review	3
3.1 Implications of Permanent Status	4
3.2 Scope: Breadth vs. Focus	4
3.3 Participation of Developing Countries	5
3.4 Outreach Beyond the IGF Community	5
3.5 Integration of the IGF Ecosystem and Making its Components Fit for Purpose	6
3.6 Outputs and Policy Impact	6
3.7 Institutional Arrangements, Governance and Leadership	7
4. From Permanence to Relevance: An Integrated Vision for the Next Phase of the IGF	8
4.1 Integration	8
4.1.1 Building a Coherent Digital Dialogue and Cooperation Ecosystem	8
4.1.2 NRIs as Distributed Policy Infrastructure	8
4.1.3 From Parallel Processes to Structural Coherence	9
4.1.4 From Dialogue to Learning and Experimentation	9
4.1.5 Integration Across the WSIS and Wider UN Digital Cooperation Architecture	10
4.2 Relevance	10
4.2.1 Reaching Decision-Makers Proactively	10
4.2.2 Reaching Beyond the IGF Community	11
4.3 Impact	12
4.3.1 Moving Towards a Policy Incubator Model	12
4.3.2 Rethinking IGF Outputs	12
4.3.3 From Dialogue to Policy Learning	13
4.3.4 Creating Pathways for Policy Uptake	13

4.3.5 Measuring Impact	13
4.4 Identity	13
4.4.1 Preserving the Multistakeholder Non-negotiation Character of the IGF	13
4.4.2 The Multistakeholder “Bottom-up” Process	15
4.4.3 Preserving the IGF's Identity within the UN System	15
4.4.4 A strengthened Secretariat and clearer oversight	15
4.4.5 Towards a More Strategic MAG	16
5. Recommendations	16
5.1 Integration	16
5.2 Relevance	17
5.3 Impact	17
5.4 Identity	17
6. Operational Pathways for these Recommendations	18
6.1 Strengthening the IGF's Policy Interface	18
6.2 Reforming the MAG's Working Method	18
6.3 Governance and Institutional Arrangements	18
7. Conclusion	19

Executive Summary

The WSIS+20 review confirmed the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) as a permanent entity within the United Nations system, marking a significant milestone for a UN-based innovation that emerged from the multistakeholder approach adopted during the World Summit on the Information Society. However, permanence alone does not ensure relevance or impact. If not accompanied by intentional strengthening and innovation, it risks institutionalizing existing limitations rather than addressing them effectively.

This paper, building on the MAG Working Group on Strategy webinar held on 2 April 2026, argues that, having secured its permanence, the IGF must now focus on strengthening and consolidating its relevance and impact within the evolving digital governance ecosystem. This requires:

- Strengthening institutional capacity and securing stable, predictable funding;
- Broadening and diversifying participation - ensuring meaningful engagement from underrepresented communities, regions, and stakeholder groups to strengthen the IGF's reach, legitimacy and relevance;
- Responding effectively to the call in the WSIS+20 outcome document to “enhance its working modalities and to broaden the participation of Governments and other stakeholders from developing countries and underrepresented communities, by working on establishing and facilitating a dialogue among Governments with the participation of all stakeholders.” (para 101):
- Enhancing the IGF's contribution to policy processes, including through stronger linkages with other with other UN bodies and policy processes outside of the UN
- Improving coherence across the IGF ecosystem - annual meeting, its thematic and stakeholder-specific tracks , National and Regional IGFs (NRIs) and intersessional activities;
- Ensuring outputs are targeted, credible, and impactful in a competitive policy environment;
- Evolving the IGF towards a policy incubator role, capable of generating measurable impact;

At the same time, this evolution must preserve the IGF's defining characteristic: its role as an accessible multistakeholder, non-negotiating forum, shaping policy through dialogue and debate. However, the effective operationalization of the multistakeholder approach itself remains a critical challenge the IGF must address in order to maintain its relevance and effectiveness and for the use of this approach to effectively complement multilateral institutions and processes that deal with digital governance.

This paper presents insights from the webinar discussion and the perspectives of the two co-authors. While not all individual interventions made during the webinar are referenced explicitly, the analysis seeks to capture the main areas of convergence and divergence that emerged during the discussion. It proposes a forward-looking vision centred on transforming the IGF into an integrated inclusive digital policy ecosystem - where national, regional and global processes connect, where intersessional work generates cumulative knowledge, and where outputs reach and influence the decision-makers at the right time.

1. Introduction

The confirmation of the IGF as a permanent UN forum reflects the recognition of the IGF ecosystem as a central space for multistakeholder dialogue on digital governance. At the same time, it marks the beginning of a new phase, characterized by heightened expectations regarding impact, inclusiveness and policy relevance.

"Permanence is not a solution, it is an opportunity." Dr. David Souter, ICT for Development Expert - IGF MAG WG-Strategy Webinar Opening Remarks, 2 April 2026

The challenge ahead is therefore not to redefine the IGF, but to reposition it within a rapidly evolving digital governance landscape - one where digital cooperation is complicated by geopolitical tensions intensifying, where artificial intelligence is reshaping the parameters of policy debate, and where the authoritativeness of multilateral institutions can no longer be taken for granted.

This paper draws on the rich and substantive discussion held during the MAG Working Group on Strategy webinar on 2 April 2026, bringing together insights from David Souter who provided the keynote address and the speakers, representatives of governments, civil society, the private sector, youth and the technical community, as well as the personal perspectives of the two authors.

2. The IGF in a Changing Global Context

The WSIS+20 outcome document, adopted through UN General Assembly Resolution ([RES/80/173](#)) in December 2025, largely reaffirmed the WSIS vision, principles and frameworks established twenty years ago, but the broader context has changed significantly. As David Souter observed, the digital society of today is virtually unrecognizable from that of 2003 - 2005 when the original WSIS agreements were reached.

Digital governance today is characterized by:

- Rapid technological change, particularly in the field of machine learning and artificial intelligence, which is reshaping the parameters of the challenges policy debate has to address at a pace that outstrips existing governance frameworks.
- Deeper and more complex links between digital development and other areas of public policy - including sustainable development, environmental policy, international finance and security
- Fragmentation of the global policy environment, with proliferating forums often operating in isolation
- Concentration of technological and economic power in a small number of corporations and jurisdictions

- Significant pressure on the international rules-based order, which underpins the legitimacy of the UN system and of the IGF

In this context, the IGF operates in what Souter described as a "competitive marketplace for ideas and influence", where many decision-makers it seeks to influence remain unaware of its work - including governmental bodies outside the digital policy community, major technology companies, international financial institutions, and organizations concerned with the interface between digital development and other policy domains.

The IGF's distinctive role remains that of a probouleutic forum - a space where dialogue not only informs and shapes decision-making processes elsewhere, but also enables reflection and debate on the consequences, effectiveness, and broader impacts of policy decisions and governance approaches. Strengthening this function is central to its future relevance.

2.1 Anchoring the Evolution of the IGF in the WSIS+20 Outcome Document

The strategic reflections emerging from the webinar are closely aligned with the provisions of the WSIS+20 outcome document ([RES/80/173](#)) which provides important guidance for the evolution of the IGF, not only in terms of its institutional arrangements, but also regarding the broader principles and policy areas that should guide its future work :

- Paragraph 90 recognizes the Internet as a critical global facility for inclusive and equitable digital transformation and stresses the importance of preserving an open, global, interoperable, stable and secure Internet, while addressing risks of fragmentation through enhanced international cooperation among stakeholders.
- Paragraph 91 reaffirms that Internet governance must remain global and multistakeholder in nature, with the full involvement of governments, the private sector, civil society, international organizations, technical and academic communities, and other relevant stakeholders, in accordance with their respective roles and responsibilities.
- Paragraph 94 takes note of the NETmundial+10 guidelines for multistakeholder collaboration and consensus-building as a contribution to strengthening Internet governance through inclusive participation, balanced representation and openness.
- Paragraph 99 confirms the IGF as a permanent forum, calling for a stable and sustainable basis for its functioning.
- Paragraph 100 underlines the need to strengthen linkages with other UN processes, including UNGIS, CSTD and the WSIS Action Lines.
- Paragraph 101 emphasizes the need to broaden participation, particularly of developing country governments.
- Paragraph 102 highlights the importance of reinforcing intersessional work and supporting NRIs
- Paragraph 103 calls for a strengthened Secretariat and sustainable funding options.

Taken together, these provisions outline a clear direction: the IGF is expected not only to continue its multistakeholder dialogue function, but to evolve into a more integrated, impactful and systemically relevant component of the UN digital cooperation architecture.

3. Strategic Challenges Emerging from the WSIS+20 Review

The April 2026 webinar was a follow-up to a series of webinars convened by the IGF MAG Working Group on Strategy in August 2025 to provide a public forum for discussing the range of statements, briefings, and proposals on the future of the IGF produced in the lead-up to the WSIS+20 review. Those submissions came from a wide array of entities - governments, industry associations, technical organisations, civil society groups, and academic institutions and networks.

The April 2026 webinar returned to those same entities with seven guiding questions - posed by the keynote speaker, Dr. David Souter - inviting them to reflect on their earlier positions in light of the WSIS review outcome - and, looking ahead to the IGF's strategic transition now that it has been granted a permanent mandate by UN member states.

Across all questions, a common thread emerged: the IGF's challenge is not to do more, but to be more relevant, more connected, more inclusive and more impactful.

3.1 Implications of Permanent Status

Speakers broadly agreed that permanence represents simultaneously a recognition of the IGF's value and a level of heightened expectation. As Souter noted, making a temporary institution permanent requires rethinking its purpose, structure and role - not merely continuing with the status quo with a different institutional context.

Desiree Miloshevic-Evans (RIPE-NCC and IGF 2025 MAG member) emphasized that permanence is a strong political signal confirming the IGF as an essential component of global digital governance, but cautioned against over-bureaucratization and a drift towards intergovernmental dominance. The challenge, she stressed, is to preserve the IGF's unique multistakeholder DNA while allowing it to evolve and mature.

William Lee (Government of Australia) captured the moment's urgency with a striking image: we have the canvas, the paints and the sketch - what is needed now is to colour in the picture, quickly, before the window of opportunity closes ahead of the Global Digital Compact review process in 2027. The period leading to upcoming global review processes, including the Global Digital Compact review, will be critical for demonstrating the IGF's added value within the evolving digital governance landscape.

Craig Stanley-Adamson (UK Government, Head of Global Internet Governance) stressed that WSIS+20 exceeded many expectations, confirming the IGF as the main multistakeholder platform for internet governance and providing it with the opportunity to play a leading role within the UN family, alongside ITU, UNESCO, UNCTAD and others. He called for clearer and more actionable outcomes - not formal decisions or recommendations - with explicit links between workshops, final messages and reporting to CSTD. On the question of governmental dialogue, he cautioned that the mechanism referred to in Paragraph 101 should not create silos, but rather remain an inclusive space involving all stakeholders. He also defended the voluntary contribution model as a component of the IGF's past success, while calling for greater private sector involvement.

3.2 Scope: Breadth vs. Focus

A key tension in the discussion concerned whether the IGF should maintain a broad thematic scope or focus more intensively on fewer issues. The discussion converged on a nuanced answer: The IGF should retain a broad scope but also to achieve a stronger focus on critical issues that would enable the Forum to have a more substantive impact.

Lea Kaspar (Global Partners Digital) argued for cross-domain integration - creating deliberate bridges between themes such as AI, cybersecurity, data governance and civic space - rather than either narrowing the agenda or allowing siloed discussions to proliferate. She added that the IGF should become defined not by what it discusses but what it enables.

Theresa Swinehart (ICANN and IGF 2025 MAG member) proposed dedicating a significant portion of the programme to a specific societally relevant issue - such as education, banking or healthcare - as a way to attract and engage new stakeholders, better understand their priorities and concerns, and demonstrate the practical relevance of internet governance across policy domains.

Jordan Carter (.AU) suggested piloting a focused, opt-in process for developing recommendations on one or two topics per year. This process would draw on inputs from NRIs and intersessional work, with

a view to consolidating and synthesizing these contributions into targeted recommendations through a MAG/Secretariat-led effort.

The objective would be to distill diverse, multistakeholder perspectives into concise, accessible policy briefs for decision-makers, clearly outlining key insights, trade-offs and available policy options and in some cases, specific recommendations.

Carter also proposed experimenting at IGF 2026 with a focused session aimed at surfacing trade-offs and policy options on a single concrete issue - for example, age limits for access to social media - and explicitly linking the output of that session to subsequent policy processes. This would also require effort to ensure that a wide range of perspectives was included, not just those already present in the IGF space. Through this wider outreach and active partnerships among session organizers, the MAG, the Secretariat and the host country this approach could serve as a model for demonstrating the distinctive value of the IGF's multidisciplinary and multistakeholder approach in an actionable, real-world governance debate.

3.3 Participation of Developing Countries

There was strong and consistent emphasis from several speakers on the Outcome Document's call for the IGF to ensure meaningful participation by developing country governments - not merely as a matter of representation, but as a condition for the IGF's legitimacy as a permanent UN institution.

Souter underlined that the forum must demonstrate sufficient value to make participation worthwhile, and asked how it can better incentivize engagement from governments that are resource-constrained or unfamiliar with multistakeholder processes. The IGF's responsiveness to the G77's call during the WSIS+20 negotiation process for more direct and substantive engagement of developing country governments is critical to whether it succeeds in leveraging the opportunity presented by permanence. It requires a substantive response, not just an additional slot in the annual forum's programme.

Chafic Chaya (Lebanon IGF) offered a practical lesson from experience: meaningful participation requires capacity building, financial support and trusted engagement. Multi-stakeholder collaboration does not happen automatically - it must be cultivated through sustained engagement with national authorities and processes that build trust over time.

Isabel Lois (Government of Switzerland and IGF 2025 MAG member) highlighted that paragraph 101 - calling for a government dialogue that includes all stakeholders - represents an opportunity to create a dedicated space that lowers the barrier to entry for unfamiliar governments, without reverting to an intergovernmental track that would undermine the multistakeholder model.

Vinayak Bharadwaj (Net Mission / APAC Youth Representative) brought a youth and regional perspective, welcoming the recognition of youth as a permanent stakeholder within the IGF architecture. He identified three critical gaps that remain to be addressed: the insufficient funding available for youth and regional initiatives; the lack of explicit youth participation in discussions on AI governance and emerging technologies, with reference to Paragraphs 81 - 87 of the WSIS+20 outcome document; and the need for structured investment in youth capacity building across the global IGF ecosystem. His intervention was a reminder that meaningful inclusion of underrepresented constituencies requires targeted mechanisms and dedicated resources, not merely formal recognition.

3.4 Outreach Beyond the IGF Community

A recurring concern was the IGF's limited visibility and influence outside its own fairly narrow "community" made up largely of "internet governance insiders". Souter posed a direct challenge: how much impact does the IGF have on thinking in major governments, the World Bank, UNEP, WTO, or the boardrooms of leading technology companies? This challenge is further compounded by the limited visibility of the IGF beyond its immediate community. A key question is the extent to which its outputs are actually read, used or referenced by policymakers and practitioners in major international

organizations, financial institutions and industry actors. Addressing this gap is essential to strengthening the IGF's external relevance and influence.

Juan Fernandez (Government of Cuba and IGF 2025 MAG member) stressed that, beyond internal improvements, the IGF should prioritize stronger outreach to the broader policy ecosystem. He called for formal linkages with international organizations to ensure that IGF outputs - particularly on issues like cybersecurity and AI - are better recognized and used in decision-making processes.

Wolfgang Kleinwachter (European Summer School of Internet Governance and IGF 2025 MAG member) noted that the IGF is - to his knowledge - the most prominent multistakeholder forum dealing with digital governance in the UN system this should be clearly and proactively communicated to intergovernmental processes, including the emerging AI governance forums.

3.5 Integration of the IGF Ecosystem and Making its Components Fit for Purpose

The wider IGF ecosystem beyond the annual event - comprising NRIs, intersessional work (currently made up of Policy Networks, Best Practice Forums, and independent Dynamic Coalitions and various capacity building efforts including the IGF Parliamentary Track) - was widely recognized as one of the forum's greatest strengths. However, speakers consistently noted that these elements operate as parallel tracks rather than as parts of a coherent and inter-connected system.

Elonnai Hickok (Global Network Initiative) argued that the bottom-up, grassroots character of the IGF's ecosystem is a distinctive asset that does not exist in other forums. Strengthening and emphasizing this feature - from national to regional to global - should be a strategic priority.

Referring to IGF Dynamic Coalitions, Wout de Natris (IGF Dynamic Coalition on Internet Standards, Security and Safety) noted that intersessional work produces outputs that few people know about and that rarely influence policy. Making this work more visible, better integrated and more effectively communicated to decision-makers is essential.

Giacomo Mazzone highlighted two further dimensions of integration that deserve attention. First, he argued for multi-year planning in the selection of themes, coordinated with other UN processes where the multistakeholder approach can add distinctive value. Second, he pointed to Policy Networks as an underutilized vehicle for policy incubation - tools already available within the IGF ecosystem that could, if better mobilized, serve as channels for translating dialogue into concrete policy inputs.

Mona Gaballa (Internet Society) presented four priorities emerging from the WSIS+20 resolution that are directly relevant to ecosystem integration. On sustainable funding, she called for a shift beyond dependence on voluntary contributions towards more predictable, long-term mechanisms. On government engagement, she noted that the multistakeholder model only functions if all stakeholders are genuinely at the table, and that incentives and structural changes still need to be studied. On connecting the IGF ecosystem, she observed that the 180+ national and regional NRIs, Best Practice Forums and Policy Networks are not sufficiently connected to one another, and that greater integration is needed while preserving the bottom-up nature of the process. Finally, on linkages with the GDC, WSIS and the 2030 Agenda, she argued that the IGF should function as a central node - not an isolated one - in the UN digital governance ecosystem.

3.6 Outputs and Policy Impact

There was strong convergence on the need to improve the quality, usability and reach of IGF outputs. The IGF operates in a highly competitive information environment, where decision-makers have access to substantive material from UN bodies, research institutions, consultancies and well-funded advocacy organizations.

Souter argued that IGF outputs must be well-researched, well-written, substantive and authoritative - and must say something credible and distinctive if they are to make a serious contribution to wider

discussions. Publishing outcomes alone is insufficient; those outcomes must address the needs of target audiences and reach them in formats and at times they will find relevant.

Desiree Miloshevic-Evans added that impact depends on delivering the right message at the right time to the right actors - aligning IGF outputs with key decision-making moments such as G20 processes, regional summits and UN review cycles.

Anita Gurumurthy (Global Digital Justice Forum/IT for Change) added that the IGF's role can also be understood as enabling "pathways for policy responsiveness", whereby dialogue contributes to shaping policy thinking in a more agile and anticipatory manner. Strengthening this function requires creating a more explicit connection between discussions and their potential policy relevance across different domains.

The question of follow-up remains a critical gap in the IGF model. While the forum generates a significant volume of insights across its annual meeting, NRIs and intersessional work, there are limited mechanisms to ensure that these insights are systematically taken up in policy processes. Strengthening impact therefore requires moving beyond the production of outputs towards establishing clearer pathways for their uptake. This includes identifying target policy processes in advance, aligning outputs with their timelines, and ensuring that responsibility for transmitting and presenting IGF contributions is clearly defined. Without such mechanisms, the risk is that valuable multistakeholder inputs remain underutilized in an increasingly crowded policy environment.

Maarten Botterman offered a reminder that is as simple as it is fundamental: participation and processes are means, not ends. What ultimately matters is impact. He reiterated the dual value of IGF outcomes: on one hand, better-informed policies resulting from genuine multistakeholder dialogue; on the other, the capacity building that participation itself generates for individuals, communities and institutions. This dual value proposition - policy impact and learning - should be more explicitly embedded in how the IGF designs its processes and communicates its results.

3.7 Institutional Arrangements, Governance and Leadership

Participants agreed on the need to revisit the IGF's governance, leadership and institutional arrangements, which have remained largely unchanged since the Tunis Agenda - a framework designed before the emergence of the platform economy, social media, big data and AI, and before the IGF evolved into a complex ecosystem.

Souter recalled that the Tunis Agenda explicitly envisaged periodic review of the IGF's institutional structure, and that the transition to permanence provides a natural and even overdue moment for such reflection.

Miloshevic-Evans called for a stronger strategic role for the MAG, with it including more focused and long-term direction and leadership structures that continue beyond annual cycles. She also argued for a more prominent role for the technical community in the Leadership Panel - bringing operational credibility and a long-standing culture of bottom-up coordination.

Kleinwachter identified three main challenges that the IGF's governance, leadership and institutional arrangements have to confront: developing a new strategic orientation; improving liaison with external processes; and doing the internal homework required to streamline modalities, strengthen intersessional work and ensure that voices from the Global South shape the IGF's direction.

Carol Roach, outgoing MAG Chair, raised two points in her closing remarks that merit explicit attention in any governance reform discussion. First, she drew attention to a generational gap that is rarely acknowledged: young adults aged 25 to 35 - who represent the next generation of policy decision-makers - fall outside the UN's formal definition of "youth" (15 to 24 years), and are therefore neither systematically targeted by youth-oriented capacity building nor fully embedded in senior leadership structures. Addressing this gap requires deliberate attention in the design of the IGF's

participation frameworks. Second, she developed the concept of an IGF Help Desk beyond its function as a navigation tool for new participants, proposing that it could also serve as a channel through which the IGF offers substantive expertise to national institutions - for example, by providing support to governments conducting public consultations on AI strategies. This would extend the IGF's relevance well beyond its annual meeting and position it as a practical resource within national governance processes.

4. From Permanence to Relevance: An Integrated Vision for the Next Phase of the IGF

The discussions at the webinar, combined with the insights of both authors, point towards a coherent vision for the IGF's evolution in the post-WSIS+20 period. This vision can be summarized as follows:

The IGF should evolve from a set of loosely connected activities into an interconnected digital policy and cooperation platform (or ecosystem) - one in which national, regional and global processes are thematically connected; where intersessional work generates cumulative, policy-relevant knowledge; where outputs can more effectively contribute to policy discussions, decision-making processes and target audiences at the appropriate moments; and where the forum's unique multistakeholder character is preserved and deepened.

This vision rests on four interconnected pillars: **Integration, Relevance, Impact and Identity which includes governance and institutional arrangements.**

4.1 Integration

4.1.1 Building a Coherent Digital Dialogue and Cooperation Ecosystem

Nearly twenty years after its creation, the IGF has evolved well beyond its original format as an annual global meeting. It has developed into a distributed ecosystem of initiatives, communities and collaborative processes operating at global, regional and national levels. This evolution is a genuine achievement - but it is an achievement that remains largely unrealized in terms of its potential to generate coherent, cumulative and impactful policy knowledge.

The WSIS+20 outcome provides a clear mandate to strengthen the IGF ecosystem and improve its integration. The central argument is that this moment requires a qualitative shift in how we think about the IGF: not as a series of events and activities, but as an integrated policy ecosystem - one in which dialogue, learning, experimentation and policy engagement reinforce one another across levels and across time.

This shift requires making better use of what already exists: the distributed NRI network, the multistakeholder model, and the flexibility and openness that are the IGF's hallmarks. It requires, above all, a clearer shared sense of purpose - a shared understanding of what the IGF ecosystem is for and how its different components contribute to that purpose.

It also requires a granular understanding of the broader digital governance ecosystem and intentional efforts to connect the IGF with the various global processes dealing with digital technologies, policies and governance. It requires a clear and solid vision of the place that the IGF occupies in the broader ecosystem.

4.1.2 NRIs as Distributed Policy Infrastructure

Today, more than 180 NRIs bring together governments, civil society, the private sector, the technical community and academia to discuss digital policy issues within their national and regional contexts.

These NRIs are diverse in what they do and seek to do and this diversity has to be recognised and supported. NRIs are an extraordinary resource - a genuinely global, genuinely multistakeholder network that connects global discussions with local experiences, perspectives and realities.

NRIs should not be seen as complementary or subsidiary elements of the IGF. They are its distributed infrastructure - the channels through which the multistakeholder model reaches communities and policy environments that the global annual meeting cannot. Strengthening the NRI network means strengthening the IGF's capacity to understand, reflect and act upon the full diversity of the world's digital governance challenges.

Moreover they have the potential to serve as spaces for planning and follow-up on WSIS implementation at regional level. This would require building better and more consistent synergies with relevant regional bodies that play a role in WSIS implementation, such as the UN regional economic commissions. This is already the case in some regions, for example in Africa, and is a contributing factor to the success and sustainability of the African IGF whose secretariat rotates between the UN Economic Commission for Africa and the African Union Commission. For NRIs to fulfill their potential they need more structured and sustained support in terms of capacity building, funding, peer learning and integration into regional and global processes. It also requires a clearer articulation of what NRIs are expected to contribute to the global IGF - and reciprocally, what the global IGF offers to NRIs.

4.1.3 From Parallel Processes to Structural Coherence

The IGF ecosystem's greatest untapped potential lies in the connections between its components. Annual meetings, NRIs, intersessional activities and the Secretariat currently operate with insufficient coordination and limited feedback between levels. Realizing the ecosystem's potential requires building structural pathways - not bureaucratic ones - that allow insights from national and regional contexts to inform global discussions, and global frameworks to be tested and implemented locally.

This means, concretely: NRIs being open to receiving thematic inputs that emerge from dialogue and debate at the global IGF and feeding consolidated perspectives back upward; intersessional outputs being systematically incorporated into annual meeting programmes; and the Secretariat playing an active knowledge management role that connects these different streams into a coherent policy narrative.

4.1.4 From Dialogue to Learning and Experimentation

As the international community moves into the implementation phase of WSIS+20, the IGF ecosystem must evolve beyond dialogue towards what we would describe as a policy incubator function. This does not mean transforming the IGF into an implementation body or a negotiating forum. It means creating spaces within the ecosystem where dialogue can evolve into shared learning, collaborative experimentation and practical initiative.

The concept of NRI Laboratories - voluntary, open multistakeholder learning spaces within the IGF annual programme - offers a concrete mechanism to support this evolution. Organized around specific policy challenges identified by interested NRIs, these Labs could bring together policymakers, experts and stakeholders from different regions to exchange experiences, examine practical implementation challenges and develop non-binding lessons learned, case studies and collaborative initiatives.

NRI Labs would provide a structured space where NRIs, together with the broader IGF community, can explore emerging policy issues, test collaborative approaches, share practical experiences, and develop initiatives that can inform and feed into policy processes at national, regional and global levels.

Where relevant, discussions within NRI Labs could also build upon and connect with ongoing work undertaken across the broader IGF ecosystem, including Dynamic Coalitions, Policy Networks, Best Practice Forums and other intersessional activities. This would help ensure that practical experiences

emerging from NRIs benefit from existing expertise and ongoing policy discussions, while also creating new pathways for knowledge-sharing and collaboration across different parts of the IGF community.

While not intended to produce formal IGF outcomes, they could generate practical knowledge and voluntary recommendations that inform policy processes at national, regional and global levels.

A key dimension of NRI Labs is that they can function as spaces for **structured peer learning among NRIs themselves** — enabling national and regional initiatives to compare approaches, draw lessons from each other's experiences, and develop shared understandings of emerging policy challenges. This peer learning function is distinct from, and complementary to, the NRIs' contribution to the broader IGF programme: it addresses the internal development needs of the NRI network, which currently lacks dedicated spaces for horizontal knowledge exchange. NRI Labs could also serve a **dual-level architecture**: while they would operate within the global IGF annual programme, they could be mirrored at national and regional level through open community initiative windows within individual NRIs — voluntary spaces where local stakeholders present concrete projects, partnerships or implementation experiences linked to WSIS Action Lines or Global Digital Compact objectives. This bottom-up aggregation of implementation knowledge would feed back into both NRI Labs and the wider IGF ecosystem, creating a genuine multi-level learning circuit.

4.1.5 Integration Across the WSIS and Wider UN Digital Cooperation Architecture

The transition from permanence to relevance requires a more clearly articulated institutional model for the IGF, consistent with the WSIS+20 framework. The priority should be to clarify roles, strengthen functions and improve system-wide integration - not to introduce new structures. For example the IGF can collaborate and connect with the Action Line oriented WSIS Forum through facilitating a process whereby the NRIs' convene decentralised WSIS planning, implementation and follow up discussions.

In this regard, the NRI Labs described above could provide a practical mechanism for bringing together interested NRIs around specific WSIS Action Lines or digital cooperation challenges, enabling the exchange of implementation experiences and the identification of good practices that could inform both the WSIS Forum and broader IGF discussions.

NRIs themselves could also introduce voluntary calls for projects and initiatives related to specific WSIS Action Lines, creating opportunities for stakeholders to showcase concrete implementation efforts and partnerships at national and regional levels. This bottom-up mechanism would increase the visibility of activities taking place on the ground, facilitate knowledge-sharing across communities, and feed practical experiences back into global discussions.

4.2 Relevance

4.2.1 Reaching Decision-Makers Proactively

A relevant IGF is one that systematically engages with decision-makers and communities of practice both within the digital space and in other public policy arenas. This should be a two-way dialogue — not just about the IGF seeking to influence those other communities of practice, but also actively listening to and learning from them. Some IGF Dynamic Coalitions are already facilitating this kind of engagement, for example the DCs on Media Sustainability and Community Connectivity.

Achieving this requires moving beyond the current approach of producing outputs and hoping they will be noticed. The IGF therefore needs a proactive engagement strategy capable of identifying relevant policy processes, establishing entry points for IGF contributions, and ensuring that outputs reach their intended audiences in formats and at times that make them useful. This engagement should extend beyond the traditional internet governance community to governments — including non-digital ministries

— international organisations, civil society organisations, think tanks, technology companies and internet-technical organisations.

The IGF should also strengthen linkages with other relevant UN and digital governance processes, including the GDC review process, CSTD, UNGIS and AI governance bodies, ensuring that IGF discussions and outputs can feed into these processes at relevant moments. To support this function effectively, the IGF will require sufficient policy expertise and operational capacity to monitor major digital policy developments, coordinate engagement efforts, and assist stakeholders unfamiliar with the IGF in navigating and participating in its processes.

As Kleinwachter suggested, the IGF is uniquely positioned to offer something intergovernmental bodies cannot: genuine multistakeholder input, synthesized from a global network of national and regional processes. This is a distinctive and valuable contribution, but it requires active communication and strategic outreach to be recognised as such.

4.2.2 Reaching Beyond the IGF Community

A recurring concern is the IGF's limited visibility and influence outside its own fairly narrow community, made up largely of internet governance insiders. Even with a strong proactive engagement strategy in place, the IGF faces a deeper challenge: making its value legible to those who are not already familiar with it.

This challenge is compounded by the fact that many of the policy processes with the most profound impact on the digital sphere — including trade, climate change, peace and militarisation — do not originate within the internet governance space at all. Building two-way bridges between the IGF and the stakeholders active in these areas is therefore both necessary and complex.

Beyond internal improvements and strategic outreach, the IGF needs to find ways of capturing and communicating the value of what a public participation platform for policy dialogue and debate offers. This is widely recognised as the IGF's core strength by those who engage with it regularly. But unless this value is understood more broadly, beyond the IGF's traditional community, the forum will struggle to consolidate its relevance in wider digital policy circles and beyond.

4.2.3 The Annual Meeting as a Strategic Interface

The annual meeting should remain the IGF's central convening space, but it should increasingly function as a strategic interface between dialogue, policy learning and decision-making processes. This requires clearer links between workshops, main sessions, intersessional work, NRIs and final outputs, as well as formats that help surface trade-offs, identify policy options and connect discussions to relevant policy moments. One mechanism for achieving this would be to dedicate a significant portion of the programme to deep-diving into a topical digital policy area or issue — such as education, banking or healthcare — from the perspective of different regions and stakeholders. This can attract new participants from those policy areas and demonstrate the practical value of internet governance across policy domains. Crucially, experts from communities of practice in those other fields should take a leading role, bringing their own priorities and framings as the starting point for discussion, rather than simply being invited to engage with an agenda set by internet governance insiders.

To connect this approach to NRIs and intersessional work, the IGF can pilot a focused, opt-in process for developing policy briefs and recommendations on one or two topics in these issue areas every year. NRIs and intersessional activities can workshop these topics at regional, national or thematic level, feed their results back into the annual planning process, and the MAG and Secretariat can consolidate and

synthesize their contributions into targeted recommendations — either as an input or outcome of the global Forum.

The objective would be to distill diverse, multistakeholder perspectives into concise, accessible policy briefs that can inform decision-makers, clearly outlining key insights, the choices available and their respective implications, and where appropriate, specific recommendations.

The IGF also needs to recognise that it is not sufficient to rely on the presence of multiple stakeholders. What matters is the quality and depth of their engagement. Specifically, this means ensuring that format innovations — from workshops and main sessions to high-level leadership segments to focused policy observatories or laboratories — are deliberately designed to draw in underrepresented voices and surface divergent views. The Sao Paulo Multistakeholder Guidelines are a useful tool for deepening the IGF's application of the multistakeholder approach, but they are not a substitute for critical engagement with that approach itself and the extent to which it risks legitimising the status quo in current internet governance arrangements.

4.3 Impact

4.3.1 Moving Towards a Policy Incubator Model

The transition from dialogue to policy incubation does not require abandoning the IGF's core character. It requires building on it - creating the conditions under which dialogue generates practical knowledge, collaborative experiments and policy proposals that can be taken forward by relevant actors.

The NRI Labs concept, described in Section 4.1.4, offers a concrete model: voluntary, open, non-prescriptive spaces where dialogue evolves into shared experimentation. The opt-in topic brief model proposed by Jordan Carter - distilling insights from NRIs and intersessional work into accessible policy documents for a specific target audience - offers another. Together, these mechanisms could transform the IGF ecosystem into a genuine policy incubator: not a body that makes decisions, but one that generates the knowledge and proposals that inform decisions elsewhere.

4.3.2 Rethinking IGF Outputs

Proposals to improve IGF outputs have been made as long as the IGF has been in existence. Doing so is certainly a prerequisite for a more impactful IGF, but the challenge is not simply to produce better documents, more concise briefs, or more targeted communications. The deeper challenge is to recognise that better outputs are the product of a better-designed process. If the IGF continues to focus on producing outputs after the fact by synthesizing at the end what has been discussed at the annual event the quality of those outputs will remain limited, regardless of the editorial effort invested. The deliberative process that leads to outputs needs to be able to stand up to scrutiny in the international fora to which those outputs are directed. The current process for Messages from the annual meeting (an overnight selection of extracts from submissions by workshop organisers) is not adequate. It's not easy to design a more robust procedure, and this needs considerable thought, including asking potential audiences what they would find useful and consider authoritative. The IGF Messages as they are currently presented are, however, effective in conveying to the general public what was discussed at the IGF.

Meaningful, policy-relevant outputs require that the process itself be designed with outputs in mind from the outset with discussions structured around clearly articulated questions; with intersessional work, NRI contributions and annual meeting sessions sequenced and connected so as to build cumulative knowledge rather than repeat familiar arguments; and that participants understand, at the beginning of a process, what kind of contribution is expected and how it will be used. Strengthening IGF outputs is a design challenge as much as it is a strategic communications challenge. It requires the MAG and the Secretariat to make explicit choices about what the IGF is trying to say, to whom, and by when - and to

work backwards from those choices to design the processes that will generate that knowledge. If applied thoughtfully the multistakeholder model is not a constraint on this kind of intentional design: it is its foundation. A well-designed multistakeholder process, in which participants with different expertise and perspectives engage with shared questions in structured ways, is precisely what generates the distinctive, authoritative insights that the IGF can offer and that no single-stakeholder body can replicate.

4.3.3 From Dialogue to Policy Learning

A key weakness of the current model is that it is very difficult to measure the IGF's impact - not because the impact does not exist, but because the mechanisms for tracking, synthesizing and communicating it are inadequate. Moving towards a policy incubator model requires developing clearer frameworks for assessing whether IGF dialogues and outputs are actually influencing policy decisions, building capacity and changing thinking.

This is not about imposing quantitative targets that distort the forum's character. It is about developing a shared understanding of what success looks like - and building the feedback mechanisms needed to know whether it is being achieved. The WSIS Action Lines and the Global Digital Compact objectives provide a ready-made framework for mapping IGF contributions to global commitments. Using this framework more systematically would strengthen both the relevance and the accountability of the IGF ecosystem.

4.3.4 Creating Pathways for Policy Uptake

The question of follow-up remains a critical gap in the IGF model. While the forum generates a significant volume of insights across its annual meeting, NRIs and intersessional work, there are limited mechanisms to ensure that these insights are systematically taken up in policy processes. Strengthening impact therefore requires moving beyond the production of outputs towards establishing clearer pathways for their uptake. This includes identifying target policy processes in advance, aligning outputs with their timelines, and ensuring that responsibility for transmitting and presenting IGF contributions is clearly defined. Without such mechanisms, the risk is that valuable multistakeholder inputs remain underutilized in an increasingly crowded policy environment.

4.3.5 Measuring Impact

Aside from data on participation in the annual forum, measurement, monitoring evaluation and learning by the IGF has been somewhat adhoc. Several evaluation studies have been commissioned, either by UN DESA itself, by a MAG chair, or by external bodies. They all provide valuable information but use different methodologies and indicators. Some of these studies come across as promotional material rather than as serious efforts to evaluate and learn.

A future-oriented IGF needs to find ways to set long-term goals, introduce results-based management and measure its impact.

One way of doing this would be for the MAG to agree on committing work on one or two specific policy issues – linked to specific decision making processes – for a two to three year period and then engage intentionally with NRIs and intersessional modalities to explore this policy issue with a view to distilling insights gained into accessible, decision-maker-facing documents. It would then be possible for the IGF to assess and gain feedback on the extent to which these documents have been received and used. This approach is not entirely without precedent in the IGF ecosystem. Some BPFs and PNAs as well as DCs have adopted this approach even if only partially.

4.4 Identity

4.4.1 Preserving the Multistakeholder Non-negotiation Character of the IGF

The IGF's greatest and most irreplaceable contribution to global governance is the space it creates - a space where governments, civil society, the private sector, the technical community and others can engage with relative freedom and openness in dialogue about the issues that shape our digital future. In a global context where such spaces are under increasing pressure, this contribution has never been more important.

The multistakeholder model is not a procedure. It is a practice - one that requires continuous investment in capacity building, trust-building and attention to power asymmetries. It also needs to consider financial resources needed to address the imbalances in participation and sustained engagement. The participation of developing country governments, civil society from the Global South, youth and marginalized communities is not simply a matter of representation; it is a condition for the legitimacy and quality of the IGF's work.

The transition to permanence introduces real risks. Bureaucratization and reduced openness and creativity are not hypothetical concerns - they are patterns that have been observed in other UN bodies as they became institutionalized. Guarding against these tendencies requires deliberate and sustained effort from the entire IGF community.

At the same time, permanence is an opportunity. It creates the conditions for more sustained and strategic engagement - for building the relationships, the knowledge base and the institutional memory that can make the IGF's contribution more consistent and more impactful over time.

The IGF's role as a forum for critical thinking, dialogue and debate must remain central. It is one of the most established and inclusive multistakeholder forums in the digital governance ecosystem and has played a unique role in bringing together governments, the private sector, the technical community, civil society and academia on an equal footing.

Its value lies not in producing negotiated outcomes, but in creating the conditions under which better-informed decisions can be made in other policy-making processes. This is a contribution that is difficult to measure but profoundly important. It must be protected, explained and defended.

At a time when digital policy challenges increasingly cut across institutions and sectors, the IGF's multistakeholder model should also be promoted more broadly as a source of inspiration for other governance processes and forums. The principles reflected in the São Paulo Multistakeholder Guidelines provide a useful reference point for strengthening inclusive, transparent and accountable participation across the wider digital governance landscape.

Looking ahead, the most important strategic investment the IGF can make is in the depth and quality of its dialogues - ensuring that the right people are in the room, that they engage with relevant issues and evidence, and that the perspectives of those most affected by digital developments are genuinely heard and reflected in the forum's outputs and direction. A key part of achieving this involves critical engagement with how the IGF operationalizes and evolves the multistakeholder approach.

This is not merely a question of who sits at the table - it is a question of how the table functions. The multistakeholder approach in digital policy can facilitate learning and understanding through dialogue between stakeholders with different perspectives and interests. It can also build enduring relationships which can strengthen policy debate over time. But it is not a substitute for accountable and inclusive governance. If used effectively, multistakeholder participation can contribute to evidence-based policy and strengthened governance. But it comes with its own set of challenges and risks.

Multistakeholder processes are complex and power asymmetries exist between and within stakeholder groups, particularly at a time when current trends in the convergence of power and interest between big tech companies and governments of the states where they are incorporated or based are making these dynamics even more complex.

4.4.2 The Multistakeholder “Bottom-up” Process

Throughout all of these evolutions, the IGF's core identity must be protected. Its value lies precisely in what differentiates it from intergovernmental bodies: its openness, its inclusiveness, its non-negotiating character, its bottom-up energy.

The risk of institutionalization is real: as the IGF becomes more structured and more integrated into UN processes, pressures will emerge to reduce openness and concentrate decision-making in fewer hands. Resisting these pressures requires deliberate, sustained effort from the entire IGF community. The goal is an IGF that is both more effective and more open - achieving greater policy impact precisely because it reflects the genuine diversity of perspectives that a multistakeholder process can generate.

We are in a highly complex digital environment. Different tracks within it require specialist discussion and targeted decision-making, but this does contribute to a distributed and at times fragmented and rapidly evolving global governance landscape. In this context the IGF's strategic positioning as a space for dialogue and coherence through facilitating public participation and aggregating information about what is being discussed in other fora becomes increasingly important. The IGF should not position itself as one forum among many, or as the only forum for digital governance and cooperation, but as the connective tissue, the space where information about who is doing what, where is easy to find, where diverse perspectives and drive dialogue and debate, and where policy silos can be bridged. Its unique value lies in its ability to bring together multistakeholder and multidisciplinary inputs from national, regional and global levels and convert them into coherent insights that can inform decision-making across institutions. This integrative function is not yet fully realized and requires more deliberate articulation and operationalization.

4.4.3 Preserving the IGF's Identity within the UN System

Greater integration within the UN system must not compromise the IGF's core characteristics. Its strength lies precisely in being a non-negotiating, open and inclusive forum, capable of shaping policy without formal decision-making power.. As recalled in paragraph 77 of the Tunis Agenda “The IGF would have no oversight function and would not replace existing arrangements, mechanisms, institutions or organizations, but would involve them and take advantage of their expertise. It would be constituted as a neutral, non-duplicative and non-binding process. It would have no involvement in day-to-day or technical operations of the Internet. “

This principle must be preserved through every stage of the IGF's institutional evolution.

4.4.4 A strengthened Secretariat and clearer oversight

Participants at the webinar agreed on the need to revisit the IGF's governance, leadership and institutional arrangements, which have remained largely unchanged since the Tunis Agenda. Neither the Leadership Panel nor the MAG has a clear oversight role that provides consistency and accountability for implementation of, for example, recommendations from Expert Group Meetings, or that emerge from independent evaluation studies. The Secretariat will also need to be expanded to respond effectively to the IGF's permanent mandate. Without institutional reform, the four-pillar vision set out above cannot be operationalized.

The MAG should evolve from a primarily operational body — focused on programme-building for the annual meeting — and include a strategic governance layer with responsibility for the coherence and cumulative impact of the entire IGF ecosystem. If the Leadership Panel is to continue it can also play

this role, ideally in collaboration with the MAG. The Secretariat should evolve into the operational and analytical backbone of the IGF. Without adequate resourcing, expectations regarding impact will remain impossible to meet.

4.4.5 Towards a More Strategic MAG

Strengthening the MAG's strategic function requires not only a clearer mandate but also a more structured working method. As currently designed, the MAG's annual cycle is dominated by programme-building for the global meeting — a necessary but insufficient function for a body expected to oversee the coherence and cumulative impact of a permanent, year-round ecosystem. A reformed MAG should operate on a **multi-year planning horizon**, adopting thematic priorities for a two-to-three-year cycle aligned with key global review moments (including the GDC review in 2027 and WSIS Forum cycles), and systematically tracking whether intersessional outputs, NRI contributions and annual meeting discussions are advancing those priorities.

Within this framework, the MAG should support the Secretariat in maintaining **dedicated liaison functions** with the principal external processes the IGF seeks to inform: the GDC review mechanism, CSTD, UNGIS, WSIS Action Line Facilitation processes, and emerging AI governance bodies, among others. These functions — whether assigned to MAG members or working groups, need to be supported and coordinated by the Secretariat — could involve monitoring relevant decision-making timelines, identifying entry points for IGF contributions, and ensuring that IGF outputs are transmitted in formats and at moments that maximize their use and uptake. This is not a departure from the IGF's non-negotiating character: it is the operational infrastructure required to make that character relevant.

The MAG should also introduce a **structured feedback loop with NRIs**, moving beyond the current model in which NRIs contribute outputs to the global meeting largely in parallel rather than in sequence. Concretely, this could take the form of an annual NRI contributions cycle: NRIs identify thematic inputs to the global programme in advance, these inputs are synthesized by the Secretariat, and the results are explicitly reflected in the global meeting's agenda and final outputs. The NRI Labs described in Section 4.1.4 could serve as the primary operational channel for this cycle, transforming what is currently an informal exchange into a structured, multi-level policy learning process.

5. Recommendations

The following recommendations are addressed to UN DESA, the IGF MAG, the Secretariat, the NRI community and the broader IGF ecosystem including Dynamic Coalitions. They translate the four-pillar vision into a practical agenda for the next phase of the IGF.

5.1 Integration

- Develop a multi-year thematic framework providing coherence across the annual meeting, intersessional activities and NRI programmes, aligned with WSIS Action Lines and GDC objectives. Keep themes broad enough to allow for surfacing emerging key issues.
- Establish clearer structural pathways between NRIs, Policy Networks, Dynamic Coalitions and the global IGF. This should include a systematic mechanism for NRIs to contribute thematic inputs to the global programme, and for global discussions to be translated into NRI-level dialogues
- Pilot NRI Laboratories at IGF 2026 as voluntary, open multistakeholder spaces for collaborative learning and experimentation

- Encourage NRIs to introduce open windows for community initiatives as a bottom-up mechanism for surfacing implementation experiences
- Strengthen the MAG's (and or the Leadership Panel) role to include oversight responsibility for coherence across all components

5.2 Relevance

- Select the IGF's thematic focus in response to current policy priorities and controversies and avoid platitudes such as "Internet for all" or "global digital cooperation among all stakeholders".
- Address controversial and complex topics and themes rather than avoid them. The IGF was created precisely to provide a platform for such discussions. For example topics such as digital governance and militarisation, financing digital development, corporate accountability, taxation, systemic surveillance, and the social and political impact of trends in social media use and business models
- Develop a systematic outreach strategy targeting decision-makers in key policy arenas: governments (including non-digital ministries), international organizations, major technology companies, and sectors such as finance, health and education
- Establish formal linkages with other UN processes - in particular the GDC review process (2027), CSTD, UNGIS and AI governance bodies but also other entities that deal with digital policy and regulation, for example, UNDP, OHCHR, UNIDIR - ensuring IGF outputs feed into these at relevant moments
- Map IGF contributions systematically to other UN processes, for example WSIS Action Lines, GDC objectives and processes (e.g. the AI Dialogue), and digital economy and data governance discussions at UNCTAD making the IGF's contribution visible and traceable and proactively inviting these initiatives to use the IGF as a platform for wider multistakeholder and interdisciplinary information sharing and consultation

5.3 Impact

- Pilot an opt-in topic brief process for one or two issues at IGF 2026 with the Secretariat distilling insights from NRIs and intersessional work into accessible, decision-maker-facing documents. These documents need not claim consensus, in fact, their value could be precisely in the aggregation of different perspectives on the chosen topics
- Align IGF output timelines with key international decision-making moments (G20, regional summits, UN review cycles)
- Develop a framework for assessing IGF impact: qualitative indicators of whether outputs are reaching, influencing and being used by target audiences
- Strengthen the analytical and knowledge management capacity of the Secretariat, enabling synthesis of intersessional outputs into policy-relevant formats
- Utilise Policy Networks and Dynamic Coalitions to deepen intersessional work on policy issues that emerge during the global forum. This intersessional work can then inform the next global forum help it deliver more comprehensive and sophisticated outcomes and messages

5.4 Identity

- Ensure that governance reforms address existing participation imbalances across the IGF ecosystem while preserving its multistakeholder character. Particular attention should be given to strengthening the participation of developing country governments, in line with the WSIS+20 Outcome Document, while also addressing underrepresentation among other stakeholder groups, including youth, Global South communities, small and medium-sized enterprises, demand-side businesses and other actors whose perspectives are not yet adequately reflected in IGF processes.

Enhanced government engagement mechanisms should complement and enrich multistakeholder dialogue rather than create parallel or separate processes.

- Avoid losing the IGF's bottom-up and community-led character by keeping MAG meetings open, inviting members of the community to participate in MAG working groups and by investing time and resources in the sustainability of the intersessional modalities.
- Facilitate capacity building to help Global North representatives improve their understanding of Global South realities and priorities
- Ensure the Leadership Panel, if it continues, reflects the full diversity of the multistakeholder model, including a more prominent role for the technical community and representatives from the Global South
- Commission a comprehensive independent external assessment of the IGF - asking those outside the community what they know, think and need - to inform the next phase of strategic development

6. Operational Pathways for these Recommendations

Translating the four-pillar vision set out in this paper into practice requires more than strategic intent. It requires identifying concrete mechanisms, assigning clear responsibilities, and introducing results-based management to ensure effective implementation. This section outlines a set of operational pathways that could enable the IGF to move from analysis to action, without altering its non-negotiating character.

6.1 Strengthening the IGF's Policy Interface

A first set of mechanisms concerns the IGF's capacity to connect its deliberative processes with relevant external decision-making moments. These could include: (i) thematic *policy windows* aligned with key global processes — such as the GDC review (2027), CSTD sessions, WSIS Forum cycles and regional summits — where IGF discussions are explicitly structured to inform upcoming decisions; (ii) the designation of *policy rapporteurs* or focal points, supported by the Secretariat, responsible for synthesizing and conveying IGF outputs to relevant institutions and for developing concise, audience-specific policy briefs; and (iii) the development of those briefs through an opt-in model that preserves the voluntary character of the IGF while enabling targeted, decision-maker-facing contributions. Responsibility for these functions should be explicitly assigned — to specific MAG working groups, Secretariat units, or a combination of both — and tracked against agreed timelines.

6.2 Reforming the MAG's Working Method

A second set of mechanisms concerns the MAG's own governance and working method. As currently designed, the MAG's annual cycle is dominated by programme-building for the global meeting — a necessary but insufficient function for a body expected to oversee a permanent, year-round ecosystem. A reformed MAG should operate on a multi-year planning horizon, adopting thematic priorities for a two-to-three-year cycle aligned with key global review moments, and systematically tracking whether intersessional outputs, NRI contributions and annual meeting discussions are advancing those priorities. The MAG should also establish dedicated liaison functions with the principal external processes the IGF seeks to inform — the GDC review mechanism, CSTD, UNGIS, WSIS Action Line Facilitation processes and emerging AI governance bodies — ensuring IGF outputs are transmitted in formats and at moments that maximize their uptake.

6.3 Governance and Institutional Arrangements

Effective operationalization also requires stronger institutional foundations. Concretely, this means:

- Review the respective roles of the Leadership Panel and the MAG, including whether greater integration, closer coordination or clearer differentiation in roles and responsibilities would improve effectiveness, transparency and accountability.
- Commission an independent review of the MAG's composition, working methods and annual calendar, with a view to strengthening MAG member selection, its strategic function and introducing multi-year planning cycles aligned with key global review processes, including the GDC review 2027
- Establish MAG liaison focal points for principal external processes (GDC, CSTD, UNGIS, WSIS Action Lines, AI governance bodies), with a clear mandate to monitor decision-making timelines, identify IGF entry points and transmit outputs in actionable formats, supported by the Secretariat and reporting back to the MAG regularly
- Formalize a structured NRI contribution cycle — an annual process through which NRIs identify thematic inputs to the global IGF programme in advance, enabling the Secretariat to synthesize and integrate these contributions into the annual meeting agenda and outputs, rather than treating them as parallel streams
- Secure stable, predictable Secretariat funding, as called for in paragraph 103 of the WSIS+20 resolution, and expand Secretariat capacity to include an executive secretary or senior management position, as well as dedicated functions for knowledge management, government engagement, policy analysis and external engagement, in addition to the current positions that focus on supporting NRIs and intersessional work.

7. Conclusion

The IGF does not need to be reinvented. It needs to be revitalised and some of its processes reformatted towards being more impactful as a significant platform for multistakeholder public participation in debate and dialogue on digital governance.

The WSIS+20 outcome has provided the mandate, the framework and the political signal. The IGF community has the analysis, the insights and the commitment. What is now required is the will and the capacity to translate these assets into a coherent, sustained programme of evolution - one that builds on what has worked well, addresses what has not, and keeps sight of what the IGF is ultimately for: ensuring that the governance of the digital environment serves the public interest.

The transition from permanence to relevance is not optional. It is explicitly embedded in the WSIS+20 Outcome Document. It is demanded by the urgency of the global digital governance challenges ahead - in AI, in cybersecurity, in digital inclusion, in the relationship between digital development and sustainability. And it is what the IGF community has been working towards throughout this cycle.

"Make haste, but take your time. We need to do things quickly - but we need to get it right." - Carol Roach, IGF MAG Chair 2025 - Closing Remarks

The measure of success of the IGF will not be the permanence it has been granted by the WSIS+20 review process. It will be its ability to remain relevant in a constantly evolving internet and digital governance landscape and the difference that relevance makes to the people and communities whose digital futures are at stake.

About the authors

Concettina Cassa served on the IGF MAG from 2018 to 2020 and on the 2025 IGF MAG. She currently serves as Head of International Affairs at AgID and coordinates the Italian Internet Governance Forum (IGF).

Anriette Esterhuysen is currently working as a consultant including in the capacity of Senior Advisor on Internet Governance at the Association for Progressive Communications (APC). While she was Executive Director of the APC she served on the IGF MAG from 2012 to 2014. After stepping down from her position at the APC she was appointed by the UN SG to chair the IGF MAG in 2020 and 2021.