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GLOBAL INFORMATION SOCIETY WATCH

*National and Regional Internet
Governance Forum Initiatives (NRIs)*



ASSOCIATION FOR PROGRESSIVE COMMUNICATIONS (APC)

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A special edition of GISWatch, "Internet governance from the edges: NRIs in their own words", is being published as a companion edition to the 2017 GISWatch annual report. It looks at the history, challenges and achievements of NRIs, as recounted by their organisers. It is available at <https://www.giswatch.org>



Colnodo

Ariel Barbosa, with members of the Colombian Bureau of Internet Governance¹
www.colnodo.apc.org

Introduction

The Colombian Bureau of Internet Governance² – *Mesa Colombiana de Gobernanza de Internet* in Spanish – is a multistakeholder group that has been facilitating discussions and debates on the future of the internet in the country since 2013. While it is called a “Bureau”, it follows the same guidelines published by the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) to assist communities in establishing IGF initiatives.³ At the time of writing, the Bureau had organised three national IGFs, and one was being planned.

Colombia is a country with great social challenges – including when it comes to constructing the space for discussion that gives voice to communities and citizens who are normally excluded the decision-making processes. Part of this is because of the remoteness of urban centres and the internal conflict that has existed in the country since the mid-20th century.

This report describes how the Colombian Bureau of Internet Governance was set up and some of the challenges it faces.

Policy and political background

It is presently a historical moment in Colombia because of the signing of the peace agreement between the country’s largest guerrilla group and the national government. To date, this agreement has resulted in the demobilisation of more than 7,000 guerrillas, the surrendering of their weapons, and the creation of a political party from former fighters (FARC – *Fuerza Alternativa Revolucionaria del Común*).⁴ Therefore, this agreement has sown great

expectations for both sides. Some Colombian citizens see the agreement as a possibility for stable peace, while others are weary because they do not believe that there will be fair reparations for the victims of more than 50 years of armed conflict, as well as exemplary criminal sanctions for some guerrillas who committed a variety of crimes during this 50-year period.

However, this cessation of conflict has allowed the country to have slight but steady economic growth over the course of the past five years, which has positioned it as a solid democracy and economy in the region, despite the fact that a peace process is pending with another guerrilla group, the National Liberation Army (*Ejército de Liberación Nacional* – ELN).⁵ The country is also attempting to control far-right and criminal groups that are attempting to resume the felonious activities such as drug trafficking or illegal mining formerly carried out by some FARC members.⁶

And it is precisely this reintegration of former guerrillas into civil society that presents one of the greatest challenges of Colombian society today. This is because this reintegration should not only facilitate former FARC members’ entry into the country’s politics and economy – both online and offline – but it also needs to ensure their physical safety. As a matter of fact, the lack of open, diverse and secure participation in the public sphere was one of the reasons that started the internal conflict in the country in the first place.

At the regional level, Colombia is one of the countries where the internet has developed rapidly, not only in terms of penetration and infrastructure, but also in terms of appropriation by civil society in general. This development has been leveraged in part by the Colombian government, which promotes the internet as a tool to make its governance more transparent and efficient through programmes such as the Connectivity Agenda. This rapid development has also been possible because of the private sector’s active participation in the roll-out

1 This report is based on the document *Mesa Colombiana de Gobernanza de Internet* which was produced by the members of the Bureau and publicly presented at the global Internet Governance Forum in Guadalajara, Mexico, in 2016.

2 www.gobernanzadeinternet.co

3 <https://www.intgovforum.org/multilingual/content/nris-toolkit>

4 Barajas, A. (2017, 31 August). Colombia’s FARC unveils new political party. *CNN*. www.cnn.com/2017/08/31/americas/colombia-farc-new-political-party/index.html

5 Arboleda, L. (2017, 7 February). Los procesos de paz con el Eln. *El Espectador*. <https://colombia2020.elespectador.com/politica/los-procesos-de-paz-con-el-eln>

6 Cosoy, N. (2017, 20 July). Los grupos armados que están ocupando los territorios abandonados por las FARC en Colombia. *BBC*. www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-40646855

of infrastructure since the early 1990s and due to the role of universities through networks such as Interred.

Thanks to the proactive and consistent activity of diverse stakeholders using the internet, there is no significant imbalance in ability to participate in decision-making spaces. However, sometimes the level of participation is different. For example, there have yet to be effective and inclusive discussions about the future of the internet and some sensitive issues in the country, such as an adequate balance between privacy and national security.

Setting up the Bureau

In 2013, after an informal meeting of the Colombian participants at the Latin American and Caribbean regional IGF (LACIGF) in Córdoba, Argentina,⁷ the Colombian Internet Governance Bureau was established. The Bureau is a local space without a formal structure and is open to multiple stakeholders. It is intended for discussing general topics associated with the concept of internet governance in Colombia. These topics include, for example, the internet and its contribution to human development; the internet and its contribution to income redistribution and poverty reduction; internet development and associated industries; and internet security.

In 2017, the participants in the Bureau drafted a Declaration⁸ which defines the Bureau's areas of interest, its target audience, forms of participation, and the nature of the agreements reached by the participants – they are non-binding, and are an expression of the opinions of participants at a given moment on a particular topic.

Since the creation of the Bureau, 22 bi-monthly meetings have been held where topics ranging from connectivity initiatives, growing zero-rating offerings, and other concerns regarding the regulation of the internet, including security, privacy, data retention, taxes, copyright infringement, IPv6 and fake news, have been discussed. Through the Commission for Communications Regulation and the Ministry of Information and Communications Technology (ICT), the government has submitted different public policy drafts to the Bureau for feedback. During this time, a healthy environment of respectful debate between the multiple stakeholders has been maintained.

How to participate

The Bureau includes participants from universities and research centres, civil society, the government

and the private sector.⁹ The Bureau has created an outline for engagement based on the following concepts:

- It is understood that by participating in the Bureau, participants seek to identify topics, actions or proposals with a focus on Colombian communities and the country's citizens.
- The Bureau is open to all persons and organisations that wish to participate in a dialogue about the issues outlined in the Declaration.¹⁰
- Participation in the Bureau is voluntary.
- A hierarchical order is not defined between members.
- The Bureau does not seek to reach consensus on different topics, but is a space for dialogue where the different opinions of its members can be acknowledged.
- The Bureau's discussions are not binding and carry no legal obligation, but are an expression of the participants' opinions on a particular topic at a given moment.
- It is the responsibility of the Bureau's different participants to search for new members from different stakeholder groups who will contribute to the diversification of viewpoints in discussions of these topics. This includes the government, businesses, civil society, universities and the technical community, among others.

The Bureau has set up a website, a Twitter account (@fgicolombia with 113 followers) and a discussion list¹¹ that, at the time of this report, had 172 registered members. The website has a documentation centre which shares news about regional and international governance and information about events. The website also publishes the minutes of all its meetings and annual forums, which are accessible to any visitor to the website.¹²

Raising awareness of internet governance in the country

In addition to these permanent resources, the Colombian Bureau of Internet Governance also hosts events, such as Vint Cerf's 2015 lecture at the Universidad del Rosario, where the results of the global IGF in Joao Pessoa, Brazil in 2015 were discussed. The Bureau also runs training workshops for government entities, such as the one conducted for the employees of the Superintendency of

7 27 to 29 August 2013.

8 <https://gubernanzadeinternet.co/es/declaracion>

9 <https://gubernanzadeinternet.co/es/actores>

10 <https://www.gubernanzadeinternet.co/es/declaracion>

11 listas.colnodo.apc.org/mailman/listinfo/fgicolombia

12 <https://gubernanzadeinternet.co/es/actas>

Industry and Commerce in 2017, with the objective of expanding government participation in the Bureau.

However, it has been found that national IGFs are the most effective way to disseminate information regarding internet governance in the country. Up until August 2017, three Colombia IGFs have been held:

- During the forum's first year in 2014, the participants' experiences and perspectives were presented.¹³ These included recounting Colombia's participation in the global IGF 2014 in Turkey; presentations on freedom of expression, privacy and violence against women in digital spaces; and discussions on cybersecurity, access to information, net neutrality, copyright, and the international and governance strategy of the Commission for Communications Regulation. GISWatch country reports for the period 2007-2014 were also presented.
- During the forum's second year in 2015, net neutrality, digital culture, cybersecurity and internet development¹⁴ were discussed.
- During the forum's third year¹⁵ in 2016, internet governance and its promotion in the region was addressed. There were also discussions regarding the digital ecosystem, with an emphasis on the gap between rural and urban accessibility, in an effort to incorporate more diverse voices into the decision-making process. Other topics addressed included "smart cities", the environmental impact of technology, and gender equality.

This third forum was a success in terms of remote participation and social networking, which shows an evolution of the Bureau's impact and influence.

The fourth national forum is planned for October 2017.¹⁶ The main themes that will be discussed in this forum include the multistakeholder model for internet governance, infrastructure, fake news, environmental and digital security and, as something new, a workshop on internet governance especially designed for those who will attend the

forum for the first time. Scholarships will also be provided to facilitate the attendance of Colombians who are located outside of Bogotá.

Since the Bureau does not have its own resources for its operations, all the participants will help in terms of event management and securing of resources. Donations from third parties will also be sought. It is important to mention the financial contributions made since 2015 by the United Nations Internet Governance Forum Support Association (IGFSA)¹⁷ in support of the national forums.

Currently, the Bureau has an action plan for organising the forum, responsibilities and schedules have been assigned, and priority activities are being implemented. Besides the work that goes into organising such an event, this action plan seeks to strengthen the Bureau's communications strategy, help different regions of the country participate in internet governance discussions generally, and train stakeholders on internet governance issues.

One of the central goals of the Bureau has been the search for strategies to involve new participants in internet governance discussions and introduce internet governance topics to a wider audience. As part of this process, two documents are being developed: the first one concerns the participation of the youth in internet governance and how the Colombian Bureau of Internet Governance has promoted and supported the inclusion of young people in the discussions¹⁸ The second document seeks to serve as a model for presenting the Bureau's work at events in regions and cities other than the country's capital, Bogotá.¹⁹ This is necessary because there are stakeholders that do not regularly participate in the Bureau's bi-monthly meetings, such as universities and civil society organisations based in other regions, indigenous communities, peasants, journalists and human rights defenders.

With respect to other issues such as gender equality, the Bureau makes an effort to ensure that the panels in the national forums have an adequate gender balance. For example, for the October forum, the panel on infrastructure has two women on a five-person panel; one woman will join two men on a panel on ICTs and the environment; three women are to join a six-person panel on digital security; and half of the members of the panel on fake news will be women as well.

13 Agenda of the 1st Colombia IGF: colnodo.apc.org/destacamos.shtml?apc=l-xx-1-&x=5682

14 Agenda of the 2nd Colombia IGF: https://gobernanzadeinternet.co/apc-aa-files/1coec76a20bd91fdc9938d30b87da6co/memorias_2do_foro_gi_colombia.pdf

15 Agenda of the 3rd Colombia IGF: <https://gobernanzadeinternet.co/evento2016/documentos/relatoria-3er-foro-colombiano-gobernanza-internet-2016.pdf>

16 The 4th Colombia IGF was held at Universidad del Rosario on 4 October 2017, with a workshop aimed at the general public held the day before. With an attendance of approximately 140 people in the room and around 500 online, four panels were held on the following subjects: infrastructure; ICT and environment; digital security; and fake news.

17 www.igfssa.org

18 Caballero, J. (2017, 19 August). Youth IGF Initiatives and other Youth-focused formations. <https://docs.google.com/document/d/19GEMsXCG-XFRc55HX8MmMwTbzaWbdeIYSKICpskGWQo/edit>

19 Trochez, M. (2017, 10 September). Presentation of the Colombian Internet Governance Bureau in the regions.

Regional reflection

Members of the Colombian Bureau have regularly participated in the regional IGF. As mentioned above, the idea of the Bureau itself was first discussed at the (LACIGF) in Córdoba, Argentina in 2013. Since then the Bureau has participated in the LACIGFs that took place in San Salvador (2014), Mexico City (2015), San José (2016) and Panama City (2017). Members of the Bureau have participated either as panel members or panel leaders on issues such as gender and ICTs, net neutrality and digital rights.

These meetings have made it possible not only to share current data and research on internet governance with members of the Bureau in Colombia, but also to discuss Colombia's current situation with others attending the regional meetings.

Conclusions

Although the Colombian Bureau of Internet Governance is a unique example of a space for internet governance deliberation, it follows the general guidelines proposed by the IGF. For example, the multistakeholder model has been used since its inception. This model is used partly because its individual and organisational members have participated in the global IGF and have seen its benefits.

This Bureau's model has not only allowed transparency and openness to new participants, but also has allowed issues that shape the evolution and use of the internet in the country to be more comprehensively addressed than they were in the past.

However, more efforts are needed to expand the coverage and diversity of these conversations. In particular, the Bureau does not have a permanent presence in the regions where it is most

strongly needed to encourage citizen participation in decision-making processes related to the use of the internet.

Action steps

The Colombian Bureau of Internet Governance should become a reference point in discussions regarding issues related to internet governance throughout Colombia. The following actions steps are suggested to strengthen the presence of the Bureau in the country:

- Develop training spaces for young people and beginners to internet governance.
- Take the Bureau to different regions where it currently has no presence. At the same time, facilitate the participation of regional representatives during the national forum.
- Expand and maintain remote participation in events.
- All members of the Bureau should be on the lookout for new participants, especially young people and small and medium-sized enterprises. To attract new members, the Bureau should identify innovative ways to address the benefits of participating in the internet governance environment.
- Maintain independence and plurality of interests, promoting the importance and validity of the multistakeholder model, its benefits and limitations. The role of civil society is important in achieving this, including promoting it at regional and international forums.
- Ensure that the results of the discussions held at the national level are shared at regional and international IGFs.

National and Regional Internet Governance Forum Initiatives (NRIs)

National and Regional Internet Governance Forum Initiatives (NRIs) are now widely recognised as a vital element of the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) process. In fact, they are seen to be the key to the sustainability and ongoing evolution of collaborative, inclusive and multistakeholder approaches to internet policy development and implementation.

A total of 54 reports on NRIs are gathered in this year's Global Information Society Watch (GISWatch). These include 40 country reports from contexts as diverse as the United States, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Italy, Pakistan, the Republic of Korea and Colombia.

The country reports are rich in approach and style and highlight several challenges faced by activists organising and participating in national IGFs, including broadening stakeholder participation, capacity building, the unsettled role of governments, and impact.

Seven regional reports analyse the impact of regional IGFs, their evolution and challenges, and the risks they still need to take to shift governance to the next level, while seven thematic reports offer critical perspectives on NRIs as well as mapping initiatives globally.

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