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National and Regional Internet Governance Forum Initiatives (NRIs)

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A special edition of GISWatch, "Internet governance from the edges: NRIs in their own words", is being published
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of NRIs, as recounted by their organisers. It is available at https://www.giswatch.org

Latin American and Caribbean Regional Preparatory Meeting for the Internet Governance Forum (LACIGF)

LESSONS FROM THE LACIGF: A SULÁ BATSÚ RETROSPECTIVE

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Introduction

Latin American and Caribbean Internet Governance Forums (LACIGFs) are preparatory meetings that take place in the LAC region prior to the global IGF. They provide a space for dialogue on internet governance for multiple stakeholders, in particular governments, the technical community, academia, the private sector and civil society organisations.

LACIGF events are not meant for making decisions on internet policy, but are rather seen as spaces to share multiple stakeholders' perspectives on critical internet policy issues, to lay out the great milestones of internet governance in the region, to present ideas and proposals for the global IGF, and to discuss in advance the issues to be addressed at the forum. They follow up on the information society agenda built at the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS).

"Parallel sessions" are also organised independently from the main event, and are run by civil society and others stakeholders. Among other things, they have dealt with issues such as gender and technology and offered cybersecurity training. They have become excellent spaces for holding stakeholders accountable, for negotiating new projects with donors and partners, and have served as meeting points for different networks and for presenting progress on projects, among other activities. This means that the forum should be valued, not only for the main event, but equally for the parallel sessions, which provide an opportunity for advocacy, engagement and learning.

This report offers a general review of the issues discussed over the last 10 years at the LACIGF. It suggests that although internet governance issues are becoming more complex in the region, the discussions at the event, and the format of these discussions, are not allowing the new complexities to be explored sufficiently. The event is also struggling through the absence of strong participation from the government and academic sectors. Finally, there is a need for the event to open up internet governance discussions to other sectors, such as education, health and the environment, and more work needs to be done in making internet governance relevant to these actors.

Overview of the LACIGF 2008-2017

The first regional preparatory meeting is held in Montevideo 2008,[1] originally convened by the Latin American and Caribbean Internet Addresses Registry (LACNIC),[2] the Association for Progressive Communications (APC)[3] and the Information Network for the Third Sector (Rits).[4] This meeting addresses two topics that will end up being discussed in all the following LACIGFs: how to connect the next billion, and security and privacy online.

The second meeting of the LACIGF is held in Rio de Janeiro in 2009.[5] In addition to the two key topics of access and security and privacy, issues around local content, multilingualism and multiculturalism, as well as freedom of expression are highlighted as the most important concerns of the region. At this event, the future of the LACIGF and the need to establish agreements for a better functioning of all its aspects – its Multistakeholder Advisory Group (MAG), the frequency of meetings, dynamic coalitions, processes related to internet governance in other similar forums, etc. – are discussed for the first time.

The third LACIGF takes place in Quito[6] in 2010. At this point in time, the global IGF has already begun integrating the reports and inputs from regional initiatives into its agenda, reinforcing the value of the preparatory meetings. Issues similar to those of previous events are addressed, as well as critical technical resources such as IPv4 and emerging issues such as the cloud.

The fourth event takes place in Trinidad and Tobago in 2011.[7] The Internet Society (ISOC)[8] and the

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1   https://archive.lacigf.org/sp/lacigf1/index.html

2   www.lacnic.net

3   https://www.apc.org

4   https://www.rits.org.br

5   https://www.nupef.org.br/?q=node/11

6   https://archive.lacigf.org/sp/lacigf3/index.html

7   https://archive.lacigf.org/sp/lacigf4/index.html

8   https://www.internetsociety.org

International Telecommunication Union (ITU)[9] Caribbean office join the founding organisers (at this point, Nupef[10] has replaced Rits). At this edition, the relationship between internet governance and human rights is positioned much more strongly on the agenda.

The fifth forum is held in Bogotá in 2012.[11] It is interesting to see how the organising committee has expanded at this point. For this event, LACNIC, APC, ISOC and Nupef are joined by the National Office of E-Government and Information Technology of Peru, the Ministry of Information and Communications Technology of Colombia, the Hispanic-American Association of Research Centers and Telecommunication (AHCIET)[12] and the Latin America and Caribbean Federation for Internet and Electronic Commerce (ECOMLAC).[13] Two new mechanisms are also put in place: the agenda is co-constructed with actors in the region who are consulted in an open and transparent way about the main topics to be discussed prior to the event, and an open call is set up for stakeholders to propose host countries and organisations for the event. Issues such as net neutrality, mobile internet and IPv6 become relevant at the 2012 forum.

The sixth event takes place in Córdoba (Argentina) in 2013.[14] In addition to what have emerged as the core themes of the LACIGF (privacy, security and access), two additional topics stand out: the challenges and advantages of a multistakeholder approach to internet governance, as well human rights online, with a specific emphasis on freedom of expression and the right to privacy online.

The seventh event is held in San Salvador in 2014.[15] The LACIGF has already grown in size by this time, not only in the number of participants, but also in terms of interested stakeholders and the complexity of the themes. For this reason, a multistakeholder coordination group called a Programme Committee is created, comprising two representatives from each sector: the government sector, the private sector, the technical community and civil society. New themes are also incorporated, such as the construction of a regional internet governance agenda, which has already been developing but is more clearly set out here. The topics of an open internet and open data are included. The line of work on internet governance and human rights continues to be strongly emphasised.

The eighth LACIGF is held in Mexico City in 2015.[16] There is an important shift as human rights, digital rights and internet governance are reinforced as key themes. Issues such as the digital economy, the right to be forgotten, network neutrality, the relationship between intellectual property and access to knowledge, and the Internet of Things start to be integrated in the discussions. This expansion of themes reflects the complexity of internet governance in the region. A need to reorganise the forums is discussed.

The ninth LACIGF takes place in San José in 2016[17] and highlights the connection between the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and internet governance. At the time of writing, the 10th forum has just been held in Panama City.[18] It highlighted new emerging issues such as the right to be forgotten, artificial intelligence and digital cities. In both events, discussions on the core themes of the LACIGF continue.

Lessons from the 9th LACIGF

The 9th LACIGF took place in Costa Rica from 27 to 29 July 2016. Cooperativa Sula Batsú organised the event, which had a high level of attendance, both in person and remotely – 500 participants were present at the event (30% from Costa Rica and 70% from the rest of the LAC region) and the same number participated remotely, mostly from outside the host country.

Based on this experience, we have summarised the strengths and lessons learned from the event, which we believe are applicable to the LACIGF generally.

Strengths

- *A meeting of stakeholders:* One of the key strengths of the forum is that it offers an opportunity for organisations, institutions and companies that work on issues related to internet governance but that do not know each other to meet for the first time. On many occasions, actors working on digital issues have not previously associated themselves with the internet governance sphere.

- *Internet governance is no longer exclusively for technological elites:* The internet governance topic is complex, made up of many different aspects including but not limited to the technical management of the internet. But because

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9   https://www.itu.int/en/Pages/default.aspx

10 https://www.nupef.org.br

11 https://archive.lacigf.org/sp/lacigf5/index.html

12 asiet.lat/nosotros

13 www.ecomlac.lat

14 https://archive.lacigf.org/sp/lacigf6/index.html

15 https://archive.lacigf.org/sp/lacigf7/index.html

16 https://archive.lacigf.org/sp/lacigf8/index.html

17 https://archive.lacigf.org/sp/lacigf9/index.html

18 https://lacigf.org/lacigf-10/

internet governance does involve complicated technical issues, technical elites have been the owners, leaders and main actors historically in decision making. Thanks to the LACIGF, internet governance has now become more popular and relevant, and has been linked to other essential issues, such as human rights and digital rights. While this is a sign of progress, the need to identify and broaden the perspectives of what issues are essential to internet governance remains. These issues could include, for instance, big data and consumer surveillance, the consumer society and the internet, employment in a digital age, new specialisation in education, and sustainability, climate change and digital technology.

- *The importance of multistakeholder participation*: The fact that the forum is not binding in terms of agreements or commitments has two sides to it. On the one hand, it facilitates the participation of a diversity of stakeholders, including some large technological corporations that take part in the conversations with the other actors on equal terms. This is interesting because different perspectives can be heard without the need to reach agreements. On the other hand, the fact that discussions are not binding can make the discussions repetitive, with a sense that we are going around in circles, with no real commitments or engagement happening.

- *The comparison between national and international perspectives:* The LACIGF allows national perspectives to be presented and discussed alongside regional and international experiences. For host organisations, with the increased participation of local stakeholders, this is very useful. It has the potential to generate new actions and initiatives at the local level as a consequence of stakeholders being exposed to best practices elsewhere in the world.

- *The participation of young people*: This was particularly relevant at the 9th LACIGF. The Youth Observatory,[19] created by Childnet International to include the voice of children and young people at the IGF, was particularly active and was joined by other young people, such as the young women who have received scholarships through the TIC-as network, a programme led by Cooperativa Sulá Batsú to promote young women's leadership in the IT sector.[20]

The participants from the TIC-as network are studying computer science at university, and the internet governance topics dealt with in the LACIGF are completely new to their curricula. The need to integrate internet governance as a topic in the university curricula was a key lesson learned during the forum.

- *A very structured logistics process*: From a logistical point of view, organising the LACIGF is not that complex – what needs to be done is clearly defined and structured. There is a written procedure that is clear and concise that helps the logistics process. The greatest limitation is the available resources.

- *The visibility of the organising entity*: Undoubtedly, the LACIGF makes the organising entity more visible in its country and in the region. For Cooperativa Sulá Batsú, it was an opportunity to strengthen its position as a civil society organisation that works on internet governance and that has relevance in the region. The fact that our organisation is a member of the Association for Progressive Communications (APC) network greatly contributed to this outcome.

Lessons learned

- *Governments and academia were largely absent:* The Costa Rica LACIGF saw the broad participation of national institutions from Costa Rica. However, the participation of governments from other LAC countries and academia from Costa Rica and the region was low. This is something important to pay attention to in the LACIGF.

- *The organising team only has a logistics role – but this is not enough:* From our experience, we believe that the organising team should be given a voice in the content and methodology of the LACIGF held in its country. This would build capacity in the organisation tasked with the logistics for the event, and better position it for future advocacy on internet governance in the host country.

- *The saturation of some topics and perspectives:* It is necessary to broaden the topics related to internet governance. Attention remains focused on certain issues such as online privacy and security that are very relevant – and are core issues for the event. However, this has meant that other emerging issues are not discussed in the Latin American region, such as the digital economy, algorithms, big data, and employment in the digital society, among others.

19 www.youthigfproject.com
20 https://tic-as.com

- *Methodological saturation*: It is important to modify the methodology used in the LACIGF (and the IGF generally). We reached a point of what I call "methodological saturation" – the top-down "expert" presentation and panel discussion format – because it is not possible to progress in our discussions in this way when confronted with new topics and perspectives. The way we are dealing with issues is not useful to the new challenges in internet governance facing the region. We need a new format.

- *The evolution of discussions:* As mentioned, there are core issues that have been debated and worked on since the first forums, such as access and online security and privacy. It would be very interesting to map the evolution of these discussions in the region.

- *We must attract new audiences*: It is also necessary to attract new audiences, groups and actors from other fields. The LACIGF must make it possible for internet governance to become relevant to new sectors in Latin America (such as the health, education, food, environment and energy sectors). At present, the same people from the same sectors participate in all the events.

- *Conduct follow-up discussions in the host country*: It is important that the organising entity looks for opportunities to continue discussions with the same multistakeholder approach at the local level. In this way, the effort of organising the IGF can trigger a more integrated approach to internet governance in each country.

- *A gender focus must be prioritised*. From our perspective, a gender analysis of internet governance mechanisms must be prioritised. This needs to go beyond focusing on the scarce participation of women in the digital sector, and should include discussions on women's leadership, women in IT development, algorithms and gender sensitivity, among others. It is also important to understand the role played by women in the IT manufacturing sector.

Action steps

Based on our experience, we would make the following recommendations to stakeholders that participate in the organisation of the LACIGF:

- Strengthen the multistakeholder approach, especially the participation of the government and academic sectors.

- Review the current methodological approach to discussions and presentations – the "expert" format. It is becoming less and less effective in stimulating discussions.

- Integrate innovative, new and unexplored thematic areas into the agenda. It is important to generate in-depth and forward-looking discussions on regional development and transformation in the context of a digital society and human rights.

- Enable the organising entity to have a more significant role that goes beyond logistics.

- Generate records of the discussions to avoid repetition in later events.

- Create relevant discussions and opportunities that attract other sectors such as health, education, agriculture and the environment.

- Integrate a gender perspective. This should accompany the perspectives of indigenous peoples and the Afro-descendant and rural communities.

- Conduct a thematic analysis of the central themes discussed over the last 10 years in the forum. What does this tell us about the future of internet governance in the region?

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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