GLOBAL INFORMATION SOCIETY WATCH

National and Regional Internet Governance Forum Initiatives (NRIs)

ASSOCIATION FOR PROGRESSIVE COMMUNICATIONS (APC)

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of GISWatch are not necessarily the views of APC or of its members.

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

Preface

Chat Garcia Ramilo
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, APC

National and Regional Internet Governance Forums (NRIs) are the stars of the 2017 Global Information Society Watch. The story of NRIs began two years after the first global IGF held in 2006. In 2008, stakeholders from Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania and Rwanda organised national forums and a subsequent East African IGF, to prepare for and discuss common concerns in anticipation of the global forum held later that year in Hyderabad. Soon after, many other national and regional initiatives emerged, impacting the global forum from the bottom up, enhancing inclusiveness and the broad engagement of multiple stakeholders.

Today there is widespread agreement that national and regional forums constitute an important part of the IGF process, that their rise has added significance to the global forum and, at the same time, strengthened national and regional initiatives in their quest for inclusive, participatory decision making on their home turf.

This GISWatch edition is the first comprehensive look at national and regional IGF initiatives from a critical, civil society perspective. In all, 54 reports are presented, including seven reports addressing cross-cutting themes, 40 covering national IGFs, and seven examining regional initiatives. Countries as diverse as Brazil and New Zealand, Serbia and Seychelles, China and Cameroon are considered. Country

reports not only deal with countries where there is an IGF; Seychelles and Serbia, for example, have not held a national IGF, while China has proposed a competing model for internet governance.

The stories in this edition chronicle each IGF's beginning and growth, achievements and failures, and offer a way forward. While each story is unique and contextual, patterns on the themes of openness, transparency, multistakeholder participation and bottom-up processes are evident. There are many success stories narrated, but more importantly, the reports reflect on common challenges facing our global IGF community. Despite the differences in the way regional IGFs have developed over the years, the reports point to similar risks. These include relative control held by one or two stakeholders over others, which stifles participation; "elitisation" among the groups who participate in IGFs, leading to the creation of closed communities; institutionalisation that kills innovation and new ideas; and the challenges of financing and sustainability. National IGFs share most of these risks and face the additional challenge of making their outcomes relevant to national policies and processes.

The authors of this year's edition are a group of highly qualified academics, journalists and activists who bring their insights as key organisers or participants

in NRIs for many years. We are fortunate to have Markus Kummer introduce this edition, drawing on his experience as executive director of the Working Group on Internet Governance from 2004 and subsequently leading the global IGF Secretariat from 2006 to 2010.

Together, the reports published here offer an opportunity to pause and consider what changes are necessary in our approach to rights-based internet governance, to reflect on our notions of multistakeholder participation, and to more fully explore what national and regional internet governance means.

Whether you are a veteran or a new participant or simply interested in NRIs, we hope that this edition provokes debate, sparks new ideas and affirms our collective commitment to the internet governance project.

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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