Ghana IGF 2020 - 2: Multi stakeholder approaches to internet governance in theory and practice

By

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Ladies and gentlemen,

It's a pleasure for me to contribute to discussions on IG and in particular bottom up decision making processes practiced in the technical internet community, IETF and RIRs. It is also employed in IG policy deliberations at ICANN and IGF

I am speaking from experience having been Chairman of the General Assembly of the DNSO at ICANN in the '90s, founded the

African Regional Internet Registry, Afrinic, and other organizations that practiced multi stakeholder bottom up decision making

We think that, if this method has been successful in holding the internet together during a pandemic the method can lead to better policies and hold a community or a country together. We advocate widespread application of bottom up community decision processes locally

The topic "multi stakeholder approaches to internet governance in theory and practice", is bold. The concept or theory is well known and documented

My interest is what a community must do correctly in order to evolve a functional bottom up decision process and will make my contribution along those lines

The bottom up decision process is not same as an adviser with a policy or a decision in hand and consulting interested parties on it. That would top down.

This is about a community addressing its issues together and making rules, standards, decisions or policies in a bottom up way

As we examine the origins of bottom up processes you'll recognize that we were working with a network of networks, internetworks, Internet. Each network is owned by a different organization/person who has his own providers and for different purposes working with different rules or policies

It is evident that for the whole internet is to work as one, each network must surrender and follow community agreed standards

and policies we together create. That is bottom up

There are several situations where this occurs but some vivid examples in Ghana are:

- In an NREN has campuses where each is governed by different policies; can apply this to develop network routing policies, security policies, privacy policies etc
- A campus has different departments with varied technology usage patterns and policies; can apply to acceptable use policies, networks interconnection policies, BYO device rules etc
- An e-government network is made of network of department and agencies of government; same as NRENs
- An inter banking switch in an interconnection of banking networks; same as NRENs

If stretch our imagination we discover numerous other areas with similar problems where the bottom up approach would apply

Quite often in practice we do not have all skills in one institution or discipline to address complex decisions. Therefore multi stakeholder bottom up process enables access to skills and expertise across the community

Likewise the operation of shared infrastructure for a community will be enhanced by bottom up processes to define norms

The system is assumed to be open and documents are published to a community who participate in developing the document

We cannot over emphasize roles and responsibilities in multi stakeholder process. Typically, one looks to find a rich community including open participation by engineers, businesses, civil-society organizations, and governments. Each has a different role with clear and focused responsibilities and each actor needs to remain in their roles for quality results. We also need a good balance of multi stakeholder diversity. In IG or technology governance in general, the participation of engineers are critical for sane policies

The community in question, the group, must have a scope of work so that moderators can call contributions out of scope readily and prevent digression

For any discussion, we need a proposal with a clear problem statement defining what to fix and a proposed solution in a

document that is openly accessible to the group concerned. Meetings are open to all of group and if working in public interest to anyone who shows up

Once the draft proposal has been accepted by the group for consideration it becomes a community document and discussions commence. Discussions are guided by neutral moderators who are usually known community personalities with track record who are determined by merit and experience.

These moderators work by independently and truthfully determining the sentiments of the group on any issue by determining if group can live with something under discussion. This is what normally called consensus or strictly speaking rough consensus. Don't vote, develop the consensus. The reason for not supporting a

decision is more important than reason for supporting

Discussions are driven by a list of unresolved issues raised on the proposal by participants. Editors modify proposal as each issue is resolved. When there are no more issues the proposal has received consensus

The moderators guide the process and give reports to group on progress of a proposal and outstanding issues to build consensus on. If an issue has been discussed and closed it cannot be repeated unless have new evidence

The moderation must be rigorous and based on merit and substance. The moderators need to have enough trust and respect in group for a good call of consensus

The benefits are numerous but includes:
-   leaves a document history on how a proposal reached consensus making it easier to develop modifications of proposal in future
-   Accepting wider and diverse views from across group and public makes proposal richer
-   Engaging the community in consensus determination makes adoption and voluntary implementation easier
-   Knowledge of community on subject of proposal is enhanced

The process takes time and can be noisy because the issues are passionately debated in public. This is very transparent

The development of bottom up multi stakeholder process for community

decisions in Africa is not without its challenges

Notice that much of activities in the process are by merit of issue not by support. Africa has to favor meritocracy than democracy or autocracy to adopt and benefit from this approach

Africans, are for context, very top down by default and often authoritative. We also don't share as much information as we should and tend to see things from personal interests and less from the group interests. We have to change these ways; they are bad for community development

Every emerging self organized community will continue to receive new members after the group is initially formed. The ability to bring new participants up to speed quickly on where discussions have reached is what

retains the cohesion of the group. If new participants come faster than we can make them up to date, we inadvertently create new stakeholders that are clueless and will disrupt. New participants should normally follow more experienced participants and gradually find their place

Everyone tends to think life started when they arrived but in reality several have been ahead. Thus sometimes the new is overly anxious and want the old to go away suddenly. The old will inevitably go away but should make sure the new is ready. This is a responsibility the old carries to continue the techno liberation struggle

Participation is necessary in multi stakeholder bottom up processes. The level of participation is the biggest challenge of the multi stakeholder decision process. It is meant to be a continuous and active

process. If participation is weak the quality of output becomes suspect and process degenerate to top down approach to decision making. With weak participation the process can thus be easily captured

Lastly, a comment on Ghana IGF. Inter sessional activities are missing in your work. Coming together once a year is great but what did we do throughout the year? Normally, what one did in last year is good to exchange along with new issues

Let's adopt multi stakeholder bottom up decision process in other domains beyond Internet governance

I thank you very much for your attention

Stay safe