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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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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 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>

COSTA RICA

THE INTERNET GOVERNANCE EXPERIENCE IN COSTA RICA



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Introduction

Costa Rica has been actively engaged in regional and global Internet Governance Forums (IGFs), and in 2017 the country held its first national IGF. In general, government and civil society representatives have been active participants and leaders in the forums, but the participation of the private and academic sectors has been rather limited. The fact that the 9th Latin America and Caribbean Internet Governance Forum, officially known as the Latin American and Caribbean Regional Preparatory Meeting for the Internet Governance Forum (LACIGF),¹ was organised in the country in 2016 also contributed to creating a good environment for discussing internet governance at the national level. This report considers some good practices in internet governance in the country, and challenges that lie ahead.

A good example of a multistakeholder approach to internet governance

Costa Rica can be held up as an example of good practice when it comes to a multistakeholder approach to internet governance. In October 2012, a national Internet Governance Council (Consejo Consultivo de Internet – CCI)² was formed, convened by NIC Costa Rica, which manages domains in the country.³

Participants included representatives of the different sectors that usually contribute to formulating internet development strategies in Costa Rica, and help define Costa Rica's political position at international internet governance events like the global IGF.

The CCI is made up of institutions from academia, civil society, the public sector and the telecommunications and business sectors. Any participating institution is invited to join by NIC Costa Rica and the CCI itself.

Building on the CCI's agreements, Costa Rica has supported the multistakeholder approach to internet governance in various international forums and has promoted a free and open internet that guarantees privacy and security for all its users. The country has also been a strong player in defending the neutrality of the internet. In recent years, Costa Rica has organised three important activities related to internet governance: the 7th South School on Internet Governance, which took place in the country in 2015, followed by the 9th LACIGF in 2016, and the first national IGF in 2017. However, these three events were organised by different groups, which resulted in a dispersal of energy in promoting internet governance in Costa Rica.

Examples of good practice in internet governance

Costa Rica does not yet have a national government institution responsible for the development of the digital society, nor a digital policy that frames the strategic development areas in this sector.

Objectives of the Internet Governance Council

1. Participate in discussions around the development of the internet and the top-level domain .cr.
2. Issue recommendations to the National Academy of Science in its role as manager of the top-level domain .cr.
3. Encourage discussions around internet development in Costa Rica in order to contribute to the country's development and improve the quality of life of Costa Ricans.

Source: <https://www.nic.cr/consejo-consultivo>

¹ <https://archive.lacigf.org/sp/lacigf9/index.html>

² <https://www.nic.cr/consejo-consultivo>

³ <https://www.nic.cr>

Discussions on internet governance are still very limited to a small group of institutions and actors.

However, the country demonstrates a number of good practices when it comes to some of the issues discussed at IGFs:

- Costa Rica has defined the internet as a human right for its people.⁴
- The Ombudsman's Office is active in the field of digital development and in the defence of digital rights.
- There is a Personal Data Protection Programme⁵ in the country which has a framework for action and which is getting stronger.
- A Cybersecurity National Strategy⁶ is being developed with a multistakeholder approach. It is still rather focused on the protection of minors, which is an important issue but not the only one in this discussion.
- The Vice Ministry of Telecommunications is promoting broadband nationally, with the intention of achieving total coverage in the country.
- As media ownership is concentrated in the hands of a few, social networks have played an important role in public life and freedom of expression.
- There are citizen initiatives aimed at positioning and educating people on issues related to internet governance.⁷

Nevertheless, Costa Rica also continues to face a number of challenges in relation to the internet, such as spectrum concentration, for example. It is also true that connectivity options and speeds are still very different between the urban and the coastal and border areas. The digital divide in this country is still conspicuous, despite the digital solidarity fund FONATEL⁸ implementing initiatives like Hogares Conectados (Connected Households).⁹

One issue that has been impossible to place on the agenda of the LACIGF is the relationship between the consumer society and digital society. This is a crucial issue for countries like Costa Rica, where the level of individual credit card debt is extremely

high. IGFs attach great importance to surveillance of activists and journalists, which is very important. However, the use of internet surveillance to stimulate consumption and its impact on citizens are not being discussed. Sulá Batsú would like to suggest the discussion of these thematic areas of internet governance, as they affect human rights massively.

The importance of organising the 9th LACIGF in Costa Rica

Sulá Batsú was involved in the organisation of the 9th LACIGF in San José. We have learned some lessons about the effects that a regional forum has at the local level.

First of all, national actors working on internet governance issues who are generally not connected or do not know each other were able to gather together in one space. This is due to the multistakeholder character of IGFs, which enables the meeting of sectors that do not usually work together.

This helped to encourage multistakeholder internet-related work in different spaces after the LACIGF. In our specific case, as a cooperative, we organised the Mobile Technologies, Innovation and Development international conference,¹⁰ as well as the First Central America Female Hackathon¹¹ using the multistakeholder model and involving some of the institutions which organised the LACIGF with us. In both events, there was a high level of engagement and excellent contributions from the multiple stakeholders that have been key to guaranteeing their success.

The Latin American regional meeting in Costa Rica also had an impact on the organisation of the first national IGF¹² in this country, led by the CCI and NIC Costa Rica. Three topics of national interest were discussed, namely legislation in the case of cyber attacks, the relationship between privacy and access, and the broadband situation. This first national event was half-a-day long and showed low participation. Hopefully it will become an annual activity that will arouse public interest.

The inclusion of women and rural populations in the discussion of internet governance

Although there was an attempt to create a gender balance on the panels in the LACIGF held in Costa Rica so that women and men could present their ideas on equal terms, it is still not enough to ensure women's participation in internet governance discussions. For

4 Declaratoria de la Sala Constitucional en la sentencia N°10627, 18 June 2010.

5 www.prohab.go.cr

6 https://micit.go.cr/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=9964:estrategia-nacional-de-ciberseguridad-en-su-ultima-etapa-de-construccion-2&catid=40&Itemid=630

7 For example, the Cybersecurity Nights (Noches de Ciberseguridad) programme on Radio Actual with Roberto Lemaitre. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I8wOF6DbfXA>

8 www.sutel.go.cr/fonatel

9 www.sutel.go.cr/fonatel/hogaresconectados

10 <https://www.sulabatsu.com/coloquiomoviles>

11 www.hackaton.sulabatsu.com

12 <https://www.nic.cr/ver-noticia/61/se-parte-del-primer-dialogo-nacional-de-gobernanza-de-internet>

example, a proposal to hold a panel discussion on internet governance from a gender perspective at the national IGF in Costa Rica was rejected. We believe that it is a necessary condition for building a free, open and inclusive network. Discussing internet governance from a gender perspective implies alternative proposals to the way in which the internet is managed, governed, used and developed.

Although there was balanced participation of men and women at the 9th LACIGF, more young women needed to be included. For that purpose, scholarships were awarded to young women in the digital sector and an alliance with universities and computer science and related courses was used to support them. We believe it is important that there is a strong group of young women interested in internet governance and building momentum around those issues.

Another aspect addressed by Sulá Batsú at the 9th LACIGF was the participation of rural populations. The discussion of internet governance topics remains concentrated in urban areas and is managed by a few actors that are already working on the subject. It is urgent, from our perspective, to broaden the discussion and work with other sectors (health, education, housing, transportation, etc.) and with other populations, especially rural, indigenous and Afro-Caribbean communities, migrants and people with disabilities. In the case of the LACIGF in Costa Rica, an effort was made to grant scholarships to young people from rural areas in the country with the aim of including them in the discussions. It is important to understand that internet

governance is a human rights issue, and therefore the rights of marginalised groups are being affected by policy decisions.

Conclusion and action steps

IGFs in Latin America are playing a very important role in helping to understand internet governance from a human rights and digital rights perspective. Hosting the South School on Internet Governance, the LACIGF and the first national IGF in Costa Rica has been very important in strengthening the multistakeholder approach to the topic. This country has also been a good example of how agreements can be reached on certain issues with a multistakeholder approach.

However, several steps are necessary to strengthen the internet governance discussion in Costa Rica:

- Building on the Costa Rican experience so far, it is necessary to progress in internet governance discussions and integrate new issues that affect the entire population, such as the issue of consumption in the context of the digital society.
- It is necessary to encourage other actors to join the discussion, such as women, rural communities, and the indigenous population, as well as other sectors, such as health and education.
- There is a need for more coordination and interaction between actors working in internet governance in the country, because fragmented efforts disperse the energy behind pushing for change.
- There is a need for more public education initiatives on internet governance and human rights.

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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