GISWatch
10th anniversary

GLOBAL INFORMATION SOCIETY WATCH

National and Regional Internet Governance Forum Initiatives (NRIs)

Association for Progressive Communications (APC)

Global Information Society Watch

2017

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Global Information Society Watch 2017
National and Regional Internet Governance Forum Initiatives (NRIs)

Coordinating committee
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Roxana Bassi (APC)

Editor
Alan Finlay

Assistant editor, publication production
Lori Nordstrom (APC)

Proofreading
Valerie Dee
Lynn Welburn

Graphic design
Monocromo
info@monocromo.com.uy
Phone: +598 2400 1685

Cover illustration
Matías Bervejillo

Financial support provided by

APC would like to thank the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) for its support for Global Information Society Watch 2017.

Published by APC
2017

Printed in USA

Global Information Society Watch 2017 web and e-book
ISBN: 978-92-95102-84-2
APC-201711-CIPP-R-EN-PDF-274

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

Southern Africa Internet Governance Forum (SAIGF)

THE SOUTHERN AFRICA IGF: LESSONS IN STRUCTURING A REGIONAL IGF

Towela Nyirenda-Jere
NEPAD Agency
www.nepad.org

Introduction

This report uses the example of the Southern Africa IGF (SAIGF) to illustrate how structuring a regional IGF has an impact on its ability to influence and shape national and regional policy. The process of establishing the SAIGF is significant in three respects: the first is that the call to set up the SAIGF was an unintended outcome of a capacity-building intervention; secondly, the inaugural SAIGF was a collaborative effort between an intergovernmental institution, a regional NGO and a global NGO; and, lastly, the SAIGF was the only regional IGF which had the endorsement of its associated regional economic community, the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC),[1] from inception. These three factors distinguish the SAIGF from other regional IGFs in Africa and were determinants of the type of structure that emerged for its operationalisation.

This report looks at how the SAIGF has evolved over time, its impact on the information and communications technology (ICT) and internet policy space in the region, and challenges and lessons to be learned. Specifically, the report highlights how buy-in from all stakeholder groups and proper coordination are essential and may affect the impact of a theoretically well-structured regional IGF.

Policy, economic and political background

The SADC was established to facilitate regional and economic integration in the region. ICT development falls under the Directorate of Infrastructure and Services[2] at the SADC Secretariat. The Secretariat also draws on two regional institutions, the Communications and Regulatory Association of Southern Africa (CRASA)[3] and the Southern Africa Telecommunications Association (SATA),[4] to draft or inform model laws, policies or guidelines for regulation and legislation in the ICT sector.

As in other regions, SADC has well-instituted policy processes that follow the general structure illustrated in Figure 1.[5]

From this structure, it can be seen that the basic entry point for policy shaping is through the ICT Sector Senior Officials Meeting. While these meetings are not usually open, stakeholders may channel issues through their national focal points or through engagement with the SADC Secretariat. SADC also has provision for National Committees which incorporate stakeholders from the government, private sector and civil society and are intended to provide national inputs into regional policies and projects and may also initiate projects and write issue papers. It is not clear to what extent these committees have been implemented in practice.

Situating the SAIGF for policy impact in SADC

The Southern Africa IGF originated from a capacity-building workshop organised in 2010 by the DiploFoundation[6] and Botswana Information Technology Society (BITS)[7] in which the participants, through their "2010 in 2010 Gabarone Communiqué",[8] called for the establishment of the SAIGF and resolved "to initiate the steering process for the establishment of a Southern African Internet Governance Forum (SAIGF) to ensure the participation

1 The Treaty Establishing the African Economic Community (AEC) was signed in 1991 and recognised Regional Economic Communities (RECs) as building blocks of the AEC. Currently there are eight RECs which for the most part align to the five geographic regions of the African Union (AU): Central, Eastern, Northern, Southern and Western Africa. Notable exceptions are the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) and the Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD), which draw membership from different geographic regions. It should also be noted that countries are not restricted to membership in one REC and as such, most countries belong to more than one REC.

2 www.sadc.int/sadc-secretariat/directorates/office-deputy-executive-secretary-regional-integration/infrastructure-services

3 www.crasa.org

4 www.sata-sec.net

5 From Nyirenda-Jere, T. (2015). *Structuring of Regional Internet Governance Forums in Africa: Impact on effectiveness.* University of Malta. https://www.um.edu.mt/library/oar/handle/123456789/12729

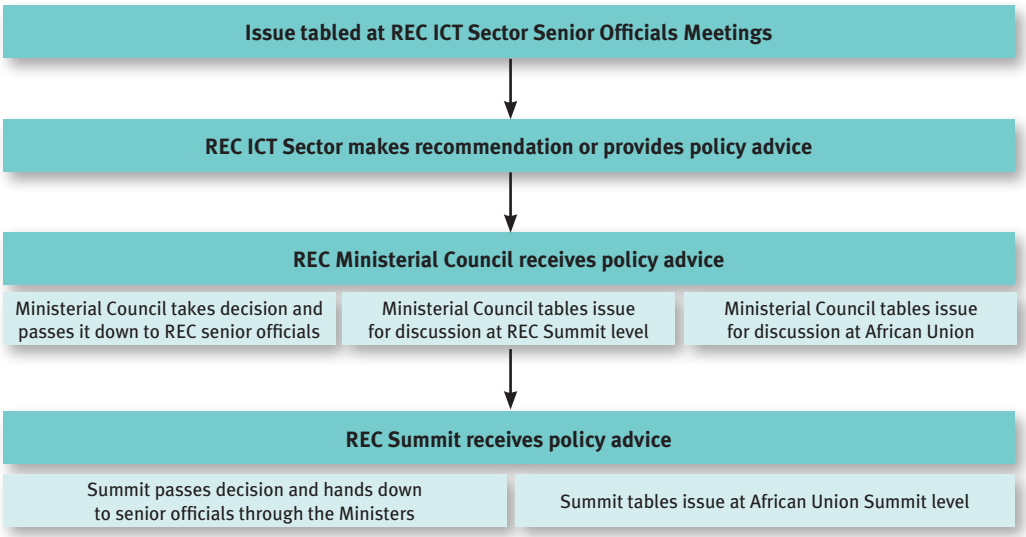
6 https://www.diplomacy.edu

7 www.bits.org.bw

8 The communiqué was drafted on 20 October, hence the name "2010 in 2010".

FIGURE 1.

Regional Economic Community (REC) policy processes



of Southern African people in issues of Internet Governance."[9] An ad-hoc Committee led by the NEPAD Agency was established, and through this, the SAIGF was launched in 2011 with the endorsement of the SADC ministers responsible for ICTs. The inaugural forum was held in 2011 in Johannesburg, South Africa, and co-convened by the NEPAD Agency,[10] the Association for Progressive Communications (APC)[11] and the Southern Africa NGO Network (SANGONeT)[12] under the auspices of the SADC Secretariat.

The endorsement of SADC and the partnership between the NEPAD Agency, APC and SANGONeT as co-convenors of the SAIGF were important and deliberate elements in the structuring of the SAIGF. Through SADC, it was expected that the SAIGF would have some measure of legitimacy, and issues discussed would find their way through the more formal policy-making processes of the region and continent at large, while the partnership would help with multistakeholder participation.

With regard to policy impact, there have been four SAIGFs held to date[13] and in each instance a report of the meeting has been included in the agenda of the SADC ICT Ministers' Meeting – for the most recent meeting, SAIGF-15, the report is included in the record of the 2016 ICT Ministers' Meeting. While the SAIGF submissions to the ministers do not include explicit policy recommendations, they serve to highlight the main issues that are being discussed at a regional and continental level, and recommendations emanating from the SAIGF would be tabled through substantive agenda items on the issue at hand. It is interesting to note that the directives given by the ministers on SAIGF are mostly around its operationalisation and the establishment of national IGFs in the region.

One impact of the SAIGF has been to encourage the establishment of national IGFs, and currently close to 50% of SADC member states have a national IGF. When it was set up, two countries had national IGFs: the Democratic Republic of Congo through its membership of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) and Tanzania through its affiliation in the East African Community (EAC). Since then, national IGFs have been established in Malawi (2014), Mozambique (2014), South Africa (2015), Zimbabwe (2015) and Namibia (2017). Botswana and Swaziland have also expressed the intent to organise national IGFs.

On the issue of multistakeholder participation, it became evident that the co-convening partnership between the NEPAD Agency, APC and SANGONeT was not sufficient to address involvement of key stakeholder groupings such as the

9 www.nepad.org/resource/2010-2010-gaborone-communiqué

10 www.nepad.org

11 https://www.apc.org

12 www.ngopulse.org

13 2011 in South Africa, 2013 in Angola, 2014 in Malawi, and 2015 in Zimbabwe.

private sector and academia, and was also not a viable option for sustainability of the SAIGF. Because of this, in 2015, the SADC endorsed the terms of reference for a Multistakeholder Coordinating Team (MCT) which would, among other things, take over the organisation of the SAIGF, including stakeholder engagement, resource mobilisation and follow-up activities. The MCT would have representation from the key stakeholder groups identified by the Tunis Agenda of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS),[14] namely government, private sector, civil society, technical community and academia. It was agreed that SANGONeT would take on the role of civil society representation while APC and the NEPAD Agency would remain as observers in the MCT, which would be chaired by the SADC Secretariat. Regional organisations would be invited to nominate members to the MCT. The 2016 ICT Ministers' Meeting record provides a directive on ensuring that the MCT has representation from academia and the private sector, showing that this is still a challenge for the SAIGF.

In 2016 there was no SAIGF meeting and it is likely that in 2017 there will also not be a meeting. This is largely due to the lack of sustainable funding for the forum and may in part be aggravated by the lack of strong links with the private sector. It should be noted that the four SAIGFs held to date have benefited largely from funding from the Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa (OSISA)[15] and funds mobilised by APC, complemented by host country support and some (local) private sector support.[16] The SAIGF has not yet managed to transition to a situation where participants (including government officials)[17] are self-sponsored, and this places a significant burden on the MCT. In the start-up years (2011-2014), the SAIGF benefited from support as part of a wider programme of the NEPAD Agency and the expectation was that over time, stakeholders would begin to absorb the expenses of organising and participating in the forum. While government support, which contributes to logistical costs, would normally come through hosting of the forum, there has been slow uptake in member states offering to host the forum. There may also be reticence on the part of member states to commit direct budgetary support through the SADC to avoid compromising the multistakeholder nature of the forum.

Regional reflection

The SAIGF from its inception sought to derive legitimacy through association with the SADC as a key driver of policy for the region, and this was accomplished through a ministerial endorsement of the forum's establishment: all SAIGFs are hosted by a national government with SADC endorsement. This is similar to the African IGF (AfIGF),[18] where endorsement comes from the African Union (AU). It is worth mentioning that although the SAIGF was the last regional IGF to be established in Africa, the model of association with a regional economic community was seen as a positive development and adopted by other regions.[19]

While the SAIGF had some measure of legitimacy from government and civil society buy-in, it did not get the same level of buy-in from academia or the private sector. The issue of stakeholder participation is not peculiar to the SAIGF, although in other regions, it is government participation that is more challenging than private sector participation.

The SAIGF is a catalyst for national IGFs and helps to link national processes to the African and global IGFs. It is expected that as more national IGFs are established in the region, there will be more of a bottom-up process of national IGFs feeding into the SAIGF which would then connect to the African IGF and ultimately to the global IGF. This need has been recognised by the SADC ICT ministers, who have called for sequencing the national IGFs and SAIGF in this regard.

The SAIGF tends to be very formal, with designated seating for government representatives. This can be attributed to the involvement of the SADC Secretariat in the forum and the (mis)understanding of the SAIGF being organised in the same way as other SADC meetings. In such a setting, discussions tend to be more restrained than one would observe in the global IGF, where the atmosphere is less formal. It is hoped that over time and with the maturity of the MCT, the format of the meeting will also change. Lessons can be learned from the AfIGF which, while convened by intergovernmental institutions, has managed to find some middle ground between the formality of the AU and the informality of the IGF.

There is limited use of social media by the SAIGF and sustaining communications post-event appears to be a challenge; there are no mechanisms to continue engaging stakeholders between events. The SAIGF does not yet have a dedicated website[20] and

14 https://www.itu.int/net/wsis/docs2/tunis/off/6rev1.html

15 www.osisa.org

16 The 2014 SAIGF also benefited from support from a global multinational company.

17 To date, only South Africa has not required support to participate in SAIGF meetings.

18 afigf.org

19 The African Union and NEPAD Agency have since 2012 used a regional ICT coordination mechanism to advocate for participation of the RECs and specialised agencies of the AU in both the regional IGFs and global internet governance processes.

20 A domain name was procured and this needs to be transferred to the MCT to set up and manage the SAIGF website.

does not feature on the SADC website, despite the fact that the SADC serves as its secretariat. The SAIGF releases a media statement at the end of each meeting through the SADC and has in some instances issued press releases through the NEPAD Agency prior to meetings. The SAIGF has also established a relationship with a regional media association – the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA)[21] – and it is hoped that this will improve media coverage and communication.

The SAIGF has adopted a process of mirroring sub-themes of the global IGF in drawing up its agenda; the agenda is set by the MCT and it is not evident whether any stakeholder consultation is undertaken. Each SAIGF meeting provides recommendations on the various sub-themes; however, these are not distilled into key messages or priorities for action. This poses a risk in terms of appropriate mechanisms for follow-up and follow-through, since there is no action plan to determine who must act on specific issues and by when. For some issues, the recommendations find their way into substantive agenda items for the ICT Ministers Meetings, but there is no mechanism to track which recommendations are actually acted on.

Conclusions

The co-convenors of the SAIGF made a deliberate effort to link it to the SADC so as to provide a strategic interface to policy processes in the region. As such, the SAIGF is included in the ICT Ministers' Meeting agenda and has served as a model for other regional economic communities to embrace their regional IGFs. The SAIGF has strengthened some aspects of its operational structure and has also enjoyed some success in catalysing national IGFs.

Several challenges remain for the SAIGF, the first of which is to strengthen its legitimacy through increased participation from the private sector and academia. The second challenge is to enhance its meetings by creating meeting spaces that do not have undertones of formal SADC meetings. Lastly, the SAIGF needs to transition to financial sustainability through self-funded participation, commitments from member states to host the event, and a resource mobilisation strategy executed by the MCT.

The SAIGF was structured to deal with a common problem facing national and regional IGFs: the involvement and participation of government and the linkage to policy processes. A tacit assumption was made that with government buy-in, the involvement of other stakeholders was guaranteed. An enduring lesson from the SAIGF is that stakeholder buy-in and engagement should include all stakeholder groups from inception.

Action steps

The following measures are suggested for the SAIGF:

- Promote the engagement of the private sector and academia. The endorsement of the SAIGF by the SADC is a big boon which has made government participation much easier than in other IGFs. The SAIGF has also benefited from the involvement of APC and SANGONeT to draw in civil society participation. Noticeably absent is the participation of the private sector or academia, and this should be the focus of the multistakeholder committee.
- Civil society needs to continue back-stopping regional IGFs in terms of framing issues, providing content and mobilising support. The diversity of civil society actors and their ability to track different issues in internet governance spaces makes them a valuable asset for the regional IGFs.
- Capacity building should be an ongoing part of strengthening regional IGFs. A survey done by the NEPAD Agency on the margins of the 2015 African IGF revealed that priorities for capacity building were in the following areas: internet policy, cybersecurity, content policy, cultural diversity, privacy and data protection, copyright, jurisdiction, e-commerce and e-money, access policy and virtual currencies. Dedicated capacity-building events alongside regional IGFs could be one way of addressing the capacity needs and gaps.
- Mechanisms should be developed for prioritisation and follow-through on issues and recommendations. The outcome documents of regional IGFs are rich with recommendations. However, from one forum to the next, there are no established mechanisms for identifying what progress has been made with these recommendations. It is important that when the recommendations are being made, as far as possible, a few should be prioritised for implementation and some lead actors identified to take responsibility for these priority recommendations. There are some who argue against such an approach as diluting the "non-decision-making" flavour of IGFs. However the counter-argument is that without tangible results emanating from the forums, their relevance becomes questionable.

21 misa.org

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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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