

A Global Alliance for ICT: Bringing Policy Making to the Public and the Public to Policy Making

Concept Paper by the **Internet
Governance Project**

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Bringing Policy Development to the Public and the Public to Policy Development

A Global Alliance for Information and Communications Technology
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Introduction

This paper proposes a Global Alliance for ICT as a successor to the UNICT Task Force. It advances the idea that the UN should take advantage of the experiences of the ICT Task Force and merge them with even more innovative efforts at developing broader collaboration in policy development. The Internet itself can be used to bring ICT governance more effectively to the public, and the public more effectively to ICT governance.

The United Nations Information and Communication Technologies (UNICT) Task Force was an innovation in multistakeholder governance. Moving beyond purely intergovernmental bodies, it developed a broader dialogue over the international policy issues surrounding information and communication technologies and the evolution of the Information Society. Since its formation in 2003, the Task Force gathered representatives of governments, non-governmental and civil society organizations, corporations and unaffiliated experts to “provide overall leadership to the United Nations role in helping to formulate strategies for the development of information and communication technologies and putting those technologies at the service of development and, on the basis of consultations with all stakeholders and Member States, forging a strategic partnership between the United Nations system, private industry and financing trusts and foundations, donors, governments and other relevant stakeholders in accordance with relevant United Nations resolutions.”²

Initially, the Task Force was scheduled to go out of existence in 2004, but with the incredible demands of the United Nations-sponsored World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), its mandate has been extended through 2005. However, given the innovative structure of the Task Force and its concomitant work program, it is appropriate to stimulate a debate about successor organizations and processes. What institutional form should embody its important mandate after WSIS has concluded?

¹ The **Internet Governance Project** is a partnership of the Convergence Center, Syracuse University School of Information Studies, the Daniel P. Moynihan Institute of Global Affairs of the Maxwell School of Syracuse University, the Internet and Public Policy Project (IP3), Georgia Institute of Technology and The Institut für Politikwissenschaft der Universität Zürich. The team for this paper consisted of John Mathiason (team leader), Derrick L. Cogburn and Lijun Du of Syracuse University.

² *Plan of Action of the UNICT Task Force*,

<http://www.unicttaskforce.org/about/planofaction.html>

Since the creation of the UN ICT TF, the Internet and World Wide Web have steadily advanced their ability to facilitate global collaboration amongst relevant stakeholders. In an increasing number of domains, ranging from scientific associations to political campaigns through community-based organizations, the sharing of information over the Internet and other forms of computer-mediated communication have improved the ability of people and organizations to collaborate quickly and mobilize support for their participation in policy processes, including WSIS.³ In this paper, we propose to merge this growing technical capacity with institutional changes to create a “global alliance” in the ICT domain.

Background: the role of information in global policy formulation

The role of knowledge and information in governance at the international level has changed as a result of the Internet. The flow of information has been essential to the creation of global agreements since the beginning of the United Nations. Since international organizations, whether public or non-governmental, are not sovereign, decision-making is different than is the case at the national level. International agreements can only be reached by consensus. Consensus means that all parties accept a decision because of its overall value, even when they may have reservations about elements of the agreement.

Consensus is possible because the parties to it share information and can be sure that the results are known and that their interests have been communicated. In earlier times, consensus was made possible by bringing the parties together physically in negotiating sessions. While these could be preceded by exchanges of information in the form of documents, expert groups and in-person consultations, the processes were not particularly open, particularly to the public, but even to specialized government officials. This lack of openness may not have been crucial when the decisions to be reached either did not need public involvement, or by the States who were negotiating the agreements could guarantee public support.

Most of the issues of international concern in the 21st Century are not amenable to restricted processes of decision-making. In most economic and social fields, consensus requires participation by civil society and the private sector. Many of the aspects of policy are not entirely under the control of governments; implementation of decisions usually requires the “consent of the governed” or the participation of the private sector when investments or technology are produced there. This applies to issues ranging from the environment, human rights, education and migration policy, crime and trade. While the international system is still based on nation-states, and as a result governments must

³ D.L. Cogburn, “Diversity Matters, Even at a Distance: Evaluating the Impact of CMC Practices on Civil Society Participation in the UN World Summit on the Information Society. Vol. X, Issue X, *Information Technology and International Development* MIT Press.

formally reach international agreements, but policy consensus must involve other participants as well.

The basis of power at the international level is legitimacy. To be legitimate, policy decisions have to be considered by those affected by them to be lawful and to have been arrived at by lawful procedures. If they are not so considered, the decisions simply will not be implemented successfully.

A key element to achieving legitimacy for international agreements is to ensure that they are arrived at through procedures that are considered to be open, transparent and permitting full participation. This, in turn, requires a free and effective flow of information. Nowhere is this more obvious than in the areas connected with information and communications technology, both because this is about information and because the use of information is not something that is easily controlled by states.

Methods of mobilizing information for international policy-making

Over the past sixty years, the United Nations has evolved a process for mobilizing information in the context of policy making. The dozens of international conferences in the economic and social arenas, especially those dealing with the environment and the advancement of women, have used similar means to engage both governments and civil society in their preparatory processes as well as in the conferences themselves. An examination of these indicates both the advantages and limitations of the current methods for engaging stakeholders in policy dialogue.

Traditional method

Most United Nations conferences and other policy-negotiation forums have used a set of methods for engaging civil society. They have been based on a combination of print media and face-to-face communication.

Print media communication included reports prepared by the Secretariat, in-session documentation and public information. In addition, non-governmental organizations often provided coverage of the processes as well as seeking to make written inputs into the processes. The coverage of environmental negotiations by the [International Institute for Sustainable Development](#) (IISD) has been notable for this.

In many ways, the traditional system is based on non-governmental organizations that have been accorded official status by the Economic and Social Council or by the conferences themselves. Based on that, NGOs with status could participate in meetings as observers and, if they were of a sufficient status, could speak and present documents to intergovernmental bodies and meetings. The role of official NGOs dates back to the United Nations Charter when this was seen as the most acceptable means of engaging non-state actors in deliberations.

The limitations of this method were that the documents were not always easy to access and organizations had to be physically present at all stages of negotiation to be able to make an input – usually very indirect, via government delegations or through the Secretariat – into the process. The number of people who could be involved personally was highly limited. While this was true for all regions, it was particularly true for persons and groups from developing countries who lacked the resources to attend the various meetings, especially the crucial preparatory meetings.

Modern method

The advent of the Internet has facilitated a much wider dissemination of information. Documents are now distributed by the United Nations over the Internet to those who want them through publicly accessible websites. Non-governmental organizations maintain their own websites, often linking into the official sites, and coverage of negotiations is usually posted on-line. Plenary sessions of meetings are often video-streamed so that anyone with an Internet connection can see them.

In addition, some organizations establish email list-servers that permit a form of interactive, asynchronous communication among different membership groups. There have been some “virtual expert group meetings” that have been tried as a way to engage more persons at lower costs.

The UNICT Task Force has provided a good example of how these techniques can be used, with its on-line forums, exchange of information and use of techniques to broadcast meetings.

While the modern methods have increased the availability of information to those who want to receive it, and have helped allow non-State actors like various NGO caucuses to formulate common positions, they have still been mostly passive. To be able to use the information to participate in policy discussions, parties still have had to be physically present at meetings. Even the process of developing positions over distance has been cumbersome, involving as it does asynchronous and individual communication.

What has been missing is the ability to communicate in real time and to participate directly in policy discussions. The technologies to do this exist, as will be seen, but the institutional structure to apply them is still lacking.

More modern method

The missing element is the capacity to collaborate over the Internet. Corporations and academic institutions are increasingly using collaborative techniques, ranging from teleconferencing to video conferencing over the Internet (which is considerably less expensive than traditional videoconferencing) or the use of text chats, to implement programmes.

The difficulty in the past has been that these techniques have been expensive or not widely available to users. In the last several years, software developers using the World Wide Web have created collaborative methods that permit synchronous communication

as well as the other Internet forms. These can now be applied to specific functions at the international level.

The [World Federation of United Nations Associations](#) (WFUNA), working with Syracuse University, is engaged in one such experiment. They are building a “policy collaboratory” to enhance the participation of their WSIS Task Force in the various preparatory processes of the Tunis phase of the Summit.

The concept of a collaboratory, which is drawn from the extensive use in the physical sciences, is based on the strategic use of information and communications technologies within a defined social context to enable groups of people who are geographically distributed to work effectively on knowledge oriented projects. This approach allows use of the Internet as the underlying infrastructure to bring together different individuals and groups working on common themes using information and communication technologies. A number of social scientists have been exploring the expansion and application of this concept to other human domains, such as HIV/AIDS research, and even to global policy processes.⁴

Concept of global alliance

The concept of a collaboratory could be built into another emerging concept, that of the global alliance. This is a new approach to mobilizing support. It consists of finding a structured way to bring together a wide range of geographically dispersed stakeholders. There are an increasing number of examples. For this paper we have examined several existing alliances. These included:

1. [The Global AIDS Alliance](#)
2. [The Global Alliance for Diversifying the Science and Engineering Workforce](#)
3. [The Global Alliance for TB Drug Development](#)
4. [The Global Alliance for Workers and Communities](#)

To see how these alliances work we looked at five factors: who is involved in the alliance, by what method are they involved, what are their main activities, how do they make an input into the policy process and how are the alliances are financed. The data from the analysis are found in the Annex.

⁴ Olson, G.M., Teasley, S., Bietz, M.J., and Cogburn, D.L., "Collaboratories to Support Distributed Science: The Example of International HIV/AIDS Research." ACM International Conference Proceedings Series, 2002; Cogburn, D.L., "Governing Global Information and Communications Policy: Emergent Regime Formation and the Impact on Africa," Telecommunications Policy, Vol. 27, Issue 1-2 pp 135 – 153 (2003); Cogburn, D.L. "Diversity Matters, Even at a Distance: Evaluating the Impact of the CMC Practices of Civil Society Participation in the World Summit on the Information Society, (in-press), *Information Technology and International Development*, MIT Press.

Some conclusions about existing alliances

The four alliances are different in composition and theme, but share certain commonalities. All were set up to provide a method of bringing together diverse parties interested in an issue who might not be able to meet physically. All have included both national-level organizations and international organizations, including in several cases, organizations of the United Nations system. All have made an effort to involve individuals and groups from developing countries. All rely to some degree on Internet-based information exchange. These include on-line publications, bibliographies, newsletters and, in some cases, videos from conferences.

The activities are varied, but involve an effort to engage the member organizations and through them those organizations' members. The alliance serves the function of selecting the most important information. All of the alliances have a secretariat. All of the alliances seek to influence public policy-making at the national level and several seek to do so at the international level.

Interested donors finance most of the alliances, while some provide funding through membership fees.

Why it would be relevant to ICT

The area of information and communication technology is particularly amenable to a global alliance approach. Like the examples, ICT involves multiple stakeholders, some governmental, some non-governmental, some from the private sector, some from the not-for-profit sector, some national and some international. The involvement of persons and organizations from developing countries is particularly important given both the nature of the subject matter and the political context of the World Summit for an Information Society and its likely follow-up.

The alliance concept, which involves membership based on self-selection, seems particularly applicable to ICT and the connections with the Internet are inherent in the subject.

An alliance, which is based on voluntary participation and the exchange of information, raises fewer issues of precedent than does an arrangement built around a formal institution like a Task Force. As a result, the coverage of issues and the involvement of interested parties could be greater than has been possible with more traditional methods.

The issue is how such an alliance would work.

A global alliance for ICT

If a global alliance were to be used as a way of building on and extending the work of the UNICT Task Force it would have to ensure a free flow of information, provide for systematic input into the policy process, be reasonably inexpensive to access (taking into consideration the differential levels of access of its members and the public), and be cross-platform compatible (thus facilitating the widest possible degree of participation in

the Alliance). The principled development of the socio-technical infrastructure of a policy collaboratory could help to facilitate these objectives.

Any successful collaboratory development would not take place in a vacuum, but would build on the existing processes and mechanisms for communication already in use by the Task Force, such as making documents available, updating web pages frequently to allow interested parties to be current, and the use of listserves and on-line forums could easily be transferred to an alliance model.

An effort would be required, however, to make the alliance a truly interactive policy collaboratory. This would mean that many of the alliance activities could begin to take advantage of Internet-based synchronous communication and collaboration practices. As has been shown in previous work, this collaboratory approach should focus on three areas: (1) people-to-people, (2) people-to-resources, and (3) people-to-facilities.⁵ This systematic approach could maintain the roles now played by expert groups, seminars and colloquia. The purpose would be to use these methods to explore issues and reach tentative policy conclusions that could be used by Governments in their negotiation processes.

It would also permit a structured exchange of experience about monitoring progress in any programs or plans of action that would emerge from WSIS and other intergovernmental processes.

Because an alliance would be focused on issues and a form of pre-consensus on how they should be treated in international discussions, this mode would allow, on a non-commitment basis, governments and international organizations to interact with civil society.

An alliance could be built around a combination of self-standing issue conferences, that could be both in-person and on-line or on-line alone, or conferences that were organized in the context of intergovernmental discussions of ICT issues. The purpose would be both to inform the members of the Alliance, and to provide a channel for organized feedback into the process. They would also permit collaboratory discussions among different groups, with a view to developing partnerships and cooperation, especially among developing country members.

Setting up such an alliance would need investment in support infrastructure (both substantive and technical). While an alliance would not need the same amount of resources as a formal organization, it would need staff and facilities. Members themselves could provide some of the resources, but the experience of other alliances suggests that a central secretariat would be essential.

Because the Economic and Social Council has provided the mandate for the ICT Task Force, it would not be unreasonable for it to endorse an alliance. The alliance could also

⁵ Ibid.

be considered as part of the follow-up to WSIS, and one that has minimal financial implications for the international organizations concerned.

For the alliance to function over a longer term, it would need to find a secure method of finance. Options for this exist, based on experience of other alliances, ranging from finding funding from donors through the levying of membership fees. If the latter option were to be chosen, consideration would have to be given to membership fees set on an ability-to-pay basis.

A Global Alliance for ICT could be an effective and fitting successor to the UNICT Task Force.

Annex. Four existing global alliances

Global alliance	Who	How	What	Input	How funded
Global AIDS Alliance	Key Partner Organizations are NGOs from the United States and International NGOs	Annual Conference at DC Video for online review Report, video and press released online	Information and interactive training sessions Meeting with key staff members in the US House and Senate and urging them to keep America's promise of real emergency action on AIDS	Domestically, by lobby the congress and administration Such as: Online advocate: ask US citizens to call Senators and Representative, and budget committee members Internationally, through annual international conference to influence NGOs from different nations and international organizations such as UN, World Bank	Grants Contributions Tax-deductible donation with credit card Received special funding to carry out the conference from several critically important donors, notably the John M. Lloyd Foundation and the UN Foundation

- (1) Organizations attending the conference are: • Africa Action • American Medical Students Association • Artists Against AIDS Worldwide • Community HIV/AIDS Mobilization for Power • CHANGE • Church World Service • Constituency for Africa • Health GAP • Hope for African Children Initiative • Interfaith Center for Corporate Responsibility – AIDS Caucus • John M. Lloyd Foundation • Jubilee USA Network • Keep a Child Alive • National Association of Black Social Workers • Physicians for Human Rights • Progressive National Baptist Convention • RESULTS • Robert F. Kennedy Memorial-Center for Human Rights • SAATHI - Solidarity against the HIV Infection in India • Student Global AIDS Campaign • United Church of Christ • United Methodist Church General Board of Church and Society • United Nations Foundation • United Negro College Fund-Global Center • Washington Office on Africa

Global alliance	Who	How	What	Input	How funded
Global Alliance for Diversifying the Science and Engineering Workforce	Collaborators are from: U.S, Africa, Asia/Pacific, European, North America, South America. International Organizations	<p>Build a comprehensive international online bibliography of journal and newspaper articles, research studies, conference proceedings, and policy documents related to minority and gender participation in the science and engineering workforce</p> <p>All report released online for download;</p> <p>Conferences at different locations, some held by Global Alliance, some held by member organizations, Such as: AAAS (member organization) Annual meeting</p> <p>One-year science and technology policy fellowships in Washington, DC</p> <p>Every four years World Engineers' Convention</p>	<p>Symposia, plenary and topical lectures, specialized seminars, poster presentations and an exhibition hall</p> <p>Public policy learning experience and to bring technical backgrounds and external perspectives to decision-making in the U.S. government</p> <p>Enhance the communication and interaction between the engineering community and the public</p>		<p>Global Alliance Sponsors: American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS); AT&T Foundation; Dow Chemical Company; Engineering Information Foundation; U.S. Department of Energy</p> <p>Stipends begin at \$58,000</p>

(1) US collaborators are: ASM International; African Technology Policy Studies Network; American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) Association des Femmes Ingenieurs du Mali (AFIMA) Association of Professional Women Engineers of Nigeria (APWEN) Association for Women in Science AT&T Labs Canadian Network of Chairs for Women in Science and Engineering Danmarks Tekniske Universitet (DTU) Egyptian Society for Women Engineers (under establishment) Gender & Science & Technology (GASAT) German Association of Engineers, Women in Engineering (VDI FIB) Global Engineering Education Exchange (Global E3) Institute for Women and Technology International Council for Science (ICSU) Ministry of Education & Science, GERMANY Ministry of Education, SWEDEN National Academy of Engineering Once & Future Network (OFAN) Society of Women Engineers (SWE) The Dow Chemical Company The Ford Motor Company UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) UN Education, Science, and Culture Organization (UNESCO) UN Science and Technology for Development (UNCSTD) Gender Advisory Board US Department of Energy Women in Engineering Programs & Advocates Network Women in Global Science & Technology (WIGSAT)

Name	Who	How	What	Input	How funded
Global Alliance for TB Drug Development	Representatives from developing nations, governments, NGOs working in the TB arena, foundations, industry, and other significant contributors to the fight against tuberculosis, including the World Bank and WHO	Creating a portfolio of R&D investments by acquiring, in-licensing or co-developing promising compounds. The development of these drug candidates is outsourced to public and private partners to whom the TB Alliance provides staged funding and expert scientific and management guidance. Managing its portfolio with dedicated project management, predefined and measurable milestones, and clear go/no-go decision points and common evaluation criteria. Designing innovative agreements leveraging intellectual property to ensure the affordability of the developed drugs, especially in poorer, high-endemic countries. Enlisting scientific capacity and resources worldwide	Conferences Global forum held at different locations all over the world Set regional offices over the world	Testimony of high-level officers from international organizations such as WHO, from the high level officials of different nation governments Participating the drug development program in international organizations and nation governments	Donation by online, phone or mail USAID Awards TB Alliance \$8 Million Grant 4 Global Fund Allocates US \$54 Million to TB Programmes

(1)Stakeholders: • American Lung Association (ALA); American Society for Tuberculosis Education and Research (ASTER); American Thoracic Society (ATS); Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry (ABPI); Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC); European Commission; Global Forum for Health Research; International Union Against Tuberculosis and Lung Disease (IUATLD) Lupin Laboratories; M.ecins Sans Frontières -Doctors Without Borders (MSF); Medical Research Council of South Africa (MRC); National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, National Institutes of Health (NIAID/NIH); National Institute of Pharmaceutical Education and Research, India (NIPER); New Jersey Medical School National Tuberculosis Center; Novartis India, Ltd; Partners in Health; Philippines Coalition Against Tuberculosis (PHILCAT); Research Institute of Tuberculosis, Japan Anti-TB Association (RIT/ JATA); Research Triangle Institute (RTI); Rockefeller Foundation; Royal Netherlands Tuberculosis Association (KNCV); Sequella Global Tuberculosis Foundation; Stop TB; U.K. Department for International Development (DFID); U.N. Programme for Research and Training in Tropical Diseases (TDR); U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID); Wellcome Trust; World Bank; World Health Organization

Global alliance	Who	How	What	Input	How funded
Global Alliance for Workers and Communities	<p>Established by International Youth Foundation, Nike, Inc and World Bank in 1999 to promote collaboration among private, public and not-for-profit partners to improve workplace and life opportunities of workers</p> <p>Current other corporate partners are Gap Inc., and Inditex, SA Academic Partners are St. John's University and Penn State</p>	<p>The GA's work is based on continuous efforts to learn about workers' needs and aspirations from the workers themselves and then to develop responsive training and development programs to create better workplace experiences and build future opportunities. Main principles of GA Needs Assessment process</p> <p>1) Workers must play a major role in identifying their concerns and aspirations;</p> <p>2) The assessment process must be cost and time efficient, effective in producing tangible results, true to workers concerns and aspirations and comparable across factory, company and country.</p>	<p>The Global Alliance's assessment process uses surveys, focus groups, in-depth interviews, and site-visits to elicit actionable ideas from workers about ways to improve their work place environment and future prospects. Based on what is learned through this process, training and development programs are designed and implemented</p>	<p>In each country, the assessment process is conducted by local, university-affiliated research organizations. The research partners we have worked with so far include the Social Research Institute (Chulalongkorn University, Thailand), the Center for Economic Studies and Applications-CESAIS (Ho Chi Minh University, Vietnam), the Center for Societal Development Studies (Atma Jaya University, Indonesia), the Asian Centre for Organization Research and Development (ACORD, in India), and the China Population Information and Research Center (CPIRC).</p>	<p>Grant and contribution Dividend and income from return of investment</p>