GISWatch Special edition

# GLOBAL INFORMATION SOCIETY WATCH 2017

*Internet governance from the edges:*
*National and regional IGFs in their own words*

Association for Progressive Communications (APC)

GISWatch 2017
SPECIAL EDITION

# Internet governance from the edges: National and regional IGFs in their own words

APC

Global Information Society Watch 2017 Special edition
Internet governance from the edges: National and regional IGFs in their own words

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Global Information Society Watch 2017 special edition:
Internet governance from the edges: NRIs in their own words

Disclaimer: The views expressed in survey responses are not necessarily the views of APC or of its members.

This report is a special companion edition to Global Information Society Watch 2017: National and Regional Internet Governance Forum Initiatives (NRIs), which can be downloaded from https://www.giswatch.org/2017-local-and-regional-internet-governance-forums-igfs

# Preface

*The first edition of Global Information Society Watch (GISWatch) focused on participation in internet governance processes. Published in 2007, it came to the conclusion that effective participation was still out of reach if you were from the global South, or from civil society. Still in its infancy at that point, the Internet Governance Forum (IGF), mandated to ensure the participation of all stakeholders, was the one platform which people believed could actually achieve this goal.*

*Barriers to participation in the IGF proved difficult to overcome. Unless you made use of remote participation, attending an IGF involved expensive air travel and local costs in the host country. For many people in civil society and from small businesses, and governments with limited travel budgets, actually getting there remained elusive.*

*The global nature of the IGF's agenda also served as a barrier to participation in some respects. You could attend an IGF, and learn a huge amount, but at the end of the four days feel that none of the issues which are most pertinent in your local context were really discussed. National and Regional IGF Initiatives (NRIs) emerged, in large part, to address these barriers. From being somewhat marginal at the outset – with their organisers having to submit workshop proposals to get exposure at a global IGF – over the years NRIs have become integral to the IGF process, gaining recognition and support.*

*Their rise, and relevance, is still subject to debate. Some commentators view them as a distraction. Others feel that they have become the domains of the individual personalities who drive the process of organising them. But some say that they are the only really effective way of developing partnership and solutions to address local internet policy-related problems. Some feel that they need to build more institutional capacity to be sustainable. Others feel that they should only be organised in response to clear and strong local demand.*

*Whatever your perspective, it is no longer possible to view the IGF and the evolution of internet governance without also considering the role and impact of NRIs. It is in this context that APC is publishing two editions of GISWatch that focus on NRIs this year. One is the annual GISWatch report, which provides critical and analytical perspectives, primarily from civil society actors, in 40 countries. The other is this publication, Internet governance from the edges: National and regional IGFs in their own words.*

*It is precisely to counterbalance what are largely "outsider" views in the main edition of GISWatch that we wanted this companion edition to capture the origin stories, achievements and challenges of NRIs in their own words. Their struggles should not be taken for granted. Behind each NRI are people who have worked extremely hard, dedicating time, most often on a voluntary basis, or on top of already demanding jobs, to convince people to participate, and, particularly challenging, to provide financial support.*

*Like the global IGF, most NRIs are still learning, trying to be stronger, find their feet, gain legitimacy, and achieve effectively balanced stakeholder participation and debate. They face huge constraints – financial, but also often political. Each has its own dynamics and will follow its own path and will hopefully benefit from the support provided by the IGF Secretariat and the NRI community.*

*Their achievements and efforts deserve respect and appreciation, and this volume is dedicated to every person who has played a role in catalysing or organising an NRI.*

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# Internet governance from the edges: National and regional IGFs in their own words

National and Regional Internet Governance Forum Initiatives (NRIs) emerged in response to the success of the first two global Internet Governance Forums (IGFs). The Tunis Agenda for the Information Society, the outcome document of the final phase of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), alongside the call for the creation of the IGF, served as the foundations for the model of bottom-up, multistakeholder internet governance. The first NRIs were set up in 2007 and 2008, and there are now close to a hundred initiatives, comprising national, sub-national, regional and youth initiatives, which organise autonomously and cooperate with the global IGF Secretariat. The importance of NRIs has increased throughout the years, as they have grown in number and their work has expanded in scope. They have acquired such relevance within the IGF that an NRI session was included in the IGF 2016 and 2017 main sessions agendas.

This year, APC has taken the initiative to compile two editions of Global Information Society Watch (GISWatch) focused on the work of NRIs. While the main 2017 GISWatch annual report provides independent and analytical perspectives on the role of NRIs in internet governance broadly, the present companion edition, *Internet governance from the edges: National and regional IGFs in their own words*, aims to give voice and visibility to the stories of each NRI, share their experiences and achievements, and highlight their perspectives on internet governance.

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