Baseline and Recommendations: Civil Society Organisation Engagement in Multilateral and Multistakeholder Internet Governance Processes

January 2025

Acknowledgements

Acronyms

AC	Advisory Committee
ALAC	At-Large Advisory Committee
AIGF	Africa Internet Governance Forum
BPF	Best Practice Forum
CADE	Civil Society Alliances for Digital Empowerment
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
CTU	Caribbean Telecommunications Union
ECNL	European Center for Non-for-profit Law
EMODIR	Education, Mentoring and Outreach Directorate
HRPC	Human Rights Protocol Considerations
ICANN	Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers
IETF	Internet Engineering Task Force
IG	Internet Governance
IGF	Internet Governance Forum
ITU	International Telecommunications Union
MAG	Multistakeholder Advisory Group
NCSG	Non-Commercial Stakeholder Group
NRIs	National and Regional Initiatives
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
PEARG	Privacy Enhancements and Assessments Research Group
RFC	Request for Comments
SO	Supporting Organisation

Contents

Executive Summary

Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) are a vital link between technical infrastructure and real-world impact. Their ability to amplify marginalised voices, champion human rights, and foster accountability is unparalleled. Enhancing CSO participation in internet governance (IG) spaces is not just about increasing numbers; it is about fostering meaningful, impactful engagement that shapes the future of the internet.

The Baseline and Recommendations detail the analytical findings of the Civil Society Alliances for Digital Empowerment (CADE) research study 'Mapping Civil Society Organisation Engagement in Multilateral and Multistakeholder Internet Governance Processes' that carried out an in-depth investigation of the essential question of how to improve CSO participation in IG spaces. The recommendations build on the mapping study, which identified gaps and opportunities.

The Baseline and Recommendations present two sets of recommendations: The first is aimed at stakeholders who can or should help strengthen CSO participation in IG. The second identifies actionable interventions designed to be implemented by CADE. The recommendations address critical challenges, opportunities, and capacity needs around four core themes identified during the mapping study:

Enhancing participation in IG spaces: This theme addresses the need to move beyond mere numerical representation to foster impactful engagement. Key recommendations include investing in capacity building and strengthening the understanding of the various IG processes, mechanisms and modalities for participation. This is especially key for new CSOs exploring contributions to these forums and spaces. As technology evolves, remote participation has significantly contributed to reducing and overcoming geographical barriers. As such, investing in user-friendly, low-bandwidth technologies for participation is key. In addition, implementing robust, real-time translation and interpretation services across all IG forums and key documents to ensure language inclusivity and wider representation is equally crucial. Lastly, facilitating strategic coalition building to amplify civil society voices and create unified fronts for advocacy.

Media engagement and awareness raising: This theme underscores the importance of leveraging media to educate the public and amplify CSO voices on crucial IG issues. Key recommendations include cultivating long-term partnerships with the media sector, including journalists and content developers, and covering technology and policy issues. The theme also focuses on simplifying complex technical jargon into accessible language for broader public understanding. Lastly, it creates compelling narratives and utilises storytelling to humanise technical issues and engage diverse audiences.

Best practices for localisation and digital inclusion: This theme focuses on ensuring that IG processes are contextually relevant and inclusive. Key recommendations include strengthening regional and national IG forums as vital spaces for communities to articulate their unique challenges and develop contextually relevant solutions. It also addresses prioritising universal access and digital literacy in IG agendas to bridge the digital divide. In

addition, it emphasises fostering collaborative partnerships and creating spaces for multistakeholder engagement at the local level.

Practical strategies for enhancing CSO capacity and effectiveness: Key recommendations include developing targeted, modular training programmes to address the technical complexity of IG issues and enhance CSO knowledge. Establishing sustainable funding mechanisms to ensure consistent CSO participation in IG processes. The theme also focuses on implementing inclusive processes and representation measures, such as quotas and accessibility measures, to ensure diverse voices are heard and considered, moving beyond token inclusion.

These recommendations and best practices can significantly improve CSO representation and effectiveness of the IG ecosystem. These efforts will contribute to shaping a future where the internet serves the global community, ensuring that diverse voices, particularly those from the Global South, are heard and considered in decision-making processes. The CADE project is positioned to play a vital role in facilitating this transformation, empowering CSOs to become key drivers in shaping a more equitable and inclusive digital future.

1. Introduction

CSOs are a vital link between technical infrastructure and real-world impact. Their ability to amplify marginalised voices, champion human rights, and foster accountability is unparalleled. Enhancing CSO participation in IG spaces is not just about increasing numbers; it is about fostering meaningful, impactful engagement that shapes the future of the internet.

CSOs represent a diverse range of stakeholders, including often marginalised groups, and actively contribute specialised knowledge on digital rights and cybersecurity to promote transparency, accountability, and informed policy-making. However, despite their significant contributions, CSOs face challenges that limit their full participation in regional and global IG forums. These challenges include limited resources, unequal power dynamics, and a lack of adequate representation in formal structures, hindering their ability to effectively influence decision-making processes.

These recommendations are the culmination of a research study that looks into improving CSO participation in IG spaces. It builds on the study, 'Mapping Civil Society Organisation Engagement in Multilateral and Multistakeholder Internet Governance Processes', which investigated the complex landscape of CSO engagement in IG processes, uncovering a landscape characterised by both progress and persistent challenges. While CSOs play a crucial role in advocating for an inclusive and equitable digital future, their participation, particularly from the Global South, remains hindered by systemic barriers.

CSO engagement within various IG bodies, including the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN), the Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF), the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), and the Internet Governance Forum (IGF), presents unique opportunities and challenges. ICANN, which is responsible for managing the internet's naming and addressing system, operates on a multistakeholder model with entry points like the Non-Commercial Stakeholder Group (NCSG) and the At-Large Advisory Committee (ALAC).

The IETF, focused on developing internet standards, functions through open working groups and a rough consensus approach, allows CSOs to contribute technical expertise, submit Requests for Comments (RFCs), and provide input on human rights and societal impacts. ITU, a UN agency coordinating global telecommunications, is member-state-driven, requiring CSOs to engage indirectly through national delegations or obtain associate or sector member status. The IGF, as a multistakeholder forum, offers open participation through various avenues like annual meetings, National and Regional Initiatives (NRIs), Best Practice Forums (BPFs), and Dynamic Coalitions.

However, CSOs from the Global South often struggle to meet the administrative and technical requirements for engagement, particularly with ICANN and ITU, and face obstacles such as financial constraints, visa issues, language barriers, and limited capacity, limiting their involvement with the IGF.

A broader finding showed clear evidence of the limited or absent participation of CSOs in critical IG discussions, which hinders their ability to contribute to policies that address the needs of all stakeholders and potentially exacerbates the digital divide. This limited engagement stems from various factors, including financial constraints, the unnecessarily complex technical language and dominance of English-only materials, and the often complex procedures and bureaucracy of

organisations like ITU. The study also revealed concerns regarding diversity and inclusivity, with the underrepresentation of individuals from diverse backgrounds, particularly in standard-setting bodies, leading to potential biases, and reinforcing existing power imbalances. The dominance of large tech companies and governments in IG processes further overshadows the voices and interests of CSOs, particularly those from the Global South.

Despite these challenges, the mapping study identified various opportunities for CSOs to engage more deeply in IG processes. Within the IETF, CSOs can participate in various working and research groups, such as the Human Rights Protocol Considerations (HRPC) and the Privacy Enhancements and Assessments Research Group (PEARG), to contribute to discussions on human rights, privacy, and internet protocol development. Initiatives like the Education, Mentoring and Outreach Directorate (EMODIR) and travel grants aim to enhance participation and address barriers to entry. CSOs can also deepen their engagement in ICANN's policy development processes through Supporting Organisations/Advisory Committees (SOs/ACs), participate in capacity-building programmes, and advocate for integrating human rights into ICANN's decision-making processes. Within ITU, CSOs can participate in study groups and focus groups focused on cybersecurity, the IoT, and sustainable development and engage regionally to address localised telecommunications challenges.

The mapping study also highlighted emerging trends and opportunities, including the increasing focus on human and digital rights issues, with growing attention to emerging domains like AI governance. However, challenges persist, such as the misalignment between certain organisations' core mandates and IG mechanisms, restrictive political climates, and the proliferation of IG forums leading to stakeholder fatigue. Emerging opportunities include focusing on specific and relevant issues like cybersecurity and AI ethics, leveraging multistakeholder platforms, promoting inclusivity and digital activism, and addressing the persistent gender and inclusivity gap.

These findings, along with the persistent gender and inclusion gaps, underscore the urgent need for increased and targeted support for CSO participation in IG processes. This support should include financial assistance, capacity building, and mentorship programmes, particularly for CSOs from the Global South. Additionally, IG forums must become more inclusive and accessible by addressing financial and language barriers, simplifying procedures, and actively promoting diversity. Breaking down silos and fostering collaboration between different stakeholder groups is crucial for developing effective and inclusive internet policies. Ultimately, ensuring that the internet serves as a tool for social good requires addressing the influence disparity and giving a voice to all stakeholders, including CSOs, in shaping its future.

The two sets of recommendations address critical challenges, opportunities, and capacity needs around four core themes identified during the mapping: 1) enhancing CSO participation in IG forums, 2) strategies for strengthening CSO capacity and effectiveness, 3) recommendations for localisation and digital inclusion, and 4) media engagement and raising awareness. These recommendations create a roadmap for a more inclusive and effective IG ecosystem that fully leverages CSOs' valuable contributions.

2. Strategies for Enhancing CSO Participation

Investing in targeted capacity building is crucial for empowering CSOs to engage effectively. For example, CSOs, especially from the Global South, might feel intimidated by the excessive technical jargon in some IG spaces, or they might benefit from a better understanding of how technology affects policy or the implications of interlinkages between different policy issues. Focused training on both technical and policy aspects can transform passive observers into active contributors. Initiatives like regional IG schools are vital in nurturing new voices in the IG ecosystem. The regional schools of IG also serve as strategic entry points to build capacity on specific regional priorities.

2.1 Financial Support and Resource Allocation

Increased funding opportunities for CSOs from the Global South are crucial for ensuring diverse and inclusive participation in IG processes. Some strategies that can be considered to address the financial disparity that exists include:

Establish dedicated funding streams
Establishing dedicated funding streams for CSOs from the Global South is essential to enhance their participation in key IG events. This can be achieved through multistakeholder partnerships and collaboration with international donors, tech companies, and governments committed to inclusive digital development. For instance, the CADE project could work with its regional partners to spearhead opportunities for fundraising at the regional and sub-regional levels and foster sustainable initiatives. Regional grant programmes could ensure sustained engagement beyond individual events. These grants could cover event attendance, preparatory work, follow-up activities, and local advocacy efforts. In addition, advocating for multi-year funding programmes to allow CSOs to develop expertise and maintain consistent participation in IG processes. This would address the challenge of the need for long-term investment in standardisation processes.

Securing multi-year funding for CSOs requires a focused strategy. This could involve advocating for sustainable funding models within IGFs, directly engaging funding organisations, and lobbying governments and intergovernmental bodies like UNESCO and ITU. Collaborating with other CSOs, raising awareness, and producing research supporting long-term funding are also crucial. There is a growing recognition of the need for multi-year, unrestricted grants. Such funding mechanisms would allow CSOs to develop IG expertise. By providing financial stability, organisations can invest in building specialised knowledge and skills crucial for effective engagement in technical IG discussions. Consistent funding enables CSOs to offer competitive salaries and career development opportunities, reducing brain drain to the private sector or international organisations.

 IG policy development is often a protracted process, so sustained funding is indispensable to allow CSOs to maintain their presence and influence throughout these lengthy cycles. Flexible funding will enable organisations to pivot and address new challenges as they arise in the rapidly evolving digital landscape. Addressing funding restrictions and expanding grant opportunities for country-level

CSOs, youth-led organisations, and coalitions working on IG issues is essential for creating a more diverse and representative IG ecosystem. This approach would empower voices from the Global South, ensuring that IG policies reflect the needs and perspectives of a broader range of internet users.

Strengthen fundraising capacity for CSOs

Empowering and strengthening the fundraising capacity of CSOs to ensure their long-term sustainability is essential. The CADE project could provide comprehensive capacity building in key fundraising areas, offering practical skills and knowledge for effective fundraising, including developing robust, diversified fundraising strategies encompassing grant writing, individual giving, corporate sponsorships, and online fundraising. Training could focus on mastering compelling proposal writing, tailoring proposals to different donors, and optimising funding success. The programme could also emphasise cultivating strong donor relationships through communication, reporting, and stewardship training.

2.2 Leverage Remote Participation

Leveraging remote (online) participation has emerged as a crucial strategy for expanding CSO involvement in IG processes, particularly for organisations facing resource constraints or geographical barriers. While in-person engagement remains valuable for relationship-building and nuanced discussions, strategic remote participation offers a pathway to more inclusive and diverse representation in IG forums. This insight underscores how remote options can democratise access to meaningful IG discussions, particularly for CSOs from the Global South who may struggle with travel costs and visa restrictions. However, effective remote participation requires more than just an internet connection. To maximise the impact of remote engagement, CSOs must invest strategically in both infrastructure and processes.

Reliable internet connectivity and appropriate equipment are foundational for meaningful remote participation. CSOs should prioritise high-speed, stable internet connections, quality audio-visual equipment for clear communication and backup power solutions to mitigate disruptions. The global nature of IG discussions presents unique challenges for remote participants, as they must navigate multiple time zones. Effective coordination would ensure consistent CSO representation without exacerbating burnout from excess physical and mental requirements. CSOs should explore possibilities for a collaborative system to encourage coordination of online participation, including joint presentations and networking. Real-time information-sharing using communications apps during meetings and virtual regional hubs where multiple CSOs can participate together, simulating in-person engagement and local collaboration can enhance the quality of meeting goals and attendee benefit.

Implement effective remote engagement protocols

To be effective as remote engagement, remote participation requires skills and strategies different from those of in-person engagement. Virtual environments often provide limited opportunities to speak. As such, preparation is crucial. CSOs should take advantage of, build upon, and implement existing guidelines, such as those developed by the IGF and DiploFoundation, for remote participation and interventions, including concise and impactful contribution guidelines.

This needs to be coupled with follow-up mechanisms to ensure the integration of remote contributions into ongoing discussions and decision-making processes. It is essential to recognise that remote engagement should *complement*, not entirely replace, in-person participation, which offers different (if not always better) avenues for networking and communication. As CSOs move forward, the IG community must continue to evolve its processes to fully integrate remote participants and ensure they have equal opportunities to influence outcomes. While in-person engagement remains valuable, strategic remote participation can significantly expand CSO involvement.

2.3 Media Engagement and Awareness Raising

Media engagement is vital for CSOs to bridge the gap between complex technical discussions and public understanding. The media has a crucial role as an amplifier for CSO voices, particularly those from the Global South. CSOs should leverage the media to amplify their voices and educate the public on crucial IG issues. Media engagement and awareness-raising remain essential for CSOs seeking to influence IG processes.

Strategies for effective media engagement

CSOs could employ key strategies to maximise their media impact, including cultivating media relationships and building long-term relationships with journalists who cover technology and policy issues.

- **Cultivate media relationships:** CSOs should actively engage with media professionals, providing them with timely, accurate, and relevant information. This involves not just press releases, but also offering expert commentary, background briefings, and access to key stakeholders. CSOs should maintain a readily accessible media contact and ensure their spokespersons are well-versed in the complexities of IG, enabling journalists to accurately report on these often technical issues.

- **Simplify complex issues:** A major challenge for CSOs is to translate intricate IG concepts into accessible narratives. CSOs could use simplified policy language to enhance public understanding and participation. CSOs should prioritise user-centric communication, focusing on the real-world implications of policies. Visual aids, such as infographics and flowcharts, can further enhance comprehension.

- **Leverage social media:** In the dynamic landscape of IG, social media serves as a crucial tool for rapid response and community mobilisation. Internet governance initiatives, such as the IGF, highlight the power of platforms like X and LinkedIn for real-time engagement. CSOs should utilise social media to disseminate key messages, amplify advocacy campaigns, and facilitate dialogue with diverse stakeholders. This includes participating in relevant hashtags, hosting live Q&A sessions, and creating shareable content. Building a strong online presence enables CSOs to quickly respond to emerging issues, counter misinformation, and foster a sense of collective action.

- **Create compelling narratives:** Humanising technical issues through compelling narratives is a cornerstone of effective IG advocacy. CSOs could leverage storytelling to connect with

audiences on an emotional level. This involves highlighting the lived experiences of individuals affected by internet policies, showcasing the impact of digital rights violations, and celebrating stories of digital empowerment. By crafting narratives that resonate with diverse audiences, CSOs can foster empathy, raise awareness, and inspire action. This includes implementing the above recommendation to simplify complex issues.

- **Compete for attention:** In an environment saturated with information, CSOs must strategically compete for attention to ensure IG issues receive adequate coverage. This involves proactive media outreach, timely responses to breaking news, and the creation of compelling content that stands out from the noise. CSOs should identify relevant news hooks, leverage data and research to support their claims and build relationships with journalists who cover related topics. Utilising strategic media partnerships can also elevate their message. Another best practice is using planned media moments that align with key global events.

- **Navigate censorship:** Navigating censorship and media control requires CSOs to adopt strategic communication approaches. Organisations such as Article 19 emphasise the importance of secure communication channels, coded language, and indirect advocacy. CSOs should prioritise the safety of their members and partners, while continuing to advocate for digital rights.

- **Maximise digital storytelling:** Multimedia content is essential for conveying complex IG concepts in an engaging and accessible manner. CSOs may create short videos, animated explainers, and interactive infographics. CSOs should leverage digital platforms to disseminate these materials, optimising them for mobile devices and social media sharing. This approach allows CSOs to reach wider audiences, including those with limited literacy or technical expertise, and to foster a deeper understanding of issues.

- **Highlight collaborative campaigns:** Coordinated campaigns are fundamental to amplifying messages and maximising impact in the IG space. CSOs should actively seek partnerships with other organisations, influencers, and community leaders to build broad-based support for their advocacy goals. This involves coordinating messaging, sharing resources, and leveraging diverse expertise to create unified campaigns. Collaborative campaigns can effectively mobilise global support, pressure decision-makers, and achieve meaningful policy change.

- **Reinforce local language content:** Reaching underserved communities requires CSOs to prioritise the creation of content in indigenous and local languages. CSOs should translate policy briefs, educational materials, and multimedia content into relevant languages, ensuring they are culturally appropriate and accessible.

2.4 Narrow Gaps in Capacity Development

Many organisations, especially smaller ones, struggle to cover travel costs and participation fees for international events. Beyond financial constraints, CSOs grapple with a lack of technical expertise and policy-related challenges. IG issues' complex and rapidly evolving nature often requires specialised knowledge that many organisations, particularly grassroots groups, may not possess. Additionally, some countries' restrictive laws and regional decision-makers further hinder CSO participation. This section presents some actionable recommendations for improving CSO engagement.

Strengthen capacity on IG technical issues

Capacity building and knowledge sharing are critical for enhancing CSO engagement in IG processes. IG issues' complex and rapidly evolving nature often requires specialised knowledge that many CSOs, particularly grassroots organisations, may not possess. CSOs could actively leverage valuable capacity building training programmes offered by reputable organisations such as the Internet Society, ICANN, ITU and DiploFoundation. Technical expertise is critical in navigating the complex internet landscape, and several prominent forums and programmes offer training on various aspects of technical internet technologies. It is strongly recommended that CSOs assess their technical capacity and explore these training programmes. Active participation in these programmes is crucial for enhancing technical skills and knowledge. Furthermore, stakeholders should promote these training opportunities within their communities, collaborate with the organisations to tailor programmes to specific needs and integrate these programmes into existing educational and professional development initiatives to ensure a sustainable pipeline of skilled professionals.

Develop modular, multilingual training programmes

Creating flexible, accessible training modules covering technical knowledge, policy advocacy, and strategic communications is crucial. These programmes could be multilingual to overcome language barriers, modular, allowing organisations to focus on their specific needs and accessible online to reach CSOs with limited travel budgets.

Capacity building should also be strategic, involving targeted training on IG mechanisms, policy analysis, and negotiation skills, particularly for individuals and organisations from the Global South.

Focus on implementing study recommendations

Specific recommendations in 2. Strategies for Enhancing CSO Participation require support and training for proper implementation. The topics in this section offer concrete objectives for training and discussion, which should be emphasised in CSO training programmes.

Mentorship initiatives

Establishing mentorship programmes as part of broader capacity-building initiatives can provide ongoing support and guidance for CSO representatives. Such mentorship initiatives could pair experienced organisations with newer CSOs to share best practices on aspects like advocacy, engagement, and fundraising. These could facilitate knowledge transfer and enhance the capacity of

less experienced participants by connecting seasoned IG professionals with emerging leaders from CSO.

Mentorship could provide frameworks for ongoing learning and support, including regular check-ins, feedback sessions, and collaborative projects to reinforce skills and build confidence. Mentors can also introduce mentees to broader networks within the IG community, helping them establish valuable connections to enhance their advocacy efforts. Such initiatives could foster long-term relationships and collaborations. In addition, empowering young people as digital rights ambassadors is a good way of creating sustainability. The Internet Society's Youth@IGF program, nurturing the next generation of IG leaders, exemplifies this approach.

Resource hubs

Creating accessible online resource hubs is essential for providing up-to-date information on IG processes, technical concepts, and policy debates. These hubs could serve as centralised locations where CSOs can access various resources, including guides on IG processes, summaries of key policies, case studies, and best practices. Resources could include simplified explanations of complex technical concepts relevant to IG. This can help demystify the jargon often used in these discussions and empower CSOs to engage more effectively. Incorporating interactive elements such as webinars, video tutorials, and discussion forums can enhance engagement with the material. These tools can facilitate peer-to-peer learning and foster community among participants.

Establish regional knowledge hubs

Regional centres for ongoing learning and information sharing can address the contextual needs of different geographic regions while fostering collaboration. Regional knowledge hubs can serve as focal points for capacity building, tailoring global IG issues to local contexts. They can also act as incubators for regional advocacy strategies and policy positions. These hubs could strategically host regular workshops and training sessions, serve as repositories for region-specific IG resources and facilitate networking and collaboration among regional CSOs.

2.5 Ensure More Inclusive and Diverse Representation

Based on the Key Expert Interview responses and analysis, one of the essential strategies that should be implemented to enhance inclusivity in IG discussions is implementing quota systems in IG forums to ensure the participation of underrepresented regions. Advocating for mandatory quotas that guarantee a minimum percentage of participants from different geographical areas, especially those historically underrepresented in IG processes, would support this possibility, for example:

- Maximise support and, if necessary, establish statistical guidelines for different stakeholder groups, ensuring a balance between government, civil society, private sector, and academic representatives.
- Implement more substantial gender diversity support, including establishing statistical guidelines if necessary, to address the gender imbalance often seen in technical forums and promote equal representation of women in IG discussions.

- Ensure accessibility for isolated linguistic groups through multilingual support, real-time captions, interpretation, translation, and accommodations for people with disabilities.
- Target meaningful youth engagement to increase the diversity of approaches and the future sustainability of these initiatives.

Building truly inclusive processes is a long-term endeavour. The process extends beyond providing immediate access, focusing instead on creating pathways for sustained engagement and leadership development for underrepresented groups. It could include providing childcare services and nursing rooms at major IG events. This seemingly small step can significantly improve parental participation, particularly among mothers. In addition, ensure all event materials are available in multiple languages and accessible formats. For example, provide sign language interpretation for spoken presentations, real-time captioning for audio content, and written materials in various languages. Documents should be optimised for screen readers, braille versions of printed materials should be available, and large-print options should be available for visually impaired attendees.

Address the gender and inclusivity gap

The persistent gender and inclusion gap in IG participation remains a critical challenge that demands urgent attention and targeted interventions. Targeted mentorship initiatives can play a transformative role in empowering women in tech policy. These programmes should focus on building technical skills and policy acumen while addressing women's unique challenges in male-dominated tech spaces.

Internet governance institutions must also embed gender considerations into their core policies and practices. Gender-responsive policies could address various aspects, including meeting schedules that accommodate caregiving responsibilities and integrating women's perspectives into technical standards development. Achieving gender equality in governance bodies requires a comprehensive review of existing policies and procedures. This review should focus on identifying and eliminating subtle barriers that prevent women's full participation in decision-making processes.

Localisation and contextual relevance

The call for localisation and contextual relevance in IG processes resonates deeply with the experiences of CSOs across the Global South. CSOs need mechanisms to bring local issues to the forefront and ensure policies consider the unique contexts. Global North perspectives dominate, while Global South voices struggle to be heard and understood. Some strategies should involve strengthening regional and national IG forums, which are crucial in bridging the gap between global discussions and local realities. National and regional IGFs are not just stepping stones to the global IGF. They are vital spaces for communities to articulate their unique IG challenges and develop contextually relevant solutions. Investing in these forums, CSOs can create platforms that amplify local voices and ensure that diverse perspectives inform global IG processes.

Strengthen thematic working groups

Thematic working groups focusing on region-specific challenges provide a structured approach to addressing local issues within global frameworks. Focused discussions on regional challenges usually uncover nuances that are often overlooked in broader global debates. These insights are crucial for developing effective, context-sensitive policies. These working groups bridge local realities and global policy-making, ensuring consideration of different regions' unique challenges.

Encourage case studies and policy inputs

Promoting case studies and policy inputs from diverse local contexts can enrich global IG discussions with concrete, real-world examples. Embracing localisation and contextual relevance can create an IG landscape that genuinely reflects internet users' diverse needs and realities worldwide. This approach ensures that the internet empowers and develops all communities.

Digital inclusion and bridging the digital divide

The persistent digital divide remains a critical challenge in the IG landscape. Unequal access to digital technologies can severely hinder meaningful participation in shaping the future of the internet. IG forums and decision-making bodies must integrate digital inclusion goals into their core processes. These bodies should prioritise digital inclusion goals equally with technical discussions. This approach ensures that they consider the needs of underserved and marginalised communities alongside technical infrastructure development. By explicitly incorporating digital inclusion objectives into IG frameworks, policymakers and stakeholders can work towards creating a more equitable and accessible digital ecosystem. This integration helps address affordability, accessibility, digital skills development, and culturally relevant content creation.

Support community networks and innovative connectivity solutions

Community-driven approaches could provide complimentary connectivity. Besides providing access, they also empower local communities to take ownership of their digital futures. These initiatives often succeed where traditional top-down approaches have failed. By advocating for policies that support and enable community networks, CSOs can help bridge the last mile of connectivity in underserved regions.

Advocate for affordable data and devices

In some instances, even where infrastructure exists, prohibitive costs for data and devices may keep many offline. Innovative pricing models and subsidies are essential in making meaningful access a reality for all. This advocacy work requires CSOs to engage with traditional IG bodies, national regulators, and telecommunications companies to reduce costs.

2.6 Support Collaboration Between CSOs and Other Stakeholders

Collaboration between CSOs and other stakeholders is crucial for effective IG. Some strategies that can be implemented to enhance cooperation across sectors, such as regular multistakeholder dialogues, are essential for building trust and identifying collaborative opportunities. Supporting joint advocacy efforts can amplify messages and increase policy influence.

To maximise their impact on policy development, CSOs could strategically shift their collaborative approaches away from establishing new working groups, towards a model that prioritises deep integration within existing policy-making structures. This includes actively participating in government and multistakeholder study groups, and bringing data, lived experience, and alternative policy solutions to the table. CSOs must invest in capacity-building programmes that empower

diverse CSOs, especially those representing marginalised communities, to effectively contribute to technical discussions.

Simultaneously, CSOs should adopt a more agile and responsive coalition-building strategy, supplementing broad cross-sector collaborations with smaller, issue-specific coalitions that can quickly address emerging policy windows. CSOs should also leverage digital tools for real-time communication and coordination, ensuring these coalitions remain fluid and adaptable.

Lastly, CSOs should establish platforms for continuous knowledge exchange and capacity building. They must move beyond one-off events by creating online forums, peer-learning networks, and joint research initiatives. This could foster long-term collaborative capacity, enabling CSOs to build sustainable policy influence.

Strategic coalition building

Strategic coalition building has emerged as a powerful tool for CSOs to amplify their voices and influence the complex landscape of IG. By forming alliances and coordinating efforts, CSOs can overcome resource constraints and navigate the intricate web of global policy-making more effectively. Strategic coalition building plays a crucial role in IG. Stakeholders must forge alliances to effectively shape policies and standards governing the global internet ecosystem. These coalitions bring together diverse actors, including governments, tech companies, CSOs and academic institutions, to collaborate on addressing complex challenges in cyberspace. This approach highlights the power of building local expertise and relationships before engaging globally. By establishing credibility and partnerships within their national context, CSOs can create a stronger foundation for international engagement. To leverage this strategy effectively, CSOs should consider the mapping of key stakeholders and potential allies and engage with progressive elements within government agencies and the private sector.

Shadowing and exchange programmes

Facilitating direct exchanges between CSOs, government agencies, and tech companies can build mutual understanding and trust. These programmes range from short-term shadowing opportunities to longer-term staff exchanges, fostering relationships beyond formal IG processes. One good example of this exchange is the Internet Society IETF Policy Fellowship programme, which targets senior government officials to attend IETF meetings to understand internet standard-making processes. All of these offer additional critical experience and training to participants.

Implementing these strategies can help CSOs work towards a more collaborative IG ecosystem. However, it's crucial to recognise that building effective partnerships takes time and sustains effort.

2.7 Strengthen Local Participation

Coordinate participation and interventions

Effective coalition building in IG extends to coordinated action in global forums. This coordinated action includes pooling resources to ensure diverse representation at key meetings, dividing tasks and speaking roles to maximise impact and developing rapid response mechanisms to address

emerging issues. CSOs must acknowledge the challenges of coalition building. They must balance diverse priorities, maintain cohesion over time, and ensure equitable representation within coalitions.

Focus engagement on emerging Issues

CSOs should strategically focus their limited resources on high-impact emerging issues. Emerging technologies like AI governance present challenges and opportunities. Empowering local voices was identified by key interviewed experts as one of the most effective approaches, along with incentivising governments to actively engage local CSOs and youth in all IG initiatives. This collaborative approach ensures that IG policies reflect local realities and needs. For instance, in Kenya, grassroots digital rights organisations have been involved in crafting the country's data protection framework, which has led to stronger safeguards for marginalised communities. It is imperative that CSOs identify 2–3 priority emerging issues aligned with organisational expertise, develop policy briefs translating technical concepts for policymakers and the public, and build partnerships with academic institutions to strengthen research capacity.

Support knowledge exchange

Supporting knowledge exchange among CSOs and youth advocates has become a crucial strategy for enhancing engagement in IG processes. This approach recognises the value of peer-to-peer learning and the importance of creating spaces where diverse perspectives can be shared and amplified. CSOs can share best practices and innovative approaches by creating platforms for knowledge exchange, discussing common challenges, collectively brainstorming solutions, and building solidarity and support networks across borders.

The African School on Internet Governance (AfriSIG) is a good example of this approach. Established in 2013, it has become a cornerstone in building a cadre of informed and engaged African IG practitioners. For intensive learning and networking sessions, the school gathers participants from diverse backgrounds, including CSOs, government, academia, and the private sector.

The Global South has replicated this model of regional IG schools in various regions. The Asia Pacific School on Internet Governance (APSIG) and the South School on Internet Governance (SSIG) in Latin America are prominent examples.

Decolonise internet governance

Decolonising IG is important in creating an inclusive and equitable digital future. Efforts to decolonise IG processes ensure genuinely global representations. This process challenges Western-centric narratives and amplifies diverse perspectives. Experts emphasise addressing the absence of African worldviews in international governance processes. Decolonising IG is not a simple task, but it is essential for creating a global and equitable digital future. By challenging entrenched power structures, amplifying marginalised voices, and reimagining our approach to governance, CSOs can build an internet that serves and empowers all of humanity.

Challenging western-centric narratives
Western nations have long dominated IG, affecting many stakeholders in the Global South. There is a need to rethink the frameworks and assumptions that underpin current IG processes. Decolonisation efforts must go beyond mere inclusion to actively challenge and reshape the dominant narratives.

A crucial aspect of decolonising IG is elevating historically marginalised voices. IG spaces could promote conversations about the future of the internet from a Global South perspective. These approaches could include terminology and the organisational structures of decision-making processes. This paradigm shift underscores the critical importance of embracing diverse viewpoints, particularly those from the Global South, in formulating and implementing IG policies and practices.

This includes advocating for linguistic diversity in IG forums and documentation and ensuring that discussions are not limited to English and other dominant languages. This emphasis on linguistic diversity makes the audience feel heard and respected, fostering a sense of inclusion and equality. Global South organisations and stakeholders should push to reform funding structures to complement these efforts. This reform would empower them and enable meaningful and consistent participation in IG processes. By actively advocating for changes in funding mechanisms, Global South entities can enhance their ability to effectively engage in shaping the future of the internet.

Reimagining technical standards

The technical foundations of the internet often reflect Western assumptions and priorities. There is a need to critically examine how these standards might disadvantage or exclude certain communities and work to develop more inclusive alternatives:

- Encourage greater participation from Global South engineers and technologists in standard-setting bodies like the IETF
- Fund research on how existing technical standards impact different communities
- Explore alternatives
- Promote the development of technologies specifically designed to meet the needs of underserved regions

Centring local knowledge and contexts

Supporting the development of regional and national IG forums that prioritise local issues and perspectives. It also encourages research on how traditional governance systems can inform digital policy-making and promote cross-cultural dialogue and exchange to enrich global IG discussions with diverse worldviews. Improving CSO engagement in IG requires a multi-faceted approach that addresses structural barriers and capacity gaps.

3. Potential CADE Interventions

This section presents recommendations for potential interventions that could be implemented under the CADE project to address key challenges, opportunities, and capacity needs for enhancing CSO engagement in IG.

3.1 Establish Regional IG Capacity Building Hubs

A recurring theme in the findings is the need for contextually relevant, accessible capacity building. We recommend establishing regional IG capacity-building hubs to develop and deliver modular, multilingual training programmes covering technical knowledge, policy advocacy, and strategic communications. The hubs can serve as repositories for region-specific IG resources and facilitate networking and collaboration among regional CSOs.

The regional IG capacity building hubs could leverage existing flagship regional programmes implemented by IG organisations. Collaboration with ICANN, for instance, could be crucial for empowering CSOs to participate effectively in policy development processes. These hubs can align their training programmes with the ITU's development goals, focusing on digital inclusion, cybersecurity, and ICT infrastructure. This alignment can facilitate new CSO participation in ITU regional and global events. The hubs can provide CSOs with training on ITU recommendations, strategically positioning CSOs as active players in IG issues.

The hubs could also strengthen CSO involvement in national and regional IGFs, including the regional schools of IGs across regions.

3.2 Create a Sustainable Funding Mechanism for CSO Participation

Financial constraints remain a significant barrier to CSO engagement. We recommend creating a dedicated, long-term funding mechanism that provides CSOs from underrepresented regions. They could apply for travel grants to attend key IG forums. The mechanism may include core funding for CSOs to build and maintain IG expertise and support for research and policy development activities.

The efficacy of such a funding mechanism hinges on the adoption of diverse and sustainable funding modalities. Multistakeholder trust funds, drawing contributions from governments, the private sector, and philanthropic organisations, offer a collaborative approach to resource mobilisation. Endowment funds provide a stable, long-term source of income, while structured grant programmes can target specific activities, such as travel, research, or capacity building. Leveraging crowdfunding and peer-to-peer funding platforms can diversify funding sources and cultivate community support. In-kind contributions, such as access to meeting spaces or technical assistance, can also alleviate the financial burden on CSOs.

The regional hubs discussed above could play a pivotal role in maximising the impact of this funding mechanism. Acting as intermediaries, they can ensure that resources are distributed effectively and equitably within their respective regions. Their deep understanding of local contexts enables them to provide targeted capacity building, mentorship, and technical assistance to new CSOs. The hubs

can facilitate networking and collaboration, fostering a sense of community and shared purpose. Additionally, they can manage localised grant applications and distribution, making the process more accessible to local organisations, and contribute to monitoring and evaluation efforts, enhancing accountability and transparency.

3.3 Develop a Digital Inclusion Advocacy Toolkit

We propose creating a comprehensive toolkit that equips CSOs to advocate for digital inclusion in their local contexts. This toolkit should include data and case studies on the impact of the digital divide. It could also include policy templates, advocacy strategies, and resources on community networks and innovative connectivity solutions.

The toolkit could include ready-to-use templates for letters to local government officials, press releases, social media campaigns, and presentation slides. An Advocacy 101 guide could break down the advocacy process into manageable steps. It could also provide a resource directory of organisations and experts active in different regions. The toolkit could offer multilingual support to ensure accessibility for diverse communities, including offline access.

3.4 Launch a CSO-IG Mentorship Programme

To bridge the knowledge gap and foster leadership development, we recommend implementing a structured mentorship programme that pairs experienced IG practitioners with emerging CSO leaders. This programme could facilitate knowledge transfer on technical and policy issues, guide navigating complex IG processes and foster long-term relationships and collaborations. Models exist in ICANN, the IGF, and the Internet Society, which can serve as models of best practices.

Beyond knowledge transfer, the mentorship programme could catalyse leadership development. It fosters essential strategic planning, risk management, and stakeholder engagement skills, empowering new CSO leaders to confidently navigate complex IG processes. This includes demystifying technical aspects of IG, such as data encryption and access controls, and providing practical guidance on data collection, storage, and responsible use. Mentors play a pivotal role in guiding mentees through the intricacies of regulatory compliance and internal policy development, ensuring they understand and mitigate potential risks associated with information management. This hands-on guidance is crucial for new CSOs often grappling with limited resources and established networks.

The programme could cultivate a robust network of support and collaboration. Connecting new CSOs with experienced practitioners would foster long-term relationships and establish a community of practice. The program's design should emphasise accessibility and contextualisation, ensuring that it meets the diverse needs of new CSOs, including those operating in remote or underserved

3.5 Establish a Multistakeholder Collaboration Platform

We recommend establishing a collaborative platform to amplify CSO impact and drive balanced policymaking. This platform could achieve this through 1) regular dialogues addressing critical issues, 2) joint working groups to develop targeted policy solutions, and 3) highlighting successful models of cooperation between CSOs, governments, and the private sector.

The combined expertise of CADE project partners such as DiploFoundation, with its capacity development in global IG and ECNL's legal advocacy for digital rights, provides a robust foundation for training and mentorship. Forus's vast CSO network and experience in mobilising organisations could ensure new CSOs can easily integrate into the platform and connect with peers.

CIPESA and KICTANet's regional expertise in African digital policy, along with SMEX's focus on the MENA region and PICISOC's Pacific Island focus, could offer invaluable contextual knowledge, crucial for navigating diverse IG landscapes. Sarvodaya-Fusion's experience in digital inclusion could also guide efforts to ensure equitable participation, while Karisma's focus on digital rights in Latin America adds to the global understanding of digital rights issues.

CADE partners can provide targeted training on policy analysis, advocacy strategies, and technical IG processes. The platform can facilitate knowledge sharing, enabling experienced partners to mentor emerging CSOs, thereby building their capacity to effectively participate in and influence IG decision-making. This collaborative approach empowers new CSOs to confidently engage in IG.

3.6 Implement a CSO-led Media Engagement Initiative

We recommend a collaborative media initiative to enhance public understanding and elevate CSO perspectives. This initiative could focus on equipping CSOs with media skills, developing clear multimedia resources on complex IG topics, and fostering partnerships with influential technology and policy journalists. The CADE partners bring a wealth of relevant experience in this field. DiploFoundation's expertise in digital diplomacy and communication can be instrumental in training CSOs on crafting effective media messages and navigating the complex media landscape. Regional expertise can tailor media strategies to specific contexts, ensuring culturally relevant and impactful communication.

Media engagement initiatives could be strategically aligned with a diverse calendar of IG events, and can advocate for specific issues that CSOs are prioritising across regions. By tailoring its message and activities to the specific focus of each event, the initiative can effectively engage a wide range of stakeholders. At the Mobile World Congress (MWC), the emphasis could be on leveraging mobile technology for digital inclusion, showcasing innovative solutions and engaging industry leaders on their role in bridging the digital divide. Meanwhile, at RightsCon, the focus shifts to digital inclusion as a fundamental human right, highlighting digital discrimination and empowering marginalised communities through workshops and digital campaigns.

The media initiative should maintain a consistent core message of digital inclusion while adapting its approach to suit the unique context of each event. This strategic alignment with diverse IG events, combined with data-driven advocacy and strong media partnerships, would ensure that the initiative effectively amplifies CSO voices and promotes digital inclusion on a global scale.

3.7 Create an Emerging Technologies Task Force

Recognising the critical need for CSOs to understand and influence the impact of rapidly evolving technologies, we propose the formation of a dedicated task force. This task force could focus on emerging technologies such as AI, IoT, and blockchain, with the goals of 1) producing accessible

policy analyses on their IG implications, 2) building CSO capacity through targeted training, and 3) facilitating knowledge exchange between CSOs and the technical community.

The establishment of an emerging technologies task force would offer new CSOs a strategic pathway to carve out a distinct and influential role within the complex landscape of IG. By concentrating on specific intersections between emerging technologies like AI, the IoT, and blockchain, and their IG implications, CSOs can rapidly develop niche expertise. This focused approach allows CSOs to acquire in-depth knowledge quickly.

The task force should serve as a vital tool for capacity building, particularly within underserved communities. It can also act as a crucial bridge between the technical and policy worlds, facilitating collaboration and knowledge exchange. This collaborative approach allows CSOs to access technical expertise, amplify citizen voices, and develop alternative policy proposals that better reflect the needs of their communities. Such efforts strengthen the CSO network and enhance their ability to influence policy decisions.

The task force can significantly enhance a new CSO's ability to secure funding and resources. Funders are increasingly interested in supporting innovative projects that address the ethical and social implications of emerging technologies. This strategic approach to resource mobilisation ensures the long-term sustainability and effectiveness of CSO initiatives.

4. Conclusion

The analysis of CSO engagement in IG processes highlights a complex interplay of challenges and opportunities, revealing that while progress has been made, the journey towards truly inclusive IG is ongoing. The Baseline and Recommendations present recommendations and areas that require attention. In some regions, CSOs face increasing restrictions, hindering their ability to operate freely and participate. Therefore, advocating for the protection and expansion of civic space is essential, ensuring CSOs can contribute without fear of reprisal.

We recognise the strength and diversity of CSOs working in internet governance arenas, and the mapping study reinforced this. The mapping study was able to gather broad, in-depth data and insights from our Key Interviewed Experts and underlying research. This extensive research and body of CSO knowledge reveals immense power in CSOs that is not always obvious in existing papers, which tend to focus on specific issues with some interconnections. Our recommendations are garnered from that collective wisdom. They owe their significance to the current work and future aspirations of CSOs, so some of these recommendations might sound familiar.

However, the 'Mapping Civil Society Organisation Engagement in Multilateral and Multistakeholder Internet Governance Processes' research has a breadth of mapping and input that allows a compilation of CSO input that presents a woven cloth, a whole, rather than the strands and threads we often find. We hope that the depth and breadth of these two papers will motivate and mobilise all of us in civil society to improve our collaborative work at a time when it is critically essential.

Recommendations to strengthen CSO participation in IG forums in the Global South are essential and offered in different contexts. Sustainable funding mechanisms are paramount and consistent and reliable financial support is critical for CSOs to maintain sustained engagement in IG discussions and decision-making. This will ensure that civil society voices are not silenced due to resource limitations, allowing for continuous and meaningful contributions.

Secondly, targeted capacity-building initiatives are crucial to bridge the technical knowledge gaps that hinder CSO participation. These initiatives should focus on demystifying complex technical discussions and empowering CSOs to effectively contribute to debates surrounding emerging technologies like AI. This would not only enhance their ability to navigate IG forums but also address the power imbalances that arise from technical disparity. Simultaneously, reforms to IG processes must prioritise inclusivity and diverse representation. This entails creating accessible platforms and mechanisms that encourage participation from CSOs across diverse backgrounds and regions, ensuring that the voices of marginalised communities are heard and considered.

Thirdly, support for coalition-building and knowledge-sharing among CSOs is vital. Strategic collaboration allows CSOs to amplify their impact, overcome resource constraints, and navigate the intricate landscape of IG forums more effectively. By fostering networks and platforms for knowledge exchange, CSOs can build collective strength and influence. Finally, integrating localisation and decolonisation principles into all aspects of IG is essential. This necessitates a paradigm shift where IG frameworks reflect the unique contexts and priorities of the Global South, acknowledging and

respecting diverse cultural and societal values. By prioritising these recommendations, CSOs can pave the way for an IG ecosystem that genuinely reflects the diverse needs and aspirations of global internet users, ultimately fostering a more inclusive and empowering digital future for all.

In addition, the media plays a critical role in disseminating information and raising public awareness about IG issues, yet media organisations are often underrepresented in IG forums. Efforts should be made to actively encourage and facilitate their involvement, recognising their unique contribution to public discourse. Improving accountability and transparency is paramount to ensure IG processes are genuinely inclusive and effective. This involves establishing clear mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating the impact of CSO participation, as well as ensuring decision-making processes are open and accessible to the public.

Moreover, fostering intersectional approaches is crucial. IG issues intersect with various social, economic, and political concerns. Therefore, considering the diverse needs and experiences of different groups, including women, youth, and marginalised communities, is essential. Lastly, emphasis on digital literacy is a key component of CSO empowerment. Digital literacy enables better navigation of IG spaces and supports better interaction with the communities the CSOs represent.