Internet Governance Forum 2025 – Workshop 4
Dynamic Coalition Session: Future of multistakeholder governance
27 June 2025 – Lillestrøm, Norway (Hybrid)

Speaker: Dr. Muhammad Shabbir, Co-Coordinator, Dynamic Coalition on Accessibility and Disability (DCAD)

SUMMARY

Intervention #1 – From Formal Commitments to Real Inclusion

Dr. Shabbir begins by situating disability inclusion within the broader architecture of international digital governance instruments. He points to:

- The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN-CRPD), widely ratified by governments
- The WSIS+20 review process
- The Global Digital Compact
- The UN Secretary-General's Digital Inclusion Strategy

All of these, he notes, explicitly reference inclusion and accessibility.

He stresses that the current year is pivotal—not only for determining the future of Internet governance, but also for shaping the future of multistakeholder governance itself. Against this backdrop, he argues that inclusion of persons with disabilities must move beyond rhetoric.

Referring to the earlier session "Beyond Tokenism," he underscores that concrete strategies already exist for meaningful participation. He also references DCAD-organized sessions focused on capacity building and principle-based inclusive models.

He directly confronts a common implicit objection: if Internet governance has been functioning, why change it? His answer is demographic and systemic. Citing WHO data, he notes that persons with disabilities represent roughly 15–16% of the global population—amounting to a population comparable to India or China. If such a large segment is not meaningfully benefiting from digital systems, then the system cannot be considered "perfect."

His central argument: if governance systems have not delivered for this population, it may be because persons with disabilities were not present at the decision-making table. Therefore, inclusion must occur at the level of decision-making, not as an afterthought.

Intervention #2 – Evolving the Multistakeholder Model

Responding to how multistakeholder models can become more inclusive, Dr. Shabbir supports strengthening the institutional voice of persons with disabilities within the IGF structure—specifically calling for representation on the MAG.

He rejects the treatment of disability as merely a "checkbox" under diversity. He describes persons with disabilities as the "largest minority" and argues their perspective should be embedded structurally.

At the same time, he defends the bottom-up nature of Dynamic Coalitions. Drawing on remarks from fellow participants, he emphasizes that DC coordinators are facilitators—not top-down authorities. Their role is to guide, resource, and enable community-driven work.

This dual stance is important:

- Protect bottom-up multistakeholder processes.

- Reform them so they are genuinely inclusive.

He contrasts highly articulate youth voices in the room with teens with disabilities who lack comparable opportunities. For him, this highlights the gap between formal multistakeholderism and substantive equality. The model must evolve to be multistakeholder "in the true sense," not symbolically.

Intervention #3 – Power and Realism

In response to a participant questioning whether centrism should replace multistakeholderism, Dr. Shabbir draws on his background in international relations.

He argues that power has never been equally distributed and never will be. Power holders do not voluntarily surrender influence.

However, he reframes the discussion: even without formal power, actors in the room possess influence. Dynamic Coalitions derive strength from "the power of the people." That form of collective influence cannot be taken away.

For DCAD, the task is not abstract institutional redesign, but making Internet governance spaces equal for persons with disabilities. Multistakeholderism, in his view, remains the mechanism through which that influence can be exercised.

Intervention #4 – Beyond Connectivity: Meaningful Use

In his concluding remarks, Dr. Shabbir broadens the lens.

He notes that global discussions often focus on the 2.7 billion people who remain unconnected. But he calls attention to another figure: approximately 1.5 billion people who may be connected, living in developed countries, using state-of-the-art devices and high-speed Internet—yet still unable to use the Internet meaningfully.

This is a powerful reframing of the digital divide. For persons with disabilities, access is not merely about connectivity; it is about usability, accessibility, and meaningful participation.

He closes by inviting participants to imagine themselves in that position—connected but excluded. DCAD stands ready to collaborate across Dynamic Coalitions to address this gap.

TRANSCRIPT

Intervention #1

Judith Hellerstein: And this is Dr. Muhammad Shabiah. He, along with myself, are the co-coordinators of our, our Dynamic Coalition. So let me without bring it over to Dr. Shabi.

Dr. Muhammad Shabbir: Thank you very much, Judith. Thank you for giving the opportunity, and my colleagues, for disabled to discuss the future of multistakeholder governance from the perspective of Dynamic Coalition on Accessibility and Disability. I would have a couple of points to make in the initial intervention, and then we can follow those points in the interactive discussion.

The first thing is that there are a number of instruments at the high level, as well as regional and national level, that talk about inclusivity, accessibility, and rights of persons with disabilities in the digital spaces. At the top of all these instruments sits the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which most of the governments by now have not just signed but ratified. Then we have WSIS+20, which is being reviewed this year, that also talks about inclusivity. We have the Global Digital Compact where inclusivity for persons with disabilities is also referred. And then we have Digital Inclusion Strategy by the UN Secretary General, where inclusivity is talked about.

This year is very important. As we all know, we'll be not only deciding the future of Internet governance, but we will also be deciding how the future of multistakeholder governance should be shaping up.

So, inclusion of persons with disabilities in the decision making, as we discussed in the session on Beyond Tokenism: the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Internet Governance. This was one of the sessions where we talked about different ways and strategies that can be implemented in the way of involving persons with disabilities in further sessions.

As dynamic coalitions, we also organized three key sessions in different clusters. I won't go into the details, but yesterday, in Hall 5, we discussed about capacities and how principle-based models can be can be made inclusive, and ensure that persons with disabilities are included in the decision making of the future.

The question here arises, why do we include persons with disabilities, whereas we have so many people who could be deciding the future of digital governance, and they have been deciding it, arguably, and it has been functioning.

As a coordinator of the Dynamic Caolition on Accessibility and Disability, I would say the system might be functioning for some, but there is a very huge number of population -- well, WHO would state that it is about 15 or 16% of the world population, which considering the total world population levels at 8 or 9 billion, would be equal to the total population of the country which is India or China, so a huge number of population is there -- who are not meaningfully benefiting from the processes or the systems that our so-called perfect technologists, policy makers, have evolved.

Therefore, when Dynamic Coalition on Accessibility and Disability comes on the stage and says that if you have not been able to evolve the perfect systems, perhaps this was because you had not the right people at the decision making tables when you are making the decisions about the future of the Internet. So, it's high time that, while we evolve the future systems, now we include persons with disabilities into those decision making.

So, I stop here and we can discuss this further. Judith, over to you. Thank you.

Intervention #2

Judith Hellerstein: How can multistakeholder models be further developed to make them more inclusive and accessible? And I point to Dr. Shabbir to talk about that.

Dr. Muhammad Shabbir: Thank you very much for that. I've been listening to my fellow DC representatives talk about different aspects, and I've been thinking how best we can evolve this multistakeholder model, that we have going, up and running, and I reflected upon the suggestion that came out from Waut, and then the discussion on having a voice or space on the MAG by the DCs, and I would, for one, from the perspective of DCAD, I would want the multistakeholder model as it exists today to evolve that to include the voice of persons with disabilities on the MAG.

Why so? Because this is the largest minority that is just being made into a checkbox under the diversity umbrella. It should not be that.

On the other hand, as the coordinator of Dynamic Coalition on Accessibility and Disability, and one of the oldest dynamic coalitions in existence, I would argue for the argument that Avri has put forwards, and that is we must guard the. System that we have here within the Dynamic Coalitions, and that is bottom up multistakeholder. We, as the coordinators of the dynamic coalitions, we are not the chairs who would give directions to the, from the top to be implemented. We facilitate the work of the coalitions as Marcus very rightly said that they are Marcus and Utah.

Are recog prefer to be recognized as facilitators of the work because our job is not to give directions. Our job is to give guidance, to provide resources, and to facilitate the work that community wants from us. And in that I just. Was thinking that whether teens, I, I hear amri and I am really impressed by his prowess and his argumentation at this age.

But when I think of the other side of the teens with disabilities. Those who do not have the right opportunities, then I need to consider that that multistakeholder model so-called needs to evolve and it needs to be multistakeholder in true sense and not just be some check boxes here and there.

Thank you.

Intervention #3

Participant: Aren't we trying to reinvent the wheel here? Shouldn't we be moving towards centrism rather than multistakeholder? Thank you.

Dr. Muhammad Shabbir: Power politics is my subject as a student of international relations, and we all know it is not equally distributed, and through the centuries it has not been, and it would never be.

Power that be, would not voluntarily give the equal distribution of it to anyone.

So, while we may not have the power to change things at our will in this room, we do have the power in this room to influence things, and that's what we are doing. Dynamic Coalition on Accessibility and Disability is trying to make the Internet and Internet governance spaces equal for people with disabilities, and that's where the power of all our dynamic coalitions comes. We have the power of the people, which cannot be taken away from us. Thank you.

Intervention #4

So, I would just go directly to the concluding statement that I have.

Dynamic Coalition on Accessibility and Disability stands ready to work with our fellow dynamic coalitions, and there are a number of subjects that one can work with. If we want the people to use the Internet meaningfully, we need to not just think only about those 2.7 billion who are not connected, but 1.5 billion people who may be connected, may be in a well-developed country, may have state of the art devices with the high speed Internet, but still be unable to use the Internet.

And, I invite you to think about that situation and put yourselves in that. What would you do if you were in that situation?

I rest my case. Thank you.