



WS #69 Beyond Tokenism: Disability-Inclusive Leadership in IG

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Internet Governance Forum 2025 – Workshop #69 Beyond Tokenism: Disability-Inclusive Leadership in Internet Governance

June 25, 2025 – Lillestrøm, Norway (Hybrid)

Session Overview

Moderated by **Dr. Muhammad Shabbir (Pakistan)**, co-coordinator of the Dynamic Coalition on Accessibility and Disability (DCAD), Workshop 69 addressed how persons with disabilities can move beyond token representation toward genuine leadership roles in Internet governance (IG). The discussion was framed around the broader WSIS+20 review and the Global Digital Compact (GDC), emphasizing the need to integrate disability inclusion into global digital policy frameworks.

The panel featured:

- **Vinton Cerf**, IGF Leadership Panel (video message)
- **Gunela Astbrink**, MAG member and ISOC Accessibility Standing Group
- **Sarah Armstrong**, Executive Director, Internet Society Foundation
- **Prof. Derrick Cogburn**, American University (online)
- **Dr. Nirmita Narasimhan**, accessibility and policy expert (online)
- **Judith Hellerstein**, DCAD co-coordinator (online moderator)

Opening Remarks – Dr. Muhammad Shabbir

Shabbir explained that while persons with disabilities are increasingly present at the IGF, their representation in **decision-making and leadership roles** remains limited—often “tokenistic.” The session’s goal was to explore how to transform inclusion from symbolic to structural, and how to ensure that digital accessibility benefits all users through **universal design principles**.

Keynote Message – Vinton Cerf

Vinton Cerf emphasized that accessibility is fundamental to the Internet’s mission of inclusion.

- Making digital tools and platforms accessible requires **deep understanding and user empathy**, often gained only through lived experience.
 - Developers should study both **successful and failed** user interfaces to learn what enables or hinders accessibility.
 - Cerf highlighted the emerging role of **AI and intelligent agents** in improving accessibility through **hands-free and conversational interfaces**.
 - He reminded designers that disabilities are diverse—“there is no single solution”—and systems must be adaptable.
 - Concluded with: “The Internet should be for everyone, including people with all kinds of disabilities.”
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Gunela Astbrink – Policy Frameworks and Implementation

Astbrink analyzed the intersection of **WSIS+20, the Global Digital Compact, and the UN Disability Inclusion Strategy**, noting these frameworks’ importance for embedding accessibility in global digital governance.

- The **WSIS+20 elements paper** includes language on the digital divide and accessibility, inviting public comment by July 15, 2025.

- The **GDC** commits by 2030 to provide accessible interfaces and target underrepresented groups, aligned with **SDGs 4 and 10**.
 - She stressed the need to move **from principles to practice**, requiring **national laws and institutional mechanisms**.
 - As a case study, she highlighted **the Internet Society's Accessibility Framework**, driven by leadership champions and guided by Dr. Shabbir's tenure on ISOC's Board of Trustees.
 - Implementation relies on fostering a "**culture of accessibility**" and senior staff advocacy to remove participation barriers.
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Sarah Armstrong – The Philanthropic Dimension

Sarah Armstrong described the **Internet Society Foundation's** efforts to integrate accessibility and leadership training for persons with disabilities:

- The Foundation funds multiple **grant programs** addressing disability inclusion:
 - **Skills** program for digital literacy.
 - **Beyond the Net** chapter initiatives (e.g., training sightless journalists in Bosnia, empowering women with disabilities in Kyrgyzstan and Indonesia).
 - **Connecting the Unconnected**, emphasizing accessible community networks.
- ISOC's **operational accessibility framework** is guided by the principle "**Nothing about us without us.**"
- The ISOC website now meets **WCAG 2.1 AA standards** with a **99/100 accessibility rating**.
- A flagship **Disability Leadership Training in Internet Governance and Digital Rights** program (5 weeks, 20 hours) trains advocates worldwide.

Recommendations for philanthropy:

1. Encourage inclusiveness in funded events (IGFs, NRIs, SIGs).
2. Require accessibility features—captioning, sign language, accessible venues.
3. Support mentorship, leadership pipelines, and intersectional inclusion.
4. Fund research, impact measurement, and regional capacity-building.

Armstrong stressed that accessibility should be viewed as **core to digital equity**, not as a peripheral issue.

Prof. Derrick Cogburn – Data, Research, and Networks

Joining online from American University, Prof. Cogburn discussed **data-driven approaches** to track and enhance disability inclusion in Internet governance.

- His research on **IGF transcripts and text analytics** shows that DCAD language on accessibility has been consistently present since the first IGF—proof of sustained impact.
- His team uses **text mining, natural language processing (NLP), and AI tools** to analyze participation patterns and policy references.
- Notable data sources include:
 - **Disability Data Initiative** (Fordham University)
 - **Disability Data Hub** (World Bank)
 - **CRPD state reports and shadow reports** for global progress tracking
- He emphasized **capacity building** in data literacy, enabling advocates to use open tools like **Python** and **R** for policy analysis.
- Generative AI, he noted, could democratize access by making research participation easier for non-programmers.
- Concluded by stressing the value of **transnational advocacy networks (TANs)**—like DCAD—as vehicles for sustained engagement across overlapping global policy arenas.

Dr. Nirmita Narasimhan – Barriers to Disability Leadership

Nirmita outlined systemic and practical barriers:

1. **Awareness gap** – Many disability advocates are unaware of IGF or how to engage.
2. **Funding and logistics** – Travel, accompaniment, and accessibility needs require financial and institutional support.
3. **Limited cross-issue engagement** – Advocates often confine participation to disability panels, missing opportunities to influence AI, data governance, and cybersecurity discussions.
4. **Continuity** – Participation must extend beyond a single IGF; networks and mentorships are key to ongoing engagement.

She called for **greater outreach, sustained support, and integration of accessibility themes across all IGF tracks**, not just in dedicated disability sessions.

Audience Interaction

Emmanuel Oruk (Uganda, online fellow)

Asked about success stories from ISOC Foundation.

- Armstrong cited projects in **Puerto Rico, Bosnia, Kyrgyzstan, and Indonesia** as tangible examples.
- She noted ongoing accessibility improvements in ISOC's website and grant processes.

Jacqueline Jijide (Malawi, African Digital Inclusion Alliance)

Expressed concern over low participation of persons with disabilities in the room and absence of sign language interpretation.

- **Judith Hellerstein** acknowledged competing sessions and noted that **captioning** was provided; inclusion efforts continue through fellowships.
- **Shabbir** agreed and underscored the session's goal: moving "beyond tokenism" to real representation, while inviting more organizations to fund disability participation.

Nigel Cassimire (Caribbean Telecommunications Union)

Asked how to foster ambition among persons with disabilities to engage globally.

- **Gunela Astbrink** referenced **South Asian leadership workshops** supported by APriGF and ISOC chapters, emphasizing "train-the-trainer" models.
- **Prof. Cogburn** recommended joining **transnational advocacy networks** like DCAD to link local efforts with global agendas.

Francis Akwa Amini (ISOC Ghana)

Proposed reserving organizational roles (e.g., 5%) for persons with disabilities to achieve self-sufficiency rather than dependency.

- **Sarah Armstrong** said ISOC is exploring inclusive hiring as part of its accessibility roadmap.
 - **Judith Hellerstein** added that DCAD promotes accessible design, forms, and documents, advocating at government and institutional levels.
 - **Dr. Shabbir** concluded that the “end goal is a world where accessibility is built-in, not requested.”
 - **Dr. Nirmita Narasimhan** added that the ultimate aim is for people with disabilities to **co-shape technology policy**, not merely seek accommodation.
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Wrap-Up and Key Takeaways (Gunela Astbrink)

1. **Keep the end goal in sight** – equitable digital governance with leadership from persons with disabilities.
 2. **Link frameworks** – translate WSIS+20, GDC, and UN instruments from principles to action.
 3. **Value lived experience** – integrate real disability perspectives in policymaking.
 4. **Join transnational advocacy networks** to sustain engagement.
 5. **Invest in leadership pipelines** – through training, mentorship, and funding partnerships.
 6. **Institutionalize accountability** via benchmarks, data metrics, and accessibility audits.
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Closing Remarks

Dr. Shabbir thanked all speakers, participants, captioners, and staff, reaffirming that **DCAD’s mission** is to ensure accessibility and leadership go hand in hand:

“In an ideal world, persons with disabilities wouldn’t have to ask for inclusion—accessibility would already be the norm.”

TRANSCRIPT

Dr. Muhammad Shabbir: Hello and good afternoon ladies and gentlemen. I am Muhammad Shabbir, your moderator for the roundtable workshop number 69, Beyond Tokenism: Disability Leadership in Internet Governance. Thank you very much for joining us today in the IGF 2025 for this very important discussion. As we move forward and look towards the future where WSIS+20 is being reviewed and IGF's mandate is getting a new direction, it is very important that we discuss and analyze how persons with disabilities have been participating in the IGF discussions. What have we so far achieved and what should be done next in this context?

In my limited understanding while we were proposing this workshop, we thought that though persons with disabilities have been participating in internet governance spaces, they come, they participated, discussed, highlighted accessibility issues. But the representation at the decision-making table or in the room where decisions were made with regards to internet governance and digital accessibility, we had a very tokenistic representation of persons with disabilities there. Though some would arguably also say that even the tokenistic nomenclature or expression can also be expanded to internet governance spaces to some extent as well.

To explore different dimensions and aspects of this question and this topic, that what has happened so far and what can be done next, I have a very excellent and eminent panelists on the stage here and online. I thank everyone for sparing their time to join us on this panel. But before we go to the panelists and ask some very critical questions, we need to understand what digital accessibility means. And who better to talk about what digital accessibility means is the father of the internet known as Vint Cerf. So, we have a video message from Vint Cerf talking about digital accessibility and what it means for persons with disabilities. May I request the support team to kindly play the video by Vint Cerf.

Vinton Cerf: Hello, my name is Vint Cerf. I'm chairman of the leadership panel of the Internet Governance Forum. Today, I'd like to talk a little bit about accessibility of the internet and the World Wide Web and in general accessibility for a lot of digital applications. This is not easy. In order to understand how to make applications accessible to someone with a disability is a non-trivial exercise. You really have to have intuition and that's hard to get unless you happen to have a particular disability or you happen to make use of certain kinds of applications like screen readers, so that you have an appreciation for how well or how poorly some of these ideas work.

One thing that I can assure you of is that if you're responsible for user interfaces or what's called user experience, it will be very very helpful for you to see

examples of successful applications and also examples of not so successful ones and to try to understand what made them either succeed or fail. It also occurs to me that in addition to these kinds of examples from which you can gain intuition, that we may discover with artificial intelligence that our ability to interact with the services of the World Wide Web and the Internet through alternative means than keyboards and mice might turn out to be important. I'm thinking of course of intelligent agents. We may be able to make an application a lot more usable if it's a question of negotiating with a system as opposed to trying to work your way through a two-dimensional space in a linear way, which is what of course the screen readers will do for someone who has vision impairment.

So, it may very well be that AI is our friend here in a number of different dimensions. This is relatively unexplored territory, although we're seeing a great deal more oral interaction, hands-free kinds of interaction which is helpful for people who don't have a visual impairment or an audio impairment, but who just don't have the ability to use their hands at the moment. There are often situations where hands-free is really very very important and valuable. So, the message here is that accessibility is a high priority. The Internet should be for everyone and that's inclusive of people with various disabilities. And second, it's important to recognize that everyone who has one or more disabilities will have different combinations and flavors. And so there's no simple single solution for audio impairment or visual impairment. We really have to design interfaces that are adaptable to people's needs.

Once again a very very important topic to make sure that the Internet really is for everyone. So, I'm glad to see that the DCAD, the Dynamic Coalition on Accessibility, is active in the Internet Governance Forum. I'm looking forward to your conclusions and your discussion as you search for better ways of making the Internet an accessible place.

Dr. Muhammad Shabbir: Thank you very much Vint Cerf. We heard right from the top of the Internet Governance leadership that how accessibility is important. I just want to add number one, when Vint was speaking about building Internet which is for everyone, he meant that following the universal design which everyone can use. And if it is made accessible, the common misunderstanding is that it is made accessible for persons with disabilities, but everyone else can use that too. So, a device which is used or prepared to make it accessible for people who lack hands or physical disabilities, it can also be used by other people who are driving or who want to do some other tasks while commanding to the machines.

Now before we move forward the discussion, I want to go to the speaker on the stage, Gunela Astbrink. She has a very wide experience of promoting, educating, and making systems and policies accessible for people with disabilities. She has vast experience of policy making as well. So, with her experience of being the leader of accessibility standing group of the Internet Society, being the MAG member, I would want to ask her: Gunela, what in your opinion do you think that WSIS, GDC and inclusion strategy mean for persons with disabilities and what policy mechanisms can be there or improved to make the environments, digital environments particularly, accessible for people with disabilities? Gunela, over to you.

Gunela Astbrink: Thank you very much, Dr. Shabbir. And that's a big question. But I will try to answer in terms of such frameworks as Dr. Shabbir mentioned: WSIS+20, Global Digital Compact and also the UN Disability Inclusion Strategy. We are right in the middle of these discussions when it comes to WSIS+20 and the Global Digital Compact. We will see results according to plan by the end of the year. And these are very complex negotiations. And we will have to find ways to be able to input into that.

So, the WSIS+20 has recently released an elements paper. And this is based on consultation with member states and other stakeholders. And there are a number of paragraphs in there. And I won't go into great detail. But it does talk about digital divide. It talks about accessibility for persons with disability and also reinforcing existing frameworks for multi-stakeholder cooperation. So, we need to read that. We need to make comments by the 15th of July into what's called the zero draft. And we have the opportunity to input just like any other stakeholder does.

I will also talk about the Global Digital Compact. And this is another instrument that is being, well, it has been drafted. But it's now a matter of how that harmonizes or not with the WSIS+20. And I want to refer to digital literacy, skills and competencies. And it says we, as in the GDC, commit by 2030 to provide accessible user interfaces. These are based on some of the Sustainable Development Goals. And in that case, it's number 4 and 10. And also to target and tailor capacity building for underrepresented groups, including persons with disability, to ensure meaningful engagement in design and implementation of programs. And that's really important when we are talking about disability leadership. That here there is something stated about that meaningful engagement. So, we have to ask ourselves, how is this going to be implemented? Because this is a high level global instrument. And obviously, it requires national legislation and regulation in many cases to do so.

So, I just wanted then to go into how do we move from policies to implementation? And there are a number of complexities with that. And I want to refer to basically a case study. And this is the Internet Society. It is important to have senior staff who are accessibility champions. It makes a huge, big difference. And the Internet Society has an accessibility standing group. And it has developed an accessibility framework. And we're very fortunate that we do have a disability leader in Dr. Muhammad Shabbir, who was on the board of trustees of the Internet Society for two years. And then during that time, a resolution was unanimously approved on an accessibility framework.

So, then how do we move to the implementation stage? And again, I want to emphasize the importance of senior staff being accessibility champions. And it's been a long and winding road. But now we have a possibility to achieve that through the Internet Society, talking about building a culture of accessibility and minimizing barriers to participation. And through that, we feel that the Internet Society can benefit from having more people with disabilities being part of the organization in a number of different ways. So, I think I'll stop there. But that gives just a flavor. So, thank you very much. Thank you very much, Gunela Astbrink.

Dr. Muhammad Shabbir: For your wonderful insights. Your discussion has a lot to unpack. And we may come to you during the discussion session to unpack some of the statements that you have made. Audience may have some questions. But you talked about Internet Society while presenting the case study. And we are fortunate to have the Executive Director of the Internet Society Foundation right on the stage. And this gives me a sort of more motivation to bring her in now and ask her, because Sarah Armstrong is the Executive Director of ISOC Foundation. And she has a very vast experience of philanthropy. So, Sarah, I have a couple of questions for you for your intervention. First relates to your philanthropic experience. And that is that what role the philanthropic organizations can play in making the organizations and Internet governance accessible for people with disabilities. And focusing on the more narrow part, what Internet Society and Internet Society Foundations are doing in this context to train persons with disabilities in leadership. And what more as a philanthropic experienced person you would recommend that can be done. Sarah, the floor is yours.

Sarah Armstrong: Thank you so much, Dr. Shabbir. Can everybody hear me okay? All right. Thanks. It's a pleasure to be here, especially with such special people here on the panel. And I appreciate the opportunity to discuss the work of the Internet Society Foundation, as well as discussing the philanthropic environment. It is definitely an issue we all need to be focused on. And that is

because we know that there's a large percentage of the population who is in many cases permanently disabled. And they really need to have the opportunity to enjoy all of the things that the Internet brings into our life.

We are committed as an organization to be sure that we have content, services, policies, and programs that are in fact accessibility oriented. And we want to make sure that accessibility is all about what we do because of the fact that digital inclusion means the Internet really is for everyone. And that is our vision statement. We have, as Dr. Shabbir noted, we have been working with the standing group, the accessibility standing group. And I just want to go through a couple of the different things that the Internet Society Foundation is doing specifically. And then I'll move on to what we believe the philanthropic arena can do as well.

So, we are accessibility champions, again, as Gunela mentioned. We have, for example, a very large portfolio of grant programs. And a number of our grant programs are in fact very much focused on targeting the audience of people with disabilities and being sure that they are funding or we are funding organizations and people who are very sensitive to the needs. So, we have training programs with some of our grantees from skills, which is all about teaching digital literacy. We have other programs with our Beyond the Net chapter program. And then finally we have Connecting the Unconnected, which is about community networks, also focusing on people with disabilities.

We also, as Gunela mentioned, have an operational framework. This was something that was approved by our board and in fact has become a really, really big focus for the organization. And that is a strategy that is based on the nothing about us without us. So, it's guiding what the Internet Society and the Internet Society Foundation is doing in this area. We also have been working on our website and making sure that all new content meets the WCAG 2.1 AA standard. And also we do an annual audit to make sure that that continues. And our most recent score was a 99 out of 100 in terms of our desktop. So, that was good to see that we're making such progress in those areas.

In addition to the grant programs focused on persons with disability, we also have a training course. And this training course is entitled Disability Leadership Training in Internet Governance and Digital Rights. This program is a five-week program, about 15 to 20 hours long, and it's developed specifically with the ISOC Accessibility Standing Group. It builds leadership and embeds accessibility in Internet governance discussions. It's designed for persons with disabilities and advocates and trainers, and it covers accessibility policy and links to Internet governance. So, this program here does, in fact, advance disability leadership.

But the question is, is there more that can be done? Is there more that can be done by us? And then talking about the other possible philanthropic organizations who may be looking at the same important issue. It's an ongoing journey. So, there are some things that we've done. I've discussed those so far, but there are also other things that we can look at. Explore opportunities for funding for disability leadership is one concept. Encourage grantees to offer more training and support systems. Introduce possibly the tracking and the publishing of participation data. So, these are things that we're looking at as we go on this journey. So, we're going to continue to move forward and stay committed. As I mentioned, we have, from the board level down, a real support for this direction. And so that's the place right now where the foundation and the Internet Society are.

And then in addition, the second question is, what role can philanthropic organizations play in enabling leadership by persons with disability in Internet governance? This is where I split it into three different areas of things that I believe the philanthropic community can do to make a better world. Encourage inclusiveness in funded events, such as IGFs or NRIs or SIGs. For example, what we're doing on our webpage on the Internet Governance Forum webpage for our Internet Governance Forum program, we have that disclaimer, a line that we encourage people to strongly make sure that the dialogues that they're having in these IGFs and these NRIs and in these schools of Internet governance, that they're strongly encouraged to review and follow the accessibility guidelines that have been developed by the Dynamic Coalition on Accessibility and Disability when planning any type of event. So, we are keeping an eye on that and keeping in touch and seeing how that move is going forward.

We also would recommend that philanthropic organizations require accessibility features, such as captioning and sign language, accessibility platforms and venues. And we definitely feel it's important for people to reference and enforce the Dynamic Coalition on Accessibility and Disability accessibility guidelines. Furthermore, for the ideas for philanthropic organizations, supporting mentorships, linking new leaders with experts, funding and facilitating disability-specific networks and coalitions, convening dialogues and embedding accessibility in IG agendas, and also back leadership of those who are facing intersecting challenges such as gender and geography.

And finally, some other key roles for philanthropic organizations to play: prioritize funding for underrepresented regions, invest in research on barriers and solutions, support impact measurement to refine the strategies and ensure accountability. So, what I've described here are ideas for what we believe other philanthropic organizations can do. And that, of course, is built on the

recommendations that have come to us that we have now followed through and implemented for our website, for our training program, for our grant program, et cetera. And we believe very, very strongly that all of these different areas together have a unique opportunity to drive equity by investing in accessibility and leadership, ensuring the internet is, in fact, for everyone. So, with that, I will thank you. And Dr. Shabbir, I'll turn it back to you.

Dr. Muhammad Shabbir: Thank you very much, Sarah, for this wonderful intervention and outlining some of the activities and also illustrating the plans that Internet Society, particularly the fellowships that Internet Society is doing and trying to advance the work on digital accessibility for people with disabilities. We have heard from practitioners. I think it is now high time that we talk about evidence and research-based evidence on the accessibility and digital accessibility for people with disabilities. And we are fortunate to have Dr. Derrick Cogburn join us online, who is an academic and a researcher in disability studies. And he is a professor in disability and internet governance. Dr. Derrick Cogburn, I have a couple of questions for you as well. And while you are making your intervention, we can deep dive while in the question and answer session. But I would want you to focus on the evidence that are there that how people with disabilities can access the leadership corridors of the internet governance. And how can research and data from your experience, would you enlighten us that it can guide us and internet governance spaces to make these spaces accessible for people with disabilities? Dr. Derrick, floor is yours.

Professor Derrick Cogburn: Thank you very much, Dr. Shabbir. I appreciate that. I thank you for your leadership of the DCAD. And I want to thank all of my fellow panelists and moderators as well. I want to congratulate the DCAD on this panel and the 20th anniversary of IGF. I attended the initial IGF and it is wonderful to see this continued progress. And I also want to acknowledge the 20th anniversary of Giganet as well, the Global Internet Governance Academic Network, which was founded at the beginning of IGF as a community of researchers to be able to focus on interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary aspects of internet governance. So, it's a nice partnership to have our discussion in this panel also linked with Giganet.

I also apologize for not being there in person, as you can tell I'm a little under the weather, but there's also a parallel conference going on here in Washington at the National Academy of Sciences. And it's focused on what are called cyber hard problems. And I know that our fellow panelist, Vint Cerf is also involved in that event. And it shows that when we talk about being involved in internet governance and digital policy leadership, there are so many overlapping venues

and spaces and locations where we need to continue to insert disability inclusive ideas. And this is helpful for me.

As you know, I wear multiple hats at American University. I'm a professor in information technology and analytics and also environment, development and health. And I also co-direct our internet governance lab and serve as executive director of our Institute on Disability and Public Policy. So, that allows me to bring these multiple areas together as we think about how do we identify data, build datasets, conduct research projects that shed light on these questions.

And one of the things that we found is that there has been a range of disability inclusive leadership in internet governance spaces and in some of the broader disability inclusive development strategies related to the SDGs, the Global Digital Compact and other areas. If you remember, some of you, in my book published by Palgrave Macmillan in 2017, we examined transnational advocacy networks in the information society, partners or pawns. And one of the things we focused on in that book was the way in which transnational advocacy networks can bring advocates together in a particular issue area to influence these global spaces. And a chapter in that book highlighted the Dynamic Coalition on Accessibility and Disability.

This is one of many transnational advocacy networks for the disability community that are active in the SDGs, that are active in disaster risk reduction and a number of other spaces. There are about seven transnational advocacy networks focused on disability inclusive development in a variety of perspectives. You also may remember my book published by MIT Press on researching internet governance. And one of the things that we looked at there were all of the text, we analyzed the text coming from the captions from the IGF going back to the beginning of the IGF.

So, text analytics has been a very powerful way for us to think about how do we analyze what is actually happening in these spaces and who is participating and engaging and shaping ideas in these spaces. And a chapter in that book that looks at the internet governance transcripts showed that the DCAD language and the language of accessibility and disability is one of the earliest and seemingly most effective of the dynamic coalitions having from the first IGF and maintaining those ideas and concepts in IGF transcripts and in IGF language going forward. And I was quite surprised to see that level of sustained reference to accessibility language and it is a testament to the impact that the DCAD has had in this space.

So, these approaches for us are very important. So, being able to use text mining and natural language processing and now using generative AI tools helps us to take advantage of the kind of data that is available to us. So, this kind of large-scale text analytics really lets us understand what kind of impact our ideas are having in these global policy spaces.

So, two weeks ago, my team organized a side event in New York at the UN for the 18th Conference of States Parties. This side event was entitled Enhancing Community Engagement and Monitoring CRPD Implementation Through AI, Text Mining, Economic Data, and Accessibility Mapping. So, one of the things that this side event showed is that when we use various forms of data, whether it be large-scale text data, so our project looked at analyzing all of the CRPD state reports to be able to understand how much progress is being made on implementing the CRPD around the world and by regions. But some of the other projects looked at data that comes from the Washington Group Short Set that has been able to influence various national census data so we can do traditional statistical analysis and we can also use data that's called mapping data for accessibility. So, there are a number of programs that are mapping accessibility in locations around the world.

So, for us, this approach gives us lots of opportunity and hope for being able to continue to monitor progress on disability inclusion around the world in different policy spaces. Now most of this data is open data, so all of the text data that I'm talking about can usually be downloaded from websites, all the transcripts from the IGF, for example, that we've downloaded, state reports, side reports, alternative reports, committee reports, all of that text data is available. And we have two really, really good sources of disability data. One is called the Disability Data Initiative, which is led by Fordham University, and the Disability Data Hub, led by the World Bank. Both of these data sets, as well as the text data, provides tremendous data for us to be able to analyze how persons with disabilities are faring in this current period, but also how do we understand who's involved in each of these areas.

Now this requires us to be able to focus on continuous capacity development in research capacity. So, even though this data is free and open, and we have tremendous open source data analytics tools like Python and R, which are open source programming languages that let us analyze this kind of data, we still need to focus on capacity building in these areas and making sure people are trained to be able to use these tools. Now we believe that the generative AI tools will help to enhance multi-stakeholder participation by those that are not trained in programming. And we have a paper that is just coming out in Data and Policy, which compares our traditional NLP approach with the generative AI approach.

But I think that focusing on capacity building for research is going to be an important area for us going forward.

Dr. Muhammad Shabbir: Yeah. Thank you very much, Dr. Derrick, for sharing with us the data and data sets that are available and how they are used to advance the cause of disability leadership in Internet governance and other spaces. Let's hear about the disability and leadership and barriers from another online speaker, Nirmita Narasimhan. I'm sorry if I'm pronouncing your name wrong. And she is one of the accessibility advocates, policy experts on accessibility. And Dr. Nirmita, I would want you to focus on the barriers, if there are any, in the way of persons with disabilities and their leadership in the Internet governance spaces and how those barriers can be removed. What are your experiences? Dr. Nirmita, the floor is yours.

Dr. Nirmita Narasimhan: Sure. Thank you. Thank you, Dr. Shabbir. So, let me approach this from a perspective of somebody who would want to be, so set to attend the IGF. So, there are barriers at every level. And the first barrier is that people don't know about it, about IGF, especially disability advocates working in different countries. There is not enough outreach to them about IGF and the issues which are discussed. And also that many of them are quite relevant to what the technologies that we use, the content that we access and the engagement and interaction that we have with the Internet.

So, the first barrier for me would be that there is probably a handful of people in a country with hundreds and hundreds of disability advocates who actually know about the IGF and what takes place there and the fact that they can contribute to it. Once you cross that barrier, how do you engage with the IGF? If you want to get there, where do you get the support to get there? There would be logistic issues maybe that people may need to take somebody along with them to help them navigate the system or to help them communicate. So, where do you get the funding from? Who are the organizations you need to be in touch with? And also other issues, maybe language, maybe technology issues.

But once you get there, I think one of the chief problems which I feel as a person having been in association with the IGF from 2008, I feel that people with disabilities do not have enough exposure to other issues which are getting discussed at the IGF. So, right now it's probably the only thing they know about is accessibility and disability and the topic they are covering or they're talking about. But meaningful participation goes beyond just talking in your session about accessibility. You need to be able to engage with other forums. You need to be able to absorb other discussions which are going on and see how you can contribute. And it works both ways. You need to be able to participate in other

discussions which are also very important. I mean, AI, for example, is a critical technology for persons with disabilities these days. And there's so much which you would unearth if you talk to people with disabilities. There is so much that they can contribute to the way the Internet is shaping in terms of AI, in terms of literacy, in terms of safety. And that representation is not coming across. And it's not coming across on both sides.

So, I think one needs to pay some more thought to how persons with disabilities and other people can work together for them to contribute to different discussions. So, I think these are primarily the kind of structural barriers one encounters. And finally, after that, what? So, remote participation has really helped persons with disabilities be part of the forum. But visibility is also important. And continuity is important. So, what happens from one forum to the other? Once you go back, so what? Do you get support or motivation or do you have the connects to work on these issues when you go back to your country? Because at the end of the day, it's not a one-time thing. It's something you need to continue, you need to work at to be able to participate meaningfully. So, continuity is, again, an issue, both in terms of being able to work in your country and move beyond just the other kind of projects which you are working on, and the support internationally to continue to work with different members at the IGF. So, these are some of the barriers which I see affect meaningful participation of persons with disabilities.

Dr. Muhammad Shabbir: Thank you very much, Nirmita, for highlighting these barriers and I think we can explore what are the strategies and how those barriers can be removed. Before I ask some more questions to the panelists, I want to see if there are any comments or questions from the audience in person or online.

Participant: Yes, thank you, Dr. Shabbir. We do have a comment from the online and it's from Emmanuel Orok from Uganda who's one of our online fellows. And his question is addressed to the ISOC Foundation and he asks, could you share success stories with practical examples of specific projects or initiatives for persons with disabilities and how does one join them?

Sarah Armstrong: Okay, so I would definitely say that the work that the Internet Society and the Internet Society Foundation have been doing just to include more and to do more towards persons with disabilities is an opportunity for people to find ISOC and the Foundation more accessible. So, the fact that we have the mandate and that we are following through on it means that more people can be involved in the types of things that the Internet Society and the Foundation are doing.

In addition, I can give some examples of our chapters. Beyond the Net, the Puerto Rico chapter is organizing conferences with the University of Puerto Rico around technology for students with disabilities. So, there's an opportunity there. Bosnia and Herzegovina chapters have a project to train sightless journalists. The Kyrgyzstan chapter is working with women with disabilities and with a minister who is visually impaired and working on, again, on things that they can do in those different countries. We are working on incorporating screen readers in some of our programs for connecting the unconnected. And our skills program through Kode Kida, which is the name of our Indonesian grantee, they are equipping women business owners with disabilities in greater Solo with digital skills and economic opportunities.

So, these are just further examples of the types of things that are happening as a result of our commitment to expanding accessibility. And in terms of being able to access information specifically on the Foundation, because of what we're doing with the website, we are making it easier for people with disabilities to be much more informed about the programs that we offer. So, I hope that helps answer the question.

Participant: Yeah, thanks so much. I'm wondering, do we have any questions from the audience in person? You do, okay, yes. So, please come to the mic and state your name and your organization you're with.

Audience Member: Okay, so my name is Jacqueline Jijide, and I'm from Malawi. I am an African Youth Ambassador on Internet Governance, and I'm also a digital inclusion practitioner from the African Digital Inclusion Alliance. First of all, let me thank you for hosting this session, especially on disability inclusion leadership. However, as somebody who advocates for digital inclusion, I was a bit worried because when I was coming to participate into this conversation, I anticipated to have a high level of this target group participating for this particular event, but the participation is low, and that is also giving me some sort of a concern, because we cannot advocate for inclusion while excluding the very voice we claim to empower. So, representation must not be symbolic, but it must be standard and intentional.

And I also want to extend that true inclusion must mean more than just inviting people into the room, but also preparing the room for them. With that being said, I was looking throughout the room to see people providing sign language interpretation. Also, I looked for the assistive tools that helps the people with disability issues, but it's not there. And also the environment where everybody can participate like the people that we are trying to empower. So, my question is, what steps have we put as the organizers or partners to make sure that we have

a high level of participation from the people that are living with disabilities and also to equip them and support them to be equal contributors, especially in high level forums like IGF in the future event. Thank you very much.

Participant: Thank you so much for your question. To touch on the sign language issue, we did ask our DCAD members who will be coming online if they wanted, if they need international sign, but we didn't hear back from them. Currently the event here has human captioning and we also do have several of our disability fellows in the audience and here. The question is, we did promote the event, but there's a lot of different competing events that are pulling people away. And oftentimes what people do here is since they can't go to an event live, they watch the replay of it in their time because there's so many events that they cannot go to and they cannot split themselves in many different people. So, that is one of the reasons, but we do promote the event, the Internet Governance Forum promotes the event. It's on the YouTube channels too, but it's always a question of how do we get people here? And that's the age old question for everyone.

Dr. Muhammad Shabbir: Yes, and in addition to what Judith has said, I totally acknowledge your point and that's where the exact title of this session states beyond tokenism. We need to move beyond tokenism, be that the leadership or the IGF spaces. We all do much to make persons with disabilities a part of these discussions. Now, having said that, as Nirmitta said, that bringing persons with disabilities to these spaces requires a lot of effort and finances and DCAD in its limited capacity tries to fulfill that gap. And I know that what we are doing is not enough. We need to do more. Your point is well acknowledged.

We do have two persons with disabilities in person attending this IGF, supported by the DCAD and one online. And this is courtesy of our first speaker, Vint Cerf, and his organization, Google LLC, that we are doing so. More organizations can come forward to contribute to this cause, but as Judith said, with regards to participation in these sessions by the other participants, we are competing with other sessions and priorities that the participating people would have. So, it's the priorities and the priorities of the people and their personal preferences that which sessions they want to attend. But thank you, your point is well taken. Any other points?

Participant: Any other, yes, we do have another question here. If you can come to the mic.

Nigel Cassimire: Thank you so much. Hello, I'm Nigel Cassimire from the Caribbean Telecommunications Union. And in our work around the Caribbean,

when we do events, at least annually, we tend to have some workshops in ICT for persons with disabilities. Our focus, though, is more on the local community, and I guess helping persons with disabilities in the local community to understand the value or the power of ICTs maybe to make their life easier. We haven't actually had persons, even advocates for the disabled community, expressing a level of interest in things like these international events or whatever. And I'm wondering how might one try to develop such an ambition in the persons with disabilities to look just beyond the local community and maybe see how you could make life better for maybe the wider society and make an influence in the world. I'm wondering if there's any experience people have had or if it's just up to the individual ambition of persons with disabilities to do something like that. Thanks.

Dr. Muhammad Shabbir: Yes, thank you very much. Does any of the panelists want to respond to this comment? Yeah, I could. Okay, Gunela, please do. Yes, and then Derrick goes, but he has to get upgraded again.

Gunela Astbrink: Yeah, thank you very much for that question. And I think as Nirmita also stated, that there is limited knowledge in some communities about internet governance and often there's a struggle to even get people with disabilities online and build digital literacy. But we can work on that and I'm going to mention some work that we have done in South Asia to build disability leaders in internet governance. And that is through support of the Asia Pacific School of Internet Governance and local chapter in Bangladesh and other supporters to run train-the-trainer workshops in internet governance and digital leadership and digital rights. And that was bringing people from South Asian countries, Sri Lanka, India, Pakistan, Nepal to Bangladesh and they are experienced advocates, but not necessarily experienced in internet governance.

But bringing those people together to learn by doing, by interacting about the internet governance discussions, the various internet groups and how they connect with disability and accessibility global instruments and so forth. So, the idea then was for those advocates to go back to their own countries and run workshops and that has happened over the past three years. And we would like that to have possibilities in other regions of the world as well. It is very important that the people who participate in that can continue the work in their communities and that might be through advocacy to their governments, to the private sector, when it comes to policy implementation in IT. And it could also be working with committees, for example, the local chapter. And it could be working with DCAD, for example, helping in various ways, going on committees to assist in building workshops on this topic in a particular country or region.

So, there's a lot of work to be done and we need to make it sustainable. And we are starting, but there's a lot of work to be done. And I should also mention that we do have, through ISOC, an online course, which Sarah has mentioned, and that is a prerequisite for any of these type of face-to-face workshops. So, we're trying to align with, for example, DCAD in the fellowships that are provided each year where you have remote participants. We just heard a question from Emmanuel Orok, and also from our participants here in the room. And that is Sarah and Jolanta, so you might want to just put your hands up. Yeah.

Dr. Muhammad Shabbir: Okay, thank you very much, Gunela. But before we take another question, I think Professor Derrick wants to contribute to the question. So, Professor Derrick, the floor is yours, but if you can be brief, we can take more questions.

Professor Derrick Cogburn: Yes. Yes. Thank you for reminding me to be brief. I think that's a great question. And what I wanted to say in my answer is tying in something that Dr. Nirmita and our previous questioner also said. So, participating effectively in these kinds of global spaces requires a sustained, engaged, committed set of activities. And it's very difficult for an individual to do that unless that individual works for an organization that is able to fund their participation in multiple meetings that are overlapping and related meetings and so forth.

And that's why I have found that it's these networks, these transnational advocacy networks that are so important. So, they allow you in your local community to connect with a group of local advocates who are aware of these issues and ready to get involved, but they are participating in a larger network of like-minded activists around the world. So, the Dynamic Coalition on Accessibility and Disability is one example where the advances in this kind of remote participation technology allows the DCAD to have regular meetings and to have people prepare for the IGF, to participate in the IGF, and then to follow up on the IGF, all using these tools and combining those people who will be remote with those people who will be in person.

When we first started the IGF and WSIS, these kinds of remote participation processes were not existent and slowly came on board over the years, and we need to be able to take advantage of the fact that they are so robust now and allow people to participate effectively remotely. So, to the original questioner, my recommendation is to find these networks like the DCAD and others that are focused on disability inclusion and start participating in those networks, trying to help raise money and encourage fellow participants to engage in those kinds of transnational advocacy networks.

Dr. Muhammad Shabbir: Thank you very much, Professor Derrick, for your insights, and Gunela as well. Gentlemen, you have been very patient. Thank you very much. So, you can introduce and ask your question. Please.

Francis: All right. Thank you. My name is Francis Akwa Amini. Looks like I'm very tall. All right. Comfortable now. All right. So, my name is Francis from Ghana. I've been an executive member of ISOC Ghana chapter for the past 10 years, and we have a policy plan or a framework for them to take up leadership role or employment again, because at the end goal, we want them to see them at the top. We have a certain policy which is going to enforce that if probably the various positions in ICANN, Internet Society, ISOC Foundation, when we're employing, we have a certain position that will say, okay, let me say 5% should be persons with disability if we're employing, so that at least once we are empowering them to be able to be part of this conversation, we can also let them be sufficient, because until then, once we don't have a clear plan to make themselves sufficient, they will still become dependent on people. At the end of the day, we'll be bringing them to forums, trying to empower them, but if you don't have a clear end goal, I don't think it's going to solve the problem. So, my question is, is there a clear vision, a clear plan to end this? Thank you.

Dr. Muhammad Shabbir: Thank you very much, Francis. This is a very interesting question, and who of the speakers wants to respond to this?

Sarah Armstrong: Well, I can start by saying for the Internet Society, as I mentioned earlier, it's a journey, but it is a commitment that we've made, that we backed up with a resolution from the Board of Trustees, that we will continue to find ways to include more people with disabilities. And it's, the work that we're doing to try to make it so that work that we do is accessible, that's a journey that we're taking and that we're making real progress on. As I mentioned, our website is considered really stellar for people to be able to access information. And then in terms of bringing on more staff, I think it's a question that you were asking whether or not we can have that, just something that we are again examining. This is something again to which we're committed and we're looking ahead at the different ways that we can do that.

Dr. Muhammad Shabbir: My co-moderator who is the online moderator as well wants to say something. So, Judith, yes.

Participant: Thanks so much, thanks so much. Yes that is an important question. What DCAD has been doing is we've been advocating for persons with disabilities and also our disability fellows then advocate in their own countries. What they've been doing is they've been advocating for online forms to be

accessible. We work with different other organizations to make sure that they are aware not only about WCAG but also they may be aware and make the websites accessible but they're not necessarily aware how to make accessible documents, how to make infographics accessible, how to make all that. So, it's a work in progress and what we can do is work on advocacy and work to enable other governments. We have governments that put in the WCAG guidelines in their legislation so we could do a lot in advocacy and trying to do all that. It is up to the others to actually then to make the next step.

Dr. Muhammad Shabbir: Yes, thank you very much Judith. But if you ask me what's the end goal as the organizer of this panel I would say in an ideal world we would not be having this discussion but persons with disabilities would not have to ask for certain facilities, services to be made accessible, websites to be made accessible, but they would already be given to them without asking. But I know we don't live in an ideal world so we are moving towards that goal. I know that may be called idealistic, not reachable or something, some other connotations, but I say that if we don't have that goal in sight we won't be reaching anywhere.

As you said, Internet Society, what Sarah has said, it has started by making the organization itself accessible. That's the first step. DCAD is trying to make persons with disabilities participate in these discussions and make these meetings accessible for people with disabilities. That's another step. There is a whole internet governance ecosystem. There needs to be other organizations who would work towards this end goal. So, I hope to some extent we were able to answer your question. Are there any other comments or questions before I go to the speakers?

Dr. Nirmita Narasimhan: May I contribute to this discussion?

Dr. Muhammad Shabbir: Yes, no matter. Okay.

Dr. Nirmita Narasimhan: So, yes, I'd say the end goal for us is not any different than other people. See the way I see it, making things accessible and getting people there in leadership positions is just what you need to do to have the end goal of being able to contribute to the discussion and shape the way the internet is emerging and the technologies are emerging. So, I don't see it necessarily as a shift in goal and we are trying to move beyond the policy and implement things. So, for me I would say the end goal is still what you can contribute to the discussions, what was in there from your experience and being accessible, being user-friendly, being present, these are all just things we need to do to get there. Thank you, Nirmita. Thank you very much.

Dr. Muhammad Shabbir: I would give 30 seconds to each of my speakers if they have any wrap-up thoughts to share those with us. Otherwise I'll go towards the wrap-up and I'm sorry Sarah. Oh okay.

Sarah Armstrong: Wrap up again, thank you very much for including me in this important discussion. I mentioned when I made my remarks about the importance of the commitment and we really feel like we have an opportunity at the Internet Society and Internet Society Foundation to lead by example, to drive equity by investing in accessibility and leadership because we again are very committed to our mission and our vision of the internet is for everyone and that needs to continue and that means to be inclusive. So, those are the things I would like to reinforce on the importance of that. We are setting an example and we feel very strongly about the progress that we're making.

Dr. Muhammad Shabbir: Thank you very much Sarah, Professor Derrick and please remember 30 seconds. Yes.

Professor Derrick Cogburn: Yes, I would just say that in response to the last question, for three years we led a program, a master's program for persons with disabilities in Southeast Asia, and I think that kind of program is something that's really helpful in making sure more advocates are trained in this space. And I would just encourage everyone to think about using the data that's available and joining and participating actively in some of these transnational networks. Thank you very much.

Dr. Nirmita Narasimhan: I won't take up more time. I think I've given my thoughts and I hope I'm happy to take more questions or respond later. What I would like to see going forward is not more sessions on accessibility, but also accessibility covered across more sessions as part of other discussions and let's see how we can take it forward. Thank you.

Dr. Muhammad Shabbir: Thank you, Dr. Nirmita. Now we are moving towards the wrap-up of this session and I would request my co-organizer Gunela Astbrink to give us the key takeaways and actionable points that she has listed and also use her 30 seconds for her wrap-up thoughts, if there are any. Gunela, over to you.

Gunela Astbrink: Thank you very much, Dr. Shabbir. Yes, so there really are quite a lot of key takeaways and I think the question about the end goals, we just need to keep that in mind all the time. And also we heard about transnational advocacy networks and how to link across those and we just need to look at

disability inclusive leadership, that it's central to equitable digital governance and we talked about that in a variety of ways.

Global frameworks that we talked about must move from principles to practice and we will be looking at particular strategies to do that in these very pivotal times at the moment. And we know about the lived experience, that that strengthens policy outcomes when we as persons with disabilities can talk about our experiences and what difference that makes if we are able to live in that ideal accessible world.

So, then we have calls to action. Shall I go on, Dr. Shabbir? Okay. So, well just to follow up again that let's try and join up with some transnational advocacy networks, identify them and work with them because the more we work together then the more we can achieve. But it's integrating accessibility and disability inclusion in internet governance structures and that is coming together, that's coming together in various ways.

We need to invest in leadership pipelines for persons with disabilities and that includes a range of stakeholders including donors and regulators because we are working in a multi-stakeholder mechanism. And finally, institutionalize accountability for inclusion and that can be through a lot of benchmarking metrics and we've heard a lot about the particular work that Derrick Cogburn's team has been doing. So, I think that's enough for me. So, thank you very much.

Dr. Muhammad Shabbir: Thank you very much, Gunela. And this brings me to thank everyone: the speakers Gunela Astbrink, Sarah Armstrong, Nirmita, Dr. Derrick, my co-moderator Judith Hellerstein and also the captioners, the participants and the wonderful support staff here in this room for joining us today in this session. We shall meet in some other session. Until then, bye bye.