

Toward Effective Multi-Stakeholder Participation

YJ Park

Policy Suggestions: Toward Effective Multi-Stakeholder Participation

As listed, those who gained power through this new rule of the multi-stakeholder principle, pan-European institutions, civil society groups and the Internet technical community from US and EU, are leaving the rest behind in the traditional setting. Even some governments in Europe as well as Asian governments felt left out mainly because their traditional role of providing central coordination on the Internet is not well accepted. How can actors in this new environment learn not to be left out?

Asia is expected to lead the world economy, together with USA and EU; however, the political leadership of Asia has never been exercised properly given their impacts to the world economy. How can Asia overcome such challenge especially in the territory of Internet Governance negotiation? This paper proposes the following five actions Asian governments should consider and implement in the near future, if Asian governments are willing to keep up with the pace of global Internet governance negotiation.

1. Overcoming Differences in Political Cultures Between East and West

One of the serious challenges for Asia in the Internet Governance debate is cultural differences in political leadership between East and West. The recent controversy of the UN Secretary General's appropriate political leadership became a global issue. Western media accused him of being invisible while Ban Ki-Moon clarified he has conducted business in a more Asian manner rather than in a showy, Western way. Obviously West and East have very different perceptions of being an effective leader. This episode is still relevant to the Internet Governance debate.

The opinion leaders of Internet Governance are mostly from Anglo-Saxon cultures such as USA, UK, Australia, New Zealand, Canada and other western European culture. Communication is conducted in English under Anglo-Saxon driven culture, therefore, effective participation in this process is determined by how aggressively each participant is presenting her or his views jumping into the open micro-phones that is culturally very foreign to Asian culture. Therefore, as of 2009, a few governments in Asia have participated in the global Internet Governance debate in both ICANN and IGF as observers, not as opinion leaders. The only exception was China's participation in the UN WSIS and UN IGF where Chinese can be recognized as one of UN official languages.

Many people predict 21st century will be an Asian century led by Asian economies. Will such change make other western actors to adjust to the Asian way of conducting business or the Asian political environment? Until that really happens, Asian governments also have to make efforts to get adjusted to a more western culture of managing political process. Otherwise, Asian governments will not be considered as appropriate political partners when Asian countries achieve economic success.

2. Governments' Strategic Partnerships with Other Stakeholders

There is a big gap between the national Internet policy-making process and the global Internet policy making process in Asia as of 2009. National Internet policies in Asia are prescribed by governments while global Internet policies are manufactured by a multi-stakeholder body especially led by the private sector. This difference between the national Internet policy-making environment and the global Internet policy-making environment makes both governments and non-governmental stakeholders have difficulty with adjusting to new global Internet policy-making process. Some western governments either expressed their interests in setting up their national IGF or started national IGF to implement this new rule at their national level.

Governments in Asia have been very reluctant to recognize and embrace the multi-

stakeholder principle as a new international rule like other leading western governments, mainly because governments in Asia are not willing to recognize this new rule that decreases governmental authority. However, those who had opportunities to exercise the new rule of the game, the multi-stakeholder principle, at their national platform, will be able to lead the global Internet policy discussion together with other western countries. It is highly recommended for governments in Asia to pay attention to ways to implement this new rule.

3. Creating the Asian Internet Governance Forum

The Internet Governance debate has created not only national level of IGF, but also regional level of IGF. While the initiative of national IGF has been driven by governments or ccTLD registry that consults with governments in Europe, the initiative of regional IGF has been led by non-governmental actors, especially Internet technical community of Latin America and Africa. This is because governments in Latin America and Africa also could not perceive the multi-stakeholder principle as a new international rule that brings critical change, while non-government actors in Latin America and Africa facilitated by their western counterparts are willing to set up regional platform where private sectors can lead the debate.

Unlike Latin America and Africa, European efforts are coordinated by the Council of Europe starting with 2008. The first European IGF was held in Strasbourg, France, in 2008 and the second European IGF will be held in Geneva, Switzerland, in September 2009. Asia is left behind in terms of setting up new platform that implements the multi-stakeholder principle both national and regional level of IGF. Why? First, unlike Latin America and Africa, non-government actors in Asia that are often in close connection with their own governments have been passively engaged with the governance dialogue out of their concerns in potential tension with governments. Second, government actors in Asia do not consider this an urgent agenda, yet. It is highly recommended for governments to initiate setting up the Asian Internet Governance Forum that invites other non-government stakeholders as partners.

4. Connecting Internet Governance Debate To ASEAN+3 and APT/ITU

How can the Asian Internet Governance Forum be launched especially when there is neither awareness nor consensus regarding Internet Governance among Asian countries as of 2009? To facilitate the Internet Governance debate in Asia, one approach governments in Asia can consider is to bring the Internet Governance debate into existing negotiation platforms in Asia such as ASEAN+3 and Asia-Pacific Telecommunity (APT)/International Telecommunications Union (ITU) rather than creating a totally new platform with which governments do not feel comfortable. However, the key to success to this approach should be to encourage exercising the new rule; the multi-stakeholder principle.

5. Creating Language-Based Networks on the NET

Substantial discussions on Internet policy are being conducted through ICANN's various constituencies' mailing lists debates. Asians in the Internet Governance debate have not been active both in the governance-related email list discussion and physical meetings. What caused such passive participation of Asia in the current global governance? One of the substantial barriers is language. Therefore, not only six official UN languages but also other languages should be recognized as a way to communicate with people. ICANN is about to introduce Internationalized Domain Names that allow those who have difficulty with English to use the Internet more freely.