

THE AFRICAN SCHOOL ON INTERNET GOVERNANCE: TRACER STUDY OF SEVEN ROUNDS OF AFRISIG (2013-2019)



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

The African School on Internet Governance (AfriSIG) is an annual five-day residential knowledge and leadership building event organised by the Association for Progressive Communications (APC) in partnership with the African Union Commission (AUC) and the African Internet Governance Forum (AfIGF). The primary objective of AfriSIG is to give Africans from multiple sectors and stakeholder groups the opportunity to gain knowledge and build the confidence that will enable them to participate effectively in internet governance processes and debates at all levels: national, regional and global.

AfriSIG has been convened annually since 2013. Each event brings together between 40 and 60 participants including fellows (the core “learners”), resource persons and faculty. Many of the annually selected fellows who participate in the annual School later serve as faculty or resource persons at subsequent AfriSIG events, and many faculty have played this role at more than one of the annual events. This study, conducted during March 2020, covers seven schools (2013-2019). An earlier tracer study covered the first four schools – 2013, 2014, 2015 and 2016.¹

At the end of each of the annual AfriSIGs, participants were asked to complete an evaluation form. Analysis of these forms provided immediate feedback on what had worked well in the training and what could be improved. This immediate feedback could not, however, give a good sense of how participants would use the information, skills and contacts that they had gained subsequently.

The survey questionnaire therefore explores what differences (or impact) AfriSIG has had from the perspective of participants. It includes questions that relate not only to the time spent at the school, but also AfriSIG-related engagements since then, including communications through the alumni email list and WhatsApp.

Not all of those who have been part of AfriSIG over the years are registered on the AfriSIG alumni email list, but most are. By the time this research was done, there were 281 names on the list. This number excludes those who have not notified APC about their changed contact details when, for example, changing jobs.

The alumni email list carries communications that include events, career and study opportunities, news items, and short discussions, among others. About 283 messages were sent to the list during 2019. This averages out at about 23 emails each month. Since 2016, participants have also been using WhatsApp groups. These are more active than the AfriSIG alumni email list. The WhatsApp groups are used for debate, for sharing achievements, events and resources, and for social interaction.

1. Budlender, D. (2018). *The African School on Internet Governance: Tracer study of four rounds of AfriSIG (2013-2016)*. Association for Progressive Communications. <https://www.apc.org/en/node/34578>

In early March 2020 a request was sent out via the email list and the WhatsApp group for participants to complete an online questionnaire. The main objective of this “tracer” questionnaire was to determine what had happened to participants since they took part in AfriSIG.

PROFILE OF AFRISIG PARTICIPANTS

Table 1 gives the gender breakdown of participants for each of the years between 2013 and 2016 inclusive, and for participants, faculty and resource persons for the most recent three years. The table reveals that in the first two years of AfriSIG, male participants outnumbered female participants. However, from 2015 on, women have accounted for half or more of all participants. In 2017, in Sharm El Sheikh, nearly three quarters of participants were women.

TABLE 1. AFRISIG PARTICIPANTS BY YEAR AND GENDER

YEAR	PLACE	WOMEN	MEN	TOTAL	% WOMEN
2013	Durban	13	15	28	46%
2014	Mauritius	16	23	39	41%
2015	Addis Ababa	17	15	32	53%
2016	Durban	21	20	41	51%
2017	Sharm El Sheikh	23	9	32	72%
2018	Zanzibar	29	29	58	50%
2019	N'Djamena	35	27	62	56%

Table 2 shows the country breakdown of participants (including faculty and resource persons for the last three years) across the seven years. The table includes some double-counting across the years because although an individual can attend AfriSIG as a participant only once, there is not the same limitation on faculty and resource persons. Further, a person participating in a given school may in that year as well as later years play the role of resource person.

Across the full period, 55 countries had at least one person participating. Each year, between 14 and 29 countries were represented, with the number of countries tending to increase from year to year. Kenya, South Africa, Uganda and Zimbabwe each had at least one participant in every year. These four countries together account for nearly half (47%) of all participants. The United States is the only country outside of Africa accounting for more than 1% of participants, and even this country accounts for only 2%.

TABLE 2. AFRISIG PARTICIPANTS BY COUNTRY AND YEAR

COUNTRY	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	TOTAL	%
South Africa	6	15	4	6	8	7	6	52	18%
Kenya	2	3	6	1	3	8	8	31	11%
Zimbabwe	3	5	2	2	3	6	7	28	10%
Uganda	3	2	2	9	4	3	2	25	9%
Nigeria	4		1	3		10	7	25	9%
Egypt				1	5	3		9	3%
Botswana	2	2	1	1		1	1	8	3%
Cameroon		2	1	2	1		2	8	3%
Ghana	1	1	1	1		2	1	7	2%
Senegal			1	1	1	1	3	7	2%
Ethiopia	1	1	2	1		1		6	2%
Zambia		1	1		1	1	2	6	2%
Namibia				1	1	2	2	6	2%
United States					1	3	2	6	2%
Chad				1			4	5	2%
Togo				1	1	2	1	5	2%
Tunisia			3	1				4	1%
Gambia		1	1	1			1	4	1%
Malawi	1	1	1			1		4	1%
Congo, Democratic Republic of (DRC)			1	1			1	3	1%
Lesotho		1	1		1			3	1%
Spain		1				1	1	3	1%
Sudan			1			2		3	1%
Tanzania	1					2		3	1%
Congo, Republic of				2				2	1%
Rwanda	1						1	2	1%
Algeria		1						1	0%

COUNTRY	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	TOTAL	%
Burkina Faso		1						1	0%
Burundi				1				1	0%
Canada	1							1	0%
Comoros				1				1	0%
Italy	1							1	0%
Ivory Coast			1					1	0%
Mauritius				1				1	0%
Morocco				1				1	0%
Mozambique		1						1	0%
Sierra Leone			1					1	0%
South Sudan				1				1	0%
Uruguay	1							1	0%
Benin							1	1	0%
Myanmar							1	1	0%
France					1			1	0%
Jordan					1			1	0%
Sweden						1		1	0%
United Kingdom						1		1	0%
India							1	1	0%
Ecuador							1	1	0%
Colombia							1	1	0%
Myanmar							1	1	0%
Argentina							1	1	0%
Liberia							1	1	0%
Madagascar							1	1	0%
Mali							1	1	0%
Bosnia and Herzegovina							1	1	0%
Total	28	39	32	41	32	58	62	292	100%

PROFILE OF AFRISIG FACULTY

Table 3 shows the number of faculty and resource persons in each year, and the breakdown between Africa and elsewhere. It includes a small number of participants who served as resource persons in the same year that they were an “ordinary” participant. The table shows the number at its lowest in 2017, when the number of participants was also at its lowest.² The number was highest the following year, at double the 2017 number. Across all years, faculty and resource persons from Africa have outnumbered those from elsewhere, although the ratio has varied over the years. Inclusion of international faculty is deliberate, in line with the global nature of internet governance. AfriSIG has, however, expanded the pool of available expertise from within Africa.

TABLE 3. FACULTY AND RESOURCE PERSONS BY YEAR AND GEOGRAPHY

YEAR	AFRICA	OTHER	TOTAL
2013	11	9	20
2014	24	4	28
2015	14	5	19
2016	20	3	23
2017	9	3	12
2018	18	6	24
2019	11	6	17

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2. In 2017 organisation of the African IGF started very late in the year due to difficulty in securing a host country. Only in mid-October of 2017 did the Egyptian National Telecommunications Regulatory Authority come forward with an offer to host the African IGF and AfriSIG in Sharm el Sheikh in late November. As AfriSIG had made a commitment to the Secretariat of the African IGF to co-locate AfriSIG 2017 with the African IGF, this inevitably resulted in delays in AfriSIG. However, the application process had proceeded as planned. An excellent slate of participants had been lined up and the organisers were doing well in trying to secure the necessary visas and travel itineraries. AfriSIG was scheduled to start on 28 November. On 24 November 2017, a mosque in north Sinai was attacked by 40 gunmen, killing 311 people and injuring 122. Sharm el Sheikh is also located on the Sinai peninsula, although very far from where the attack occurred. Nevertheless, this did have an impact on the participation of fellows and faculty, as some people pulled out, while others failed to submit their visa applications in time. As a result, AfriSIG 2017 turned out to have fewer participants than in previous, and subsequent, years.

THE TRACER STUDY

Profile of respondents

A total of 80 participants completed the questionnaire. This gives a response rate of more than 27%, which is encouraging for a tracer study, where there is usually a very poor response rate due to the long period of time that has passed for many participants.

Of the 80 respondents included in the analysis, 39 were women, 40 were men, and one self-classified as “Other”. There was thus good gender balance among those who responded.

Table 4 shows that respondents who had attended recent AfriSIGs were more likely to respond than those who attended in earlier years. However, there were nearly twice as many respondents for the 2016 AfriSIG as for the 2017 AfriSIG. This is not surprising given the small overall number of participants in 2017.

Of the 80, 64 attended only one AfriSIG, eight attended two, one attended three, and four attended four. Three respondents – all of them faculty or resource persons – attended all seven AfriSIGs to date. Nevertheless, for each of the years, the number of participants who responded to the questionnaire consisted mainly of people who attended only one AfriSIG.

TABLE 4. RESPONDENTS’ ATTENDANCE BY YEAR AND ROLE

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Participant	5	5	3	12	4	14	23
Faculty/resource person	3	3	3	8	6	10	8
Participant and resource person	1	1	2	1	2	2	4
Total attending	9	9	8	21	12	26	35

Thirteen of the respondents were living in South Africa at the time they completed the questionnaire, ten in Nigeria, eight in Uganda, seven in Kenya, five in Zimbabwe, four in Zambia, three in the United States, and two each in Botswana, Cameroon, DRC and Namibia. All other countries had only one respondent, giving a total of 34 countries overall. Spain, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia and the United States were the only non-African countries. Thus people from 29 African countries responded.

Respondents were asked which stakeholder group they belonged to when they (last) attended AfriSIG, and which group they now belonged to. Table 5 shows civil society organisations (CSOs) accounted for close one half (45%) of participants in both periods. The next largest grouping in both periods was academics. Comparison of the distribution across stakeholder groups before and after shows very small changes. The largest

change is an increase from seven people describing themselves as from government before attending to nine people describing themselves in this way now. Some of the participants had therefore moved to work in government after attending.

Three of those who classified themselves as “other” when attending AfriSIG described themselves as belonging to more than one stakeholder group. The remaining two said they were from the media and from a research think tank respectively. The three who classified themselves as “other” currently all belonged to more than one stakeholder group.

TABLE 5. STAKEHOLDER GROUP WHEN ATTENDING AND NOW

GROUP	WHEN AT AFRISIG	NOW
Academia	12	11
Business community	4	3
Civil society organisation	37	37
Consultancy	4	3
Development/donor agency		1
Government	7	9
Parliament		1
Regulator	4	4
Technical community	7	8
Other	5	3
Total	80	80

Roles in internet governance

The next set of questions asked about respondents’ roles in internet governance (defined broadly and including discussion and policy-making processes and forums) in two time periods, prior to and after attending AfriSIG. Participants were able to indicate that they had played speaker, moderator or similar roles and/or a role as an ordinary participant in either of the two time periods.

Table 6 reveals that the number with no role in internet governance dropped from 21 before attending to five after attending. The number who acted as speaker or moderator at internet governance events more than doubled, from 39 to 61, while the number who were “ordinary” participants decreased slightly, from 40 to 32. Participants were able to indicate that they played more than one role before and/or after. Not shown in the table,

the number who played roles of both speaker/moderator and ordinary participant stayed constant, at 19.

TABLE 6. ROLES IN INTERNET GOVERNANCE BEFORE AND AFTER ATTENDING AFRISIG

	SPEAKER, MODERATOR	ORDINARY PARTICIPANT	NO ROLE
Before attending	39	40	21
After attending	61	32	5

When asked whether they had been involved in organising internet governance processes before and after attending AfriSIG, there was again a marked increase in activity. The number not involved at all dropped from 33 to five, the number involved a little dropped from 34 to 27, while the number involved a lot was more than three times higher than before – at 47 rather than 13.

When asked whether they felt that they could influence the agenda, discussions and decisions in internet governance processes before and after attending AfriSIG, there was again a clear pattern. Before attending AfriSIG, 27 participants felt that they had no influence at all and 43 that they had only a little influence. The number who felt that they had a lot of influence meanwhile increased from 10 participants before attending to more than three quarters (63) after attending.

TABLE 7. INVOLVEMENT IN ORGANISING AND INFLUENCING INTERNET GOVERNANCE PROCESSES BEFORE AND AFTER AFRISIG

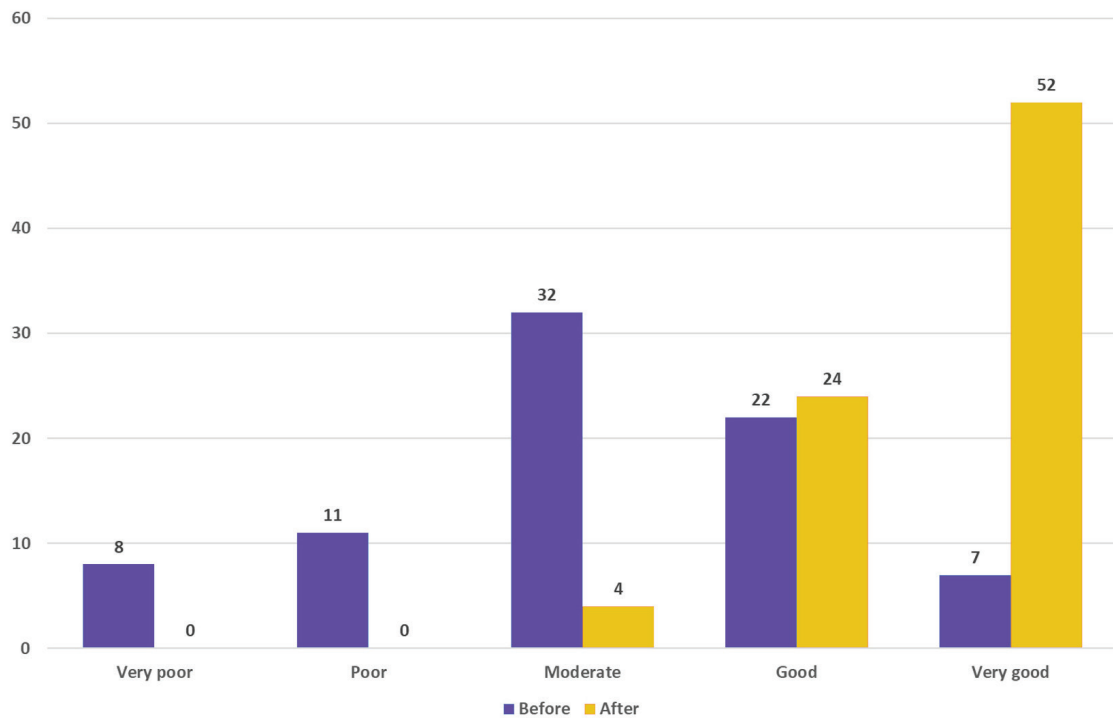
INVOLVEMENT	TIMING	NOT AT ALL	A LITTLE	A LOT
Organising internet governance processes	Before	33	34	13
	After	5	27	47
Influencing internet governance processes	Before	27	43	10
	After	2	15	63

Understanding of internet governance

Figure 1 shows a large improvement in respondents' reported level of understanding of internet governance after attending AfriSIG. Before attending, 19 people said that they had a poor or very poor understanding of internet governance, while none claimed this after attending. At the other end of the spectrum, only seven said they had a good or very

good understanding before attending, while 52 said this after attending. After attending, all but four respondents claimed to have a good or very good understanding. The fact that a relatively large number – but less than half – had a “moderate” understanding already before attending makes sense, as those with some interest in the area would be more likely to hear about AfriSIG and want to attend.

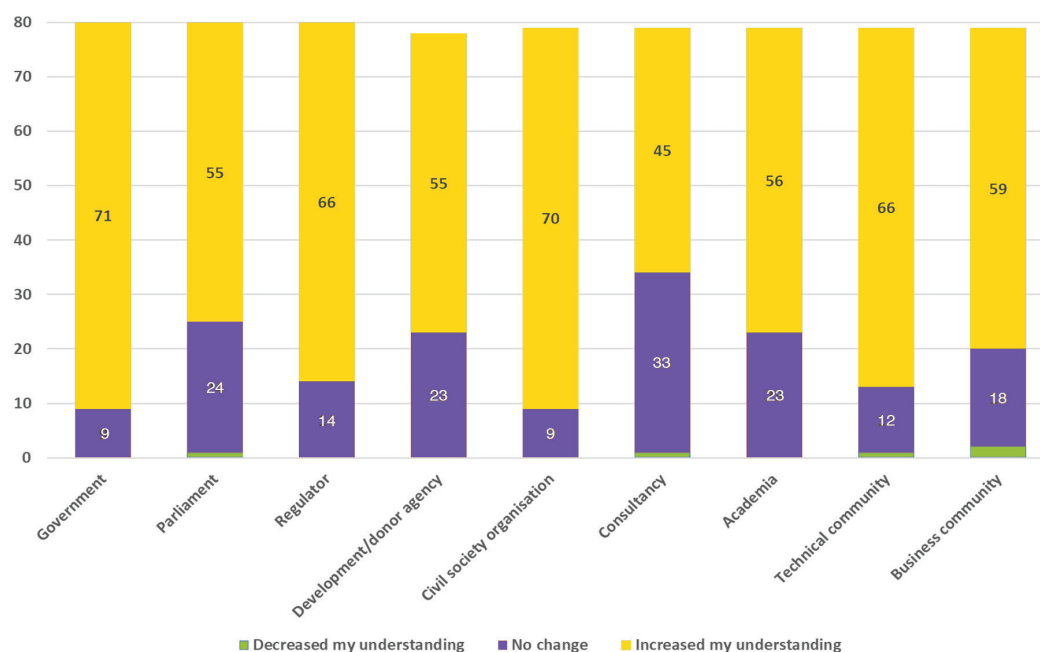
FIGURE 1. UNDERSTANDING OF INTERNET GOVERNANCE BEFORE AND AFTER ATTENDING AFRISIG



The next set of questions asked about their understanding of the roles of different stakeholder groups in internet governance.

Figure 2 shows the reported degree of change in the respondents’ level of understanding of the roles of each of the different stakeholder groups. For all groups, more than half of the respondents said that their understanding increased. The least change was found in respect of consultancies. A similar pattern was found in the earlier tracer survey and could imply that participants felt that consultancies had less of a role to play than others. In the earlier study there was also limited change in respect of understanding the role of parliament. Although this is still the stakeholder with the second least change, its scoring is similar to that for development agencies and academia. The most change was found in respect of government and CSOs, followed by the technical community and regulators.

FIGURE 2. CHANGE IN UNDERSTANDING OF ROLES OF STAKEHOLDERS



When asked how participation in AfriSIG had changed their understanding of the multi-stakeholder approach more generally, three said that there had been no change in their understanding, 14 reported a small change, and 62 – more than three quarters – reported a big change. Two of the three who reported no change attended AfriSIG as resource persons, and may therefore have had very good understanding even before attending.

When asked how participation in AfriSIG had changed their understanding of gender issues in internet governance processes, six said that there had been no change in their understanding, 17 reported a small change, and 57 reported a big change. Of the six who reported no change, four were women and two men. Three of the six (two women and one man) had attended as facilitators.

Methodologies used in AfriSIG

Figure 3 reflects responses when asked for a rating – from 1 “nothing” (blue) to 5 “a lot” (green) –of how much they learned from different methods used during AfriSIG. The practicum emerges clearly as the most useful aspect of AfriSIG from a learning perspective, with discussions and lectures and other inputs next most useful. In contrast, lectures scored low in the previous tracer study. Also unlike in the earlier tracer study, the post-AfriSIG policy event emerges as the least useful method from a learning perspective. Nevertheless, more than half gave the policy event a 4 or 5, with 35 – more than a third of the total – giving it the highest possible score. Only practicums and the post-AfriSIG policy event had any “nothing” scores from a participant.

FIGURE 3. RATING OF HOW MUCH LEARNED FROM DIFFERENT METHODS

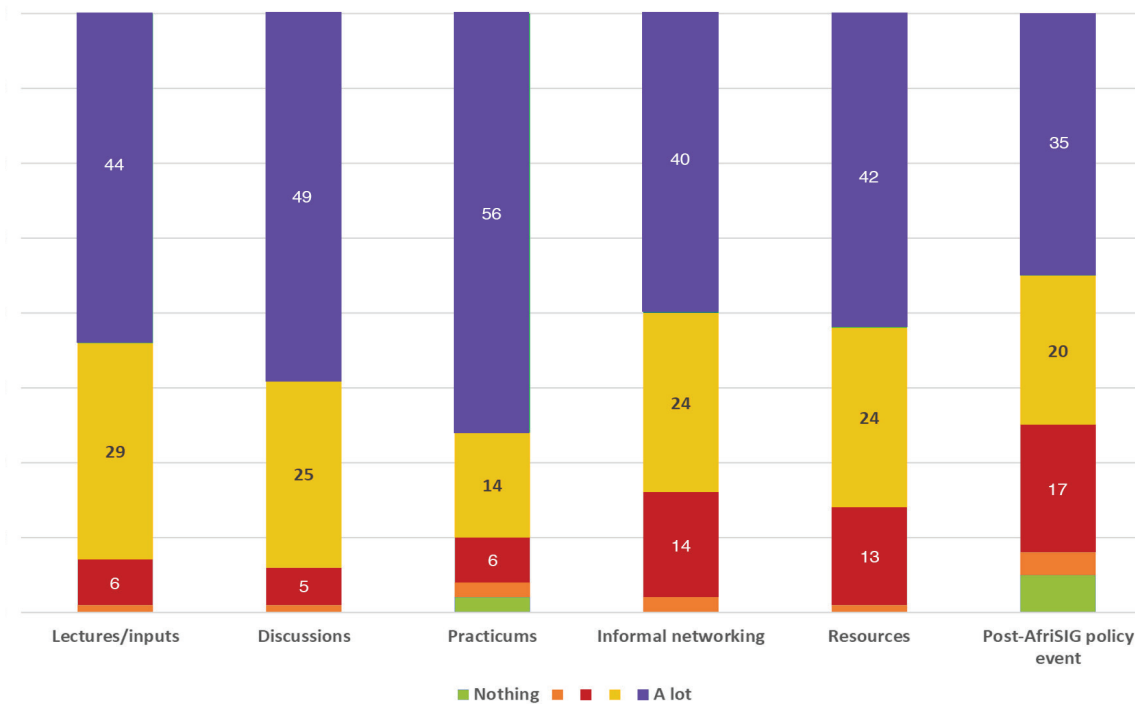
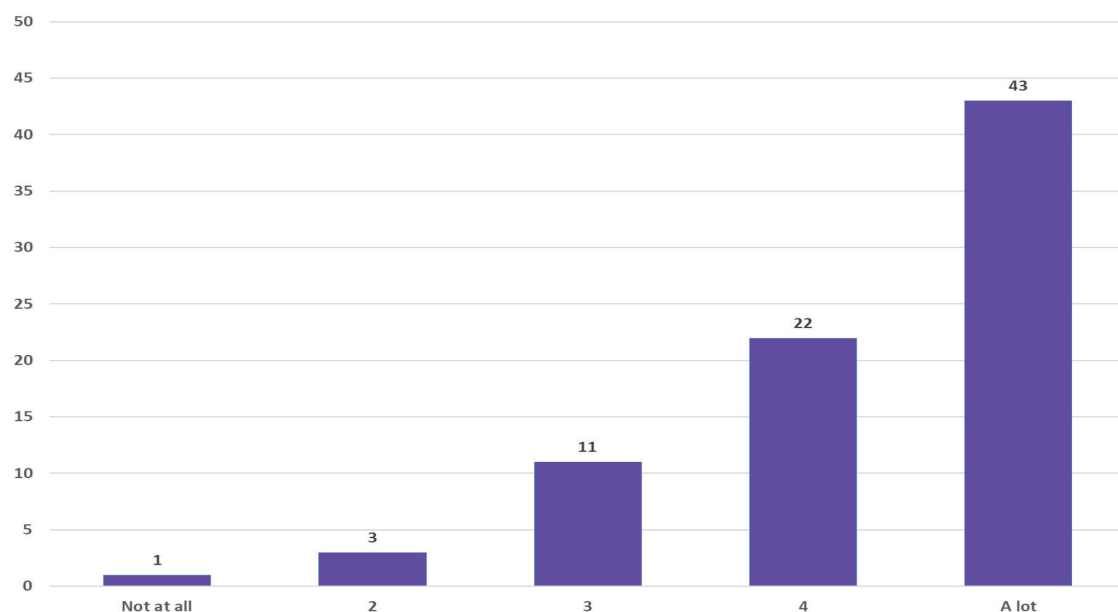


Figure 4 shows responses to a similar question as to how much the person benefited from the alumni network. Only one person reported no benefit, as against 43 – more than half – who reported they benefited a lot.

FIGURE 4. EXTENT OF BENEFIT FROM ALUMNI NETWORK



The majority of respondents took the opportunity to elaborate on how they had benefited from being part of the alumni network.

The person who said that they had not benefited at all said that they had not used the network very much. Nevertheless, the knowledge they gained from AfriSIG had allowed them to provide practical input and guidance on regulatory interventions and other internet governance issues. One of the two people who had given a rating of 2 said it was useful for reaching out to others for further collaborations and insights.

Among those who gave a rating of 3, the predominant benefit mentioned was access to information and opportunities. In terms of opportunities, one of the people said that they had won funding for a project through an opportunity that they learned about through the network. One person said these opportunities increased their capacity to contribute “to online and offline human rights/social narrative within my region.” There was a longer response among those who gave a 3 rating which noted that the country-specific alumni network created a safe space for people to share, discuss, share opportunities and support each other. The person ended as follows: “Most importantly, a space for creating lifetime friendships and raising the next generation of internet governance advocates.”

Among those giving a rating of 4, access to information (or increased knowledge) and opportunities again dominated the responses. Those citing gains in knowledge referred to learning through sharing of documents, articles, blogs, training materials, thoughts, views, links, views and best practice. Several used words such as “nuance” and “insight” to describe what they gained. Several said that they used the knowledge gained in their work and in advocacy on internet governance-related issues. One said simply that they appreciated learning what other alumni were doing.

A few of those who said that they appreciated the opportunities gave specific examples. These included participating in drafting an APC article about internet shutdowns in Africa, participating and presenting a research policy brief at a conference, and serving as a panellist at an event. The more general responses referred to learning about events, work opportunities and educational opportunities.

Among those who gave the highest score, 5, there was the same pattern of knowledge sharing and opportunities dominating. One difference was that at least three people wrote at a more personal level about how they had “built new and meaningful friendships”, and how the network was a community or family that shared and learned at both the personal and more professional level.

A second difference was that there were several mentions of the WhatsApp group being particularly appreciated.

A third difference was that those who gave a score of 5 tended to give longer answers than those giving a lower score. The following examples give the flavour of some of the longer responses.

As a consultant I rely heavily on in-country experts in the different multistakeholder groups. [...] Furthermore, the alumni network is always willing and ready to introduce and refer me to others in or out of the network.

There are often debates that are very enriching, and sometimes challenging, such as the debate on sexism in the 2019 WhatsApp group. I learn a lot from hearing how alumni feel about emerging policy, e.g. the discussion recently on criminalising of misinformation on the coronavirus.

I have been able to break the digital divide experienced before AfriSIG 2013 and am now fully active in the internet governance fora.

One of the respondents who gave a score of 5 used the opportunity to make a suggestion. The person noted that with more than 200 alumni, the network was sitting on a “goldmine of opportunities”. They suggested that people be “pooled” together to undertake projects to develop the regional internet governance landscape in Africa, starting with periodic in-country reviews of internet governance developments.

Impact

Of the 80 respondents, 79 said that participation in AfriSIG made a difference to them personally, 66 said it made a difference for their organisation or institution, and 62 said it made a difference beyond themselves and their organisation or institution. In each case, those who answered yes were asked to explain. Most did so, but a few unfortunately did not.

Personal benefit

Unsurprisingly given that AfriSIG is a “school”, the most common theme emerging from responses about the impact on them personally was learning. This was referred to in different ways by more than 30 respondents. They referred to learning about technology management, policy making, technical as well as practical aspects, country-related issues, gender, digital rights, human rights more broadly, consensus building, multistakeholder approaches, localisation of mechanisms, government curtailment of online freedoms, internet infrastructure, cybercrime, the role of civil society, indigenous communities, the interaction between linguistic diversity and internet design, the importance of telling stories in a compelling way, the importance of regulation, presentation and facilitation skills, and how to manage staff. The diversity across participants in the issues they highlighted as important learnings sends a strong message that AfriSIG was able to bring something new to people from varied backgrounds and fill very different “gaps” in their knowledge. One person noted that in line with the African saying “It takes a village...”, AfriSIG was a “forum where 54 nations develop one agenda, one voice.”

Some of those who focused on knowledge indicated that this had assisted them in their particular tasks. Two noted that they were now “lifelong” students. One who appears to be from outside Africa said that they “learned about the people with their culture, politics, interests, and their conceptual frameworks, of a region I knew little about.” A law enforcement official said that he learned that “for law enforcement to combat crimes properly there is need of involvement of other stakeholders and [to] discuss issues affecting the community.” Finally, one complimented the lecturers on their ability to present material simply. This person wrote:

AfriSIG 2019 lecturers were phenomenal in simplifying complex technical issues that a legal person would ordinarily not have grasped. The sessions on the internet infrastructure by Mallory and the gentleman from ICANN, Bob, actually helped me understand how the internet works in a simplified manner.

Eight respondents described how participation had assisted in advancing them in their career or some other aspect. The advances included using it in applications for jobs, fellowships and as a member of the global Internet Governance Forum Multistakeholder Advisory Group (MAG); joining APC as a staff member; becoming a “key player” in the internet governance world; providing training for others; and being invited to attend more internet-related events. One added that AfriSIG “made me a different person” and “a better man when it comes to provide a valuable insight regarding IGF processes.”

Another seven described how participation had resulted in their taking action in some way. Examples of such actions included planning youth sessions or serving as a main speaker for the African IGF; becoming more involved in local internet governance processes “at youth level”; making regulatory interventions; “spearheading” the registration of a national Internet Society (ISOC) chapter; creating content; obtaining a masters degree; and becoming involved in a project to educate people on the internet, the fourth industrial revolution, law and human rights. On a negative note, a respondent noted that lack of sponsorship restricted their participation in internet governance after attending AfriSIG.

Seven noted that they had gained in confidence, in particular in speaking about internet governance in different forums, but some also in writing, asking questions, and negotiating. One noted that the practicum was especially important in instilling confidence. Another summed up: “It’s been an amazing experience and I will always recommend it.”

Nine respondents referred to benefiting from the networking. They noted, for example, that they met a “diverse community that was intellectually stimulating”, that they “made life-long friends as well as very strong professional relationships”, that they met many “interesting and charming persons”, and that they could “interact and learn first-hand from the people who have been in the trenches of internet governance.” They noted that this had benefited them personally and professionally. One felt “much more aware and connected to communities working in internet governance.” Another observed that

interacting with people from so many different backgrounds gave them “a richer outlook on life.” Another valued the opportunity “to be part of regional, closed and purposeful conversations on internet governance.”

Finally, one of the organisers commented at some length on how they had witnessed the impact of the work:

It made me feel as if the effort is really, really worthwhile. It is rare in development and social change work to see impact in tangible ways. In the case of AfriSIG I see the impact immediately... and in the short and medium term. What is this impact? People feeling empowered, becoming more confident to ask questions, think critically, and debate. And secondly, people’s world view shifting. For example, human rights in internet governance becomes something that even people from government and from regulators begin to see as necessary and important to them, not just a concern of civil society. Also, to see civil society activists taking the role and responsibility of government more seriously... that is also the kind of impact that really makes me feel it is worthwhile.

Benefit to organisation

Among the comments explaining the responses to the question about benefit to their organisation or institutions there were 23 that related to their own role, and 34 which spoke more about the organisation. The distinction is, however, not cut and dried, as among the 23 were several that described the role that the person had played in their organisation, while some of the 34 highlighted the role that the AfriSIG alumnus had played. A further two responses related to changes in relation to the business community – the category in which they had previously classified themselves – rather than to an organisation or institution. One referred to guidelines on cyberspace and security and business being updated so as to be more comprehensive, and the second to other stakeholders better understanding “the position of business and the essence of digital cooperation.”

Among the 34, the most common response was a shift in the direction, approach, stance or activities of the organisation or institution in its work. These included changing the curriculum of a course; hosting a national IGF; growth of the organisation; improved relationship with ISOC; increased adoption of multistakeholderism; incorporation of internet governance into existing areas of work; strengthening of the approach in existing areas of work; development of new areas of work; increased emphasis on access, affordability and inclusion; increased use of an evidence-based approach; playing an increased role in internet governance forums and structures; and embarking on a national cybersecurity awareness programme for educational institutions. One person had established a new organisation to work on issues of digital rights, internet governance, cybersecurity and online protection – the first such organisation in their country. These changes were found across stakeholder groups, including government.

There were some responses that indicated learning or gains in knowledge, including improved appreciation of gender issues in relation to information and communications technology (ICT) in the workplace; learning how technology and human rights intersect with the other areas of work of the organisation; better appreciation of a donor of what AfriSIG does; learning how to organise a local SIG; learning the importance of multistakeholderism; and learning the importance of being involved in these issues and using the internet and technologies in the fight against gender-based violence in schools.

Some responses related to networking and opportunity, including the opportunity for colleagues to attend AfriSIG. These responses came from participants in different work situations, including a consultancy, as well as from an APC person who noted that for APC:

AfriSIG has been a very good network builder on the African continent. Most recent Africa-based staff employed by APC are AfriSIG alumni. It has also been a way for APC to build lasting relationships with other institutions, e.g. the African Union Commission.

Among the 23 who referred to more personal changes, nine people described how participation had changed the way they did what they were doing previously. For example, a journalist who covers ICT policy said that they were able to publish more informative and analytical articles; a policy officer said that they were more knowledgeable in their role; someone else said that they were now able to provide “more meaningful input” to their organisation’s work on digital rights and internet governance; and another person said that they were now “pushing” the organisation to engage more on internet policy issues in the country.

Seven people described what seemed to be new initiatives that they had introduced in their organisation or institution. One, for example, had established a small group of women leaders to help “drive campaign to grassroots” in Nigeria; a government official helped reform internet policies that restricted use of the internet to criticise government; researchers had developed new research projects; a government official had organised a session on behalf of their institution at RightsCon³ 2017 in Brussels; and another respondent has assisted with organising a subsequent AfriSIG.

Five people referred to a new role that they played, such as being chosen to represent their organisation or institution (three people), applying the “tips” that they learned at AfriSIG in an unspecified new role, or speaking at internet-related activities.

3. An annual global summit on human rights in the digital age. For more information, see: <https://www.rightscon.org/about-and-contact>

Benefit to other people

The majority of respondents said that AfriSIG had made a difference to other people who attended AfriSIG (69), to internet governance in Africa (66), and to internet governance beyond Africa (57).

At least 10 people noted that other AfriSIG participants had gained knowledge and understanding. Several said that they could see this in how people participated in broader internet governance forums as well as on the alumni email list. The alumni email list was also seen as a means of others increasing their knowledge.

One person commented, in particular, that some of their colleagues had gained a greater understanding of gender issues related to internet governance. Other issues named as areas where others had increased understanding included the roles of different stakeholders, how the internet evolved, the benefits of the internet, and security issues. Some people commented on particular categories of participant that had gained knowledge, such as regulators, international faculty, and “young people”.

At least 20 people commented on how attendance at AfriSIG had impacted on participation of people in diverse ways. The most common responses were those that referred, in general terms, to greater engagement in internet governance-related activities in their own countries and beyond. One noted that their fellow participants were also active in digital rights movements. Several noted that alumni were now more vocal, “bold”, confident and influential in their participation. As one example, a respondent noted that alumni “become very vocal on issues they are passionate about in different forums.”

At least 14 people said that members of the network had been promoted or found new jobs or opportunities such as fellowships. A few wrote that this had happened for “most” alumni! Some of the responses were more specific, for example, naming international organisations such as Facebook, Google, ARTICLE 19, Access Now and the UN. There were also examples of people advancing locally, such as one who had become the manager of the local internet registry. Some responses noted that not only had people accessed new positions, but – as one put it – they “now have very influential careers and are doing an amazing job.” One of those who referred to promotion expressed a concern that some of the promotions to leadership positions might have come too soon – AfriSIG definitely built their capacity, but it was not a substitute for work and day-to-day leadership experience.

One person commented on the willingness of alumni to share best practices and encourage younger Africans to engage in the internet governance area. This person referred, in particular, to Bob Omondi’s work through ICANN with universities in Uganda. Another noted that “a good number” of the national SIGs that had emerged on the continent had been initiated by AfriSIG alumni.

Two people said that they had received positive feedback from others who had attended AfriSIG.

Difference to internet governance in Africa

Twenty responses related to the extent to which AfriSIG alumni were active in the various internet governance forums, many of which were now led by alumni and in which they served as role models. One noted further that alumni were “doing their best to fight for internet freedom and human rights” in these spaces. Another commented that AfriSIG had “made a huge difference, and is building a generation that is carrying Africa to the next level of its Digital History.” A third respondent observed that the extent of the impact on internet governance in Africa was “meaningful” given that AfriSIG was only seven years old. The fourth respondent noted that AfriSIG alumni were now treated with respect in the various forums, and also enjoyed support from fellow alumni.

Six responses noted how internet governance – and IGFs – in Africa had progressed without specifying who had played a role and how this had been achieved. They noted changes in the extent to which forums were active and sought solutions, in levels of understanding, in the number of countries with national IGFs, and in awareness of a broader range of aspects of internet governance. One said that AfriSIG had increased “push back against retrogressive policies.” Another pointed to how AfriSIG had contributed to curriculum development for newly established national SIGs.

Six responses appreciated the way in which AfriSIG had contributed to multistakeholderism. Some of these noted how AfriSIG itself brought together the different stakeholders, facilitated exchange of ideas, and encouraged long-term collaboration. One of these contrasted this with other groupings, such as the African Regional At Large Organisation, which brought together only those involved in the area of ICANN and domain names, or AfriNIC, which brought together people in the area of internet numbers. One person illustrated the impact at country level with the specific example of Uganda, where AfriSIG was said to have led to those responsible for internet-related issues now calling for representatives of different stakeholder groups. Finally, one of the six responses relating to multistakeholderism said that there had been “slight” change, but “many governments are reluctant about collaboration and adopting a multistakeholder approach when developing policies.”

Four responses referred to the way in which alumni served as “ambassadors” or “champions” for internet governance, raising awareness about internet governance and the related issues. Five commented on the way in which AfriSIG had contributed to building a “community of experts and practitioners on internet governance issues in Africa”, and “influenced conversations” about different aspects of internet governance “such as law and policy, cybercrimes and cyber security issues.” One especially appreciated the fact that the experts created had “generic” expertise that was applicable on the continent beyond their own country. Five people had comments highlighting how AfriSIG had encouraged and capacitated youth to engage in the internet governance space. One of these added: “especially women”. Another named Lillian Nalwoga as an example, given

that she served as a representative on the MAG. Yet another noted that it would “only be a matter of time when [the younger] AfriSIG fellows are influencing policy at senior and top organs of different stakeholder groups.”

Two responses suggested, but without being specific, that AfriSIG was fighting for, or had contributed to, more affordable and broader access “for everyone and women”, and bridging of the digital divide. A further two said that AfriSIG had led to the improvement of CSO participation, and also encouraged “harmony” in CSOs’ responses to government actions. The Huduma Number “fiasco” in Kenya was offered as an example of the latter.

Finally, a respondent pointed to the establishment of the Arusha School of Internet Governance in Tanzania.

Difference to internet governance beyond Africa

The most common response – from 14 people – to the question about making a difference beyond Africa was to refer to the presence of AfriSIG alumni in various global forums. Some did not specify the forums. Those who did referred to the global IGF and digital rights conferences, as well as bodies such as ICANN and ISOC.

Respondents noted that alumni had the “skills and confidence to speak on panels and shape the internet governance agenda.” Some suggested that AfriSIG alumni brought a specific perspective which, through their participation, could “reach a global audience and influence thinking” and also determine themes. One noted that the participation “reinforced the perspective of ‘nothing for us without us’.” Another said that AfriSIG’s input was “welcomed and appreciated” by the UN, European Union and other agencies. A respondent noted that the majority of the African participants in the various forums had attended AfriSIG.

In addition to the 14 who referred to the other forums, four respondents highlighted that “AfriSIGers” were members of the MAG, including holding the position of chairperson. One observed that “taking the mantle of the MAG at IGF is a strong vote that AfriSIG conveners and the alumni are pushing the envelope to influence internet governance not only in Africa but also beyond.”

Three people referred to AfriSIG training alumni and thus giving them the expertise to “take the African issues to the global stage” and “help shape the internet space positively.” Three people referred to AfriSIG alumni – or even they themselves – working in international organisations and/or at the international level or having improved prospects of getting such jobs.

Two respondents felt that conversations, and even policies, in the global North were beginning to reflect views from the global South. However, one of the two noted that more still needed to be done in respect of visas and other travel restrictions. Others felt that the participation of alumni had affected outcomes by making participants from

beyond the continent aware of African concerns, and had given greater prominence to cybersecurity, data protection and regulation, inclusion and bridging the digital divide on the global agenda. Somewhat in contrast, one person referred to Africa being “eager to learn more from the outside world especially developed countries on best practices towards access to the internet and protection of online freedoms.”

There were some further comments that are not easily clustered, or that were very general (“it has scaled its space worldwide”).

Finally, three people said that they were not aware of how AfriSIG may or may not have had influence beyond Africa. One explained their inability by their not having succeeded in getting funding to participate in internet governance forums outside the region.

Going forward

Almost all (76) of the respondents said that they had recommended AfriSIG to other people. Of those who did so, 29 said that at least one person to whom they had recommended AfriSIG had subsequently attended, 21 said that no one to whom they had recommended it had attended, while 24 did not know whether anyone had subsequently attended AfriSIG.

The penultimate question asked respondents if they had anything to add. A little under half (33) responded to this invitation.

In four of these responses, people who said they had recommended AfriSIG to others but none had yet attended, explained that this was because they would attend in the future, or had not been selected.

At least 12 of the 33 used this opportunity to commend and/or thank the organisers of AfriSIG. Such compliments and thanks were often added to other observations. Examples of some of the longer “thank you” responses read as follows:

I was so glad to participate at this school! It was very interesting and grateful for me. I learned a lot about the importance of Internet for me, for women, and for Africa! I would like to thank all the organisations for their work and their patience! I hope to see u soon and work with u some day!! Thank so much for this funny survey!

AfriSIG is an experience worth experiencing by everyone. The intensity of the fellowship alone reminds you that life isn't as easy as you want it to be. AfriSIG has made me confident and ambitious to go for whatever challenge is ahead of me. I love the commitment with which Anriette, Koliwe and the rest of the APC team puts the activities together. Shout outs to Koliwe for always making sure that AfriSIG is lit and suitable for everyone from all walks of life.

It was a wonderful experience. I learnt so much about negotiation (I loved the practicums), I met great people who have become close friends. This scheme should not end, more and more people need to know about this. In Africa, more people need to be aware of the consequences of not just government policies but also of their action or inaction online and offline. The struggle to ensure that the internet remains a freely available resource akin to fundamental human rights needs to be buttressed and entrenched in our hearts, such that anyone or organisation supporting censorship etc do not get near the gates of governing in any country.

Two people again commented on the personal benefit to themselves. One said that attending AfriSIG had made “a huge difference to my work”, noting that they were more confident in multistakeholder settings and making more meaningful contributions to policy, especially with respect to women and internet governance. The second said they were new to the field and AfriSIG had been a “stepping stone” to contributing in a “different capacity” in the “near future”.

Ten people made suggestions, as summarised below, with the first two suggestions each put forward by two people:

- That AfriSIG be replicated at country level to allow more stakeholders to be trained.
- That the agenda include an informal fireside chat in the evenings where students and faculty can discuss topical internet governance issues.
- That the curriculum cover more current and topical issues each year and discussions be practical rather than “high level”, and include African case studies and examples. Topics suggested for 2020 were: digital ID, online jurisdictional considerations, data privacy, and the impact of digital data analytics.
- That a platform be created beyond the email list to facilitate networking between alumni from different years.
- That it should be made more obvious in the application form that self-sponsored participants are allowed to attend.
- That more advanced training be provided to alumni to keep them motivated.
- That post- and pre-activities like conferences be posted in respect of all participating countries.
- That APC take the lead in establishing alumni as a negotiating coalition for Africa at major IGF decision-making institutions and processes.
- That AfriSIG faculty and fellows all play a role in marketing AfriSIG to people interested in internet governance issues.
- That AfriSIG have more direct collaborations with universities, colleges and law firms across the continent.

One person said that they would like to attend AfriSIG again, and another said that IGF processes needed more funding.

Finally, all respondents said that they were signed up to the AfriSIG alumni email list.

CONCLUSION

This evaluation paints a picture of an initiative that has been and continues to be a great success. AfriSIG is not simply “another workshop”, but instead an experience that brings about change in participants’ understanding, motivation and actions and – in so doing – can bring about change in the broad field of internet governance in Africa.

The evaluation explores an initiative that has succeeded, for seven consecutive years, in bringing together a new group of participants who span both many countries of the continent and a broad range of stakeholders. The latter is especially important given that multistakeholderism is a key focus of AfriSIG and of internet governance more generally.

The fact that an initiative with a civil society organisation as the lead partner is able to attract representatives of all these stakeholder groups for an intense learning event that continues for several days gives a sense of the respect with which the initiative and APC are seen. For those who are employed, the employer – including government – would have had to agree to the person being away from their normal duties to attend the event. The ongoing ability to attract new participants suggests that the issues covered continue to be very topical.

The fact that so many participants elaborate on their responses in the survey rather than simply completing the closed-ended questions is a further indication of participants’ appreciation of, and interest in, AfriSIG. It also suggests that they feel that APC is an organisation that will take their views seriously.

Providing a worthwhile experience for such a diverse audience is not an easy task. The overall positivity of the responses to all the questions suggests that there were few, if any, aspects of AfriSIG that displeased any of those who responded to the questionnaire.

Those responsible for organising AfriSIG need to be commended for the fact that the initiative has performed so well over seven years and built a strong network of people committed to taking the work forward.

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