

Summary of the report “Analysis of Participation and Incidence in the eLAC process”

Introduction

Although WSIS was primarily an intergovernmental dialogue space, it was considered important to include perspectives from other sectors such as civil society, in the regional processes. As such, after the evaluation of the initial phase of the process (eLAC2007) and the definition of political commitments and goals for the second phase (eLAC2010), during eLAC’s last ministerial meeting in El Salvador governments agreed to add a civil society entity in the regional follow-up mechanism. The idea was for this organisation to serve as a link between regional governments and civil society institutions that form part of the process in the region. These same organisations met and decided that APC would take on this role.

In order to evaluate the current state of participation and incidence by civil society and particularly of APC’s communication and information policy program in Latin America (CIPP-LA), in the eLAC process and how best to improve it in future, APC saw the need to conduct a study. The report, “Analysis of participation and incidence in the eLAC process” analyses the conclusions of a survey presented to actors involved in ICT work in the region and with a knowledge of the eLAC process. The results were first used for an analysis of actors through which indices of relevance, collaboration, and participation in networks were determined.

Indices of relevance, collaboration, and participation in networks

In the index of relevance, those surveyed determined that the five most relevant actors in ICT policy processes in decreasing order are: ECLAC, APC, national governments, the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), and the Latin American and Caribbean Internet Addresses Registry (LACNIC); among these, APC was mentioned twenty times. Meanwhile, for the index of collaboration, the top five actors named by the group surveyed as those that collaborate with their institutions in ICT policy work were: APC, ECLAC, ICA/IDRC, IADB, and OAS; where APC was mentioned thirteen times. They were also asked to name the networks their organisations form part of. APC came out on top with nine mentions. In light of these initial results, it can be confirmed that those surveyed recognize APC’s high penetration in the region as a network of civil society organisations, ECLAC’s facilitation of ICT policy processes, including of course the eLAC process, and IDRC as an important source of funding for these processes.

The next set of questions evaluated the level of importance attributed to ICT policy processes in general and to the eLAC process in particular by regional actors. To this end, those surveyed were asked to indicate the level of relevance assigned to ICT policy processes. Generally the group showed a “high” or “very high” level of interest. Besides the importance assigned to these processes, the report also analyzed the levels of interest and participation, specifically the relationship between

the two. It was observed that, overall, the concordance between the two is high. With respect to the level of relevance assigned to the eLAC process, the highest percentage (44.64%) chose "medium". An interesting point to note in this section is that the obstacles and challenges listed by those surveyed (financial, participatory/strategic, political), were likewise considered facilitators for participation depending on the context.

Participation and incidence of civil society in eLAC

In regards to the participation and incidence of civil society in eLAC, the majority of those surveyed considered the relevance of this participation as "somewhat relevant". According to the findings in the report, it is clear that percentage-wise, government representatives "assigned a higher level of relevance to the participation of civil society in the eLAC process, while the members of the civil society organisations themselves adopted a less enthusiastic view." The majority of those surveyed considered the incidence of civil society in eLAC "average", and were in large part from the civil society sector (although there were some government representatives). Likewise, when they were asked to define the future participation expected in the process, the majority – government representatives along with civil society members – answered that it should be "much greater".

Although in general, government representatives seem to favour a higher participation by civil society in the process, there is a clear contradiction in these results. When it was proposed that a civil society organisation should be included in the coordination of the process, not all governments agreed on the role that this entity would have. It was finally decided that it would participate in the follow-up mechanism but merely as an observer. Nevertheless, the results of the survey show that there is an opportunity to increase the participation and incidence of civil society.

In the last section of the report, the need to augment the participation and incidence of APC as a civil society organisation is also reinforced by the results. In regards to ICT policy processes at the regional level, the majority of those surveyed responded that APC's work is "mostly positive" or "very positive". However, when they were asked the level of knowledge they had on APC's participation in eLAC, 37.73% answered that they were "slightly" or "not at all informed" while 35.85% replied that they were "quite" or "very well informed".

Conclusions

The results of the report indicate that besides deepening participation by civil society in the process, it is necessary to make it more effective. It is also clear that the role of APC as a link between governments and civil society organisations can be an important way to achieve this.

Also, the continuous participation of all actors involved in the process is needed: there is a logical connection between the levels of interest and participation, which are then directly reflected in the actions of these actors at national and regional levels.