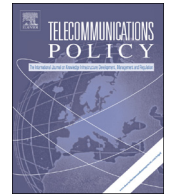




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The transformative effects of multistakeholderism in Internet governance: A case study of the East Africa Internet Governance Forum

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ABSTRACT

Internet governance issues tend to be contentious, multifaceted, and interconnected among various stakeholders. The Internet Governance Forum (IGF) was formed as a potentially effective and legitimate multistakeholder governance network that could better ensure cooperation. An evaluation of the impacts of the IGF model in regional contexts, particularly developing country contexts, has gained limited attention. This study is one of the first to explore the function of the IGF model in a regional context by investigating the impacts of the East African Community's (EAC) East Africa Internet Governance Forum (EAIGF), the first regional IGF established globally.

International regime theory, the theory of elite competition, and a modified version of the actor-centered institutionalism model were used to examine the power of stakeholders, including impacts of institutional endowments on stakeholder influence within the EAIGF and impacts of participation in the EAIGF on member country Internet governance tactics. Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews with EAIGF participants, observations of the 2012 EAIGF meeting, and qualitative document analysis of EAIGF documents and related policy documents from EAC member states. Findings reveal the EAIGF promotes capacity building, knowledge sharing, and policy transfer within the region and has contributed to a shift in the balance of power in policymaking processes from state-centric to multistakeholder. However, the forum reinforced influence of states and stakeholders with stronger institutional endowments on the framing of policy issues within the forum. Thus, policy decisions attributed to the forum are likely reflective of the preferences of stronger stakeholders.

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1. Introduction

According to [Mueller \(2010, p. 1\)](#), “a distinctive global politics is developing around the Internet” where some states have taken a technological determinist view that the Internet due to its open network design cannot be governed others believe that it is within a nation's sovereign rights to govern the Internet within its territorial domain. Because Internet governance¹

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¹ Internet governance is broadly defined as “a set of rules and procedures that could be agreed upon by stakeholders across national boundaries to resolve issues brought about by Internet use” ([Kumar & Mowshowitz, 2008, p. 33](#)).

issues tend to be contentious, multifaceted, and interconnected among various stakeholders,² multistakeholder governance networks have formed as potentially effective and legitimate structures to enable communication and cooperation (Mueller, 2010; Reinicke & Deng, 2000).

The Internet Governance Forum (IGF) was established in 2006 out of the United Nations-sponsored World Summit on the Information Society in response to criticism that Internet governance standards were being unjustly set by powerful nation-states and private sector stakeholders (Mueller, 2010). Since its origin, the IGF has sought to serve as a non-binding, multistakeholder forum where national, regional, and global stakeholders from developed and developing countries can openly discuss Internet governance issues and potential solutions (IGF, 2011).

Even though the IGF was formed to promote inclusivity, concerns that the forum has employed hierarchical processes that exclude stakeholders have emerged. According to Mueller (2010), developed country stakeholders have had the greatest influence on defining the structure of the IGF and issues addressed at IGF meetings. This is particularly problematic when considering the work of Epstein (2010) who asserts that participants in IGF meetings “build and polish a vocabulary that is used to describe, design, and eventually regulate the Internet” (p. 2). The terms used to describe Internet governance issues influence the perceptions of policymakers and the general public, which subsequently influences how policies are shaped and enacted by governments. Epstein (2010) argues that understanding the discourse from IGF meetings is important, as it is likely to be used verbatim in actual policies. Furthermore, understanding inclusivity of stakeholders in IGF processes is vitally important if IGF discourse influences the formation of law.

While multistakeholder governance processes are “strongly promoted by international actors, the knowledge about how and why they influence policymaking and implementation is still scarce” (Schiffer, Hartwich, & Monge, 2010, p. 4). The influence of the IGF model within national and regional contexts, particularly developing country contexts, has gained limited attention. This study is one of the first to explore the function of the IGF model in a regional context by focusing on the East African Community’s (EAC) East Africa Internet Governance Forum (EAIGF), the first regional IGF established globally. This research article evaluates how policy discourse is constructed at the EAIGF and how the EAIGF ultimately impacts formation of Internet governance-related laws within the EAC.

The paper is structured as follows: first, the multistakeholder governance model is described in Section 2, including legitimacy of the multistakeholder approach within Internet governance and impacts of stakeholders’ institutional endowments on participation and influence within the forum. The theoretical framework is described in Section 3. The methodology appears in Section 4 and is followed by an overview of the EAIGF with a description of the mechanisms of influence stakeholders can utilize within the EAIGF in Section 5. Section 6 provides a description of the 2012 EAIGF and concludes in Section 7 with a broader discussion of the impacts of the EAIGF on formal policymaking processes in the region.

2. Multistakeholder governance: legitimacy and power

2.1. Legitimacy of multistakeholder approach to Internet governance

Given the capacity for the Internet to be transnational in scope, boundless in scale, and difficult to control, governance of this platform has increasingly become an area of contention among stakeholders. These contentions have led to the rise of new institutions of governance based on decentralized and distributed control among transnational stakeholders (Mueller, 2010).

At the center of the Internet governance debate are concerns of not whether the Internet *should* be governed but how it can be *effectively* and *legitimately* governed (Mueller, 2010). Internet governance of both the technical characteristics and its social applications is increasingly being viewed on the premise that a well-functioning system can only be maintained through “international cooperation, collaboration, and implementation” (Napoli, 2008, p. 3). Reinforcing the concept of inclusiveness, the UN-backed Working Group on Internet Governance (WGIG) composed the following working definition for Internet governance (WGIG, 2005, p. 4):

Internet governance is the development and application by Governments, the private sector and civil society, in their respective roles, of shared principles, norms, rules, decision-making procedures, and programs that shape the evolution and use of the Internet.

Internet governance has given rise to new forms of global governance. Where state-centric multilateral institutions once prevailed, multistakeholder³ global forums now operate to deal with the increasing complexities of Internet governance. However, the viability of multistakeholder processes and the legitimacy of this approach are often questioned (see Hirst,

² In this study the term ‘stakeholder’ typically refers to telecommunications regulatory agencies, ministries of information/telecommunication, civil society organizations, and the private sector.

³ This research draws from Mueller (2010) and characterizes multilateral organizations as the organization of nation-states and multistakeholder organizations as the organization of multiple agents including governments, civil society groups, non-governmental organizations, corporate entities, etc.

2000; Scott, 2008), especially within the African context where limited resources or capabilities impede full participation among all stakeholder groups (Calandro, Gillwald, & Zingales, 2013).

Given the historical nature of telecommunications policymaking as state-centric, multistakeholder governance organizations that are non-binding, such as the IGF, face criticism of legitimacy due to its informality and the potential to inappropriately handle complex issues. Arguments against the multistakeholder governance approach include fears that it is inefficient and will more likely resemble a “mere talk shop dominated by angry and/or sterile debates” than an organization that fosters inclusiveness and the cooperative identification of policy problems and solutions (De la Chapelle, 2009, p. 266).

On the other hand, scholars (Chhotray & Stoker, 2009; Hocking, 2006; Mathiason, 2009; Mueller, 2010) have claimed that the multistakeholder approach emerged because of a perceived lack of legitimacy for nation-states to govern global resources, including the Internet. The perceived role of the state in policymaking, in many contexts, is changing. Where the state was once believed capable of forming policies alone, complex contemporary issues necessitate the inclusion of state and non-state actors into policymaking processes. While most contemporary political ideologies view the nation-state as the creator and enforcer of rules, rights, policies, and laws, a multistakeholder approach to Internet governance may leverage the impact of non-state actors (Mueller, 2010). State power in policymaking has not completely diminished, nor will it likely ever, but multistakeholder interactions are playing an increasing role in policymaking. However, a significant risk to this approach is the inefficiency that the multistakeholder model may possess at achieving its inclusionary goals.

2.2. Power structures and the IGF

Scholars (Chhotray & Stoker, 2009; Kooiman, 2003; Pavan, 2012) have credited the growth of multistakeholder governance networks on globalization and technological advancements that have redistributed power through increased information flow and collaboration across stakeholder groups. While multistakeholder networks can serve as a leveling ground for stakeholder collaboration, these interactions are embedded in wider institutionalized norms that dictate participation and influence (Epstein, 2012; Mueller, 2010).

Institutionalized roles affect stakeholder power and relations in multistakeholder networks. Van Gorp and Maitland (2009) found that states with stronger institutional endowments or with “specific policy or regulation-making expertise” may have greater influence within a multistakeholder network and may have greater influence on the formation of policies (p. 48). Since government agencies, such as ICT-related ministries and agencies, function to define and enforce regulations within the ICT sector, they are likely to have greater influence within multistakeholder networks. For example, Epstein (2012) identified “IGF celebrities” including government representatives or tech experts who “draw their authority on external to the forum sources, such as a position in the host government or a legacy of a pivotal role in the Internet community” to shape policy discourse during the global IGF (Epstein 2012, p. 169).

While IGF stakeholders are believed to collaborate to reach common aims, they do not always share common values and are bound by different mandates and expectations for involvement (Rasmussen, 2007). Thus, the multistakeholder approach may not meet the needs of all stakeholders nor control for the dominance of certain stakeholders within the network.

3. Theoretical framework

Drawing from the theoretical foundations of new institutional economics, this study examines the power of stakeholders, including the impacts of their institutional endowments, on stakeholder dynamics in the EAIGF. By utilizing international regime theory and the theory of elite competition to modify Scharpf's (1997) actor-centered institutionalism model, this research conceptualizes the mechanisms of influence of EAIGF stakeholders within EAIGF processes and outcomes.

3.1. International regime theory

Cogburn (2003) builds upon international regime theory to include the influence of epistemic communities in defining a regime's principles, norms, rules, and decision-making procedures. Epistemic communities are believed to bring salience to “a range of social, political, economic, cultural and technological factors” and to define what are considered “acceptable forms of problem definition and solution” (Cogburn, 2003, p. 137). Cogburn's emphasis on the capacity of multiple stakeholders to influence policy issue identification and solution further articulates an actor-centered view of international relations.

Krasner (2001) states that governments no longer maintain sovereign control but share power with “different agents, national, regional, and international, public and private” (p. 3). As states become increasingly interconnected, the behavior of states may not necessarily be sovereignly dictated but regime-controlled. Krasner (1983) points out that while international regimes tend to be controlled by the most powerful stakeholders, the regime can eventually be “used by actors with limited national capabilities as a source of power” (p. 364). Over time the preferences and needs of the most powerful stakeholders are likely to change. Since the principles, norms, rules, and decision-making procedures of a regime remain fairly constant, the inconsistencies between the needs of the powerful and the structure of the regime can open opportunities for weaker stakeholders. This shift in power is evident in the formation of non-binding, multistakeholder policy networks that have emerged around Internet governance.

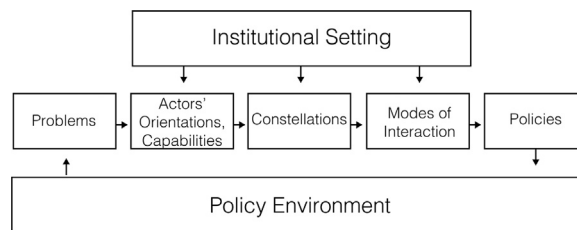


Fig. 1. The actor-centered institutionalism model for policy analysis.

Source: Scharpf (1997, p. 44).

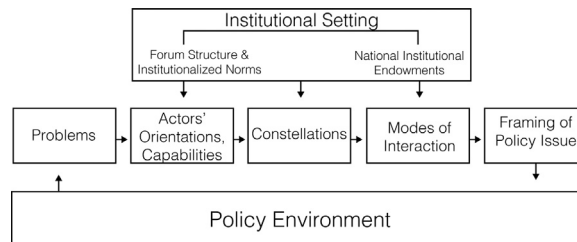


Fig. 2. Modified actor-centered institutionalism model for non-binding, multistakeholder policy interactions.

Adapted from Scharpf (1997).

3.2. Theory of elite competition

The theory of elite competition argues that policymaking is no longer solely motivated by the formation of optimal policy solutions but rather the process of “institutionalized competition for dominance” (Genieys & Smyrl, 2008, p.10). Stakeholders utilize the rules and procedures of the epistemic community to maintain or leverage their position as elite decision-makers in the policymaking process.

The theory is not necessarily applied to understand the policy outcome per se but in the act of defining policy issues and solutions (Genieys & Smyrl, 2008). It is within the formation of a “shared vocabulary and agreed meanings” on policy issues that serve to legitimize the inclusion of particular actors in the policymaking process (Genieys & Smyrl, 2008). Genieys and Smyrl (2008) define policymaking as “the power struggles over cognitive control” and contend that the process is not interested necessarily in the formation of rational-based policy solutions but in the competition of actors to leverage power in the policymaking process (Genieys & Smyrl, 2008, p. 11). Thus, within multistakeholder policy networks (e.g., the EAIGF), stakeholders may seek use of the forum to reinforce their position as key opinion leaders of a particular policy area, which could manifest itself as setting the agenda or dominating how a policy issue is defined by giving formal presentations that shape the forum’s dialogue on the issue.

3.3. Actor-centered institutionalism

Actor-centered institutionalism (ACI) is a theoretical approach that attempts to contextualize the dynamics of stakeholders and their interactions in policymaking processes (Scharpf, 1997). ACI is an interaction-oriented policy model as it emphasizes the behavior and interactions of stakeholders in connection with the opportunities and constraints imposed by institutional factors (Scharpf, 1997).

While ACI is primarily based in rational-choice institutionalism and game theory, (e.g., actors are assumed rational and that their actions will maximize their own self-interest while taking into account the actions of other stakeholders, see Rhodes, 2006), Scharpf (1997) believes that actors are bound by limited knowledge and resources and cannot completely “exploit all opportunities for individual gain regardless of the norms and rules that are violated” (p. 21). Instead, actors operate on their subjectively defined understanding of what policy action is “right”, “good” or “appropriate” within the socially-constructed institutional rules that dictate behavior (Scharpf, 1997, p. 19).

The ACI model places the capacities and interactions of relevant stakeholders at the foreground of analysis. The ACI model begins with the identification of policy issues (*problems*) that affect multiple *actors*⁴ (see Fig. 1). *Actors' orientations* are the normative perceptions of what is considered a “right” or “good” course of action and *capabilities* are the “personal qualities, physical resources, technological capabilities, and privileged access to information” that allow an actor to influence

⁴ For this study, actors are *composite actors* (also referred to as *stakeholders*, which are representatives of government, corporations, special interest groups, civil society organizations, etc.) (Scharpf, 1997). Composite actors’ participation is shaped not only by the institutional structure but also by commitments to their constituents, shareholders, etc.

outcomes within an institution (Lieshout, 2008, p. 9). The *actor constellation* identifies each actor's strategic options, predicted outcomes associated with strategies, and preferences of action. *Modes of interaction* detail how stakeholders can reach agreement through "unilateral action, negotiated agreement, majority vote, and hierarchical direction" on policy construction (Scharpf, 1997, p. 46). The *institutional setting* and policy environment can constrain and/or enable stakeholder interactions. The *institutional setting* defines relevant stakeholders and their capabilities and regulates stakeholder behavior (e.g., actor constellations and modes of interaction). The policy environment influences the types of policy problems that emerge and possible solutions (Scharpf, 1997).

Scharpf's (1997) ACI model has been effective at understanding the influence of institutional structures within binding interactions in Internet governance (see Bendrath & Mueller, 2011). This study extends the ACI model to understand whether non-binding, multistakeholder interactions in the EAIGF do (as suggested by Epstein (2010)) influence the framing of policy issues (see Fig. 2). International regime theory and the theory of elite competition were used to modify the ACI model. The theories were applied to incorporate how the forum may replicate structures of power originating from national institutional endowments and how the institutionalized structure of the EAIGF itself may serve to leverage the power and influence of certain stakeholders within the forum (Genieys & Smyrl, 2008, p. 11).

4. Methodology

The case study method was used to better understand the mechanisms of influence of the EAIGF on policymaking in the EAC and whether a state's institutional endowments affect its influence within the EAIGF. EAC member states were compared based on the "replication logic" that comparative cases should be used to either "(a) predict similar results (*a literal replication*) or (b) predict contrasting results but for anticipated reasons (*a theoretical replication*)" (Yin, 2009, p. 54). Comparisons were based on the latter assumption that differing national institutional endowments would result in different participation and influence between states in the EAIGF and capacity for policy transfer/adoption from EAIGF discourse. Drawing on the work of Van Gorp and Maitland (2009) and Scharpf's actor-centered institutionalism model, it was assumed that a more powerful state (i.e., a wealthier state or a state with specific expertise in a policy area) would have more influence within the EAIGF.

Data were collected using three data collection techniques: semi-structured in-depth interviews, qualitative document analysis and observations of the 2012 EAIGF. Interviews were conducted with EAIGF participants using an interview protocol that contained questions constructed according to the theoretical framework. Interview questions primarily focused on identifying stakeholders' perceived utility of the EAIGF as well as power structures and perceived influence of stakeholders on policy discourse formation and potential policy adoption in member countries. Interview participants were selected in two ways. First, meeting agendas from prior EAIGFs were consulted to identify individuals who had presented at an EAIGF. Second, individuals were recruited during the 2012 EAIGF. Interview participants were chosen based on their prior experience with the EAIGF and to ensure representation from key IGF stakeholder groups (e.g., civil society organizations, ICT-related ministries/regulatory agencies, and private sector). A total of 36 interviews were conducted and audio recorded. Transcripts from the interviews were read multiple times and coded using the NVivo software to identify recurring themes.

Qualitative document analysis (QDA) and observations of the 2012 EAIGF were used to corroborate findings. QDA was used to investigate numerous documents, including: EAIGF meeting agendas, summary reports and policy documents from EAC member countries. These documents were chosen to better understand the influence of stakeholders within the EAIGF and to what extent, if any, the EAIGF influenced policy development in participant countries. Documents were read multiple times and coded using the NVivo software to identify recurring themes. The researcher participated in all aspects of the 2012 EAIGF face-to-face meeting.

5. The East Africa Internet Governance Forum and the East African Community

5.1. Overview of the EAIGF

The EAIGF was the first regional IGF established globally in 2008. It includes the five member countries of the East African Community: Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Uganda.

The EAIGF's mission is to (EAIGF, 2008, p. 1):

1. Create awareness and build policy and technical capacity in order to enable meaningful participation in global Internet governance and ICT policy processes.
2. Institute a consensus-building process and develop a common understanding among East African Internet stakeholders on the nature and character of Internet governance.
3. Provide a forum that engages industry, government, parliament, media, academia and civil society in debate on Internet governance issues.

Table 1

Date, location, and funders for each East Africa Internet Governance Forum Meeting from 2008 to 2012.

EAIGF Meetings	Date	Location	Funders
1st EAIGF	November 10–12, 2008	Nairobi, Kenya	1. Communications Commission of Kenya (CCK) 2. International Development Research Centre (IDRC), Canada 3. Internet Society, USA 4. Kenya Network Information Center (KENIC) 5. Kenya ICT Board 6. Telecommunications Service Providers of Kenya (TESPOK)
2nd EAIGF	September 7–9, 2009	Scheduled to be held in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. Held in Nairobi, Kenya	1. AT&T, USA 2. CCK, Kenya 3. IDRC, Canada 4. Internet Society, USA 5. Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) 6. KENIC, Kenya 7. Kenya ICT Board 8. Nominet, UK 9. TESPOK, Kenya
Parliamentary Session 3rd EAIGF	September 9, 2009 August 11–13, 2010	Nairobi, Kenya Kampala, Uganda	– 1. AT&T, USA 2. CCK, Kenya 3. IDRC, Canada 4. Internet Society, USA 5. KENIC, Kenya 6. Kenya ICT Board 7. Nominet, UK 8. TESPOK, Kenya
4th EAIGF	August 17–18, 2011	Kigali, Rwanda	1. AT&T, USA 2. CCK, Kenya 3. IDRC, Canada 4. Internet Society, USA 5. KENIC, Kenya 6. Kenya ICT Board 7. Nominet, UK 8. TESPOK, Kenya
5th EAIGF	July 17–18, 2012	Scheduled to be held in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. Held in Nairobi, Kenya.	1. African Telecommunication Union (ATU) 2. AT&T, USA 3. CCK, Kenya 4. Internet Society, USA 5. International Telecommunication Union (ITU) 6. KENIC, Kenya 7. Kenya ICT Board 8. TESPOK, Kenya

Note: Double dash (–) indicates there were no formal funders.

The EAIGF was initiated by and continues to be driven by Kenyan civil society stakeholders. While the location of the annual EAIGF was intended to rotate between the EAC member states and all EAC member states were to fundraise for the EAIGF meetings, Kenyan civil society organizations and the Kenyan government have played the strongest role in sustaining the EAIGF by hosting and funding the majority of the EAIGF meetings (see Table 1).

The EAIGF is not the region's first attempt at the formation of a multistakeholder network to promote regional ICT policy integration. The EAC established the East African Regulatory, Posts and Telecommunications Organization (EARPTO) in 2001 (renamed the East African Communications Organization (EACO) in 2009), yet full ICT policy harmonization across the region remains unachieved (Nyaga, 2014). Further, EACO employs a membership fee and restricts membership to the private sector and ICT-related ministries, excluding academic and civil society stakeholders.

5.2. Mechanisms of influence in the EAIGF

Since the EAIGF is non-binding, a stakeholder's primary mechanism of influence is the ability to contribute to and shape policy discourse. Contribution to policy discourse can be achieved in two ways: a stakeholder can give a formal presentation on a policy issue (shaping how the policy issue is framed/discussed in the forum) or a stakeholder can shape the policy discourse by promoting the saliency of their viewpoint through interactions with other stakeholder groups.

A modified version of Scharpf's ACI model was developed to better understand the influence of institutional setting on stakeholders' mechanisms of influence within the EAIGF (see Fig. 2). Two institutional factors were believed to affect a stakeholder's ability to contribute to and shape policy discourse. The first includes the institutionalized structure of the

Table 2

Overview of Population, Economic, and ICT Sector Development of EAC Member Countries. Sources: CIA (2014), ITU (2014), and World Bank (2014).

	Burundi	Kenya	Rwanda	Tanzania	Uganda
Population	10 M	44.8 M	12.6 M	51 M	37 M
Gross National Income (GNI)	\$8.4B	\$131B	\$18B	\$124B	\$65B
Total number of mobile telephone subscriptions	3 M	33.6 M	7.7 M	31.8 M	20.3 M
Total number of Internet users (mobile and fixed-line access)	144,500 (1.4% of pop.)	16.5 M (36.8% of pop.)	1.1 M (8.7% of pop.)	7.4 M (14.5% of pop.)	6 M (16.2% of pop.)
ICT Development Index (IDI). Scores on IDI range from 0 (weak) to 10 (strong)	–	2.79	1.86	1.76	1.94

Note: All data are estimates for 2014. Estimates for mobile telephone subscriptions may not be accurate, as individuals in Africa tend to have more than one mobile subscription.

Table 3

Breakdown of the 34 presentations at the 2012 East Africa Internet Governance Forum by country and stakeholder group.

	Stakeholder group				Total
	Academia	Civil society	Government (ICT-related Ministries & Regulatory Agencies)	Private sector	
Country					
Burundi	–	1	1	–	2
Kenya	–	9	7	3	19
Rwanda	–	3	2	2	7
Tanzania	–	2	–	1	3
Uganda	1	1	1	–	3
Total	1	16	11	6	34

EAIGF as a civil society-run organization. Because civil society stakeholders organize the EAIGF, define the objectives and structure of forum meetings, and decide who presents in a formal capacity, the structure of the forum defines participant roles and power. The second includes a stakeholder's national institutional endowments, including national wealth and domain expertise. Stakeholders from nations with greater institutional endowments are believed to exert more influence within policy networks (see Souter, 2012; van Gorp & Maitland, 2009).

5.3. EAC member countries

Van Gorp and Maitland (2009) point out that disparities in wealth or expertise between countries may create power imbalances within stakeholder interaction. The ITU's ICT Development Index (IDI) was used to compare ICT sector development across the countries. The IDI is a composite index that assesses a country's level of infrastructure and access to ICTs, level of ICT usage, and skills necessary for ICT usage (ITU, 2014). Scores on the IDI range from zero to ten, where ten represents a country that has widespread infrastructure and access, a majority of the population uses the Internet, and a majority of the population has the skills necessary to effectively use ICTs. Kenya ranks higher on the IDI than the other EAC member countries (see Table 2). Overall, Kenya has a stronger economy and greater telecommunications development than the other EAC member countries (see Table 2). Because of Kenya's position as a regional leader, it may have greater influence within the EAIGF.

6. The 2012 EAIGF

The 2012 EAIGF program agenda, as well as observations conducted during the 2012 EAIGF, were used to better understand the structure of the forum. The forum was organized by Kenyan civil society organizations and was held at the Jacaranda Hotel in Nairobi, Kenya. The forum included 34 formal presentations that covered the following issues: (1) universal and affordable access to ICTs; (2) capacity and skills development, including strengthening understanding of Internet governance issues; (3) harmonization of legal and regulatory frameworks within the EAC; (4) managing critical Internet resources; and (5) creating national and regional regulatory frameworks for cyber security, including protecting national and regional infrastructure, personal data security, and developing legislation for electronic crimes.

6.1. Stakeholder roles and influence in the 2012 EAIGF

It was assumed that the individuals who gave a formal presentation were believed to have the greatest influence on policy discourse formation in that subject area at the EAIGF. Kenyan stakeholders gave the majority of formal presentations (see Table 3). The majority of participants interviewed indicated Kenya as an exemplar in the region and that decisions made

in Kenya are used as benchmarks for model policies in the region. Additionally, civil society stakeholders gave the second highest number of presentations, which could be indicative of the fact that civil society stakeholders organized the forum.

During interviews, EAIGF participants were asked to indicate the stakeholders they seek to discuss with during face-to-face forum meetings. While numerous participants indicated they seek to discuss with all stakeholders to reach a better understanding of how different stakeholders and countries address ICT-related policy problems, the majority of civil society stakeholders indicated they seek to discuss with government stakeholders from ICT-related ministries or telecommunications regulatory agencies. Vice versa, government stakeholders indicated that they seek to discuss with civil society stakeholders. This could also be why government and civil society stakeholders gave the majority of presentations.

While the EAIGF is multistakeholder and open to all EAC member countries, nearly all participants interviewed indicated that Kenya has the greatest influence within the forum. Kenya is believed to be a leader in the EAIGF because it was integral in initiating the first EAIGF in 2008 and has hosted the most forums within the region. Furthermore, EAIGF participants commented that the EAIGF has had consistent financial support from the Kenyan government, consistent participation from individuals from Kenya's Ministry of Information and Communication (MOIC) and the Communications Commission of Kenya (CCK), and that the majority of the participants in the forum every year are Kenyan. A member of the Uganda Communications Commission (UCC) commented that Kenya's position as a regional economic and telecommunications leader has influenced its ability to exert more influence within the forum. "Kenya has played an important role in shaping the Internet Governance Forums...their economy is bigger and their ICT sector is bigger and I think that can be one of the main reasons why they are playing a big role."

Nearly all individuals who were interviewed believe that government stakeholders/policymakers are the most influential participants in the face-to-face meeting of the EAIGF. The involvement of these stakeholders is perceived to be critical in leveraging EAIGF discussions into policy formation. A Kenyan civil society stakeholder indicated that government involvement in the EAIGF process is vitally important because "the regulators who tend to be most involved in the policy implementation are also advising their respective governments on policy direction... once they go back to their respective countries they will also try to adopt some of the recommendations coming from the EAIGF."

Due to their role in organizing the forum and their greater participation in the forum itself (see Table 4), civil society stakeholders are the most influential in shaping the structure, goals, and mission of the EAIGF. On the other hand, government stakeholders' influence in the forum is derived from their external role in establishing and enforcing policies. The dual power of civil society and government stakeholders in the EAIGF is insightful. While civil society stakeholders indicated that they actively seek to engage with government stakeholders as a means of influencing policy formation. Government stakeholders indicated that their main goal for participating is to interact with civil society stakeholders and that these interactions are "essential" to the success of their policy work. This finding provides insight into the impacts of the EAIGF on promoting a more open and cooperative structure for Internet governance policymaking in the region, at least among civil society and government stakeholders.

6.2. Stakeholders' perceived impacts of the 2012 EAIGF

Participants indicated that the EAIGF influences regional capacity building in Internet governance, aids identification of emerging national and regional Internet governance issues, leverages issues to additional regional and international forums (e.g., EACO and the global IGF), and supports formation of national and regional policies.

The EAC has been working since 2007 to harmonize legislation in the areas of "data security, network security, cyber-crime, information systems, and electronic transactions" under its EAC Cyberlaw Framework (cyber laws) (UNCTAD, 2012, p. 3). Out of the 36 individuals interviewed in this study, 16 indicated that the "cyber laws" were discussed extensively at EAIGF meetings and that these discussions influenced the language of the laws and adoption in the EAC member countries. The "cyber laws" were discussed extensively at the 2012 EAIGF, including three formal presentations on e-government and open data initiatives. Presentations were given from a Kenyan representative from the Directorate of e-government, a

Table 4

Breakdown of the 51 participants at the 2012 East Africa Internet Governance Forum by country and stakeholder group.

	Stakeholder group					Total
	Academia	Civil society	Government (ICT-related Ministries & Regulatory Agencies)	Media/press	Private sector ^a	
Country						
Burundi	–	1	3	–	–	4
Kenya	3	16	1	5	12	37
Rwanda	–	2	1	–	–	3
Tanzania	–	3	–	–	1	4
Uganda	2	–	1	–	–	3
TOTAL	5	22	6	5	13	51

^a The private sector stakeholders present were from Internet domain registrars or small IT-based businesses. There were no representatives from large Internet service providers, mobile telecommunications operators, or fixed-line telecommunications operators.

Kenyan representative from a civil society organization, and a Rwandan representative from the Rwanda Utilities Regulatory Agency. Numerous interview participants indicated that Kenya is a regional exemplar in its implementation of the “cyber laws” and that their country benchmarks their country’s progress against Kenya.

Even though government stakeholders are believed to be the most influential within the forum, participants also believed that the forum’s external impact comes from the efforts of civil society stakeholders who have encouraged multistakeholder processes in policy formation. A representative from the Uganda Ministry of Information and Communication Technology (MOICT) believes that as a result of the EAIGF, “We are seeing again and again a close relationship between civil society and government as far as Internet governance issues are concerned... we are seeing a close collaboration in the policymaking process.” A permanent secretary at the Kenya MOIC emphasized the influence of the EAIGF on collaborative policymaking. “Whether it is a technical or social policy it must go through a series of stakeholder hearings. Through [the] East Africa IGF and national IGFs you get to articulate the policies better by discussing them and getting more people understanding what you are trying to do. So, in a forum is where it begins... [the EAIGF] greatly influences our policies and this is usually serving as a test bed of some of the policy directions that we want to take.”

Further, a member of the Kenya MOIC indicated the EAIGF has influenced inclusion of multistakeholder processes in other policy arenas. “In terms of ensuring that the policymaking arm of the government continues to use a multistakeholder approach, it has had a huge impact. It is this sector [ICT] that compels the government to apply the principles of multistakeholderism in all policymaking processes.” The participant further commented that the EAIGF influenced the inclusion of multistakeholder ideals in Kenya’s 2010 constitution, which states the need to promote “involvement of the people in the process of policymaking.”

While some EAIGF stakeholders believe the EAIGF has influenced multistakeholder processes in policy formation outside the forum, others question whether it serves as a “talk shop” with no tangible outcomes. An individual from the UCC believes that the EAIGF “ends up seeming like a talking forum where you just talk, and talk, and talk... it has no teeth and the talking stops at the EAIGF.” A representative from the Rwanda telecommunications regulatory agency believes that the EAIGF needs to “come out of this IGF talk show mode into something a little bit more concrete” and an individual from the CCK raised the concern that if the EAIGF model does not transition from a “talk shop” it may no longer be in operation in a couple of years. These findings align with prior research conducted on the global IGF where stakeholders questioned whether the global IGF has had an impact beyond serving as a multistakeholder discursive space (see [Epstein, 2012](#)).

Multiple stakeholders indicated that the role of the IGF model in the EAC is viewed differently from the global IGF due to its position in a developing region. Participants voiced concerns that the EAIGF should lead to actual policy formation and not serve solely as a discursive space for hearing one another’s perspectives on a policy issue. The convener of the EAIGF stated that “the East Africa region aims to go a little further to get away from all the limitations of the global IGF that is non-decision making and for the regional one we have aimed at discussing a policy issue and actually making sure it has an impact at the national level. The objective of the regional and national IGFs is to go slightly beyond...to implementing those recommendations.” Further, numerous stakeholders and the permanent secretary of Kenya’s MOIC indicated a desire to combine the EAIGF with EACO to ensure the work of the EAIGF is used in actual ICT policy formation.

7. Conclusion

While research has been conducted on the impacts of the global IGF model, the impacts of the IGF within regional contexts, particularly within developing country contexts, has been limited. This study is one of the first to explore the function of the IGF in a developing country region by focusing on the first regional IGF formed globally, the EAIGF. This study focused on the influence of the EAIGF in the region as well as the impacts of institutional endowments on shaping stakeholder power and interactions within the forum.

Participants believed that the forum promoted capacity building, knowledge sharing, and policy transfer within the region. The EAIGF was found to support capacity building by enabling knowledge transfer between civil society, government officials, and technical experts. The forum was also found to promote consensus building and identification of emerging regional Internet governance issues that could be brought to the attention of regional policymaking groups (e.g., EACO) or to the global stage (e.g., the global IGF). Stakeholders indicated that they believed the EAIGF assisted in the formation of regional policies (e.g., the “cyber laws”) by allowing state and non-state actors to openly discuss these policy issues and potential solutions at forum meetings. These interactions are contributing to a transformation in the balance of power over ICT policymaking from nation-state centric to multistakeholder.

While there were numerous participants who believed the EAIGF has had beneficial impacts in the region, some, including the civil society stakeholder who established the EAIGF, criticized it for being too much of a “talk shop” with few tangible outcomes. Participants believed one way to resolve this would be to have EACO oversee the EAIGF. Even though EACO has produced numerous model policy frameworks that have been adopted within the member countries, its exclusive structure and membership fee model may prohibit certain states and stakeholders from participation ultimately prohibiting the EAIGF from achieving its core inclusionary goals.

When comparing the impacts of institutional endowments on participation and power within the EAIGF, states with greater wealth, telecommunications sector development, or policy expertise had greater participation and perceived influence in the EAIGF. Participants indicated that they believed Kenya had the greatest influence within the forum because

of its position as a regional economic leader, its strong telecommunications sector, and its longstanding role as the regional champion for the EAIGF. This finding supports van Gorp and Maitland's (2009) finding that states with greater wealth or expertise may exert more influence within multistakeholder networks. Indeed, the majority of participants and formal presentations in the 2012 EAIGF were by Kenyans. Thus, policy discourse emerging from the EAIGF may be biased to reflect the views of more powerful states or stakeholders (e.g., nation-states with stronger institutional endowments).

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