



## Comments by DotConnectAfrica to the NETmundial Initiative (NMI) April 2015

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### General Introduction

NETMundial Initiative (NMI) came out of the 'Global Multi-stakeholder Meeting on the Future of Internet Governance' that took place in Sao Paulo, Brazil in April 2014.

The draft Terms of Reference (TOR) document has been issued following the working meeting of the Inaugural Coordination Council of the NMI at Stanford University at the end of March 2015 which convened to discuss the organization, role and activities of NMI.

However, in terms of what it is about, and what its general and specific objectives are, the NMI remains an inchoate idea. The organization of the NMI, its role and activities remain undefined. It has no clear mandate and what the organization is about is still being deliberated with the hope of fleshing out the idea as it is 'iteratively developed' through public discussions and comments collection with the hope of formulating a clear idea on how move forward the implementation process of the NETMundial Principles. It is doubtful whether an organization can be created if it lacks a clear objective that would lead to the formulation of its mandate, and strategic mission and vision.

The Draft Terms of Reference (TOR) for the NETMundial Initiative is heavy on circuitous rhetoric and vague descriptions but actually short on specifics.

1. **The NMI has not identified the particular weaknesses in existing Internet Governance Frameworks that it aims (or intends) to repair.** Even before commencing the actualization of the NMI, its facilitators should have first of all produced a comprehensive 'Strength, Weakness, Opportunities & Threats' (SWOT) Analysis of all existing Global Internet Governance Frameworks to see what specific weaknesses there are that the NMI is expected to help address. Without such an inception effort, it is apparent that an arduous attempt is being exerted to create the NMI out of a 'nebula'. Without prior strategic analysis, it is doubtful whether NMI can be designed to achieve any strategic goals in Global Internet Governance or have any effective impact in the Internet Governance Ecosystem.
2. II (Mission Statement) focuses on advancing the implementation of the NETMundial Principles. However, the exact role of NMI has not been clearly defined, and articulated, and as explained in (1) above, could result in a premeditated failure due to lack of proper strategic foundation. A Strategic Global Internet Governance Policy Review should have been done to know whether NMI is actually needed. **What strategic role will NMI play – or what strategic purpose would the NMI fulfill are important questions that have not yet been contemplated; and answers are grossly lacking.**
3. It has been mentioned that the NMI will help address gaps in policy development; meanwhile, it will not be involved in policy setting. **If NMI is not involved in setting policy, how would it be**

**able to address gaps in policy development?** Would this be on the basis of playing a direct role in policy review and evaluation – by simply identifying such gaps? This remains quite nebulous – and again, lacks clarity.

4. **NMI Scope of Activities lack precision and differentiation.** As an IG ‘Clearinghouse’ NMI seems geared towards Internet Governance Advocacy, Cooperation, Collaboration, Engagement and Facilitation – all based on consensus. How much influence in terms of weight and overall substantiality would it have?
5. The imperative for the Global Internet Community to further develop the Internet Governance Ecosystem “to produce operational solutions” – implies that NMI will have a program management/implementation role for current and future Internet issues; **but implementing what exactly?** Again, without any indisputable mandate, its prospective implementation role cannot be envisioned.
6. That NMI will facilitate capacity building and financing **but leaves out where such financing will be mobilized from; and from where such resources will be harnessed for capacity building.**
7. It remains to be understood how the NMI can adequately address the needs and involvement of under-represented areas such as Africa. **Regional IGFs are better frameworks for articulating regional views on Global Internet Governance.** The NMI could actually cause the marginalization of Regional Internet Governance initiatives.
8. **The sort of complementarity that is envisioned between the NMI and existing IG initiatives has not been explained.** The NMI has not clearly explained how it would be different from the IGF. For this reason, the NMI could actually cause the duplication of functions that are already under the purview of the Internet Governance Forum. The IGF that came out of the Working Group on Internet Governance (WGIG) is a multi-stakeholder platform but lacks any decision making authority. If the IGF has any reported short-comings, perhaps, efforts should be made to make the IGF work better. **If the NMI will not be involved in policy-setting, then it would suffer the same fate as the IGF.** Therefore, the conveners/participants of the NMI should integrate their efforts with a view to strengthening the IGF.
9. There is no provision that has been stated within the NMI Scope of Activities (IV) that cannot be done by existing Internet Governance dialogue frameworks. **There is nothing in the NMI Principles that are not also conveyed in the IGF.**
10. III (Rationale & Commitment Principles) – NMI is conceived as an operational solution for current and future Internet issues. **Leaving aside future issues, what are the current Internet issues that the NMI is framed to solve?** This is quite unclear, and assumes that current issues are not being addressed by existing Internet Governance processes and dialogue mechanisms. Moreover, without any policy-setting mandate, this follows that the NMI would also not have any decision-making authority, and as such, it would not be able to provide required solutions. **Without clarity in terms of its commitments; coupled with lack of any substantive objectives and specific mission, the NMI would have no operational effectiveness since such commitments cannot be translated into actionable programs.**