

A Global Forum on National Issues

by [Jim Dempsey](#) [1]

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The inaugural Internet Governance Forum closed last Thursday in Athens, Greece after 4 days of panel discussions and workshops that attracted over 1,000 government officials, business representatives, and non-governmental organizations from around the world. I was there, representing CDT and the Global Internet Policy Initiative (GIPI), our joint project with Internews. In two workshops and a plenary session, I highlighted GIPI as a proven model for working locally to reform national laws and policies in order to foster expanded Internet access in developing countries. Everything you need to know about GIPI can be found [here](#) [2]. Also present was GIPI executive director George Sadowsky, who, over the past 12 years, has educated and advised a generation of Internet technologists and policymakers in the developing world.

As a special advisor to the Chair of the IGF, Sadowsky had a major role in planning the Forum. The unstated question at the IGF was "What is Internet governance?" Based on our experience with GIPI, both George and I stressed repeatedly that 90% of Internet governance is local: telecommunications policy (especially enforcement of competition and interconnection), licensing requirements, limits on use of wireless technology, the privacy framework, and management of country-code Internet domains. Overall, it seems as though the initial misperceptions that equated ICANN with Internet governance have been replaced with a more sophisticated view.

Although some speakers continued to express vague complaints about Western dominance of the Internet, many speakers from developing talked about problems at home and what they are doing to create a framework more conducive to Internet growth. In comments at the closing plenary, I urged participants to follow the adage "Think globally, act locally." I recommended that each country present should convene at the national level an ongoing multi-stakeholder dialogue -- local businesses, government officials, academics and users -- to identify specific barriers and specific solutions that can be implemented through national strategies. The session closed with the announcement that the next IGF will be in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, November 12-15, 2007. The IGF Website, with transcripts, is [here](#) [3].

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