

E-participation

The Internet has entered meeting rooms worldwide. Discussions are broadcast globally; more and more people are engaged in the previously exclusive realm of diplomats; ideas and experiences of millions worldwide can be harvested for better policy decisions. E-participation creates new possibilities for participation in national, regional, and international policy-making.

E-participation can be traced back to 1992 when civil society first used mailing lists at the Rio Earth Summit. This first, and still dominant, phase of e-participation is now supplemented by web-broadcasting from international meetings, allowing people worldwide to follow proceedings as they unfold.

A second, emerging phase involves **interactive** participation in global meetings, allowing participants to contribute to deliberations in real time. Through remote hubs worldwide, they can link discussions at global meetings to local policy context. Instead of passively following the proceedings, by participating in remote hubs they can discuss the local consequences of global decision-making.

It is not surprising that one of the most advanced uses of e-participation in a global context has been the Internet Governance Forum (IGF). Over the last five years, Diplo – together with the IGF Secretariat and the Working Group on Remote Participation – has conceptualised and deployed e-participation through webcast, social networking, and remote hubs.

At the IGF in Vilnius, Lithuania, in September 2010, participants at the venue were joined by 33 local hubs, with hundreds more contributing worldwide through the smart integration of social media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter). For the first time, virtual participants had the same status as those present in person. The line between *in situ* and online participation blurred, creating a unique policy space and vastly extending the reach of the IGF proceedings.

Based on research and practical experience from the IGF, Diplo offers complete support for conceptualising and deploying e-participation in international meetings. This includes strategic planning for remote hubs and workshops, guidelines for meeting organisers, integration of social media tools, and training of moderators.

E-participation offers a flexible, economical option to speak and to be heard. It also increases the quality of dialogue and policy-making. Change will not be wrought by technological marvels, but by the appropriate use of these new tools. Capacity development for e-participation is empowering the world, one remote participant, one remote hub, one community at a time.

For more information about current activities and future collaboration, please contact us at diplo@diplomacy.edu



Inspired by football fans gathering together to watch a match, we developed the concept of remote hubs (Photo: Ekehard Schulz/AP)



At a remote hub in Burundi, participants gather together to follow a debate from IGF 2010 held in Vilnius, Lithuania