

### We Need to Develop Global Goals for the Internet



Foto: ETNO

*Lise Fuhr, member of the ATV, has been appointed to the UN led Internet Governance Forum Leadership Panel. Her ambition is to gather users, tech companies, and infrastructure in developing a set of Global Goals for the internet.*

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In August this year, Academy Member Lise Fuhr was appointed to Internet Governance Forum (IGF) Leadership Panel for a two-year period. The panel is created by the UN to strengthen the IGF and its strategic outlook. Lise Fuhr accepted the role with a clear ambition in mind, namely that the IGF should develop Global Goals for the internet.

“Many of UN’s Global Sustainability Goals refer indirectly to the internet. For instance,

goal no 17 refers to the number of internet users. But as far as I am concerned, the internet is a defining technological tool in our lives and therefore we need to have Global Goals specifically for the internet. But when we talk about the governance of the internet, the discussion needs to be more technically detailed and therefore we are better off with specific goals for the internet.”

“But still”, Lise Fuhr says, “it is important that they are goals that we can work towards, jointly, that they are not defined by the IGF Leadership Panel. The digital world evolves at such a fast pace because new stakeholders and new technologies continuously change the possibilities on the internet.”

In raising this point, Lise Fuhr addresses two of the core issues that the IGF Leadership Panel is expected to address: Firstly, is that the internet is not accessible for everyone. The preconditions for speaking of Global Goals for the internet are very different world-wide, both in cultural and practical terms. Secondly, the speed that characterizes the internet: how can we make rules for something that is under constant development?

### **The first step is a broad dialogue**

For some commentators, the IGF Leadership Panel is too much ‘top-down’. The panel has high-profile members such as one of the inventors of the internet, Vint Cerf, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Maria Ressa, as well as government representatives from around the world. Thus, Lise Fuhr considers it important that the panel has a dialogue with those, who actually take part in shaping the internet, such as the tele-operators, domain suppliers, the big platforms such as Google and Meta.

“I find it important that we as members are impartial, and that we must gather information from many stakeholders of the internet society. Including governments and the European Union. We are a really international crowd, so if we all go out to investigate and find out what’s going on, we are able to identify and address the most pertaining issues,” Lise Fuhr says.

IGF’s existence is based on a mandate from the UN but is not subject to the limitations under which UN operates. The IGF have been able to discuss subjects such as neutrality, freedom of speech and ‘splinternet’, i.e., the notion that the internet is being fragmented by governments or by tech giants. Lise Fuhr hopes that this broader mandate can help IGF become a forum for unbiased dialogue that can help draw the broad lines of the internet and its development.

“It’s important that we understand the needs of the internet’s different stakeholders as well as their scope. Industry brings innovation, the private user or consumer have needs, infrastructure provides the framework. If the three elements do not come together, we are going to miss important aspects.”

Industry clearly has different demands and requirements regarding the infrastructure. But in the end, industry and infrastructure providers will find a way to collaborate – which leaves the consumer as the weaker part, potentially feeling left behind.

“This is where IGF can be an important player. Consumers must be able to understand what their data is used for, and what they will gain from sharing it across the internet. If they do not understand this, we will miss important opportunities for development”, Lise Fuhr explains and continues:

“If we do not act now, we risk creating a damaging alienation. Yes, transparency is important, but you need to understand what the transparency is about. And as a consumer you need to understand what you have to look out for. This is something we, as consumers, have to learn along the way. But the underlying principals also need to be in place, and I think IGF is the right forum for developing these principles.”

### **Global Goals for Everybody**

Still, the question is whether it is possible to set up Global Goals for the internet when user conditions are so different. According to the UN, in some developing countries only 19% of the population have access to the internet. In these countries, the discussion will not focus on openness and freedom, but rather on basic need and access.

Lise Fuhr elaborates, “Our first priority is to have an internet that is open and accessible to everyone, and that more and more people have access. As this is realized, we also need to engage these new internet users so that we do not shape the internet only on ideals of the West.”

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“It is paramount that we create the framework for this dialogue. A farmer in India does not necessarily have the same requirements or needs as a farmer in Denmark, but they both need to be connected to the internet and feel comfortable about it. If we don’t address that issue, I believe that we will lose hold of what the internet is used for and how it develops.”

Another important priority for Lise Fuhr is to strengthen IGF’s visibility in countries around the world. For a number of years, IGF has had nation level activities, i.e., national IGF meetings that address internet-related specific to the country in question. But up until now, this has mostly taken place on a grass-roots level, and several of them have imploded. The discussions in IGF must be lifted to a higher political level and be more concrete so that the goals that we define actually solve problems in the individual countries. At the same time, the local IGFs can provide the IGF HQ with important feedback.

“Things are moving really fast, and IGF can’t be at the cutting edge of technology, but we can develop principles that are independent of technology. Next, I expect that we can use

the Global Goals for the internet to strengthen national discussions about the internet. This is also a way to leave the national guidelines to each country, with the IGF principles as a starting point,” says Lise Fuhr.

Finally, there is the overarching question: Will the pervasiveness of the internet and platforms such as Meta change what it means to be a virtual human being? Humans have been used to a physical presence, transporting themselves in order to buy stuff or experience something. These limitations are being erased in the digital world.

“This is an interesting question”, Lise Fuhr responds, and continues, “I might not be the right person to answer, though. I am from a generation that has grown up in the physical world, and now function in a virtual world, but how about the generation growing up now – in the virtual world? Things are moving so fast, so I don’t think I should be the one to define it. I think the young people who are totally into this, are the ones who need to take part in the discussion. They are the generation that will be even more influenced by the internet. Therefore, the younger generation is a stakeholder group for me to focus on.”

### Do you want to contribute to the discussion?

For several years, ATV’s Digital Advisers have been working to provide better internet to everyone in Denmark, and have discussed opportunities and challenges presented to us by the ubiquity of the internet, e.g. its energy consumption.

Do you want to join the discussion or help define a set of global goals for the internet? Or do you think ATV should play a role? You are welcome to reach out to Lise Fuhr ([fuhr\(a\)etno.eu](mailto:fuhr(a)etno.eu)) or Maja Lænkholm from ATV, [ml@atv.dk](mailto:ml@atv.dk).

More information about: [IGF Leadership Panel Members | Internet Governance Forum \(intgovforum.org\)](https://www.intgovforum.org/).