The Digital Opportunities Task Force:
Results of an Email Survey of Participants

Jeffrey A. Hart
Professor
Department of Political Science
Indiana University
Woodburn Hall 210
Bloomington, IN 47405
Email: hartj@indiana.edu
Web: http://mypage.iu.edu/~hartj

Abstract

During the past decade, the G8 countries have discussed a number of issues related to the governance of cyberspace. These include (among others): the regulation and taxation of e-commerce, the protection of individual privacy and security, the maintenance of infrastructure security, and the promotion of broadband infrastructure. While these discussions were mostly initiated by the U.S. government, they moved over time in a direction not anticipated by any of the G8 governments. Between 1999 and 2002, the G8 discussions in the Digital Opportunities Task Force (DOT Force) focused on how to bridge the global digital divide. This paper summarizes the results of a survey of participants administered via e-mail.

Introduction

The representatives of the countries that comprised the Group of Eight (G8) began
to address the problems of coordinating policies regarding the governance of cyberspace
in the early 1990s.[1] The governance issues they dealt with initially included, among
others, the establishment of norms, principles, and rules regarding the interconnection of
computer networks via networks of networks like the Internet, rights of access to those
networks, pricing of access, monitoring of network-mediated economic transactions,
intellectual property protection, taxation of goods and services delivered via the
networks, privacy, security, and a variety of other matters thought to affect the
confidence of users. Towards the end of the decade, the G8 turned to a new issue:
reversing the tendencies toward an increasing "global digital divide" between rich and
poor countries.

In a previous paper I suggested that one of the main reasons why the G8
addressed the question of bridging the digital divide was the G8's need to respond to
criticisms by anti-globalization forces that economic globalization and global economic
governance were undemocratic and therefore resulted in increasing levels of global
inequality. The members of the G8 wanted to provide a counterargument to the anti-
globalization movement's claim that there was a democratic deficit. To do this credibly,
the G8 attempted to transcend its inherently intergovernmental character by including
representatives from "civil society" in its deliberations on the global digital divide. The
DOT Force developed a method called the "multi-stakeholder approach." Based on the

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[1] I will use G8 to stand for both the Group of Seven (G7) major industrialized countries that met annually at
international economic summits from 1974 through 1997 (the United States, Canada, Japan, Britain,
France, Germany, and Italy) and the Group of Eight (G8) that began in 1998 with the addition of Russia as
the eighth member of the group.

survey of participants discussed below, many of them considered the multi-stakeholder approach to be a success, and some thought it should be deepened and generalized to other issue-areas.

Origins of the Debate over the Digital Divide

Although originating in the late 1960s in research begun under the auspices of the U.S. Department of Defense's Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA), the Internet emerged in the 1990s as the most important network of networks with the capability, in principle, to interconnect every computer (large or small) on the planet. While the ARPANET was built in the 1970s to interconnect military contractors with one another, it was succeeded first by the NSFNET, which expanded interconnection to university scientists and engineers, and then by the Internet. Commercial interconnection to the Internet began in the late 1980s and soon many businesses had shifted at least some of their activities to cyberspace.[2]

By the early 1990s, the U.S. government began to ask the rest of the world to adopt policies that it believed would be conducive to the spread of Internet-based commercial activity. This was the Global Information Infrastructure (GII) initiative of the Clinton administration. One particularly important aspect of the Clinton administration's GII initiative was the push for policies of minimal restrictions on e-commerce in order to encourage the shift of economic transactions to the Internet.

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[2] Jeffrey Hart, François Bar and Robert Reed, "The Building of the Internet: Implications for the Future of Broadband Networks", *Telecommunications Policy*, 16 (November 1992), pp. 666-689. For other accounts, see Katie Hafner and Matthew Lyon, *When Wizards Stay Up Late* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998); Tim Berners-Lee, *Weaving the Web* (San Francisco: HarperBusiness, 2000); Vint Cerf, "A Brief History of the Internet and Related Networks," http://www.isoc.org/internet/history/cerf.shtml; and Janet Abbate, *Inventing the Internet* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT, 1999).

According to one official publication, *The Framework for Global Electronic Commerce*, there was a danger of killing off the goose that lays the golden eggs:

> Commerce on the Internet could total tens of billions of dollars by the turn of the century. For this potential to be realized fully, governments must adopt a non-regulatory, market-oriented approach to electronic commerce, one that facilitates the emergence of a transparent and predictable legal environment to support global business and commerce. Official decision makers must respect the unique nature of the medium and recognize that widespread competition and increased consumer choice should be the defining features of the new digital marketplace.[3]

The Clinton administration called on the World Trade Organization (WTO) to declare the Internet a tax-free environment and to request the development of a uniform commercial code for electronic commerce. They asked that there be a WTO effort to make national intellectual property regimes more consistent and enforceable. A series of reports were issued to provide background information for these and other related policy proposals over the next three years.[4] The U.S. government was largely successful in these policy initiatives, although not without generating considerable controversy.

The Clinton administration also called for a meeting of the information ministers of the G8 in 1995 to be held on February 25-26 in Brussels. The main topic of discussion

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[3] *Framework for Global Electronic Commerce* (Washington, D.C.: July 1, 1997), p. 2. The document bears the names of both President William Clinton and Vice President Albert Gore.

[4] Marcia S. Smith, John D. Moteff, Lennard G. Kruger, Glenn J. McLoughlin, and Jeffrey W. Seifert, *Internet: An Overview of Key Technology Policy Areas Affecting Its Use and Growth* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, updated January 21, 2001), p. 12.

was the means by which to "encourage and promote the innovation and development of new technologies, including, in particular, the implementation of open, competitive, and world-wide information infrastructures." The conference concluded with the identification of a set of pilot projects that would benefit from international cooperation.[5] These projects were adopted formally and funded by the G8 at the following summit.

At around the same time, a joint symposium of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) countries and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in Vancouver, Canada, addressed "Building the Foundation for the 21st Century." The APEC-OECD symposium laid the framework for a market-led policy for infrastructure and service development. The OECD followed up in Turku, Finland, in 1997 with a joint government and business conference on the theme of "Dismantling the Barriers to Global Electronic Commerce." In 1998, the OECD held a ministerial conference in Ottawa on "A Borderless World: Realizing the Potential of Electronic Commerce."[6] It was at this conference that the members of the OECD agreed to the Ottawa Taxation Framework Conditions (see below for details). APEC also held follow-up meetings that focused on using the Internet and information technologies to solve problems of economic development. These meetings probably influenced later discussions on bridging the digital divide among the G8.[7]

The World Bank formed a Global Information Infrastructure Commission (GIIC) in February 1995 that has met annually since then. The first full meeting of the GIIC

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[5] G7 Information Society Conference, Information Society Website, http://europa.eu.int/ISPO/intcoop/g8/i_g8conference.html.

[6] The official website for the conference is http://www.ottawaoecdconference.org/.

[7] Richard Beaird, "Opening Remarks," OECD-APEC Forum, Policy Frameworks for the Digital Economy, Honolulu, Hawaii, January 14-17, 2003, http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/19/56/2492657.pdf.

took place in Washington in July 1995. The GIIC was designed to facilitate cooperation between governments and the private sector in order "to foster private sector leadership and private-public sector cooperation in the development of information networks and services to advance global economic growth, education and quality of life."[8]

The Commerce Department issued a report in 2000 entitled *Falling Through the Net: Toward Digital Inclusion.*[9] This was the first major U.S. governmental effort to study and document inequalities in access to and usage of the Internet across social groups. The report showed a trend of increasing usage of the Internet but also an increasing gap in usage between urban and rural, minority and non-minority groups, and high and low socio-economic status households. For some variables, such as gender and income, the gap was decreasing. But the key finding was that "noticeable divides still exist between those with different levels of income and education, different racial and ethnic groups, old and young, single and dual-parent families, and those with and without disabilities."[10]

The NTIA report focused mainly on the United States, but it did not take long for similar studies to appear that highlighted international aspects of the digital divide. For example, the World Economic Forum launched its Global Digital Divide Initiative (GDDI) in 2000 "to develop public-private partnerships that would help bridge the gap

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[8] GII Commission Inaugural Meeting, http://www.giic.org/events/ann1.asp.

[9] National Telecommunication and Information Administration, U.S. Department of Commerce, *Falling through the Net: Toward Digital Inclusion* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2000), http://www.ntia.doc.gov/ntiahome/fttn00/contents00.html.

[10] *Falling Through the Net*, executive summary.

between those who have ICT access, skills and resources and those who do not."[11] The International Labor Organization released a study in 2001 arguing that lack of access to information and communication technologies (ICTs) on the part of workers in the developing world denied them access to jobs in the technology sector. The report noted that access to ICTs without appropriate education and training would not be a sufficient response to the growing North-South digital divide.[12] Similar studies were done by the World Bank and special agencies of the United Nations.

The Okinawa Charter

At the international economic summit held in Okinawa and Kyushu in June-July 2000, the G8 adopted the *Okinawa Charter on Global Information Society*.[13] A draft for this document was prepared for pre-summit discussions with representatives from developing countries at a meeting in Tokyo just before the summit under the sponsorship of Japanese Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori. The Japanese government wanted the G8 to go beyond the scheduled discussions of debt relief in Okinawa summit, partly as a response to the demonstrations against the G8 and the WTO that had taken place in Seattle in 1999. It raised the possibility that there would be a large fund of new aid money available to developing countries to assist them in the process of integrating new

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[11] World Economic Forum, Global Digital Divide Initiative,
http://www.weforum.org/site/homepublic.nsf/Content/Global+Digital+Divide+Initiative.

[12] International Labor Organization, *World Employment Report 2001: Life at Work in the Information Economy* (Geneva: ILO, 2001).

[13] http://www.DOT Force.org/reports/it1.html.

information technologies into their ongoing economic development efforts – possibly as much as $15-20 billion.[14]

The Okinawa Charter started by stating that ICTs are "fast becoming a vital engine for the world economy." It argued that ICTs have the potential to transform economies and societies because of their "power to help individuals and societies use knowledge and ideas." The Okinawa Charter put forward a principle of inclusion in which "everyone, everywhere should be enabled to participate in and no one should be excluded from the benefits of the global information society." It stressed the importance of governmental leadership in creating an "appropriate policy and regulatory environment" which included the fostering of competition and innovation in an overall environment of economic and financial stability. It called for "collaboration to optimize global networks, fight abuses that undermine the integrity of the network, bridge the digital divide, invest in people, and promote global access and participation." The last paragraph of the preamble to the Okinawa Charter reiterated the G8's commitment to bridging the global digital divide.[15]

The second section of the Okinawa Charter focused on the need to create the right policy and regulatory environment for ICTs to have a positive impact. The private sector "plays a leading role" but "it is up to governments to create a predictable, transparent, and non-discriminatory policy and regulatory environment…" The document went on to stress the importance of enforcing intellectual property rights and liberalizing international flows, especially e-commerce. It urged taxation policies consistent with

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[14] Clay Chandler, "Rich Pay Heed to the Poor as G8 Summit Opens," *Washington Post*, July 21, 2000, p. A19; email survey of DOT Force participants.

[15] *Okinawa Charter on Global Information Society,* http://www.DOT Force.org/reports/it1.html.

those pursued by the OECD, "continuing the practice of not imposing customs duties on electronic transmissions," and the adoption of interoperable, market-driven standards. Like the OECD efforts described briefly above, the Okinawa Charter identified privacy protection, electronic authentication, and security to be important areas for future discussion.

The remainder of the document reaffirmed the commitment of the G8 to bridging the global digital divide and suggested ways of working with other international organizations and private sector groups to achieve this goal. In the final pages, the Okinawa Charter announced the decision of the G8 to establish a Digital Opportunity Taskforce (DOT Force) to respond to the needs of the developing countries. The Okinawa Charter became the foundational document for a G8 effort that was to begin in 2000 and end in 2003 with the creation of a number of pilot programs, reports, and policy dialogues meant to advance the state of art in applying ICTs to development concerns.

The DOT Force

After the Okinawa Summit, forty three teams from organizations representing governments, the private sector, non-profit organizations, and international organizations were assembled to "identify ways in which the digital revolution can benefit all the world's people, especially the poorest and most marginalized groups."[16] The first meeting of the DOT Force was held in Tokyo on November 27-28, 2000. The meeting was chaired by Japanese Deputy Foreign Minister Yoshiji Nogami. A schedule was

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[16] *Digital Opportunities for All: Meeting the Challenge*, Report of the Digital Opportunity Task Force (DOT Force) including a proposal for a Genoa Plan of Action, May 11, 2001, http://www.DOT Force.org/reports/DOT_Force_Report_V_5.0h.html.

established for the preparation of a report prior to the next international economic summit in Genoa. The report, to be finished by May 2001, would be drafted with the help of the World Bank and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). It would deal with the issues discussed in the Okinawa Charter and would be "action-oriented."[17]

The report that resulted, *Digital Opportunities for All: Meeting the Challenge*, concluded that "when wisely applied, ICT offer enormous opportunities to narrow social and economic inequalities and support sustainable wealth creation, and thus help to achieve the broader development goals that the international community has set."[18] It proposed four areas for action:

1. fostering policy, regulatory, and network readiness;

2. improving connectivity, increasing access, and lowering costs;

3. building human capacity; and

4. encouraging participation in global e-commerce and other e-Networks.[19]

The members of the DOT Force went so far as to assert that "the basic right of access to knowledge and information is a prerequisite for modern human development." The enthusiasm for using ICT as the primary vehicle for this was palpable in the report's verbiage.

The report went on to discuss and summarize the UN Millennium Declaration and the related Development Goals, which included, among other items, reducing the number of people living in extreme poverty by half between 1990 and 2015. It stressed the

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[17] *First Meeting of the Digital Opportunity Task Force* (dot force) (Summary), November 30, 2000, http://www.library.utoronto.ca/g7/dot_force/summary-nov-00.html.

[18] *Digital Opportunities for All*, p. 3.

[19] *Ibid*, pp. 4-5.

potential utility of using ICTs to reduce global inequality but also the need to put "in place the appropriate infrastructure," which "is a multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder task." The report referred to the need for governments to work together with non-profit organizations, private firms, and international organizations. The report claimed that the DOT Force was the first G8 initiative to take this idea seriously. This emphasis on multi-stakeholder participation was no doubt partly a response to the criticisms of the so-called "civil society organizations" about their lack of access to decision-making in the G8, the WTO, and the World Bank/IMF systems.

The report did not ignore the difficulties of the tasks it recommended the G8 to undertake. It included discussions of the problem of general skepticism about the potential role of ICTs in development, opposition to using ICTs to enhance transparency and thereby reduce corruption, and the possibility of negative reactions to the effects of ICT diffusion on employment patterns. It called for fresh thinking on these matters and for a search for best practices on a global basis. The report concluded with nine "action points" that later were called the Genoa Plan of Action. The Plan of Action was fully endorsed by G8 leaders at the Genoa Summit in July 2001.

The G8 was led by Italy in 2001 and Canada in 2002. The governments of the two countries were given the responsibility to facilitate the work of the DOT Force after the Genoa Summit. The DOT Force implementation teams proposed a number of new projects in the following seven areas:

- national e-strategies

- access and connectivity

- human capacity building

- entrepreneurship

- ICTs for health

- local content and applications

- global policy participation

These projects and the subprojects associated with them would continue beyond the life-span of the DOT Force itself, mainly via a hand off to working groups of the newly created UN ICT Task Force (see Appendix II for a listing)..

The DOT Force prepared a final document entitled *Report Card: Digital Opportunities for All* that was published in June 2002 in time for discussion at the G8 summit in Kananaskis.[20] This report asserted that the "multi-stakeholder approach of the DOT Force now serves as the model for other global 'ICT for development' initiatives that follow in its footsteps."[21] With the conclusion of the Kananaskis summit the DOT Force officially ceased operations.

An E-Mail Survey of Participants

In an attempt to see the DOT Force from the perspective of the participants, I sent a list of questions via email to 68 participants in the Spring of 2004:

I have been commissioned by John Kirton of the University of Toronto's

G7/G8 Study Center to write a paper on the history of the DOT Force. This

paper will be presented at a conference to be held in early June in

Bloomington, Indiana. I would therefore appreciate your prompt attention

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[20] Digital Opportunity Task Force, *Report Card: Digital Opportunities for All* (Ottawa: DOT Force, June 2002), http://www.DOT Force.org/reports/documents/64/General-Report_e.pdf.

[21] Ibid, p. 2.

to this list of questions.

Please answer the following questions by email or regular mail. I will

not reveal your identity in any publication other than to say that you

were a DOT Force participant.

1.   How did you first get involved in the DOT Force?

2.   On what issues on the DOT Force's overall agenda were you

involved? Try to estimate the percentage of your time spent on specific

agenda items.

3.   Were you pleased with the overall outcome of the DOT Force's work?

4.   What outcomes did you think were most worthwhile? (Please be as

specific as possible)

5.   What DOT Force projects are likely to have the largest long-term

impact?

6.   Do you think that the multi-stakeholder approach to including

members of civil society in DOT Force deliberations was successful? If so,

why; if not, why not?

7.   If you could redo any aspect of the DOT Force's work, what would

you have done differently and why?

8.   Please read the attached paper which is my first attempt to

describe the history of the DOT Force and send me comments and

criticism. Feel free to send or suggest additional documents that would

help me to improve the paper. Thanks very much in advance.

I sent 68 emails and received 21 replies for a response rate of __ percent. The answers to the first question tended to reflect the official role of the respondent. Representatives of governments responded by saying that their government was a member of the G8 or had been asked to join the DOT Force deliberations by G8 members. Representatives of private companies tended to volunteer their company's expertise in ICT matters and sometimes helped to pay for meetings and projects. Representatives of NPOs and civil society organizations mentioned their expertise in technology issues and their participation in other related forums.

Most participants were unable or unwilling to estimate how much time they spent on which issue (question 2). They did report, generally, that they were pleased with the outcome, although some said that they would be better able to judge after the various DOT Force projects had a chance to be fully implemented. Here is an example of a positive response to question 3 from one of the participants:

> The DOT Force exceeded its objectives, i.e. to produce a 'state of the art' report to convince G-8 decision makers that fighting the digital divide was both important and feasible. Among its other achievements, [four] are worth quoting:
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> 1.   bring together civil society, governments, business and IGOs to promote an agenda for action in which all could identify benefits
>
> 2.   produce an action plan organized around a limited number of major headings
>
> 3.   generate a new momentum for tackling the Digital Divide; from this momentum, the agenda of the UN ICT Task Force was born, as well as several components of the WSIS Plan of Action

4. the whole issue of 'governance' in an information-intensive economy has been redefined in many respects by the work of the DOT Force

A participant from a developing country was somewhat less satisfied with the results because promises in Okinawa of billions of dollars in funding for ICT projects had not materialized:

> The overall outcome was good -- excellent materials how to initiate projects in ICT. There was crazy fancy of the 25 - 15 billion US dollars pledged at [the] Okinawa meeting which I am told Bangladesh has been able to access some of the funds.

Another participant was critical of the results, but compared the DOT Force process favorably to the UN ICT Task Force:

> I don't think that the documents and especially implementation of the projects were even close to desired, but based on my latest experience with the UN ICT TF (where I am an advisor), the Genoa Plan of Action is still the best document on ICT even developed on the international level, as well as G8 process is much more efficient than that one in the UN.

Finally, one of the participants from private industry made the following rather negative observations:

> Based on the above situation of the overall climate in the IT industry and the competing creation of the UN ICT TF, the outcome was less than I would have hoped. Also, given the great expectations raised by the Japanese at the Okinawa summit, where the prospect of 15 bn USD funding for ICT projects was put on the agenda, a lot less was achieved than was suggested by that big number

(which, in my opinion, never really materialized). I would rather have done a

few real projects, helping real people, and not simply written policy papers that

later on had no real impact.

To summarize, the participants sampled had a range of responses to questions 3

and 4 about the results of the DOT Force deliberations, but the main common theme was

that the results were mostly positive, the reports were well written, the multi-stakeholder

approach was a good one, and the DOT Force had fed good ideas into the UN ICT

process even if the latter did not appear to be likely to produce much in the way of

results.

On the question of the potential long-range impact of the DOT Force programs

(question 5), the participants were mostly cautious in their assessments. Again the most

negative response came from a private business representative:

The DOT Force has largely disintegrated, and individual projects are carried on

by individual contributors, but not as DOT Force projects. There is no more

communication within the DOT Force or its Informal Network structure, except

perhaps amongst project participants. But the DOT Force as a group is no longer

visible.

Another participant stressed the consciousness-raising implications of the DOT Force's

work as being more important than any specific program:

I would say that the overall awareness on the issue within government elites is

the most important outcome of DOT Force. I don't think that any specific project

or Action Point had very strong influence. This was specifically well seen in the

outcomes of December 2003 WSIS and the UN Internet Governance Forum in

March 2004.

Similarly, another participant argued that "the climate of trust created with developing

countries and civil society will have long-term impact."

Responses to question 6 about the importance of the multi-stakeholder approach

were mostly positive. For example, one participant said:

A climate of trust was built around (1) the candid recognition of differences

among objectives, concerns and visions, and (2) the identification of 'frontier

subjects' (e.g. open source) or collective challenges (e.g. hunger, HIV-AIDS)

around which points of view could be combined and actions identified.

Another participant commented as follows:

Yes, it [the multi-stakeholder approach] definitely was [successful]. As well as

involvement of a private sector - for example, current representation in the UN

ICT TF is a unique example for UN structures - and this is an outcome of DOT

Force structure.

My personal view of this issue is that at the end of 90-s governments of

the industrial countries realized that they are losing control on the globalization

processes, and that was the main reason [for] this attempt to establish [the]

multi-stakeholder approach and Public-Private partnership. Unfortunately, the

events of the beginning of the new century changed priorities and resulted in

less interest of governments in partnering with the private sector and civil

society.

Another thoughtful response to this question came from a participant who was a representative of a nonprofit organization (NPO):

> Yes, [the multi-stakeholder approach was] successful -- actually very successful, I think civil society groups were among the most active and productive. I think more transparency in the initial processes would have given more legitimacy in the eyes of civil society generally (but we're a hard to satisfy group!) I think civil society recognizes that at the end of the day, final word-smithing is the task of governments, but so long as that task honors the commitments made during earlier discussions/negotiations, etc. then that's fine. I think the problem/potential problem with a high level international processes like DOT Force, is not with the NPO and private sector, it's government and particularly what happens when there's a change of government during the process. For the G8, in any given year there's likely to be an election in one of member states. Specifically, the change of US administrations made a significant difference, in approach (not enthusiastic) and content. This, I think, is the risk of such level of multi stakeholder partnerships.

Both these respondents were hinting at the fact that the change in the U.S. administration following the 2000 elections and the shifts in U.S. policies following the September 11, 2001 attacks had had a negative impact on the DOT Force's efforts to create a precedent for multi-stakeholder approaches to global governance.

The responses to question 7 were all over the map. One respondent wanted the DOT Force to conclude its business at the end of the Genoa Summit instead of waiting until the Kananaskis Summit. Another thought that too much attention had been paid to

the "digital divide" and not enough to the creation of digital opportunities. Several participants suggested that more should have been done to educate their own citizens about ICT issues and to insist upon broader societal participation in ICT-related deliberations. Several respondents said there should have been better funding and more follow up in the G8 instead of handing over the initiative to the UN ICT Task Force. One participant thought that there were too many subcommittees in the DOT Force and not enough coordination of their separate activities.

Finally, several participants read the paper I sent them and commented on it. In general, they agreed that the multi-stakeholder approach was a DOT Force innovation that should be studied carefully and perhaps used in other forums. In their responses to other questions, several of the participants explicitly mentioned the problem of legitimacy in global governance and the desirability of encouraging the participation of nongovernmental actors in the designing of action plans and programs. I was struck by the fact that several of the participants who were government officials saw the main value of the DOT Force as allowing them to design and implement innovative bilateral aid programs.

Conclusions

The email survey summarized above, although limited in its response rate, provided useful and reasonably consistent information about the views of participants in the DOT Force. The participants mostly agreed that the DOT Force was a success, particularly in innovating a multi-stakeholder approach by creating teams of representatives from governments, for-profit and nonprofit organizations, civil society

18

organizations and intergovernmental organizations to arrive at innovative solutions to difficult problems. They agreed that such deliberative structures were likely to produce greater legitimacy for the final decisions of intergovernmental institutions, like the G8, that played a key role in global economic governance than pre-existing structures. They discounted the likelihood that larger forums, like the UN ICT Task Force, would produce positive results and they identified problems with both the DOT Force and the UN ICT Task Force processes that could be useful in designing better deliberative forums in the future.