

## ***Advancing Solutions for Connectivity: Improving Global Coordination and Collaboration***

Co-organizers: ICANN, IEEE, Internet Society, International Telecommunication Union, Global Connect, UNESCO, World Bank, World Economic Forum

### **Summary**

The co-organizers of this session were a group of diverse organizations, joining in an effort to improve coordination and collaboration among our respective projects and initiatives striving to achieve the common goal of universal Internet access by 2020. Recognizing the benefits of our separate activities, communities and strengths, the organizations resolved to work together and to leverage our efforts in implementing and accelerating progress on expanding an accessible, global, and open Internet for everyone.

As a first step, we invited all IGF-participants to discuss the various challenges of connecting the remaining billions and to share their perspectives on the solutions. Organized as an interactive work-session, the event started with presentations on a set of proposed themes, followed by breakout discussions led by subject matter experts to identify solutions and synergies among the community's various initiatives. The session was concluded with an interactive panel discussion on the current status of universal Internet access in six geographic regions of the world.

This summary of the discussions is to serve as input to the IGF's initiative on "Connecting the Next Billion Phase II".

### **Thematic Issues Discussed**

Following a round of short thematic presentations by subject matter experts on some of the challenges of expanding access and the digital divide, the group broke out into small working groups to further discuss the topics presented, and to dive deeper into the intricacies and possible solutions. The following themes were discussed:

#### **Improving Data for Internet Inclusion**

The group pointed to cases where obtaining useful data from companies could be beneficial, but that there are legal impediments. Among the greatest needs is impact data and data comparability. Among the opportunities in improved data gathering were the locations of cell towers; data on rights of way; on repairs to roads and digging trenches – all potentially shareable. Engagement of civil society was also identified as key element, even though their resources are dedicated to working with cases on the ground.

#### **Coordination on Basic Digital Skills Training**

The discussion around skills emphasized that people need to see the value-added in the needed skills to acquire them. A big part of the challenge around building skills was thought to also encompass helping people understand what is in it for them and thus drive demand. Socio-cultural challenges, where women and girls may not have access because they are forbidden from having access, are other factors that also link to the skills area. The group put an emphasis that there are many issues that are intertwined, where solving for one point there is a reaction in all parts of the user eco-system that will happen as people increasingly achieve the needed skills. It was also noted that there is a need to develop information literacy for people to make choices and understand what they're seeing, and how to put it into context what they're reading with that of the real world. The group also discussed the opportunity of using public libraries as one approach to scale skill-training.

## Gender and the Digital Divide

The group emphasized that gender and the digital divide is more than just giving a woman access to the Internet or a mobile phone - it is about the entire ecosystem. It is also about empowering women and girls to understand that there are opportunities and options for them online, was the main conclusion of the group discussing 'Gender gap'. In addition, the group expressed concern over harassment directed towards women online, which in many cases keeps women completely offline or limiting their engagements. The group also pointed to affordability, education, and that women need to be given equal opportunities in order to see change. It was also noted that mainstream media plays a great role in shaping the perceptions, and needs to be involved in a positive way.

## Infrastructure Development and Impact Investing for Connectivity

The group identified two broad categories of 'needs'. The first involves areas which enjoy connectivity, but where an increased demand would drive investment and incentivize businesses to invest in these areas. The second category involved areas where connectivity is low or non-existent, and there is no true demand. Among the proposed solutions in the second category were different sharing models and community networks, using low cost tools to get access that would create a demand and a subsequent business case. Another solution was based on the fact that the delivery of government services to many remote areas are currently expensive, and to present the business case to governments that investments in connectivity and to digitalize those services would provide long-term cost savings. There was also an idea to increase outside investment in small projects that currently did not have the scale or were too risky by bundling them together in a diversified investment portfolio of projects to increase scale and reduce risk.

## Youth and Connectivity

Centered around the central question, 'How is youth affected by the lack of connectivity?', the group concluded that the lack of Internet access has a direct influence on knowledge and youth empowerment. Among the issues identified was the skills gap within the broader group of youth, where concepts such as "digital natives" should not be equated with having the actual skills for meaningful use of the Internet. Among the solutions was to utilize libraries as hubs for digital skills development. Another identified concern was the case of online 'filter bubbles', amplified through social networks, which have a direct impact on the way they shape thoughts and expose privacy without our (consumers') knowledge.

## Regional Perspectives and Common Challenges

The session was concluded with a series of short "lightning talks" on the regional challenges in Europe; Latin America; North America; Africa; Asia and the Middle East, followed by a subsequent panel discussion. The discussions identified seven themes of challenges that were present to varying degrees in all regions:

- **Taxation:** Creating artificially high access costs, and in some countries combined with conflicting policies and government programs that aimed to expand access
- **Capacity building:** The need to improve digital skills, and to incorporate digital skills training in school curricula.
- **Role of government and control (beyond taxation):** Tendency of governments to focus their policies and efforts on access control rather than access growth.
- **Provide backhaul/middle mile connectivity:** Deploying backhaul infrastructure is a persistent problem that needs greater investments.
- **Provide more spectrum/opportunistic sharing:** Sharing of, and taking advantage of unused, spectrum frequencies.
- **Close gender gap:** The digital gender divide is a persistent feature across all regions, and there needs to be more attention from policy makers of getting women online.
- **Local language content:** Locally relevant content, accessible in local languages, is an important driver for Internet adoption and increase demand.