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Internet Society Contribution to CITEL PCC.1. Preparatory Meeting for the ITU World Telecommunication Development Conference 2017 (WTDC-17)

Introduction

The Internet Society (ISOC) is committed to making the Internet available to everyone, everywhere. For twenty-five years, the Internet Society has worked collaboratively with our global community and diverse stakeholders across the globe to advance Internet growth and promote its open development, evolution, and use for the benefit of all people. Experience has taught us that the challenges for enabling access for Internet growth are complex and interrelated. A "one-size-fits-all" approach is not the most effective way to achieve desired outcomes. The latter is an important consideration in view of the common themes that have emerged from the Development Sector's (ITU-D's) WTDC-17 Regional Preparatory Meetings (RPMs). ITU-D RPM common themes reflect the context of digital inclusion and the digital divide related issues, highlighted at WTDC-14, that still remain. The challenges identified at the RPMs provide an excellent road-map that can be addressed during WTDC-17.

As an associate member, the Internet Society is pleased to submit our contribution to CITEL PCC.1. Our contribution draws on the progress that has been made, since WTDC-14, to expand Internet connectivity, and highlights the Multistakeholder and Enabling Environment approaches to support and expand policies for access to ensure that Internet growth continues and meets the goals of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. As the Development Sector and its Members define new projects and activities, the Internet Society suggests the integration of these approaches into the draft work plans and activities of ITU-D.

Beyond WTDC 2014

Participants at WTDC-14 recognized the important role that information communications technologies (ICTs) play in socio-economic development, noting that no one should be offline.[1] While substantial progress has been made to make Internet access available to people that did not have it before, 3.9 billion people are still without an Internet connection. More than half of the world's population is still off-line. The ITU ICT Facts also reveal that the digital divide persists by gender, income and geography, and markedly, those offline are disproportionately located in Least Developed Countries (LDCs). While Internet access has increased overall, the Internet penetration rates are highest amongst men than women, and the gender gap is widest in Africa and greatest amongst LDCs.[2] Without an Internet connection, individuals cannot contribute to the global digital economy nor experience the same socio-economic benefits that the other "connected-half" does with Internet access. Failure to address the digital divide risks depriving a generation the opportunity to develop their potential and their ability to uplift their entire communities economically and socially. Furthermore, it undermines the progress that has been made towards achieving the 2030 Sustainable

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[1] WTDC-14: Dubai Declaration, see: http://www.itu.int/en/newsroom/wtdc-14/Pages/dubai-declaration.aspx
[2] ICT Facts and Figures, 2016.
See: http://www.itu.int/en/ITU D/Statistics/Documents/facts/ICTFactsFigures2016.pdf

Development Goals (SDGs). The positive socio-economic consequences of ICTs and the Internet are well established. Therefore, connecting the unconnected is critical to fulfilling many of the goals set in the 2030 Agenda. This is no easy task and renewed focus and commitment by stakeholders including governments to work together, is needed in order to assist developing countries to bridge the digital divide across all corners of the globe.

Unique challenges require innovative approaches

There are many reasons why people are not connected to the Internet. Many of these reasons have been identified in recently held ITU-D RPMs, and have been noted as some of the more difficult challenges to overcome.

For some people, Internet affordability is a challenge, while for others in rural, remote and urban underserved locations, geography and/or lack of public infrastructure does not allow them easy access. For some, residing in low population density areas, economies of scale are difficult, making the provision of basic services too costly or less cost effective for operators. For others, Internet access is available but they lack digital literacy skills necessary to optimize use of the Internet. Lack of content in local languages or locally relevant content prohibits Internet uptake for others.

While these reasons present barriers to Internet access, it's important not to lose sight of the fundamental importance of the availability of a basic Internet connection by which many uses are possible and socio-economic benefits can be derived. Connecting the unconnected, while seemingly overwhelming, can be addressed successfully through the application of practical yet effective approaches. From our experience and lessons learned in the field, to reach our shared goals for development and access to the Internet, collaboration and cooperation through partnerships is essential. Furthermore, policies and approaches that are sustainable and effective must take into account the vital expertise and focus of different stakeholders and organizations. As we prepare for the next phase of work in ITU-D, we suggest that CITEL colleagues consider integrating these approaches into draft work-items that are focused on bridging the digital divide and advancing ICT infrastructure development with the goal that they are recognized and prioritized in national digital strategies across the globe.

Multistakeholder Collaborative approach

The case to make Internet access available for everyone, everywhere has been well articulated. It is critical to deliver on a shared commitment to make that a reality. The Internet was developed by the public and private sectors, academia, and civil society, harnessing the shared technical expertise of a global community of equals. Much of the Internet's infrastructure is operated across borders and by diverse groups of stakeholders. To tackle the complex challenges of enabling Internet access, it is important to implement an inclusive and collaborative approach that brings government, businesses and other stakeholders to the table. By coming together, and each with an equal voice at the table, stakeholders can share ideas and lessons learned, discuss different needs and develop local solutions to the issues. The multistakeholder approach should emphasize core attributes of inclusiveness, transparency, collective responsibility, effective decision making, and a distributed and interoperable

governance system.[3] Attributes that all stakeholders, whether private or public should adopt to create the conditions that are necessary to expand Internet access.

Enabling Environment approach promotes Internet growth

To connect the rest of the world's population who are still unconnected, the focus has to be on extending Internet access to those for whom access is still not available, and those who could access the Internet, but choose not to. This is an enormous undertaking that can be accomplished but will take collaborative efforts across a range of stakeholders, including private sector and civil society, among others. Policymakers, however, have an important role to play in creating an enabling environment for the Internet that promotes universal and affordable access and the content and services, and skills that improve people's lives. Most often the difficulty policymakers confront, especially in developing countries, is the challenge of attracting private investment to advance Internet infrastructure, and not fully optimizing the available human capacity to grow the Internet. Achieving this requires taking proactive steps to enhance enabling environment conditions across infrastructure, governance, and human capacity that enable Internet adoption in unconnected parts of the world. Together these sets of conditions foster an environment that supports development:

➢ **Expanding Infrastructure:** Simply promoting growth and investment in access infrastructure is no longer enough to increase Internet use and affordability. Stakeholders need to create an environment where local content and its hosting and distribution infrastructure can flourish as well as the development of core Internet infrastructures.

➢ **Fostering Skills and Entrepreneurship:** The development of skilled and engaged people who can create and sustain access infrastructure, online content, and e-services is essential for a sustainable economy and creating jobs. Stakeholders need to support professional skill development, innovation, and entrepreneurship, as well as promote digital literacy for all citizens.

➢ **Supportive Governance:** Stakeholders need to leverage the expertise and commitment of the range of participants involved in the Internet in order to advance growth. Open and transparent policy processes that embrace a multistakeholder approach, improve the ease and pedicability of doing business, including ensuring transparent, open, fair, and timely government processes and decisionmaking.

These three sets of interrelated conditions have proven successful in bringing Internet access to underserved, rural and remote communities through alternative but sustainable and scalable solutions such as Community networks aimed at addressing the Internet connectivity gap. Community networks are characterized by multistakeholder collaborative approach and a bottom-up participatory process that empowers local communities to develop and design their own Internet access policies that reflect their local needs. For example, ISOC's partnership with the Digital Empowerment Foundation (DEF) to build community networks through the Wireless for Communities (W4C) projects in South Asia have connected rural and remote

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[3] Internet Society Policy Brief, "Why the Multistakeholder Approach works," 2016.

villages that have simply been left off the grid.[4] The W4C projects empower local communities through capacity building and training to build their own community wireless networks. Additionally, these underserved communities lack content, products and services. The W4C projects train communities to develop content that is relevant to their local needs. Similar projects have emerged in other communities and their ability to provide Internet access depends on having supportive enabling environment conditions.[5] We have enclosed our Policy Enabling Access Framework that outlines specific policy steps that policymakers can take to enhance these sets of conditions according to their local needs. The Internet Society stands ready to lend our expertise and experience to demonstrate the case that enabling environment approaches work and yield success.

Finally, the Internet Society is pleased to participate at CITEL PCC-1. WTDC-17 preparations and in the global discussions on development for greater connectivity. We look forward to working together with all members to advance our shared goals for development at the local, regional and global level.

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[4] Wireless for Communities (W4C) is a programme initiated in 2010 by the Internet Society Asia-Pacific Bureau. The W4C programme provides last mile connectivity to rural and remote areas of the Asia-Pacific using wireless technologies. Also see: https://www.internetsociety.org/what-we-do/where-we-work/asia-pacific/wireless-communities

[5] Also see the Digital Empowerment Foundation (DEF) which has connected 13 rural villages in India which has resulted in the creation of micro-enterprises, health centres and online schools. Community members trained to develop and deploy their own local wireless community networks. URL: http://defindia.org/