



IGF Internet
Governance
Forum



IGF 2015
João Pessoa, Brasil

IGF Policy Options for Connecting the Next Billion

- A Synthesis -

Introduction

More than three billion people will be connected to the Internet by the end of 2015. This is by all standards a great achievement, and the number of Internet users has tripled over the past ten years, but much work is still ahead. Four billion people remain unconnected, which are four billion people unconnected to the vast opportunities for economic and social progress inherent to the Internet. The way forward can learn from the past, and build on the experiences and collaboration amongst all stakeholders, to tackle the challenges ahead. This initiative draws on those experiences and intends to address the issue of connecting the next billions, the last billion, and to address the digital divide.

Based on recommendations from the ECOSOC Working Group on Improvements to the IGF¹, the initiative is part of a broader effort by the IGF community to produce more tangible outputs to “enhance the impact of the IGF on global Internet governance and policy”. It is also a timely endeavor given the ongoing ten-year review of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), as well as the newly adopted United Nations Sustainable Development Agenda that recognizes ICTs as a crucial component in development, and calls for “universal and affordable access to the Internet in least developed countries by 2020”. The Internet’s potential to improve results in a diverse set of areas, such as healthcare, commerce, agriculture or education, makes it a key enabler for future development and improved living conditions for all people of the world. A report from the Human Rights Council of the United Nations General Assembly² also declares access to the Internet a basic human right which enables individuals to “exercise their right to freedom of opinion and expression”.

A Multistakeholder Approach to Address the Issue

The Internet’s value comes from all those it connects, and the cooperation amongst all stakeholders is imperative to realize its full potential. No single stakeholder can solve the challenge of connecting the remaining parts of the world – it can only be solved through collaboration and partnerships with stakeholders across all segments of society. This is why the multistakeholder nature of the IGF makes it a unique space with the ability to solve complex and cross cutting issues involving all stakeholders.

To share experiences is the first step to find the path forward. By gathering inputs from all stakeholders to identify the obstacles, solutions and strategies to increase connectivity, the initiative makes use of the bottom-up and inclusive approach that is at the core of the IGF process. Rounds of online public consultations have been conducted to carry out this exercise, and more than 80 diverse inputs and contributions representing all stakeholders³, as well as

¹ http://unctad.org/meetings/en/SessionalDocuments/a67d65_en.pdf

² http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/docs/17session/A.HRC.17.27_en.pdf

³ <http://www.intgovforum.org/cms/policy-options-for-connection-the-next-billion/classified-list-of-contributions>

contributions from National and Regional IGF initiatives, have been submitted to the IGF Secretariat –making it a unique exercise in the history of the IGF.

Policy Issues and Options

The process has been designed to allow for the IGF community to help define the issue, and the contributions and comments received have successfully mapped out the complex and multifaceted nature of increasing connectivity. Different stakeholders have approached the issue from diverse and unique perspectives, which allows for a holistic approach to connectivity which ranges from the deployment of infrastructure to factors that drive demand and enable users to utilize the Internet. To others access is understood from a rights-oriented perspective as the capability to retrieve, produce and distribute information over the Internet. While some inputs have been focused on describing the main obstacles, others have suggested concrete ‘policy options’ for achieving increased connectivity. Together they help shape a useful resource for the community to address the complexity of the challenge ahead.

Below is a summary of the five main dimensions and policy options for increasing connectivity as identified by the IGF community: **1. Deploying infrastructure, 2. Increasing usability, 3. Enabling users, 4. Ensuring affordability and 5. Creating an enabling environment.** Based on this compilation of options, a few possible paths for **the way forward** are also laid out.

1. Deploying infrastructure

The various contributions have identified both “good” and “bad” examples related to the expansion of infrastructure to connect the next billion. The contributions varied from policy suggestions on how to deploy infrastructure, while other contributions were focused on the current challenges in laying out the necessary infrastructure in the developing world.

Much effort has been made in recent years to improve access by deploying both submarine and terrestrial infrastructure. However, many of the contributions identify a need for more investment and public-private cooperation to strengthen national infrastructure backbones in developing countries – and in particular in rural areas. The continued deployment of Internet Exchange Points (IXPs) is another identified priority in order to bring down access costs and stimulate the further development of a local ecosystem. The contributions also highlight the need to transition to IPv6 to ensure long term and sustainable Internet expansion. It is clear from the submissions received that infrastructure development is a key driver for socio-economic growth and access to that infrastructure is paramount to development.

Key areas:

- Physical Infrastructure
 - Broadband, Wi-Fi, Spectrum
-

- Mobile
- Universal Service Funds
- IXPs/Interconnection Layer
- IPv6

2. Increasing usability

The need to ensure that people are able to use the Internet according to their needs was reflected in many of the contributions. Providing access to the Internet is only the first step – once in place people must be able to use it. Ensuring availability and the ability to use applications, to stimulate the development of local content and services in all languages, and to implement strategies for safeguarding access to people with disabilities were some of the issues identified by the community.

Key areas:

- Applications
- Services
- Local Content/Multilingualism
- Media
- Accessibility

3. Enabling Users

Many of the contributions provided important insights and examples on issues related to enabling individuals online once they have gained access to the Internet. The contributions identified both good practices to improve digital literacy at the National and Regional levels as well as the remaining challenges. At its core is the capability to retrieve, produce and distribute information over the Internet, and many inputs stressed the importance of human rights online, and the need to enable young people, women, the elderly and people with disabilities.

Key areas:

- Human Rights
- Inclusiveness
- User Literacy
- Digital Citizenship
- Entrepreneurship

4. Ensuring affordability

Many of the contributions addressed costs and affordability in developing countries as a critical issue. Cost of access is seen as one of the biggest barriers to getting online, and much of the work currently being done is focused on making Internet access affordable in order to ensure an Internet for all. It's clear that increasing affordable Internet access is essential if countries are to achieve the social development and inclusive knowledge-based economies they desire. Many

of the challenges in improving Internet affordability require both innovative policies and methods to make these strategies a reality.

Key areas:

- Digital Divide
- Cost of Access per capita

5. Creating enabling Environments

Creating an enabling environment for access and connectivity is highlighted by many of the contributions as an imperative part of bringing more people online. These contributions emphasized the need to create attractive business environments through policies, regulations and legislations, while also taking into consideration existing government policies and institutional environment in developing countries. The contributions offered examples of good practices for such strategies as well as failed attempts for others to learn from.

Many inputs stressed the importance of multistakeholder collaboration to achieve forward-looking connectivity goals and submissions to this process emphasized that future efforts need to ensure that those coming online have access to the entire global, free, and open Internet. Access should be universal, equitable, secure, affordable, and high-quality on the basis of human rights and the rule of law and respect should be given to privacy and the freedom of expression.

Key areas:

- Government, Regulatory Authorities and IGO Frameworks
- Private Sector led Initiatives
- Non-profit and Other Initiatives

Conclusion and Recommendations - The Way Forward

This initiative and its outputs constituted a unique exercise in the history of the IGF. As a process it is an attempt to mobilize the inherent benefits of solving complex problems through a diversity of perspectives - each with their own contribution to the solution. It was also a unique opportunity for the IGF community to manifest the benefits of a multistakeholder approach in tackling the challenges ahead, and a chance to show the IGF's ability to produce tangible outputs in an efficient and effective manner.

Beyond the specificities reflected through the national and regional IGF contributions and others, the IGF community identified some common recommendations for multistakeholder actions moving forward:

- **In the deployment of infrastructure** much more investment and public-private cooperation is necessary to strengthen national backbones in the developing world, and, in particular, rural populations, and to increase and scale-up cross-border connectivity. Infrastructure development is a key driver for socio-economic growth and access to that infrastructure is paramount to development.

- **To increase usability**, it's important to ensure the availability and the ability for users to use applications, to stimulate the development of local content and services in all languages, and to implement strategies for safeguarding access to people with disabilities.

- Policies that promote the continued creation of locally relevant content should be encouraged, including protections for the freedom of expression, the press, privacy and intellectual property, the development of e-commerce infrastructure, consumer protections, and trusted online payment systems.

- **To enable user's online** emphasis should be placed on the promotion of human rights and the enablement of young people, women and girls, the elderly and persons with disabilities. Access to the Internet is essential for the full realization of human development and facilitates the exercise and enjoyment of a number of human rights and freedoms, including the rights to freedom of expression and access to information, peaceful assembly and association.

- Fostering public access points, as for example in public libraries and community centres among others, and promoting in those spaces digital literacy and local content production activities will also secure better conditions for Internet access and use.

- **To ensure affordability** and address the digital divide, increased efforts and investment are necessary to increase supply and lower the cost of access. Increasing affordable Internet access is essential if countries are to achieve the social developments and inclusive knowledge-based economies they desire.

- Many of the challenges in improving Internet affordability require both innovative policies and methods to make these strategies a reality. There are many well-known benefits to infrastructure sharing, such as lowering industry costs. To encourage this practice and make operators more amenable to sharing, governments can put in place guidelines and regulations to support infrastructure sharing and introduce new business opportunities.

- **In Creating an Enabling Environment** future connectivity efforts need to ensure that those coming online have access to the entire global and open Internet. Access should be universal, equitable, secure, affordable, and high-quality on the basis of human rights and the rule of law and respect should be given to privacy and the freedom of expression.

As the Internet continues to permeate almost all aspects of modern society, the importance of bridging the digital divide increases. The Internet has shown its potential to function as a key enabler for economic and social progress, but it could also exacerbate the economic and social inequalities between those connected and those that are not. This is why the issue of connecting the next

billion cannot wait. The current initiative is a step towards reaching the goal, and if successful could be linked to efforts in other fora and inspire new collaborations across the wider community.

The compilation output document, available on the IGF website, was presented and discussed during the 10th IGF Main Session on 'Policy Options and Best Practices for Connecting the Next Billion' on 11 November⁴. More than 80 background contributions were received from the community including submissions from 5 Regional IGFs representing most regions of the world (Asia-Pacific IGF, Arab IGF, African IGF, European Dialogue on Internet Governance, Latin American and Caribbean IGF), 9 National IGFs, and inputs from Governments, Intergovernmental Organizations, Civil Society, Private Sector and Business Community, Technical Community, Academic Community, IGF Best Practice Forums and Dynamic Coalitions and individual IGF stakeholders. Many of these contributions can be found in full via working [links](#) throughout the compilation document to the respective inputs listed on the IGF website. We hope this compilation document and the full list of background contributions can serve as a robust resource on this important topic and can also serve as an input into other relevant Internet public policy fora and processes moving forward.

⁴ Full transcript of the main session can be accessed here: <http://www.intgovforum.org/cms/187-igf-2015/transcripts-igf-2015/2339-2015-11-11-igf-intersessional-work-policy-options-and-best-practices-for-connecting-the-next-billion-main-meeting-room>