HARNESSING THE POTENTIAL OF THE INTERNET TO ADDRESS THE DIGITAL DIVIDE AND FOSTER SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IS KEY

Harnessing the potential of the internet to address the digital divide and foster sustainable development – development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs - is the fundamental message coming out of the 10th Internet Governance Forum (IGF) taking place in Joao Pessoa, Brazil.

Internet Economy and Sustainable Development

A main session at the IGF focused on challenges as well as recommendations for improving the state of the internet economy in order to attain the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Attendees, which included government representatives as well as civil society and private sector leaders, discussed the lack of capacity-building, relevant content at the local level as well as affordability of internet in the context of bridging the digital divide.

"If we do not bridge this digital divide, there will be no truly globalized internet economy and there will be no contribution of Internet Economy to sustainable development in the democratizing way that has been associated with the Internet," noted UN Assistant Secretary-General Lenni Montiel at the session.

He added that he Internet should be seen as an engine for job creation, income generation, economic growth that is inclusive and equitable, and for providing equal opportunities to women and youth.

Mr. Montiel also recognized the valuable inputs that the session would make to the preparatory process of the outcome document for the ten year review of the World Summit on Information Society (WSIS).

Other participants stressed the importance of multistakeholder participation and increased partnership as prerequisite for increasing the contributions of the internet economy to achieving sustainable development.

"We need partnerships. We need Government. We need the private sector, and of course, academia, to work together," stated Sergio Quiroga da Cunha, head of Latin America for Ericsson.

Some participants emphasized the importance of social media in driving e-commerce while others called for market regulation, the development of accountable institutions and better investments in the public

sector domain to support local startups and innovation. Looking at lessons learnt from the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the need for better collaboration, regular monitoring and inclusion of areas such as scientific knowledge and culture for development in achieving the sustainable development agenda was underscored.

Policy Options and Best Practices for Connecting the Next Billion

A unique exercise in the history of the IGF, the community-driven Policy Options and Best Practices for Connecting the Next Billion main session gave the participants the opportunity to discuss challenges as well as recommendations that had been previously identified as necessary to improve and increase connectivity for the 4 billion people that are still without access to the Internet. The bottom-up community driven exercise compiled more than 80 contributions from the multistakeholder community, including inputs from regional IGFs from all parts of the world. There was broad support for the compilation document presented by the IGF Secretariat and it was suggested that the outputs from the experience should feed into and act as inputs into other relevant processes such as relevant activities of the United Nations agencies working on similar issues.

IGF Best Practice Forums (BPFs) which worked throughout the year to produce diverse outputs and robust resources, also presented their work. BPFs on Regulation and Mitigation of Unwanted Communications; Establishing and Supporting Computer Security Incident Response Teams (CSIRTs); Developing Meaningful Multistakeholder Participation Mechanisms; Practices to Countering Abuse Against Women Online; Creating an Enabling Environment for IPv6 Adoption and Enabling Environments to Establish Successful IXPs reported on their sessions held just prior to the main session. Delegates were appreciative of the work and suggested ways in which the work could continue.

Other Highlights

While the digital environment is a driver for innovation, productivity and growth, discussions in several workshops also focused on the risks that could jeopardize economic and social prosperity and therefore impede sustainable development, as well as other issues such as human rights, child online protection and gender based violence against women.