IGF 2021 DC main session: DC3 briefing paper
DC3 contribution to the IGF 2021 issue areas

1. About the DC

The need for a Dynamic Coalition on Community Connectivity (DC3) emerged during the IGF workshop 223 "Community Networks: A Revolutionary Paradigm", held in João Pessoa, during the 10th IGF. Workshop participants agreed on the potential of community networks in order to promote sustainable Internet connectivity and foster the full enjoyment of fundamental rights such as freedom of expression and self-determination. To this extent DC3 was established to fostering synergy and coordination amongst different community networks, as well as to promote research on such initiatives. DC3 strives to identify best practices for the development and maintenance of community networks; sustainable organizational and financial models for community networks; and policy proposal that may facilitate their establishment and development.

2. Relevant issue area(s) and policy (questions)

I.   Economic and social inclusion and human rights

Social inequality and the pandemic

1. What can be learned from the COVID-19 pandemic context about the relationship between digital inequality and social and economic inequality?

Economic and social inclusion and sustainable development

1. What is the relationship between digital policy and development and the established international frameworks for social and economic inclusion set out in the Sustainable Development Goals and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and in treaties such as the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Conventions on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, on the Rights of the Child, and on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities?

Digital policy and human rights frameworks

1. What is the relationship between digital policy and development and the established international frameworks for civil and political rights as set out in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and further interpretation of these in the online context provided by various resolutions of the Human Rights Council?

II. Universal access and meaningful connectivity

Defining universal and meaningful access

- What are the key elements that constitute universal and meaningful Internet access? How can it be measured?

Practical locally-driven policy solutions

1. What lessons can be drawn (and how) from successful policy solutions to universal access and meaningful connectivity around the world, while taking into account local specificities and needs? In particular, what are the relevant practices implemented by local actors (local government, civil society, local providers and entrepreneurs) to advance universal and meaningful access?

Challenges and solutions in regulating spectrum

1. What are the relevant regulatory issues that require attention when it comes to enabling broader access to spectrum in order to stimulate dissemination of affordable and quality access at the community level?

3. DC contribution

II.   Economic and social inclusion and human rights

Social inequality and the pandemic

1. What can be learned from the COVID-19 pandemic context about the relationship between digital inequality and social and economic inequality?

The DCNN and the DC3 have joined efforts to work extensively during the pandemic period to produce a joint report on dedicated **"**The Value of Internet Openness in Times of Crisis**."** The report has explored how the pandemic has exposed the adverse impact of digital divides on social equality and how internet openness, fostered via net neutrality approaches and community network initiatives, may be useful ally to reduce such divides. In July 20231, t**he French Telecoms Regulator (ARCEP) referred for the first time to community networks in its official 2021 report dedicated to "**The State of the Internet**", including a full** section on "The Value of Internet Openness in Times of Crisis: Net Neutrality, Community Networks and Digital Self-determination" (page 16-17 of the ARCEP report), **drawing on the joint DC3-DCNN output report**.

Economic and social inclusion and sustainable development

1. What is the relationship between digital policy and development and the established international frameworks for social and economic inclusion set out in the Sustainable Development Goals and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and in treaties such as the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Conventions on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, on the Rights of the Child, and on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities?

The DC3 has promoted a collaborative effort to explore sustainable funding models for community networks. Community networks are well-known alternative connectivity models able to trigger positive external effects, empowering local communities and reviving local economic ecosystems, especially in rural and peripheral areas. The 2021 work of the DC3 will emphasize the existence of financially sustainable and scalable community networks models, that can favour economic and social inclusion of the disconnected. As highlighted by various DC3 reports, community networks have direct impact in promoting self-determination as the right to pursue economic, social and cultural development (art. 1 UDHR, 1(3) ICCPR & ICESCR). In this sense, see the concept of "network self-determination'" elaborated in the chapters authored by Prof Luca Belli in the DC3 report of 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020.

Digital policy and human rights frameworks

2. What is the relationship between digital policy and development and the established international frameworks for civil and political rights as set out in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and further interpretation of these in the online context provided by various resolutions of the Human Rights Council?

DC3 will note that, as an extension of the fundamental right to self-determination enshrined on art. 1 UDHR and art 1(3) ICCPR & ICESCR, all individuals should have the right to free development of network infrastructure, defined as "network self-determination", which should ebe seen an instrumental condition to allow the full exercise of individuals' human rights. DC3 will note that by developing community networks, individuals demonstrate they already enjoy a right to network self-determination, de facto, and such right plays a pivotal role allowing individuals to associate in collective entities, joining efforts to bridge digital divides in a participatory and bottom-up fashion.

II. Universal access and meaningful connectivity

Defining universal and meaningful access

- What are the key elements that constitute universal and meaningful Internet access? How can it be measured?

DC3 will stress that meaningful connectivity should encompass also the right to "network self-determination" defined as the "right to freely associate in order to define, in a democratic fashion, the design, development and management of network infrastructure as a common good, so that all individuals can freely seek, impart and receive information and innovation" (see the DC3 reports of 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020 and 2021). As such the local populations, and local stakeholders, will not only be included but can be considered as the real protagonists of meaningful connectivity.

Practical locally-driven policy solutions

1. What lessons can be drawn (and how) from successful policy solutions to universal access and meaningful connectivity around the world, while taking into account local specificities and needs? In particular, what are the relevant practices implemented by local actors (local government, civil society, local providers and entrepreneurs) to advance universal and meaningful access?

DC3 will stress the role of community networks as powerful solutions, driven by local communities, to connect the unconnected. As highlighted by the DC3 reports, community networks are crowd sourced distributed networks built, utilised and managed in a bottom up fashion by the local community as commons managed democratically by groups of individuals and entities such as NGOs, local businesses, and/or public administrations. Importantly, the study of community networks demonstrates that these community-driven initiatives trigger several positive externalities, such as the development of new content, applications and services that provide new business opportunities for local communities, while catering for the needs. (see the DC3 reports of 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020 and 2021).

Challenges and solutions in regulating spectrum

1. What are the relevant regulatory issues that require attention when it comes to enabling broader access to spectrum in order to stimulate dissemination of affordable and quality access at the community level?

DC3 will stress that much of the available spectrum, which is assigned to national operators, is severely underused or simply not used in rural areas. In this perspective, there is a considerable opportunity to act with minimal effort to promote innovative approaches to reuse this "unused" spectrum to support the provision of affordable access, using local community-driven initiatives.