

IGF 2016

Reporter: Michael Oghia

Session title: Dynamic Coalition on Innovative Approaches to Connecting the Unconnected

Session organizers: Sharada Srinivasan and Christopher Yoo

Date: Wednesday, 7 December

Time: 4:30 p.m. – 6:00 p.m.

Room: Workshop Room 3 PALCCO

Link: <https://igf2016.sched.org/event/8htK/dc-on-connecting-the-unconnected?iframe=no&w=100%&sidebar=yes&bg=no>

The session introduced the Dynamic Coalition on Innovative Approaches to Connecting the Unconnected, a new Dynamic Coalition that met for the first time at IGF 2016. The session was moderated by Mr Christopher Yoo (University of Pennsylvania), and after introducing the speakers, he stressed that there is often overlap between initiatives that seek to connect the unconnected to the Internet as well as little communication between initiatives, and the DC seeks to help bridge such gaps. He stressed that the DC has identified more than 200 potential case studies that illustrate solutions to expand network connectivity and specifically connect the unconnected, and then introduced various case studies. One of them was an initiative in Vanuatu, which is providing connectivity for services such as telemedicine. Another is in Nepal, which is providing connectivity to rural villages. The third example was in the Netherlands, which is providing connectivity hotspots for refugees. The fourth example detailed Zenzeleni Networks in South Africa. The fifth detailed mesh Wi-Fi networks in remote parts of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The sixth detailed Rhizomatica in Mexico, which provides connectivity to 16 rural communities. The seventh detailed the Wireless for Communities initiative in India, which establishes community networks in rural India. Themes for other case studies include access for women, seniors, and youth. The next step is for the Dynamic Coalition to find partners to help with fieldwork wherever possible, and identify new case studies.

Mr Michael Kende (Internet Society) stressed that Internet growth rates are slowing down, even in developing areas. He detailed how Internet in Africa, for instance, has evolved since 2009 when almost all connectivity was achieved via satellite. He said there are two set of users that need to be addressed: those with mobile coverage that are not subscribing, and those completely without Internet access. Harder issues that need to be addressed include local content, training, language issues, and many more. He concluded that the Dynamic Coalition will be a good resource to help connect the next billion and address such issues.

Mr Rajan Mathews (COAI) said he is excited about the Dynamic Coalition, and said it is specifically relevant to India since around 63% to 65% of all Indians reside in rural areas and it is one of the fastest and largest-growing Internet markets. He stressed it is important for operators to ensure that there is enough data for new subscribers, and India has significant challenges in terms of spectrum. He also said that it is important to have relevant and up-to-date data that can inform policymakers and help them make more effective decisions. He

concluded by stating, 'If a solution is not scalable and affordable in India, there's very little chance it will take off.'

Ms Anriette Esterhueysen (Association for Progressive Communications (APC)) said that APC has a long history with providing access. This includes working on broadband policy, transparency, expanding fibre optics, white space and spectrum, influencing and informing policymakers and regulators, and community networks and infrastructure. She stressed that she is sceptical of the push to connect more people, especially for the sake of connecting them, as it merely creates more consumers. She added that issues such as quality of service and the amount of data available are challenges in many parts of the world, and they will have a significant effect on how new subscribers will come online.

Mr Alex Wong (World Economic Forum) emphasized that almost all of the solutions needed to connect the next billion are already in existence, so there is very few reasons why we cannot do so. He said that common, unifying language and a streamlined mission is important, and also stressed the importance of collaboration across stakeholder groups to generate and implement solutions. He added that it is critical that global organizations come together to work at the local level as well as with local organizations and individuals.

Ms Karen McCabe (Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE)) said IEEE initially began connectivity programs to connect technologists and members of the technical community to policymakers; however, they are also now focusing on policy and regulation, infrastructure, capacity building, and technology.