Digital Inclusion

About the Theme

At IGF 2019, discussions on this theme considered:

- How digital inclusion sits at the heart of the IGF, reflecting the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) goal to build "a people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society where everyone can create, access, utilize and share information and knowledge".
- The pledge of the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development to leave no one behind.

Berlin IGF Messages on Digital Inclusion

Inclusive Access to the Internet and Its Infrastructure

- For developing and least developed countries to truly benefit from the potential of the Internet for development, it is important to build a culture of trust and knowledge exchange among governments and other stakeholders at national level.

- Digital infrastructure development should not come at the expense of the development of other physical infrastructure.

- Internet user growth has slowed down and connecting the unconnected remains a huge challenge. At the same time, attacks against Internet connectivity have become a dangerous instrument of politics. Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) target 9.c on access is unlikely to be reached, with only 60-70% of the world's population projected to be connected by 2025.

- Mobile phone penetration is not a good way to measure progress towards achieving digital inclusion. Instead, assessment of digital inclusion is more usefully framed as assessing how many people are connected to a safe and secure Internet, and how many of people have "meaningful connectivity" – that is, connectivity to do what people find useful online, delivered at the right speed with sufficient data.

- Community networks, where infrastructure is locally owned and managed, not only help connect the unconnected, but also create social bonds, strengthen local economies, increase access to knowledge and help achieve the SDGs, such as empowering women in getting online.

- To be open to and supportive of community networks, regulators and policy makers should consider simplifying licensing regimes, providing dynamic spectrum access, and sometimes recognizing that the regulatory rules that apply in an urban environment might not necessarily work for remote and rural communities.

- To achieve digital inclusion, there is a need to understand the differences between access and accessibility and to recognize and cater for their different requirements when engaging in policy dialogues. Access comes first, then comes the harder work of accessibility.

- To improve the experience of persons with disabilities – the world's largest minority, making up around 15% of the world's population or one billion people – there is a need to agree upon and use universal design principles for accessibility across countries

and regions. ICTs, including specially-developed technologies for persons with disabilities, to help break through

communication and access barriers, enhance mobility and foster independent living and societal integration.

Capacity and Skills for Digital Inclusion and Innovation

- Digital skills and literacy are as integral to digital inclusion as the ability to read and write are to social inclusion. Access to education and training are essential for people to gain employment. Schools and tertiary education institutions are well positioned to deliver on digital literacy needs, but educators may need help to better prepare for their increasingly important role in transferring digital skills to those who need them. Internet governance schools have also emerged as a targeted and effective platform for building knowledge and leadership across the diverse and growing field of Internet development, policy and regulation.

- More resources are needed for capacity building across stakeholder groups. People must be empowered to articulate their own capacity building needs and be actively involved in efforts to respond to these needs. Effective governance is crucial to anticipating and meeting these needs, as building skills and social welfare systems requires time and creativity.

- AI is creating new social challenges and affecting the labour market. Jobs of the future require skills that many people – particularly those who are already marginalized and those who live in the Global South – do not have. Policy and regulation need to be developed inclusively to ensure that the jobs of the future offer decent and sustainable livelihoods for women and populations at the margins.

- With employment opportunities are increasingly falling into the categories of "micro-work" or the "gig economy" and platform work replicating existing exclusions and gender divides, fair work principles for platform work are being developed and should be taken on board by policy-makers. Policies need to balance the ability of workers to do well with the 'freedom' many gig-workers enjoy while also providing an appropriate safety net to ensure these jobs are able to provide a decent and appropriate standard of living.

Social and Economic Inclusion, Gender Equality and Human Rights

- Taxing social media use creates new barriers and restricts people's day-to-day communications as well as their use of ICTs to generate income and is not an effective way for states to gain revenue.

- Digital technologies have transformed the economy, creating extraordinary opportunities for economic development and commercial success across all sectors. As connectivity increases in low- and middle-income countries, remote and platform-mediated work provides an opportunity to overcome pervasive unemployment and

provide new sources of income for qualified populations.

- Technical innovations are there to serve people and not the other way around. We need to better understand the relationship between digital advances and inequality: inequality and exclusion drive social unrest and conflict; digital technologies can either widen digital, social and economic divides, or be a force to help reduce them.

- Least developed and developing countries should be able to benefit from an equitable share of the digital wealth that the Internet enables. To achieve this, regulators and

policy makers can support conducive environments that can incubates, develop, and grow local technology companies that can grow into large domestic, regional, and continental tech giants – the so-called "new Silicon Valleys of the Global South".

- Bias and exclusion continue to be deeply imbedded in digital spaces. Discussion about inclusion of marginalized people should be at the centre of Internet governance and public policy conversations and not in the margins.

- Securing work remains challenging for many, particularly for women, and working

Local content and language diversity

- Unconnected citizens of the Global South should be viewed as more than potential digital consumers of the tech giants of the north. Instead, it is important that as more people have access to the Internet from least developed and developing countries, that they are active contributors to the digital environment and not just consumers.

- The adoption of Internationalised Domain Names (IDNs) needs further encouragement and support by all stakeholders to increase the benefits made possible by having Internet domains in local languages and scripts but.

- Universal acceptance of IDNs and internationalized email addresses is not just a technical issue, it is also a policy issue. Governments and public entities should

conditions are often dire. Everywhere, women, gender-diverse people, people from the global South and people of colour do not have the same opportunities, presence or influence in digital spaces as men, and people from the global North. Solutions have to be value based and practical. Infrastructure and connectivity issues must, therefore, be viewed from a gender perspective to understand and respond to the specific inclusion of women and gender-diverse people.

promote universal acceptance and lead by example through using IDNs themselves.

- Copyright can be both an enabler of local content production as well a barrier to content creation and distribution. Creative Commons licences give content creators control over how their content is shared and re-used.

- Digitization of local content and cultural heritage that does not take place with the active involvement of local communities generates a form of "extractivism" and exploitation.

- Preserving heritage and promoting local content needs sustainable local production infrastructures and markets so that people can make a living out of creating content.