

Community networks (CN) are structured to be open and neutral. Such networks rely on the active participation of local communities in the design, development, deployment and management of the shared infrastructure as a common resource, owned by the community and operated in a democratic fashion. CNs can be operationalised, wholly or partly, through local stakeholders, NGOs, private sector entities and/or public administrations. CNs are characterised by collective ownership; social management; open design and open participation; free peering and transit with networks offering reciprocity; as well as the promotion of free software and open standards and technologies.

The fact that almost 60% of the world's population lives in rural areas or urban slums suggests that new approaches - alternative to the mainstream commercial model - must be adopted if the Internet is to reach everyone. Over the past decade, a variety of successful examples of CNs have emerged on all continents, exploiting many technical and governance configurations, as documented by the Report of the Dynamic Coalition on Community Connectivity.¹ Such examples have demonstrated that CNs may be a viable option to connect the unconnected while truly empowering local communities and building local technical capacity. Notably, the establishment of CNs has proven that local stakeholders, including public administrations, entrepreneurs and NGOs, may become protagonists of the development of Internet connectivity, building infrastructure from the first square mile and proposing innovative sustainability models. Furthermore, CNs foster the development of new services, applications and local content as well as job creation, as in the Guifi.net and DEF India cases. Therefore, CNs should be considered as a credible option for connecting the unconnected. Public policies should be crafted in order to facilitate rather than hinder the establishment of CN, as suggested by the Declaration on Community Connectivity.² CNs are an example of connectivity for local communities by local communities through the community and relevant stakeholders.

¹ See Community Connectivity: Building the Internet from Scratch. Annual Report of the UN IGF Dynamic Coalition on Community Connectivity. [add link here]

² [please add link to the DC3 Declaration]