

## Contribution

### Policy Options for Connecting the Next Billion – Phase II

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While inputs of any format will be considered for incorporation, a suggested format could include bullet points addressing some or all of the following questions:

**1. How would you define, or how do you understand, the theme “*Connecting and Enabling the Next Billion*”?**

The emphasis is on enabling. The concept of “connecting” would refer to the infrastructure to “enable” a connected society, but also the programs and applications to ensure that people are “enabled” to access and use the infrastructure in a meaningful way. Connecting understood as cables and infrastructure is largely a matter of time and money. Connecting understood as promoting understanding, awareness, and enabling meaningful use & application requires policies and programs.

**2. The first phase of *Connecting and Enabling the Next Billion (2015)* identified a set of policy options aimed at the creation of enabling environments, including deploying infrastructure, increasing usability, enabling users, and ensuring affordability. What are the factors to consider when adopting these policy options at local levels (e.g. the state of a country’s market development, the available infrastructure, level of capacity-building, etc.).**

To enable the next billion, policies and programs should consider addressing the need to:

1) build capabilities, develop skills, promote awareness, ensure understanding, and encourage application of technologies in *meaningful* ways, to positively impact the material lives of people, and promote their participation as active members of society and encourage innovation and development;  
2) *engage* users (not only involve, but engage) in the definition of priorities, design, development and implementation of policies and programs. Engaging individual users, networks, stakeholders is essential for sustainability and impact over time.

**3. Are you aware of any specificities around connectivity at a local or regional level? (In other words, do you know of factors that impact connectivity in, for instance, rural areas but less so at an urban level? Or factors that affect connectivity at regional or larger scale, but not as noticeably at local or smaller scale?)**

The engagement of networks and “organizations stakeholders in the *process*” (OSIP) (Hendi, 2015)<sup>1</sup> in the design and implementation of ICT policies and programs, especially in rural and remote areas, increases the opportunities for the policies to be adopted and have long term effects. These effects ultimately lead to the development of policy windows leading to policy change and a subsequent advancement of information societies.

These organizations or entities (OSIPs) at the regional and local level operate in conditions and contexts that promote the dissemination of ICT issues among the population and in the policy process. Among others, they succeed in the design and implementation of ICT policies and programs occurred when:

- the design of the initiatives included the promotion of meaningful use and application;
- the continuity and sustainability of the process of advancing the initiatives;
- the forms of collaboration among networks and multiple stakeholders;
- the involvement of policy entrepreneurs; and
- the role of local expertise in the process.

(Hendi, 2015)

**4. Data shows that the growth of Internet adoption is slowing down in some areas, especially as broadband services extend to more remote, less densely populated areas (facing challenges beyond affordability and availability).<sup>1[1]</sup> What are some of the barriers or limitations preventing people who *do* have Internet access from being enabled or empowered through such connectivity?**

Many users are challenged in understanding the tools and applications. Some of these users are decision makers, university professors, community leaders. Their knowledge of what they can do with their tools is limited. They are unaware of the possible applications. Especially in challenged and developing areas. But also this occurs among older generations in developed groups. Having a smart phone to chat, facebook or download movies does not develop capabilities to apply technologies to real life challenges, and encourage development or innovation.

It is necessary to encourage the development of new skills and capabilities that promote both the access to ICTs, as well as the meaningful use of these technologies so citizens have the opportunity to be active members of the information societies.

**5. What does *meaningful access* mean?**

*Meaningful* refers to the application of technologies that lead to an improvement in the material aspects of people's lives and their empowerment as active members in society.

It is related to the concept of "the advancement of information societies" and the path of promoting access to ICTs, together with the development of skills, capabilities and policies. The concept also implies conducting efforts to promote digital literacy, the ongoing awareness around new tools and processes as they arise, as well as the engagement in collaborative developments around ICTs in order to grasp the new dimensions and opportunities brought about by technologies (Hendi, 2015). Governments have a leading responsibility to promote networks and develop multiple-stakeholder partnerships to ensure all citizens have equal opportunities to access infrastructure, technologies and platforms.

**6. How can connectivity contribute to reaching the new SDGs?**

Connectivity is access to technology, together with the skills and capability to use and apply ICTs in meaningful ways to increase the opportunity to improve the material life of people. As ICTs are both a sector as well as an enabler of the economy and society, the ICT initiatives may impact or involve various levels of government, numerous sectors and stakeholders and partnerships. Being multidimensional and dynamic, ICTs have the potential to impact on structures, as well as on processes, and on multiple economic, industrial and social actors and sectors. Ensuring users are enabled in use and application of ICTs to *their* issues and challenges will increase their opportunity for development and innovation. And thus will contribute to reach the new SDGs.

**7. Do you know examples of stories where using ICTs to support development has not worked, and why?**

For starters, the lack or limitation of journaling of experiences, stories and *processes* in using ICTs to support development is a challenge, as well as an opportunity for future consideration.

Among the few local cases documented and available for research, it appears that national or regional policies designed top-down, with little or no engagement of users, networks and organizations stakeholders in the process, which focused mainly on telecom technology and tools (hardware, roll-out of lucrative telecommunications infrastructure, etc.), have failed altogether, were not sustainable or achieved very limited results (Hendi, 2015). It is important to engage users, networks and organizations stakeholders in the process to address local culture, development and innovation issues.

**8. Can you think of ways in which ICTs or Internet connectivity could be used to help reach the SDGs?**

As mentioned in point 6) above, as ICTs are both a sector as well as an enabler of the economy and society, the ICT initiatives may impact or involve various levels of government, numerous sectors and stakeholders and partnerships. Being multidimensional and dynamic, ICTs have the potential to impact on structures, as well as on processes, and on multiple economic, industrial and social actors and sectors. Ensuring users are enabled in use and application of ICTs to *their* issues and challenges will increase their opportunity for development and innovation. And thus will contribute to reach the new SDGs.

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**9. Do you know of examples of success stories that can illustrate how Internet access can help to address real-world problems (in either developed or developing countries)? For example, do you have stories or experiences to share regarding some or all of the following SDG-related questions:**

The Argentine organization CFI, engaged in a proactive approach to the implementation of ICT initiatives between 1998 and 2008. These involved a number of strategies, including; dissemination, awareness sessions, hands-on learning-by-doing developments, and action-research to engage stakeholders and policymakers in advancing ICTs and incorporating new processes into their existing ones (Hendi, 2015)

In order to advance the ICT initiatives, the approach of the CFI was to include provincial policy networks, policymakers and stakeholders from the onset, as well as to develop coalitions among actors and stakeholders from a variety of institutions, organizations of society and governments in order to achieve buy-in and engagement in the advancement of the initiatives. This approach was very different from organizations and initiatives that try to proceed unilaterally, without the involvement of local governments and on the grounds that those governmental institutions are too weak to be of functional support (Hendi, 2015)

The method of advancing implementation with activities aimed at developing meaningful use and application of ICTs was a design strategy promoted by the CFI. The organization developed collaborative projects of action-learning as a way of developing capabilities and succeed in disseminating ICT knowledge. It contributed to the participation of local stakeholders in the initiatives, and for the provincial governments and society to accelerate their understanding of opportunities and challenges around ICTs (Hendi, 2015).

The approach of the CFI was designed to actually strengthen the institutions of governance, and not bypass them, and provides a significant best practice; it is important for the encouragement of policy windows and a knowledgeable participation by governments and stakeholders in the policy process. It is not about an old paradigm struggle over how to allocate power and resources, but rather a struggle over how to deal with the new, the novel and the unknown (Hendi, 2015).

In one of their initiatives, the CFI specifically address under-privileged youth and empowering women and girls. The initiative focused on developing employability skills by learning to use and apply ICTs to real life use, and thus supported the **reduction of poverty**, innovation, **promoted well being, employment**, and change in policies.

- **How can connecting and enabling users help to ensure inclusive and equitable, quality education(SDG 4); learning opportunities (SGD 4); economic growth (SDG 8); productive employment (SDG8); inclusive institutions (SDG 16), among others.**

There is an opportunity to promote the development of policy at the educational level to encourage collaborative design projects in schools and universities, while at the same time addressing the digital divide. Through the development of multi-stakeholder and multi-sector projects designed with the user in mind, and with the incorporation of ICTs as a cross-sector enabler, there is an opportunity to empower future generations for innovation in the information society, close the digital divide, and address the SDGs (Hendi, 2016<sup>ii</sup>).

According to reports from the Mobile World Congress (MWC)<sup>iii</sup> that took place last February 2016, Latin America was relegated from the agendas of discussion on issues of technology and innovation. While the rest of the world is looking at ways to promote development and technological innovation, the region is still revolving around of topic of closing of the digital divide. While the developed world advances on other agendas.

National education programmes have largely considered the incorporation of technological "tools" (mainly software) as additional or "external" elements from the curricula. According to a UNESCO report, the approach to ICTs in the education sectors, even in the most developed countries, in general continues focussed on supporting existing tools and ways of thinking, and in doing the same things in a different way. Without the appropriation of tools such as ICT, it is very difficult to promote an

innovative thinking process in the development of holistic and inclusive projects and policies in the educational curricula (Hendi, 2015).

The education and academic sectors emerge as possible spaces for these collaborative developments. Involving ICTs as a cross-sector enabler enhances the existing curricula and promotes the formulation of integrative and complex perspectives. In addition, this involvement of ICTs promotes the development of capabilities and thought processes that lead to the narrowing of the digital divide, to innovation, addressing SDGs and lead towards an advancement of the information societies (Hendi, 2016).

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<sup>i</sup> Hendi, Kim Lilianne. "Policy Windows: Advancing Information Societies. An analysis of ICT initiatives led by the Consejo Federal de Inversiones (CFI) of Argentina between 1998 – 2008". (2015) [www.kimhendi.com](http://www.kimhendi.com)

<sup>ii</sup> Hendi, Kim Lilianne. "Developing multi-stakeholder projects with ICTs as cross-sector enabler and Design Thinking: Empowering future generations for innovation in the information society". (2016)

<sup>iii</sup> The Mobile World Congress (MWC) is an annual event that brings together the latest advances in technology and services from the mobile and wireless industry. Source: TyN Magazine - <http://www.tynmagazine.com/finalizo-el-mwc-con-una-marcada-orientacion-hacia-el-mundo-desarrollado/>. Accessed: 27/03/2016.