

IGD – Connecting & Enabling the next billion 2016

How can connecting and enabling users help to build **effective, accountable and inclusive institutions** at all levels? (SDG 16)

As the World forum for democracy 2013 on “Connecting citizens and institutions in the digital age” revealed, we are witnessing an ever wider spread of online collaborative platforms offering to involve citizens in law- and policy-making. Online platforms now enable petitioning, policy initiatives, problem-solving and pooling of expertise and crowdsourcing applications which increase the transparency of political processes and decisions (alert systems, candidate profile comparisons, whistleblowing, big data applications). Social media and specialised applications allow citizens to comment on political issues and voice concerns. They also enable individuals and small organisations to mobilise support and resources for various causes and make activism safer in authoritarian regimes. The interactive nature of the Internet stimulates citizen-driven solution journalism to promote and harness new ideas and solutions emerging outside institutional channels and enables deliberation on a large scale and the emergence of shared positions on complex issues through the use of algorithms.

While the balance of power still remains within elected institutions, their functioning is to an ever greater extent subject to scrutiny, influence and input from citizens empowered through e-participation tools.

While e-petition platforms have enabled citizens to influence government or local decision-making, the movement has also given rise to “easy” civic engagement without real commitment; private e-petition platforms also raise concerns about the protection and lawful utilisation of users’ data by proprietary platforms. Other growing concerns are the potential use of data gathered by global internet companies for influencing voters’ opinion, the lack of reliable authentication in the majority of social media and e-democracy applications, and the spread of hate speech.

Institutional back-up for e-participation initiatives is a key factor for the success of e-democracy initiatives. One of the biggest challenges is to convince the civil servants and political leadership to interact more actively with the citizens in order to improve the quality of the work of the authorities. In addition, even when genuine and effective e-participation platforms are in place, it is often difficult to bring disillusioned and skeptical citizens to use them.

The Council of Europe has issued several relevant Recommendations such as Recommendation Rec(2004)11 on legal, operational and technical standards for e-voting. This text remains the only source of international law reference on the subject. It is used in

national jurisprudence even in non-member States, as well as by other relevant international actors. Recommendation CM/Rec(2009)1 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on electronic democracy (e-democracy) proposes detailed principles and standards to guide member States in using e-technologies in the field of democratic governance. In order to assist governments and local authorities in implementing these standards, the Council has set up a participatory governance incubator which uses a benchmark (participatory democracy index) to measure performance in both online and offline participatory democracy, and connects policy-makers and practitioners to help spread good practice and trigger innovation. The Council of Europe will be developing guidelines on e-participation in 2017.

On a global level a series of agreed and enforceable rules are required on:

- the rights and obligations of global internet companies in relation to their influence on political debate (modeled on the principles of media ethics and media regulations during elections).
- the authentication of users
- the protection of personal data, including from state surveillance
- the curbing of hate speech

Beyond regulation, educational measures are required to support e-democracy. Adequate level of media literacy should become universal and e-citizenship skills should be included in programmes for civic education. This should include civic responses to hate speech and awareness of digital surveillance.

How can connecting and enabling users help to **promote peaceful and inclusive societies** for sustainable development? (SDG 16)

Simply connecting individual internet users will not automatically improve social inclusion and peace. It has been demonstrated that users chose information sources and communicate with others which confirm their opinions. Digital communications and media have actually weakened rather than enhanced inclusion through the segmentation of media across political, social and cultural divides, the spread of rumours and conspiracy theories and giving a wider platform to populists.

These challenges can be addressed, inter alia, via

- User media education, including through initiatives such as the Anti-rumour strategies for local authorities and the No hate campaigns promoted by the Council of Europe
- The application of media ethics related to diversity and pluralism to online media and social media
- The strict enforcement of anti-hate-speech regulations

- Support for emerging online media which use business models based on user contribution to content and financing, and which (eg see the Council of Europe's online media Diversity accelerator Div-A).

question 8 on ways in which ICT or Internet connectivity could be used to help reach the SDGs ?

Council of Europe disposes of a number of instruments which can contribute to meeting the goals. These include the following CM Recommendations which should be put into practice by the member States by taking into account and implementing the principles and guidelines set forth in them. As set out in particular in the recommendations on e-governance and e-democracy, new technology is not an objective in and by itself but constitutes a means to achieve the stated goals and objectives. It is about democracy, human rights and technology should serve the promotion thereof.

Recommendation Rec(2003)2 on neighbourhood services in disadvantaged urban areas;
Recommendation Rec(2004)15 on e-governance;
Recommendation Rec(2004)15 on e-democracy.
Recommendation Rec(2016) 2 on the internet of citizens

To be achievable, the Strategic Development Goals referred to above will require compliance with the **Twelve principles of good democratic governance** set out in the **Strategy for Innovation and Good Governance** of the Council of Europe. Proper use of technology can indeed contribute to observing the Twelve Principles but such use, in turn, will also need to meet the requirements of the Twelve principles. The relevant benchmark can provide additional guidance to this effect.

From the point of view of democracy, ICT and new applications should always provide access to complete and pluralistic information, beyond regulation, educational measures are required to support e-democracy. An adequate level of media literacy should become universal and e-citizenship skills should be included in programmes for civic education in order to avoid a new divide between those who have the necessary skills and access to exploit the new technologies to the full and those who do not. Civic responses to hate speech could be usefully complemented also by a political response through appropriate and correct democratic discourse.

New technologies should not restrict or filter people's access to information but through the interactive nature of the internet, should provide enhanced access to diverse and pluralistic sources of information. Civic and political responses could be modelled along the practices used in 'constructive journalism' promoted in public service broadcasting and which aims to use new technologies to present a constructive debate with as broad an input as possible on complex issues (rather than focusing on 'hot' or current topics and one-sided statements). as such could indeed also contribute to stimulates citizen-driven solution journalism to promote and harness new ideas and solutions emerging outside institutional channels and enables deliberation on a large scale and the emergence of shared positions on complex issues.

The Internet governance therefore must become more democratic – and democratic governance must be sought. Recommendation (2016)² should become an integral part of this.

To this end the multi-stakeholder approach should be widened as much as possible also. Setting up a Multi-disciplinary framework for Internet governance and information society policy development and implementation could contribute to this.

Question No. 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:

- How can connecting and enabling users help to combat **climate change** and its impacts? (SDG 13)
- How can connecting and enabling users help to conserve and sustainably use the **oceans, seas and marine resources** for sustainable development? (SDG 14)
- How can connecting and enabling users help to protect, restore and promote sustainable use of **terrestrial ecosystems**, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss? (SDG 15)

Bern Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (ETS No. 104):

- Citizen science engages the general public and in particular amateur scientists and nature enthusiasts in science related endeavours. The involvement of the general public in science does not only create new knowledge or provide precious data to professional scientists. It further supports informed decision-making in the environment field and indirectly improves conservation actions' planning. Even more important, it is a catalyst for greater public engagement in the democratic processes and policy making;
- Web platforms, applications and other internet related infrastructure and tools can facilitate access to citizen science, increase its impact, create networks of contributors and provide them with new learning opportunities;
- Improving connectivity of the large public can support their engagement in citizen science, contribute to the monitoring of both terrestrial and marine ecosystems and thus support world efforts in halting biodiversity loss.