

IGF 2018 KEY MESSAGES: DIGITAL INCLUSION & ACCESSIBILITY

The Internet Governance Forum (IGF) is a world platform which involves people from various stakeholder groups in discussions on public policy issues relating to the Internet. The IGF facilitates a common understanding of how to maximize Internet opportunities and address risks and challenges that arise out of the technological development.

The Internet Governance Forum 2018 held in Paris (12 - 14 November 2018) was dedicated to the Internet of Trust.

The following are the highlights of the main messages on inclusion and accessibility for the Internet of Trust:

1. Inclusivity

The Internet can be a powerful tool for inclusion. Even with availability of access, a lack of trust in the Internet as a medium will deepen existing digital divides.

2. Connectivity

After more than 20 years the Internet is close to participation by 50% of the world's population. However, society cannot afford another 20 years to ensure digital inclusion for the remaining 50% and it has to deal seriously with the issue.

3. Digital inclusion

Despite increased awareness and efforts, multiple forms of digital divides exist. There is a growing consensus on the need for more diverse policy perspectives on the root causes and consequences of digital inclusion.

Access & connectivity

- Internet access is a key component in thriving innovations. It is important to focus on not just technical aspects but also human [or social] aspects of connectivity.
- Challenges in access and connectivity remain and take different forms in various



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environments. Problems of access and connectivity also include many commercial operators focusing on lucrative urban rather than rural connectivity

- Advanced technology and cost effective features, for example such as the 5G network, is/are envisioned to be a cornerstone infrastructure for digital economy and inclusion. IoTs and AI are among some new assistive technologies that display strongly evidenced success and potential to address efficiently the basic needs of the underserved in society.
- In enabling Internet access not only feasibility should be taken into consideration but also features like affordability and sustainability.
- Governments have a key role in facilitating the adoption of new technologies like 5G, IoTs, AI for the improvement of its population's accessibility and connectivity. Such technologies are expected to expand rapidly for the benefit of consumers, innovators and business.
- In the convergent environment, accessibility should be all-encompassing to include people with disabilities.

Digital inclusion of vulnerable groups

- Digital inclusion can also lead to exclusion. The introduction of digital literacy programmes will not benefit those who are currently unconnected.
- Cities should exist to serve the needs of society and all people, not the other way around. The needs of persons with disabilities, older persons and other vulnerable groups should be part of a thoughtful policy and integrated into the designs of cities.
- The needs of persons with disabilities are not sufficiently reflected in the Internet development and design of technologies. Artificial intelligence technologies can assist people with disabilities and other marginalized groups to access technology and establish or improve their professional, educational and human connections.
- Digital inclusion is also particularly important for refugees. Technologies such as blockchains and AI also have been increasingly deployed in an effective manner to empower and deliver basic services to refugees and migrants.
- People living in indigenous reservations lack basic access to services such as electricity and therefore to the Internet. As such reservations also occur within higher developed countries, it is important to adopt suitable regional or local approaches to ensure digital inclusion for all.

Community networks

- The establishment of community networks has emerged as a concrete alternative to address the challenge of connecting the unconnected. Successful community networks rely on the active participation of local communities in the design, development, and management of network infrastructure as a common public resource.

- One useful output coming out of the IGF’s Dynamic Coalition on Community Connectivity is “The Community Network Manual”. The Manual provides useful guidance on how to build, organise, and deploy community networks through toolkits, guidelines, and instructions.
- Community networks face problems in finding a regulatory framework which could be adapted to the needs. Often such frameworks have never been considered by policy makers.
- Technological development increasingly provides new opportunities for libraries as cloud computing and the possibility to host digital content in safe servers. Libraries act as strategic players in forging partnerships and furthering Internet accessing goal.

Net Neutrality

- Neutral networks will allow equitable exchanges over the Internet.
- Detecting violations in net neutrality is usually not an easy task. The IGF ecosystem could do more to (i) articulate what is net neutrality and the consideration of regulation; (ii) develop crowdsourcing models for feedback and buy-ins; (iii) encourage research and development on the measurement of net discrimination.
- Measuring net neutrality is difficult because it depends on who is measuring and what is being measured. Crowdsourcing can be an option to verify net neutrality, allowing users to collectively provide input when they are confronted with discrimination on networks.

Online education and digital capacity development

- Digital skills training programs complement traditional connectivity and improve economic outcomes for vulnerable communities..
- The fear of adoption of technology can be related to the fear of losing jobs. Retraining workers and adapting public policies (in areas such as industry or workplace relations policy) offer possible solutions for this.
- Digital literacy is important but digital inclusion is an all encompassing process. Without digital literacy training we will not accomplish the social goals we seek.
- According to the IGF participants if we only expand broadband access we could not bridge easily the gaps in today’s digital inclusion. What we need most is improved data systems, engagement and multistakeholder partnerships as well as appropriate legal frameworks that are in line with relevant international norms.

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https://www.intgovforum.org/multilingual/index.php?q=filedepot_download/6037/1411