

IGF 2021 WS #158 Digital Inclusivity in DLDCs: User Connectivity vs. Content

Key Takeaways:

1. **Data Localization:** Data and content should be localized with government championing the creation of enabling environment. This would resolve the issues around trust and unauthorized data mining.
2. **Government Bureaucracy and Taxation:** Permit from Government in launching projects is a big bottleneck to connectivity today. There are a lot of bureaucracy with government processes. Government's heavy tax on digital services should be discouraged
3. **Expensive Connectivity:** Connecting is still very expensive with less content available for people to access and all these need to be addressed to have meaningful connectivity. Telcos should practice infrastructural handshake
4. **Cyber Safety:** Safety online should also be considered. People would come online if it's safe of threats & cyberbully.
5. **Access to Funding:** There should be funding availability for innovators & access to loan to improve on local solutions

Call to Action/Recommendations

1. Governments should digitize their processes without any more delays & put citizen-facing services online while also ensuring that digital infrastructure deficits are vigorously addressed.
2. Government should create a level playing field & provide some level of support to local content creators to ensure they meet the standards generally acceptable by users at an affordable price.
3. Telcos should engage in infrastructure sharing to reduce waste...
4. Private Sector and Civil Society Organizations should undertake enlightenment & digital literacy programs to sensitize the general public, the benefits the Internet provides, and as well debunk the fears of coming online.
5. Government to grant telcos tax holiday, loan facilities, important infrastructures i.e energy, and reduce the cost of "right of way" in order to reduce the cost of connection which is currently quite high.

Full report



AfICTA's Workshop session @ the IGF-2021 held concurrently as the 9th AfICTA Summit in a hybrid format. The session which was the third installment of an AfICTA workshop at the global IGF was moderated by Paul Rowney, the Deputy Chair of AfICTA. The Chair of AfICTA, Mr. Thabo Mashegoane gave a brief opening remark. Mr. Thabo Mashegoane stated how critical the topic “**Digital Inclusivity in Developed and Least Developed Countries (DLDCs): User Connectivity vs Content**” is, especially in a time where strategies are being devised regarding connecting the dis-connected half of the world. He appreciated the panelists and attendees for joining.



The moderator further gave background information about AfICTA as an advocacy group for businesses in Africa and that though connectivity in Africa is 50%, the speed is still relatively slow and aside being connected, another critical aspect of connectivity is content accessibility.

He gave a brief introduction of all the panelists; **Dr. Isa Ibrahim Jalo** the Director of Abuja Geographic Information Systems – AGIS; **Dr. Melissa Sassi** the Global Head of IBM Hyper Protect Accelerator, **Mrs. Mary Uduma**, West Africa IGF Coordinator; **Kulesza Joanna** the Assistant Professor of International Law University North Poland and **Jane Coffin** the Senior VP & Internet Growth, ISOC.

Question 1: Barriers to universal and meaningful access: What are the main challenges that people face in obtaining and making full use of Internet access? To what extent are these the result of social, economic and cultural factors, and to what extent do they result from aspects of the digital environment? How can we use the responses to these questions to better understand the intersection between digital policies and other policy areas? Can this understanding help us to develop and implement more realistic Internet-related policy goals?

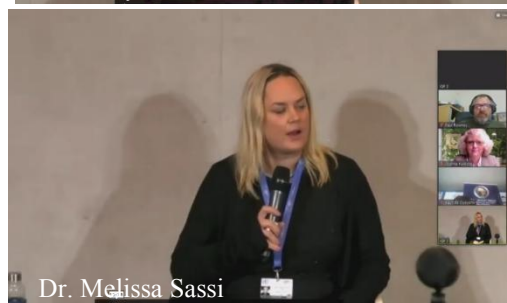
Dr. Isa Ibrahim Jalo mentioned affordability as one of the major barriers, as the cost of data is still not affordable for a lot of people. He also highlighted availability of quality access which the Fiber optic is meant to address but it's hard to have it at the hinterland due to several factors like "the cost of the right of way", government policies and most times delayed licensing. Dr. Isa Jalo mentioned the need for contents and data to be localized with government championing the creation of enabling environment such as policy formulation, creating required infrastructures and resolving issues around trust and unauthorized data mining.

Dr. Melissa Sassi's stand point regarding "...Connectivity vs Content" was that both are extremely important to ensuring the last-mile connection. She mentioned how important it is to enable young people with access to various digital skills such that they aren't just consumers but creators, contributing their quota toward creating indigenous solutions to problems. She recounted some of her interventions on digital literacy for youths on the continent, partnerships and funding interventions such as Credit Plus from Uganda that provides temporary loan which isn't predatory. [Pay Hippo](#) providing small businesses loan access etc.

Mrs. Mary Uduma raised the issue of availability as another major bottleneck to improving connectivity. The dilemma whereby one can afford it but it's not available. She mentioned how there are little or no citizen-facing content online and how the need of the people with special needs are least considered. Language is another major barrier as people with no formal education find it difficult to interact online. She also raised the issue of trust and shared her experience of people's wrong perception of what the Internet is. Safety online is very important as more people would come online only if it's safe of threats and cyberbully.

Kulesza Joanna examined the issue of capacity building, human right and online safety. She highlighted how safety online is important to end-users most especially

now that huge junk of our day-to-day activities are based online due to the COVID-19 Pandemic. She mentioned that users' security online should be of great concern to stakeholders by enlightening and educating on how they could keep safe while using the Internet. Another important aspect of Joanna's intervention was the need to get not just only the youths connected but also the older generation through education. She mentioned some of the ongoing interventions on ensuring more user connectivity/safety with "GFC - Global Funds for Cyber-Experts and Council of Europe.



The floor was opened for interventions and questions

1. We had Rada from Pakistan; How do we ensure there are more of positive local contents rather than harmful contents. Melissa answered that by putting more of the positive content online and making sure solutions are well branded.
2. We had Nassar Nicholas, Tanzania Digital Programme Manager with the list of what the government is doing to improve digital access and knowledge. About 200 Women and Youth Innovation Hubs to enhance connectivity with language barrier resolved.
3. Akintunde opined that there is need to create groups like ISOC in schools that would further expose school children to digital knowledge and mentorship and that could be scaled such that it becomes a regional initiative.
4. Kossi AMESSINOU expressed how connectivity in schools is important to universal digital access.

Government Bureaucracy and Taxation: Permit from Government in launching a project is a big bottleneck to connectivity today. There are a lot of bureaucracy with government processes and policies. Taxation on every digital initiative by government discourages innovators and delays connectivity.

Question 2: Practical locally-driven policy solutions: What lessons can be drawn (and how) from successful policy solutions to universal access and meaningful connectivity around the world, while taking into account local specificities and needs? In particular, what are the relevant practices implemented by local actors (local government, civil society, local providers and entrepreneurs) to advance universal and meaningful access?

Joanna mentioned that African leaders are adopting good practices to leapfrog into the future and thought it's a good idea that must be promoted. She added that discussions around connectivity and service provision must be encouraged and joining fora like ICANN, IGF, ISOC and other initiatives would fast-track the idea and expose Africa to solutions that are already available. Regarding power inconsistency as earlier mentioned by one of the panelists, Joanna pointed out that ISOC supports solar panel project in some cities and rural area.

Mary Uduma said there should be a synergy between the government and other stakeholders. Initiatives must be clearly spelt out by innovators so as to encourage government's support. Mary charged the government to ensure their efforts are not in silos, there should be digital corporation at the local level and government should work with all their arms and provide better services either cybersecurity, digital literacy, capacity building etc.

Melissa explained the need for multi-stakeholder approach and stated some of her interventions with the Cape Verde Government regarding building entrepreneurship and capacity development. National Day of Code was established with the support of the Ministry of Education, Ministry of IT and Ministry of Tourism. She mentioned that the initiative has gone through the teachers to the students empowering them on how to code.

The floor was opened for interventions and questions

1. Raiz Mondugu, Professor of Information from Nepal brought in the perspective of Nepal with respect to digitalization and Internet access to users which is growing by the day.
2. Kemambo from Tanzania works with content creators, service providers and shared her experience around policy formulation and how government in Africa do not prioritize connectivity but building other infrastructures. Delay with approving licensing and heavy taxation on Internet services.
3. Inye Kemabonta's comment was on the 4th of the 4As (Accessibility, Availability, Affordability and Appropriate Contents) He said there are little or no appropriate contents available to users in a form that it is easily accessible to them. He cited an example of featured phones usage in Nigeria for education, financial transactions and how peoples' need are met.
4. Kileo Yusuph intervened regarding capacity building. 3 things he said could be the reasons for getting it wrong. a. There are more people with wrong skill-set sitting in right places, b. Lack of awareness of the opportunities the internet brings and c. Lack of knowledge and synergy.
5. Yusuf Ahamad further buttressed the point regarding the need for government to be more decisive in encouraging more people to come online rather than victimizing them with laws and tax.

In Concluding the session, Kossi encouraged that government should bring all important stakeholders to the table for a stronger and more inclusive perspective.

Dr. Isa Jalo also encouraged that government should be inclusive regarding formulation of laws and should also see to digitizing all their processes so as to drive traffic online and as well encourage those that are not online to come online. "We must as well build capacity regarding content creation".

Mrs. Mary Uduma and Melissa Sassi also appreciated all for the information shared and the knowledge impacted and look forward to putting them into action.

The session was closed by the moderator, Mr. Paul Rowney

