Asia-Pacific Regional Internet & Development Dialogue

THE INTERNET OF OPPORTUNITY: Building a sustainable future through an inclusive Internet in Asia-Pacific

Background

Home to over 4 billion people and covering more than 50 countries and territories, the Asia-Pacific is the largest and most diverse region of the globe. The region is home to countries like China, India, Indonesia and Japan, which account for 37% of the world’s mobile subscriber base (GSMA\(^1\)), while on the other hand, only 7% of people in the region have fixed broadband access (ESCAP\(^2\)). It is also arguably the most digitally divided region in the world, with Republic of Korea at 84.3% Internet penetration, compared to Myanmar with only 2.1% (World Bank).

A significant shift to smartphones and tablets in many economies across the region is expected to drive demand even further with many economies transitioning to 4G/LTE rapidly. The use of cloud-based applications in the workplace, together with video streaming and social media, will place far greater demands on bandwidth – and in particular for mobile broadband. This also has the potential to further widen the digital divide between countries in the region. Particularly significant is the cross-cutting gender divide that the region faces, as women and girls have less access to broadband Internet and knowledge-enhancing software applications. Beyond connectivity, there are other access related issues that need to be addressed as well – including affordability for the connected and bringing the unconnected online.

Connecting the still unconnected will remain one of the major issues for both governments and industry and policymakers in the short to medium term. The coalescence of connectivity and socio-economic inclusiveness, particularly for the last two billion, underlines the need for transformative Internet access through integrative policies, user-driven tools, and technical solutions that can be rapidly deployed and appropriated by various localities across the region. The demand for international transit and sub-regional transit is also expected to increase with various regional integration initiatives such as the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) and closer intra-regional trade.

ESCAP member countries have recognized the need for a concerted regional effort on promoting ICT connectivity for sustainable development. As a result, the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway (AP-IS) initiative was developed to promote the regional ICT connectivity (terrestrial or submarine fibre cables), connecting each separate country into a cohesive regional information superhighway to enhance competition and open new opportunities for large-scale investment in broadband infrastructure. In addition, regional connectedness will lead to economies of scale and drive international bandwidth prices down, increasing resilience by offering redundancy to submarine cables, and decreasing latency across the region. Such initiatives will improve availability, reliability and affordability of broadband access among much wider segments of the populations and enable them to take full advantage of the burgeoning digital economy, digital government services and environment-conscious initiatives, such as smart cities, intelligent transport, trade facilitation, smart energy grids, ICT-enabled disaster risk reduction, just to name a few.

\(^1\)https://www.gsmaintelligence.com/research/?file=fba9efc032061d5066b0eda769ad277f&download

Initiatives such as the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway (APIS) being facilitated by ESCAP will be even more critical to ensure the region’s continued socio-economic development and to contributing towards the effective implementation of WSIS action lines in support of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In addition to this, and in order to realise the SDGs, disaster risk reduction and the establishment of resilient telecommunications infrastructure needs to be mainstreamed into development policies, planning and implementation. As a result, ICTs through mechanisms such as social media are vital for disaster response and recovery, and functioning ICT infrastructures are essential both pre- and post-disaster.

The region generates nearly 40% of global domestic product and contributes to 60% of the global growth rates (source: ADB\(^3\)), factors driving these contributions from the Asia-Pacific include adoption of new technology, globalization, regional integration and market-oriented reforms. However, the region remains home to more than 700 million living on less than USD 1.25 a day (IPS\(^4\)). Poverty reduction, improving health and education, economic prosperity, women empowerment, combating climate change and environmental responsibility are high priority agenda items on the future development vision for governments in the region.

For the Asia-Pacific, ICTs and the Internet will play an important role in development, and can be an important catalyst in improving the socio-economic status of communities, as well playing a transformative role for the economy as a whole in the transition towards a digital economy. Underpinning all this will be continued trust in the Internet and all that it enables.

**Conference Details**

**When:** 03- 04 October

**Where:** United Nations Conference Centre (UNCC)
Bangkok, Thailand

The conference will consist of opening and closing sessions, plenary sessions as well as panel discussions. It will be a one and half days program covering a range of topical issues related to Internet and Development in the Asia-Pacific region.

The event will be hosted by ESCAP (Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific) and will be held back-to-back with the ESCAP first Committee on Information Communications and Technology, Science, Technology and Innovations meeting. This will elevate its overall value, ensuring high-level participation and speakers from the region and beyond.

**Objective**

The purpose of this conference is to convene a multi-stakeholder regional dialogue on policy issues around ‘Internet for Development’ matters and address some of the opportunities and challenges in the Asia-Pacific region. Special attention will be given to the transformational potential of ICT and Internet for SDGs, as well as mainstreaming gender within topical discussions. The conference will offer open high-level discussions addressing the following dimensions:

- Connecting the Next Billion
- ICTs and Sustainable Development
- Regional Opportunities and Challenges

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3 http://www.adb.org/site/sgd/overview
4 http://www.ipsnews.net/2015/05/the-asia-pacific-region-is-growing-but-millions-are-living-in-poverty/
Conference Cross-cutting Themes

Keeping in mind the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and considering the opportunities the Internet enables, the conference will explore qualitative and quantitative impact, best practices and lessons learned, as well as findings from the latest studies and analysis on the following topics:

**Rural Connectivity** A significant proportion of the population in Asia-Pacific live in rural and remote areas—the same areas that, in addition to being broadly marginalised, are also more likely to be victims of market failure, with commercial viability often an issue for service providers. To this end, the conference will discuss various alternatives to Internet access provision to such communities in order to encourage diversity and resilience. It will also look into policy options for infrastructure sharing, spectrum allocation, universal service funds and subsidy models, community owned networks, as well as projects by commercial and non-commercial actors to roll out networks to underserved and unserved areas in the region.

**Financial Inclusion** Financial services are crucial to encouraging entrepreneurship and economic participation, especially for the informal sector—yet an estimated 1.2 billion people in Asia-Pacific do not have access to a bank account. The Internet, along with mobile technologies, are helping to fill in these gaps through mechanisms like mobile payments, micro-lending and micro-insurance, which allow the unbanked to save, transfer, transact, and borrow money at reasonable rates, and governments to deliver social benefits to the poor at much lower costs. Tailoring products to the particular needs of the unbanked is important, as well the need for interoperability among different platforms and service providers, and harmonisation of laws, standards and guidelines among jurisdictions in the region.

**Disaster management and mitigation** The increasing frequency and intensity of disasters around Asia-Pacific call for technologies to monitor environmental changes, power early warning systems, support crucial communication, and aid local and international coordination to help communities prepare and respond to natural calamities. With participants from the region’s disaster-prone countries, the conference will look into how connected devices and platforms like solar-powered sensors, transponders, 3D mapping and delay-tolerant networks, are being applied to emergency situations to help minimise the damage and casualties from natural calamities, and will explore some of the policy considerations around these.

**Enabling e-services** Increased Internet connectivity is expected to pave the way for the development and more widespread — and timely - distribution of tools, services and applications to support meaningful Internet access and empowerment for marginalised sectors of community, including women, indigenous communities, and those with special needs, such as the elderly and persons with disabilities. But findings from recent research also show that the link between Internet access and use is not straightforward. While many governments in the region have launched frameworks for e-health, e-government and e-education, implementation rates vary wildly in part due to the lack of local capacity but as well due to issues around access. An enabling environment that allows the public and private sectors, as well as not-for-profit organisations, to innovate, create and facilitate is critical, and the open Internet plays a key role in this. Improving access and accessibility, building digital skills and literacy, enhancing trust online, and taking into account the user’s capabilities and needs are some of the factors that will increase the value and utility of the Internet for existing and potential users.

**Frugal innovation and Entrepreneurship** Extending Internet connectivity to the last billions inevitably involves low-cost, and often low-power and open solutions that can be easily adopted or reproduced by low-income, rural and less skilled communities. The conference will seek to highlight some of the innovative equipment, platforms, software and systems that encourage future Internet users to not only become consumers, but also producers and creators of the Internet and the active and passive infrastructure, devices and services that go with it.
### Tentative Program

#### Day 1 | October 03, 2016

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<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tr>
<td>09:00 – 12:00</td>
<td>Pre-Event Workshop: Gender and ICT Access</td>
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<tr>
<td>13:00 - 14:00</td>
<td>Registration</td>
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<td>14:00 - 14:30</td>
<td>Inaugural Session</td>
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<td>Featuring welcome, opening, and a keynote</td>
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<td>14:30 - 16:00</td>
<td>Plenary 1: Setting the scene - Connecting the unconnected</td>
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<td>Access and Affordability stand as two main challenges in bringing the next billion users online in the Asia-Pacific. Governments are making efforts to facilitate, industry is trying to remain competitive while the future users from rural and unserved parts are eager to become part of the digital society. The session will feature discussions on issues, challenges and future outlook of Internet access and affordability in the Asia-Pacific.</td>
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<td>16:00 - 16:30</td>
<td>Break [Videos from projects/initiatives in the region play in background]</td>
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<tr>
<td>16:30 - 17:30</td>
<td>Forum: Disaster Risk Reduction</td>
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<td>This session will provide an insight on best practices and experiences and knowledge related to the development of ICT for disaster response and recovery, that ultimately seeks to realise robustness and reliability of critical ICT infrastructure throughout the Asia-Pacific region.</td>
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#### Day 2 | October 04, 2016

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<th>Time</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tr>
<td>09:00 - 10:30</td>
<td>Plenary 2: Building Trust in the age of the Digital Economy</td>
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<td>This session will look at how we can build a better online security and trust agenda for the Asia-Pacific region as we move towards a digital economy that cuts across all sectors. It will also look at the interplay of security and trust, and the policy choices they shape.</td>
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<tr>
<td>10:30 - 11:00</td>
<td>Break [Videos from projects/initiatives in the region play in background]</td>
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<tr>
<td>11:00 - 12:00</td>
<td>Forum: Frugal Innovation and Entrepreneurship</td>
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<td>This session will showcase stories of innovative devices, platforms, software and entrepreneurs. It will also focus on steps required to nurture innovative minds, providing them with opportunities to create and contribute to the digital ecosystem.</td>
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<td>12:00 - 13:15</td>
<td>Lunch</td>
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<td>13:15 - 14:15</td>
<td>Setting the scene: WSIS and Sustainable Development in the Asia-Pacific</td>
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<td>This session will provide a broad overview of WSIS and its linkages to the Sustainable Development Goals, and policy actions required to put the region on</td>
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track to sustainable development.

14:15 - 15:30
**Plenary 3: Asia Pacific Information Superhighway for the Sustainable Development Goals**

This session will examine how the ESCAP’s AP-IS initiative towards regional ICT connectivity as a tool can empower human capacity, increase access to financial services, education, healthcare and foster sustainable development.

15:30 - 16:00
Break [Videos from projects/initiatives in the region play in background]

16.00 - 17:00
**High Level Roundtable: Harnessing the Internet of Opportunity for the Asia-Pacific**

17:00 - 17:30
Closing Remarks and Wrap-up

18:00 - 19:30
Conference Reception

**Participation**

Invitations will be sent to high-level government officials representing developing countries, developed countries and emerging countries from the Asia-Pacific. In addition, leading regional experts, industry representatives, civil society organizations, entrepreneurs and research institutes will also be invited to attend - a total of 200 participants are expected to attend.

**Conference Documentation**

Short issues paper on the themes of the conference will be prepared and distributed in advance of the conference. In addition, a conference outcomes report will be prepared noting key inputs and discussions captured during the conference; these will be synthesized and presented as a way-forward document after the conference. It is expected this document will be used by other fora in the region as an input and issues document.

**Expected Outcomes**

It is expected that this conference will lead to a number of possible outcomes, including:

- One or more working groups may emerge from the discussions, organised around issues e.g. Internet for sustainable development, connectivity, innovation and collaboration.
- Specific follow-up and engagement with national governments present at the conference.
- The Regional Internet development conference becoming a biannual event that serves as a pragmatic forum for broadening discussion about the Internet and socio-economic development. The outcome of this multi stakeholder event will feed into the ESCAP Committee on Information Communications and Technology, Science, Technology and Innovations and the WSIS regional review meetings.