Internet Society’s contribution to the 3rd APT Preparatory Meeting for the ITU World Telecommunication Development Conference (23-25 October 2013)

Introduction

The Internet Society (ISOC) respectfully submits this contribution to the October 2013 WTDC Preparatory Meeting of the Asia Pacific Telecommunity. The Internet Society is a global organization with Regional Bureaus all over the world. With a Regional Office in Singapore and over 26% of ISOC members coming from the Asia-Pacific Region, ISOC has a strong commitment to the Asia-Pacific region. Our Asia-Pacific Regional Presence gives us a unique perspective on the key challenges facing this highly diverse region as it takes its place as a global information technology leader. Through capacity building activities, technical engagement, policy advocacy and partnerships across the region, ISOC’s efforts aim to support the growth and evolution of the Internet throughout the Region.

Our contribution to this APT meeting aims to provide ISOC’s perspective on the progress the Asia-Pacific region has made in advancing connectivity since the last WTDC in 2010 and to highlight challenges where more work may be needed. In short, the ITU-D has important work to do in order to assist developing countries to bridge the digital divide and bring much-needed infrastructure to all parts of the globe. To be successful in this mission and to work within limited resources, the ITU-D must work collaboratively and in partnership with other stakeholders in the region.

It has been our experience that cooperation, collaboration and partnership are the cornerstones for effective and sustainable development strategies at the global, regional and local levels and we are hopeful that these elements will form the basis for ITU-D’s activities for the coming period.

Regional Considerations

The Asia-Pacific region is highly diverse in many ways including population size, geography, and rate of development. As a result, it is difficult to find any one measure that captures the scope and scale of the information society in the Asia-Pacific Region. The Region is home to several of the world’s most technologically advanced economies in the world including South Korea, Singapore, Australia and Japan. At the same time, Pacific Island countries continue to struggle to obtain affordable access to the global Internet and landlocked countries such as Nepal and Mongolia have to overcome high costs to gain access to undersea cables. Despite this tremendous intra-regional diversity, one trend is clear: the Asia-Pacific region is an exceedingly dynamic market for communications with tremendous opportunities in the coming years.
Since 2010, the Asia-Pacific region has seen steady growth in the number of broadband subscribers, which has, in turn, driven region-wide improvements in costs and available content. End-user generated traffic is on the rise, reflecting greater access speeds throughout the region. According to the ITU's most recent report on “Measuring the Information Society”, mobile broadband represents one of the most dynamic growth areas of the region’s ICT market, reflecting major strides that have been made to improve infrastructure and affordability. Hong Kong, Korea and Australia continue to outpace their regional neighbors in terms of growth in mobile broadband; however, emerging economies like Indonesia are also seeing investments in 3G networks paying off in terms of improvements in local access and affordability.\(^1\)

As an example of the Region’s increasing market strength, intra-Asian traffic exchange now accounts for 44% of all regional traffic; a trend driven by less dependence on U.S. content and the growth of more locally sourced content.\(^2\) South Asia outpaced other sub-regions in Asia with a 63% compound growth rate from 2009-2013 in peak traffic on international links.\(^3\) While the Pacific Islands still struggle to build out Internet infrastructure, a key milestone was reached in August 2013 when Tonga celebrated the arrival of its first fiber optic cable.\(^4\) Renesys reports that latency dropped precipitously in Tonga following the activation of that cable and that access to this important infrastructure should improve overall quality of service for end-users in Tonga.\(^5\) These are all positive trends that position the Region to make critical progress in the coming period.

As noted above, the Asia-Pacific Region is highly diverse and this diversity is most evident in the disparities in access to communications within the region. The ITU’s MIS report notes that the gap between countries with highly advanced ICT development and those at the bottom is stark – at least 12 countries in the region are considered below the global developing country average for ICT development.\(^6\) Indeed, while end-user generated traffic is increasing dramatically, discrepancies in connection speeds among high-income and low-income sub-regions are still far too high and point to a growing digital divide within the region. Even within countries, the digital divide is growing as indigenous and rural communities and ethnic minorities continue to face significant challenges in gaining access to communications.

The Asia-Pacific Region is already leading the world in terms of communications innovation and growth. By focusing on bridging the intra-regional digital divide and leveraging its natural strengths, the Internet Society believes that the Region can lead the world by showing how cooperation and knowledge-sharing can help solve some of this generation’s most difficult communications development challenges. The Internet Society remains committed to being an active partner in this regional effort to bridge the digital divide. We have a deep commitment to ensuring that all people have the opportunity to benefit from the Internet and our activities in the region are undertaken with this overall purpose in mind. In particular, the Internet Society is especially proud of our efforts in the following areas:

- Supporting the deployment of IPv6 in the region through awareness building, technical training and capacity building;
- Supporting the creation of Network Operator Groups (NOGs) in order to share best practices, learn from each other and the establishment of communities of practice;

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\(^2\) www.telegeography.com
\(^3\) www.telegeography.com
\(^5\) http://www.renesys.com/2013/10/subsea-cables-add-resilience/
• Promoting the use of Internet exchange points (IXPs) as a means to improve local and regional connectivity;
• Encouraging governments to discuss and understand Internet technical issues, and to establishing multi-stakeholder consultative processes when deliberating policy issues
• Training and supporting capacity building projects which seek to develop and enhance technical skills and expertise within economies;
• Working with Universities, national research and education networks (NRENs), and academic institutions to discuss advanced technical Internet topics and contribute to the development of technical standards;
• Providing support to, contributing and cooperating with relevant regional organizations such as APEC TEL, APT, APNIC (Regional Internet Registry for Asia-Pacific) and national industry bodies to on matters related to the Internet and ICTs
• Providing support for technical workshops and online training for regulators, governments, IXPs, country-code top-level domains (ccTLDs), and academic institutions in the region;
• And, supporting and promoting the use of community wireless networks in rural and underserved locations in the region to empower people and contribute to their socio-economic development and participation in the information society.

PROPOSAL:

1. Enabling Environment: The ITU-D’s work in Programme 3 on the Regulatory and Market Environment for telecommunications should continue. In particular, we commend the ITU’s Global Symposium for Regulators and focus on Regulatory Best Practices as a key forum for Telecoms Regulators from around the world to share information amongst each other and to learn from one another.

Within Programme 3, we note that the Hyderabad Action Plan identified telephone numbering as a priority area. Many countries, especially those in the Pacific Islands, still lack the necessary knowledge and tools to build national E.164 telephone numbering plans that can adequately address and respond to instances of identified number misappropriation. We would encourage that work to continue in the ITU-D particularly for the Pacific Islands.

The ITU’s statistics and Indicators work continues to be highly relevant and important for countries and stakeholders to monitor progress and identify challenges. We appreciate ITU’s work in this area and support its continuation.

Open Standards – In the Internet environment, standards that are balanced and based on consensus, openness, due process, and transparent processes are an essential part of the ecosystem. These standards are voluntarily implemented and have proven to lead to global interoperability, scalability, stability, competition, and innovation. As part of creating an enabling environment, we urge governments to learn more about the benefits of the open standards process and how they can better embrace the results of those activities.

2. Emergency communications – the need for continuity of communications during times of disasters is a critical issue for all countries, but particularly for countries in the Asia-Pacific region who have suffered from major disasters. We note that continuity and resiliency is best achieved through carefully planned infrastructure diversity and there are many strong examples in the Asia-Pacific region in that regard. Having multiple connections and different routes between key points ensures that traffic can “route around” network problems – for
example, nodes that are off the air because of technical, physical, or political interference. We've seen instances in the Asia-Pacific Region where important resources remained accessible even when a country was impacted by disaster. Even though access from local, on-the-ground points may be impossible, it can be incredibly important for people and organizations outside the affected area to be able to access and use regional web resources, etc. We think that the ITU could have an important role in this regard to help encourage network diversity and resiliency.

Promotion of local content, intra-regional traffic exchange, and increased access and interconnection – As highlighted above, land-locked countries in the Asia-Pacific continue to face difficult challenges in obtaining access to affordable international Internet infrastructure. Consistent with the purposes of Programme 5, more work and assistance is needed to improve cross-border access and interconnection, in order to bring down prices, empower communities, develop greater diversity, enhance intra-regional cooperation, and incentivize the creation and dissemination of local content.

3. Capacity Building – Development is not only about technical capacity building – human capacity development is also critical. Training the next generation of experts and enhancing institutional/governance capacity provides the basis to grow skills and foster digital inclusion for everyone, including those from disadvantaged communities and those with special needs. This is a key element of any overall development strategy and we encourage the ITU to continue its efforts in this area. Building communities of interest requires knowledge, trust and a set of common objectives. In that light, we encourage the ITU to use Programme 4 in a multistakeholder fashion – to exemplify how stakeholders can come together in pursuit of common goals.

4. Partnerships – As we noted above, cooperation and partnerships are a key element of successful policy and development strategies. As the ITU embarks on projects and programmes, we strongly encourage a partnership approach that encourages mutually beneficial outcomes for all parties involved. In some cases, the ITU may take the lead; in others, it can play an important supporting role. But by working as part of the broader ecosystem, the ITU-D is well positioned to make an important contribution to advancing global development.