

Outcome Document of the Asia-Pacific Regional Internet and Development Dialogue on building a sustainable future through an inclusive Internet in Asia and the Pacific

Bangkok, Thailand
2-4 October 2016

The Internet Society (ISOC) and the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) co-organized an Asia-Pacific Regional Internet and Development Dialogue (APRIDD) on 3-4 October 2016. The event brought together about 200 participants that included high-level government officials from Asia and the Pacific, and a multidisciplinary group of leading regional experts, civil society organizations, industry representatives, entrepreneurs, and academic and research institutes.

A pre-event workshop took place in partnership with the Association for Progressive Communication (APC) on 2 October 2016. This workshop brought together 19 women leaders and 19 ISOC Chapter leaders from the region to discuss strategies for mainstreaming gender in information and communications technology (ICT) policymaking that will contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The participants from this workshop also took part in APRIDD.

The APRIDD convened a multi-stakeholder regional dialogue on policy issues around "Internet for Development" to address some of the opportunities and challenges towards achieving the SDGs and the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) Action Lines in the Asia-Pacific region.

APRIDD had seven sessions that focused on:

1. Connecting the unconnected
2. Disaster risk reduction
3. Building trust in the age of the digital economy
4. Frugal innovation and entrepreneurship
5. WSIS and sustainable development in the Asia-Pacific
6. Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway for the SDGs
7. Harnessing the Internet of opportunity for the Asia-Pacific

Each session comprised of a diverse panel and a moderator, and was conducted in the style of a dialogue with active interactions between the panellists, moderator and participants. In all the sessions, gender perspectives were considered and discussed.

The key issues, messages and ways forward that emerged from the sessions are summarized below. The summary below is meant to serve as a guide to the key discussion points from the event and do not necessarily represent the views of ISOC, ESCAP or APC, nor of the session speakers and organizations represented.

1. The achievement of the SDGs using ICT requires multi-stakeholder coordination and cooperation that mobilize and share knowledge, expertise, technology and financial resources (as stated in SDG target 17.16).
2. To use ICT to achieve the SDGs, the ICT infrastructure, particularly broadband, needs to be built. Fundamentally, electricity needs to be available to power the ICT infrastructure. Despite numerous challenges that Asia-Pacific countries face, particularly in supplying connectivity to rural and remote areas, and to landlocked and island countries, there have been many innovative approaches and solutions, particularly in providing last mile connectivity. In this regard the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway (AP-IS) project initiated by ESCAP will substantially increase the availability and affordability of ICT across the region.
3. Yet, the Internet is not being used even when it is available. This means that in addition to coming up with innovative solutions to "supply" connectivity to rural and remote areas, and to landlocked and least developed countries, emphasis must also be placed on addressing demand-side issues such as: (1) affordability; (2) awareness and digital skills; (3) relevant content and services; (4) security, privacy and trust; and (5) culture and norms.
4. It is important to promote the creation of Internet-enabled content and services, rather than just their consumption. This includes establishing Internet exchange points to keep Internet traffic local, and supporting and encouraging entrepreneurs and developers, especially women entrepreneurs and developers, to generate content and services that meet local demand. Fundamentally, digital literacy and skills development needs to be included in basic education.
5. These innovations to address the supply and demand sides have often been led by individuals or organizations in specific locations within a country, and typically independent of government interventions. However, if government can lead in driving the use of ICT for social and economic impact, and providing an enabling environment where innovation can flourish and scale up, this could accelerate the achievement of the SDGs.
6. The inclusion of frugal innovation in national development agendas is important. Frugal innovations are low-cost solutions that originate from local communities, and make use of local knowledge and resources to meet their specific local needs. Frugal innovations often fulfil needs that are neglected by mainstream businesses. While scientists, technologists, innovators and entrepreneurs are considered the traditional sources of innovative activity, there is potentially untapped resource of talent residing in under-represented communities, including women.
7. Often, technology interventions are regarded as gender-neutral, which means that they are equally suitable and benefitting both women and men. In reality, ICTs are not accessed and controlled by women and men equally. Studies have shown that women in low- and middle-income countries are 21% less likely than men to own a mobile phone, and 25% less likely to have Internet connectivity.
8. It is therefore important to collect sex-disaggregated data and support policy research to better understand the different barriers that women and men face in Internet use, particularly the policy measures that need to be in place to address the social and cultural barriers, and issues related to privacy and security. It is also important to provide, particularly for women, alternative, including non-digital, means to access information and services, and participate in decision-making and policymaking.

9. Carefully crafted regulations and policies are important because they can enable or limit the environment for investments in the ICT infrastructure. An enabling regulatory and policy environment that fosters innovation is necessary to: (1) address the numerous challenges of availability, accessibility and affordability of the Internet; (2) develop relevant content and services; and (3) build an ecosystem around the digital content and services. Since the ecosystem cuts across multiple sectors, a multi-stakeholder approach is encouraged to understand the complexity of the issues, and collaboratively work towards solutions.
10. Despite the ubiquity of mobile phones, public access points (also variedly called telecentres, community multimedia centres, Internet cafes, etc.) are still relevant and needed, especially for providing training on the use of the Internet and assisting with the use of online services. Broadband connections are important at these public access points to stream audios and videos, as a significant proportion of the population are still illiterate.
11. Sustainable business models for public access points are still being sought. It would therefore be useful to collate and analyse the knowledge and experiences in this area to better inform decision-making and ensure that public access points are sustainable.
12. Security, privacy and trust issues should be incorporated into strategies to enable Internet adoption and use, especially when many countries in Asia and the Pacific are pursuing financial inclusion through digital means, and a substantial number of first-time users are coming online. Women's and children's security online must also be incorporated, along with data protection laws to ensure privacy for sensitive and personal data that underpin services in the different sectors, including finance and health. A multi-stakeholder collaborative approach to addressing security, privacy and trust issues is critical. Particularly, ICT literacy and skills development need to include an understanding of security, privacy and trust issues. It is also important to shift the burden of establishing digital trust from users to public and private sector organizations that are in a stronger position to bear the risk.
13. Another area of risk is related to the exposure to disasters. Asia-Pacific is the most disaster prone region in the world. With climate change, the frequency and intensity of disasters will increase, impeding progress towards sustainable development. ICT can play an important role in all phases of disaster risk management, and the use of social media for emergency response has proven to be particularly valuable. It is important for governments to incorporate the use of social media in their preparedness planning process. The development of resilient infrastructures, communities and individuals is also vital and ICTs can play a key role.
14. The formation of a working group, comprised of participants from the pre-event workshop, has been proposed to identify the priorities that emerged from the dialogue and seek opportunities to address these issues collaboratively. One of the potential activities is the development of a survey focused on issues related to gender mainstreaming for an inclusive Internet in Asia and the Pacific that will be developed by working group members with support from ISOC and APC.
15. Asia-Pacific's digital divide is widening between and within countries, and between different social groups. The consequences of these divides are profound. As the world becomes more interconnected, and the ICT infrastructure, particularly broadband, underlies economic growth and social development, those without access, will be further disadvantaged. At this juncture, a multi-stakeholder approach to policymaking is critical to better understand the divides, and effectively leverage the resources and expertise to realize the Internet of

opportunity for achieving the SDGs. In addition, a multi-stakeholder approach will avoid overlaps and allows non-profit and government organizations, as well as United Nations agencies to share best practices.

ISOC is the trusted independent source for Internet information and thought leadership from around the world. It is also the organizational home for the Internet Engineering Task Force. With its principled vision and substantial technological foundation, ISOC promotes open dialogue on Internet policy, technology, and future development among users, companies, governments, and other organizations. Working with its members and Chapters around the world, ISOC enables the continued evolution and growth of the Internet for everyone.

APC is an international organization and network with members in 46 countries, mostly in the global south. The APC network has been pioneering in spreading access to ICTs, advocating for a rights-based approach to Internet access and governance, building capacity in the women's movement, and working in partnership with a diverse range of people and institutions since it was established in 1990.

ESCAP is the regional development arm of the United Nations and serves as the main economic and social development centre for the United Nations in Asia and the Pacific. Its mandate is to foster cooperation among its 53 members and 9 associate members. It provides the strategic link between global and country-level programmes and issues. It supports governments of countries in the region in consolidating regional positions and advocates regional approaches to meeting the region's unique socioeconomic challenges in a globalizing world. The ESCAP secretariat is based in Bangkok, Thailand.

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