

LACIGF 12 Report

Title of the session: Session 6 – Internet Access – The Challenge of Connecting the Unconnected in the Short Term

Session summary:

The moderator **Valeria Betancourt (Association for Progressive Communications - APC, Ecuador)** began the session highlighting the relevance of the topic, whose objective was to present and discuss different approaches and perspectives for the issue of Internet access to unconnected people. The significant barriers faced by the unconnected people were motivations for this debate since the lack of Internet access increases inequality. The moderator mentioned that there are more than 243 million unconnected people in Latin America and the Caribbean and that it is important to understand how the regulatory and economic implications fit the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 5 and 9 of the United Nations (UN).

Karla Velasco (REDES A.C., Mexico) presented pictures of real communities assisted by her community networks initiative and highlighted the discontinuity of digital inclusion programs. In a community network, the community itself builds the network, owns its data and can generate profit. In addition, it is a factor of empowerment and inclusion. The speaker presented success factors and shared limitations she still observes in her reality. In the Q&A session, Karla said that the business and funding models for the networks change according to the community network itself.

María Cristina Capelo (Facebook, Mexico), began her presentation highlighting Facebook's intention to contribute to the promotion of inclusion of unconnected people. She presented three pillars of these initiatives: expand access, create alliances with local content producers, and provide technology and reduce the costs of access resources. In the end, she presented the "Internet For All" project. In the Q&A session, María Cristina was asked to talk about the contractual parameters between Facebook and the operators in its project, if there is an exclusivity agreement for access to the social network. According to her, it is an evolving model, but there is no exclusivity agreement. In her final comment, she rescued the spirit of collaboration, dialogue, and flexibility to seek solutions among the various stakeholders.

Natalia Quevedo González (Comisión de Regulación de Comunicaciones de Colombia, Costa Rica) was asked by the moderator to comment on the models presented by the previous panelists. Therefore, she reckoned that the two models are good and that they need to dialogue with regulatory supporters. She said that current regulatory models may be rigid and expensive, but there should be a dialogue with the regulator. All stakeholders must take part in the regulation process. In the Q&A session, Natalia emphasized that success depends on the evaluation of public policies.

Andrés Sastre (Asociación Interamericana de Telecomunicaciones - ASIET, Uruguay) was asked by the moderator about what sustainable models could be deployed to reach unconnected rural areas. He contextualized the reality and explained that the success of having connected about 60% of the population of Latin America and the Caribbean was the result of a strong competition policy, cost-reducing, and some quality controls. Andrés believes that we need to change regulation, creating a distinction between the city and the rural area. In the Q&A session, Andrés stated that public policies that have gone successful had policies of funding protection, including for fiber deployment.

Eduardo Tomé (Internet Society Honduras, Honduras) was asked by the moderator about the perspectives of the technical community on the topic and about the appropriate institutional framework to bridge the divides. Eduardo pointed out the importance of democratizing the spectrum and mentioned Mexico as an example. According to the experience in Honduras with a community network in indigenous territory, the institutional framework must encompass and consider the culture of people assisted. He agreed with Andrés regarding the regulatory framework for cities and rural areas. In his final comment after the questions, Eduardo emphasized that in the community networks the important outcome is the social network that composes it.

Julián Casasbuenas (Association for Progressive Communications - APC and Colnodo, Colombia) was asked by the moderator on the importance of collaboration between government/public organizations and civil society organizations. He talked about his experience in Colombia, implementing the model used in Mexico. The experience seeks to bring connectivity without competing with private operators. Quality is a huge challenge for the communities and they try to have connections that are truly broadband, so they will not remain “under” connected. In the Q&A session and in his final comment, Julian said that there is no standard model for the implementation of a community network, but the communities are the ones that should start the process.

Outputs and other relevant links:

Full session: <https://youtu.be/eJ3JthbiDPc>

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