



August 2021

Asia-Pacific Regional Community Networks Summit 2021

Innovating Policymaking to Connect the Unconnected

Key Outcomes

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1. The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and the Internet Society (ISOC) co-hosted the Asia-Pacific Regional Community Networks Summit 2021 on 18 August 2021. The objectives of the Summit were to reflect on the progress on the use of Community Networks as a complementary access solution in the Asia-Pacific region, and discuss how policymakers could further accelerate the use of Community Networks for digital connectivity in rural areas.
2. The Asia-Pacific Regional Community Networks Summit was attended by ICT government officials, private sectors, non-government organisations, international organisations, and other stakeholders. The List of Online Registered Participants and Programme of the event are attached to this document (Annex 1 & 2).
3. The Summit discussed and highlighted the following issues:
 - a) Recognized that the digital divides continue to be a major challenge for meaningful digital connectivity in many Asia-Pacific developing economies, particularly in rural communities.
 - b) Acknowledged that Community Networks are cost-effective and empowers rural community ownership to bridging the rural-urban digital divide as a complementary access solution in the Asia-Pacific region.
 - c) Emphasized that multistakeholder partnerships through national/regional cooperation including through the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway initiative, are critical and requested all relevant stakeholders to work together towards bridging the rural digital divide in Asia and the Pacific. In particular, to achieve universal connectivity, multistakeholder partnerships need the 4C's - Collaboration, Coordination, Cooperation and Common Understanding.
 - d) Acknowledged the important roles of international organisations on supporting analytical research and conducting capacity trainings on digital connectivity opportunities and challenges; multinational development banks on funding digital connectivity infrastructures; and other relevant stakeholders including Community Networks operators on supporting the growth of Community Networks. In addition, noted that private sector collaboration

with rural stakeholders has been successful to explore technologies, business models and partnerships to bring more rural communities online and overcome the digital connectivity affordability challenge.

- e) Noted that strengthening of rural digital connectivity including the sustainable operation of Community Networks have improved economic resilience of rural communities especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- f) Recognized that challenges remain on development of Community Networks in rural communities including limitation on intellectual property rights to put educational content from the Internet through Community Networks; lack of digital literacy; lack of awareness on usefulness of the Internet; and restrictive spectrum policies in the Asia-Pacific region.
- g) Noted that innovative policymaking is critical for both supplying connectivity to rural and remote areas where it is economically unviable, and addressing demand-side issues such as affordability, awareness and digital skills development, and relevant content and services in local languages. Policies must include the voice of marginalized groups, including women, children and youth, older persons, persons with disabilities and indigenous peoples.
- h) Acknowledged that opportunities for strengthening rural digital connectivity can be facilitated through sharing of good practices and lessons learned, while looking at successful innovative ways and networks to expand digital rural connectivity. In particular, strong collaboration on simple technology and engagement of rural communities on sustainable operation of Community Networks are important.

Annex 1: List of online registered participants

Members

Bangladesh

Ms. Vanesa Rodrigues, Director (Planning and Development), Department of ICT, ICT Division, Ministry of Post, Telecommunication and Information Technology.

Kazakhstan

Mr. Nurbolat Alimbayev, Counsellor and Deputy Permanent Representative to ESCAP, Embassy of Kazakhstan, Bangkok.

Lao People's Democratic Republic

Mr. Thavisak Manodham, Director General, Ministry of Technology and Communications.

Maldives

H.E. Mr. Mohamed Shareef, Minister of State, Ministry of Environment, Climate Change and Technology.

Pakistan

Mr. Bilal Zaka, Head of IT Services, COMSATS University Islamabad Pakistan, Ministry of Science and Technology.

Philippines

Mr. Antonio E. Padre, Director, Government Digital Transformation Bureau, Department of Information and Communications Technology.

Samoa

Mr. Taiesea Fiti Petaia, Principal IT Officer, Ministry of Communications and Information Technology.

Solomon Islands

Mr. Alwyn Danitofea, Director Communication, Ministry of Communication and Aviation.

Sri Lanka

H.E. Mrs. Colonne Appuhamillage Chaminda Inoka Colonne, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary and Permanent Representative to ESCAP, Embassy of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, Bangkok

Ms. Saritha Ranatunga, First Secretary and Deputy Permanent Representative, Embassy the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, Bangkok

Thailand

Mr. Kiattipong Aunmueng, Policy and Play Analyst, Ministry of Digital Economy and Society.

Mr. Komsorn Nilkamhaeng, Computer Technical Officer, Office of the National Digital Economy and Society Commission.

Mr. Taran Osiri, Plan and Policy Analyst Professional Level, Office of the National Digital Economy and Society Commission Ministry of Digital Economy and Society.

Ms. Natpakhan Thiangtham, Plan and Policy Analyst, Office of the National Digital Economy and Society Commission.

Mr. Pakawat Sitthiwong, Computer Technical Officer, Ministry of Digital Economy and Society.

Ms. Pasinee Apisakmontri, Computer Technical Officer, Office of the National Digital Economy and Society Commission.

Mr. Phera Srisongmuang, Computer Technical Officer, Office of National Digital Economy and Society.

Timor-Leste

Mr. Fernando Carvalho Da Cruz, Chief of Staff of Policy and Cooperation, Ministry of Transport and Communications.

Tonga

Ms. Mele Tuipulotu, System Administrator, Communication Department, Ministry of Meteorology, Energy, Information, Disaster Management, Environment, Climate Change and Communications.

Uzbekistan

Mr. Nuriddin Mamatkulov, Consulate General and Deputy Permanent Representative to ESCAP, The Consulate General of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Bangkok

Vanuatu

Mr. John Jack, Deputy Chief Information Officer, Office of the Government Chief Information Officer.

Viet Nam

Mr. Su Ngo, Official, Authority of Information Security, Ministry of Information and Communication.

Specialized agencies and related organizations

Asian Development Bank (ADB)

Mr. Thomas E. ABELL, Advisor SDCC and Chief of Digital Technology for Development

Asia-Pacific Telecommunity (APT)

Mr. Masanori Kondo, Secretary General.

Other entities

Agriculture Republic

Mr. Aamer Hayat, Co-Founder.

Alternative Solutions for Rural Communities

Mr. Michael Suantak, Director, Community Network Department.

Asia Pacific Network Information Centre (APNIC) Foundation

Ms. Sylvia Cadena, Head of Programs and Partnerships.

Association for Progressive Communications

Mr. Carlos, Rey-Moreno, Co-lead Local Networks: Policy and Strategy, LocNet Section.

Ms. Kathleen Diga, Community Networks & Local Networks Co-lead, Communications and Information Policy Programme.

Ms. Sarbani Belur, Asia Regional Coordinator.

Cyber Cafe Association of India (CCAOI)

Ms. Amrita Choudhury, Director, Public Policy.

Common Room Networks Foundation

Mr. Gustaff Harriman Iskandar, Director, Art, Culture & ICT Media Department.

Connectivity Capital

Mr. Jim Forster, General Partner, General Operations Department.

Digital Empowerment Foundation

Mr. Osama Manzar, Founder & Director.

Global System for Mobile Communications (GSMA)

Ms. Carissa Ng, Government Affairs Project Coordinator APAC.

Institute for Social Entrepreneurship in Asia

Mr. Albert Teo, Regional Council Member & Professor.

Mr. Gomer Padong, Programs and Development Cooperation Specialist.

Internet Education and Research Laboratory (IntERLab)/Net2home

Ms. Nisarath Tansakul, Project Manager.

Internet Governance Council

Mr. Vahan Hovsepian, External Relations Officer at RIPE Network Coordination Center.

Internet Society (ISOC)

Mr. Rajnesh Singh, Regional Vice President, Asia-Pacific Office.

Ms. Christine Apikul, Consultant.

Mr. Talant Sultanov, Chair, Kyrgyz Chapter.

Ms. Olivia Loy, Executive Assistant.

Mr. Naveed Haq, Regional Director, Infrastructure and Connectivity.

Mr. Juan Peirano, Senior Policy Advisor.

Janastu

Mr. Sanketh Kumar, Technical Manager, Community Operated Wireless Decentralized Network.

Mr. T.B. Dinesh, Tech Director, ICT.

LIRNEasia

Ms. Gayani Hurulle, Research Manager.

MakaNet Ltd & Kaniu WiFi

Mr. Emani Lui, Managing Director.

Myanmar Center for Responsible Business

Ms. Svetlana Zens, Digital Rights Program Manager.

Ms. Khin Yamone, Zaw, Digital Rights Program Associate.

Nepal Internet Foundation

Mr. Bikram Shrestha, Civil Society.

Nepal Wireless

Mr. Girish Adhikari, Senior Network and Implementation officer, Network Department.

Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) University

Mr. Daniel Featherstone, Senior Research Fellow, School of Media and Communications.

School of Computing Malaysia

Mr. Cheng Haw Yih, Student.

SecDev Foundation

Mr. Michael Gray, Program Manager, SE Asia.

Swiss German University

Ms. Ezmieralda Melissa, Researcher/ Lecturer, Global Strategic Communication.

University College of Technology Sarawak

Mr. Tariq Zaman, Associate Professor, School of Computing and Creative Media.

Mr. Gary Loh Chee Wyai, Senior Lecturer, School of Computing and Creative Media.

World Wide Web Foundation

Ms. Anju Mangal, Head of Asia Pacific, Alliance for Affordable Internet.

ESCAP secretariat

Information and Communications Technology and Disaster Risk Reduction Division

Mr. Tae Hyung Kim, Chief of ICT and Development Section, ICT and Disaster Risk Reduction Division.

Mr. Siope Vakataki 'Ofa, Economic Affairs Officer, ICT and Development Section, ICT and Disaster Risk Reduction Division.

Ms. Cristina Bernal Aparicio, Consultant, ICT and Development Section, ICT and Disaster Risk Reduction Division.

Ms. Quynh Nguyen, Consultant, ICT and Development Section, ICT and Disaster Risk Reduction Division.

Annex 2: Programme

Bangkok time (UTC+7)

09:45-10:00 *Logging in and system connectivity checks*

10:00-10:15 *Inaugural session*

Featuring opening and welcome remarks

- Mr. Tae Hyung KIM, Chief of ICT and Development Section, ESCAP
- Mr. Rajnesh D. SINGH, Regional Vice President, Asia-Pacific, Internet Society
- H.E. Mr. Mohamed SHAREEF, Minister of State, Ministry of Environment, Climate Change and Technology, Maldives

Moderator: Mr. Siopé Vakataki 'OFA, ESCAP

10:15-11:15 *Session 1: Digital Connectivity in the Asia-Pacific - State of Play*

This session will reflect on the past two years since the 2019 Summit, new and emerging digital divides, and the critical role connectivity plays. It will also look at some of the challenges being faced by the region and progress on the implementation of the AP-IS.

- Overview of digital connectivity and use in the region, Ms. Amrita CHOUDHRY, Vice-Chair, APRIIGF, MAG Member, IGF
- Progress on AP-IS and initiatives to support connectivity, Mr. Siopé Vakataki 'OFA, ESCAP
- Promoting a resilient digital connectivity strategy (national/subregional/regional) during and after COVID-19, Mr.

Thomas E. ABELL, Advisor SDCC and Chief of Digital Technology for Development, ADB

Moderator: Ms. Cristina BERNAL APARICIO, ESCAP

11:15-11:25 *Break*

11:25-12:00 *Session 2: Sharing Success - Case Studies of How CNs Have Helped Connect the Unconnected*

- India (Mr. Osama MANZAR, DEF, India)
- Thailand (Prof. Kanchana KANCHANASUT, TakNet/THNIC Foundation, Thailand)
- Kyrgyzstan (Mr. Talant SULTANOV, Internet Society Kyrgyzstan Chapter, Kyrgyzstan)
- Q&A

Moderator: Mr. Naveed HAQ, Internet Society

12:00-12:50 *Session 3: Roundtable: How Innovative Policymaking Can Accelerate Connectivity Deployment*

This session will reflect on the status of digital connectivity in the region, consider the policy and regulatory gaps that exist, and reflect on how innovative policymaking can accelerate connectivity deployment to under- and un-served communities.

- Mr. Masanori KONDO, Secretary-General, Asia-Pacific Telecommunity
 - Ms. Renuka RAJARATNAM, Public Policy Manager, Connectivity & Access Policy, Facebook
- Moderator: Ms. Anju MANGAL, A4AI

12:50-13:00 *Session 4: Closing*

- Mr. Siope Vakataki 'OFA, ESCAP
- Mr. Juan PEIRANO, Senior Policy Advisor, Internet Society