

DYNAMIC COALITION ON ACCESS AND CONNECTIVITY FOR RURAL, REMOTE AND DISPERSED COMMUNITIES

ABOUT

The Dynamic Coalition on Access and Connectivity for Rural, Remote and Dispersed Communities was set up as an outcome of IGF Athens 2006 to specifically consider the access and connectivity issues and challenges facing remote, rural and dispersed communities around the world.

OBJECTIVES

- (i) To create an open multi-stakeholder forum to consider access/connectivity issues and challenges facing remote, rural and dispersed communities
- (ii) To highlight and promote solutions by way of case studies and best practices
- (iii) To explore and promote public-private partnership in delivering appropriate solutions
- (iv) To ensure the principle of Universal Access for all is an integral part of IGF and its deliberations

HOW THE WORK OF THIS DYNAMIC COALITION RELATES TO IGF

Access was highlighted as one of the themes for the inaugural IGF and is likely to remain a focal point for future IGF meetings. For the inaugural IGF meeting, the IGF Secretariat stated the following when describing "Access" as a theme (cf http://www.intgovforum.org/Description_of_Theme_Access.php):

Even if by now almost one billion people have access to the Internet, it should be borne in mind that five billion people remain without access to this important tool for economic growth and social development. Access may therefore be the single most important issue to most people, in particular in developing countries. Access is vital to empowering more and more individuals to explore the powerful resource that the Internet represents.

WSIS recognized the importance of an enabling environment to enhance the development of the ICT infrastructure. The Geneva Declaration specified that such an enabling environment should be accompanied by a supportive, transparent, pro-competitive, technologically neutral and predictable policy and regulatory framework. WSIS also called for the development and use of open, interoperable, non-discriminatory and demand-driven standards that take into account needs of users and consumers as a basic element for the development and greater diffusion of ICTs and more affordable access to them, particularly in developing countries. Furthermore, WSIS raised concerns regarding International Internet Connectivity (IIC) and called for the development of strategies for increasing affordable global connectivity to facilitate access for all. The consultations and the contributions received in the preparatory process of the Athens meeting emphasized the importance stakeholders attach to this issue.

During IGF Athens 2006, Nitin Desai, Chairman of the IGF stated the following at the Summing-up session on Day 4 (Thursday Nov 2nd):

.....the focus was very much on equity. And many other things we talked of, Internet users in developing countries, the questions that were raised about users in remote areas, the questions that have been raised about gender, about indigenous people or people with disability, I will say even the discussions that we have had on local content and IDN so it is more accessible to people whose natural language is not English, natural script is not Latin, the question of access cost which came up very sharply. And the frequent references to the 5 billion who are not yet on the Internet. All of these are essentially discussions about equity. And the broad message I get is this is a wonderful thing that has happened, but essentially we do have certain issues of the equity of access to this fantastic tool of communication that has developed, which we need to address.....

The above highlights recognition by the IGF of the issue of equitable access and connectivity for all. Access and connectivity is a critical issue for a large part of the world's population. Many of these people do not necessarily live in areas with readily available access, but the need for access by them may perhaps be far greater (in some instances) than for others.

This need can be extended to issues such as telemedicine, advice on crops/agriculture, impending natural disasters (eg. Hurricanes, floods, snowstorms) and other weather-related information, reporting on the aftermath of natural disasters or extreme weather (a critical factor in ensuring appropriate aid is delivered in time) and to more basic things like primary health care, distance learning/education and just simply staying in touch with family and friends. At the same time it is important to realise and reinforce policy matters that the Governments of such populations must consider and act upon to ensure that such communities are able to realise the benefits of Internet technology and all it has to offer.

ORIGINS

The Dynamic Coalition (DC) was established as an outcome of two workshops during IGF Athens: *“ICTs to achieve MDGs”* organised by the Pacific Islands Chapter of the Internet Society, and *“Building Local Access”* organised by ISOC/GIPI. These workshops brought together a diverse range of stakeholders and their engagement in various discussions during IGF Athens and the period straight after. This led to the idea of establishing a DC to consider the access/connectivity needs of rural, remote and dispersed communities around the world.

WHO CAN PARTICIPATE

The Dynamic Coalition is open to anyone interested in the challenges, issues and needs of rural, remote and dispersed communities. Visit www.pacificit.org to join the Dynamic Coalition.

HOW WE MEET

- (i) Online collaboration tools are our primary means of communications
- (ii) Side meetings at events around the globe where members are present

FURTHER INFORMATION

The establishment of this Dynamic Coalition is being co-ordinated by Rajnesh Singh, email rajnesh [at] pacificit [dot] org or visit www.pacificit.org/dc