IGF 2023 Policy Network on Meaningful Access
Plenary Report
Wednesday 11 October, 08:30 – 10:00 UTC
Main Hall, International Conference Centre
Kyoto, Japan

1. Line-Up:
Chairs of the PNMA: Neema Lugangira & Giacomo Mazzone
Onsite moderation: Giacomo Mazzone – PNMA co-chair; Independent
Remote moderation: Roberto Zambrana, Bolivia IGF
Video message: Vint Cerf – Chair, IGF Leadership Panel
PNMA focal point: Daphnee Iglesias – UN IGF Consultant for Meaningful Access and Connectivity
Speakers:
- [Video Message] Vint Cerf – Chair, IGF Leadership panel
- [Civil Society] Onica Nonhlanhla Makwakwa - Global Digital Inclusion Partnership
- [Civil Society / Academia] Keisuke Kamimura – Daito Bunka University
- [Government – remote] Steven Matainaho, Secretary for the Papua New Guinea Department of Information Communication Technology
- [Intergovernmental Organisation]
  - Maria de Brasdefer, International Federal of Library Associations – IFLA
  - Martin Schaaper, International Telecommunications Union – ITU
  - Laurent Ferrali, Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers – ICANN
  - Paolo Lanteri, World Intellectual Property Organization – WIPO
- [Private Sector – remote] Meme Kagga and Nana Kagga Macpherson – Savannah Moon
Interventions from the floor:
- Don Means, Gigabit Libraries Project
- Bertrand Moullier, International Federation of Film Producers' Associations – FIAPF (speaking on behalf of Meme Kagga and Nana Kagga Macpherson, Savannah Moon, due to connectivity issues)
- Kossi Amenou
- TB Dinesh, Servelots India
- Maarten Botterman, ICANN
Interventions from the online audience:
- Carlos Afonso, NUPEF
PNMA members in charge of collecting main take-aways for the Focus Areas:
- Connectivity – Jane Coffin
- Digital Inclusion – Carlos Rey-Moreno
- Capacity Development – Margaret Nyambura Ndung'u

2. About the session / key policy questions

The concept of meaningful access has emerged in response to the growing body of evidence that even when people have connectivity, they might not have been fully benefiting from the Internet. How one gets connected to the Internet and to which contents and services one can access is an equally important challenge to the experience that a person will have once they are online, even more so to the community/country in which they live.

Since 2022, the PNMA's work has been on the agreed three overarching thematic workstreams: Connectivity (Infrastructure & Business Models), Digital Inclusion through a citizen-centric approach (accessibility & multilingualism: local services and contents in local languages based on local needs and resources) and Capacity Development (technical skills training). The policy network has actively contributed within and outside IGF communities to identify a certain number of good practices and policy solutions and retain them as possible models to be exported or applied to other regions of the world. Stakeholders from diverse groups joined this enterprise: government, international organisations, academia, private actors, non-profits and local or language-based communities.

This year, the PNMA process focused on experiences with implementation and problem-solving for the issues previously raised. By building a repository, the network could explore reasons on why practices have or have not expanded, why digital divides persist, and which structural issues repeat themselves in different scenarios. In this session we will explore how stakeholders are working towards better local content and languages online, the use of non-Latin alphabets, lack of connectivity, and more. We expect great participation from the audience, as the key ideas emerged during this discussion will be registered in the policy network's 2023 output report. Hosting the 18th IGF in a country with a non-Latin character alphabet, it will give a unique opportunity to explore this area of problems and their potential solutions determined by non-Latin characters, including in the realm of IDN (International Domain Names).

IGF 2023 sub-theme: Digital Divides and Inclusion

3. Summary of issues discussed

The session started with a video message from **Vint Cerf (Chair of the IGF Leadership Panel)** in which he replied to the following questions:

- Video Question 1: What is the importance of affordable devices for meaningful access?
- Video Question 2: How can AI contribute to meaningful access?

As mentioned by Vint last year, affordability is a key element to ensure meaningful access: "If you can't afford the devices, equipment and services it gives you access to a meaningful and useful internet, then you don't get to use it," said Cerf in his speech. "So we need to drive costs out about in a number of ways, it could be making things less expensive. It could be subsidizing income".

Onica Makwakwa (Global Digital Inclusion Partnership) followed this train of thought and explained about how GDIP defines meaningful access – as a combination of affordable smart devices, daily Internet access and unlimited data. Research has shown that meaningful access needs to be implemented for services that change people's lives (e.g., looking for a job, government services), going beyond the ordinary use of the network. Hence, we need to recalibrate how to define data and how to employ meaning to it. Replying to an intervention from the floor,

Onica highlighted that people in Africa spend as much as 40% of their income on devices or data; hence the importance of providing affordability as a key element to meaningful access.

Moving on with the discussion, **Prof. Keisuke Kamimura (Daito Bunka University)** explained how Internet use and digital inclusion work in a country such as Japan, which uses non-Latin characters. According to him, ordinary users are fine with the lack of Japanese characters online because of the country's overall technical capacity with computers and other devices – meaning the digital literacy is high.

Steven Matainaho **(Government of Papua New Guinea)** introduced the audience to Papua New Guinea's digital strategy. The island nation holds 12% of all world's languages, with 846 of them being actively spoken. Connectivity has been a priority for the government since 2003, at a time when the most three accessed websites in the country were PNG News, National Rugby League from Australia, and Facebook. This scenario was consistent for at least ten years, until the digital transformation policy was implemented in 2009. For the government of PNG, meaningful connectivity means connectivity with purpose, and so they started to position themselves as leaders in offering meaningful digital services. Currently, 76% of the population has internet access, varying from 2G to 4G – the country has opted to go straight into mobile access, hence access on landlines is uncommon. There, the threshold for determining device affordability is USD 60 and the government is currently planning tax reduction incentives for devices as part of the next phase of the digital transformation policy (2023-2025).

In the first intervention round, Maria de Brasdefer **(International Federal of Library Associations)** spoke about the importance of adapting meaningful access to local needs. She also mentioned the key role libraries perform both as spaces that provide public access to the Internet, as well as online versions of offline knowledge. Don Means, the creator of the **Gigabit Libraries**, was in the audience and introduced the project from the floor: "the Gigabit Libraries Network" – explained Means – "is an open consortium of innovative libraries using emerging telecom technology to expand internet inclusion as well as to increase community resiliency against disasters and outages. The Consortium has started deploying low earth orbit satellite kits in libraries in Africa, starting in Nigeria. The aim is that every community should have at least a single point of no fee or low fee internet access like a library, and it should be resilient against outages".

Martin Shaaper from the **International Telecommunication Union (ITU)** informed the participants that his organization not only promotes best practices and policies to implement the meaningful access across the least developed countries (LDC), but has also, for the past two years, supported this action through the collection of data related to it. In close cooperation with the UN Tech Envoy, a specific set of data to measure meaningful access has been identified and is now regularly collected throughout the regions that are left behind. This set of data is publicly available on the ITU website and is provided to all interested policymakers, in order to support their decision-making process. With a special contribution from the EU and with other international organizations, a pilot project is now being developed in the Pacific region. Data on access collected by ITU is complemented by UNESCO – through the ROAM indicators – with other more qualitative data on the language used and the local contents that are available over the Internet.

Laurent Ferrali from the **International Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN)** explained that the Digital Africa project, launched last year at the IGF in Addis Abeba, is progressing. In association with eleven partners, seven projects to develop full connectivity are expanding. Priority is given to the empowerment of African CCTLDs and to the development of naming capacity across the continent.

Paolo Lanteri **(World Intellectual Property Organization – WIPO)** stressed that meaningful access policies need to be developed together with content protection and open access measures. WIPO initiatives towards Digital Inclusion include public-private partnerships towards a global book service ("ABC Global Book Service") that offers open access to more than 80,000 titles in 80 different languages. Good practices must be encouraged and exchanged amongst stakeholders.

Due to connectivity issues, Meme Kagga and Nana Kagga Macpherson **(Savannah Moon)** could not join the plenary remotely. Bertrand Moullier **(International Federation of Film Producers' Associations)** spoke from the floor in their behalf, highlighting the social and technical challenges for production of local content in Africa. In particular, he explained that Savannah Moon has produced two highly professional movies on stories closely related to the current situation in their home country Uganda. These movies are now being distributed directly by the two entrepreneurial ladies over the Internet through mobile streaming services, with all the limitations that this form of distribution has. No specific policy currently exists in Uganda to support the production of local content.

4. Other initiatives addressing the session issues
In addition to the interventions from Don Means and Bertrand Moullier, we welcomed the following remarks:

Kossi Amenou raised the question of who collects, who stores and who controls data about African Internet users, because this is a delicate question for the continent.

TB Dinesh, Servelots India, stressed the importance of projects as the one he is running in India (featured in the 2022 PNMA Output Report, with progress updates connected to this year's final report), that takes into account one limitation of the Internet today: most of the information is in written form, which creates a barrier for illiterate persons and indigenous cultures that are based on oral tradition and communication.

Maarten Botterman, ICANN, remembered the importance of the Internationalized Domain Names (IDNs) that finally allow countries and communities using non-Latin alphabet characters to access the Internet in their own language. These efforts have been relevant, but still more need to be done in order to increase the usage of IDNs.

Carlos Afonso, NUPEF (remote), stressed the importance of "persistent connectivity," as an additional problem for those communities that are cut out from progress towards access and have unstable connection. This is one of the handicaps that limits a larger use of the Internet by those that are working from home.

5. Gender remarks

There was a 60/40 participation of men and women in the original plenary. There was no intervention from women from the audience. The necessity of including a gender dimension within meaningful access strategies has been underlined by the participants.

6. Session outputs: key takeaways, policy recommendations, suggestions

The PNMA has elected three community members to summarise the takeaways of the plenary following this year's focus areas.

Connectivity, by Jane Coffin:

- Universal and meaningful digital connectivity - the possibility for everyone to enjoy a safe, satisfying, enriching, productive and affordable online experience - is key for enabling digital transformation and achieving the SDGs. Achieving universal and meaningful digital connectivity requires policy makers to embrace the concept, set targets, and include it in national digital strategies and policy plans.
- Good quality data on all aspects of universal and meaningful connectivity are essential to inform and monitor digital policies, highlight to policy makers where the digital divides in a country are, and how severe they are. In the absence of these data, policymakers should request these data from the relevant statistical agencies in the country and fund data collection.
- The full potential of public access to libraries as a way to address the decoupling of progress in extending connectivity and broader social progress needs to be part of internet strategies going forward.
- Private actors identify a shift in the lack of connectivity from coverage gap to usage gap. This means that, recently, there was an improvement in the Internet coverage and the main issue now relies on the meaningful Internet use by those living in regions with coverage.
- All the promises of universalizing Internet access through the 5G have not been materialized yet, and some sectors are already discussing the 6G technology. Additionally, there are other concerns to have in mind: e.g., Internet fees, which may lead to Internet Fragmentation.
- We call governments and intergovernmental agencies to reinforce the relevance of universal and meaningful connectivity as a fundamental enabler of human rights and elaborate on this relevance for the protection, promotion, and enjoyment of civil and political rights, in addition to economic and social development.
- We ask policy makers and governments from around the world to stand against the imposition of direct payment obligations to the benefit of only a handful of telecommunication operators.
- Solving the connectivity gap will take a multistakeholder approach - much like the PNMA itself and the contributions coming from different venues at IGF.
- Current issues are being solved through coalitions tackling regulatory and policy-making arenas, hence partnerships are key.
- Data must be gathered to identify gaps: ITU, ICANN and other international organisations are looking at those solutions.

- Innovative financing approaches need to be made to support and build networks, ccTLDs and Data Centers.

Digital Inclusion, by Carlos Rey-Moreno:
- To advance digital inclusion through Open Education Resources (OER), there is a need to move from raising awareness and digital skills literacy to access, re-use, create and share OER to focusing on how to make OER more inclusive to the diverse needs of learners.
- It is important that educational resources developed with public funds should be made available as OER. Investments from government and different stakeholders should be made to ensure the quality of teaching and learning experiences by providing inclusive and accessible OER for all learners.
- It is important to have localized awareness of content to build a knowledge commons, with incentives in place for stakeholders to contribute and use such material.
- Initiatives need to be led by the target communities, and the voices of those who will benefit from these initiatives have to be in the conversation. Best practices from other Open Solutions – Open Access, Open Data - can be useful for ensuring the interoperability of repositories and increased sharing of knowledge through OER.
- Purpose-driven content means culturally-relevant content; it needs incentives and funding to be sustainable, from production to distribution
- There must be strong ccTLDs and cybersecurity matters to ensure gender digital inclusion and combat gender-based violence online.
- It is not only necessary to include youth people online, but also to hear them in a way that is meaningful and can be included in the final decision-making process. Regarding women and gender diverse people, it is necessary to understand that access is not enough, there are variables and intersectionalities in the offline spaces that translate into the online spaces reproducing these inequalities and affectation. Therefore, there must be strong ccTLDs and cybersecurity matters to ensure gender digital inclusion and combat gender-based violence online.
- Accessibility for persons with disabilities is also a share of the work around digital inclusion; divides can only be overcome when the Internet is available to all. On a similar note, inclusion needs to contemplate the illiterate and the diversity of languages online.
- Technology design, development, implementation, and use, as well as the design of policies, must include young people, women, and gender-diverse people at all stages to ensure not only inclusion and representation, but also diversity and real impact in the technologies we want. Again, multistakeholderism is key to addressing the rights of young people, women and gender diverse people online. Only through this can we envision an Internet that is truly inclusive and successful.

Capacity Development, by Margaret Nyambura Ndung'u:
- Technical skills are needed to understand emerging technologies and make them address and offer solutions.
- Digital skills are needed to ensure quality services and address cybersecurity challenges. Likewise, thorough statistics are needed to determine skills needed to achieve meaningful access and use.

- Training the trainers with localised information/data and perspectives is critical. Technical capacity support should also benefit from this.
- Finally, a holistic approach on capacity development is key to achieve sustainable meaningful access.