IGF 2020 Messages

Inclusion

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Note: this is a living document being put out for public comment. A final version will be published 3 weeks after IGF ends. For any questions or feedback regarding the IGF 2020 Messages, please write to igf@un.org.

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Messages related to Overarching Policy Question 1

What do stakeholders need to do to develop and implement sustainable initiatives and policies that foster meaningful digital inclusion for all and eliminate all forms of digital divide?

▪ Meaningful and inclusive Internet access should be a guiding principle for all policies and initiatives dedicated to eliminating the digital divide. Meaningful access means that users have access to the Internet constantly, with enough data, a fast connection, and an appropriate device. It also means that users are able to access content and services (especially local) that are relevant for their needs and realities. Policies focused on enabling such access need to be anchored into local contexts and respond to real needs.

▪ The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted digital inequalities and the need for more action to ensure universal access and leave no one behind. Accelerating infrastructure roll-out is therefore urgent and must be encouraged by governments through more flexible, innovative and agile regulatory frameworks that benefit both telecom companies and alternative solutions such as community networks and rural operators. Revising universal service funds approaches, facilitating access to spectrum, and simplifying the issuance of authorisations needed for deploying infrastructures are examples of what could be done in this regard.

▪ Community networks are enablers of affordable and meaningful connectivity. Technical capacity building for local communities is needed to ensure that they have

the skills and knowledge to build and run safe and sustainable infrastructures. Traditional operators should enable interconnection with these networks.

- Financial resources are key in achieving universal connectivity; beyond government funds and telecom sector investments, identifying innovative funding models deserves more attention. Lowering taxes and prices for infrastructure equipment and devices could also make the Internet access more affordable.

- More sustainable policies are needed to eliminate the digital divide that affects women, girls, and gender-diverse people. Beyond connectivity, empowering them to create digital content is essential for building a more inclusive Internet. Countering online gender-based violence should also be a priority; stronger legal frameworks and enhanced enforcement capacities, as well as sustained action by the online platforms are essential building blocks.

- Tech companies, public institutions and other organisations have a responsibility to ensure that digital products, services and content respond to the needs of persons with disabilities. A stricter enforcement of accessibility-related regulations and embedding the concept of universal accessible design in the development of digital technologies are essential. Proper legal frameworks are also needed to address intellectual property barriers and market failures related to the production and distribution of accessible digital content.

- Promoting multilingualism online requires the mobilisation of more institutional and financial resources. Governments, the private sector and nonprofit entities should empower local communities and indigenous people to produce digital content in their languages, and manage the associated intellectual property rights. The tech community can also help by developing technologies that enable the digital inclusion of low resource languages (oral languages, endangered languages, etc.). In addition, governments and tech companies should be more active in enabling the universal acceptance (UA) of internationalised domain names (IDNs) and email addresses within their services and technologies. More awareness raising and capacity development are needed – on both the demand and supply side – to enable stakeholders to better understand the social benefits and long-term business benefits of supporting UA-readiness.

- More investments are needed (from the public and private sector) to develop digital skills among citizens. Beyond acquiring technical skills, people need to be empowered to exercise critical thinking and use technology in a safe and meaningful way to advance their rights.

- Collaborative efforts are needed to ensure equitable access to digital content for education, research, culture, work etc. Solutions to be further explored include open access models, digital-ready sets of limitations and exceptions to copyright (including across borders), and addressing the challenges around e-book pricing, access and delivery models.

- Online education needs to be fair, inclusive and qualitative. Governments, educational institutions and the private sector must cooperate to ensure meaningful access to the Internet, but also to online learning environments that consider the needs of all children and learners, including the most vulnerable ones. Simply transposing face-to-face learning to an online setting is not enough; schools and universities need to design innovative approaches for learning and teaching, and rethink curricula and pedagogical models. Creating frameworks to develop the digital capacities of teachers is key. And so is ensuring the safety, security, privacy and wellbeing of children and students.

- The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated digital transformation worldwide; governments and other stakeholders need to build on this and further leverage the potential of digital technologies as enablers of social and economic development. The international community has a duty to support developing countries in these efforts; this could be done through capacity development instruments that (1) help countries build regulations and institutions to govern the development, deployment and use of digital technologies that benefit society at large, and (2) empower other stakeholders to contribute to such governance processes.

Messages related to Overarching Policy Question 2

What policies, regulations and support structures are needed to build the enabling environments for inclusive digital economies that allow everyone to have access to their benefits in both developed and developing countries?

- More needs to be done to empower individuals, especially in developing countries, to benefit from the digital economy and be prepared for the future of work. Policy makers need to develop and implement agile and enabling policies and regulations that focus on ensuring meaningful access to infrastructure and technology; reforming educational systems to put more focus on both digital skills and soft skills; and supporting innovation and entrepreneurship. Regulatory sandboxes could also help in the development and testing of adequate regulations to support inclusive digital economies.

- Small businesses will benefit from support (from governments and bigger players) in their efforts to join the digital market. Capacity development initiatives, mentorship programmes, and easy access to e-commerce platforms are examples of such support.

- Governments and the private sector need to address inequalities related to the participation of women, people with disabilities, and other vulnerable groups in the digital economy. Eliminating barriers to accessing the platform economy or other digital businesses, and ensuring equitable treatment for workers are examples of required actions.

- The transborder harmonisation of policies could help accelerate the development of more inclusive and sustainable digital economies. Policies focused on eliminating barriers to cross-border digital trade are one example in this regard.

- Accelerating financial inclusion and ensuring that everyone has access to fast, reliable and secure digital payments can support inclusive economic development, boost entrepreneurship, reduce the informal economy, and improve citizens' life. Governments need to work together with other stakeholders to build adequate infrastructures for digital payments and encourage their use by merchants (e.g. via tax incentives) and consumers (e.g. via capacity development, reduced VAT for digital payments).

- Legal frameworks are required to uphold labour rights in the digital economy and promote fair work principles (fair pay, fair contracts, fair wages, ability to collectivise). Such frameworks should focus on protecting people, not jobs, and should be properly implemented. Private-sector-driven codes of good practices for fair work could be a complementary solution.

Messages related to Overarching Policy Question 3

How can we ensure that policy spaces and processes that address digital inclusion issues are inclusive and foster the active and meaningful participation of those people and communities whose digital inclusion issues they hope to overcome?

- If digital inclusion policies are to be effective, efficient and sustainable, they need to be developed and implemented with the active participation of the targeted communities (youth, women, rural communities, etc.). Digital inequalities are different, so it is important to contextualise such policies and adapt them to the needs of the targeted communities.

- Inclusion should not be only about policy spaces, but also about technology spaces. These too need to integrate the views and interests of various communities such as women and persons with disabilities. For instance, the private sector needs to look at disability inclusion at all levels of the organisations, truly understand the challenges and needs of persons with disabilities, and involve them in the design of digital tech and products.

- More inclusive, participatory, and innovative models of Internet governance are required at the national and international levels. One way to drive more engagement in Internet governance processes is by better connecting them with the realities on the. Citizens and other stakeholders are more likely to get involved if they understand how Internet governance issues impact them directly.

- Stakeholders should create more opportunities for an effective, sustainable, and meaningful participation of youth, women, gender-diverse people, and other underrepresented groups in Internet governance spaces (including the decision-making ones). Ensuring that these spaces are safe and secure, avoiding tokenism, and allocating more resources (including financial) to capacity development programmes are essential elements.