

IGF 2018 Messages - Development, Innovation & Economic Issues

Overarching messages

The role of Internet and ICTs in driving development, including as outlined in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, is becoming ever-more central. Technology is not just a factor in development targets related to infrastructure and partnerships; it has the potential to support or even ‘turbocharge’ all aspects of development. As societies and economies try to seize the technological moment and harness the power of the Internet, calls are growing to ensure those development strategies are inclusive, equitable, transparent and take into account potential risks and unintended consequences.

Future of Work

- Society is worried about the risks that the Internet and new technologies could pose for jobs. How will industries and Governments cope with the prospect of mass unemployment? It is important to understand these concerns and ensure no voices are left behind, particularly youth voices, in the discussion on the future of work.
- Two key reflections should also be at the centre of the Future of Work issue: that public policy will and should play a major role in curtailing the risks to labour markets and in adapting jobs to the digital age; and that quality education is an essential mitigating factor to the rapid changes in global workforce.

Internet for Development & the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

- Supporting the digital transformation will require a strategic mix of approaches and public policies. These should be aimed at promoting innovation and the constructive use of emerging technologies, such as Artificial Intelligence, Blockchain, Big Data, Fintech, etc., to provide concrete solutions to development challenges. Digital technologies may be effective in accelerating the achievement of the SDGs, but capacity building of institutions will be key to understanding and harnessing the full potential of digital technologies.
- Strong cooperation among regions and blocs of states, such as Small Island Developing States (SIDS), should continue to play an important role in managing and innovating in the digital age. For SIDS specifically, enhanced collaboration could help create resources that will contribute to the development of their digital economies.
- The Internet is helping youth access resources, deepen connections and exchange ideas globally. A digitally mobilized youth is an economically vigorous youth – and there is a correlation generally between high youth mobility and the overall health of an economy.
- Policymaking around maximizing the potential of new technologies and digitizing societies must be people-centred and examine carefully the full impacts of technological adoptions, including any unintended consequences. In this regard, possible questions might include: (i) Is the advent of mobile Internet, versus fixed Internet, a necessary good in developing economies? (ii) Are there tangible and intangible forms of culture that are suffering as a result of fast-paced advancements in technology? (iii) In light of both positive and negative impacts of digital technologies, how can policymakers best assess and manage the synergies and trade-offs? Dimensions of individual and societal well-being should be re-configured for the digital age.

- A people-centred digital transformation should understand who the people at the centre of the transformation are – women, youth, people with disabilities and small and medium enterprise owners. It should not stop at examining how citizens can be reskilled and economically supported for the future, but how they can be prepared in a more holistic way. How can they be prepared to be good users, content creators and innovators?
- In order for the Internet and technologies to accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, some of its goals will first require action in other, non-digital areas. For example, SDG 5 (on gender equality) illustrates that eliminating discriminatory practices against women and girls that keep them circumscribed to marginal roles and unconnected to the Internet will be a precondition for women to benefit from the empowering effects of connectivity. 'Positive discrimination' measures should be applied to that effect.

Infrastructure and Financing Connectivity

- Public connectivity through free and accessible Internet points, such as those available in public libraries, can deliver meaningful and equitable access to information for underserved communities. These points are a low-cost, high-impact resource that is often overlooked. Nevertheless, not all libraries or community centres are online and they are often subject to low or inconsistent public funding. Better awareness-building on how to overcome the barriers to achieving access in public spaces, and on the related financial and legal frameworks, is essential.
- Successful connectivity, in particular connectivity investment, relies on coordinated efforts from multiple stakeholders. While much of the current investment comes from private network operators, blended financing models are beginning to show promise. Policies should be aimed at promoting new investments for connectivity.
- Submarine cables are one of the key connectivity infrastructures. Policymaking should be conducive to investments in their deployment, whether the investment models are public, private or public-private, and encourage transparent and participatory management of those infrastructures.

The Multistakeholder Approach for Digital Development

- Given that some technologies such as algorithms are at the earlier stages of adoption, and that the interplay between their benefits and risks is not always so clear, the multistakeholder model can be used as a mapping tool for algorithmic practices across countries and regions. With rapid technological development we need to constantly examine the application of these technologies and create opportunities for exchanges of best practices and current legislative frameworks that work.
- Big data should be fully leveraged for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); at the same time, its application should be accompanied by multistakeholder governance discussions with an eye to developing a transnational governance structure.
- Focus should be placed on ways for the multistakeholder approach to serve as a guiding pole to contribute effectively in international/multilateral digital negotiations, with the engagement of the multistakeholder community – channelling their inputs into intergovernmental negotiations and ensuring they are represented in the 2019 digital agendas of fora such as the G7, G20 and others.

**This is a preliminary draft version of IGF Messages open to community inputs. To provide feedback on the Messages, please write to igf@un.org.*