

INTERACTIVE PANEL 2: Digital Inclusion – Giving voice to the voiceless

Summary

The objective of this session was to have Panelists debating on policies, regulatory and business strategies that can address some of the toughest issues facing political and business leaders alike. Participated in this Session Philip PAULWELL, MP, Minister of Science, Technology, Energy and Mining, Jamaica; Rafael MARADIAGA, Executive Secretary of COMTELCA; Francesca CESA BIANCHI, Vice President for Institutional Relations, G3ict; Joslyn READ, Vice-President, Regulatory Affairs, O3b Networks, United Kingdom; Miguel RAIMILLA, Executive Director, Telecenter.org Foundation; Kenneth SYLVESTER, CEO Caribbean Knowledge & Learning Network; and, Pablo BELLO, Secretary-General, Asociación Iberoamericana de Centros de Investigación y Empresas de Telecomunicaciones (AHCJET).

The Session was moderated by Ms. Margarita Cedeño de Fernández, First Lady of The Dominican Republic and 2007 ITU Award for Digital Inclusion. In her introductory remarks Ms. Cedeño highlighted that traditionally the access to information has been the main obstacle for the achievement of equal opportunities – the rapid development of the information and communication technologies promises to break down all these barriers allowing equal access and as a result, more inclusive and equitable societies.

Discussions in this Session centered around (1) the need to reduce digital divide (2) spectrum allocation (3) broadband penetration (4) assistive technology (5) cooperation among players and (6) users' protection.

A number of challenges were raised during the discussion: means to reduce the digital, social and economic divide; the importance to build a knowledge and learning network; some Panelists expressed their concern in the struggle of cyber threats; they all agree that governments and business should coordinate and noted the importance of having a favorable regulatory framework.

In response to these and other challenges Panelists highlighted the importance for government and industry to share information. Many Panelists endorsed the implementation of capacity building programs, specifically focusing on youth as well as the adoption of initiatives to promote assistive

technology, training people with disabilities within their capacities focusing not only in the long term impaired but also those that may become temporally impaired. The important role of telecentres was noted by the Panelists and satellite system was mentioned as an efficient way of lowering costs, providing high speed and high bandwidth capacity to reach underserved areas. The Caribbean effort in creating a knowledge network based on the interconnection of academic institutions within the subregion and with institutions from other regions was welcome and raised a comment from the audience on the need to join efforts towards a global interconnection as to allow the dissemination knowledge to all people, to all citizens of the world.

In their final remarks, Panelists endorsed the need to involve final users in the whole process and stressed that accessibility cannot be implemented top-down; teachers need the knowledge and capacity to spread accessibility benefits; governments need to implement quality indicators to diminish complaints from users and protect them since the consumer is always in disadvantage position in relation to the service provider. Panelists again emphasized that consultation needs to become a priority and different human groups should have a word in the decisions that will affect their community.

