Session Outcome Document

Community-centered connectivity: Empowering local champions to expand Internet access for all

Internet Society

16:30–17:30 (UTC+02:00)

https://www.itu.int/net4/wsis/forum/2025/Agenda/Session/405

Key Issues Discussed: Looking Beyond 2025

- The digital divide persists: 2.6 billion people remain offline globally. In India, for example, only 30% of rural residents have smartphones.

- Community-led connectivity is effective: local models (e.g., Assam's digital centers, Mexico's indigenous mobile networks) show scalable and sustainable impact.

- Affordable technology solutions exist: license-free solutions can deliver connectivity at a lower price.

- Policy barriers, such as high customs duties, spectrum access issues, and misaligned regulations, hinder grassroots efforts.

- Sustainability requires local ownership: long-term impact depends on training, entrepreneurship, and community-led operations.

- Connectivity must be purposeful: people engage more with the Internet when it meets real needs (e.g. health, income, education).

Tangible Outcomes of the Session

Key Achievements

- Showcased community connectivity models from India, Mexico, Ghana, South Africa, Mongolia, and Nigeria that have proven successful.

- Highlighted the Internet Society's support for local champions through mentorship and funding programs.

- o Demonstrated the effectiveness of youth- and community-led strategies in closing the digital gap.

Announcements and Initiatives Presented

- o **Indigenous mobile networks (Mexico)**: 17 communities run their mobile service for 2 USD a month; the first of its kind led by Indigenous groups.
- o **Youth tech training (Giga, Mongolia):** Young people were trained to fix the school Internet, which helped reduce downtime and build local skills.
- o **Air quality (Nigeria):** communities tracked pollution using digital tools, pushing for better Internet access.
- o **Pan-African youth training**: Over 2000 young people across Africa were trained in Internet policies in five languages.
- o **AI for farming (Ghana):** AI tools used to help farmers share info and improve practices.
- o **Satellite and disaster training (Ghana)**: communities learned to set up satellite Internet after disasters.

Key Recommendations and Action Plan for WSIS+20 and Beyond

- Scale community-based models: prioritize grassroots-driven infrastructure and local champions.
- Invest in youth and women: expand access to training, funding, and leadership roles.
- Enable affordable technology: promote the use of low-cost, license-free digital infrastructure.
- Support multi-level ecosystems: encourage partnerships from local to global levels for sustainability.