Session Outcome Document

Offline, underserved and left behind? - The overlooked intermediaries that are mitigating digital exclusion

International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) & Universal Postal Union (UPU)

Monday 7 July 2025, 15:00-15:45h Room L

https://www.itu.int/net4/wsis/forum/2025/Agenda/Session/166

Key Issues discussed: Looking Beyond 2025 (5–8 bullet points highlighting achievements, emerging trends, challenges in 20 years, figures, success stories and opportunities for WSIS beyond 2025)

- There is a persistent connectivity gap, despite progress many remain offline and their informational needs are not being met. The library and the postal networks are therefore responding to this issue and acting as intermediaries meeting the needs of underserved populations.
- Libraries and post offices provide critical services such as digital financial services, digital skills training, e-learning, e-commerce, facilitation of access to e-government services, preservation and dissemination of traditional and indigenous knowledge and many more that are essential to many communities worldwide.
- There is evidence of the successful collaboration between libraries and post offices and how they both complement each other with resources, infrastructure and services offered.
- The Zimbabwe case study as presented by Dr. Nancy and Dr. Gift introduces also a unique perspective on how the authorities in Zimbabwe have leveraged the postal network to serve their communities and how the libraries have partnered with them to extend their services.
- Multistakeholder partnerships are necessary to align work, collect data and avoid overlapping.

Tangible Outcomes of the session

- **Key achievements:** Reinforced recognition of libraries and post offices as pivotal digital inclusion actors, provided evidence for hybrid service delivery models that complement personal digital access, blending technology with a people centered approach.
- **Announcements/launch during the session:** Upcoming IFLA-UPU Policy Brief on digital inclusion and cooperation between Libraries and Post Offices.

- **Agreements/commitments as an outcome of the session:** Call to action for greater investment and policy support to institutionalize anchor intermediaries in national digital strategies.

Key Recommendations and Forward-Looking Action Plan for the WSIS+20 Review and Beyond (2–5 bullet points presenting concrete actions and guidance to inform the WSIS+20 Review by UNGA and build the multistakeholder vision of WSIS beyond 2025)

- There is great importance on the investment on public access infrastructure. It is important to provide sustainable funding and connectivity to equip every community with reliable, trusted digital access points—particularly in underserved regions.
- Zimbabwe's digital centres were funded through the country's Universal Service and Access Fund (USAF). To replicate this success, ministries and regulators overseeing USAFs should ensure that Post Offices, Libraries, and other anchor institutions qualify for access to USAFs, as this is not the case in many countries.
- The WSIS action lines included the connectivity of libraries, post offices, and other anchor institutions, something that has been lost in the GDC. Harmonization efforts between the GDC and WSIS+20 Review must take into account the role libraries, posts, and other intermediaries are playing in digital inclusion and thus call for their connectivity.