Session Outcome Document

Beyond International Aid: Investing in Community Connectivity and Making it Self-Sustainable

Association for Progressive Communications

Thursday, 10 July 2025 - 15:00–15:45 (UTC+02:00)

https://www.itu.int/net4/wsis/forum/2025/Agenda/Session/338

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)

- Internet access statistics hide realities that become apparent when using meaningful connectivity frameworks: in Brazil 84% vs 29%.

- Lack of meaningful connecitity is concentrated in traditionally marginalized communities (rural, small, economically poor and indigenous)

- Diversified telecommunication ecosystems are needed to target these inequality, and community-centred connectivity initiatives (CCCIs) respond to them in a responsible way.

- The recognition of community networks as infrastructure investments with measurable social returns, combined with concrete funding commitments, suggests positive momentum for bridging the financial divide in digital inclusion.

- There was strong consensus on the need for blended finance mechanisms and recognition of CCCIs as social enterprises that generate measurable social returns alongside connectivity services.

- The aggregation of multiple CCCIs into investment portfolios was highlighted as a strategy for managing risk and scaling impact.

- The conversation reflected a shift from advocacy to rigorous, quantitative research as the foundation for building investment cases.

- ISOC and APC are working on funding and financing initiatives to suppport CCCIs to be sustainable beyond aid, which is complementary to GIGA efforts connecting schools.

Tangible Outcomes of the session

- APC referred to the research their launched at the IGF 2025: Financing Self-Sustaining Solutions for Community Connectivity:
- ISOC referred to their Co-Funding Initiative they launched earlier this year:https://www.internetsociety.org/issues/access/connectivity-co-funding-initiative/
- GIGA referred to the ITU Digital Infrastructure Investment Catalyst they launched at the UN Financing for Development Conference together with UNCTAD.
- APC, ISOC and ITU are interested to explored partnerships that have to further their financing work to close the digital divide.

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)

- Strengthening funding mechanisms, stakeholder engagement, capacity building and policy integration is critical in improving scalability of community centered connectivity initiatives and ensuring their lasting success.
- A shift in perception is needed: from unsustainable micro-non-profit to high-impact, undercapitalised asset class. With the right mix of donors, development finance institutions, and mission-aligned investors, there is an opportunity to recognize community-centred connectivity initiatives not as fringe actors, but as essential infrastructure builders, and to join in creating the investment vehicles that can unlock their full potential for inequality reduction and sustainable development.