



Summary of session 9

The WSIS 2022 High Level Policy Session 9 : Inclusiveness, Access to Information and Knowledge for All / WSIS Action Lines and 2030 / Bridging Digital Divide, was successfully held online on June 1, 2022. With the common aim to build a people-centered, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society for all, WSIS Action Line Facilitator, Dr. M. Oliveira of UNESCO and 8 panelists from government, public sector and academia joined online to share how WSIS action lines and 2030 agenda are implemented to achieve inclusive access to information and knowledge for all, sharing good practices and opinions on pressing challenges and fresh priorities to bridge the digital gap and connect the unconnected. The panelists are:

- Mr. Shyam Sunder Sikder (Chairman, Telecommunication Regulatory Commission, Bangladesh)
- Dr. P.D. Vaghela (Chairman, Telecom Regulatory Authority of India, India)
- Mr. Dick Christophe Ng Sui Wa (Chairman, Information and Communication Technologies Authority ICTA, Mauritius)
- Dr. XIE Cun (Director General, Department of ICT Development, Ministry of Industry and Information Technology, China)
- Eng. Hasanul Haq Inu (Chairman, Parliamentary Standing Committee for Ministry of Information and Broadcasting & Chairperson, Bangladesh Internet Governance Forum, Bangladesh)
- Dr. Ismail Ismail (Director General, Resource Management and Equipment of Post and Informatics, Ministry of Communications and Informatics, Indonesia)
- Dr. Pavan Duggal (Honorary Chancellor, Cyberlaw University, India)
- Mr. Ernest Mafuta (Chair, Affordable Internet Access SIG, Zambia)

The session is moderated by Dr. Ke GONG, past president of World Federation of Engineering Organizations.

The panel recognizes the contribution of ICT for allowing people to access information and knowledge especially during lockdown period in the pandemic to maintain production and social services and help to fight the COVID. However, it has also seen a new kind of connectivity gap has been created exposing fissures between the connected and the unconnected and their potential to play a role within the global economy.

In the past years, great efforts have been made to bridge the digital divide. For example, Bangladesh has introduced 'One Country One Rate' for the broadband services so that every person, even people in the rural areas, is not discriminated with a higher price. India has taken a series of measures to provide connectivity, affordability and accessibility. among which, India has robust Right of Way (RoW) rules to roll out the digital infrastructure. A national portal, to facilitate the RoW Application Process through a single interface for stakeholders like Central and State/UT Government(s), Local bodies, and Service Providers is available. By far, Indian telephone subscribers have increased to 1.17 billion, 80 times since 1997. Mauritius is made up of several islands scattered in the Indian Ocean such as Rodrigues and Agalega by using comprehensive technologies including satellite and undersea cable as well as mobile communication, with the help of Universal Service Fund established by the government. China implements a moderately forward-looking technical strategy for deploying its 5G network, which has now more than 1.5 million base stations reaching to more than 400 million users, and China has got all villages across the country connected by broadband for the first time in history, and basically achieving the "same network and same speed" in both rural and urban areas.

In spite of the significant progresses, much more need to be done. The panel stresses that to further close the gap, efforts should be made on both hard and soft side. The hard one is mainly about network infrastructure and smart access devices, when introducing 5G and integrating it with fiber and satellite transmission to provide broadband and telecom access as a basic need for personal, educational, social and economic growth, it must ensure all people should be covered, including the areas with natural barriers or lack of financial capacity. The soft one is mainly about digital literacy and capacity with special attention to vulnerable and marginalized populations, as well as women and youth. Other soft issues have also been mentioned, such as the lack of proper contents to attract individual users, and the necessity of standardization. It is appreciated the effort made by ITU on standardization of the "digital transformation for cities and communities".

The panel points out that Public Private Partnership is of great importance to the sustainable development of ICT development and information services to be affordable for all. And, international collaboration is absolutely the key for building back better with inclusive access to information and knowledge.

The panel calls for more efforts from government, private sector and academia to build a better digital ecosystem with ubiquitous network penetration with proper digital literacy and skills of all people, while preventing erosion of the freedom of expression and the spread of disinformation and misinformation, supported by proper governmental policies and international cooperation.

The panel identifies that digital security is a growing challenge to the information society, and global efforts should be made to ensure a safe and secure and meaningful access.

The panel recommends:

- to create a digital transformation towards future-proofing society and create a more digitally literate, adaptive culture where affordability and access are the norms. It is through this resilience and framework of the ITU leveraging on information communication to close the digital divide gap that the sustainable development goals can be better achieved for a more connected world accessed by all.
- to encourage government sectors to use evidence-based approaches, which can help bridge the partisan divide and support research-based debate about what outcomes we want to achieve for minimizing digital divide and inequality.
- to establish an international consortium of cyber security, especially on International Cyber Security Law. Cyberattacks and breaches of cybersecurity have increased a lot and concern the governments and the public. There is no international cyber security law in place and different countries have put in place their own distinctive national laws on regulating cyber security. So, the need for accepting universal principles impacting regulation of cyber security becomes the urgency of the day.