Community networks newsletter: From recognition to action

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By APCNews

Around the world, communities are building alternatives to bridge the digital divide and foster self-determination related to communications technologies. And their contribution has been recognised recently: in this edition, we can see tangible examples coming from government representatives from Cameroon, Colombia and Argentina, so much so an international prize was awarded to the Argentine regulator for its programmes developed hand in hand with civil society organisations to support community-led connectivity.

The recognition from those occupying decision-making positions is an important first step, especially in a sector dominated by insufficient commercial alternatives for many decades. This first step should translate into action from multiple stakeholders who can support community networks to help them flourish and grow.

Welcome to the 56th monthly round-up of developments impacting your local access networks and community-based initiatives.

Community networks news and stories

- Weaving dreams together in Latin America: a range of people with diverse backgrounds are building community-led initiatives in the LAC (Latin America and the Caribbean) region, demonstrating that community networks can be a process in which technologies, communications and access are moulded to meet local realities, dreams and needs. Read more. [Also available in Spanish.]

- Seeding change: "Twenty years of dreams were finally given a breath of life by a pandemic," Dunia Moja founder Twahir Hussein says about his work with underprivileged communities in Kilifi, on the coast of Kenya. Read more. [Also available in French.]

- Returning to learning: Daniel Arapmoi shares his story in this piece, highlighting the importance of a project from BOSCO Uganda to upgrade the ICT centre in the Agago District in Uganda. Read more.

- Participants in the Amazon Community Networks School in Brazil will expand community communication in seven territories of the region. They are building community-led projects after completing the training process. Read more. [Available in Portuguese.]

- From Asia, two articles from ASORCOM take a deep dive on community networks in Myanmar: one focusing on challenges and opportunities and the other on sustainable connectivity strategies.

Gendered experiences

- Women have historically been underrepresented in the telecommunications policy and regulation spaces, but there has been a recent push to increase diversity in these fields. This underrepresentation can result from gender bias, discrimination and lack of access to mentorship and networking opportunities, points out Josephine Miliza in this reflection to KICTANet. Read more.

- Women are the key in building community networks. They are important "links between history-memory, innovation-change and consideration-adaptation," says Jésica Giudice in this article published by AlterMundi. [Available in Spanish.]

- Did you know that rural women face more challenges to access the internet? Within the framework of International Women's Day, Colnodo talks about the opportunities for women in community networks. Read more. [Available in Spanish.]

Enabling policy and regulation

- Stakeholders and government representatives came together in Cameroon in March to discuss how to address the digital divide. The country's minister of posts and telecommunications, Minette Libom Li Likeng, highlighted the need for community networks. Read more here and here.

- To support the dialogue above, APC and GIZ Cameroon presented a new paper highlighting the ever-increasing importance of access to electronic communications services in Cameroon. It also presents regulatory and operational recommendations to make the national environment more favourable to the development of community networks. Read more. [Also available in French.]

- The telecom regulatory agency in Argentina, ENACOM, was recognised by the World Summit on the Information Society Prizes 2023 for its work in supporting community networks in the country. Find out more in this thread from AlterMundi. [Available in Spanish.]

- In Colombia, President Gustavo Petro visited the Jxa'h Wejxia Casil community network in Caldono, Cauca. Read more. [Available in Spanish.]

- A series of publications from KICTANet on community networks discuss important aspects of these initiatives in Kenya, such as the state of connectivity, sustainable operating models for connected schools and capacity building as a sustainability strategy for community networks.

Publications, research and toolkits

- Did you know there is an online learning repository focused on materials made by and for community networks? This is a collective space just

launched (see the recordings) to store and exchange resources that can be useful in training processes. Read more.

- Here comes the sun: for those interested in understanding the basics of electricity and photovoltaic systems for community networks, this manual presents an introductory framework. Read more. [Also available in Spanish and French.]

- This manual was written from the real experience of installing the Pirania Captive Portal in a women-led community network in Brazil. The portal is a network access controller: when accessing it, one device is directed to the screen requesting individual passwords. Read more. [Available in Portuguese and Spanish.]

- First bamboo tech tower in Uganda: this piece and video documented the creation of a telecom tower made entirely from bamboo. During these past decades, bamboo has become an option for community networks as it is a renewable resource, grows incredibly fast and can be an affordable alternative to steel towers. Read more.

- The Brazilian feminist organisation MariaLab just launched a free, feminist and safe service, Maria D'Ajuda, offering emergency assistance for digital threat cases in Latin America. Read more. [Available in Portuguese.]

Events

- The new edition of the Training Programme for the Management of ICT Networks in Indigenous and Rural Communities in Latin America 2023 is open for people in Latin America. This is a training programme happening from May until November this year. Those interested should apply by 16 April 2023. Find out more. [Available in Spanish.]

- On 30 March 2023, the forum "Community Networks: Complementary Solutions, Innovations and Partnerships to Bridge the Digital Divide" showcased community networks and the important role of partnerships and policy in enabling these innovative solutions to expand connectivity. Check out the recordings.

- Community Networks at the WSIS Forum 2023: check out the recordings of sessions focusing on community-led initiatives and capacity building to bridge the digital divide here, here and here.

- The Fourth Social Enterprise Advocacy and Leveraging (SEAL) Asia Conference held a session focusing on "Seeding and Enabling Community Networks towards Bridging the Digital Divide". The recordings are available here.

Funding opportunities

- ISIF Asia announced that the Ian Peter Grants for Internet and the Environment are now accepting applications from public and private

sector organisations, academia, non-profits and social enterprise organisations across three thematic areas: inclusion, infrastructure and knowledge. The deadline is 30 April 2023. Read more.

- There are two funding programmes to support communities around the world in gaining greater access to the internet and ensuring its security and resiliency: Connecting the Unconnected and Sustainable Technical Communities. Applications to both programmes will be accepted on a rolling basis. Read more.

Why we must support women in community networks

When editing a GenderIT.org special edition on community networks and infrastructures of resistance, Adriana Labardini Inzunza noticed that the involvement of women, and not just men, is essential to lead change for all: children, adults and the elderly, Indigenous, native and quilombola groups reinventing community life.

In her own words, "The community network movement must address any inequalities and power imbalances upfront, root-up. Every form of discrimination and violence should be addressed inside communities, so that they do not take root deeper, eroding inclusion and equality."

Find out more!

This newsletter is part of the Local Networks (LocNet) initiative, an initiative led by APC in partnership with Rhizomatica that aims to directly support the work of community networks and to contribute to an enabling ecosystem for the emergence and growth of community networks and other community-based connectivity activities in developing countries. You can read more about the initiative here, here, and here.

Previous editions of this newsletter are available here.

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