

# DECLARATION ON COMMUNITY CONNECTIVITY

## **Preamble**

Over four billion people may remain unconnected to the Internet, including approximately one billion who do not have access to basic telephony services. Most people in rural and economically disadvantaged areas are unlikely to realise the benefits of connectivity in the near term. Rural communities and slum dwellers represent almost 60% of the worldwide population and, to date, traditional Internet access models have failed to provide coverage to such populations.

To reverse these trends, it is necessary to create appropriate frameworks that allow communities and local entrepreneurs to solve their own connectivity challenges. Bottom-up strategies that embrace non-discriminatory treatment of data traffic and diversity in the first mile can empower individuals and communities, allowing them to play an active role as co-creators of local Internet and communication infrastructure. We acknowledge that communication technology does not have a neutral impact and can exacerbate unequal power relations in the community, and so community networks should strive to implement more inclusive and just alternatives.

## **1. Connectivity**

Connectivity is the ability to reach all endpoints connected to the Internet without any form of restriction on the data-packets exchanged, enabling end-users to run any application, access and share any type of content and service via any device as long as this does not harm the rights of others. Connectivity is the goal of the Internet.

## **2. Community Networks**

We embrace the potential of community networks as a vehicle for transformation that increases the agency of all community members, including by fostering gender-balance. Community networks are structured to be open, free, and to respect network neutrality. Such networks rely on the active participation of local communities in the design, development, deployment, and management of shared infrastructure as a common resource, owned by the community, and operated in a democratic fashion. Community networks can be operationalised, wholly or partly, through individuals and local stakeholders, NGO's, private sector entities, and/or public administrations. Community networks are recognised by:

- a) Collective ownership: the network infrastructure is managed as a common resource by the community where it is deployed;
- b) Social management: the network infrastructure is technically operated by the community;
- c) Open design: the network implementation and management details are public and accessible to everyone;
- d) Open participation: anyone is allowed to extend the network, as long as they abide by the principles and design of the network;
- e) Promotion of peering and transit: community networks should, whenever possible, be open to settlement-free peering agreements;
- f) Promotion of the consideration of security and privacy concerns while designing and operating the network;
- g) Promotion of the development and circulation of local content in local languages, thus stimulating community interactions community development.

### **3. Community Network Participants**

Community network members are considered active participants, and should be considered both producers and users of content, applications, and services. Notably, community network participants must:

- a) Have the freedom to use the network for any purpose as long as they do not harm the operation of the network itself, overburden the network, the rights of other participants, or the principles of neutrality that allow content and services to flow without deliberate interference;
- b) Have the right to know the technical details and operation of the network and its components, and to share knowledge of its mechanisms and principles;
- c) Have the right to offer services and contents to the network, while establishing their own terms;
- d) Have the right to join the network, and the obligation to extend this set of rights to anyone according to these same terms.
- e) Promote full gender balance

### **4. Policy Affecting Connectivity and Community Networks**

National as well as international policy should facilitate the development of community connectivity and the deployment of community networks.

National and international policy should:

- a) Take into account individuals' human rights to freedom of expression and privacy;
- b) Lower barriers that may hinder individuals' and communities' capability to create connectivity, including gender barriers;
- c) Allow the commons-based use of existing unlicensed spectrum bands or unused licensed spectrum for public-interest purposes, and consider the growth in use of unlicensed spectrum bands and the establishment of special licenses which address the needs of community connectivity;
- d) Incentivise the development and adoption of technologies based on open standards, free software and open hardware to improve the replicability and resilience of community networks;
- e) Allow for the deployment of technologies based on dynamic access of spectrum and other new technologies that do not necessarily have a full regulatory framework in place supporting them;
- f) Promote the elaboration of appropriate frameworks and the utilisation of existing funds, such as universal service funds or other specific telecommunication development funds), towards advancing community connectivity.