

March 30, 2023

Connecting the Unconnected

Creating an enabling environment for community networks



We believe the Internet
is for everyone.



What is the digital divide?

There is no one digital divide.

Gap between those who have access, and those who don't.

There are many factors:

- Availability
- Affordability
- Quality of service
- Relevance, like language, availability of apps
- Additional divides like security, digital literacy, access to equipment



Challenges

The Internet has been around a long time and a lot of money has been invested in its growth.

Why is there still a digital divide?

- High costs of infrastructure
- Low ROI for incumbents
- Geographical challenges in rural and remote locations
- Lack of sustainable funding opportunities



Rethinking approaches to connectivity

- COVID underscored urgent need for digital equity NOW
- Traditional models aren't getting the job done good enough or fast enough.
- Community-led networks have proven models to bring fast, affordable, reliable Internet to hardest-to-connect communities



Photo: © Natalie Campbell

What is a community network?



For, by and with the community

Community networks are Internet service solutions built by, for and with the communities they serve, taking into account their needs, challenges, and goals.



How we support community networks

We help communities build and manage their own connections.

- Funding
- Technical support
- Training



Photo credit: © Chris Gregory

Closing the digital divide in North America

- **Nation of Hawaii:** grant/training; from 1 to 5 CNs in 2 years
- **NYC Mesh:** seed funding & grant to connect to local IXP
- **Winnipeg's North End Connect:** seed funding and equipment
- **Ulukhaktok:** grant/training; first Arctic community network to deploy this summer; LEO backhaul



Photo credit: © Elyse Butler

NANUM Women Connected

In 2022 we supported two communities in the deployment of their own Internet infrastructure in Bolivia and Paraguay.

They are part of NANUM Mujeres Conectadas [Women Connected], initiative seeking to connect and empower Indigenous women in the South American Chaco region, present in countries such as Argentina, Paraguay, Bolivia, and Brazil.



NANUM Women Connected

Both communities now have Internet infrastructure and a community center where they can access information and trainings to build technical skills.

Local focus on finding alternatives to fight climate change.

They are now under expansion to connect even more people in the Chaco region.



AFCHIX Women-led CNs

We have supported our CN development partner AFCHIX.

They have supported the deployment of 3 women led community networks in Kenya, Morocco and Namibia.

A 4th CN in Senegal is in the works.



How can governments
help close the digital divide?



International commitments

WTDC21 resolution to work towards Connect 2030 goals & UN's 10 urgent priorities, including UN Roadmap of Digital Cooperation.

Encourages use and adoption of complementary networks (like CNs) and policy/regulatory frameworks that support them.



Policy recommendations

- **More, faster, and easier-to-access** broadband funding opportunities for community-driven solutions.
- **Sustainable funding** for network operations and digital literacy, not just capital costs.
- **Funding opportunities that are inclusive** to all kinds of Internet providers, including small or community-run networks, Indigenous governments and community members.



Policy recommendations (cont'd)

- **Easier access to spectrum licenses**, including priority access for Indigenous communities
- **Education and outreach** to raise community awareness and provide applicant support for funding and spectrum license opportunities.
- **Build better relationships** with community members to understand their needs in policy consultation and implementation processes



References

Financing Mechanisms for Locally Owned Internet Infrastructure. Internet Society, Connect Humanity (2022). Available at:
<https://www.internetsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Financing-Mechanisms-for-Locally-Owned-Internet-Infrastructure.pdf>



Thank you.

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