
ICANN80 | HLGM – Session 3: Towards a Better Digital Inclusion
Sunday, June 9, 2024 – 14:30 to 16:15 KGL

BAHER ESMAT: Welcome back. I hope you enjoyed your lunch. We begin the third session of the day on Digital Inclusion and Bridging the Digital Divide. I'd like to welcome our moderator for this session, Ms. Theresa Swinehart, Senior Vice President of Global Domains and Strategy at ICANN.

THERESA SWINEHART: So first of all, welcome everybody. I have the pleasure of welcoming you after your lunch. So hopefully this conversation is going to be keeping everybody awake after you've enjoyed a wonderful meal provided by our hosts as well.

So this session towards a better digital inclusion is really a wonderful opportunity to focus in on all the different areas that have an impact on making digital inclusivity possible. And there's so many different elements that are relevant to it. We heard about several areas this morning, and we look forward to welcoming our panelists to discuss this further.

So, if I could ask to come up to the stage Ms. Bernadette Lewis, Secretary General, Commonwealth Telecommunications Organization, his Excellency, Mr. Boukar, Ministry of Telecommunications and Economics, Chad. Yes, he's here. Mr. Henao, Vice Minister of Digital Transformation, Columbia. Let's see.

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Yes. Okay. Brigadier General Rahman, Director General of Bangladesh Telecommunications Regulatory Commission.

And Mr. Mirzapour, Commissioner in the Communications Regulatory Authority, and Advisor to the Minister of ICT, Ministry of Communications and Information Technology, Iran. Wonderful. Thank you. We seem to be missing Mr. Henao from Columbia. Ah, there you are. Very nice. Thank you. Well, welcome everybody, and I look forward to our discussion here. And we'll kick it off with a question that goes to every panelist.

And so, I will pose the questions potentially in the order starting at my right, if I may. Would that be all right? Okay. And the question to everybody is, could each of you briefly share your perspective on the most critical aspect of bridging the digital divide in your respective regions?

BERNADETTE LEWIS:

Thank you. Thank you. First of all, I'd like to thank the government of the Republic of Rwanda and the people for their warm hospitality, and for ICANN for the opportunity to share some perspectives on closing the digital divide at this high-level government meeting. Now, bridging the digital divide is a collective responsibility.

It involves partnerships and collaboration between many diverse stakeholders, and one of these stakeholders is the government. And I want to focus my remarks on the role of governments and their relationship with their citizens. And I want to make three points that

may seem obvious, but they're not trivial and they cannot be taken for granted. And I really believe in my first point that there's a need for a new social contract, one that puts citizens at the center of governments activities. We should be aiming for citizen-serving, not self-serving government. And governments must do what is right for all of their citizens without discrimination.

Closing the digital divide can only be accomplished with visionary leadership leaders who are genuinely concerned, who care for citizens, who inspire them to believe in and work together towards a digital future. It takes leaders who exercise political will and act with demonstrated compassion and commitment to their citizens. It takes leaders who are prepared to innovate, to be constantly evaluating the effectiveness of their actions, and courageous enough to discard and reject those processes that do not serve the best interests of all of their citizens. And our host country, the Republic of Rwanda, is a sterling example of this kind of visionary committed leadership.

And then I'd like to talk a bit about the relationship between the governments and their citizens, and knowledge of the citizen and respect for their rights is essential for bridging the digital divide. It's not possible to serve citizens without knowing them and understanding their needs, whether they be in rural or remote communities, disadvantaged places with disabilities, it requires engagement with citizens and their communities.

It requires recognition of the local circumstances and customization of solutions to solve problems without harm to the environment, to the

culture, and also to the people. And the last point is that bridging the digital divide, it requires the implementation of evidence-based policies, and I'm going to stress on implementation of evidence-based policies.

And there has to be a deliberate system of policies that direct the action of governments to achieve national outcomes in service to citizens, and it imperative that these policies are implemented. I've seen on too many occasions, excellent policies, excellent strategies, have they been implemented? They have not. And all of this, I think, starts with public awareness and education.

And this ICANN forum is an excellent initiative, the inclusion of governments as one of the stakeholders, the encouragement of governments to participate in the process is so important. And the need to educate on the internet, its resources, the organizations that are involved in its evolution, and encouraging our governments to participate as one of the many diverse stakeholders.

So I'm encouraging, and as it was said earlier, this is the choir, so the CTO will be working towards bringing other governments into the fold, in raising the awareness. We are committed to working with ICANN to support our members within the Commonwealth and beyond, to bring governments into the full multi-stakeholder fold, which has worked so well and brought us thus far. Those are just my introductory comments. Thank you.

THERESA SWINEHART: Thank you. Those are wonderful, and they certainly capture some of the things this morning that we had also talked about. And evidence-based policies, knowledge of your citizens, it's wonderful in the social contract. His excellency, Mr. Boukar, could I turn to you with the same question?

BOUKAR MICHEL: Thank you very much. I would like to join the chorus of my predecessors and thank the government of this country for the hospitality and the warm welcome that they've given us. It is my first time at ICANN, and I am a Minister of Telecommunications and Digital Economy of the Republic of Chad. I believe I share your vision.

You know that on the African continent or at the global level, more than 50% of citizens cannot access internet, but the African continent is a specific case. The African continent does not have sufficient access to internet, it does not have the appropriate infrastructure. So when one talks about digital inclusion, one must be aware of things on a global level, and I believe that some of our governments are not aware of this.

Every year, millions of African students graduate from universities. Do we know how many? I would say circa 10 million graduates from universities, but cannot find a job. When one addresses the internet, one must address the need for an energy infrastructure. So I would address energy, the internet, and infrastructure in the same breath.

Africa has more than 600 million citizens, it should have the means to feed its population, but it cannot. 600 million Africans cannot have sufficient access to energy. How can they access the internet? I believe this is something that should be thought about. Four years ago, as an academic, I published a book.

It was a book that addressed agriculture and sustainable and renewable energies. It was published in Germany and translated in a number of languages. Mrs. Lewis said some very relevant things, and she shared her vision. And if we want to foster better inclusion, we also need better financial inclusion, and we need a multi-stakeholder approach in order to bring better digital inclusion.

And for a better multi-stakeholder approach, we need to elevate the more vulnerable governments or countries. In Chad, we only have one fiber optic access coming from Cameroon, and this was a result of the exploitation of oral resources. And if this fiber optic access is cut, then Chad will not have access to internet.

So you cannot talk about better digital inclusion if you do not address a better support infrastructure for vulnerable states. We need to think about this in order to bring about solutions for Africa. Again, we have the issue of landlocked countries. We have to think about leveraging the better-connected countries in order to help the landlocked countries such as countries like Chad. Chad is in a very difficult situation currently, and this is why we would like to join the chorus and really stress the importance of support to more vulnerable countries.

The World Bank has expressed this itself and said that this was a good idea, and we also welcome the support of Rwanda because Rwanda is a beacon for every African country. And we all hope that we could muster the same measures in order to reach that same level. As for Chad, there is an issue I'd like to bring to the fore.

So if we're talking about high broadband internet, necessarily talking about fiber optics, but then what about Starlink? At the global level, Starlink is an internet provider, but in war torn countries, could we potentially think about deploying Starlink in other more vulnerable countries?

So I believe we can think about some legal frameworks to foster this kind of evolution. We have already talked to Mr. Musk in order to deploy Starlink, but we need to find legal solutions in order to better frame this approach. Today, there is not sufficient legal provisions to frame the deployment of Starlink. We believe that Chad is moving forward, and I would like to seize this opportunity to thank everybody. And I hope that we can think together about how better supporting vulnerable countries. Thank you.

THERESA SWINEHART:

Thank you. Those were absolutely wonderful observations, and a situation of a landlocked country with a single fiber optic and the challenges. But I appreciated your observations as well, that in order to be able to have everything function, you need the energy, you need the infrastructure and you need the financial investment, but also the legal frameworks. So I think we have a lot of discussions here on what

we need for digital inclusion, and it's not a single recipe for anybody. With that, may I turn it over to Brigadier General Rahman? Thanks. Same question. Okay.

KAZI MUSTAFIZUR RAHMAN: Thank you, Theresa. First of all, the Honorable Delegates and distinguished guest, it's my great honor to address this esteem assembly at the ICANN High Level Government Meeting. As we gather here today, we stand at a pivotal moment in the history of the internet and era where our collective decision will shape the future of this indispensable global resources.

The internet, with the boundless potential, has revolutionized every aspect of our lives, it has transformed economies, empowered societies, and created unprecedented opportunities for innovation and collaboration. Yet, with this transformation come significant challenges that require our argent attention and collaborative effort.

Let me highlight few of the key milestone in the journey of Bangladesh. In the sector of digital services government transparency. Bangladesh has already offered 2,420 digital services, where in 2008, it was only eight. The number of government website transmitting national information has skyrocketed from 98 to 52,200 as in today. Our national information broadcasting thematic content has reached over 10.1 million people.

Our myGov platform has now over 4.4 million registered citizens with 2.6 million applications settle and 348,000 mobile apps downloads.

Now coming to the additionally the one stop services in our country, also known as the Digital Center, have expanded from two to 9,394 locations providing 387 types of services and delivery over 9.146 million services transactions.

In the telecommunications sector and specific to connectivity with the staggering 93 million voice subscriber and over 138 million internet users, including more than 2 million mobile broadband subscribers, our nation boasts one of the largest telecom sectors globally. Nearly 98% of our population is covered by the mobile broadband network, and we are so fortunate that our country is not landlocked as said by the minister, Chad, their country is landlock.

And we have enormous opportunity at this moment. We have three terrestrial, submarine submitting terrestrial cable, we have seven other terrestrial licenses. And very recently, in near future, we'll have one more consortium for our three public sector, three private sector. They have got the license and they'll be connected with the submarine cable within our country. And we have constructed 45,230 towers, developed an extensive optical fiber network spanning 175,000 kilometer. The daily average transaction through mobile financial service is around 4,000 cores, it's approximately three 50 million USD.

Now, about the connectivity of infrastructure under the digital Bangladesh Initiative, we have connected 4,500 Indians that are connected. So these are the success story of Bangladesh. And with that, we are also developing our human resources. We have

developed 650,000 scale IT freelancer, we have established 13,000 digital labs, and provided training to 5,000 persons with disabilities.

We have trained 90,000 persons in cybersecurity, we have success in the e-government initiative, success in industrial promotion, and many other sectors. To talk about our ongoing effort with the ICANN related initiatives that also reducing the digital divide that we are pairing the operational guidelines for ccTLD, and this year February, we have issued this operational guideline for Bangladesh, ccctld.bdn.bangla.

Definitely, this will ensure consumer centric and industry-oriented operation for our ccTLDs. The other initiatives with ICANN are the registered and reseller enlistment. We are now opening up the process of enlisting registers and resellers for our ccTLDs. We are working on the Universal Acceptance, .bangla domain, and as a regulator, we must ensure that the internet remains as a global public resources that is accessible, secure, and resilient.

This necessitates a multi-faceted approaches that include promoting inclusive access, enhancing cyber security, and upholding internet governance principles, protecting privacy and data, and last but not the least, fostering innovation and development. For reducing the digital divide and in increase the digital inclusion, as I said, we have increased the submarine cable and we are working on the 5G spectrum.

And after connecting all our unions with the high-speed optical fiber network, we are now planning to connect the villages with the optical

fiber network. We need to lay out more than 500,000 kilometers of fiber in this respect.

We are now implementing projects to connect remote and hard reached areas by social obligation fund supported projects. And these projects are using fiber networks primarily to connect the areas. There are additional projects to connect these areas using satellite-based network, using our own bongo bundu satellite. We are putting all our effort to become a manufacturing hub of ICT device. Currently, 98% of the smartphone used in Bangladesh are produced locally in Bangladesh. We are also taking initiative to enhance the e-governance initiative, we are working to enhance digital financial inclusion.

Based on the current success of MSS services, the government has awarded digital banking license to connect the unbanked. We have also developed one stop digital platform to pay all bills and charges like ePay and have been using digital social safety net platform in the country. We have undertaken blended education acceleration program, and at the same time, Bangladesh has become a big center of digital economic activities, and we are giving all support and incentive for our entrepreneurs, especially for the SMEs to go digital and to be ready for the emergence of the new technologies.

Finally, I'd like to say that in choosing and referring, Bangladesh committed to working collaboratively with ICANN and the global community to ensure the continued growth and stability of internet. Together we can build a digital future that upholds the value of openness, inclusivity, and innovation. Thank you.

THERESA SWINEHART: Thank you so much. That's really a full spectrum of areas that have been brought together to enable this. And I'm glad you also touched on Universal Acceptance, we'll be coming back to that a bit later. If I could pose the same question to you, Mr. Mirzapour. Thank you.

HOSSEIN MIRZAPOUR: Okay. Dear Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen, good afternoon, good evening, probably good morning for some remote participants. First of all, I should thank the people and government of Rwanda for hosting this great event and as well as the whole lovely GAC crew.

Then back to the question I was asked for, you may know for more than a decade, ICT has been selected as a key driver for Iran's development plan. For Iran's development plan, we have seen more than six, five years plans. In most of them, ICT has been the key driver. Having created appropriate decision-making structures, including Communications Regulatory Authority called CRA in Iran, the nation has achieved remarkable speed in the implementation and follow up of the related programs.

In this regard, the fixed and mobile broadband coverage is not only considered as an inevitable infrastructure, but also provide a necessary ingredient for the sustainable grass of the digital economy. Let me give you briefly some facts and figures. Mobile broadband

connection called MBB, including 3G and 4G has reached almost all different corners of Iran as a vast country.

In the form of the universal service obligation, USO plan, Iran has ensured all users, even in rural and remote areas, have access to mobile broadband and publicly available communication network facilities and services at an affordable price.

I think all villages now with more than 20 households are connected to MBB, and to continue this success story, 5G technology has been initiated since last year, and major cities and provincial capitals will be fully covered by the end of next year. On top of that, and for fixed broadband, FBB Iran is at the middle of an ambitious fiber to home and business project called FTTX.

As you may know, it is more than just a means of delivering high speed internet, but also the lifeline of smart cities enabling the seamless integration and operation of IOT applications, smart grids, and other technologies. Since last year, this network has already reached about 7.5 million households and will be tripled in next couple of years to hopefully shape a historical record in this field.

All these quick wins have been accomplished by a group of private and public companies serving in the form of licensed operators. We have recently reshaped the market structure by introducing unified service provider license to all eligible MNLs and ISPs. To facilitate the competition and innovation and accelerate mobile fixed convergence as well. Nobody could have imagined such an outcome without a competitive private sector.

With a deep sorrow, I remember three weeks ago when this productive strategy was exactly acknowledged by our late president during his visit of ICT Ministry. Furthermore, Iranian Nation managed to establish digital platforms for various services, including eHealth, messengers, social media, video content, and e-commerce, which cater to national needs.

The Smart Government National Portal launched last year is now connecting 99% of public entities and offering more than 3000 services. Nevertheless, Iran has faced numerous and sometimes new challenges in the process of accelerating digital connections. One of the most remarkable ones is the Universal Coercive Measures, UCM, and sanctions maintained by few, but powerful countries, which are hosting major digital technology providers or have big deals with them.

Some simple ingredients of the network have been banned for decades to be used in Iran. This is fully the real multilateral and serious multi-stakeholder dialects, as well as collaboration within ICANN communities, can provide a basis for formulating joint mechanism related to the establishment of regulations leading to responsible behaviors in the global digital economy in addition to overcoming the above challenge.

As a matter of fact, ICANN high level meeting is a great opportunity for policy makers from around the world to discuss key policy trends and to consider appropriate solutions to reach maximum connectivity and bridge the digital divide.

Considering what we need to achieve in the fastest framework possible, providing a global platform for the exchange of knowledge, developing cooperation, and communicating with policy makers, business leaders, and industrial community activities, it is very important to achieve that. With its active participation in policy making bodies, Iran has always been trying to seriously pursue its development plans, along with maximum international collaboration and participation to shape a better digital future for all. Thank you for your attention.

THERESA SWINEHART: Thank you very much. That's really quite a spectrum of areas, in especially the public private reinforcement there. But your term also responsible regulation reminded me a little bit of what we heard right at the beginning of evidence-based policies and looking at how it's going to be effective and what works. So with that, may I turn it next to Mr. Henao? Same question to you. Thank you.

BELFOR FABIO GARCIA HENAO: My name is Belfor Garcia, I am the Viceminister of Digital Transformation for the ICT Ministry in Colombia. This is a country of South America. First of all, I would like to thank ICANN, the government of Rwanda, the people of Rwanda, for making this meeting possible, and a big thank to the organizers for making governments, the academia, the civil society, and the community together to discuss these sort of topics.

And let me also give you the greetings of our president, Mr. Pedro. He believes internet governance is very important, and as a government, we believe in the multi-stakeholder model to guarantee the existence of this ecosystem. Among the different development proposals and the digital transformation, we have a goal and we are willing to work on digital literacy programming, education for young people, cybersecurity, and we are also addressing artificial intelligence issues.

We are creating 100 centers of AI in our country. We would like to foster critical thinking in kids and children to give them digital certificates and we would like to promote gender programs in order to reduce the gender divide. We have seen in this meeting that we need a stable, secure, and resilient internet. It has to be a sustainable and interoperable internet. This is what we see in general terms, but let me take what Paul Wilson said this morning. He was the director of the APNIC Network Information Center. He said that the system is not perfect.

And then we also recapped and taken the words of other colleagues, we need to go beyond. When looking ahead, we need to look back because internet is the result of the history of the 20th century. Let's go back to the thirties and the forties. Who were the creators? Let me quote Alan Turing, [00:36:38 - inaudible], member of the Czech Republic, [00:36:45 - inaudible] from North America.

They, from different parts of the world, were able to create the maps and created what we know now as the Turing machine. And while creating the model, they were the mathematicians helping us to

develop that model. So what happened? What happened during the fifties, thinkers were reconfiguring the world, and in the sixties, the programmers started to work, and then we had the Fortran programming language helping us to man mine to the moon.

So gathering the government society and the academia sector together makes us wonder what we need for the 21st century. We think that we need a more democratic technology, a more democratic technological world, a more democratic digital economy. And when we say that we need more people to be connected, well that is democracy. We need democracy to set up the technological world of the 21st century. And let me end my speech by saying that technology is a conquest of humanity and it's a right for society. Thank you so much.

THERESA SWINEHART:

Thank you so much. And also, the reminder of the history of how we got to where we are today and the importance of all of that in the elements. I'm now going to go to each of you with some very focused questions that we had put in. So if I may, I will start with Ms. Lewis. And the question would be, in your view, how does digital transformation contribute to broader societal changes, particularly in terms of social inclusion in commonwealth nations, and what are some of the CTO's initiatives in this field?

BERNADETTE LEWIS:

Thank you. I'd like to point to one aspect. I'm still focusing on the governance, and the government is a unique institution in that it is the only institution with which a citizen has to interact at every stage of this development, from birth to school, to health, every aspect.

And therefore, if the government can digitally transform effectively and connect its citizens meaningfully, that catalyzes a whole process of ICT adoption, of effective use of ICT and that enables a lot of societal changes. So it's very important in our view we believe that the government really has to make effective use of the technology. And when it gets it right and citizens are confident and citizens are accepting, and citizens are seeing the benefit, it catalyzes, it's like a snowball effect, and it will result in societal transformation. And in 2020, the CTO adopted a new strategic direction to focus on supporting its members in accelerating digital transformation.

And there are two areas that we are focusing on, digital government, and I've just explained there's sort of rationale for that, and also universal, affordable, meaningful connectivity. The government doesn't do it in isolation, they have to bring their population along and engage their population and make sure that their population, their citizens can use the tools effectively.

And the delivery of services is one sort of proof of what is possible. So we have this embarked, and it's not just about digital transformation, but accelerating digital transformation because at the start of the-- there was this some 20 years ago, there were countries that were ahead in terms of ICT adoption and there are countries lagging behind.

Twenty years later, that sort of distribution hasn't really changed particularly well. And when we look at the pace of technological innovation, it's relentless. And we cannot just afford to go about business as usual, but we have to look at the strategies that enable the countries that are lagging to accelerate the transformation.

Otherwise, that digital divide is just going to be stretching wider, wider, and wider. So a number of things that the CTO has been working on, and one of them is an intensive program of public awareness and education. You have to educate all of your citizenry, the entire spectrum from the governments to the man in the street, and to spark their imagination of the possibilities for a digital future. So that is one of our areas of focus. We also introduced a new capacity development program.

It's not training for the sake of training, but capacity building for development impact. So the training that we do is designed to help our members implement, not training for the sake of training. And I had mentioned earlier the whole issue of implementation, it's not sufficient to have a good plan. You're not going to make any progress with a good plan, it has to be implemented. And our focus is going to be working hand in hand with our members to implement the plans that they come up with. So capacity building is also a very important point that we think needs to be addressed.

And also, we have also done to support our work in digital transformation, we did a very important study of six countries, and we looked at their, their successes in digital transformation. And we also

looked at the critical success factors, Bangladesh was one of them, and we had some very, very interesting results coming out of that. If I could just point very quickly, it's a vision.

It starts with a vision and leadership and political will. You have to do the research, you have to get the evidence, you have to collect the data, you have to articulate the challenges, and often just articulating what the real issue is, that is a challenge. So you must do that research. Of course, we've spoken about it over and over, partnerships, it requires partnerships, participation from multiple stakeholders, the appropriate enabling environment of the regulatory and legal frameworks.

Technology requires investment. Yes, and we have to look for models of how are we going to, as you said my friend from Chad, my colleague from Chad, the whole issue of investment is absolutely significant. And our study supports that multi-stakeholder approach, consultation, and so on and digital skills vital.

You can't do it without those skills. There are a number of hindrances, competing agendas in coherence, misalignment of the strategies, the lack of inter-agency collaboration, everybody's going off in their own direction, you need whole of government approaches.

And we've spoken of some of the digital skills and literacy, those are very important things. If you don't have them, you may buy the technology and have it, but who's going to maintain it? Who's going to expand it? Who's going to apply to another situation? Those are things that we have been working on, and we are working along and

we are supporting, we are closely aligned to the WSIS action lines. And our work is really about facilitating greater degrees of collaboration and support, mutual support from our members. Thank you.

THERESA SWINEHART:

Thank you so much. And I know when we spoke earlier, you were very focused also on expediting all the efforts in the region. So I can hear that in how you're describing it very much. Let me go to the next question. This goes to Brigadier Rahman. Could you discuss the importance of promoting and developing local content in bridging the digital gap? And what initiatives has your government undertaken in this regard? And I know you'd also touched on Universal Acceptance, and when we spoke earlier, you'd already shared the telecommunications network that you have. But how do you bridge the digital gap with the local content and development?

KAZI MUSTAFIZUR RAHMAN:

Thank you. Talking about the promoting and developing local content is very important, it's very crucial in bridging the digital gap particularly in developing countries like Bangladesh. I know the local content helps to make the internet more relevant, more accessible to the local population, thereby encouraging more people to go online and benefit from digital technologies.

Let me tell you some of the key reasons why the local content is very important and the initiative of Bangladesh has undertaken to promote it. First of all, the cultural relevance, local content ensures that the

information available online is culturally and linguistically relevant to the local population. This helps in engaging more users who may not be comfortable with the foreign languages or content that does not reflect the culture. The second point comes to educational resources.

Developing local educational content can significantly enhance learning opportunities for students and educators, providing resources that are tailored to the local curriculum and educational needs. The economic development, the local content development can stimulate the local economy by creating jobs in content creation, digital marketing, and related fields. It also supports local business by providing them with the platform to reach a wider audience. To talk about the social inclusion by making the initiative or by making the internet more accessible and relevant, the local content can be helpful by bridging the digital divide, ensuring that marginalized communities have access to the information and services, what they need.

The government in the civil engagement that the local content can facilitate better communication between the government and citizens, improving access to the government services and encouraging civil participants. Now about talking about the initiative that what Bangladesh has taken to promote the local content.

Bangladesh has recognized the importance of the local content in bridging the digital gap, and has undertaken several initiatives to promote it and develop it. The first of all is the Digital Bangladesh Vision 21 that we have already implemented. The government gave

the vision, this is the visionary leadership of our leadership that to make the digital Bangladesh that we have achieved.

And Bangladesh has given the new vision to make the Smart Bangladesh by 2041, and the government is working and the people of Bangladesh is working on that. The next is the Bengali Language Promotions. Efforts have been made to increase the availability of Bengali language content on the internet. These include the digitization of books, creating of online educational resources in Bengali, and development of Bengali language interface of various digital platform.

Our e-government services government has launched several e-government services, such as online tax filing, digital land records, e-health Services, which provide locally relevant content and services to the citizens. And on the innovation and entrepreneurship, the initiative have been taken, like the initiative like innovation, design and entrepreneurship, academia project supports local startups and entrepreneurs to creating digital content and services that cater to the local market.

The government has developed a national web portal, this is bangladesh.gov.bd that serves as a one-stop access point of information and services related to the various government and department and agencies. This portal provides a wealth of local content and resources in Bengali. Programs like the access to information, A2I project, have been undertaken in developing the digital education and content training program to improve digital

literacy and skill among the population. And we are also providing the grant for the local content developers, and we are also doing the public private partnership.

The government has encouraged this public partner, private partnership to foster the development of local content. This includes collaboration with the technical companies, NGOs and educational institutions. So, however, by promoting and developing local content, Bangladesh is working to ensure that more people can benefit from digital technologies, thereby reducing the digital divide and fostering inclusive growth. These efforts are essential for building a digital inclusive society where everyone has the opportunity to participate in and benefit from the digital economy. Thank you.

THERESA SWINEHART:

Thank you. You really highlight that it has to be the full experience, the individual needs to have the full experience within their language. If I could pose the next question to Mr. Mirzapour, what strategies are being employed to ensure meaningful connectivity and digital inclusion in Iran, particularly in the rural and underserved areas? You touched on many things earlier, but the rural and underserved very much. Thank you.

HOSSEIN MIRZAPOUR:

Thank you. I think I can highlight four or five different strategies which were partially implicitly mentioned in my first term. First of all, and through the Universal Service Obligation plan, USO plan, all MNOs,

they were like obliged to put 7% of the yearly revenue for the rural and remote areas. That was one of the most important things to bring the connectivity MBB, particularly, I mean mobile connection to all different corner of the such a vast country. Second and quite recent one is the FBB because the country was not so advanced and fixed as mobile.

Recently, the subsidy gone to fix FTTX project, and now I think about 10 ISPs in the form of UNSP license, they are competing each other to cover the whole country. They have started first with cities, and then later on they will go further. So far, as I mentioned, more than 7 million households, they have been covered and it'll reach 20 million by the end of next year, I think. This is the second strategy.

And the third one, which is probably more important, is the whole success story happened with private sector. So the market was restructured more than a decade ago, and a communications regulatory authority was established. So everybody was, private public companies, they were licensed to do this.

And actually, nobody can imagine such a success without the help of an innovative private sector. And the last one, last but not least the national smart government portal with more than 3000 connected services right now, I think 99%, as I mentioned, of governmental bodies, they are connected, they are offering their services there, like from police certificate, issuing passport, birth certificate, I don't know, business license, many things, many things. This kind of national portal stimulate the demands of whole people from different sectors

to be connected to ask for connection. That was an important strategy. I think I can elaborate on that. Thank you.

THERESA SWINEHART: Thank you. Yes, it's really also creating the demand and the interest for it very much. If I could turn the next question to his excellency Boukar, what steps is Chad taking to develop its digital economy, and how are these efforts helping to improve digital inclusion across the country? You had shared many examples of the challenges, and so also, what steps are you taking now?

BOUKAR MICHEL: Thank you very much. As for digital inclusion, we have adopted a twofold vision. There's a legal and institutional framework on the one hand, we have outlined a policy for the development of telecommunications. We have strategies that is focused on electronic communications and digital services. Currently, we are drafting a number of a regulatory text, and many have been adopted and focused on digital inclusion. On the other hand, we have also focused on infrastructure. You are aware that Chad is a country with a very vast land area, more than 1.2 million square kilometers.

With a country with such a large surface area, you need substantial investment in infrastructure. Chad is connected nationally and internationally via fiber optics, satellite connections, and other means. More than 92% of Chad digital traffic is transmitted via the water cables. We also have a fiber optic backbone of more than 200,000

kilometers. Chad is connected to the international network via fiber optics, and this fiber optic networks goes through Cameroon. We are dependent on this connection because of the issues in Sudan.

Recently, Chad has been finalizing the construction of a data center, has also been modernizing its network, building many antenna and towers, and it is needed in such a vast territory. We believe that thanks to our agreements with the European Investment Bank, Chad will be able to strengthen its infrastructure. If you look at sustainable development mechanisms, if you look at the SDGs, you'll see that every UN country has decided to fight for these SDGs, you know the name of these different SDGs, SDGs seven on energy up to SDG 14 on digital inclusion.

So when are we going to reach these goals? But this is a difficult question to answer, and I believe that vulnerable countries need support from the international community. As for my country, Chad, I am advocating here in front of you for such support to be given. I know I'm not part of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, I am the Minister for Telecommunications, and I am aware of the difficult situation of my country, and I believe that we need better support in order to foster better digital inclusion. Thank you very much.

THERESA SWINEHART:

Thank you. I think you've very much touched on why it's a global effort and a regional effort and partnerships are necessary. Not one country can do it on their own. So thank you for touching on that. And that's a lot of landmass to cover. If I could turn the last question, but

not the least important in any way whatsoever, to Mr. Henao, Columbia has been advancing digital transformation agenda with a major focus on digital education. Could you elaborate on the key initiatives your government is implementing to enhance digital literacy and education in your country?

BELFOR FABIO GARCIA HENAO: Mr. Henao speaking. In terms of digital education, this is paramount to our government. Digital education is all encompassing, it includes awareness, programming. We have advanced artificial intelligence programs in place, for instance, because we believe that artificial intelligence has to foster development in society. Now, when it comes to our government program, we, as a government, reach out to all our region. We also have a vast area in our country with different geographies and some hard-to-reach locations. So we believe that the backbone of our program is made up of technology or technological communities.

We have to reach out to the underserved communities so that this underserved community becomes an empowered community technology with agency to be protagonists of this process, so that they are active participants in our government program as well. So we work with society, we work with the fishermen in some area, we work with farmers in other areas of our countries. We work with our population in order to include society in our government programs, so that we together work toward a solution that caters for regional needs.

THERESA SWINEHART: Thank you very much. Yeah, it's the partnerships and advancing those very much. Before we open it up to the floor for our interventions, I'd like to ask each of you just to share one or two points that you got from the discussions here that we had identified, and then we'll open it up to our interventions on the floor. Maybe I could go the other direction this time from when we started. And Mr. Henao, if I could start with you just one or two observations quickly, and we'll go through everybody from the dialogue here on really the things that we can do for better inclusion that we've heard from all of our colleagues on the panel.

BELFOR FABIO GARCIA HENAO: Mr. Henao speaking. Well, the most important takeaway for me is the following. The digital divide affects all countries. We need to think globally in order to focus on how we can move forward. If we look back in history, we see that technology enabled a quantum leap so that we were able to reach communities in order to transform the lives of their citizens. In short, technology is a priceless opportunity that we have so that we can accelerate meaningful social change. This is what my government is focusing on, and continuously underscores working for the people and with the people.

THERESA SWINEHART: The global aspect and the people are very-- yes, exactly. If I could, Mr. Mirzapour, if I could turn to you for your quick observations.

HOSSEIN MIRZAPOUR: Actually, I had the same takeaway as mentioned right before. The power of technology, and particularly the connectivity, is very shined and highlighted when we see the social change, even in traditional societies. When people, they are connected in remote areas, you see the rate of literacy is going up very high, and you will have other welfare side effects, positive side effects, and this is very interesting. This is the thing I want to emphasize. Thank you.

THERESA SWINEHART: Thank you very much. Brigadier Rahman, your observation.

KAZI MUSTAFIZUR RAHMAN: Thank you. I'd like to thank all the panelists, they have given very important insight on the digital inclusion. To me to have digital inclusion or to reduce the digital divide, the infrastructure is very important as the minister of Chad has already mentioned. The infrastructure and the connectivity connect the unconnected people, the remote people.

For example, of my country always is a small country, but we have connected 98%, more than 98% of our people, they are connected through the telecommunication, they have covered by the mobile side. Then after connectivity, next thing comes is the quality of the connectivity, how quality is given, that is very important.

After that, I will take this talk about this this digital literacy, internet literacy is very important. Once someone is connected, this literacy comes after that. So literacy is a very good impact in future. For

example, so you are connected, you are you are smart in using artificial intelligence, but I have connectivity, but I'm not that smart in using the artificial intelligence. Automatically, I will go behind, I will not be at par with you. The way we will give the output product, probably I cannot give it that way. So to that context, I will say that the literacy is very important, digital literacy is very important to me. With that, I thank all of you.

THERESA SWINEHART: It is about the full experience once you're online to be able to use what you want to use and how. Yeah, very much so. Thank you. If I could turn it over to your excellency, Mr. Boukar, for your observations from the discussions that you've heard.

BOUKAR MICHEL: Thank you. I listened closely to what everyone had to say, and I think the experience of Bangladesh as Brigadier General was just recalling is impressive, they worked on providing technology, but on everything else that goes with it.

South Korea in the sixties had a GDP that was lower than what African countries have today and what they had back then, and when South Korea, as is the case of Bangladesh, began adopting their new policies and the necessary policies, they could see a transformation as just said, Mr. Garcia Henao that helped them underpin everything they needed for the sake of transformation. And they became one of the bigger countries in the world at the economic level.

And I think when we speak of the Rwandan case, we have a similar case. We all traveled here, and Rwanda produces tea, for instance, and anyone can order tea from wherever we are and they will deliver it, but it is only because there is digital inclusion that they are able to export that tea.

And so I was thinking of circular economy through digital inclusion, meaning that if you produce something, you can also sell it, you can buy, you can consume, everything is transformed with the circular economy model and digital inclusion. And I think that is what Africa needs. We need support in order to develop this model, we need to enhance what we're doing. Rwanda, our host, was a completely different country back in the nineties, and it is thanks to everything that President Kagame did, Rwanda has become a center for the region.

Why isn't this the case for all the other countries in the region? Well, it is because it has an innovative idea. We need knowledge, we need innovation, and it is through that sort of human interaction that we will get there. So those are my first remarks. But then further, I would like to add that whenever we speak of internet, we end up speaking of infrastructure and we leave aside power, electricity, but this needs to go hand in hand. You could never develop the internet or achieve digital inclusion if you don't have power everywhere.

If you communicate, if you have a lamp that's on, then you will be able to connect. But if you don't have power, how do you intend to connect? There are 6 million African people who did not have access

to electrical power, 6 million people. So how could we get them connected? That I think is a real challenge. So I think within ICANN, we need to reflect on what concept can join the two and get us to connect people together with this electrical inclusion.

THERESA SWINEHART: Your observation on the power and the connection to that is really instrumental, instrumental. But I also liked very much the expression, the circular model for digital inclusion, and I think power should be part of that. Electricity needs to be part of that equation, yes. If I could turn it over to Ms. Lewis for her observations and then we will go to the floor for the interventions.

BERNADETTE LEWIS: Great, thank you. My thought is we are nations, part of the global community, and we have to foster the mechanisms that would enable us to collaborate, and I'm going to use the word meaningfully. We have to look at mechanisms that foster greater degrees of collaboration because there's so much that we could learn from Bangladesh and Iran and from all the countries.

And I think that is something that we really have to focus our attention to those mechanisms that would allow us to collaborate in a way where we could provide mutual support. I absolutely agree concerning the energy, that has been a concern of ours, we're talking about the technology, but the technology needs energy, I absolutely agree with that.

And the only other thing I wanted to say is the whole issue of infrastructure devices and the technology, it calls for investment, and we have to be creative in our approaches and how we acquire the technology. And that is why I feel the collaboration if countries to get together as a region and approach the technology providers collectively, they are economies of scales that could be derived from such approaches. Those are my comments. Thank you.

THERESA SWINEHART: Wonderful. Thank you. This has been a very, very rich conversation. I certainly come away with a lot. With that, I'm now going to open it to the interventions from the floor. And I believe the first intervention is from China. So if I could ask for you to take the floor please. Thank you.

UNKNOWN SPEAKER: Thank you very much. I'm [01:15:45 - inaudible] from China, and first I would like to express my gratitude to the Rwanda government for hosting this forum and to ICANN for giving me the opportunity to share the experience of China and bridging the digital divide. In the following, I will speak Chinese.

China has always put people at the center in its development of the internet while increasing the internet inclusivity. So far, China had set up more than 6.3 million stations, and more than 77% of the Chinese citizens are internet users. In terms of bridging the digital gap, we have five experiences that we have learned. One is to continue to

narrow down the digital gap in order to develop. We started the universal telecommunication services back in the 2014. Back in 2000, we started to build up the connectivity from village to village. We also attached great importance to the imbalance between the development in different regions by lowering down the threshold for usage of the internet.

And thirdly, we continue to improve the education by targeting different groups of users to dissolving the difference. At the same time, we are providing user easily and friendly contents. Fourth is to bridge the gap in terms of regulation. We continue to improve the regulatory framework and assessment framework. Fifth is to extend the international cooperation to solve the problems that is concerned with internet resources sharing. By strengthening the international cooperation, we hope that all the people in the world can share the benefits of the internet. China has been devoted to collectively cooperate and holistically improve, bring benefits to the users in order to create a harmonious development. Thank you.

THERESA SWINEHART:

Thank you very much. I ask for the next intervention from Mr. Alan Davidson, Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Communications and Information and NTIA Administrator, US.

ALAN DAVIDSON:

Thank you so much. And I just say thank you to the panel. It was inspiring really to hear these stories about how we are addressing

these issues of inclusion, and I think it is true that the digital divide really does affect all countries. I wanted to focus though particularly on one aspect, and that is building a multilingual internet, which we think is fundamental to digital inclusion and meaningful connectivity.

Everyone online deserves access to a digital sphere that is diverse and inclusive and that serves their needs. And multilingualism on the internet will provide a gateway, the gateway to the next billion people who will get online. To reach those future users, we need to enable multilingualism in the domain name system and more broadly. Consider that over half of all global domains primarily use English according to a recent estimate. There are over 7,000 languages and dialects used globally, but only about 10 of those languages have any substantial online presence.

The US supports continued efforts to build a multilingual internet. And one important aspect of achieving a truly multilingual internet is Universal Acceptance. We've heard about it off and on by a number of people here today. Universal Acceptance is a technical standard that enables domain names and email addresses to function in non-Latin scripts, it enables users to navigate the internet using their own language, and this is a foundational element of a multilingual internet and in turn, will advance digital inclusion.

The next application round for new gTLDs in 2026 will increase access to internationalized domain names in the DNS, and we hope that that will encourage a more thriving, multilingual internet ecosystem. But to maximize the impact of these new gTLDs, we need to raise

awareness and increase use of the global Universal Acceptance system. There are efforts underway to increase Universal Acceptance and to promote internet multilingualism at both ICANN and the ITU. This includes an upcoming open consultation within the ITU's council working group on international public policy issues related to the internet, so we hope to see more engagement on this.

And in closing, I just encourage the high-level representatives here today to engage with these efforts. With your partnership, we can make the internet a more multilingual and inclusive place for everyone. Thank you.

THERESA SWINEHART: Thank you so much for those observations. If I could ask for Mr. Abdullahi, Nigeria, Director General for the National Information Technology Development Agency, NITDA. You have the floor.

KASHIFU INUWA ABDULLAHI: Thank you. First and foremost, I want to thank the ICANN and the government of Rwanda for organizing and hosting this meeting. And also, I'm super excited with what I heard from our panelists with a lot of emphasis on meaningful connectivity and digital literacy. That resonates with our commitment in Nigeria. In the spirit of innovation and progress, in Nigeria, we embark on a transformative journey to leverage meaningful connectivity for our collective digital future and prosperity. Digital inclusion is pivotal to this meaningful connectivity,

and our commitment is to ensure that every citizen contribute to and benefit from digital economy.

So, to achieve that, we need to ensure that every citizen has access, not only to internet and connectivity, but to devices and technology as well. As we progress on building frontier AI systems, we need to make sure every person on the planet is visible. If not, this frontier systems might not consider them while making decisions. So we need to ensure that every citizen is digitally visible. And also, on the digital literacy, we are very committed to that, and we develop the National Digital Literacy framework, and we have an initiative for digital literacy for all, where we want to make sure every citizen can operate devices and software, and also have skills to navigate around the internet to get information as well as data literacy to protect personal data.

We also want to ensure we equip our citizens with the skills to collaborate and communicate on digital platforms, as well as the capacity to develop digital content. We are also keen about safety. We want to make sure that every Nigerian can navigate the internet safely and responsibly. And also, we are working on ensuring that every citizen has a basic knowledge to troubleshoot hardware and software. So in conclusion, our call for ICANN is we need to be more strategic on digital literacy the same way we push for connectivity, because access to internet alone is meaningless without the literacy and fluency for someone to use that services. Thank you.

THERESA SWINEHART: Thank you very much. The next intervention will come from Cambodia, Mr. Sun, Under Secretary of State Ministry of Post and Telecommunications, the floor is yours.

RAPID SUN: Thank you. Good afternoon, excellency, minister, head of delegate, lady and gentleman. First of all, I would like to thank to Rwanda government and ICANN for hosting the High Level Government Meeting. Cambodia has made tremendous progress in internet connectivity in the recent years.

As of June, 2023, number of internet user was over 18.5 million, more than the population, with the monthly data user, 30 gigabyte per user, the number of mobile phone user was over 20 million, and the 4G mobile network coverage is cover more than 92.4 a person. Although Cambodia internet has better coverage and affordability, especially in the live city and town, the overall quality is still limited, which require further strengthening.

The coverage of digital infrastructure is not sufficient, and maximized. School, hospital, and subnational administration are not yet fully connected. In addition, SME has not been utilized availability connectivity for IT production and services. Therefore, the royal government of Cambodia has introduced important policy such as Cambodia Digital Economy and Society Policy Framework 2021, 2035, and Cambodia Digital Government policy 22, 2035. Both always focus on building the foundation, digital infrastructure, and building trust and confident on the digital.

And also building other three pillar for digital citizen, digital government, and digital business that promote and provide full support for the digital transformation. The government has made some effort to foster connectivity and digital transformation nationwide through various activity such as established seeing the submarine fiber optic cable from Hong Kong to the [01:26:58 - inaudible]. It is scheduled to be complete in 2025, building the digital government network, connecting to the commune by 2027, connecting the school, medical center, commune administration, and also establishing community tech center in high school.

To promote digital inclusion, the government has established digital education ecosystem, which provide free internet access to educational content and platform locally for student, teacher, government official, and citizen, ensuring no one left behind in cooperation with private mobile operator.

Internet has changed the way we live, do business, study, and work, it's enabler for the digital transformation. I would like to call for stronger cooperation between multi-stakeholder, including ICANN, ITU, United Nations, development partners, private sector, academia, civil society, and the government for better universal and meaningful connectivity in order to accelerate inclusive and sustainable digital transformation in the developing country.

Last, Cambodia, in cooperation with ITU, will host National Roundtable on Partner2Connect to be held on eight and nine July,

2024. I would like to invite you to participate this event in Cambodia.
Thank you.

THERESA SWINEHART: Thank you very much. The next intervention from the United Kingdom, Mr. Gaskell, Deputy Director of Internet Governance Department for Science, Innovation, and Technology.

PAUL GASKELL: Thank you. I would also like just to thank contributors again for a fascinating discussion we've been having this afternoon on digital inclusion. So the global internet has brought and can bring transformational benefits to our economies and to the lives of our citizens. It's an incredible tool to drive digital development and digital inclusion.

Digital connectivity is the core of this digital inclusion, and we all want to ensure that digital connectivity is truly global. But as other contributors have said, it's essential to think of connectivity as being meaningful. If internet connectivity is slow or videos cannot load due to bandwidth, that is not meaningful. We need to deliver on a more ambitious vision of connectivity. As others have also said, digital inclusion is about making sure people can communicate easily online, including through their own local languages. In this respect, enabling multilingualism on the internet is absolutely key as well.

The UK is committed to the digital inclusion agenda, and we have just launched our own new UK digital Development strategy, which

underpins our work globally on development issues, not least ahead of the review of the SDGs in 2030. Our initiatives to this strategy are based on working together through multi-stakeholder partnerships to deliver digital inclusion and connectivity. We see digital inclusion as having four elements. They are digital transformation, sorry, we see-- pardon me. We see digital development as having four elements. They include digital transformation, digital inclusion, digital responsibility, and digital sustainability. If I had more time, I would explain them, but I do not.

Finally, I'd just like to thank ICANN for their important work in this space, including through the Coalition for Digital Africa, which we'll be discussing later today. I'll stop there and I'm keen to hear from others. Thank you very much.

THERESA SWINEHART:

Thank you very much. Our next intervention is from India. Mr. Sushil Pal, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology and the India GAC representative. The floor is yours.

T. SANTHOSH:

On behalf of the government of India, this is T. Santhosh giving the intervention. So on digital technologies, it can accelerate over 70 percentage of our sustainable development goal targets, necessarily the continuation of digital transformation momentum gained during the pandemic during 2020 as well as 2021.

And in this regard, the government of India has remained committed to the mission of promoting technology for social good, as it is identified as a key growth driver, which has helped to sustain the challenges posed by our evolving environment. Testament to this, the BharatNet project of India, which is considered as one of the biggest rural telecom projects in the world, has connected more than 600,000 villages through this project. We are building an ecosystem by providing broadband connectivity to all the service providers for initiating various services such as e-Health, e-Education and e-Governance in rural and remote India.

Moreover, with the objective of connecting the unconnected in remote and farfetched, hilly areas and other inaccessible region, the government of India has implemented the network of so-called common service centers for the delivery of various government to citizens services and other citizen-centric e-services to every citizen in an assisted mode.

India has championed in the efforts for promoting Universal Acceptance, which a majority of the panelist has mentioned during the panel discussion as the most diverse country that is India with 22 scheduled languages, we have created internationalized domain needs of our country code top level domains in all 22 languages.

The work on email address internationalization has also been implemented in few states in India. Therefore, an increased focus on connecting the unconnected to provide more meaningful connectivity to the connected users while ensuring that they continue to work in an

open, safe, and trusted and accountable online environment. Thank you.

THERESA SWINEHART: Thank you so much. And our next intervention, and our last one would be from Niue, his Excellency, Mr. Crossley, Ministry of Financing Infrastructure. The floor is yours.

CROSSLEY TATUI: Thank you, moderator, and also the panel. Honorable ministers, dear representatives of ICANN and distinguished [01:34:33 - inaudible], it is a great honor and a pleasure for me to speak here today, representing the government of Niue from the Pacific continent.

As a remote island, Niue depends heavily on reliable internet access and internet governance. Over the past 10 years, despite limited resources, Niue has finalized the advancement from satellite internet connection to underwater fiber internet connection by the Pacific Cable Network, transforming Niue into an up-to-date part of the global internet community.

The [01:35:11 - inaudible] cable project in combination with the domestic connectivity network constitutes the largest infrastructure development ever in Niue for the local internet community, as well as for Niue as a part of the global internet community.

It is an indispensable investment for the future technical and economic development of Niue. The developments over the past 10

years highlight the significance of effectively managing new top level domain name .niue in a manner that benefits both the local and global internet community. According to Niue law, the domain name is considered a national asset and has been sold for 24 years. The current ICANN designated manager, trustee of the domain name has not assisted Niue with the infrastructure developments.

It's not communicating with the government of Niue and is not managing the domain name, .niue, in the interest of either the local or global internet community. Aside from spearheading the greatest internet infrastructure developments in the history of Niue, the governor of Niue also forged a partnership with one of the world's largest registry companies to manage the domain .niue in the future.

The government of Niue looks very much forward to collaborating with the ICANN family to ensure that our country top domain name will be managed in the interest of the local and local community. Last but not the least, on behalf of the government of Niue, I want to express our warm gratitude to the government and people of Rwanda, the officials, as well as to ICANN for organizing and hosting this important event. I wish everyone a productive week of fruitful discussions and work ahead. Thank you.

THERESA SWINEHART:

Thank you very much. And with that, we've concluded the interventions from the floor and the discussion with our panelists. I just want to express my thanks. I think you've shared through all of the experiences here and the interventions that the only way we can

get to better digital inclusion is to look at it from all lenses, the financial part, the electrical part, the community parts, I think as was shared, it's indeed a circular model and we can't leave one element out at all. So thank you very much for the rich discussion, and thank you everybody for joining us in this for a better internet for a better digital inclusion. Thank you.

BAHER ESMAT:

Thank you. Thanks to all the speakers and the participants for the rich discussion. We will now take a short coffee break and we'll be back at 4:30 PM. Thank you.

[END OF TRANSCRIPTION]