

Report LACIGF 13

Session title: Digital Inclusion: models for an inclusive Internet

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Session summary:

The opening of LACIGF 2020 began at 11:06 UTC-3 with the presentation of the master of ceremony of the event, Claudia Cely, who highlighted LACIGF as a space for the community to discuss the directions of Internet governance in the region, with the support of organizations such as ICANN, Google, and LACNIC. After following the initial protocols, Cely introduced Virginia Pardo, a member of AGESIC (Agency for Electronic Government and Information). Pardo mentioned that among the topics this year is digital inclusion and its impacts on human rights, as well as the changes that have occurred due to the Covid-19 pandemic and how they will affect various sectors of society. Regarding the online event, she explained that, exceptionally, the format of the event was modified due to the crisis that the world is going through.

Then, Cely opened the first panel of the event: Digital Inclusion - Models for an inclusive internet - divided into segments, with panelists and a moderator.

The moderator of the session, Valeria Betancourt, introduced the first panelist and asked about the progress made in recent months, as well as the challenges that still persist in the current emergency situation. The panelist, Laura Kaplan (LACNIC RIR), spoke about the challenge of accessing an open, of good-quality, secure and resilient Internet. For her, it is important to mention the support in the implementation of IPv6, struggles related to DNS resilience and root server installation, improvements in security investment, and the advancement of online training as the foundations for digital inclusion.

Adriana Labardini (Rhizomatica in Mexico), the following panelist, spoke about the challenges concerning a free, accessible, of good quality and neutral Internet, starting with access, which is still not enough for the entire population. For her, progress and challenges are needed in the field of Latin American digital inclusion. In addition, open, flexible, and inclusive regulation has been discussed and it has allowed the creation of more efficient models, as well as experimentation with community networks. The importance of sustainability, according to her, should be emphasized and implemented in each project. In the end, she emphasized that we cannot go backwards in terms of human rights on the Internet.

In this context, the moderator asked the following speaker to present the perspectives of the private sector to face current challenges in the process of digital inclusion. The

representative of the private sector, Sérgio Valdés (AT&T, Colombia), began his speech by presenting some statistical data on Internet access in Colombia. From the figures presented, the panelist inferred that there is still a great challenge for digital inclusion in the country. Immediately afterwards, he presented national public policies that aim to change this scenario, such as (i) the Modernization Law, which seeks, among other objectives, to bring more infrastructure to remote regions; (ii) the National Development Plan, with the allocation of resources from the national budget for digital inclusion; and (iii) initiatives of the Ministry of Technology (MinTIC) in the development of smart regulation in this scenario. The speaker also highlighted that these good regulatory practices are the result of the adoption by Colombia of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). And at the end of the presentation, Valdés highlighted the challenges related to the complexity of digital inclusion in its quantitative and qualitative sense. Despite all the challenges, he believes his country is on the right path.

Then, the moderator resumed the presentation and invited the following speaker with a question about the effects of the actions carried out in relation to digital inclusion. To respond to this question, the panelist Allan Ruiz (Regional Technical Commission of Telecommunications - COMTELCA, Honduras) presented the positive aspects of the use and resilience of the network during the pandemic, allowing access to education, health, and labor rights. In regards to these aspects, he highlighted some contrasts, addressing the issue of digital exclusion as a limiting factor for rights. As a solution, he pointed out qualitative access and good policies in this regard, namely the implementation of IPv6, proper use of infrastructure, and the promotion of capacity building projects. However, he emphasized that these projects should be implemented as soon as possible so that the intended purpose is not lost. As a prospectus, he emphasizes the need for smarter policies and regulations.

The fifth panelist, Sebastián Rovira (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean - ECLAC) addressed the importance and need to provide access to digital technologies, especially in this period of emergency when connectivity in the region has been very precarious. In his presentation, he presented data on the growing differences in access in terms of geographic location, age groups, and income, noting that this can generate a serious risk of deepening social inequalities. He reported that ECLAC offers the possibility of working on the creation of a basic digital basket that includes access to the Internet and a device to access it, in addition to implementing regulatory environments to better define the destination of these resources.

Shortly after, the moderator began the second segment of the panel, in which the panelists presented solutions that were verified in the technical, regulatory, and capacity building spheres to promote digital inclusion. Lilian Chamorro (Colnodo, Colombia), the first speaker in this segment, presented cases of Colombian community networks and how they advance these implementation and maintenance processes within the communities. He stressed that work should be done on digital inclusion to provide connectivity for communities. Along these lines, he highlighted that the recognition of communities as active actors in the inclusion process encourages rural communities to be transforming agents in their own regions, making it essential for connectivity and inclusion to be sustainable over time. In the municipality of Maní, located in Casanare, a group of people from a rural area established connectivity where before there was no coverage from any provider, but only satellite coverage for Internet access, the price of which was inaccessible to many of the inhabitants. With 11 farms and 1 school connected, this community network allowed users to connect to a 120-megabyte fiber optic link.

Gustavo Ríos (Government of Chihuahua, Mexico), also shared the solutions developed by the local public sector to solve the problem of digital inclusion. He explained that the population of Chihuahua is scarce in the mountains, which makes it difficult for any commercial operator to be interested in the complexity of implementing a profitable and sustainable infrastructure in the region. Given this, the State Government decided to institute a strategy called "Convergent Connectivity Plan", with a view to expand and modernize the telecommunications infrastructure to create accessible coverage and make services reach different regions. This initiative modernized existing technologies and enabled new infrastructures in regions where there was no digital presence, avoiding the need to build everything from scratch. To make it possible, the government implemented public policies, strategies aimed at connecting the population, doing coordinated work with units and organizations that work in different areas.

Miguel Estrada (LACTLD) presented some models for a more inclusive Internet, presenting what has been done in the logical layer of the Internet. He shared projects developed by some Information and Coordination Centers (NIC) in Latin America to make the online presence more accessible and inclusive for everyone. As indicated, NIC Argentina offered free online training on domain registration and digital assistance until the end of the pandemic; NIC Brazil prepared documents on disinformation, privacy, among other issues to guide different audiences through the #InternetSeguraBR initiative; NIC México provided free advice to companies on electronic commerce through #LeAtiendoloPorInternet; NIC Ecuador offered a generalization service for business web pages through the "Meu Negócios Digital" initiative, and SVnet in El Salvador instituted an educational program for vulnerable youth called "Ticongle".

Finally, Marta Suárez (Dynamic Spectrum Alliance) commented that there is not enough bandwidth coverage for the world population and that the only alternative for small ISPs to provide services is through the radioelectric spectrum without a license. In most countries, there are no mechanisms, other than unlicensed spectrum, to facilitate the opening of more companies that can offer Internet services. Despite the great efforts of the industries, the current access situation is not enough, so two alternatives have been proposed: spectrum without a license or shared spectrum. The central point of the unlicensed spectrum was the delay in obtaining an additional spectrum for Wi-Fi, so it is expected that regulators consider this need to acquire better transmission rates and greater stability. Efficient use of the shared spectrum can be made and there are different band options that offer good coverage.

Results and other relevant links:

Colombian Modernization Law - Law 1978 of 2019:

<<https://www.funcionpublica.gov.co/eva/gestornormativo/norma.php?i=98210>>.

National Development Plan of Colombia:

<<https://colaboracion.dnp.gov.co/CDT/Prensa/Resumen-PND2018-2022-final.pdf>>.



Foro de Gobernanza de Internet
de América Latina y el Caribe

Ministry of Information and Communication Technologies (MinTIC):

<<https://www.mintic.gov.co/portal/inicio/>>.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDG):

<<https://www.ods.gov.co/es/objetivo/>>.