Report LACIGF 13

Session title: Connecting the disconnected: Challenges in infrastructure and regulation from the ODS to challenges of the pandemic in Latin America.

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Session summary:

The session, moderated by **Mr. Sergio Scarabino (ITU, Argentina)**, highlighted the importance of connectivity for society in the economic, educational and health spheres in a world affected by the pandemic. The moderator began the panel by welcoming and introducing the topic, emphasizing the acceleration of work related to connectivity at the present time, citing as an example the work of the Internet Society with the promotion of community networks.

Two questions guided the session: the first about how Agenda 2030 can be implemented to face infrastructure and development challenges in a post-pandemic world with a framework of actions to face the challenges; and the second question involves developing regulatory solutions to generate a sustainable structure in the medium and long term.

Panelist **Estefanía Laterza (SDG, Paraguay)**, began her speech by thanking the opportunity to participate in the event, emphasizing how timely the debate on the topic becomes in the current context, since it brings a reflection that involves the present and the future, considering ways to follow Sustainable Development Goals.

In relation to the first question, **Estefanía Laterza** highlighted in her speech the ninth Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) whose statement is "Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation", and made a connection with the first five Sustainable Development Goals (SDS) whose titles are "no poverty", "zero hunger and sustainable agriculture", "good health and well-being", "quality education" and "gender equality" respectively. The panelist followed her reflection on the current context, reaching a conclusion that points to the lack of investment in the basic sectors as main factors that contribute to our current crisis. Finally, she proposed the formulation of

regulatory frameworks and comprehensive public policies to strengthen physical and digital infrastructures.

The panelist **Christian O'Flaherty (Internet Society)** gave his impressions highlighting **Estefanía Laterza**'s speech about infrastructures, emphasizing the health area, emphasizing the need to establish quality connection to the Internet, because the flow of information is closely linked to issues of life or death.

Christian also brought up a reflection on how data coverage of internet connection by area can be inaccurate in practice. In his view, it is necessary to take into account not only the network supply, but also the quality and efficiency of the connection provided.

Panelist **Mariela Baladron (IEALC)**, in turn, reflected on the potential and risks of using Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), arguing that their use should be made in an inclusive manner so that there is no potential for increasing social inequalities. As an example, he cited a work that has been developed in Argentina which proposes the implementation of community networks, an efficient connectivity solution aimed at assisting people who live in peripheral or rural areas, offering quality internet connection. Finally, the panelist explained the importance of generating regulatory frameworks to support similar projects that increase connectivity for these populations.

Following this, the panelist **Eduardo Salido (Telefonica)** spoke about the work being done by ISPs to improve telecommunications infrastructures, highlighting that even with a high demand for data traffic during the new coronavirus pandemic, access providers were able to keep their services running. Still, the panelist also talked about the importance of corporations being willing to digitize their services in order to remain economically active, stating that a digital pact is currently being developed between governments and access providers, uniting public and private initiative to promote public policies aimed at lowering the cost of infrastructure.

When asked about public policies to reduce the digital divide, the panelists reinforced the content explained in their speeches, and presented critical points such as the difficulty in the destination of incoming resources, and the importance of content itself.

Christian O'Flaherty's last question is also worth mentioning, since there is the need to build an environment that allows for sustainability, as some models of public policies have proven to be unsustainable in the long run. Effective examples of how to promote connectivity include more flexible regulation; simple internet for simple places; and better understanding of community networks.

Mariela Baladron went in the same direction, reaffirming the need for connection between community networks and backbones, at the same time that it is necessary to think of asymmetric regulation - as it would be unfair to small providers to compete with the giants that had long years of monopoly in Internet supply.

In the second session, **Estefanía Laterza**'s words are highlighted - that there is a variation of interest from countries in terms of inclusion and regulation; and that Internet access is not a luxury, but a human right.

For **Christian O'Flaherty**, looking back at the past brings learning - such as the abandonment of telecenters and other costly programs - stating that new public policies should be focused on licensing.

Eduardo Salido emphasized the importance of Internet sustainability - financial, environmental and social.

Full session link (in Spanish):

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hUTHVvV-ltI&feature=youtu.be

Document cited in Estefanía Laterza's speech (UNESCO, 2019) in Spanish:

https://www.cetic.br/pt/publicacao/tic-para-el-desarrollo-sostenible-recomendaciones-de-politicas-publicas-que-garantizan-derechos/

Document cited in Estefanía Laterza's speech (UNESCO, 2019) in Portuguese:

https://www.cetic.br/pt/publicacao/tic-para-o-desenvolvimento-sustentavel-recomendacoes-de-politicas-publicas-que-garantem-direitos/