

WSIS+20 Forum High-Level Event 2024
Leaders TalkX 1: Forging Partnerships:
Shaping the “Digital for Development” Landscape

<https://www.itu.int/net4/wsis/forum/2024/Agenda/Session/372>

Monday, 27 May 2024, (14:30-15:00 CEST)
Moderator: Karen McCabe, IEEE

This Leaders TalkX session underscored the pivotal role of governments and stakeholders in driving ICTs for development. It emphasized the need for cooperation; the impact of effective participation of all entities; and provided examples of local and national strategies and actions.

Key observations from the session included:

- The recognition of the significant role of digital technology in development, notably in a rapidly changing world, as it provides opportunities for helping to improve socio-economic challenges; and how technology serves as means to uplift communities, drive innovation, and promote sustainable development.
- This journey toward digital development for good requires collective action and partnerships at both national and international levels.
- ICTs are more than connectivity or information access. They are not only about network coverage or service quality but seen as through the lens of a regulation or a strategy, they can help promote sustainability and their use for development to ensure that people can fully benefit from ICTs.
- More work needs to be done as in 2024, despite rapid advancement in the digital world, 2.6 billion people—approximately one-third of the global population—still are unconnected to the internet.
- There are rising challenges and opportunities with the introduction of technologies such as Artificial Intelligence.
- Green ICT is important as ICTs can help with climate and sustainability monitoring.

Examples of actions included:

- In Somalia, the Digital Inclusion Policy, aligned with the countries 201902024 National ICT Policy and Strategy, which encompasses working with local groups to improve healthcare, education, and financial access through technology and building 4600 kilometers of infrastructure to provide affordable internet, especially in rural areas.
- In Thailand, the Thailand 5G Smart Ports project aims to study the potential of smart port development by using 5G and green technologies, while preparing employees for digital transformation. In this project, three main semi-automated ports in Thailand are expected to transform into Green Automation ports by using 5G and green technologies for their port logistics.
- DCO’s groundbreaking digital marketplace promotes multilateral partnership and cooperation within the DCO ecosystem, which facilitates knowledge exchange among DCO Member States, cultivating digital ecosystems, and enhancing capabilities for effective government transformation. The platform promotes the adoption of digital solutions to improve government operation and service delivery, foster economic growth, innovation, investment attraction, and job creation.
- The UN Internet Governance Forum Multi Stakeholder Group (MAG), progression and growth where it convenes over 9000 participants from around the world to address digital policy issues and provide action-based insights for addressing the complex challenges and opportunities presented by the digital age.

**Leaders TalkX 3: Gateway to knowledge:
Empowering Global Access Through Digital**

Presented at WSIS High Level Event

Monday, 27 May 2024, Geneva

Session Report

I. High-Level Track Facilitator: Ms. Lori Schulman, Senior Director, Internet Policy, International Trademark Association (INTA)

II. High-Level Panellists:

- **United Nations Representative:** Dr. Tawfik Jelassi, Assistant Director-General for Communication and Information, UNESCO
- **Cuba:** H.E. Ms. Mayra Arevich Marín, Minister, Ministry of Communications
- **Iraq:** H.E. Dr. Hayam Al-yasiri, Minister, Ministry of Communications
- **Brunei-Darussalam:** Mr. Ir Haji Jailani bin Haji Buntar, Chief Executive, AITI
- **Estonia:** Ms. Nele Leosk, Ambassador-at-Large for Digital Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- **BNNRC:** Mr. AHM Bazlur Rahman, Chief Executive Officer, Bangladesh NGOs Network for Radio and Communication (BNNRC)
- **Costa Rica:** Ms. Cinthya Arias Leitón, President of the Board, Superintendencia de Telecomunicaciones (SUTEL)

III. Session Overview

This session highlighted that access to information is not only about connectivity but the integrity and reliability of the information we receive online. The United Nations Representative set the context for the session by describing the current state of inequality in access and usage of the internet. The divides are particularly noticeable among men and women and urban and rural users. Women outnumber men non-users by 17%. And urban users greatly outnumber rural users. 81% of Urban users have access to the internet. Rural users do not.

The issues of access are not limited to technical access. There are issues of language barriers and the quality of information that is found online. There are 10 Languages used on the Internet although globally there are over 7,000 languages. This is of particular concern given that the UN General Assembly has declared 2022-2032 the International Decade of Indigenous Languages. Further, the issue of misinformation is a key component of ensuring reliable access to knowledge.

Cuba responded by affirming that ICTs are the catalyst for social and political equality. Safe Access must be a priority of Government. There is increasing access to the Internet for personal and

professional development. Cuba has made significant headway despite the limitations and challenges created by the Blockade. Cuba seeks to ensure accessibility to all in the digital space on a non-discriminatory basis. It has established a centre for intermediation for persons with disabilities so that all persons can be at the center of the country's digital transformation. Cuba seeks to create a more egalitarian society online.

Iraq's efforts have yielded a high number of Wi-fi users through the implementation of fiber optic chains, employing submarine cables and investing in connectivity infrastructure for others through Iraq. As a result, 3.5 million homes have fiber optics. Iraq is implementing licenses for 4G and 5G. They are promoting home use of 4G and other connectivity measures. Iraq has also implemented an electronic national identity program tied to electronic visas. All ministries have implemented and support a government network that allows internet access and affords free internet access to certain schools through public-private sector partnerships. 6000 official departments are now networked. Iraq has requested that the ITU focus on content on the internet as well as infrastructure. The issue of social media and respecting local society ethics is a big challenge for Iraq.

The Authority for Info-communications Technology Industry (AITI) Brunei-Darussalam noted that reliability of data continues to build trust and confidence in the digital world. Therefore, Brunei Darussalam is adopting Data Protection Directive for the use and processing of data by private sector and transfer across borders. Brunei-Darussalam continues its awareness and capacity building programs in this space. Cybersecurity Brunei has been established to address cybercrimes. Brunei-Darussalam has committed to align with the Asia Pacific Telecommunity (APT) 700 MHz band plan.

Access to information is one of main prerequisites to building a digital state and Estonia has been working on access to information laws for last 25 years. Estonia adopted legislation for government institutions to have websites and provide basic information. This legislation includes institutions like schools as well as government authorities. The challenge now is how should the Government manage personal data. There is also increasing reliance on AI in the provision of Government Services. Estonia is currently working on governmental chatbots and information services. This includes increasing public awareness of these services. Estonia is also providing global contributions in raising awareness as well.

Bangladesh NGOs Network for Radio and Communication (BNNRC) has been continuously engaged in the WSIS action lines since 2006. Action lines C1 – C11 have contributed to digital infrastructure and

inclusivity. Global dynamics and global corporations create roadblocks to cultural consumerism, unsustainable and isolated interests. Civil rights in digital world being eroded by disinformation, misinformation, fake news and hate speech. Ownership concentrated and access limited to those who can pay for services. Important to promote diversity and cultures, licensing of copyrighted material, open-source software and content and a public digital infrastructure.

Costa Rica is focused on 5G implementation in rural areas. There is a first draft of a public enquiry document includes obligations to the winning bidder to focus on development of infrastructure in 134 high priority districts that currently have little to no connectivity. Information is a tool. Greater emphasis is being placed on Information Companies. Costa Rica is part of the Freedom Online Coalition of Governments (FOC). The FOC seeks to ensure that the challenges and opportunities relating to Internet freedom and digital technologies are on the policy agenda to drive concrete policy changes and outcomes, shape global norms to promote a rules-based, democratic, and inclusive world where human rights and fundamental freedoms are upheld in online and digital contexts.

In conclusion, the issues of physical infrastructure, equal access, quality of data, quality of content, language and social barriers are challenges that governments, the private sector, and NGOs encounter as technology accelerates. While we have a long way to go, the panel's interventions demonstrates that we have come a long way in providing gateways to knowledge at the local and global levels. The message is positive is despite the continuing challenges.

Leaders TalkX 4: Bridging the Skills Gap: Building Capacity for the Digital Age

<https://www.itu.int/net4/wsis/forum/2024/Agenda/Session/462>

Tuesday, 28 May 2024, (09:00-09:30 CEST)

Moderator: Konstantinos Komaitis, Atlantic Council

There is imperative to ensure universal access to ICT skills and literacy for all individuals. We should emphasize the need for domestic policies integrating ICTs into education and lifelong learning, eradicating illiteracy through ICT programs, and promoting e-literacy skills. Additionally, it is important to highlight initiatives to empower disadvantaged groups, address gender disparities in ICT education, and enhance local communities' capacity in ICT use. The discussion about ensuring that people are digitally literate also underscores the importance of regional and international cooperation in capacity-building efforts and the role of volunteering in promoting ICT skills development.

Ensuring that every citizen has the required digital skills to actively and equitably participate in the digital economy is critical for the advancement of societies. There is an urgency in creating such capacity in order to bridge the existing divides. To do so, the infrastructure supporting communication technologies should be robust and resilient as well as affordable.

As the world looks towards 2030, it is imperative to accelerate programs and policies that provide the necessary initiatives for citizens to actively participate in digital skill development.

For the past twenty years, the WSIS Action Lines have been a compass towards achieving the ambitious goals that were set in 2003. The fact that we are now able to address the divides related to digital skills is because of the vision and commitment of WSIS. As we move forward with the Summit for the Future, as well as next year's WSIS+20 Review, it is important to remember the role that WSIS has played.

The renewed discussion about technology and development is creating a challenge on how to make sure that WSIS remains relevant. It also presents us with an opportunity to demonstrate not only its relevance but also its agility in adapting to the new digital realities.

Two priorities were identified:

- Cross-government and cross-stakeholder collaboration: bridging the divide on digital skills is not the job of one entity – it is a collective responsibility.
- Policy measures: governments should be enacting policy measures that seek to incentivise and create the conditions for people to want to participate. Education should start early on.

The renewed interest in the way technology facilitates development has presented both opportunities and challenges. Challenges include issues of infrastructure and, in particular, how robust the infrastructure supporting communication should be. Another challenge has to do with aligning under a coherent policy the various objectives to address issues of divide.

Both these challenges however present opportunities. The main thing is for policy makers to ensure they enact policies that provide the necessary incentives and are based on collaboration. They also need to view issues of divide more holistically and address such issues like infrastructure security.

- Links to WSIS Action Lines and Sustainable Development Goals

Goal 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

Related Action Lines:

- C3: Access to information knowledge
- C4: Capacity building
- C5: Building confidence and security in the use of ICTs
- C6: Enabling environment
- C7 ICT Applications
- C8: Cultural diversity and identity, linguistic diversity and local content
- C10: Ethical dimensions of the Information Society

Goal 8: Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all.

Related Action Lines:

- C2: Information and communication infrastructure: an essential foundation for the information society
- C3: Access to information knowledge
- C5: Building confidence and security in the use of ICTs
- C6: Enabling environment
- C7 ICT Applications
- C8: Cultural diversity and identity, linguistic diversity and local content
- C10: Ethical dimensions of the Information Society

Goal 9: Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialisation and foster innovation.

Related Action Lines:

- C2: Information and communication infrastructure: an essential foundation for the information society
- C3: Access to information knowledge
- C5: Building confidence and security in the use of ICTs
- C6: Enabling environment
- C7 ICT Applications
- C8: Cultural diversity and identity, linguistic diversity and local content
- C9: Media
- C10: Ethical dimensions of the Information Society

- Case Examples

ITU/UNESCO: Giga Project

Lithuania: No One is Left Behind

Nigeria Communications Commission (NCC): Critical National Infrastructure Project

Cambodia: Digital Skill Development Roadmap 2024-2035

Leaders TalkX 5: Securing the Digital Realm: Collaborative Strategies for Trust and Resilience

<https://www.itu.int/net4/wsis/forum/2024/Agenda/Session/473>

Tuesday, 28 May 2024, (09:30-10:00 CEST)

Moderator: Moira Whelan, National Democratic Institute

Key Issues discussed:

The cost of cybercrime has skyrocketed and a cyber attack happens every 30 seconds around the globe. New threats such as AI driven cyberthreats, scrambling to be ready for a post-quantum world as well as the physical security of subsea cables and satellite systems are rising.

The ITU Global Cybersecurity Index in 2017 stated that 128 countries lacked cybersecurity standards and 110 countries didn't have a cybersecurity strategy. This number reduced to 88 and 67, respectively in just 5 years.

Given the borderless nature of cyber security related incidents, international cooperation is increasingly vital in cultivating trust and internet regulators play a critical role in setting the tone for collaboration within governments to ensure confidence and security with the private sector and the public.

Sharing information among countries and regulators creates working procedures for resilience and lessons learned, which are essential for the success of trade and the prosecution of cybercrimes.

Cybersecurity collaboration at a high level brings information between different stakeholders, such as organizations, government agencies, industry associations, and security professionals. By pooling knowledge and resources, we can increase cybersecurity readiness and improve security measures.

Towards WSIS+20 and WSIS beyond 2025, please share your views on the emerging trends, challenges, achievements, and opportunities in the implementation of the WSIS Action Lines to date

Trust in the system is the most essential element of cybersecurity. Citizens must trust that the system not only works, but that their data is safe. COVID is an example of how much faith was lost in governments not simply from a health perspective, but also when it came to digital rights. The common element of enabling this resilience across governments are multistakeholder and collaborative frameworks.

Artificial intelligence is becoming a key factor in the transformation of the entire global society and plays a key role in improving IT security through analysis of large amounts of data to detect and prevent security threats. Challenges such as an insufficient number of experts and finances are an obstacle for small countries. Enabling the interoperability of the global system is key to allowing small countries to share resources.

SUCCESS STORIES:

Mutually Agreed Norms for Routing Security (MANRS) demonstrates what can be achieved with **collaboration**. MANRS is a global, community-driven initiative to improve the security and resilience of the Internet's global routing system that uses the Border Gateway Protocol (BGP). MANRS was created in 2014 by a small group of network operators who recognized the need to join forces to improve the system and has grown to a community of more than 1,000 participants. The MANRS community comprises network operators, Internet exchange points (IXPs), content delivery

networks (CDNs), cloud providers, and equipment vendors who have committed to taking MANRS actions and reducing common routing threats.

The 5G Tactics programme focuses on the issue of cybersecurity and trust in 5G networks among several countries. The programme aims to foster cooperation between national authorities to include Montenegro and private service and equipment providers, in particular innovative European SMEs, network operators and specialized technology providers based on Open RAN

The Swedish government took steps to address Spoofing through advising telecommunications companies to block Swedish phone numbers from abroad to prevent fraud. This has resulted in a significant number of phone numbers used in fraud to be blocked.

Tangible outcomes (such as key achievements, announcements, launches, agreements, commitments, figures, and success stories (3-5 bullet points))

ACHIEVEMENT: Despite the arrival of more than a million new people from Ukraine into Poland in less than 10 days, mobile operators, with regulator's assistance, were able to ensure the smooth operation of services to a whole host of new customers by rapidly expanding network capacity. When people needed it most, reliable, safe and trustworthy connectivity enabled survivors—across borders—to respond and act in a crisis.

ACHIEVEMENT: The WSIS system enables regulators to stay on the cutting edge of technology. In Mauritius the ICT regulator developed a blockchain based license verification system as the risk of forged, fake or invalid ICTA licenses in circulation which are being used fraudulently is a reality. The Mauritian ICT regulator launched this new verification service so as to give added assurance to the different stakeholders and the public using licenses issued by the regulator. This verification system makes use of smart contracts on the Ethereum blockchain to store cryptographic proof of the ICTA licenses.

Actionable plan and key recommendations (2-5 points)

Education of citizens is a key need. Most individuals don't know how to protect themselves online and more work must be done to empower people to protect themselves. Internet regulators must be at the center of this and address it in a multistakeholder way. Sweden hosts Digital Today to inspire an increase in digital skills. It currently has 375 partners and goal for this year is 1 million partners working together to enable digital skills of citizens in all municipalities. Greater funding is needed throughout the world to address this issue.

SMS can be altered easily and is being used to mislead users to believe it is sent by an authority such as a government or a bank and regulators must. It is a key indicator or a space where regulators can't operate without the cooperation of other entities, but is a tangible and persistent problem that must be addressed to allow people to trust the technology and the system.

Suggestions for thematic aspects that might be included in the WSIS Forum 2025 (one paragraph)

Although at its origin, the WSIS system did not conceive of many of the challenges identified, the open and collaborative process has allowed countries to quickly scale best practices to address emerging technologies in an inclusive, multi stakeholder fashion that is central to resilience and security. A greater priority should be placed on the role of regulators in this process and their responsibility to help grow the system, especially fostering Small and Medium providers access to tools and best practices and the essential nature of multistakeholder models increasing the security and resilience of countries' digital infrastructure should be elevated.

The topic of cable cuts—and the number of challenges seen in 2024— should be addressed in WSIS Forum 2025 as it illuminates the need to prioritize resilience and trust through the internet system itself. The ultimate objective is to get data to its final destination. The Internet works best --it is most robust-- when its many different, independent operators have many ways to achieve their goal through manifold connections. That makes the Internet more trustworthy in that its users can rely on it to be available all the time.

Leaders TalkX 6: When Policy Meets Progress: Shaping a Fit for Future Digital World

<https://www.itu.int/net4/wsis/forum/2024/Agenda/Session/497>

Tuesday, 28 May 2024, (10:00-10:30 CEST)

Moderator: Timea Suto, ICC

Introduction

The Leaders Talk entitled When Policy Meets Progress: Shaping a Fit for Future Digital World took place on Tuesday, 28 May 2024 and discussed the crucial importance of creating enabling policy environments to foster innovation, bridge digital divides, and enhance socio-economic development.

The session saw a lively discussion with distinguished representatives of:

- ITU ;
- Ministry of Post and Telecommunications of Algeria;
- Telecommunications Regulatory Authority of Bahrain;
- National Communications Commission of Georgia;
- Federal Telecommunications Institute of Mexico;
- United States Department of State; and
- Commonwealth Telecommunication Organization.

The session kicked off with an overview of the topic delivered by ITU, highlighting the need to create synergies between all stakeholders, remain agile and flexible, and streamline regulations to be able to create fit for purpose policy frameworks that help respond to the ever changing world of digital technologies and fully reap the opportunities they offer and address any potential challenges this rapid transformation may bring. Panellists then discussed how their countries and organizations approach the topic, what are some of the best practices and lessons learned for the broader WSIS community to build on, and what the road ahead looks like.

Vision

The session underscored the need for greater collaboration and multistakeholder dialogue.

Participants emphasized the importance of a shared vision, common objectives and joint action across government agencies, the entire digital ecosystem and all impacted stakeholders to devise effective solutions and improve cooperation so that all can share in the benefits of the information society.

WSIS+20: 20 Years of Achievements, Challenges and Opportunities

Participants noted the WSIS+20 Forum as a significant milestone, offering the opportunity to renew commitments in line with the efforts and initiatives undertaken by the international community to advance the information society, and celebrate two decades of progress and achievement of the objectives set in the Geneva Plan of Action and the Tunis Agenda.

Towards the Summit of the Future / GDC and Beyond

The discussion highlighted the importance of reflecting on and taking stock of past achievements to inform future progress. They noted how WSIS, particularly the Geneva Plan of Action, provides an ambitious roadmap to leverage ICTs for sustainable development and social inclusion, highlighting the importance of international and multistakeholder collaboration and innovation. They noted the need to build on this roadmap in upcoming discussions at the Summit of the Future.

Fresh priorities

Participants stressed the importance of policies and regulations keeping pace with rapidly evolving technologies. This requires a nimble policy-making and regulatory process, embracing regulatory sandboxes, and fostering a culture of innovation that allows for testing and learning from both successes and failures. They also highlighted the need for awareness-raising, information sharing, and capacity-building initiatives to build trust among users, businesses, and governments.

Emerging trends

In sharing their own projects, initiatives and lessons learned, participants noted the need for:

- Holistic view of the digital ecosystem: Policies should foster investment, competition, and innovation in the development and deployment of broadband services and connectivity devices, with the aim of expanding affordable access. At the same time policies should facilitate investment in and enable the development of content and services that helps drive and sustain adoption, including through expanded e-government services. Governments should also invest directly in digital literacy and skills development.
- Political will: Strong, and forward-looking commitments are necessary only to set strategies and visions, but to effectively implement them and ensure long-term planning;
- Agility: Given the large variety of barriers to connectivity to be addressed, as well as the speed at which new services, players and business models appear, it is vital that regulatory regimes are flexible, forward-looking, adjust to rapidly evolving markets and encourage innovation. Regulators should focus on critical societal objectives and introduce flexible, light-touch approaches to achieve them, being cautious not to regulate prescriptively at too granular a level, which may limit the flexibility needed to consider or capitalise on innovative potential.
- Evidence-based policymaking: Policymaking and regulation should be evidence-based, transparent, inclusive of all stakeholders.
- International cooperation : The interconnectedness of today's world demands robust international collaboration to tackle digital challenges and opportunities that transcend borders. Participants emphasized that global cooperation is essential to address issues such as fostering trust and security, ensure cross-border data flows, and the interoperability of policy approaches and regulatory frameworks. Collaborative efforts can also facilitate the sharing of best practices and coordinated responses to global digital divides.
- Multistakeholder approach: A diverse and inclusive approach involving all stakeholders is crucial for effective digital policy-making. Participants highlighted that incorporating multiple perspectives leads to more comprehensive and resilient policy frameworks that are better equipped to address the complex and multifaceted nature of digital transformation.
- Capacity building: Participants underscored the need for continuous capacity-building initiatives that focus on digital literacy, technical skills, and regulatory expertise. This includes providing training and education programs to enhance the digital skills of the workforce, empowering individuals to use digital tools effectively, and equipping policymakers with the knowledge to craft informed and forward-looking regulations.

Opportunities

Participants in the session highlighted how access to ICTs and digital technologies and bridging the digital divides is not the goal in itself, but a means to unlocking broader development goals. Meaningful connectivity opens opportunities for economic and social growth such as financial

inclusion, broad access to education and healthcare and improved avenues for public services to reach all citizens and enhanced entrepreneurship and growth opportunities for small businesses

Challenges

Participants identified several key challenges to creating an enabling policy environment for ICTs and digitalization. These include bridging the digital divide, particularly in developing countries and rural and hard-to-reach areas, and building trust in digital technologies. Policy and regulatory frameworks often lag behind rapid technological innovation, necessitating agile and adaptable regulations. Addressing these challenges requires coordinated efforts and international collaboration to maximize the benefits of digital technologies.

Links to WSIS Action Lines and Sustainable Development Goals

This session explored WSIS Action Line 6, and was also strongly linked with WSIS Action lines 2, 3 and 5 as well as all 17 SDGs.

Leaders TalkX 7: ICT Applications Unlocking the Full Potential of Digital - Part I

<https://www.itu.int/net4/wsis/forum/2024/Agenda/Session/472>

Tuesday, 27 May 2024, (10:30-11:0 CEST)

Moderator: Syed Mohammad Shaharyar Jawaid, Islamic Development Bank (IsDB)

Fresh Priorities:

The session highlighted fresh priorities of Government of Bangladesh evolving from Digital Bangladesh in 2009 to aspiring to become Smart Bangladesh Vision 2041, where Bangladesh plans to establish good governance, maintain accountability and transparency, promote innovation, and reduce inefficiency. The goal is to build a prosperous and happy Bangladesh, where technology serves as a catalyst for sustainable development and social progress.

Emerging Trends:

The Digital Agenda 2030 of Qatar outlines a comprehensive roadmap for Qatar's digital future, focusing on six key pillars: digital infrastructure, digital government, digital economy, digital technology, digital society, and a robust database system. These pillars will accelerate technology adoption, foster digital economic growth, enhance innovation, and deliver excellent government services, all while empowering our society to thrive in an increasingly digital world. Qatar is aspiring to become a global technology hub leveraging the latest advancements such as 5G networks, artificial intelligence, digital twinning, cloud computing, and big data.

Opportunities:

Republic of Iraq's efforts call for cooperation between the public industrial sector and the private sector in the field of technology to use artificial intelligence as a means. The government facilitates these partnerships through a wide range of joint research between key institutions and provides support and technical support to projects involved in the development of artificial technology. Moreover, the government is adopting technology transfer programs and converting academic subscriptions into marketable commercial services. This is done by providing financial and technical support to emerging companies and small pioneering projects that enable them to use artificial technology in their products and services.

Key Challenges:

ICT applications can provide benefits in many aspects of our lives: public administration, health, education, transport, culture, among others. However, there is one key aspect that needs to be considered to guarantee we all benefit from ICT applications: accessibility. Access to information and communication, which is directly linked to the Sustainable Development Goals, should be a driving force in digitalization. The needs of diverse users in terms of languages, cultures and formats should be considered. Some users communicate with spoken words, some with sign language, others with written text. However, access is still limited for persons with disabilities, language barriers or low digital literacy. In this context Academia initiatives like AccessCat play a key role. Academia can contribute through education, research and knowledge transfer to build --quoting the first lines of the WSIS Declaration of Principles-- a "people-centered, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society".

Case Example:

Türkiye's National Mobile Alert System is an important part of the country's disaster management strategy, providing critical information to the public during emergencies. The system covers urban, rural, and remote areas nationwide and offers multilingual alerts to address various population groups. Authorized users send geo-targeted alerts to mobile devices over mobile operator infrastructure using methods such as the Commercial Mobile Alert System (CMAS), SMS, Cell Broadcasting (CBS), and Pre-

Call Announcement. Real-time alert distribution provides immediate warnings in emergencies and continuous updates as situations evolve. The system integrates data from government agencies and real-time sources to ensure accuracy and relevance. Users can set the types of alerts they want to receive and their priority level, making notifications more meaningful and personally relevant. Geo-targeting ensures that users receive the most relevant information based on their location, enabling a more effective response to emergencies.

Leaders TalkX 8: Click to Govern: inclusive and efficient e-services

<https://www.itu.int/net4/wsis/forum/2024/Agenda/Session/470>

Tuesday, 28 May 2024, (11:00-11:30 CEST)

Moderator: Mei Lin Fung, People Centered Internet

Click to Govern was the original title of this session – but governments can only govern if they deliver services that practically serve the needs of their citizens. So renamed “Click to Serve”

Challenges for governments are high in providing good e-services that responsively meet citizens’ needs:

- **Constantly improving reliable responsive eServices** ease of access/ease of use
- **Bridging divides** language & digital literacy, age, urban/rural, physical/mental spectrum
- **Serving all inclusively, appropriately and fairly** with Safety, Privacy, Dignity and Respect
- **Earning and keeping the trust** of citizens and their families, communities, businesses
- **Encouraging participation and engagement** with citizens by responsively receiving feedback
- **Finding the finance for building infrastructure for delivering e-Services**

Highlights in meeting these challenges

The **Philippines** is improving quality of life of citizens with “Bayang Digital ang Bagong Pilipinas” —the New Philippines is a Digital Nation – cutting redtape so citizen feedback quickly gets to the person who can act on it

Slovenia stands out for people-centered digital services increasingly responsive to the needs of underserved people like the elderly and differently abled, and proactively improving by sharing and learning with other countries.

Kenyan eServices show citizens they are valued and cared for. Integrating culture by practical public-private partnerships, the government creates awareness of digital opportunities by practically improving citizens’ daily lives.

Senegal sets up regulatory sandboxes to participatively design, rapidly test and deploy secure eServices that strives to earn and keeps the trust of citizens by deep attention to local culture, values & responsively acting on feedback.

In conclusion, the increasing maturity of eGovernment in Asia, Africa and Europe is clearly demonstrated in this session devoted to WSIS Action Line 7. The value of the WSIS forum in bringing together countries from around the world to exchange practical stories of how they are addressing solving common challenges is enhanced by the structure of numbered WSIS Action lines – each country can find the specific issue they want to address and look at all the ways that countries are solving them. Each year at WSIS the encyclopaedia of practice grows by hundreds of stories creating a practical playbook for digital transformation that speeds up success and reduces the wasted funds and frustration of trial and error. WSIS is a trading post and social network which delivers value all year around.

Leaders TalkX 9: Digital Advancing Sustainable Development: A Trusted Connected World

<https://www.itu.int/net4/wsis/forum/2024/Agenda/Session/507>

Tuesday, 28 May 2024, (11:30-12:00 CEST)

Moderator: Prof. Tim Unwin, UNESCO Chair in ICT4D

Introduction

This inspiring session brought together the following:

- H.E. Mr. Gobind Singh Deo Minister Ministry of Digital, Malaysia
- Dr. Konstantinos Masselos President Hellenic Telecommunications and Post Commission, Greece
- Dr. Mercedes Aramendia Falco Presidenta de Directorio Unidad Reguladora de Servicios de Comunicaciones (URSEC), Uruguay
- Dr. Charles Noir Vice-President, Community Investment, Policy & Advocacy Canadian Internet Registration Authority (CIRA)
- Ms. Lise Fuhr Director General European Telecommunications Network Operators' Association (ETNO)

These excellent speakers represented a diversity of views from governments, regulators, operators and Internet registrars from Europe, South America, Asia and North America.

Vision

Much has been achieved, but much remains to be done if we are to use digital tech sustainably to serve the needs of the world's poorest and most marginalised people and communities. At the heart of our future vision is the need to build trust between all those of good intent working with and through the Internet.

Digital infrastructure and networks of the future will be about the new services these networks will make possible – and as we progress towards offering new, complex, and socioeconomically transforming services, as we integrate these services in our day-to-day activities, the importance of cyber-security will truly shine to its full potential

WSIS+20: 20 Years of Achievements, Challenges and Opportunities

The oral and written presentations crafted for this session focused especially on the successes achieved by the countries and organisations represented, with highlighted examples noted below:

Achievements

- CIRA provides cybersecurity services to over 500 organizations across Canada and DNS and registry services to organizations globally.
- ETNO has championed a multistakeholder approach
- Uruguay is a leader in the adoption of renewable energy and is working on decarbonizing transport and industry, developing a green hydrogen economy, and making more efficient use of the electricity system
- Development of telecommunications infrastructures globally has seen extraordinary progress
- Important role played by the technical community in advancing sustainable development.

Challenges (many of these are also opportunities)

- Continuing need to focus on meaningful connectivity

- Cybersecurity is essential to protect networks, systems, and data, and to ensure trust in the use of digital technologies
- it is essential to distinguish between the coverage gap and the usage gap
- We need universal quality connectivity and affordable access to devices
- We need to do more to ensure that all genders can access and use digital tech safely, wisely and securely

Opportunities

- IGF Leadership working on the *Internet We Want* principles (whole and open, universal and inclusive, free-flowing and trustworthy, safe and secure and rights-respecting)
- Potential for, global DNS infrastructure in progress towards SDG objectives.
- Governments, academic, civil society, the private sector and the technical community—to continue to meaningfully shape the governance of global network
- Education and development of digital skills is essential – and offers many opportunities for new technology deployments
- The future of employment requires new skills and retraining
- Regulation has to be adequate, adaptable, and flexible to facilitate and promote digital innovation, empowering people and putting them at the center
- In the European Union the investment needs to achieve the EU Digital Decade Policy Programme connectivity targets of 2030 are optimistically estimated to be larger than 200 Beuros – many opportunities for investment and deployment.

Towards the Summit of the Future / GDC and Beyond

The GDC was not a topic discussed explicitly, but there was an underlying current that any new processes should not reinvent the wheel. Existing processes such as WSIS, IGF and NETmundial seem to be working quite well. The lack of any detailed discussion on the GDC might suggest that its potential benefits remain unclear.

Fresh priorities

Much has been achieved, but greater (and more novel) emphasis could be placed on

- Conceptualising sustainability in terms of environmental, financial and social-economical sustainability
 - It is crucially important that we move beyond a “carbon” and “climate change” focus to a more comprehensive and holistic understanding of the interactions between digital technologies and the physical environment
- Policy and regulatory action is required to address investment challenges and achieve digital infrastructure deployment targets
- Cybersecurity is becoming ever more important for trust to be maintained, and needs to become prioritised by governments, the private sector, civil society organisations and individual citizens.

Emerging trends

There are many emerging trends, but two seem to be particularly important:

- For economic growth it is important to maximise the opportunities for competition. In principle the most important driver in a market remains competition as it creates incentives for innovation, investment in infrastructure and better services to consumer.
- AI and Quantum Computing provide very serious threats with respect to cybersecurity, but they also provides opportunities to mitigate these potential harms. Building trust is essential for ensuring that everyone can benefit from digital tech.

Links to WSIS Action Lines and Sustainable Development Goals

The session addressed most WSIS Action Lines and all SDGs (explicitly in one response) and especially quality education (SDG 4), economic growth (SDG 8) and climate action (SDG 13).

Case Examples

Many examples of good practices were shared, but two specific cases are worth noting:

- [Plan Ceibal](#) (Uruguay)
- European Commission White Paper “[How to master Europe's digital infrastructure needs?](#)” which introduces a number of regulatory proposals to address digital infrastructure deployment, to attract investment and foster innovation including

Leaders TalkX 10: ICT Applications
Unlocking the Full Potential of Digital - Part II

<https://www.itu.int/net4/wsis/forum/2024/Agenda/Session/511>

Tuesday, 28 May 2024, (14:30-15:00 CEST)

Moderator: Dana Ramadan, Access Partnership

Introduction

The panel discussion on "ICT Applications Unlocking the Full Potential of Digital - Part II" brought together experts from diverse backgrounds, sectors (public and private), and geographies to explore the impact of information and communication technologies (ICTs). The panelists delved into the opportunities, challenges, and emerging trends shaping the digital landscape, offering perspectives on how ICTs can accelerate sustainable development and drive societal transformation.

Vision

The overarching vision that emerged from the panel centred on harnessing the power of digital technologies to create a more inclusive and sustainable future. The panelists emphasized the need for global and local collaborative efforts among governments, the private sector, and grassroots communities to unlock the full potential of ICTs and digital public goods, fostering innovation and driving progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

WSIS+20: 20 Years of Achievements, Challenges and Opportunities

The panel reflected on the achievements, challenges, and opportunities that have shaped the digital landscape over the past two decades, from the perspective of their respective governments and companies.

Towards the Summit of the Future/GDC and Beyond

N/A

Fresh Priorities

One of the priorities emphasized during the panel was the importance of digital public goods (DPGs), such as free and open-source software. DPGs (or digital public infrastructure) can accelerate digital and societal transformation by providing accessible and cost-effective solutions to address challenges. Other priorities include robust regulatory frameworks which are needed to ensure cybersecurity and responsible data handling in traditional industries transformed by ICT.

Emerging Trends

Several emerging trends are shaping the digital landscape, including the uptake of Internet of Things (IoT) in traditional industries, the increase in e-employment, and talent upskilling. The panel highlighted the transformative impact of these trends, enabling new business models, enhancing efficiency, and driving innovation. With that said, negative trends were also highlighted, such as the rise of disinformation through AI, the digital divide between urban centers and rural areas including skill-gaps, and challenges associated with remote work.

Opportunities & Key Challenges

The panelists emphasized the need for collaborative efforts and innovative solutions to address these challenges. The panel identified numerous opportunities presented by ICTs, such as access to essential services like healthcare and education, financial inclusion, and empowerment of employees and marginalized communities. While acknowledging the immense potential of ICTs, the panelists also addressed key challenges that must be addressed. These included talent upskilling, data protection and cybersecurity, and the persistent digital divide

- **International Collaboration:** The persistent digital divide and risks posed by tech misuse demand concerted efforts and international cooperation to ensure a socially just, ecological, and inclusive digital future for all. International collaboration is crucial to harness the potential of ICT for global development. The World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) is a key forum for such cooperation.
- **Private Sector Partnerships & Multistakeholder Engagement Framework:** While limitations exist in current models, innovative models of partnership with the private sector demonstrate the collaborative solutions required to drive meaningful change at the grassroots level. A need for a paradigm shift was thus highlighted, with an emphasis on a holistic, bottom-up approach grounded in local realities and inclusive multistakeholder engagement.
- **Challenges from the Industry Perspective:** Talent upskilling, data protection, and cybersecurity were identified as key industry concerns.
- **Digital Public Goods (DPGs) and the SDGs:** DPGs were highlighted as crucial opportunities for maximizing impact towards the SDGs. Benefits of DPGs:
 - Faster time to market for technology solutions.
 - Reduced risk.
 - Increased transparency through use of standardized products.
 - Scalability and reusability.
- **ICT Transforming Traditional Industries:** The Internet of Things (IoT) and robust infrastructure are key opportunities to drive ICT-enabled transformations in traditional industries.

Links to WSIS Action Lines and Sustainable Development Goals

The panel implicitly highlighted the strong links between ICT applications and the WSIS Action Lines, and explicitly, their contribution to the SDGs. It emphasized how digital technologies can facilitate progress in areas such as quality education (SDG 4), decent work and economic growth (SDG 8), and industry, innovation, and infrastructure (SDG 9).

Case Examples

The panel discussion was enriched by various case examples shared by the panelists.

Harnessing ICT for Socio-Economic Growth

- **India:** A thriving ICT sector is a cornerstone of India's growth strategy. Initiatives like Digital India and JAM trinity (Jan Dhan-Aadhaar-Mobile) promote financial inclusion, digital identity verification, and welfare delivery.
- **Germany:** The "FAIR Forward" initiative in Uganda exemplifies how digital tools can support green energy solutions and economic development, including empowering small business owners.

Telecommunications and the Rise of E-Employment

- **Portugal:** The national communications regulatory authority is taking measures to ensure reliable connectivity, promote competition in the telecom sector, and bridge the digital divide. Telecom infrastructure advancements like high-speed internet, 5G networks, and cloud computing are enabling the growth of e-employment and remote work.

Digital Public Goods

- India's national ID system (nearly 100% penetration)
- DHIS2 health information system (used in 75 countries)

Conclusion

The LeadersTalk 10 on ICT Applications Unlocking the Full Potential of Digital Part II explored the power of digital technologies and their potential to drive sustainable development. The panel emphasized the need for collaborative efforts, innovative partnerships, and a holistic approach to address challenges and unlock the full potential of ICTs. By leveraging digital public goods, fostering talent development, and ensuring inclusivity, the panelists envisioned a future where digital technologies create a more equitable, prosperous, and sustainable world for all.

**Leaders TalkX 11: Looking Ahead:
Emerging tech for building sustainable futures**

<https://www.itu.int/net4/wsis/forum/2024/Agenda/Session/515>

Tuesday, 28 May 2024, (15:00-15:30 CEST)

Moderator: Dr. Liberato Bautista, CoNGO

This Leaders TalkX theme was “Looking Ahead: Emerging Tech for Building Sustainable Futures. The session reaffirmed the WSIS Principles and Lines of Action as main reference points for global digital discussions, especially in developing and using emerging technology to build sustainable futures. The panel was reminded of 2024 and 2025 being pivotal for the governance of the internet, artificial intelligence, and other emerging technologies. These were evident across the interventions by all six high-level speakers from governments (3), from the United Nations (1), and from civil society (2), who touched upon the session theme’s multiple aspects.

The moderator impressed the panelists and the audience with the fact that the title of the high-level session indicated not just a singular future but of futures—in the plural. He then underscored that none of us have a franchise of the future—not in our imagining and not in our acting. But imagining and acting together on our “futures,” not the least through multistakeholder processes like WSIS, is most desirable to understand better what the future holds about technology, digital futures, and more.

The intersections of ongoing intergovernmental processes were spotlighted, particularly the negotiation of the texts for the Global Digital Compact, the Pact for the Future, and the Summit of the Future, just ahead of 2025’s WSIS+20 review. It was pointed out that these processes leading to digital governance are “increasingly complex and politically charged.” Even as various stakeholders are grappling with the fast-moving emergence of ICTs, lagging is the governance architecture that is crucial in technologies that equally have the potential to undermine the cultural diversity, social fabric, and cohesion of society. (Wallonie-Bruxelles, The UN Brief), Netherlands)

The universality of human rights and their protection and safeguarding—online and offline—were underscored as crucial principles for all digital technologies and internet governance. Aside from human rights, other ethical dimensions of ICTs were addressed variedly by the panelists. The warning was sounded out that “the ethos of breaking things and moving fast has to be put to rest, as we have seen how it breaks our societies, from the divisiveness of our online public square to the pollution of our ecosystems with online toxic exchanges and dissemination of mis- and disinformation, that spill to the real world.”(Netherlands, Belgium, The UN Brief)

The panelist presentations underscored the transformative power of information and communication technologies, which have profoundly changed and impacted how various sectors of society work and deliver their goals. This includes the governance aspects of already available technologies and emerging ones and their use and application in fields like education, aging, healthcare delivery, health research, gathering news and distributing information, and culture and the arts. Innovations and strategies in artificial intelligence are plentiful, and national and global governance mechanisms must be implemented now rather than later. Even as AI is being developed, incentivized by its potential to transform (improve) economies, and portrayed as a social good, it is desired that these strategies square with principles already enunciated by WSIS, particularly the Tunis principles. The panel was made aware that cultural diversity must be factored into the roles assigned to technology, especially AI and other emerging technologies. An example was given: AI development and use present numerous opportunities for the cultural sector, starting with generative AI tools for artistic creation. Still, significant discoverability issues (the ability of online content to be discovered) of

cultural content exist, which influence multilingualism and cultural diversity. (GCOA, India, Netherlands, Wallonie-Bruxelles)

The panelists collectively emphasized a robust public-private partnership, a cornerstone of collective efforts needed in both governance (policy) and implementation. Such partnerships, however, must enhance and uphold the multistakeholder partnerships that ITU has modeled in conducting the business of the WSIS Process. This resonated with the Tunis principles of “effective cooperation among governments, the private sector, civil society, the UN, and other international organizations, each according to their different roles and responsibilities, and leveraging their expertise. (UNJSPF, Netherlands, The UN Brief)

This multistakeholder partnership that WSIS already models is also enhanced by broader geographic collaboration (i.e., interregional), ensuring that strategies to address complex issues related to emerging technologies benefit from a variety of perspectives, ensuring inclusivity which is essential in the development of robust and adaptable policies that can withstand the test of time and technological innovation. But this “variety of perspectives” is under attack by emerging technologies (Generative AI) that undermine public interest in news media organizations and when multilingualism is not promoted in social media applications, including those using AI. The audience was made aware that “the referencing methods on search engines and platforms may already tend to reinforce the visibility of linguistically majority content, therefore in English.” (Netherlands, GCOA, The UN Brief, Wallonia-Bruxelles)

This panel highlighted the urgent need to incentivize innovation in ICTs, underlining their crucial role in shaping sustainable futures. The digital frontier, largely uncharted and expansive open for exploration, if not also abuse and mis- and disinformation, is a minefield for innovation and the emergence of ICTs. (India, GCOA, The UN Brief)

Leaders TalkX 12: Ethical Dimensions of the Information Society

<https://www.itu.int/net4/wsis/forum/2024/Agenda/Session/498>

Tuesday, 28 May 2024, (15:30-16:00 CEST)

Moderator: Jennifer Chung, DotAsia Organisation

This session looked at universally held values and ethical dimensions into the digital and focused on collective responsibility of all stakeholders to foster an Information Society that champions the common good, safeguards privacy, and actively combats abusive and discriminatory behaviors enabled by digital technologies.

The panelists highlighted the importance of awareness and education in the use of digital technologies and discussed the implementation of laws and preventive measures to ensure a respectful, secure digital environment.

Key takeaways:

UN Representative: Mr. Sameer Chauhan, Director, United Nations International Computing Centre (UNICC)

UNICC noted that ethical use of ICTs needs to be operating in a secure digital environment under the highest security guarantee, and innovation should be facilitated while keeping cybersecurity front and center in frontier technologies. UNICC has recently launched a cybersecurity fund for the UN family to ensure that all UN systems have a consistent level of cybersecurity measures.

Russian Federation: H.E. Mr. Grigoriy Borisenko, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Digital Development, Communications and Mass Media

The Russian Federation has a National AI Development Strategy for up until 2030 which establishes general ethical principles and standards of behavior that guide voluntary signatories (360 organizations and counting) in the field of AI. The country uses a concept of hybrid regulation (some issues are resolved by regulations, others by means of “soft” law) and has already approved 13 experimental legal regimes in the field of operation of drone systems and unmanned vehicles, as well as in the field of healthcare.

Republic of Korea: Dr. Kyoung Yul Bae, President, Korea Information Society Development Institute (KISDI)

Dr. Bae contrasted the European approach on tight AI regulations on ethical dimensions versus the American non-regulatory approach which favors AI innovations and business. For the Republic of Korea, the country is ready to enact ethical regulations, in a more focused manner on specific segments, e.g. self-driving cars, generative AI, manufacturing parts, small and big entrepreneurs.

UN CSTD Vice-Chair: Ms. Ana Neves, Vice-Chair, United Nations Commission on Science and Technology for Development (CSTD)

The CSTD Vice-chair highlighted that ethics is about responsibility and integrity, and informs responsible solutions for critical challenges in policy, regulations, and designing functional ICT strategies. In addition, public policy has to ensure every stakeholder in the design and development of intelligent and autonomous systems is educated, trained and empowered to prioritize ethical considerations. Empowerment is key for citizens and also for institutions. Common values and principles from UNESCO, EU, OECD, WEF, Council of Europe, IEEE, Netmundial+10 highlight using the multistakeholder approach in digital transformation to maximize digital policy processes for the common good.

Costa Rica: H.E. Mr. Hubert Vargas Picado, Vice Minister of Telecommunications, Ministry of Science, Technology and Telecommunications

Costa Rica shared two pivotal initiatives: The National Cybersecurity Strategy - a comprehensive public policy document that articulates a strategic vision for cybersecurity via an efficient institutional model and fostering the engagement of all stakeholders. The pending National strategy for AI - which will allow Costa Rica to enhance the well-being of its citizens through the prudent application of frontier technology. Costa Rica strives to ensure free access to information, promotes digital literacy and civic participation through online platforms, and full connectivity for indigenous populations before 2030.

**Leaders TalkX 13: Partnership Pivot:
innovating international cooperation to scale digital inclusion**

<https://www.itu.int/net4/wsis/forum/2024/Agenda/Session/502>

Tuesday, 28 May 2024, (16:00-16:30 CEST)

Moderator: Helen Harris, Amazon

During this session, speakers raised the following points:

- Digital transformation is a multidisciplinary activity. As such, its implementation requires cooperation and collaboration from various departments (across the UN / within governments).
- Furthermore, digital inclusion is not limited to merely access to digital technology, but also a matter of ensuring that individuals have access to digital spaces in their local languages. This provides access to information, empowers local communities and integrates their insights into global discussions, thereby catalyzing local innovation and development.
- The multi-stakeholder process remains a priority and a key mechanism for international cooperation on digital issues. The importance of WSIS—including IGF—has not changed, and these frameworks should be leveraged for the implementation of the GDC. The IGF, given its multi-stakeholder nature and its adaptability—is the right place to have global, inclusive, human-rights respecting discussions about governance of the Internet and digital technologies. Multistakeholder spaces, such as IGF and ICANN, bring together diverse perspectives and ensure that digital policies benefit from a broad base of expertise and meet the varied needs of global users.
- Industry plays an important role, as it is a key player in the development (and deployment) of technology and services. Consequently, it is necessary to deepen the involvement of industry in promoting international cooperation. But in order to secure industry's active participation, government's need to develop flexible, technology-neutral regulatory frameworks that encourage investment and innovation.

**Leaders TalkX 14: Local Voices, Global Echoes:
Preserving Human Legacy, Linguistic Identity and Local Content in a Digital World**

<https://www.itu.int/net4/wsis/forum/2024/Agenda/Session/504>

Tuesday, 28 May 2024, (16:30-17:00 CEST)

Moderator: Ms. Daniella Esi Darlington, Copianto AI

Fresh Priorities:

- Empowering local content creators to develop content in indigenous languages to preserve cultural diversity and history: H.E. Ms. Rose Pola Pricemou, Minister, Ministry of Posts, Telecommunications, and Digital Economy.
- Digitalizing local archives and cultural content to make them accessible online: (H.E. Mr. Ousman A. Bah, Minister, Ministry of Communications and Digital Economy)
- Developing multilingual tools and platforms to facilitate cultural and linguistic diversity
- Integrating local languages into education sector curriculum to promote linguistic identity: (The Gambia)
- Continuing collaboration with partners to develop human capital for local content and digital solutions in local languages: (The Gambia)
- Organizing global conferences on language technologies to address the linguistic divide in the digital age: (Tawfik Jelassi, Assistant Director-General for Communication and Information, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO))

Emerging Trends:

The vast majority of the world's languages are missing from the digital world. While there are over 7,000 languages spoken globally, only a handful are currently represented online. UNESCO's Tawfik Jelassi emphasized this gap. To bridge the divide, speakers from Gambia, India and Denmark proposed using technologies like artificial intelligence and machine learning to digitize archives, translate content, and develop tools that make local languages more accessible online.

Opportunities:

Digitizing local content and indigenous manuscripts can help preserve cultural heritage. A key theme that emerged across various speakers was the importance of promoting multilingualism in the digital space. Prof. NK Goyal from India specifically emphasized this point, along with the need for creating digital content in local languages and facilitating access to digital tools and infrastructure for local communities. He also highlighted the importance of collaboration, raising awareness and leveraging communication channels. Ms. Dana Northcott, representing the International Trademark Association, provided an international perspective. She discussed the importance of multi-stakeholder collaboration, including efforts by ICANN (Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers) to expand the use of non-English characters online. This highlights the need for international cooperation to create a truly inclusive digital space.

Key Challenges:

- The large linguistic divide that exists digitally, with only a few dozen languages present online while over 7000 languages are used globally. This poses a major challenge to inclusion.
- Homogenization of online content, with most content produced in a few dominant languages, posing a threat to cultural and linguistic diversity.
- Lack of local language content and tools, making internet access difficult for those who don't speak dominant languages.
- Risk of certain indigenous and minority languages becoming endangered or extinct if not preserved digitally.

- Heavy consumption of foreign content in some countries poses challenges to promoting local cultures and languages.
- Gender biases and online harassment amplified by technologies, disproportionately impacting women.
- Potential for "meta life" to blur boundaries with real life and shape public perceptions in harmful ways.
- Ensuring local voices and perspectives are reflected in technology development and policymaking to avoid marginalization.

Case Example:

- UNESCO initiatives like creating a word atlas of languages, promoting multilingualism, and organizing a global conference on language technologies.
- Guinea developing multilingual tools/platforms, regulating content, digitizing archives, and promoting local creators.
- The Gambia prioritizing digital library, integrating local languages in education, and promoting indigenous digital solutions.
- India's government has built the Bhashini-Translation's ASR software to simultaneously translate content into local languages globally.
- Denmark promoting local perspectives to shape digital futures and ensure diversity online.
- INTAs advocacy for universal acceptance of non-ASCII domain names to enhance accessibility.
- Technological advancements like AI/ML to digitize archives, translate content, and develop local language tools.
- Countries like Gambia and Guinea are taking a proactive approach to bridge the digital divide. They've implemented national policies emphasizing inclusive connectivity, digital literacy, entrepreneurship, and local content development. For instance, Gambia's Entrepreneurship Policy and the ICT Agency Act 2019 both prioritize the development of local digital solutions and content, ensuring their citizens have access to information and tools in their native languages.