



Community Networks: Bridging the Digital Divide and Connecting the Last Mile Connectivity

17 March 2022 | 2:00pm - 4:00pm GMT+8 (06:00 UTC) | via Zoom



Speaker:
Sol Luca de Tena
Zenzeleni, South Africa



Speaker:
Gustaff Harriman Iskandar
Common Room, Indonesia



Speaker:
Karla Velasco Ramos
REDES, Mexico



Moderator:
Prof. Albert Teo
Institute for Social Entrepreneurship in Asia (ISEA)



Closing Remarks:
Dr. Sarbani Belur
Asia Regional Coordinator, APC



Register thru this link <https://tinyurl.com/CommNet-0317> or scan the QR code in the poster

What **Community Networks: Bridging the Digital Divide and Connecting the Last Mile Connectivity**

When Thursday, 17 March 2022
14:00- 16:00 (GMT +8)
6AM (UTC)

Co-organizers Technological Innovations for Sustainable Development Platform
Association of Progressive Communications (APC)
Institute for Social Entrepreneurship in Asia (ISEA)

Concept Note

Connecting the unconnected has always been about enabling connectivity of the remote rural areas and bridging the urban-rural digital divide. In the current times, connectivity has come to have a new meaning that focuses more on meaningful connectivity that unlocks the full potential of internet access. There is therefore an urgent need, not only bridge the digital divide, but also bridge the other social divides of gender, societal class and caste. Internet access is now being sought after in rural areas to enhance livelihoods, create jobs and entrepreneurship and contribute to economic growth. As access is still a distant dream in rural areas, there has been innovative ways by which access is created based on the needs of the communities, designing of frugal technologies and its usage. Internet is thus being customized based on the availability of devices, mobile signal and inherent needs of the communities. Connectivity based on needs has become important as the existing digital infrastructure operates in a broadly unsustainable manner.

It is within this gap of infrastructural presence that community networks present a viable solution: as low-cost, often open-source communication technology, they provide an alternative to connectivity that can be locally owned and operated, catering to both fluctuating demands and issues of affordability. But implicit within the discourse of last mile connectivity is a critical lens that questions *who* these are for, what their significance is and who finally succeeds in participating within their use and design.

Immense strides have been made in exploring and implementing alternative or supplementary modes of connectivity that challenge the androcentric, expensive, top-down approaches adopted by more mainstream models. One such alternative model adopted worldwide has been seeding the growth of community networks. The internet and its benefits are said to be meaningfully accessed when it is pervasive, affordable, of sufficient quality and speed such that individuals are enabled to access

information freely, seek their well-being, express themselves, create content while also engaging in development discourses actively. These networks are based on the needs of the people and are used to add relevance and value to the community. Some community networks have focused on enabling women's economic empowerment, sharing of traditional knowledge through art, craft, music and recipes, community radios that facilitate as a medium of self-expression by women. Community Networks have thus emerged as an important and innovative tool for making internet connectivity be meaningfully accessed by everyone in the community. It employs a participatory model that emerges from the immediate needs and context of the community, where members can be involved in all levels from its design to its implementation.

Objectives

This learning session aims at sharing cases of community networks located in different countries. These community networks shall feature their business models, technology use as well as the vision why such networks are supported. At the end of the learning session, participants should have

- An understanding of the different models and approaches of community networks
- An appreciation of the roles of community networks in providing holistic connectivity
- An appreciation on the relevance of community networks for last mile connectivity especially in the pandemic.

TARGET PARTICIPANTS

Participants will include civil society partners engaging with the Asia Pacific Regional CSO Engagement Mechanism (AP-RCEM) especially those in the social and community enterprise constituency. ISEA members and partners as well will be invited in the learning session. Other stakeholders, including government representatives, research and academic organizations will also be invited.

PROPOSED PROGRAM

Community Networks: Bridging the Digital Divide and Connecting the Last Mile Connectivity

2pm- 2:05pm	Photo session Introduction of the Learning Series/ Session Moderator: Albert Teo, ISEA (tbc)
2:06- 2:10pm	Welcome Remarks: Carlos Rey Moreno, APC or Kathleen Diga, APC (tbc)
Speakers:	
2:11pm- 2:30pm	Sol Luca de Tena, Zenzeleni, South Africa
2:31pm- 2:50pm	Gustaff Harriman Iskandar, Common Room, Indonesia
2:51pm- 3:10pm	Karla Velasco Ramos, REDES, Mexico
3:10pm- 3:50pm	Open Forum
3:50pm- 3:57pm	Closing Remarks: Sarbani Belur, APC
3:57pm- 4:00pm	Photo session



Community Networks: Issues, Challenges and Prospects

24 March 2022 | 2:00pm - 4:00pm GMT+8 (06:00 UTC) | via Zoom



Moderator:
Dr. Sarbani Belur
Asia Regional Coordinator,
APC



Speaker:
TB Dinesh
Servelots, India



Speaker:
Michael Suantak
ASORCOM,
Myanmar



Closing Remarks:
Prof. Albert Teo
Dean, Tung Wah College
in Hongkong



Speaker:
Osama Manzar
Digital Empowerment
Foundation, India



Speaker:
Pooja Majgankar
BAIF Development Research
Foundation, India



Register thru this link <https://tinyurl.com/CommNet0317> or scan the QR code in the poster

What: **Community Networks: Issues, Challenges and Prospects**

When: Thursday, 24 March 2022
14:00- 16:00 (GMT +8); 6AM (UTC)

Co-organizers: Technological Innovations for Sustainable Development Platform
Association of Progressive Communications (APC)
Institute for Social Entrepreneurship in Asia (ISEA)
Asia Pacific Regional CSO Engagement Mechanism- Social and Community
Enterprise Constituency

Concept Note

Internet connectivity plays an essential role in driving fundamental changes in economic and social development. Internet access is now being sought after, especially in rural areas, to enhance livelihoods, create jobs and entrepreneurship and contribute to economic growth. While existing digital infrastructures are still limited and operates in a broadly unsustainable manner, there has been innovative ways by which access is created based on the needs of the communities, designing of frugal technologies and its usage.

Community Networks emerged to provide a low-cost, often open-source communication technology, that can be locally owned and operated, that can be locally owned and operated, catering to both fluctuating demands and issues of affordability. Community Networks employ a participatory model that emerges from the immediate needs and context of the community, where members can be involved in all levels from its design to its implementation. By bridging the connectivity gap, Community Networks allows individuals and communities to pursue economic, social and cultural development opportunities.

While Community Networks are growing in size and scale, several barriers hold these alternative infrastructures from fully maximising their potential and technologies. This session aims to introduce and identify common issues and challenges experienced by community networks and provide a space for sharing perspectives to think of ways on how to overcome and resolve these challenges.

Objectives

This learning session aims at sharing experiences and insights on common issues and challenges faced by community networks located in different countries. At the end of the learning session, participants should have

- An understanding of the different issues and challenges of community networks
- An understanding on the strategies employed to address and overcome challenges
- An appreciation of the potential and capacity of community networks to provide holistic connectivity

TARGET PARTICIPANTS

Participants will include civil society partners engaging with the Asia Pacific Regional CSO Engagement Mechanism (AP-RCEM) especially those in the social and community enterprise constituency. ISEA members and partners as well will be invited in the learning session. Other stakeholders, including government representatives, research and academic organizations will also be invited.

PROPOSED PROGRAM

2pm- 2:05pm	Introduction of the Learning Series/ Session Moderator: Dr Sarbani Belur, Asia Coordinator for Connecting the Unconnected, APC and Indian institute of Technology in Bombay Photo session
2:06- 2:10pm	Welcome Remarks: Dr Sarbani Belur Speakers:
2:11pm- 2:30pm	TB Dinesh, Servalots, India
2:31pm- 2:50pm	Michael Suantak, ASORCOM, Myanmar
2:51pm- 3:10pm	Osama Manzar, Digital Empowerment Foundation, India
3:11pm- 3:30pm	Pooja Majgankar, BAIF Development Research Foundation, India
3:30pm-3:50pm	Open Forum
3:50pm- 3:57pm	Closing Remarks: Prof Albert Teo, ISEA and Dean, Tung Wah College in Hong Kong
3:57pm- 4:00pm	Photo session

Profiles of Speakers

TB Dinesh moved from academic computer science to real world research that involves backward linkages to regional communities around him. As, Janastu and Servalots (open.janastu.org), they strive to set up a rural research lab (iruWay) near Bangalore, India. iruWay strives to conceptualise and deploy inclusive internet technology tools with communities who are marginalised by literacy.

COWMesh (wifi-mesh community network) strives to provision hyper-media archives for discovery and navigation of local information to be seamlessly and safely provisioned within the world wide Web with the needs of women set as the baseline.

Michael Suantak is a 2015 DeBoer Fellow. He is the founder of ASORCOM (Alternative Solutions for Rural Communities) which builds a community wireless network as an

alternative communication platform. This network connects more than 20 jungle villages over the hills in Chin State where there are no proper roads, internet, or mobile coverage. He is CEO at Savory Social Enterprise and one of Myanmar's digital Tarzans from the jungle of Chin State, located in the northwest of Myanmar.

Osama Manzar is Senior Ashoka Fellow and British Chevening Scholar who founded Digital Empowerment Foundation which has empowered more than 25 million people in India and several global south. He has served on various committees at MeITY, MIB, CII, and served on the boards of APC, World Summit Awards, World Wide Web Foundation's A4AI, Down To Earth, and many more.

Pooja Majgankar, with an urge for social and sustainable development, is working on ICT initiatives at BAIF Development Research Foundation (BAIF). She hails from Pune city in India where she completed her schooling and Master's Degree in Commerce from Savitribai Phule Pune University.

She has been working with BAIF since 2002 and has been involved in the Sorted Semen project funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and also as a part of the ICT initiatives at BAIF such as "Sanvadini" - a rural call centre, elearning - its development and deployment, software update and technology advancement. She is also heading the eLearning initiative at BAIF.

Her broad interests are in technology and development.



Asia-Pacific Regional CSO
Engagement Mechanism

Bridging the Gap: Addressing Policy, Regulation and Governance of Community Networks

11 April 2022 | 2:00pm - 4:00pm GMT+8 (06:00 UTC) | via Zoom



Opening Speaker:
Carlos Rey Moreno
Project Coordinator,
APC



Speaker:
Isha Suri
Senior Researcher,
Center for Internet
and Society (India)



Speaker:
Gayani Hurulle
Research Manager,
LIRNEasia



Speaker:
Tariq Zaman
Associate Professor,
University of Technology
Sarawak (Malaysia)



Speaker:
Ida Widianingsih
Senior Researcher, Center for
Decentralization & Participatory
Development Research Universitas
Padjadjaran (Indonesia)



Moderator:
Kathleen Diga
Project Coordinator,
APC



Closing Remarks:
Marie Lisa Dacanay
President, ISEA

Title: **Bridging the Gap: Addressing Policy, Regulation and Governance of Community Networks**

April 11, 2022; 2pm-4pm (GMT+8)

Co-organizers: Asia Pacific Regional CSO Engagement Mechanism
Association of Progressive Communications
Institute for Social Entrepreneurship in Asia

Context:

The global COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the extent and further exacerbated the digital divide – the ever-widening gap in access to digital technology and infrastructures between the rich and the poor, between men and women, and between urban and rural communities within countries. This is very evident in the Asia Pacific region as more people are pushed to poverty and could not keep up with the technological shifts during the pandemic.

As the digital gap is widening and worsening also as a result of the pandemic, the world on both sides of the divide have to deal with the consequences and issues around digitalization - ranging from violation of basic rights, especially of women, girls and young people, racial and gender discrimination, and breach of privacy and cyber security attacks, to repression and manipulation, and disproportional power and influence of technology platforms and companies. While a few countries have attempted to address some of these issues by putting in place regulations, including sanctions, on large technology platforms, most countries are still mostly grappling with how to deal within their national jurisdiction with these issues that are virtual and transboundary by nature.

Community networks have always been about connecting the unconnected and enabling connectivity of the remote rural areas and bridging the urban-rural digital divide. In current times, there is an urgent need not only bridge the digital divide, but also bridge the other social divides of gender, societal class and caste. In rural areas, connectivity has enhanced livelihood and contributed to the creation of decent jobs. As access is still a distant dream in other areas in the region, the installation

of community networks had been one innovative way by which access is created based on the needs of the communities, designing of frugal technologies and its usage, providing an alternative to connectivity that can be locally owned and operated, catering to both fluctuating demands and issues of affordability. Implicit within the discourse of last mile connectivity is a critical lens that questions who these are for, what their significance is and who finally succeeds in participating within their use and design.

Strategic value

A number of UN agencies such as UNCTAD have published trends and analysis on digital technologies to guide member states on developments and issues that need to be tackled. In his recent “Our Common Agenda” report, the UN Secretary General has proposed the creation of a “Global Digital Compact” to be agreed at a “Summit of the Future” in 2023. Amid these efforts at the global and national levels, there remains a huge vacuum in policy and governance of digital technologies, including community networks, that need to be addressed with a sense of urgency to assert the mandate of inclusion of the poorest and marginalized as well as protection of human rights of all citizens.

This learning session will provide a space to provide insights and present proposals on policy and governance of digitalization and community networks.

Program

Moderator: Kathleen Diga, APC

Photo Session

Speaker 1 Isha Suri, Senior Researcher, Center for Internet and Society-India

Speaker 2 Gayani Hurulle

Speaker 3 Tariq Zaman

Speaker 4 Ida Widianingsih

Speaker 5 Carlos Rey Moreno

Open Forum

Closing Remarks Marie Lisa Dacanay, ISEA

Profile of Speakers

Ida Widianingsih, is an associate professor at Public Administration Department and Head of Graduate program in Public Administration, Universitas Padjadjaran (Unpad), Indonesia. She also serves as a Senior researcher at Center for Decentralization and Participatory Development Research, Unpad.

She holds a PhD from Flinders Institute of Public Policy and Management, Flinders University, Australia (2014); Master degree in International development granted from Center for Development Studies, Flinders University, Australia (2005); and Bachelor's in Public Administration from Universitas Padjadjaran (1995). Her main research interests are public administration and development issues.

Dr Kathleen Diga has 15 years of experience in the Information and Communication Technology for Development (ICT4D) research space. She currently is a project coordinator for connectivity projects

that facilitates learning and exchange of communities who operate remote and underserved community-owned telecommunication infrastructure in the global South through the Association for Progressive Communications. Her main focus of research is understanding the changing ICT asset portfolio within households in South Africa and how these items are contributing to well-being and wealth changes, particularly amongst those at the margins.

Dr. Carlos Rey-Moreno is a telecommunications engineer with a background on development studies. Carlos has been involved in rural connectivity projects in underserved areas for more than ten years, initially with the EHAS Foundation in Latin America, and more recently as one of the founders of Zenzeleni Networks, a community-owned ISP providing affordable communications in rural Eastern Cape, South Africa. In studying how to scale Zenzeleni Networks, he has become one of the most knowledgeable people about the community networks movement in Africa by participating in the deployment of another community network in Namibia, mapping the community network initiatives in the continent, co-organising the first two editions of the Summit of Community Networks in Africa, and authoring an in-depth report on the topic. He has also been involved in the LibreRouter project, an initiative to create software and hardware solutions to facilitate the deployment of community networks.

Isha Suri is a Senior Researcher at the Centre for Internet & Society (CIS). Her areas of interest include Telecom Policy, Competition Law, Internet Governance, Intellectual Property Rights, and Privacy and Data Protection. She holds an LL.B. (Hons.) with a specialization in Intellectual Property Law from the Indian Institute of Technology, Kharagpur. Prior to this she worked with the Digital Economy Startups and Innovation Team (erstwhile Telecom and Technology Policy team) at the Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations (ICRIER), a New-Delhi based think tank.

Gayani Hurulle is a Research Manager at LIRNEasia, where she researches digital policy and regulation, and the future of work. She is also an external consultant at EY, where she is conducting World Bank Digital Economy Assessments for Sri Lanka and Maldives.

She has engaged in external consulting for two government agencies in Sri Lanka– Ministry of Digital Infrastructure and Information Technology and the Ministry of Finance. Notably, she has contributed towards the drafting of Sri Lanka's National Digital Policy (2020-2025). Gayani has also worked extensively in Myanmar, where she has led research projects, and coordinated capacity building programmes.

She holds a master's degree in Public Policy from the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, National University of Singapore, and bachelor's degree in Economics from the University of London.

Dr Tariq Zaman is an Associate Professor and Head of the Advanced Centre for Sustainable Socio-Economic and Technological Development (ASSET) in University of Technology Sarawak, Sibu Malaysia. His research concentrates on co-designing technologies with children and indigenous communities. Having dual professional backgrounds, as a lawyer and a Professor of Human-Computer Interaction, Tariq is concerned with co-designing human rights-based policy interventions to address digital inequalities.

Dr Marie Lisa Dacanay is the founding President of the Institute for Social Entrepreneurship in Asia (ISEA) and is a pioneer in social entrepreneurship education and research in the region. She is a Social Innovation Thought Leader of the Year 2019 Awardee of the Schwab Foundation for Social Entrepreneurship.

Dr. Dacanay is a coach and mentor of social entrepreneurship practitioners and resource institutions and a bridging leader promoting dialogue and collaboration between the social enterprise sector with government, business, civil society, and academe to achieve greater impact. She leads the Social and Community Enterprise Constituency of the AP-RCEM engaging the United Nations.