



## **Building Consensus on Internet Access at the Internet Governance Forum**

This paper identifies and documents the main areas of discussions and 'recommendations' that were generated under the Access theme at the second Internet Governance Forum in Rio De Janeiro, November 2007.

Whilst recognising that the IGF is currently viewed and operates primarily as a space for discussion, the paper finds that (specifically in the case of Access) it is also a space in which commonality of opinion occurs to the level at which 'recommendations' can be made and repeatedly asserted independently/individually in the workshops, and strategically reinforced at different levels of the IGF.

The levels addressed in the paper include:

- the three 'thematic' workshops on access
- the reporting back session
- and the main access plenary

The paper finds the generation and articulation of recommendations to be in line with the mandate of the IGF, specifically:

*Advising all stakeholders in proposing ways and means to accelerate the availability and affordability of the Internet in the developing world.*

Whilst a variety of recommendations were made, these can be categorised into the following broad areas:

- Enhancement of the development of and access to infrastructure - in recognising that the availability of internet infrastructure needs to be considered hand-in-hand with the affordability of the infrastructure, this recommendation calls for the consistent implementation of competitive regimes and the creation of incentives that facilitate the co-existence of competitive and collaborative models for providing and/or improving access.
- Localisation of ICT and Telecom policies and regulation – refers to calls for a review of the ways in which access issues are articulated and ICT/Telecom policy and regulation is formulated. It asks that the translation/customisation of largely urban-centric policies be challenged and that greater emphasis be given to demand-side characteristics and the needs of rural/local communities.
- Promoting the development potential of ICTs and integrating access infrastructure initiatives with other basic needs – calls for a multi-sectoral approach to infrastructure development and regulation; specifically the integration of ICT regulation and policy with local development strategies, as well as the exploitation of complementarities between different types of development infrastructure

This paper proposes that the convergence in opinions about how to address the challenges of access may be a result of a maturity in understanding of the issues relating to access that has built up over time and is discussed in other related bodies and fora. However, thinking and understanding of 'tools' and implementation procedures/processes of solutions for resolving/addressing these well understood issues and challenges cannot be described as having attained a similar level of maturity – in fact, particularly in the case of rural/local access they can be described as infantile.

There is therefore continued need and relevance for addressing Access at future IGF meetings, however the way in which this will need to be done will have to be different from the largely discursive identification of issues and challenges. The Internet governance community and indeed the portion of the world's population waiting to gain access to the Internet would benefit from a more implementation-orientation to future discussions on Access.

One idea proposed by APC<sup>1</sup> is that the IGF uses the format of the Working Group on Internet Governance (WGIG, established during the World Summit on the Information Society), or bodies such as the Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF) to convene working groups to address complex issues that emerge during a forum. These groups can be made up of individuals with the necessary expertise and drawn from different stakeholder groups. These groups can then engage specific issues in greater depth, and, if they feel it is required, develop recommendations that can be communicated to the internet community at large, or addressed to specific institutions.

These recommendations need not be presented as formally agreed recommendations from the IGF, but as recommendations or suggestions for action from the individuals in the working group.

These working groups have a different role from the self-organised dynamic coalitions which we believe should continue. Dynamic coalitions have a broader mandate and are informal in nature. APC sees IGF working groups as differing from dynamic coalitions in that they should address particular challenges rather than a general issue area. They will also have a degree of accountability and an obligation to report that dynamic coalitions do not have. One such group could be a working group on competitive and collaborative models for access.

#### Further Information:

Willie Currie  
APC Communication and Information Policy Programme Manager  
[wcurrie@apc.org](mailto:wcurrie@apc.org)

## **Introduction**

The Internet Governance Forum (IGF) is a space for multi-stakeholder policy dialogue, set up in 2006 as a direct response to the deliberations of the World Summit of the Information Society (WSIS). The forum was created to (amongst other things) discuss public policy issues related to key elements of Internet governance in order to foster the sustainability, robustness, security, stability and development of the Internet. Its structure, function and working are addressed in paragraphs 73 - 79 of the (WSIS) Tunis Agenda.

The mandate of the IGF is listed in paragraph 72 of the Agenda; specific to issues relating to

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<sup>1</sup> Statement of the Association for Progressive Communications (APC) on the second Internet Governance Forum, Rio de Janeiro November 12-15 2007 <http://www.apc.org/english/news/index.shtml?x=5340227>

access to Internet infrastructure, paragraph 72e states that this mandate includes:

*... Advis(ing) all stakeholders in proposing ways and means to accelerate the availability and affordability of the Internet in the developing world.*

The IGF has sought to achieve this through the workshops and plenary sessions devoted to access issues that were held during its inaugural meeting in Athens, Greece and at its second meeting in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Whilst the IGF has contributed to an increase in understanding of the issues and challenges inhibiting access to the Internet in developing countries, it has not been explicit in "proposing ways and means" by which such issues and challenges can be addressed in order to accelerate access in the developing world. The reasons for this and the arguments for and against the IGF developing into a body that makes recommendations as opposed to just being a "discursive space" have been debated/discussed in other publications<sup>2</sup> and are outside the scope of this paper.

Instead, this paper summarises the discussions held during the *thematic* workshops on Access at the second IGF as well as the proceedings of the *Access* plenary session. The relevant workshops are:

1. "Regulatory Frameworks for Improving Access" organised by the Association for Progressive Communications (APC), International Development Research Council (IDRC), and Learning Initiative on Regulation for Networked Economies (LIRNE.net)
2. "Access: the local challenge" organised by the Internet Society (ISOC), Global Internet Policy Initiative (GIPI), Association for Progressive Communications (APC), and the Latin American and Caribbean Internet Addresses Registry (LACNIC)
3. "Qualifying, Quantifying, and Meeting the Challenge of Internet Access Costs" organised by the Global Information Infrastructure Commission, World Information Technology and Services Alliance, iGrowthGlobal, Nippon Keidanren, and Packet Clearing House

The paper aims to identify and delineate the "recommendations" that emerged from the discussions within these sessions – i.e. suggestions as to the *ways and means* by which access to the Internet can be facilitated in the developing world. The paper will also seek to trace the path of such recommendations from the thematic workshops to the plenary session. By doing this, the paper illustrates the potential of the IGF as a space for discussion as well as one in which 'recommendations' can legitimately be developed/proposed.

## Background

The Association for Progressive Communications (APC) believes that the limited access to the Internet that exists in the developing world is largely a function of two factors: first the sparse deployment of broadband networks and secondly the high cost of access to existing physical Internet infrastructure<sup>3,4</sup>. APC is therefore actively involved in promoting the prioritisation of issues on access to Internet infrastructure on the global agenda, including in the Internet governance sector. APC also advocates on these issues at regional and national levels through people-centred and public-interest orientated initiatives<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> See paragraphs 54 – 59 IGF Second Meeting Synthesis Paper, September 2007 <http://www.intgovforum.org/> and Statement of the Association for Progressive Communications (APC) on the second Internet Governance Forum, Rio de Janeiro November 12-15 2007 <http://www.apc.org/english/news/index.shtml?x=5340227>

<sup>3</sup> See Esterhuysen, A. and W. Currie (2007). Open, universal, and affordable access to the Internet. The Power of Ideas: Internet Governance in a Global Multi-Stakeholder Environment. W. Kleinwächter. Berlin, Marketing für Deutschland GmbH: 60-67

<sup>4</sup> The Tunis Agenda also highlights the importance of physical infrastructure to the Internet and recognised the need for more (financial) resources to be investment in its development

<sup>5</sup> See the experience of the Catalysing Access to ICTs in Africa (CATIA) programme in Lishan Adam, Tina James and

At the second meeting of the Internet Governance Forum in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; APC, in partnership with the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and Learning Initiatives on Reforms for Network Economies (LIRNE.net), hosted a workshop to identify and discuss key regulatory imperatives/issues relating to access to Internet (communications) infrastructure at international, regional and national levels. In addition, APC attended and reported on all other workshops under the Access theme as well as the plenary session. The primary objective of this process and key output of APC's participation in the Access theme at the second meeting of the IGF is this paper: a documentation of the discussion and emergence of 'recommendations' on the facilitation of access in the developing world.

## **A Convergence of Opinion**

A key observation from the second IGF meeting was the semblance of convergence of opinion and recommendations on how the availability, accessibility, and affordability of the Internet can be improved upon in the developing world. Three main areas in which opinions were seen to converge were identified: first, there appeared to be agreement that the competitive (market) model<sup>6</sup> has been effective in increasing Access in developing countries. There were therefore calls for policy coherence in the telecom sectors of developing nations – specifically “for the principles of competition to be consistently and evenly applied to all areas of the telecom sector”<sup>7</sup>.

Second, there was recognition of the applicability of collaborative models for providing access in areas where traditional market models seem to have failed. Such areas include rural and other underserved areas where the participation of diverse network operators and providers – including municipal government authorities, co-operatives, and community operators has contributed to increasing access. There were therefore calls for the review of policy and regulation, and the establishment of incentives to facilitate increased participation by this cadre of operators.

Third, there continues to be conviction and consensus on the potential of ICTs as tools for development – particularly at the level of rural and local access. ICTs can be used in increasing accessibility to healthcare and education; they can help in decreasing vulnerabilities and improving citizen engagement with governments and their institutions. There was a therefore a call for the promotion and adoption of a multi-sectoral approach in achieving universal, affordable and equitable access. Specifically the integration of ICT regulation and policy with local development strategies, as well as the exploitation of complementarities between different types of development infrastructure (for example transport networks, water pipes/canals, power/electrification, communication etc).

The observed convergence of views however requires further interrogation/examination. There is for example (at least at face value) an inherent contradiction between acceptance of the “efficacy” of competitive models and its promotion in the telecom sector, and the call for increased participation of a more diverse range of network operators and providers most of whom adopt non-market models (to achieve wider access in rural areas). Were all stakeholders at the IGF truly in agreement that in order to make universal access a reality competitive models need to coexist (at the same period of time) with collaborative ones? Also, were there opinions and views expressed in workshops that were not carried through/voiced at the Access plenary and does their omission indicate evasion of dissent or is it due merely to the limited time constraints faced by panellists?

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Alice Munyua Wanjira: Frequently Asked Questions about Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships in ICTs for Development, CATIA/APC, September 2007

<sup>6</sup> One in which consumers are able to select from a range of providers, the product that best matches their needs at a price they feel is acceptable.

<sup>7</sup> See Press Release by APC: “Convergence of views on access at international internet forum.”

This paper provides such an interrogation by documenting and tracing key issues and recommendations raised in the workshops and plenary, and analysing them in the context in which they were proffered.

### **“Regulatory Frameworks for Improving Access” Workshop**

Issues discussed and recommendations/suggestions mooted during the workshop were classified as follows:

- Enhancing the development of and access to infrastructure
- Enabling policies and financial frameworks
- Advancing the development dimensions of ICT regulation
- Offering technology choice, responding to demand and addressing the challenges/opportunities of convergence

Under **enhancing the development of and access to infrastructure** a clear message from the workshop was the need to address the reinforced monopolies that exist around access to international infrastructure by local operators; this refers to the phenomenon, prevalent in the majority of developing countries, whereby the incumbent/national operator is the sole provider of basic telecom services that are key to the availability of the Internet and its affordability. The monopoly status occurs because such operators control access to physical infrastructure and/or operate under licensing regimes that are favourable to them but which are prohibitive and inadvertently limit competition. Specifically, workshop participants spoke of the need to open up international and terrestrial backbone infrastructure (e.g. through stronger regulation of backbone infrastructure and shared access/investment).

It was under this topic of discussion that participants voiced an opinion that was to be repeated in other access workshops and during the plenary – that competition works; and that principles of 'open access'<sup>8</sup> should be applied evenly to all areas of the telecom sector. This statement on competition was made with reference to the experience of equipment providers who operate in highly competitive markets and whose performance and efficiencies have benefited from the competitive environment.

The fostering of competition and facilitation of multiple players in telecom markets requires **enabling policies and financing frameworks**; licensing procedures should be simplified, as should the regulation and cost of interconnection. Furthermore, countries should allow for and promote the use of new technologies/applications – with specific examples being given of the use of VOIP in rural areas.

In relation to rural and underserved areas, workshop participants noted the need for stakeholders to recognise that a “different” approach to regulation may be needed under these circumstances. Specifically, participants challenged the translation of 'traditional urban-centric' legal/regulatory frameworks - which are mostly focused on competitive markets where consumers have choice - to rural areas where 'business models', economic contexts, communication needs and appropriate technologies are different. Recognition of these differences and the opportunities and constraints they present leads to an appreciation of the importance of diverse network operators and providers in such areas; these include community operators, and economic producers/organisations who might also serve as providers of ICT services.

Such diversity can be encouraged by “incentivising” not only competitive behaviour but also

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<sup>8</sup> “Open Access is about creating competition in all layers of the IP network allowing a wide variety of physical networks and applications to interact in an open architecture.” InfoDev: Open Access Models: Options for Improving Backbone Access in Developing Countries (with a Focus on Sub-Saharan Africa) August 2005 <http://www.infodev.org/en/Publication.10.html>

collaborations that take advantage of complementarities between different aspects of infrastructure ownership and service provision - for example collaboration in fostering and financing infrastructure development, encouraging the aggregation of demand, and of financial and technical resources etc.

Collaborations should also be considered and encouraged with non-telecom partners. This requires a rethink of traditional perspectives of telecom regulation that are predominantly sector specific, and the adoption of more economically and socially inclusive perspective/approach instead. Such an approach/perspective would see ICTs as more than just a communicative tool but as key to local development. In particular, workshop participants promoted the idea of a multi-sectoral approach to regulation and/or adoption of a multi-sectoral regulator model - where the focus is on exploiting the complementarities between different types of infrastructure (e.g. laying down roads, water canals, power and ICT cabling or use of power grid for enable ICT) so as to not only reduce costs of infrastructure development but also to contribute to the potentially more effective use of universal access funds and/or scarce development resources.

There is therefore a clear need for the IGF to **advance the development dimensions of ICT regulation**. This can be achieved by enhancing the priority of ICTs in development (and investment) decision-making spaces and by encouraging the creation of incentives that promote ICTs as a development tool - particularly at the level of rural/local access. Such regulation would incorporate more than market-driven incentives and/or address a market-failure situation, but seek to locate ICT regulatory policy in the context of development and local development strategies. This would focus on complementarities in providing and financing critical infrastructures and include the promotion of public-private partnership models. Such regulation would also move beyond just direct uses of ICT but also consider its transformative aspects in terms of local development opportunities by enabling the reorganisation and enhanced viability of local enterprises, and empowerment of stakeholders etc.

A focus on the developmental aspects of ICTs also requires that regulation promotes **technological choice, responds to the demands of communities, and addresses the challenges/opportunities of convergence**.

The rapid uptake of mobile phones in developing nations means that they are now considered to be viable technology for providing voice, access to the Internet and a variety of financial and e-governance services - at least at present. Regulation must therefore provide an enabling environment for the use of the technology for such purpose. A realisation of the potential role mobile phones will play in developing countries, also necessitates the promotion of content creation for such devices, as well as services and applications that meet the local need - for example financial content (that - with respect to a multi-sector approach to telecom regulation - would require cooperation between telecoms (mobile) and financial sectors).

In responding to the demands of communities, regulation needs to facilitate exploration of new generation community-driven networks as platforms for a variety of ICTs - cheap telephony, community-radio and Internet-based content. Such networks offer a potentially more economically sustainable basis by (i) helping to aggregate and grow demand (rather than only focusing on shared access) for a range of ICTs and services that can be provided on the platform and (ii) by being more responsive to current/changing community needs as the focus is not on any one technology.

The demands on regulators and regulation are significant - in terms of creating, implementing, and managing access incentives, coordinating with complementary sectors, promoting the developmental aspects of ICTs, promoting diverse participation in the provision of products and services in rural and underserved areas etc. The need to build up the capacities of regulators can therefore not be over stated - particularly in light of converging technologies that hold great opportunities for the delivery of services but also introduce great challenges and complexity to the work of regulators.

## **“Access: the local challenge” Workshop**

The focus of this workshop was on the challenges and opportunities that exist at local (geographic) levels. According to the workshop participants, challenges of access at the local level can be attributed to: the effects of government interference in the telecoms sector, policies that limit/prohibit the capabilities/application of (new) technologies, intrusive regulations/regulators, communication habits of the user population etc. Whilst the focus of this workshop differs from the one discussed above (i.e. that on regulatory frameworks) the recommendations were nonetheless similar. For example, with respect to **enhancing the development of and access to infrastructure**, participants at this workshop also identified the need to fully and consistently implement the 'dominant model' of telecom reforms (characterised by competition, interconnection and universal access) across all sectors of the industry. At the same time, a call was also made for countries to identify a set of critical/basic services and applications that should be made available in rural areas as public goods/services; with economic considerations only coming into play after a certain level of provision has been attained. This suggestion calls for more careful consideration of (i) the diverse characteristics of such areas in an effort to match services to their needs, and (ii) **the role of governments** in alleviating access issues - including their role in enforcing competition, encouraging the development of content, training and capacity building, provision of public access points etc.

As was the case in the workshop on “regulatory frameworks”, participants at the “local access” workshop, in discussing **enabling policies**, also challenged the logic of translating 'traditional urban-centric' legal/regulatory frameworks to rural areas. Participants highlighted the need to view 'rural' populations not as the exception – that require customisation of regulations and policies developed from an urban mindset – but to instead consider using the rural experience as the starting point of policy formulation.

Participants also asked for a review of the ways in which access issues are articulated, asking that they be assessed from the perspective of the user/individual (as opposed to operators and other service providers) as this would facilitate the use of technologies that are appropriate to such areas (i.e. those that are feasible and sustainable). Furthermore, viewing access from the perspective of connectivity and access to personal computers is no longer adequate; mobile phones/technologies have been proven to increase access to communications and the opportunities that they present should also be taken into consideration.

The “local access” workshop also called for a rethink of ICT policy formulation processes – in particular the reference point chosen for the development of policy. Particular emphasis was placed on policy makers being made to understand and appreciate that connectivity does not equate to access and that from the demand perspective access is influenced by affordability, relevance (potential use), and ease of use (capacity of individual/community). Such factors should therefore be considered in policy formulation as well as in the determination of which technologies to deliver/implement.

Just as the “Regulatory Frameworks” workshop identified the need to build up the capacities of regulators, this workshop also identified the need to work with communities and build upon their capabilities and the capacities of the organisations/institutions that serve them. For example it was mentioned that small towns and cities should be educated on the benefits of models of consumer collaboration and cooperation such as the pooling of demand and sharing of resources. Building on the developmental orientation of ICT policy, capacity building also needs to extend to facilitating the better coordination of funding request of providers of community based access projects, and capacities of managers of universal service funds.

The call for a multi-sector perspective/approach to regulation was also echoed during the “local access” workshop. Discussants highlighted that an “enabling environment” at the local level is one in which regulations and policies from different sectors (not just telecoms) complement

one another in creating a supportive environment for the implementation of solutions. There was therefore agreement that issues relating to access need to be viewed from the perspective of development policy rather than communicative policy; demand side rather than supply side; and from the peripheral/margins of networks rather than from the centre/core. It was felt that this would (amongst other things) help in better **integrating access infrastructure initiatives with the other basic needs** of "communities at the margins" who suffer deprivation of a wide range of infrastructure/services.

### **"Qualifying, Quantifying, and Meeting the Challenge of Internet Access Costs" Workshop**

It is possible to identify a progression in the level of focus of the workshops being reported in this paper; whilst that on "Regulatory frameworks" adopted a broader perspective of challenges and opportunities for access (considering issues at international, national, and local levels), that on "local challenges" had as its focus the needs and perspectives of users/individuals and communities – particularly in rural areas. The focus of this third workshop – on access costs – is narrower still and takes a more business/private-sector orientation of the requirements for reducing the cost of Internet access.

Recommendations emanating from this workshop echo those discussed in other workshops, in particular the call for a **more consistent application of the principles of competition** in all segments of the telecommunications sector. Specifically, governments were encouraged to combine their national broadband strategies with a strict competition policy for the ICT sector. The case of Japan was cited as a success story in combining its eJapan broadband strategy with full competition to rapidly boost broadband access to 26.4 million households and achieve 80% internet access in the mobile market. South Africa was cited as an example of where an unchecked monopoly fixed line operator had been allowed to stifle growth in the internet services market and to engage in anti-competitive abuses with regard to Internet Service Providers. Egypt was cited as a country on the right track – moving from opening its international gateways and cable landing stations to competition to introducing fixed line competition as well as using a range of broadband strategies and national ICT initiatives to create incentives for people to obtain internet access and computer ownership. The workshop made the strongest possible case that the immediate suspension of all forms of monopoly provision of telecommunications and the fashioning of policy within the framework of a national broadband strategy would have dramatic effects on increasing broadband internet in developing countries.

Specific initiatives for boosting competition in Internet services that were recommended by participants included (i) liberalising international gateways and landing stations, and (ii) ending monopolies in fixed line provision especially with regard to the leasing of fixed lines, unbundling the local loop, collocation of facilities, and permitting Internet Service Providers (ISPs) to build their own networks. Such recommendations are in line with calls to **enhance the development of and access to infrastructure** that were discussed in other access workshops.

ISPs are considered to be the major driving force behind the expansion of the Internet and participants at this workshop called on governments to create an **enabling environment** for ISPs to open Internet Exchange Points (IXPs) to retain domestic traffic inside the country. This would translate to cost savings as domestic traffic would no longer need to be transmitted via international routes/infrastructure and incur the high costs associated with the use of such infrastructure; costs that are usually borne 100% by developing country service providers/operators. It was also pointed out that the keeping internet traffic inside a country or region by using IXPs would provide an incentive to local producers to provide local content which in turn would increase local demand for internet access. This dimension of the use of IXPs fits with the consensus in the other workshops that stimulating local demand as opposed to reliance on supply for solutions is strongly indicated as a crucial element in increasing

access in developing countries.

## Reporting Back Session and Access Plenary

The IGF provides opportunity for coordinators/organisers of workshops to summarise and present the discussions held during their workshops to a wider audience via the Reporting Back sessions. These were generally just prior to plenary sessions and allowed for workshops held during the preceding section/day to be presented back to the Forum<sup>9</sup>. The schedule of the IGF was developed in such a way as to allow for workshops on a particular theme to be "reported back" just prior to the plenary of that theme. In other words, coordinators/organisers of workshops under the Access theme gave summaries of their discussions in a session immediately preceding the Access Plenary<sup>10</sup>.

This should therefore have provided workshop organisers with the opportunity to set the tone/basis of discussions during the Plenary. Unfortunately, time limitations and the number of people presenting summaries of their workshops means that the full depth of workshop discussions cannot be communicated and that key messages/recommendations are often lost in the multitude of presentations. It is felt that greater coordination between workshop coordinators/organisers prior to the reporting back session (for example via a brief meeting beforehand) would facilitate the communication of key messages/recommendations – particularly in the case of the Access theme where so many similarities in discussion and recommendations occurred.

One of the objectives of APC's study of the Access theme at the second IGF was to identify if and how recommendations made during the workshops were taken up by discussants in the Plenary and further by the Chairman of the IGF during the closing sessions. With respect to the "Regulatory Frameworks" workshop, discussions and recommendations were summarised immediately after the workshop and circulated to workshop partners and panellists for their verification and comments. The agreed recommendations were then clustered according to the broad areas discussed above (see page 3); these clustered (with examples to provide context and/or detailed explanation) were then presented to the Forum during the Reporting Back session.

As with other workshops, at least one of the panellists of the "Regulatory Frameworks" workshop was also a panellist or discussant at the Access Plenary. It was therefore **possible** for the key messages/recommendations of the workshops to be reflected in the discussions of the plenary. However, it is the moderator of the plenary that sets the framework/agenda of discussions during the plenary and unless s/he has been briefed on the key issues and converged opinions of the workshops it would be impossible for this individual to draw on workshop outputs and extend the discussions emanating from them.

The moderator for the Access Plenary (Richard Sambrook) asked that the discussions of the panel be framed in light of the following two considerations: (i) the characteristics of the next billion people to be connected to the Internet - "How do they differ from those who are already connected -including who they are and what is needed in order to bring them online?; and (ii) issues that arise when a demand-side perspective is adopted as opposed to the more common, 'traditional' supply-side perspective.

Fortunately, the framework proposed by the moderator was a good fit to the discussions that had taken place earlier in the workshops. It should be recalled that these workshops – in particular that on local access challenges called for a review of the ways in which access issues are articulated and ICT policy is formulated. Issues that typically arise when a supply-side

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<sup>9</sup> Please refer to the IGF timetable/schedule at [http://www.intgovforum.org/Rio\\_Schedule\\_final.html](http://www.intgovforum.org/Rio_Schedule_final.html)

<sup>10</sup> Transcripts of the reporting back and plenary sessions for the access theme can be found on the IGF website [http://www.intgovforum.org/Rio\\_Meeting/IGF2-Access-13NOV07.txt](http://www.intgovforum.org/Rio_Meeting/IGF2-Access-13NOV07.txt)  
[http://www.intgovforum.org/rio\\_reports/rio\\_reports.html](http://www.intgovforum.org/rio_reports/rio_reports.html)

perspective is adopted include those relating to regulation, law, policy, competition, capacity building etc. Whilst demand-side perspectives bring to the fore issues of cost/affordability, ease of use, relevance of content, access for the elderly and those with disabilities, questions of language, and the crucial link between access and development.

In addition to the framework proposed by the moderator, the discussions and direction of the plenary is also influenced/determined by the willingness of panellists and discussants to stick to the framework in making their contributions and to be guided by its boundaries. Again, in the case of the Access Plenary, this was largely the case and may be indicative of the maturity that has been achieved in understanding the challenges of access.

The recommendations made during the plenary largely echoed (and in some cases clarified) those presented/voiced during the workshops. A key example is the call for coherence of policy regarding competition in the telecom sector. As Mike Jensen stated, for affordable and universal access to be achieved, the competitive environment (especially regulatory and policy regimes) in developing nations need to be further developed/improved upon. In particular the "long-term monopolies, duopolies or cosy cartels" that exist in the key areas of international gateways, backhaul/terrestrial networks and mobile sector need to be addressed. Other regulatory and policy areas that need to be looked into are interconnection, number portability, and the expansion and/or increase in diversity of organisations that are able to deliver/provide telecom services – including community operators, municipal authorities, cooperatives etc<sup>11</sup>.

The last point in the statement above is key; access markets need to be opened up to diverse service providers/operators, especially in rural areas and this may require that incentives and concessions be made to promote their participation. Whilst the private sector welcomes calls for the promotion of competitive models, their level of commitment to the participation in more diverse organisations via collaborative models is as yet unclear. However experience shows that although markets have been known to 'work'; they have (and do) on occasion 'fail'. There is therefore no contradiction in calling for the full implementation of competitive models whilst at the same time encouraging and facilitating the establishment of collaborative ones. As highlighted by Anita Gurumurthy, when it comes to providing access to poor communities: "the most meaningful ICT models ... are not just about creating demand loops for individual users to pay, but models that address systemic and institutional change through ICTs". This is similar to Valerie D'Costa request for greater understanding and articulation of "what the critical Internet use issues<sup>12</sup> are in underserved communities" as a way of better understanding the relevance of telecoms and ICT to development, and in initiating access solutions that better serve these communities.

This brings up the debate about/discussions on the communications as a public good and the developmental impact/relevance of ICTs. Gurumurthy suggested that Telecoms/ICTs be embedded within social development initiatives and in these circumstances be delivered as a public good; emphasising that a "public goods approach to ICT" does not negate the need and relevance of market-orientated approaches to Internet access; rather each approach has its own area of application.

As highlighted elsewhere in this paper, several calls were made for advancing the development

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<sup>11</sup> Jensen's succinct prescriptions for achieving the goal of affordable universal broadband include:

- More competition and innovation in the Internet and telecom sector, with effective regulation
- Much more backbone fibre, national and international, with effective regulation of non-discriminatory access to the bandwidth by operators and service providers
- More effort to build demand, especially by national governments to build useful local applications
- Improved availability of electric power
- Better indicators for measuring progress

<sup>12</sup> Examples of these include how such use substitutes for a two or three day journey to the nearest town. How it can help a citizen better engage more effectively with a local or their municipal authority. How it can help a small business to expand its market reach, or its distribution network. How it can help new entertainment and information possibilities open up to those citizens.

dimensions of ICTs and ICT regulation. Calls were also made to integrate access infrastructure initiatives with other basic needs – especially for "communities at the margins". During the Access Plenary some panellists made specific requests: Sylvia Cadena suggested that communication during emergencies and disasters should be provided as a public good (and be considered more important than any economic interest); and Mike Jensen extended the public goods concept to the deployment of international and national fibre optic network. Suggesting that backhaul networks be viewed as a public good (in much the same way as roads are) and that in this respect their deployment be coordinated with other infrastructure projects – such as new road, rail, electricity, gas pipelines etc. Furthermore he proffered the position that "...development finance for these types of infrastructure projects should be conditional on including fibre in their deployment."

The framework proposed by the moderator of the Access Plenary perhaps brought to the fore issues of language and local content more than occurred during the workshops. Adopting a supply-side perspective and recognising the needs of users – especially those in rural communities, highlights the importance of translating and promoting local languages and local customs as this facilitates the use of communications networks by these communities. An appreciation of the culture and incorporation of local languages also helps to promote and develop the skills of the members of the community in using the networks and in adapting them to their needs; which can significantly improve the sustainability and continuity of the network.

The point raised above also emphasises that highlighted in the workshops on the process of formulating ICT policy. In developing countries; rural areas can no longer be treated as the exception: "when in truth [in cited specific instance] more than 70% of the population lives in rural areas" (Cadena). This discussion of the recommendations from the Access Plenary at the second IGF should therefore probably conclude by iterating the call for reform/modification of regulation and policy that would facilitate the implementation of access solutions in these areas.