

GLOBAL INFORMATION SOCIETY WATCH **2018**

Community Networks



ASSOCIATION FOR PROGRESSIVE COMMUNICATIONS (APC)
AND INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH CENTRE (IDRC)

Global Information Society Watch

2018



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This edition of GISWatch came into being alongside a brand new baby boy. Welcome to the world, Ronan Diga!

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Preface

Chat Garcia Ramilo
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, APC

This year's Global Information Society Watch (GISWatch) focuses on community networks. Community networks are "communication networks built, owned, operated, and used by citizens in a participatory and open manner."¹ This is a starting point. As the 43 country reports gathered here show, in practice, "community networks" can be hybrid systems, with different political and practical objectives. The country reports cover a diverse range of countries such as Georgia, Nepal, South Africa, India, Argentina, Honduras, Portugal, Germany and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Key ideas like participatory governance systems and community ownership and skills transfer, and the "do-it-yourself" spirit that drives community networks, give community networks across the globe a shared purpose and implementation methodology.

The country reports are framed by eight thematic reports. Some – for example, those by Steve Song, Mike Jensen and Nic Bidwell – draw on research conducted under the two-year "Community access networks: How to connect the next billion to the Internet" project implemented by the Association for Progressive Communications (APC) and Rhizomatica in collaboration with the

Internet Society and funded by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC). The thematic reports deal with issues critical to the emerging global community network movement of which the Community access networks project is a part. The themes include the need for telecommunication regulation institutions to take into account the steep reductions in costs that wireless technologies have effected and to redesign regulation to further community networks; the need to increase awareness of "community stories" and the power structures embedded in those stories; the need to foster the transformation of local social structures and power relationships to enhance the agency of women and give them real power; the need to increase meaningful local content that is conducive to social change; and the need to explore ways for community networks to achieve financial sustainability.

This GISWatch edition was supported by a group of experts whose contributions, as members of the advisory committee, are gratefully acknowledged. We are pleased to present this edition to raise awareness of the tremendous potential of community networks to help achieve universal access.

¹ See the introduction to this year's edition of GISWatch, "The rise and fall and rise of community networks".

Community Networks

THE 43 COUNTRY REPORTS included in this year's Global Information Society Watch (GISWatch) capture the different experiences and approaches in setting up community networks across the globe. They show that key ideas, such as participatory governance systems, community ownership and skills transfer, as well as the "do-it-yourself" spirit that drives community networks in many different contexts, are characteristics that lend them a shared purpose and approach.

The country reports are framed by eight thematic reports that deal with critical issues such as the regulatory framework necessary to support community networks, sustainability, local content, feminist infrastructure and community networks, and the importance of being aware of "community stories" and the power structures embedded in those stories.

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2018 Report

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