



Connecting Indigenous & Mountain Communities

Guwahati | Shillong | North East Region of India
November 24-25, 2023



About

CNX (Community Network Exchange) is a platform to explore alternate technologies for the internet and to move towards more decentralised and local solutions to global connectivity. This networking platform has been conducting annual conferences which are conducted in an offline set-up for the initial three years followed by an online format for the past three years.

Vision

To constantly empower communities, especially marginalised and information dark communities throughout Asia Pacific Region, with the power of information and know-how of community networks.

Objectives

Knowledge & Network

To organise annual CNX Summits to engage community network providers and stakeholders across different global societies to share their learnings, experiences and technological innovations on one platform; to create a consortium of community network providers and social funders for the purpose of sustainability in Asia-Pacific; to provide support to community network gatherings and hands-on work meetings at regional level for advocating and addressing regional policy issues and challenges; to share recommendations from the summit at other international forums such as Internet Governance Forum (IGF) and World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), among others.

Policy & Advocacy

To discuss sustainable business models around community networks with sound understanding of social and economic challenges; to identify various issues such as spectrum, technological, regulatory, content and localisation, among others, that need to be addressed in the national and international framework of policies; to develop a series of policy briefing papers that focus on regulatory issues that need to be addressed; to make community networks visible to policy makers so that they can be considered as an actor within the telecommunications ecosystem.

Training & Exchange

To develop a comprehensive and self-contained guide to strengthen grassroots expertise by training community members in basic wireless technology; to enable individuals (barefoot engineers) to not only to run and manage these networks but to also further transfer their skills to others creating a multiplier effect; to organise country-level exchange programmes for learners and barefoot wireless network engineers who can visit and engage in other country networks and learn from their experiences.

The Beginning

- Community Network Xchange (CNX) Asia Pacific was **first organised in 2017**, focusing on bringing together community network practitioners and enthusiasts of community-driven Internet connectivity to exchange ideas and serve as catalysts for the grassroots connectivity ecosystem and movement.
- CNX organised by the Digital Empowerment Foundation (DEF) and Internet Society (ISOC) in partnership with the Asia-Pacific Institute for Broadcasting Development (AIBD), APNIC Foundation, Association for Progressive Communications (APC), Alliance for Affordable Internet (A4AI), A-CODE, Action for Hope, Media and Information Literacy Expert Network (MILEN), Broadband India Forum (BIF), World Association for Christian Communication (WACC) and of course several communities of practices.

6th CNX 2022



Making use of the positive outcome of online discussions that witnessed more participation and fruitful outcomes, CNX-2022 was planned to become Phygital- follow the online format of congregating the people but also showing the locally active networks and also holding community level meetings parallel and simultaneously with the online events. The conventional offline conferences lean towards more “talking” while the online-offline mode allows the participants to have a better outlook on the practical aspects and challenges of the field. Hence, 6th CNX 2022 discussions were designed to take the approach of “Walk the Talk” by exploring 10-12 community networks (CNs) across India, Indonesia, Kyrgyzstan, Malawi, Malaysia, Nepal and Costa Rica. The discussions were spread across 5 meetings held on the 29th of each month from June to October, 2022.

CNX 2022 were organised by New Delhi, India, based Digital Empowerment Foundation (DEF) and Internet Society (ISOC) in partnership with the Asia-Pacific Institute for Broadcasting Development (AIBD), APNIC Foundation, Association for Progressive Communications (APC), Alliance for Affordable Internet (A4AI), Art & Collectives for Digital Empowerment (A-CODE), Action for Hope, Media and Information Literacy Expert Network (MILEN), Broadband India Forum (BIF), and of course several COPs (Communities of Practices). CNX APAC 2022 took place over the five series from June 2022 to October 2022, with 31 panelists from the Asia-Pacific region joining us online.

The Larger Issue Discussed

In 2021, the second wave of the pandemic intensified the fundamental issue of inaccessibility. Much of the pandemic's management, such as vaccinations and movement tracking, depended on being digitally connected. As a result, the vulnerability of billions of people escalated. Today, nearly half the world still has no Internet access. The majority of the people who lack access are in developing and least developed countries. For them specifically, the need to be online is even more urgent. In recent years, community networks have played a significant role in connecting and empowering rural and underprivileged populations and providing access to information, education, healthcare, and much more.

6th CNX 2022: Key Takeaways

- Connectivity is a base for achieving larger goals of community development, let it be agriculture, tourism, education or access to rightful services.
- Community networks (CN) can contribute significantly towards access to the internet, if they are able to overcome regulatory and funding barriers.
- The sustainability of community networks needs to be ensured from a financial perspective as well. One of the best models is to involve community members in funding so that their ownership also is assured.
- CNs need sustainable business model to run so that they serve the communities in the long run and develop self-evolving dynamics over the period of time.
- CN policy recommendations is to ensure easy access to build these networks in disaster-prone areas where the need for CN is critical and hence recognised.
- There cannot be a one-size-fits-all approach to community networks, which makes the different narratives from the ground very important in understanding local challenges, while still negotiating the need for some consistency in policy while scaling up the Community networks.
- **“Walk the Talk”** mode of discussion helps in understanding CN along with its challenges. Highly effective to have real-time examples which would make those at the other end of the spectrum understand the essence of CN better and help in connecting initiatives from the government and the public sector.
- The community radio model can be a channel of learning and information dissemination because the broadcasting range is higher and voice-based, but integrating the internet into the community radio network can be in a way that can provide connectivity even in unconnected areas.
- Relevant stakeholders like NGOs, nonprofits, organisations, and SHGs have to come together strongly and translate the CN cases into a toolkit that can be used in communities elsewhere as well.
- There have to be more deliberations on the sustainability of community networks as it often relies on government and non-governmental funding. It is important to develop methods of community contributions so that the networks can scale up and cover more populations.

7th CNX 2023 – Asia Pacific

Connecting Indigenous and Mountain Communities

Focus: Last mile access, connectivity, services for the indigenous, tribal, and hilly & mountain communities.

Thematic Areas

- Addressing the Networking Divide in Hilly, Tribal, Indigenous and Mountain Communities
- Repositioning and Reinventing Community Network in Theory & Practice
- Community Network to Networking Unconnected Communities
- Promoting CN Variants - Community Network Cooperatives; Community Network Entrepreneurs; Community Network Building Organisations
- Community Networks in Emerging Connectivity Infrastructure Space;
- Spacing CNs within Telecom Policy, Regulations and Schemes;
- Promoting CNs - From Subsidy to incentivising;
- Community Networks in emerging technology space; innovations & solutions;
- Gender and Network: CNs by women;
- Telecom Service Providers / ISPs in CNs for the last mile.

Activities

Showcasing – the Internet Society BOLT Project in India; The Ziro Valley Network project; The AmraPari Riverine Project; The Brahmaputra Community Radio; CN cases from Africa, Pacific and Latin America Network Project and others.

Case Studies & Presentations

Showcasing examples of India and South Asia in tea garden and its indigenous; community being connected through a unique CN; Showcasing a CN connecting communities of Apatani tribes in Zero Valley in Arunachal Pradesh, India

Showcasing examples from Africa, Latin America and Pacific region.

Discussions & Deliberations

Showcasing how rural women entrepreneurs are using PM WANI Scheme as means to become last mile internet providers

Sharing research findings on how and what best could serve the North Eastern himalayan region of digitally excluded and how CN could be a solution

Videos, stories, exhibitions.

Country Participation

Bhutan
Bangladesh
Nepal
Malaysia
Indonesia
Sri Lanka
India
Latin America
Africa
Pacific Region

States Participation (India)

Maharashtra
Telangana
Arunachal Pradesh
Assam
Meghalaya
Rajasthan
Madhya Pradesh
West Bengal
More

Organisation Participation

Internet Society
Association for Progressive Communication
Broadband India Forum
APNIC
ISOC Kolkata
ISOC Delhi
ICIMOD
BNNRC
BRAC
others

Recognising Good Practices

7th CNX Declaration

8th CNX Announcement

CNX 2023: Founding Members

Osama Manzar, Founder & Director, Digital Empowerment Foundation, India
Rajnish D Singh, Vice President, Asia Pacific, Internet Society

PROGRAMME (TENTATIVE)

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Digital Inclusion and Equity

Digital Divide: Ongoing challenges related to the digital divide, where underserved communities lack access to the internet and digital services. Explore how community networks can bridge this gap.

Social and Economic Impact: Improving last-mile access can positively impact education, healthcare, employment, and overall socio-economic development in marginalized communities

Community Network & Empowerment

Local Ownership: The benefits of community-driven network initiatives that empower local residents to take ownership and control over their connectivity infrastructure.

Skill Development: How community networks can create opportunities for skill development in networking, technology management, and digital literacy

Sustainability & Scalability

Financial Models: Sustainable funding models for community networks, considering options such as grants, donations, micro-financing, and revenue-sharing arrangements.

Technical Scalability: How to design community networks that can grow and adapt to increasing demand without compromising quality of service.

Technology & Infrastructure

Mesh Networking: Mesh networking technologies that allow devices to interconnect directly, enabling cost-effective and decentralized network deployments.

Low-Cost Hardware: The availability and development of affordable hardware solutions suitable for community network deployments.

Regulatory & Policy Frameworks

Licensing and Spectrum Allocation: Regulatory challenges related to acquiring licenses and allocating spectrum for community networks, especially in regions with limited available frequencies.

Net Neutrality: Concerns about net neutrality and how community networks can ensure equitable access to online content and services.

Government Support & Recognition

Policy Advocacy: Exploring ways in which community networks can advocate for supportive policies and regulations at local, regional, and national levels.

Recognition of Contributions: How governments and regulatory bodies can recognize the value of community networks in enhancing digital inclusion.

Cultural & Linguistic Diversity

Public-Private Partnerships: Examining the role of collaborations between community organizations, local governments, and private sector entities in facilitating network deployment and management.

Knowledge Sharing: Discussing the importance of sharing best practices and lessons learned among different community network initiatives.

Privacy & Security

Data Protection: Addressing concerns about data privacy and security within community networks, especially when dealing with sensitive user information.

Cybersecurity: Exploring strategies to mitigate potential cybersecurity risks and protect community networks from attacks.



Case studies



Presentations



Discussions



Experience Sharing

7th CNX 2023 hosted alongside the 8th eNorth East 2023 in North East Region of India

<https://enortheast.in/>

Organised by



Partners



scan to know more

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