

## Kenya ICT Action Network (KICTANet)

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### **CWG-Internet: Online Open Consultation (December 2020)**

The [ITU Council Working Group on International Internet-related Public Policy Issues \(CWG-Internet\)](#) is holding an open consultation (online and physical) on the following topic:

#### **Expanding Internet Connectivity**

CWG-Internet invites all stakeholders to submit contributions on international internet-related public policy issues relating to expanding internet connectivity, focusing on the following questions:

#### **1. What are the challenges and opportunities for expanding Internet connectivity, particularly to remote and under-served areas?**

- Community networks require infrastructure deployment and service provision licenses to operate in the telecommunications sector. In the majority of African countries, license categories exist only for national operators and are costly.
- Operators' licensing, mobile broadband spectrum assignments are also done nationally in exchange for high fees. This exclusive and broad regulatory framework results in inefficient use of spectrum, where either assigned spectrum is not used in rural and remote areas, or regulators do not find enough companies interested in paying those fees and have an unassigned mobile broadband spectrum.
- The majority of community networks in Africa exist in low-income areas making it challenging to get access to financing and the human capacity required to deploy, operate, and maintain these networks. The initial start-up financing for most of the CNs has been through private grant funding programs.

## **2. What are the roles of governments and non-government actors in overcoming these challenges?**

### Role of Government

- Tax incentives.
- Mandating infrastructure sharing (enabling communities to access government infrastructure or infrastructure of established operators).
- Expansion of license-exempt frequencies.
- Adoption of dynamic spectrum licensing and spectrum sharing.
- Streamlining licensing procedures to make them accessible to communities.
- Governments to mandate funding for universal network access, and allocate a portion of that funding for the growth of community networks.

### Role of non-government actors

- Capacity-building at the community level to ensure communities have the knowledge to implement community networks.
- A structured dialogue between all stakeholders to find ways community networks can be supported and be more widespread in underserved areas. For example, KICTANet has worked with Community Networks for several years, and in 2020, it produced the first Policy brief on Community Networks in the region to act as a dialog document to policymakers. Community networks have been shown to be very effective in achieving affordable access to the internet.

## **3. How can small/community/non-profit operators help in promoting the increase of Internet connectivity?**

- Social purpose networks such as community networks offer a holistic approach to digital inclusion enabling contextualizing meaningful connectivity with local realities.
- Communities have a wealth of knowledge that remains untapped, these communities are able to mobilize resources and information enabling them to deploy and operate connectivity infrastructure at lower costs.
- Beyond access community networks create a platform that promotes building local capacities, creation, and distribution of locally relevant content.
- Community networks contribute to local economies, workforce development, and fostering social connections.