Connecting communities across Africa to the internet

The fourth annual Community Networks Summit seeks to connect communities in Africa to the global internet.
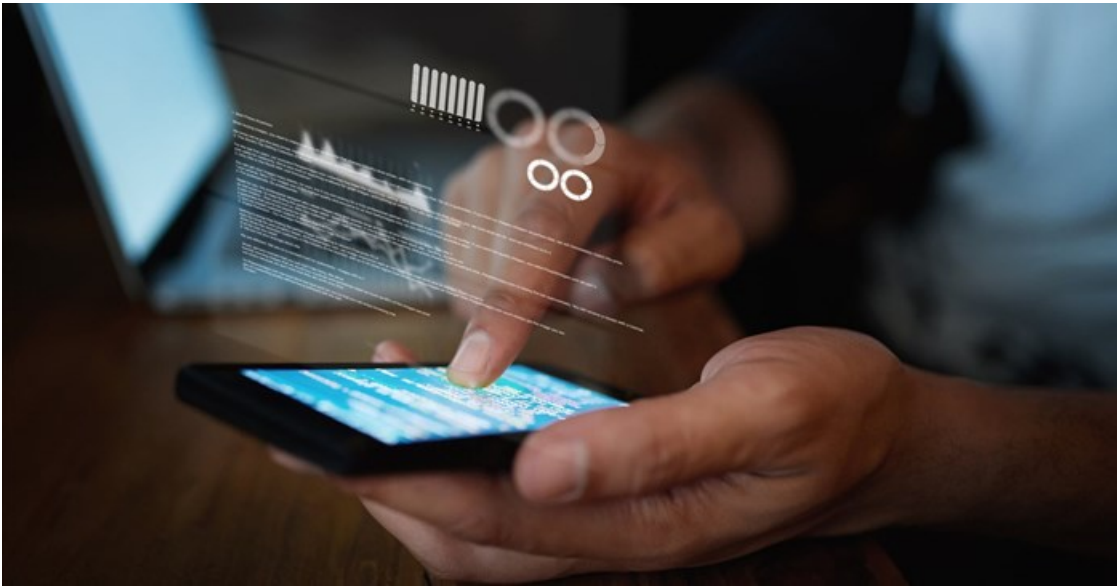

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Community Networks are "do-it-yourself" telecommunications networks built by local communities and are a way to get connectivity to underserved urban, remote and rural areas where commercial service providers may not find it viable.

The Internet Society and the Association for Progressive Communications (APC), in partnership with the University of Dodoma, hosted the Fourth Annual Community Networks Summit in Dodoma, Tanzania, 28 October – 2 November 2019.

In Tanzania, there are 43.7 million voice telephone subscriptions and only 23.1 million Internet users. This gap is also reflected in internet access in rural and urban areas with 86% of rural dwellers unconnected compared to 44.6% in urban areas.

To help address the growing need for communication and broadband access in rural areas, the University of Dodoma and the Internet Society (ISOC) Tanzania Chapter collaborated to build a Community Network to bring internet access to Kondoa, a rural and underserved area in Dodoma region of Tanzania. The network connects educational institutions in Kondoa and provides fast internet access to community members around the host institutions.

"Internet has been a game changer to schools in Kondoa, teachers are able to access teaching and learning resources

which has raised the performance of students," says Jabhera Matogoro, assistant lecturer and PhD Student from the University of Dodoma. "The Kondoa Community Network which connects three schools and over 2000 students has taken learning to another level," he adds.

Community Networks are built and operated by the communities themselves. "In order to be resilient and achieve sustainability, members of the Community Network play a critical role in the building of the community network infrastructure. We help provide the training and know-how that is needed, but ultimately it's up to the communities to run the network themselves," explains Michuki Mwangi, senior development manager for Africa for the Internet Society.

The fourth annual Summit aims to promote the creation and growth of community networks, increase collaboration between community network operators in the region, and provide an opportunity for them to engage with other stakeholders including content providers, regulators and policy makers. Previous Summits have been held in South Africa and Kenya.

Critical to the success of Community Networks is access to licensing and spectrum. Policy makers and regulators play a key role in ensuring innovative approaches to making spectrum available. The University of Dodoma secured a two-year authorisation from the local regulator to use TV UHF spectrum in Kondoa. The results from the pilot indicated that television white space is the feasible solution to connect the unconnected population in rural Tanzania.

"Community Networks in the continent are thrilling in spite of enabling policy and regulatory environments, events like this one, and innovations such as the ones used by the Kondoa Community Network should make regulators and policy makers rethink the way they support to these type of connectivity models within their national frameworks," adds Carlos Rey Moreno, Local Access Policy and Regulation Coordinator for the Association for Progressive Communications.