

Community networks newsletter: Building collective knowledge together

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Paulo Lima. Photo by Dario Celestino

By APC News

A common element in community network projects is the union of people from all walks of life and the synergy of their multiple knowledges to build new alternatives. Beyond addressing connectivity and digital inclusion, this movement is reclaiming information and communication technologies to improve people's well-being and ensure their rights.

In this edition, we celebrate the people and initiatives building collective knowledge together, such as the Community Network Seedbeds taking place in Argentina, and a series of manuals created from the collaboration among community network practitioners in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

Welcome to the 57th monthly round-up of developments impacting your local access networks and community-based initiatives.

We dedicate this edition to Paulo Lima, while [expressing our deep sorrow](#) for his premature passing on 16 April 2023. Paulo was a dear friend and ally who had a long history of connecting communities. In recent years, together with the Projeto Saúde e Alegria team, he was on the forefront of setting up the implementation of the Amazon Community Networks School that brought together seven Indigenous and traditional communities of the region. He will be

very much missed by a community that learned and improved a lot, thanks to him.

Community networks news and stories

- What are the Community Network Seedbeds awarded by the 2022 Connecting the Unconnected Challenge? Why it is important to expand this collective learning experience happening in Argentina? This article by J sica Giudice (AlterMundi) answers these questions and more. [Read more](#).
- The online dialogue "[Building a community network learning repository together](#)" brought people from various countries together to discuss ways to treasure and share knowledge among community networks experiences. The event marked the launch of an [online learning repository](#) as well as [five manuals](#) created from the collaboration among community networks builders and supporters in Africa, Asia and Latin America.
- "Let's capture a collective dream for the territories in which we find ourselves." The Latin American meeting of the Local Networks initiative revolved around this idea, identifying challenges and opportunities for community networks in the region. [Read more](#). [Available in Spanish.]
- Seeding change: This article shows an inspiring pilot project from Digital Empowerment Foundation to tackle the problem of e-waste in two communities in India. [Read more](#).
- How did the Esp rito Santinho community created the first fibre community network in Brazil? Find out more in [this piece](#) from Internet Society.

Gendered experiences

- The International Telecommunications Union-managed PRIDA project announced a fully funded training on spectrum management for young women in Africa. Spectrum management is the process of regulating the use of radio frequencies. [Read more](#).
- Equal opportunities are not enough: This piece made by AFCHIX within the framework of International Women's Day highlights that addressing social norms is critical to get women online. [Read more](#).

Enabling policy and regulation

- Community networks in Colombia made advances in claiming supportive policy and regulation in the country. In April, the Ministry of Information and Communication Technologies of Colombia published a draft decree including community networks and opened it to comments. Meanwhile, a proposal was discussed, approved and filled in the Congress for the recognition of community networks in the National Development Plan. Read more [here](#) and [here](#). [Available in Spanish.]

- In Brazil, the National Telecommunications Agency (ANATEL) announced the constitution of a working group on community networks. Among the agency and government members and others, it was made clear that four representatives of community networks should be part of the group. [Read more](#). [Available in Portuguese.]
- How can governments, international organisations, private companies and civil society groups work together to close the digital divide while improving access skills and meaningful connectivity, leaving no one behind? State officials and stakeholders reflected on that vital question during the [Global Digital Compact Deep-Dive](#) on digital inclusion and connectivity on 27 March 2023. Find out more on the interventions from [Colnodo](#) and [Derechos Digitales](#).
- A series of publications from KICTANet pointed out how capacity-building and discussion about spectrum are key to community network projects. The [first piece](#) introduces the topic, while other two focus on [telecoms regulation](#) and explain the [difference between spectrum licensing options](#).

Publications, research and toolkits

- Pedagogical manual for social exchanges: This manual is an invitation to motivate and strengthen local and circular economies based on the recognition of community processes, resources and needs. [Read more](#). [Also available in [Spanish](#).]
- How to use Pirania: Lessons from real use in community networks. This manual was produced based on the real-life experience of installing the Pirania Captive Portal in a community network in Vale do Ribeira, Brazil. [Read more](#). [Also available in [Portuguese](#) and [Spanish](#).]
- Here comes the sun: This manual focuses on sharing knowledge on using solar power to generate electricity as a key step to produce a more democratic supply and a more inclusive infrastructure. [Read more](#). [Also available in [Spanish](#) and [French](#).]
- Bamboo for community networks. The purpose of this manual is to support communities and entrepreneurs to overcome environmental and technical constraints through easy-to-adopt management practices in planting bamboo. This material can be an affordable alternative for community networks infrastructure. [Read more](#).
- Community networks meet community currencies. This manual is about building bottom-up infrastructure, specifically an intervention to bootstrap a community inclusion currency (voucher), and a local community network, content and services platform. [Read more](#).

- All these manuals are now populating the community networks' learning repository, a collective platform to both consult and share materials with others. [Read more](#).

Events

- IGF 2023 calls for session proposals: Stakeholders are invited to apply to organise various sessions at this year's Internet Governance Forum before the deadline on 19 May 2023. [Read more](#).
- The 2023 Wireless Battle Mesh will happen from 8 to 14 May in Calafou, Spain. The convention features a variety of talks and workshops on technical and political issues related to topics such as mesh networking and wireless community networks. [Read more](#).
- Under the theme "Mtandao Mashinani", meaning "Connectivity in underserved areas", a series of virtual webinars will be held to promote the growth of community networks in Kenya in May and June 2023. Those interested can [subscribe to find out more](#).

Funding opportunities

- The Women in the Digital Economy Fund has called for applications to support speeding up digital gender equity. The deadline is 26 May. [Read more](#).
- If your organisation is working to promote digital skills in education and income-generating opportunities, an Internet Society funding opportunity is opening from 1 to 31 May. [Read more](#).

Why do we need complementary approaches to access, including community-led initiatives?

Steve Song provides an answer to this question using a simple metaphor: if you try to fill a glass Mason jar with roughly fist-sized stones, you can fit a few of them in there but not very many. The jar looks full of stones, but if you fill it with water, the liquid will easily take up more than 50% of the volume.

"Twenty-five years of privatisation and liberalisation in the telecom sector have revealed the reality that most countries cannot sustain more than 3 or 4 national operators. Yet the problem of connecting almost half of the world that remains without affordable access to the internet persists. On the face of it, it does seem unlikely that the business model of a one-size-fits-all national operator may not be optimal for service delivery in challenging markets and regions," he explains.

[Find out more!](#)

This newsletter is part of the Local Networks (LocNet) initiative, an initiative led by APC in partnership with Rhizomatica that aims to directly support the work of community networks and to contribute to an enabling ecosystem for the emergence and growth of

community networks and other community-based connectivity activities in developing countries. You can read more about the initiative [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#).

Previous editions of this newsletter are available [here](#).

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One more thing! If you have comments about the newsletter or information relevant to the topic that you would like us to include in the next edition, please share it with us [here](#).