# GLOBAL INFORMATION SOCIETY WATCH 2018

COMMUNITY NETWORKS
Available at www.giswatch.org/community-networks

Community networks defined as “communication networks that are built, owned, operated and used by citizens in a participatory and open manner.”

In practice, “community networks” can be hybrid systems, with different political and practical objectives.

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country reports

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thematic reports

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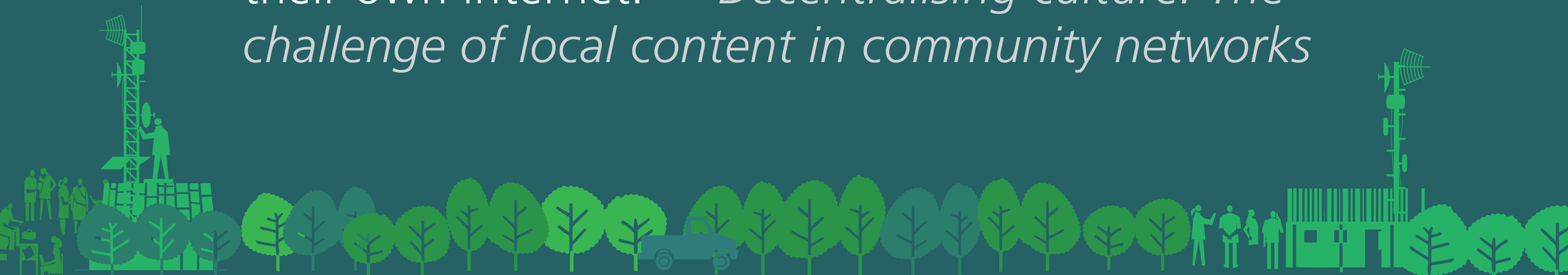
Zambia
Seychelles
Kyrgyzstan
Pakistan
India
Myanmar
Nepal
China
Indonesia
Malaysia
Philippines
Thailand
Australia

“Community networks should not be conceived as small or weak organisations; they can be constituted as large, sustainable and influential organisations that are in the hands of the people they provide services to.” - *Costa Rica*

“Our basic mode of operation is ‘do-ocracy’: members suggest actions and, if not vetoed by other members, they go ahead and try to fulfil them.” - *Greece*

“What we have to contribute as social actors has to go in the direction of developing tools that enable communities in their role as free, sovereign and empowered subjects to produce and share culture. In this way, conditions are created so that the right to co-create the internet can be engaged, appropriated and inhabited by all the people who coexist in the great global network, creating, in all dimensions, their own internet.” - *Decentralising culture: The challenge of local content in community networks*



“Community networks are recognised as a catalyst for development, especially for women, who have fewer opportunities to access digital tools compared to men. But when the opportunity is given to them, we find that they manage our wireless networks effectively and efficiently – just how they manage their homes.” - *India*

“Community networks are like entrepreneurial start-ups: it takes resilience, learning from failures, and efficient management of available resources to build one. It is an iterative process, as technology and community needs keep evolving. They also need institutional support to survive.” *- Kenya*

“In Mexico, community networks have been processes that sought to address the digital divide that exists in rural or indigenous communities. That the solutions have come from the communities themselves has ensured the appropriation of technology by communities, and the inclusion of their values and ways of life in the solutions.” - *Mexico*

“Freedom is not the same as getting things for free. Sometimes people do not value services that they do not have to pay for. To empower people to have responsible behaviour when using the community networks and maintaining them in a sustainable way, we asked for contributions, not only of money, but also their time, whether through physical labour or other forms of volunteer engagement.” - *Myanmar*

“Inclusion is what will drive the adoption and growth of the network. If more people benefit from it, more people will want to keep it up and running, and more people will be interested in keeping it growing.”

*- Namibia*

“Let go of the idea of building a network for five communities all at once – maybe that will happen, but it's not the first step. Start with a single link, and that small, practical step will teach you things that enable you to grow the network later.” - *Ecuador*

“Sometimes users would fight amongst themselves. Some users downloaded videos and games that affected connectivity for everyone. Sometimes people wanted to charge their neighbours for connecting to their router. We have had to offer counselling to resolve these disputes.” - *Myanmar*

“The main obstacle that made us lose all our hope was the requirement to register the use of frequencies. We thought that we could use certain frequencies, as long as nobody else was using them. When we found out that we needed to register them and that it takes half a year just to go through the application, we were devastated...” - *Kyrgyzstan*

“Any potential political champions one could find would always want public credit and visibility for their personal brand in exchange for their support, sometimes demanding control and trying to dictate how the project would work.” *- Portugal*

“Ninux.org […] was the initiative of a computer science engineering student, Nino Ciurleo. Nino had grown technically in the ham radio community as well as the Italian hacker scene and was influenced by the punk do-it-yourself attitude.” - *Italy*

“We didn’t bridge any digital divide, we didn’t fill a development void nor provide critical information where it could not otherwise be reached. We experimented with a new idea...” - *Australia*

“It is a model of slow co-creation with and through the community, and its network has been cared for and used.”
- *South Africa*

“A clear understanding of the importance of the 'bottom-up' approach is crucial. Each community also has to understand the importance of volunteer activities and how this can contribute to the development of their community or region.” *- Georgia*

“By connecting over 300 refugee shelters and reception centres, Freifunk [underscores] the significance of its hacker practices for digital infrastructure politics in Germany.”
- *Germany*

“The most important aspect of sustainability is not whether or not a community network can generate revenue, or how it can survive through contributions from the community. The most important aspect is that the complex structure that guarantees the right to information and communication must be sustainable.”

- *Argentina*

“Orthodox state-sponsored development often inadvertently damages the cultures and lifestyles of indigenous peoples, as well as plundering their natural resources, despoiling their environment and sometimes moving them into new forms of poverty where none previously existed. Opposition to such initiatives can be misinterpreted as opposition to development...” - *Malaysia and Indonesia (on Borneo)*

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