



Community Network Newsletter

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POINT OF VIEW

Community networks provide communities with a wealth of benefits. The use of community networks strengthen community life, improves the democratic process, ensure residents' access to the "information superhighway", and aids local economic development.

National Advisory Committee Holds Physical Meeting.

The meeting was the fourth in line of series of meeting that the committee has previously.

The physical meeting held in Kaduna with over 19 attendees where issues about Community Schools, topics and other issues were also discussed.

CITAD SENSITIZES LAILEYI COMMUNITY ON NETWORK CONNECTION BASED ON LOCAL ENTITY AND THE MARCH OF BARRICADING GAP OF NETWORK CONNECTION

On its continued efforts to link communities with network and have access to affordable network, the Centre for Information Technology

ready been implemented in other communities in the country; Jama'are and Itas in Bauchi, Dakwa in Abuja all are among the communities

include service render by community network, regulatory conditions of project among others. Also, the Technical Officer of CITAD dis-



and Development (CITAD) had on the 9th of July, 2021 sensitized Laileyi community on community network connection based. Network problem is becoming rampant in Nigeria, in accessing services such as voice call, text message and Internet access as a result of lack of community networks in Nigeria. The network community project program has al-

that are benefiting from the program. This sensitization program was held at Laileyi Community. The program started with definition of community network and its benefits to the communities; these are some of the major contents that were discussed during the event by Suhail Sani Abdullahi, Technical Officer of CITAD. Other topics that were discussed in-

cussed on the linkages of the communities to open access to network. Religious leaders, youth representatives and traditional rulers were among the participants that attended the sensitization. At the end participants asked questions and offered contributions.

CITAD SENSITIZE STAKEHOLDERS IN TUNGAN-ASHERE ON COMMUNITY NETWORKS

The exercise is part of activities to be implemented under the organization's community networks project aimed at linking communities for easy access to affordable networks. Humanity Watch had reported a similar sensitization campaign embarked upon by CITAD in other parts of the FCT.

The campaign which is part of a larger activity to support Community-Led Approaches to Addressing the Digital Divide Nigeria, a project being coordinated globally by the Association for Progressive Communications (APC) with support from the United Kingdom's Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office (FCDO) through their Digital Access Programme (DAP) was attended by stakeholders in the community.

APC is a global network of civil society organisations that promotes the empowerment of citizens through ICT, and advocates access to a free and open Internet, in respect of human rights and freedoms in the online space.

Muhammad Yahya Bello, Technical Officer, for CITAD, Abuja at the workshop said the sensitization was organised to enlighten and educate the people about community networks which aimed at bridging the digital divide between the rural and urban communities, its benefits, importance and the procedures involved in the project implementation. "Most of the time we see that rural communities are not connected so they don't even know what is going on in the world. They are always left behind in the technologies, so a group of individuals and organisations like CITAD, APC, and the United Kingdom's Foreign Common Wealth are trying to bridge these gaps in these communities.

"The community networks will strengthen the networks in the beneficiary communities to give them unhindered access to electronic learning, E-commerce. Even in the political aspect, it will help them to be well informed to make the right choice of their leaders, hold their leaders accountable and ensure transparency and good governance," he said.

Bello said to ensure the sustainability of the network facilities when installed, stakeholders have been enlightened on the sustainability plan that would be put in place such as how to generate funds for maintenance of the centre.

While responding to the gesture, the Chief of Tungan-Ashere, Sani Yakubu, thanked CITAD and partners for the project.

He said with the ICT centre deployed to the community, the community has achieved a lot of things.

He said when the community networks are implemented, the community would achieve even more.

Yakubu said the workshop had enlightened them on how to leverage the intervention to improve their lives and wellbeing. According to him, following the deployment of the ICT centre, the community had been in direct talk with the daughter of former Nigeria President, Ibrahim Babangida who has provided improved cassava stem for farmers in the community for economic empowerment.

"We are also communicating directly with her and she has promised to assist us with processing machine for processing gari and she also promised to link us with buyers overseers for us to export cassava from our farms," he explained further.

Speaking on behalf of women in the community, Safiya Yakubu, said she's very happy that her community was considered for the intervention.

The Women Leader noted that the networks connection project will be of great benefit to women in the community as they will be able to market their farm products on the internet. On his part, Bashir Musa, Community Representative also expressed joy over the enlistment of his community for the network connection project.

While describing the project as a very good development, he said the project will benefit them in many ways especially in the area of social media engagement. "With this, we can advertise and create awareness to people and the government about our farm produce and what is going on in our community. It will also enable us to make contact with other neighbouring communities," he said.

He said the ICT centre deployed to the community previously by CITAD with support from Actionaid Nigeria had been of great benefit to people in his community because before the intervention they had no knowledge of computers.

"We are very grateful because before now, making a call or using the internet facility was very difficult because of lack of strong network in our community.

"CITAD has impacted greatly on our community in many ways to give us a good life and we are very grateful and appreciate all their assistance," Musa stated.

The network community project program has already been implemented in other communities in the country; Jama'are and Itas in Bauchi, Dakwa and Pasepa in Abuja all are among the communities that are benefit-

CITAD LAUDS DONATION OF LAND FOR COMMUNITY NETWORK IN BAUCHI

The Centre for Information Technology and Development (CITAD) has commended donation of land by the Chairman of Itas/Gadau Local Government Area of Bauchi state, for building of structures needed for proposed community network.

In a statement on Wednesday, the Executive Director, CITAD, Y. Z. Yaú said the use of community networks is part of the many strategies aimed at addressing connectivity gaps and bridging the digital divide across the country.

He explained that Community networks are telecommunications infrastructure deployed and operated by local groups to meet their own communication needs and also a communications infrastructure, designed and erected to be managed for use by local communities.

According to him, this communication needs can be voice, data, etc. and can be point of convergence for community to come together to address their common community problems.

Yau noted that in Nigeria, Community Networks is seen as a recent development.

He therefore revealed that to stimulate the evolution and growth of the community networks in the country, CITAD with support from the Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) of the UK through the Association for Progressive Communications (APC) is implementing a project

aimed at enhancing the capacity of communities to design, deploy and manage community networks to meet their communication needs while at the same time engaging regulators and other relevant policy makers to enact policies and provide support that could enhance the flourishing of community networks in the country.

He also said that this project has pilot sites in seven communities across three states namely Jamaare and Itas in Bauchi State, Kafanchan in Kaduna State and four sites in rural community of Federal Capacity Territory, Abuja (Tungen Ashere, Dakwa Community, Pasepa and Leleyi Gwari.)

He therefore commended the donation of land by the Chairman of the Itas/Gadau Local Government Area of Bauchi state to support the building of structures needed for proposed community network in the area.

He said, "While all the organizations in these seven sites are being trained to enhance their capacity to undertake the roll out of community networks, we are happy to announce the donation of a lot of land in Itas by the Chairman of the Itas/Gadau Local Government of Bauchi state, Honorable Abdullahi Muhammad Maigari (Yayan Gida) for the building to accommodate the structures needed for the proposed community network in the community. "CITAD welcomes this donation as demonstration of the community of the leadership of the community to support their citizens to create the necessary conditions for their digital self-inclusion which will contribute in facilitating access to digital business and opportunity as well as increase access to education.

"We thank the chairman for this exemplary gesture and assured him that CITAD will ensure the proper use of the land to power its digital programmes for the community."

He urged on the Nigeria Communications Commission (NCC) to fast track its process of policy development for community networks in the country "CITAD like to use this opportunity to call on the Nigeria Communications Commission (NCC) to fast track its process of policy development for community networks in the country

The CSO group also called on "The Galaxy Backbone which has declared its support and commitment to promoting community networks to demonstrate this support by reaching out to communities that are already working to roll out such in their communities.

It urged the USPF and NITAD to extend their digital inclusion programmes to community networks initiatives so that these efforts could become more sustainable.

CITAD further called on other Political leaders in Itas-Gadau Local Government and in other communities, especially the Members, State House of Assembly and House Representative members to as a matter of their constituents' interest support efforts to build the community networks in their communities to address the digital marginalization of their people,

"Philanthropists and business individuals in the local governments to assist in the building of the community network centers," he also stated.

Yau encouraged other local government chairmen in the country, especially where the intervention is taking place to emulate the good gesture of Itas-Gadau

COMMUNIQUE ISSUED AT THE END OF A ONE-DAY CIVIL SOCIETY CONSULTATIVE MEETING ON COMMUNITY NETWORKS CONVENED BY CENTRE FOR INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY AND DEVELOPMENT (CITAD)

The Centre for Information technology and development (CITAD) as part of its project on Supporting Community-led Approaches to Addressing the Digital Divide in Nigeria which is part of larger project on community networks coordinated globally by the Association for Progressive Communications (APC) with support from the United Kingdom's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) through its Digital Access Programme (DAP), convened a once day consultative meeting of Civil Society Organizations on Community Networks. Community networks is a telecommunications infrastructure deployed and operated by a local group to meet their own communication needs and also a communications infrastructure, designed and erected to be managed for use by local communities. This communication needs can be voice, data, etc. and can be point of convergence for community to come together to address their common community problems.

The meeting, attended by over 40 CSOs from different parts of the country was held online using zoom on July 27 was meant to sensitize them on the importance of community networks as a tool for addressing the digital divide. Additionally, it was meant to explore the possibility of a joint advocacy for the government to develop a policy framework for the community networks, noting that at the present, the country does not have a policy for community networks t, a situation that has hampered their evolution and growth.

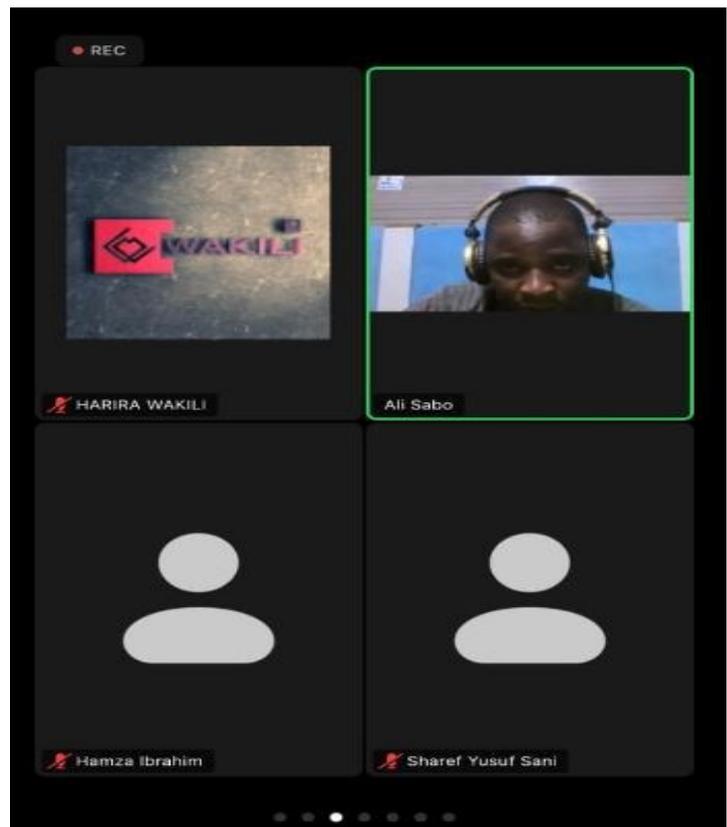
The meeting featured four presentations as follows:

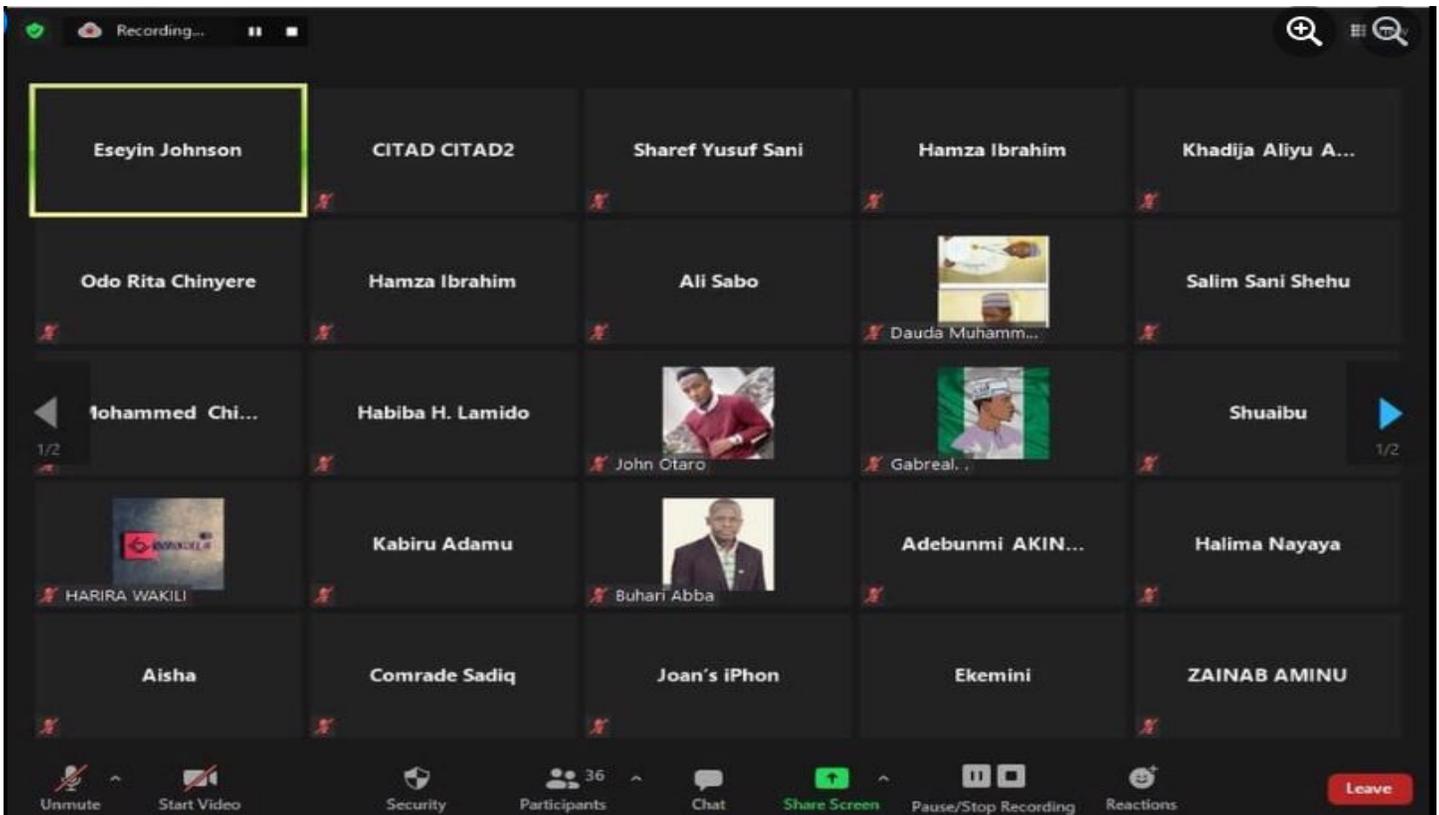
1. Concept and Benefits of Community Network
2. Community Network in Practice: Experience from of Fauntsuam Foundation
3. Community Networks in Africa
4. The Policy Vacuum with Respect to Community Networks in Nigeria

Observations

Participants observed that:

1. There is no policy or regulation to recognize community networks as distinct operators with appropriate conditions for their operations
2. That at the moment there are over 100 unserved or underserved communities who are digitally excluded in the country
3. That although there are over 298,823,195 connected lines out of which 297,536,702 were said to be active in the country, only about 40% of these are connected to the internet, meaning that internet penetration in the country covers only about 40% of the population.
4. That most of the blind areas are in either hard to reach, rural communities or poor communities where affordability is a problem, hence the market mechanism is not able to provide connectivity to them since it would be unprofitable.
5. That although the Nigerian Communication Commission is favourably disposed to midwifing the policy framework for community networks, there are still many challenges that have to be addressed for community networks to flourish and be sustainable in the country





5. Efforts should be made in expanding high speed network and network infrastructure to underserved rural communities

6. Community network will bring opportunities for direct access to education and health care for rural residents

Recommendations

Participants, believing that community networks have immense benefits in addition to providing veritable tool for bridging the digital divide In the country, recommend that:

1. The national regulator should hasten the processes of articulating a National Community Networks Policy for the country
2. That NCC should formal regulations allowing the use of TVWS technologies to address access challenges have yet to be issued
3. That community networks should be categorized as a different layer of operators and be given license exempt
4. That community networks should be considered as start –ups and be eligible to national support

systems for start ups

6. Government through USPF, NCC and NITDA should facilitate the setting up of community networks centres at rural and hard to reach areas

7. That government should support an initiative that offers free or subsidized spectrums to local communities

Resolution

The participants unanimously resolved to form a CSO Coalition on Community Networks with the following objectives:

1. Popularize community networks as catalyst tool for addressing digital divide and promoting digital inclusion in the country
2. Sensitizing their community members about the importance and benefit of community network
3. To conduct sustained advocacy for the national telecommunications regulator to come up with a national policy framework for community networks in the country
4. Support effort by all stakeholders to address the multifarious dimensions of the digital divide in Nigeria.



World Map Showing Countries involve in community network project

Photo: APC

NIGERIA
SHOWING SOME CITIES



0 100 200 Km
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Nigeria Map Showing community Networks Area.

Photo: CITAD

CITAD TO ESTABLISH COMMUNITY NETWORKS IN UNDER-SERVED COMMUNITIES IN NIGERIA

In its bid to bridge the gap of internet accessibility and connectivity, an organization known as Centre for Information Technology and Development, CITAD, has disclosed the need for setting up of community networks in unserved and underserved communities in Nigeria in order to promote digital inclusion in the country.

The Coordinator, School of Community Network, Haruna Adamu Hadejia disclosed this while briefing newsmen during Experience Sharing Meeting with Community Networks Micro Organizations in the state on the project supported by Association for Progressive Communications, APC through United Kingdom's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, FCDO.

Hadejia said the community network centers piloted by in the seven communities comprises of two centers in Jama'are and Itas-Gadau in rural part of Bauchi State, one centre in Kafanchan, Kaduna State and four others in Federal Capital Territory, FCT were the pilot phase of the community network. According to him, "This is part of a global project to catalyze the flourishing of community networks as a means of connecting the unconnected.

"The objectives of the project are segmented at three levels as follows: To provide Business management and technical capacity development programmes to communities and their organizations for local people to start and maintain efficient networks. "Similarly, it is to address both accessibility and affordability gaps since most underserved communities are poor and unprofitable to the market, we need to develop low cost access models that are viable, sustainable and affordable to the poor. "Equally, it will improve awareness of local, marginalised communities with regard to both potential dividends and harms generated by digital technologies through greater access to information on opportunities and risks hinders the adoption of inclusive digital access for development in many underserved communities and provision of digital literacy skills and knowledge to manage the above challenges.

"The project focuses on selected locally managed community networks in three regions, Africa, Asia and Latin America, to strengthen their impact, reach and sustainability.

"This group of community networks will form the core of a peer community that can connect and broaden support for community-based connectivity initiatives, nationally, regionally and internationally.

"The project will achieve its objectives through peer learning and exchange, awareness raising, technical assistance, capacity building for the development of scalable, innovative and sustainable networks, policy and regulatory advocacy and community mobilisation.

"However, CITAD with support from APC in 2020 implement a project on supporting Community Led-Approach to Addressing the Digital Divide in Nigeria by establishing community networks centers across the country which aim is to work with the existing centers and also build their capacity to support policy implications. "The micro organizations can be divided into three. One category composed of those that are already experimenting with community networks. These are the Fantsuam Foundation, based in Kafanchan, a rural area of Kaduna State and the ISOC Community network which is located in Zaria, an academic and urban centre of Kaduna state. The second category are where there is no network but there is a community digital centres. These are: Zoboda Women Traders Co-operative Society the third category are those in which there is internet which is relatively poor. In all but six communities, affordability is low as these are rural poor communities," Hadejia stated.

A report by the Universal Service Provision Fund, USPF in 2019 identified 114 connectivity gaps in the country as either underserved and unserved hence the need for the community networks.

OVER 50% NIGERIANS UNCONNECTED TO INTERNET- CITAD

CITAD's observation is coming as the nation's telecommunication regulator, the Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC) begins to review its licensing processes and conditions after nearly 20 years. The Executive Director of the Centre, Mr Y. Z. Yau in a statement said the telecommunication sector is highly dynamic such that its regulatory framework has to be equally dynamic, to respond to changes in technological development. "At the beginning of this year, only about 43% of Nigerians were using the internet.

This means more than half of Nigerians are still unconnected, creating an unwanted digital divide in the country. "Since that review, a lot of major technological developments have occurred, making some of the provision obsolete and thrusting new issues that there hitherto not anticipate. "Among the technological progress for instance, we have moved from 2G through 3G and now heading for the deployment of 5G. We are witnessing the update of artificial intelligence and internet of all things (IoT) both of which are major users of bandwidth. "Within the period, internet has moved from a fringe luxury of the rich to an indispensable tool for all. One of the lessons that the COVID lockdown has taught the world is that the future is increasing dependent on online interactions.

This is why the United Nations has declared access to the internet a right that no one should be left behind," Yau stated. According to him, "Although Nigeria has made tremendous progress over the years, there are still many millions of people who are unconnected and are not using the internet. At the beginning of this year, only about 43% of Nigerians were using the internet. This means more than half of Nigerians are still unconnected, creating an unwanted digital divide in the country. "Cost and infrastructure of access rollout limitations are among the key factors for the persistence of the digital divide in the country.

Of course, there are other peculiarities such as the relatively poorer access to the internet by women and people living with disabilities. Infrastructure of access rollout is conditioned by regulations and policy provisions as well as licensing conditions. To accelerate that and lower the cost of access and use and expand affordability for the many, the NCC is called upon to embrace innovative licensing frameworks that could catalyse speedy roll out with cost crushing down. "One of the innovative approach is the inclusion of community networks as a special category of licenses, available to communities and non-profits to rollout community level networks that could provide access to internet for communities and provide sites for technical experimentation and promotion of digital literacy.

This is being used successfully in many countries globally, including in Africa in such countries as Kenya, South Africa Malawi, etc," CITAD further stressed. The Centre called on the NCC "to use the occasion of the review to mainstream community networks licenses within its licensing framework. We would also like to call on the regulator to review the Framework for the deployment of TV white space (TVWS) to enable its utilization for community networks," while also cautioning that "this review should not engage with the issues of licensing and regulating of over the top (OTT) platforms, which is being clamored for by some within government as part of the fallout of the misunderstanding between the government and Twitter.

Y.z Yau

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