

## Submission # 78

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**How would you define the stakeholder community or communities to which you belong?**

Academic

**Are there any suggestions that you wish to make in respect of the proposed themes, questions and indicators which are included in the framework as it stands?**

A theme that has not found its way into the current draft of the Internet Universality Indicators is the effect of the between-islands digital divide that is caused by a slow onset of access to the Internet. This is definitely a topic in SIDS where some islands are more remote than others. Existing economic, social and cultural relations between islands within a group of islands can be disrupted by an unequal onset of access to the Internet by some islands but not others. Currently, as new islands in the Pacific are being connected to the Internet through undersea cables (examples: islands in Tonga, islands in Palau) others are not. While residents of central islands gain access to a great number of opportunities, including digital business prospects, others are left behind. Given the cost of investment, remote islands have little chance to ever being connected (or at least not at the same marginal cost per unit of bandwidth). While business consultancies and think tanks have emphasized the opportunities for SIDS to become digital service hubs, the traditional economic relations of trading between islands are at risk to becoming obsolete. Hence increasing the pressure in remote islands to leave for more central islands, destroying the traditional cultural and social fabric. The unique challenge of unequal onset of Internet access may be unique in SIDS (because the barriers to expanding Internet access to remote islands are very high). From that perspective, measuring this between-islands digital divide is important in order to manage the situation. Subsidizing Internet access for remote islands within SIDS maybe important as to avoid a loss of economic sustainability of life in remote islands and with it the social and cultural life in these places. Such indicators may be similarly important for places in other geographic situations where remoteness is an important issue

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to consider (e.g. communities in the Amazon, mountainous communities or in general extremely

rural

places all over the world).

What kind of indicator could measure this? In my opinion, Theme B "Connectivity and Usage" is the appropriate section to include considerations of this kind. B.1 shows the challenge I describe for SIDS:

the indicator "Percentage of population covered by fixed broadband networks, including bandwidth tiers" is generally useful for countries that are geographically and economically more homogenous, like the Singapore or Italy. However, what does the indicator measurement of "30% of the population

of state XY is covered by fixed broadband networks, including bandwidth tiers" mean for a small island developing state? It could very well mean that 80% of the population of the main island is covered but 0% of the rest of the country, bringing the total to e.g. 40%. This does not help to manage

the challenge of between-islands digital divide as explained above. Hence, an additional data point in

the form of an indicator needs to be provided in order to allow governments, advocates and international organizations to effectively support populations of SIDS to make the most of Internet access, rather than witness great economic disruptions because of it.

Specifically, such indicator could be an assessment of the geographic inequality of access much like

indicator D.1 "Are there significant differences in broadband access between urban and rural areas?"

but with a specific focus on inter-island differences. Urban and rural as concepts do not necessarily help in this respect because remote islands are at a significantly different situation because Internet access is even more difficult to afford in these places, without the construction of undersea cables.

To

develop and include meaningful indicators for this is a tough thing to ask. In my knowledge, such measures do not exist yet. Nonetheless, as far as Internet access in SIDS (especially those with many

islands) is concerned, this may be a very important avenue to explore. As will become evident below,

data sources in SIDS are sometimes tricky to access, particularly with regard to Internet access and policies.

**Are there any suggestions that you wish to make in respect of the proposed themes, questions and indicators which are included in the framework as it stands?**

As explained above, I would like to ask you to consider adding to D.1 a measure of central and remote/outer islands for SIDS as to increase the usefulness of the urban/rural distinction for Small Island Developing States.

**What sources and means of verification would you recommend, from your experience, in relation to any of the questions and indicators that have been proposed?**

For Small Island Developing States, the most difficult issue with regard to the Internet Universality Indicators is to access good and up-to-date data sources. We are working with some of the Pacific

SIDS in order to get good data on Internet access and bandwidth for projects that the Island Ark Project Foundation Inc. conducts in collaboration with ICHCAP (UNESCO C2C Center under 2003 ICH

Convention). Our experience is that even the International Telecommunications Union does not have

(or share) up-to-date information from some countries concerning such basic measures like "Proportion of households with Internet access at home, aggregate and disaggregated" (under

indicator B.3), "Volume of mobile broadband Internet traffic in exabytes (including and excluding video streaming), per citizen, per Internet user, and trend" (under indicator B.5; here the tourist-heavy SIDS would have a problem to disaggregate "citizen" and "Internet user") and also "Geographical coverage in urban and rural areas, by level of bandwidth" (under indicator D.1). What are avenues to explore to gain sustainable access to these kinds of data? Obviously, Internet World Stats has a lot of data and links to data available regarding SIDS including dedicated sections for the Pacific (<https://www.internetworldstats.com/pacific.htm>). For additional data collection and information on what is already being collected my best guess would be to start at the regional level,

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i.e. meetings of national telecommunications providers. The Pacific Communications Council that holds a meeting every year could be a good starting point for the SIDS in the Pacific region (<https://council.ptc.org>). A list of members that includes telecommunications providers from the Pacific can also be found on their website (<https://council.ptc.org/PTC/member-listing.aspx>). In general, with some effort data could be collected from SIDS telecommunications providers or authorities directly by sending out (digital) questionnaires. Working with the Delegation of Palau to UNESCO, I think that SIDS delegations could also be helpful in collecting such data and/or in establishing contact with national authorities. In my opinion, what is paramount is to establish an overview of which of the proposed indicators' measures exist and can be readily accessed. My intuition is that larger SIDS are able to provide information more easily and in a timely manner, while smaller states may struggle to provide the information at this point. Only if a full assessment of how to gain access to the data in small island states is conducted, can the 39 SIDS be meaningfully included and progress on Internet Universality be made.