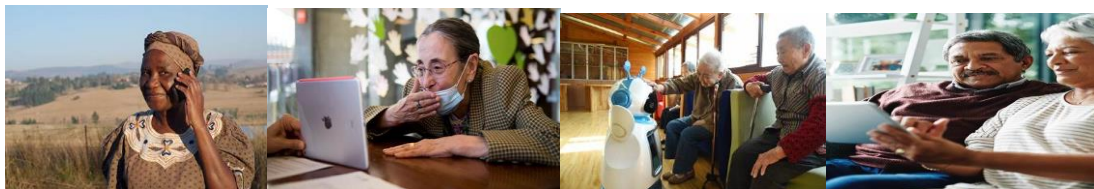# Network for the Digital Inclusion of Older Persons
Roundtable #1 on Broadband Access
June 22, 2022

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The "*Network for the Digital Inclusion of Older Persons*" represents a diverse group of stakeholders supporting the United Nation's Secretary-General's Roadmap for Digital Cooperation. It calls for the global community to work together to connect all people by the year 2030 by ensuring digital inclusion for all. Digital challenges affect the most vulnerable, including older populations. The immediate goals of this Network are to identify successful models, potential solutions, and recommendations addressing digital inclusion barriers for older persons. This can be accomplished through partnerships, technologies, metrics, programs, or policies. The Network will then share those solutions amongst Network members and to the United Nation's Office of the Secretary General's Envoy on Technology later this year.

The Broadband Access roundtable convened a group of 30 participants – representing multiple countries and constituencies – to share best practices, policy recommendations, and implementation strategies. This first of three roundtable events was held on June 22, 2022.

While the group agreed that access to technology has become a human right, many older people may lack access, and in some cases may not know why it would provide benefit. Awareness, affordability, and lack of training are known factors that may limit access. In addition, initiatives within and across countries may be overlapping, potentially slowing progress. Appropriate measurements must be developed and monitored as they are in other international initiatives. New approaches to engaging older persons must be tried that address language and gender barriers to access. Finally, public-private partnership approaches must be reviewed and possibly overhauled or augmented to boost impact.

Goals of the Three Roundtables

1. Collaborate on ideas to advance digital inclusion and overcome barriers.

2. Share successful initiatives, models, partnerships, technologies and policies that are helping to address digital inclusion barriers, to present back to the United Nations Network-of-Networks.

3. Raise visibility for incorporating older persons into all digital equity efforts at the United Nations and beyond.

4. Disseminate opportunities, best practices, policy recommendations, and implementation strategies to member organizations.

5. Commence the "Network for the Digital Inclusion of Older Persons," as a member of the United Nations Network-of-Networks.

Broadband access for older persons -- a 'transition of demography'

Access to Technology is a Human Right. 60% of the world's population is online, but in less-developed countries, that may drop to only one in five. Even in developed countries like Germany or the United States (US), broadband is affordable and available nearly everywhere, but people aged 70 and older may be 'non-liners." 100 million Africans live outside of traditional mobile networks. And in the US, only 42% of older Americans lack 'wireline' access, generally viewed as more reliable than wireless. Reasons include lack of understanding of its usefulness in their lives, not feeling safe, or that they lack assistance to make the leap. And yet it is increasingly apparent all older persons will gain benefits from access to broadband access – including obtaining services, finding shared-interest peers and needed support, learning new skills, improving health and wellbeing over a longer lifespan, and gaining employment.

But if we build it, will they come? Will older adults be able to afford devices and access cost? Will they want to? And will they get the training needed to gain benefits of technology access? Consider that people lacking access in multiple countries may be overly represented by women of lower socioeconomic status. Country policies to expand broadband access to older persons vary and may be uncoordinated across government agencies. Expansion efforts lack a coherent framework for measurement of success. Broadband service providers may play inconsistent roles in expanding access, and technology companies that anticipate and depend on that expansion may

2

play a limited role in making it happen. Design of technology, both hardware and software applications, may not acknowledge the needs of older adults, who may struggle to learn to use them, and even give up.

Imagine an aging future with a connected world, across the globe. What are the roles of government and the private sector in building this more-connected society for older people? What are the policies and best practices that could accelerate progress towards digital inclusion of older persons? The UN adopted a Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2006. And today thousands of cities are in the WHO Age Friendly City network. These network best practices are beginning to incorporate technology access and usage, most notably to combat social isolation that worsened during the Covid-19 pandemic. Shared Value Africa Initiative is a business effort to improve business competitiveness and enhance quality of life in communities. It is time for **a Convention on the Rights of Older Persons,** tracking strategies and solutions that benefit that growing population**.** As with disabilities, this could play a role in overcoming barriers present in multiple countries today.

Solutions Presented by Roundtable Participants

Topic areas – Measurement/Policy, Training/Usability & Public/Private Partnerships

Measurement/policy: "*If you can't measure it, you can't achieve it"*

- **Adopt a framework for measurement that spans five dimensions.** Publicize tracking of progress, practices, and programs designed to expand access to broadband worldwide, as WHO does with Age Friendly practices. One of the Roundtable suggested frameworks included the following dimensions:
  - o **F** – Funding for expansion – from country or local governments or the private sector?
  - o **R** – Regulatory constraints preventing or enabling expansion within a geography
  - o **A** – Availability of broadband providers in a geography
  - o **P** – Profitability of expansion approaches, for providers, particularly in rural areas.
  - o **D** – Design – of devices, apps, websites, training

- **Utilize multiple metrics across** access, affordability, adoption in countries, not just one metric, particularly identifying the difference between access, and usage (which may lag availability of access). In some countries, affordability is

the number one issue – the higher the income, the more access to the Internet. In other countries, barriers may include digital readiness of groups of individuals. Measure digital readiness gaps, crafting population assessments possibly modeled on a [Pew research report about the use of tech tools to pursue learning online,](#) categorizing individuals from 'least ready' to 'most ready.'

- **Match financial incentives and programs connection to digital access.** This is needed in multiple countries -- promoting the role of the pandemic to increased access to technologies useful to combat it. However, lack of technology access limited its benefit. For example, in one country, a financial stipend was provided for older adults related to Covid– but the only channel it was delivered on was a mobile device, so the project failed. And in the US, vaccine signup of older adults at the start of the pandemic was only available to those who could register online.

- **Measure the connection between technology access and health equity**. For example, use of technology that could address or assist for chronic conditions like diabetes, heart disease, or dementia. [WHO identifies Social Determinants of Health](#) (SDH), but these do not include technology access that could help manage chronic conditions.

- **Measure and improve accessibility.** Improve communication capabilities that help overcome limits of older adults, like hearing, vision, mobility, speech impairment. There are direct correlations [between hearing limitations and cognitive ability](#), for example. And the [Web Accessibility Initiative](#) (focused on making the web accessible for people with disabilities) offers stories about specific, vision, hearing, and [cognitive limitations](#). W3C notes that that there are 1 billion people globally with disabilities and represent spending power of $1 trillion.

- **Consider language.** English is the [most spoken language globally](#) and in Africa, for example, it is the primary language. But many may only speak, not read it – a major barrier for online websites and broadband connection instructions, for example. Tech providers of broadband, devices, and software must communicate in the local language for local content and marketing.

Training/Usability: *"Overcome anxiety about learning"*

- **Initiatives must help overcome the stigma of learning something new**. Try devices in broadly accessed locations like libraries and/or restaurants – within the comfort zone of older individuals who may be there already. Create a 'digital brag book' for older adults. Use devices rejected by younger people, reducing screens down to what older adults want to brag about (Facebook,

pictures), then demonstrate in churches or 'where the people are', including libraries, community centers or restaurants.

- **People want to learn in order to play games and interact with grandchildren.** Interest in digital connectivity starts with connection to friends and family. Connecting to other resources (health, financial, etc.) will likely follow. Organizations hoping to expand access should create a 'digital brag book' for older adults by locating devices rejected by younger people, then adjust them to reduce screens down to what older adults want to brag about (Facebook, pictures), then demonstrate the Digital Brag Book to older adults.

- **Co-design new technology with the participation of older adults.** One example: Amazon has been involved with AARP for a number of years, likely resulting in several of the company's newer offerings targeting older adults.

- **Involve trusted institutions in expanding access.** Increasingly libraries and religious organizations are hosting tech seminars and training for older adults. This should be expanded to engage and include broadband and technology providers, perhaps as sponsors of discounts, low-price or even free devices.

- **Create individual lifelong learning accounts** – a free educational service (with points) that matches interests at any age, enabling older adults to acquire skills or knowledge that improve their quality of life.

- **Create a scalable digital navigator/ambassador role for older adults.** In Germany that might be in grocery stores; in the US, AARP is a partner of Lowe's to help older adults understand technology for aging in place.

- **Build a 'digital well'.** Create community access centers to deliver the usage and adoption resources they might need. A well symbolizes a place where people come and congregate to relieve thirst. It is a metaphor for what the world needs in every community to enable digital access for older adults.

- **Identify a strategy to overcome ageism among tech and service providers.** Providers may value and focus on younger consumers over older consumers – particularly notable in device/app design or setup instructions for new technology. Instead, recommend co-design of processes, documentation and training with and for older users. For example, a typical interaction of older people with young call center staffers can be filled with baffling terminology and instructions, for example: 'Go reboot the router' when the caller does not know what a router is. One option could be to provide a terminology guide for new users (Wi-Fi, computer, tablet, phone) to mitigate their fear of asking.

- **Find ways to leverage skills of older persons to train others.** Note successes with one-on-one training on digital literacy, using older women to train their peers. Or consider the example in China, where women have learned how to use a [QR code to transact business](#).

- **Mirror tech literacy programs that focus on school aged children** but offer them for older adults – [Comcast Internet Essentials](#) or OATS-provided training materials for low-income older adults, [especially to expand Internet access](#).

- **Closing the gender gap has been a priority at the UN.** For example, public Wi-Fi places may intimidate women, fearful of surveillance. Combine that concern with concerns of aging – and that may further limit online usage. 24% of women in Germany are 65+, 28% in Japan. There is a [digital gender gap in Japan](#).

Public/Private Partnerships: *"Fund centrally, implement locally"*

- **Local organizations must sustain projects beyond government funding.** Partnerships between non-profits, government agencies, and companies could be the method for funding more access and deployment of devices and training. The World Bank focuses on broadband expansion around the world, tracking the expansion of fiber and most recently funding $140 million to expand [access in Nepal](#).

- **National organizations strive to help older adults with wellness, independence.** The [Veterans Administration in the US](#) has various initiatives to expand [broadband access to veterans](#) with a special [focus on telehealth](#). And the [Administration for Community Living](#) (ACL) in the US provides information to assist older adults in remaining in their communities versus institutions, with particular focus on those with disabilities.

- **Models for public-private collaboration exist and should be promoted.** Research and identify example frameworks of successful public/private partnerships, promoting and widely communicating best practices. One example to review is the [Alliance for an Affordable Internet](#): With global sponsors such as Google, Amazon, Cisco, Ericsson, Intel and Huawei, among many others, efforts are underway to expand low-cost access to the Internet in rural and low-income regions. Efforts include a rural broadband framework and a goal to keep to the cost of broadband to 2% of income or less by 2026. Increasingly possible within a few years -- countries that lack high speed Internet may partner with private companies like SpaceX. This may help older adults gain access to high-speed Internet even if they lack other broadband alternatives. The cost may have to be subsidized within individual countries.

Next Steps

Two additional Network Roundtables are scheduled: Inclusive & Accessible Design on July 13th, and Digital Skills in September. A synthesized report of recommendations will be provided back to the United Nation's Office of the Secretary General's Envoy on Technology later this year containing a broad-based library of solutions across technology, policy, partnerships, programs, research and measurements. In 2023, we will broaden our focus, as part of the Network-of-Networks, to look at intersectionalities and areas of opportunity that arise from them. Examples might be technology, health, and gender or trust, safety and age (children).

Roundtable Participants List

- **Tom Kamber (moderator);** OATS from AARP; Executive Director
- **Susanne Wein (panelist)**; German Government / Federal Ministry of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth; Head of division, "Digitalization and Education for Senior Citizens"
- **Yeong-Ran Park (panelist)**; International Society for Gerontechnology; Vice President
- **Ed Hudson (panelist)**; Stimson Center; Associate
- **Nicola Palmarini (panelist)**; UK's National Innovation Centre for Ageing; Director
- **Michael Phillips**; AARP; Director, Technology Strategy & Partnerships
- **Peter Rundlet**; AARP International; Vice President, International Affairs
- **Erica Dhar**; AARP International; Director, Global Alliances
- **Majaella Ruden**; AARP International; Project Manager
- **Laurie Orlov**; Aging and Health Technology Watch; Founder
- **Maiko Nakagaki**; Alliance for Affordable Internet (A4AI); Senior Strategic Partnerships Manager
- **Susan Dieglman**; AT&T; Director Public Policy
- **David Baxter**; Baxter International Development; International Development Consultant
- **Nicol Turner-Lee**; Brookings Institution; Fellow, Center for Technology Innovation
- **Stephen Eyre**; Calix Partner Community; Vice President
- **Trinity Thorpe-Lubneuski**; Comcast; Executive Director, Internet Essentials
- **Magrini Paola**; Enel Group; Diversity Specialist
- **Kai Leichsenring**; European Centre for Social Welfare Policy and Research; Executive Director
- **Luis Miguel Gutierrez Robledo**; Government of Mexico; Founder and Director General, National Institute of Geriatric Medicine
- **Carl Taylor**; Humana Regional; Vice President, Provider Experience
- **Lydia Carroon**; Microsoft; Manager, Microsoft Airband Initiative
- **Ryan Palmer**; Microsoft; Global Digital Equity Strategist
- **June A. Clare Nyakahuma**; Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development; Economist-Macroeconomic Policy, Uganda
- **Tiekie Barnard**; Shared Value Africa Initiative; CEO & Founder
- **Yu Ping Chan**; United Nations; Tech Envoy's Office
- **Anna Polomska**; United Nations, International Telecommunications Union; Broadband Commission
- **Larra Clark**; University of Alabama; Deputy Director for Public Policy
- **Kelly Cronin**; US Government / Administration for Community Living (ACL); Deputy Administrator, Innovation and Partnerships
- **Caroline Van Dullemen**; VU Amsterdam; University lecturer & Founder of WorldGranny
- **Nicholas Sewe**; World Benchmarking Alliance; Engagement Manager

Resources and Links Noted during the Roundtable

[Alliance for an Affordable Internet](#)
[Bridging the Digital Gender Divide: Include, Upskill, Innovate (OECD)](#)
[Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#)
[Digital Gender Gap Policy Brief - Japan](#)
[Empower Africa](#)
[Hearing Loss and Cognitive Impairment Study 2021 (Japan)](#)
[OATS Senior Planet from AARP](#)
[Pew Research Digital Readiness Gaps (2016)](#)
[UN Digital Inclusion Brief](#)
[United Nations Network-of-Networks](#).
[UN Roadmap for Digital Cooperation](#)
[UN Secretary-General Appoints Envoy on Technology](#)
[WHO Age Friendly World – Best Practices, Communication and Information](#)
[WHO Social Determinants of Health](#)
[Web Accessibility Initiative](#)
[World Bank: Connecting for Inclusion, Broadband Access for All](#)

Report Prepared by:

 Aging and Health Technology Watch

Industry Market Trends, Research & Analysis