What is a People Centered Approach and Why It Matters?

Moderator Mei Lin Fung, Co-Chair, People Centered Internet

The world produces 328.77 terabytes of data daily. This information can be used to achieve the SDGs and shape a positive digital future IF the data is accessible as a global good and permissioned by those who produce it. This session will outline what it means to take a people centered approach to data collection and use, illustrate why this change now matters, and discuss current examples in health service delivery, financial service development, national digital transformation efforts, and more on how this can be implemented in practice so that policymakers and scientists can work collaboratively to harness the available information today to shape the future we all want tomorrow.

The initial event on this topic took place as part of the event of the UN Science Summit Sessions on "Key Challenges and Objectives for Digital Cooperation, Governance and Regulation" (Link to recording). The 9th edition of the Science Summit around the 78th United Nations General Assembly (SSUNGA78) took place from 12-29 September 2023. The People Centered Internet (PCI) organized nine sessions in conjunction with the International Science Council from Sept 20-22 to discuss the future of digital in achieving the SDGs. The sessions took a people centered approach; this means to discuss how scientific and digital collaboration can only be advanced through human feedback loops. The People Centered Internet sessions explored the parameters of this approach focusing on specific use cases where this is needed to achieve the SDGs and discussing the recommended enabling policy, regulatory, and financial environments, that are required to support genuinely global scientific collaborations across continents, nations, and themes. Speakers from each panel summarized the most important results in a stocktaking (Link).

Summary of Keynote Speech

Prepared by Christine Asjoma, Convenor of the Panel Series "Key Challenges and Objectives for Digital Cooperation, Governance and Regulation"

Digital connectivity holds immense transformative power. The potential of the Internet is to connect people worldwide and enable them to participate in the global policy-making process. The Internet can promote collective care and public spirit.

Mei Lin Fung talked about her family's will to stick together as an important influencing factor for her to proclaim and design collective digital cooperation. In this respect, we all can learn much from the sense of community in populous countries such as India and China. Mei Lin Fung experienced the dramatic economic transformation in Singapore and four decades of digital revolution in Silicon Valley.

People can achieve great things when they work together and use all their skills collectively. On the 50th anniversary of the Internet, Mei Lin Fung called for reflection on the next 50 years and advocated a future where everyone plays a role in shaping a world that benefits future generations. We now have a choice between a future dictated by a powerful few and one in which everyone can actively participate in shaping a better world.