



# 2020-2023 STRATEGIC PLAN



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. INTRODUCTION	3
II. PROCESS	5
III. HISTORICAL OVERVIEW	6
IV. SUMMARY OF CURRENT AND EXPECTED CONTEXT	8
V. THEORY OF CHANGE/OUR POLITICAL ASSUMPTIONS AND BELIEFS	10
VI. OUR VISION	12
VII. OUR MISSION	12
VIII. OUR VALUES	13
IX. OUTCOME AREAS AND IMPACT OBJECTIVES	14

# I. INTRODUCTION

The Association for Progressive Communications (APC) is a membership-based network of organisations and activists, founded in 1990, to empower individuals, organisations and social movements to use information and communications technologies (ICTs) to build strategic communities to contribute to equitable human development, social justice, participatory political processes and environmental sustainability. APC's mission, formulated 30 years ago, has been the starting point of APC's strategic priorities and plans.

In the consultations to develop APC's strategic plan for 2020-2023, APC members, staff and partners affirmed the continuing relevance of this mission. At the same time, we realise the need to refocus APC's vision and mission to leverage our network's strength to contribute to transforming the systems of oppression and inequality that are being perpetuated and deepened by the ways in which digital technologies and spaces are being used, deployed, developed and governed.

For this strategic period, APC's focus is to *challenge discrimination, structural inequality and power structures by working to decolonise the internet, digital technologies and spaces to create a more just and sustainable world.*

This new strategic plan was developed as part of long-term reflection and visioning discussions within the APC network as it approaches its 30th year in 2020. Regional member consultations were held in 2018 imagining what the APC network has to be and what the network should be doing up to 2030 to fulfil the realisation of its vision. In September 2020, APC is due to convene its global triennial member meeting to continue the discussion of our network's strategic direction, including our politics, priorities, structure, membership, partnerships and how we are positioned to remain relevant, effective and resilient in the long term. On this occasion, we will bring together the wider networks and movements that APC is part of, to co-create our 10-year vision.

In the last two comprehensive evaluations (conducted in 2015 and 2018) of the impact of APC's work, the experience, expertise and credibility of the people who make up the APC network and the organisational culture of feminist values, commitment to human rights, belief in collaboration and respect and care that APC brings to its relationship in the APC community was singled out as APC's greatest strength. We add this learning to APC's history and re-affirm our identity as:

**A diverse and grounded community.** APC derives its strength from the experience, expertise and diversity of the people and organisations that make up the network. We are a global network of members and an organisation with staff skilled in internet policy and practice at the national, regional and global level. This identity puts APC in a position to effect high-level policy change while having a well-rooted understanding of what is happening on the ground, increasing our effectiveness across the board. Our experience in implementing national, regional and global initiatives allows us to develop innovative and community-based access and connectivity solutions, advocate for a rights-based approach to internet access and governance, build capacity in the women's movement, and work in partnership with a diverse range of people and institutions.

**People-centred technology innovators and practitioners.** Most of the original APC members emerged to provide "proto-internet" services for NGOs in the early 1990s, prior to the emergence of the commercial internet. Since then, and along with many recent APC members, we continue to work on developing and adopting internet and digital technologies – including working with local communities to develop alternative, people-centred pathways to connectivity – as well as providing training and support at a local level. APC has almost three decades of technical and policy experience and expertise and our approach to technology practice is based on an understanding of and vision for internet infrastructure and protocols that are locally appropriate, open and sustainable.

**Human rights and feminist network.** APC influences discourse and analysis of internet-related issues to integrate human rights norms and standards, gender justice and feminist values in internet and digital technology policy, governance, development and practice. Our focus is on a broad range of rights, from civil and political rights to economic, social, cultural and sexual rights as they relate to the internet and digital technologies. We support and work with activists, organisations and networks in the human rights, sexual rights, women’s rights and social justice movements.

**Policy change actors.** APC links national, regional and global policy and practice through collective analysis, capacity building and supporting sustained engagement in human rights and internet governance mechanisms with our members and strategic partners. We engage critically with governments and the private sector, and we hold them accountable for upholding human rights and promoting social justice. Our approach to policy advocacy makes use of collaborative implementation, with our members and partners, and

leverages linkages between national, regional and global levels. We engage critically and constructively with multistakeholder approaches to internet governance, making them more inclusive, accountable and rights and gender responsive.

**Bridge builder, connector and convener.** APC is a trusted interlocutor and bridge builder, linking different movements, organisations and interests at national, regional and global levels to support communities and initiatives that promote the role of the internet and digital technologies in contributing to equitable and sustainable development, social justice and participatory political processes. We are uniquely located within the digital rights, feminist and women’s rights movements. We play a vital role in bringing together people and organisations who have different perspectives and experiences from around the world at key moments to work in regional and global policy spaces. We facilitate collaborative work that is deeply informed by grassroots challenges and achievements that foster relationships and trust within networks.

## DEFINITIONS

- A. When we refer to “APC” we are referring to members (individuals and organisations) and staff that make up the network.<sup>1</sup>
- B. When we refer to the “APC network” we are also referring to (A) and to networks we convene and facilitate and partners we work with closely through joint projects, campaigns and other activities.<sup>2,3</sup>
- C. When we refer to the “APC community” we are referring to (A) and (B) but in a broader sense. We are including people, networks (informal or otherwise) and organisations – friends, allies and partners – who consider themselves to be closely connected to APC, but not necessarily in a formal relationship with APC.<sup>4</sup>
- D. When we refer to “APC the organisation”, we are referring to the formal and legal “infrastructure” related to the incorporation of APC as a not-for-profit international organisation with a formal staff and governance structure, registered offices, bank accounts, lawyers and auditors.
- E. In other cases, we refer to “staff”, “members” and the “board” explicitly.

1. For example: “APC has been committed to the advancement of environmental sustainability since its inception” and “The Fourth World Conference on Women was a hugely significant process for APC.”

2. For example: “During its first decade, the APC network was instrumental in working with partners to build communication network infrastructure in the global South” and “The [APC] network focused on building and strengthening communities’ strategic use of the internet.”

3. For example, the Take Back the Tech network of campaigners, the EROTICS network, the Global Information Society Watch authors and the African Declaration Coalition.

4. For example: “...the mid-term evaluation exercise where we invited members of the APC community – members, partners, political allies, donors and staff – to participate in the exercise” and “The APC community, which includes – but also extends – our own network of members, is the most important resource we have to achieve the transformations we are seeking.”

## II. PROCESS

The 2020-2023 strategic plan is the result of parallel and iterative evaluation and strategic direction visioning processes that began in May 2018. Our goal with the overall strategic planning process was to provide multiple opportunities for APC community members to provide insight and feedback and shape our new strategic plan.

The first process was an external evaluation of the outcomes, impacts and lessons learned to date of APC's implementation of its 2016-2019 strategic plan. A total of 141 APC community members provided feedback for the evaluation process, representing 60% of the total possible number of APC stakeholders during this evaluation period and including members, partners, political allies, donors and staff.

The second process was a series of iterative, strategic direction focus groups that took place with members and staff. The first set of consultations focused on identifying contextual trends and opportunities in the current and expected environment that people felt were critical for APC to position itself to respond to or leverage. Focus groups took place from July to September 2018 with the APC Board of Directors, APC staff and at regional member meetings that took place in Argentina, Thailand, Macedonia and Ghana.

Using the results from the evaluation and the strategic direction focus groups, APC members were provided with another opportunity to provide feedback into the 2020-2023 strategic planning process via a second set of seven virtual (4) and in-person (3) strategic direction consultations.

The focus of these consultations was to collectively reflect on the findings, themes and trends in all the data collected and begin to discuss and debate what the APC 2020-2023 priorities should be and why.

Following these consultations, 35 APC members (24) and staff (11) met for a two-day strategic planning retreat in Tunis in June 2019 to debate and confirm APC's priority areas using all the data collected to date. Outputs from this meeting were used by a small group of staff volunteers to build a draft skeleton of a strategic plan, including a first pass at defining outcome areas and their accompanying impact objectives for the 2020-2023 planning period. The results of this work were presented to all staff via two virtual convenings to test the validity of the thinking to date and identify gaps or flags that would need to be further unpacked in the next step of the process.

A sub-group of 18 APC management and staff, representative of all the current key result areas of focus, met again in August for a final three-day strategic planning retreat to finalise the draft strategic plan. This was then sent out for testing and validation to all staff via an online survey before it was finalised for presentation to APC's Council.

The proposed strategic plan was presented, discussed and approved with changes during the APC online member meeting from 2 to 24 September 2019. A total of 45 member organisations and nine individual members participated in the meeting.

# III. HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

APC was established by seven founding organisations in 1990 as an international membership-based network. Members, located in the social justice, labour, human rights, environment and peace movements, worked with pioneering NGOs and activists around the world to generate content, share information, network and mobilise emerging electronic information and communication networks. During this founding period, APC had a strong and extensive network of partners in the global South who were all similarly pioneers in building these networks in their countries.

During its first decade, APC was instrumental in working with partners to build communication network infrastructures in the global South and connecting NGOs and activists with one another nationally, regionally and internationally. During the 1990s, APC worked closely with the United Nations to provide electronic communications to many UN conferences including the 1992 Earth Summit (on Environment and Development), the World Conference on Human Rights (1993), the World Summit for Social Development (1995) and the Fourth World Conference on Women (1995).

The 1992 Earth Summit, and the binding commitments governments made, captured in “Agenda 21”, provided a platform for sustained and continued advocacy action by environmental activists nationally, regionally and internationally. APC supported the environmental movement, one of the first adopters of computer-mediated communications, during this time and worked closely with them in policy advocacy throughout the decade.

APC has been committed to the advancement of environmental sustainability since its inception and has incorporated an emphasis on environmental sustainability, in various ways, in its strategic plans since 2004. Even when APC has not had the resources to dedicate to working on environmental sustainability, it has remained part of APC’s overall sensibility and analysis.

The Fourth World Conference on Women was a hugely significant process for APC. Women working at APC member organisations, already focusing

on the nexus of ICTs and gender equality in their work, recognised the opportunity that the two-year preparatory process (implemented in all regions of the world) presented to build an international network of women’s organisations working together online, supported by APC’s Women’s Networking Support Programme (WNSP). The WNSP, founded in 1993, became a pioneering leader of women’s rights, gender equality and ICTs through the 1990s and 2000s and its work continues through ongoing cutting-edge leadership by the (renamed) Women’s Rights programme (WRP) to this day.

These early information and communication networks facilitated the widest possible access to information for participants, especially for grassroots NGOs,<sup>5</sup> and connected the environmental movement, development community and human rights and women’s movements worldwide.

During its second decade, APC shifted its collective emphasis from building connectivity solutions and facilitating access to the internet to working for a vision for *all people having easy and affordable access to a free and open internet to improve their lives and create a more just world*. The network focused on building and strengthening communities’ strategic use of the internet, advocating for “meaningful” access and monitoring and assessing critical areas that were shaping the development and evolution of the emergent ICT networks and the internet. APC critiqued the exclusion of the majority of people in developing countries and the concentration of ownership and control of ICTs<sup>6</sup> and raised the need for a human rights-based approach to be applied in the use, development and evolution of the internet.

At this time, the use of the internet by NGOs and activists to challenge power and structural inequality was not going unnoticed by states and private sector interests. The first instances of online human rights violations can be traced to the late

5. <https://www.apc.org/about/history/enabling-civil-society-policy-making>

6. This text is from APC’s input in 2000 to the UN’s High Level Panel on ICT for Development. This quote is included in “Involving civil society in the information society”, APC, 2003. [https://www.apc.org/sites/default/files/InvolvingCivilSociety\\_EN.pdf](https://www.apc.org/sites/default/files/InvolvingCivilSociety_EN.pdf)

1990s, and this was the beginning of APC's work to defend online human rights, outlined in APC's Internet Rights Charter, developed in 2000.<sup>7</sup>

APC actively adopted a human rights-based approach in its focus on people's right to participate in decisions that affect them and their access to rights; its focus on holding governments accountable for the promotion, protection, respect and enjoyment of human rights and holding companies accountable for respecting human rights; on discrimination and equality, on empowerment, and on people knowing and claiming their rights and having the capacity to do so. APC became recognised for integrating human rights, inclusive and accountable governance and gender equality in our work on ICTs for development.

During the 2000s, APC's work at national, regional and global levels incorporated significant policy advocacy strategies and campaigns built around the APC Internet Rights Charter. The World Social Forum(s), the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS)<sup>8</sup> and the subsequent Internet Governance Forum (IGF) were the primary policy processes APC engaged. APC was a critical convenor and facilitator of CSO networks during this period.

In the mid-2000s, the Women's Rights Programme initiated the advocacy to end online gender-based violence (GBV). This work was embodied in the strategic plan of the time, in policy advocacy, through the groundbreaking Take Back the Tech campaign and embedded in APC's evolving work to leverage the newly formed UN Human Rights Council (HRC) as a new policy space to advocate for the same recognition of human rights online as offline.

In its third decade, advocating for "internet rights" to be recognised as human rights was a central strategy of APC's work. Policy advocacy at the HRC, the IGF, WSIS forums and other spaces drew on the research, knowledge, experience and testimonies generated through a range of projects including Internet Rights Are Human Rights,

EROTICS (exploring and expanding the work of sexual rights and digital rights activists), Connect Your Rights and Take Back the Tech campaigns, Connecting Your Rights (advancing internet rights as a way to advance economic, social and cultural rights, ESCRs), IMPACT (Advocacy for Change through Technology in India, Malaysia and Pakistan), and CHALLENGE (Challenging hate narratives and violations of freedom of religion and expression online in Asia). Working with partners and allies, APC was instrumental in influencing two important HRC resolutions: the recognition that "the same rights that people have offline must also be protected online" (first adopted in 2012) and the recognition of online GBV as a rights violation (2018).

The work of the WRP around GBV in the 2000s, informed by a women's rights and feminist analysis, led to the development of an entirely new vision of the internet, which has been a critical pillar of APC's current work. During the past 10 years, this work, as well as the centring of perspectives of advocates working on sexual and reproductive health and queer rights, has resulted in an intersectional approach, which is embodied in the Feminist Principles of the Internet (FPIs).<sup>9</sup> The FPIs upfront the political aspects of the internet and are a powerful way for actors across a wide range of interests to engage with the internet and other technologies on their own terms.

As we move towards the end of APC's third decade, parts of our work have in some ways gone "full circle". To quote a current board member, "APC connected the first, APC is connecting the last." APC's Connecting the Unconnected initiative is grounded in the experience of community-based connectivity initiatives themselves and in APC's track record in gender analysis and collaborative approaches to changing policy and regulation and in implementing a rights-based approach to building networks, facilitating peer support and capacity development.

As APC moves into its fourth decade, there is an urgent need to mobilise the collective power of networks and social movements to respond to the environmental crisis we are collectively contributing to and must take responsibility for, to counter corporate power, to challenge and prevent state and non-state violence and abuse, to respond to intensifying attacks on human rights and the weaponising of social media and other digital technologies, and to push back against the constant undermining of civic spaces, democratic processes and institutions.

7. It is important to understand the difference between the "human rights-based approach" and defending human rights. The human rights-based approach's roots are in the global South (expressed in 1986 in the UN General Assembly resolution on the right to development), and in the social justice critique of individual civil and political rights that emerged towards the end of the cold war. APC's work with human rights has always been about more than just individual rights, or digital rights.

8. "Involving civil society in the information society", APC, 2003, contains positions on the WSIS from APC regions and the Women's Networking Support Programme. <https://www.apc.org/en/pubs/books/involving-civil-society-ict-policy-world-summit-in>

9. <https://feministinternet.org/>



# IV. SUMMARY OF CURRENT AND EXPECTED CONTEXT

Since APC's last Strategic Plan 2016-2019, many of the same challenges and trends remain highly relevant. However, the broader context in which APC operates has changed in ways that threaten the enjoyment of human rights, and in particular the ability of women, marginalised minorities and vulnerable communities to make their voices heard and to contribute to and benefit from the development of a just and sustainable world.

Governments' and corporations' interests are colluding in many ways. States have allowed companies to occupy public roles, resulting in an expansion of corporate power. The current internet "allows for social media companies to regulate every piece of content – and it gives governments the targets for regulation and surveillance,"<sup>10</sup> resulting in surveillance capitalism.

In an alarming number of countries, populist and authoritarian governments have ascended to power using digital tools, in tacit or in some cases explicit coordination with corporate giants. Once in power, populist and authoritarian governments have used technology to suppress dissent, roll back human rights, and thwart advocacy by women, LGBTIQ groups and marginalised communities. Civic space has been shrinking at the same time that malicious state and non-state actors with racist and xenophobic motives have used technology to attack, threaten and harm women, minorities and migrants.

It is against this backdrop that we observe persistent challenges to a just and sustainable world becoming more acute, as well as new and emerging threats as a result of technological advances.

In the absence of policy and regulation to curtail the inherent abuses, the exploitation of personal data for private and political purposes has expanded to previously unimaginable proportions.

Mass and targeted surveillance by governments facilitated by corporate surveillance combined with the datafication of people's personal information has fundamentally altered how people relate to their governments, companies and each other. This is linked to the rapid expansion of video surveillance technologies such as interoperable high definition cameras, facial recognition software, drones and the indiscriminate use of biometric identification systems. The use of malicious software (malware) by states continues to allow the monitoring of the electronic communications of political dissidents, human rights defenders, journalists, activists and ordinary people.

Artificial intelligence is being applied in various aspects of people's lives without human rights due diligence, which puts people at risk of being subject to discrimination and bias without recourse, thus undermining human rights and democratic institutions. Technological innovations have also led to the enhanced ability to manipulate digital realities (e.g. "deep fake" videos) which has fomented mistrust in veritable sources of information.

Cyberattacks have become increasingly sophisticated and disruptive, affecting businesses and the operations of critical infrastructure including hospitals, power grids, financial institutions and government agencies. The right to privacy has been under assault, leaving users of digital technologies vulnerable and with limited means to protect their rights. States urgently need to agree on the "rules of the road" to avoid the escalation of cyberattacks, in order to enhance both security and human rights.

While there is a rise in global wealth, wealth inequality persists.<sup>11</sup> A World Bank study found that in most countries, whether rich or emerging, huge

10. David Kaye. *Speech Police: The Global Struggle to Govern the Internet*. Columbia Global Reports, 2019.

11. "The Changing Wealth of Nations 2018". <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/29001/9781464810466.pdf>



transfers of public to private wealth have occurred since 1980. The combination of rising income inequality and large transfers of public to private wealth contributed to the steep rise in wealth inequality.<sup>12</sup>

Inequality limits opportunities to improve well-being, and undermines democracy as power imbalances favour elites at the expense of the needs of ordinary people, and in particular women and minority groups. Digitalisation in the workplace is leading to precarious labour conditions for workers and the lack of adequate public policy responses to it. Upgrading skills through worker training has lagged. Technological innovation has tended to weaken workers' negotiating powers.

Climate change has reached crisis dimensions and is a threat to the sustainability of life on earth. Digitalisation has compounded the problem, by increasing the carbon footprint and e-waste, by facilitating the dissemination of misinformation by climate change deniers, and by obfuscating deliberations on issues that should be based on evidence and scientific principles. It has become increasingly clear that governments and

international institutions are unlikely to take decisive action in time to avert a climate catastrophe.

Digital exclusion persists despite the vaunted promise of connecting the next billion, and remains an obstacle for poor communities, especially those living in rural areas. Across the board, there is a slowdown in the growth of voice and internet users, whether one looks at mobile subscribers or internet penetration. The strategies that have been deployed for decades simply won't address the needs of the billions of people in developing countries who still suffer from digital exclusion. Without meaningful access, people are being left behind from the social and economic benefits of the digital society and economy and have no means to benefit economically from digital technologies, advocate for themselves, or fight for their rights.

These critical features of the emerging environment condition the ability of APC and its partners to mobilise people and resources and steer an effective response to these formidable challenges.

---

12. "World Inequality Report 2018". <https://wir2018.wid.world/>

# V. THEORY OF CHANGE/OUR POLITICAL ASSUMPTIONS AND BELIEFS

*Political assumptions relate to how we, collectively, understand how power and change operate in the real-life political, cultural and organising contexts we are working in. Beliefs refer to how we feel we can effect and/or contribute to the changes desired along with types of strategies that will be most effective for us to use to bring about the desired organisational outcomes.*

This section outlines APC's revised political assumptions and beliefs – our understanding of how power and change operate in the real-life political, cultural and organising contexts we are working in and how we, collectively, can best effect the changes we are seeking.

The internet has transformed human communications and behaviour and challenged existing structures of power, including gender-based power, and should be recognised and governed as a global public good. We believe that the internet and digital technologies have enormous potential to strengthen social, political, cultural, economic and human development. They are tools and spaces for expression, for organising, for accessing information, for creating and sharing content and for exercising human rights. They can increase agency, build community, facilitate political participation, good governance, learning and innovation, and increase transparency and accountability among governments, business and civil society.

However, this potential is being threatened by the following factors:

- Digital exclusion is increasing in different dimensions under current economic and regulatory models, intensifying inequalities, poverty and discrimination and amplifying unequal power relations.
- The dominance of corporate control and influence in shaping the internet and digital

technologies and spaces has eroded the publicness of the internet and human rights. The power of global technology corporations, based primarily in the global North, to control and exploit data and content platforms, exacerbates discrimination and inequalities.

- The content, language and knowledge of the internet and digital technologies continue to be dominated by white, male, private and global North interests, deepening the colonisation of knowledge in the offline world. The belief that the internet could create a truly inclusive global public knowledge commons is disappearing as digital spaces have themselves become battlegrounds for struggles over power and narratives.
- Digital spaces are increasingly powered by hate and discrimination that target women, LGBTIQ communities, religious minorities, migrants, people with disabilities and other people and groups that are in positions of vulnerability or marginalisation. This includes new manifestations of gender-based violence mediated by digital technologies.
- Governments are often at the forefront of control, surveillance, censorship and even total shutdowns of internet services, thereby disrupting not just the internet, but also peoples' ability to enjoy fundamental human rights.
- New issues, challenges and questions have arisen, especially around security, sustainability and resilience in the current climate of shrinking civic spaces, increased surveillance and threats faced by social change actors, as well as the multiple crises that impact on all areas of women's rights and feminist activism.
- The production and use of digital technologies is likely to continue contributing to climate crisis proportionate to their increasing share in

overall consumption of raw materials, manufacturing, energy consumption and waste disposal and recycling. Governments and the powerful private interests that profit from activities that cause environmental damage are likely to respond through increasing internet surveillance, censorship and propaganda, both directly as well as through cooperation with the few companies who today handle the majority of internet communications.

Our basic assumptions and beliefs about our role in harnessing the transformations we seek:

- Digitally networked technologies are changing the landscape of movement building, and there is an increasing awareness of the critical role of the internet in the work of movements to drive and sustain change. We are strengthening our approach to organising and movement building to reflect the emerging digital landscape and build on our history of network building and connecting movements. This includes our political understanding of how the digital landscape has brought new opportunities and challenges and new actors outside familiar forms of organising; considering emerging dynamics and spaces of organising; exploring distributed accountability and leadership and models of resource distribution to support new ways of organising.
- Digital inclusion goes beyond access to connectivity infrastructure and should include enabling conditions to increase overall individual and collective autonomy, agency and choice in how people connect to digital technology and spaces, as well as how they use, shape, inform or create them once they are connected. We believe in developing alternatives to how people connect through contributing to an enabling ecosystem for the emergence and growth of community networks and other community-based connectivity initiatives in developing countries. By addressing human capacity and sustainability challenges, along with policy and regulatory obstacles that limit the growth of community-based connectivity initiatives, we seek to strengthen the impact, reach and sustainability of the community networks movement in the global South.
- Used strategically, the internet and digital technologies and spaces can amplify the voices and efforts of civil society organisations, social movements, individual activists and excluded communities and groups. We contribute to amplifying voice, agency and capacity by providing opportunities for knowledge exchange and learning, incorporating the politics and practice of care and safety, through peer exchanges, local convenings, workshops and campaigns.
- The internet and digital technologies are enablers of human rights, development and social justice, including gender justice. We believe in influencing policy change by working with our members, partners, collaborators and strategic allies to develop positions that promote and protect human rights, challenge corporate domination and hold governments accountable.
- We believe in building knowledge and contributing to discourse through research, social media and other media content and artistic content that counter privileged positions and perspectives, discrimination and oppression, and that support evidence-based advocacy towards a rights-based approach and feminist internet which contribute to building a global commons of knowledge.
- There is a need for continued engagement in internet governance processes to challenge corporate power and emphasise governments' responsibility to hold private corporations accountable. The views, voices and interests of people confronting structural discrimination and oppression are needed to push back against corporate power and state control and challenge the securitisation of the internet.
- The choice and use of digital technologies and the policies guiding their production, use and disposal and the recovery of raw materials will have a huge impact on the way they contribute to the climate catastrophe, but also on their potential to mitigate it. The environmental crisis requires a drastic change from the existing design/production/use/disposal/recycling model to one that embraces a circular economy aiming to eliminate waste and foster the continual reuse of resources.

## **VI. OUR VISION**

**Our vision is for people to use and shape the internet and digital technologies to create a just and sustainable world, leading to greater care for ourselves, each other and the earth.**

## **VII. OUR MISSION**

**Our mission is to create a just and sustainable world by harnessing the collective power of activists, organisations, excluded groups, communities and social movements, to challenge existing power structures and ensure that the internet is developed and governed as a global public good.**

# VIII. OUR VALUES

Our organisational values are the beliefs and principles that guide all programme design, implementation and interventions of APC. They are shared by the staff and members and are strongly embedded culturally and operationally within our network. They help define how we aspire to build and maintain relationships with the people and organisations we engage with internally and externally.

**Because we believe that the internet is a public resource** and we are committed to promoting alternative infrastructure and economic models that contribute to the public commons, we value:

- Local initiative and ownership
- Open content, open standards and free/libre and open source software (FLOSS)
- Technology solutions that are appropriate and affordable.

**Because we believe in the collective power of networks and movements,** we value:

- Collaboration and partnership
- Creativity, innovation and strengthening of each other that comes from sharing and deepening our collective intelligence
- Shared leadership
- Local and distributed action
- Linking theory and practice.

**Because we believe in the importance of understanding and critiquing structures and systems of oppression from a feminist and human rights perspective,** we value:

- Intersectionality as a lens that we apply across everything we do
- Freedom of expression, including the expression of one's sexual and gender identities
- Inclusiveness and diversity
- Social equality
- Democratic, accountable and transparent governance.

**Because we believe that the sustainability of ourselves, each other and the earth** are necessary ingredients in creating the world we want, we value:

- Socially and environmentally sustainable approaches and actions
- Contributing to the creation of sustainable systems, approaches and practices
- Practising self and collective care.

# **IX. OUTCOME AREAS AND IMPACT OBJECTIVES<sup>13</sup>**

Outcome areas are prioritised areas of focus, for the period of the strategic plan, that represent the key achievements required to move closer to realising APC's vision in consideration of the current and expected context.

Impact objectives are the accumulated desired results needed until the end of 2023 in order to move closer to realising the change in each organisational outcome.

---

<sup>13</sup>. In previous APC strategic plans, outcome areas were referred to as key result areas (KRAs)

## OUTCOME 1

**The collective power of communities<sup>14</sup> within and beyond the APC network is harnessed through existing and new relationships built around transformative actions and our shared visions.**

The APC network is the most important resource we have to achieve the transformations we are seeking. We prioritise our network, but recognise that we are part of a collective endeavour in working for transformation. The partnerships and alliances of broader communities that we collaborate with are critical in strengthening the movements that we are part of. These include communities working on environmental justice and sustainability, local access and community networks, sexual rights, digital rights activism, feminist internet, technology and alternative infrastructure, among others. This broader community of networks is a resource that grows in power when we take time to learn from and strengthen each other. We need to sustain the transformations we seek through self and collective care and through a renewed commitment to contributing to social and environmental justice and human rights.

**RATIONALE/  
DEFINITIONS**

---

14. The APC network refers to the APC staff and members and the partners and networks we collectively work with. Communities refers to constituencies and social movements that we are part of and collaborate with.



## IMPACT OBJECTIVES

**1. Diverse communities and movements are interconnected and mobilised through shared knowledge, platforms and collective action.**

**2. APC and its members have the institutional capacity to effectively support collaboration and stimulate engagement among its communities.**

## ACTIVITIES

- Identify and support the uptake and use of knowledge-sharing tools and platforms that are built, hosted, maintained and embedded with open-source values and principles developed by APC members and others.
- Support movement building through community networks peer exchanges, Making a Feminist Internet (MFI) local convenings and “city conversations”, learning events, and regional/global summits for dialogue, knowledge sharing and agenda setting.
- Support for the open source (OS) movement through adoption and promotion of OS software and hardware, and through engagement with the OS developers and users community.
- Ensure that APC has a diverse, engaged, active and empowered membership that collectively implements its mission and vision.
- In celebration of APC’s 30th anniversary, convene a gathering of the APC network and the communities we are part of to mobilise our collective power towards transformative action.
- Organise activities that help to strengthen the institutional capacity of APC and its members, including in financial, resource mobilisation, governance and human resource areas.
- Strengthen and increase APC’s member sub-granting programme to better respond to the priorities of the APC network in the 2020-2023 period, including through additional fundraising, encouraging more collaborative grants and supporting all members where possible.

## OUTCOME 2

**People affected by exclusion, discrimination and inequality are able to meaningfully use and shape the internet and digital technologies to meet their specific needs.**

Digital exclusion relates to structural socioeconomic barriers and to the individual and collective access and capabilities of people to benefit from the use of the internet and digital technologies to improve their lives. Current economic and regulatory models are exacerbating inequalities, poverty and discrimination and amplifying unequal power relations in different ways. It is necessary to broaden the focus beyond access to connectivity infrastructure and enable conditions (political, regulatory, technical, technological, financial) to increase overall individual and collective autonomy, agency and choice in how people connect to digital technology and spaces, as well as how they use, shape, inform or create them once they are connected.

Alternative and complementary approaches, frameworks and solutions are needed to bring about changes in affordable service provision, technical and human capacity to deploy and manage locally owned networks, and the ability to develop and use applications and content effectively. Holistic interventions are needed to mitigate political, economic, social and cultural barriers that prevent people from fully benefiting from the digital society and economy. This includes access to open digital technology and spaces free of censorship, surveillance, harassment and any other forms of violation of human rights.

APC's strategies build evidence for policy and regulatory change and increase understanding and support by community groups (women in particular), development organisations, civil society, media and the private sector regarding the potential of small-scale local initiatives in meeting the information and communication needs of the unconnected or the barely connected. APC also works to convince policy makers and regulators to enable public access, infrastructure sharing, better use of radio spectrum and open telecom data, and to limit concentration of ownership by a few global companies.

**RATIONALE/  
DEFINITIONS**

## IMPACT OBJECTIVES

**1. Free, open and sustainable digital technologies and platforms are developed, shaped and used to address digital exclusion.**

**2. Inclusive, fair and just economic models aimed towards digital inclusion are recognised, enabled and adopted as viable sustainable solutions for universal, affordable access and services.**

**3. Individuals and groups, in particular women, who champion digital inclusion have increased capacity and resources to create and meet the demand for alternative models.**

## ACTIVITIES

- Awareness raising with different actors and facilitation of global and regional movement building dynamics to enable the creation of new community networks.
- Support for innovative technology use and approaches in order to enable scaling and sustainability of community networks.
- Advocacy for an enabling policy and regulatory environment for local access initiatives at national, regional and global levels.
- Initiatives promoting net neutrality, open data, open licensing, open source, and adversarial interoperability<sup>15</sup> principles.
- Support for women's participation in community-based connectivity initiatives.

---

15. Cory Doctorow defines adversarial interoperability as "what happens when someone makes a new product or service that works with a dominant product or service, against the wishes of the dominant business."  
<https://boingboing.net/2019/08/05/ibm-pc-compatible-how-adv.html>  
<https://www.eff.org/deeplinks/2019/06/adversarial-interoperability-reviving-elegant-weapon-more-civilized-age-slay>

## OUTCOME 3

### **Women and people of diverse sexualities and genders participate in, shape and co-create the internet and digital technologies that reflect and respond to their lived realities.**

Women and people of diverse sexualities and genders experience the backlash against gains made towards gender equality most acutely. Threats to feminist organising online and offline are expanding and taking new forms, enabling violations by a range of actors, including states, fundamentalist religious structures and private corporations, who increasingly find common purpose in narrowing notions of morality, family and “equality”. These threats often manifest as targeted gender-based violence (GBV) online, intimately linked to offline spaces, and the twin roles of censorship and gendered surveillance that facilitate this violence.

Alongside this, increased data gathering and datafication impact unevenly on the autonomy, privacy and livelihoods of women and people of diverse sexualities and genders. Stereotypes linked to gender, race, caste and ability are embedded into technology and data-dependent processes and algorithms. This data is used in profiling by companies and governments, raising questions of privacy and decreased autonomy, especially for those marginalised on account of sexuality, gender or other categories. Also troubling is that even as forms of labour and work change in the digital age, work that is gendered or feminised continues to be devalued.

The collaboratively developed Feminist Principles of the Internet (FPIs) is the framework that underpins APC’s work on feminism, women’s rights, sexuality and technology. The feminist internet we work towards is one in which women and people of diverse sexualities and genders are able to access and enjoy a free and open internet to exercise agency and autonomy, build collective power, strengthen movements, and transform power relations for gender and sexual justice. To achieve this, we must interrogate how the systems of oppression such as sexism, racism, casteism, ableism and compulsory heterosexuality intersect and impact people.

**RATIONALE/  
DEFINITIONS**

## IMPACT OBJECTIVES

**1. Ideas, skills, processes and spaces for collective organising and strategising towards a feminist and sustainable internet are created and nurtured.**

**2. Internet policy discussions and decision making integrate and reflect the perspectives of women and people of diverse sexualities and genders.**

**3. Increased financial resources and diversity of actors for a feminist internet, including those working on feminist technology development.**

## ACTIVITIES

- Thematic or geographically based (including local) convenings to analyse shifts in landscape and develop tactics to respond to pressing challenges affecting communities.
- Feminist Tech Exchange (FTX) convenings and trainings to build the skills, confidence and networks needed to engage with and transform digital technologies through a politics and practice of care and safety.
- Take Back the Tech! campaigns including support for local actions and expansion of the feminist learning circles.
- Building a feminist internet research network of people using research and knowledge towards realising the feminist internet.
- Capacity building for women's rights and sexual rights activists to effectively engage in strategic processes.
- Participation in strategic policy and advocacy processes such as the Human Rights Council (HRC) and CEDAW to integrate the perspectives of women and people of diverse sexualities and genders, and in women's rights and sexual rights processes to integrate internet rights concerns.
- Research and knowledge creation that build evidence around the lived realities and needs of women and people of diverse genders and sexualities to ensure that these inform internet policy discussions and recommendations on access, online GBV, algorithmic decision making, gendered labour and the impact of datafication.
- Advocacy with donors and partners to develop alternative models of resource distribution that respond to the needs of organising in a digital age and to increase the amount of resources available for interventions that link women's rights, sexual rights and technology.

## OUTCOME 4

**People, especially those facing discrimination and oppression, have greater power and autonomy through digital technologies to exercise their full range of human rights online and offline.**

Human rights are integral to the realisation of human autonomy and to advancing social justice. Digital technologies and spaces have impacted the way we experience our rights online and offline. On the one hand, digital technologies and spaces have been instrumental in mobilisation and advocacy, while on the other hand, they have paved the way for new forms of violations that have far-reaching consequences. As digital technologies become more widespread and pervasively deployed in society, they impact a wide range of rights, from the freedoms of expression, assembly and association and privacy to economic, social and cultural rights, like the right to work, education and culture. As digital divides widen, people are reliant on digital technologies to participate in democratic processes and to access public services. The digitisation of people's lives, combined with the exploitation of people's data, presents profound risks to people's rights, including their right to be free from discrimination.

Human rights need to be at the centre of the development, deployment, utilisation and regulation of the internet and digital technologies. The focus for this strategic plan is to ensure that people are able to exercise their rights, which includes advancing human rights norms and their implementation towards holding states accountable for new and emerging forms of rights violations. Recognising that the landscape of human rights protection and promotion has changed and that the private sector mediates many of our rights, we will increase our advocacy aimed at challenging the private sector and holding companies accountable.

**RATIONALE/  
DEFINITIONS**

## IMPACT OBJECTIVES

**1. People and civil society organisations hold states and the private sector accountable for violations.**

**2. Norms, standards and regulations relating to the internet, digital technologies and spaces advance human rights online and offline.**

**3. Governments promote, protect and respect human rights and comply with their obligations – including addressing violations by private actors.**

## ACTIVITIES

- Support and strengthen regional and national civil society actors to address rights violations online (i.e. censorship, hate speech, surveillance) through research, policy advocacy and capacity building.
- Utilise international and regional human rights mechanisms (Universal Periodic Review, treaty bodies, UN Special Procedures and regional bodies) to hold governments accountable for human rights violations.
- Contribute to the advancement of international norms to promote and protect human rights in light of new challenges presented by digital technologies (focusing on the UN, in particular the HRC, UN General Assembly and treaty bodies).
- Build the capacity of civil society actors to engage with regional and international human rights mechanisms.
- Advocate with and improve the capacity of key institutions tasked with promoting and protecting human rights in digital contexts.
- Develop, strengthen and apply a human rights-based approach to internet and digital technology laws and policies.
- Assess private sector policies and practices and advocate for rights-respecting behaviour.



## OUTCOME 5

**The internet is recognised and governed as a global public good<sup>16</sup> in an inclusive, transparent, democratic and accountable manner.**

The publicness of the internet is at the core of power disputes in the internet governance ecosystem. The rise and consolidation of global internet platforms and the trend of states controlling the digital space in authoritarian ways have led to erosion of the publicness of the internet and the global digital commons. Internet business models, private sector monopolies and the sophisticated ways in which the internet and digital technologies are being developed for profit are contrary to the public interest, equitable economic development and the exercise of human rights.

The private power over the public domain by global internet companies such as Facebook, Google and Twitter that rely on collecting and profiting from personal data have given rise to surveillance capitalism. Big technology platforms have become governance institutions<sup>17</sup> often floundering in developing and implementing content policies and community standards that adhere to human rights norms and standards of transparency and accountability. At the same time, states' attempts to police digital spaces are leading to securitisation of internet policy.

There is a need for continued engagement in internet governance processes to challenge corporate power and emphasise governments' responsibility to hold private corporations accountable. The views, voices and interests of people confronting structural discrimination and oppression are needed to push back against corporate power and state control and challenge the securitisation of the internet. However, effective engagement in internet governance and internet policy processes and spaces nationally, regionally and globally is becoming either too onerous or restricted for civil society actors, and at the same time, multistakeholder processes and forums are losing support and traction. There is an urgent need to advocate more strongly for inclusive, transparent, accessible and accountable internet governance processes and mechanisms, and for recognition of the value of civil society voices in shaping national, regional and global internet governance conversations and policy responses.

**RATIONALE/  
DEFINITIONS**

---

16. APC first proposed this in June 2004 in a paper by ITeM. <https://www.apc.org/en/pubs/issue/financing-information-society-south-global-public>

17. David Kaye. *Speech Police: The Global Struggle to Govern the Internet*. Columbia Global Reports, 2019.

## IMPACT OBJECTIVES

**1. Individuals and civil society organisations engage meaningfully in and influence policy, regulation and governance processes to shape an open and sustainable internet.**

**2. Internet policy and regulation actors and institutions recognise and govern the internet as a global public good.**

**3. Internet and other digital technology companies are held accountable for upholding human rights and protecting the public interest.**

## ACTIVITIES

- Strengthen the capacity of diverse civil society actors, particularly sexual rights, feminist, environmental, disability rights and other human rights activists and organisations, to engage in internet policy and governance processes through initiatives like the African School on Internet Governance (AfriSIG) and its expansion to other regions.
- Contribute actively to strengthen the participation, coordination, influence and solidarity of civil society representatives and networks in national, regional and global internet governance processes.
- Contribute to capacity building of policy makers and regulators (e.g. through AfriSIG and policy training for national regulators on local access and community networks).
- Develop and use Global Information Society Watch (GISWatch) more proactively to reach and influence policy actors.
- Conduct research and advocacy to counter corporate practices that undermine the publicness of the internet and impact adversely on human rights.

## OUTCOME 6

**APC's collective action and activism contribute to environmental justice and preservation of the earth, and mitigate the negative environmental impacts of the internet, digital technologies and the digital economy.**

APC's roots are anchored in the environmental movements of the 1980s and 1990s, and many members have called for a strong network response to the global environmental crisis. These movements will regain prominence during the next decade as it becomes increasingly clear that governments and international institutions are unlikely to take action in time to avert a climate catastrophe. Governments and the powerful private interests that profit from activities that cause environmental damage are likely to respond through increasing internet surveillance, censorship and propaganda, both directly as well as through cooperation with the few companies who today handle the majority of internet communications.

The production and use of digital technologies are likely to continue contributing to climate change proportionate to their increasing share in overall consumption of raw materials (including conflict minerals), manufacturing, energy consumption and waste disposal and recycling. The choice and use of digital technologies and the policies guiding their production, use and disposal and the recovery of raw materials will have a huge impact on the way they contribute to the climate catastrophe, but also on their potential to mitigate it. The environmental crisis requires a drastic change from the existing design/production/use/disposal/recycling model to one that embraces a circular economy aiming to eliminate waste and foster the continual reuse of resources.

A critical assessment is needed of the impacts of the so-called digital/smart economy on communities' sustainable livelihoods. The vision of this economy supports the globally unsustainable model of unlimited growth, by creating the expectation that "smart" innovations will somehow make it possible for humanity to keep exploiting the earth's limited resources. The 2030 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)<sup>18</sup> can provide a comprehensive and legitimate framework for assessing how the internet, digital technology and the digital economy are contributing to the global environmental crisis, and in what ways they can be used to mitigate the damage to the environment.

APC is well positioned to connect academic and activist knowledge about how to use the internet and digital technologies to adapt to and combat climate change. Building on our history of emerging from green movements, and our ongoing connections with them, APC has decades-long experience with a hands-on approach to technology and its use in ways that are sustainable and promote social and environmental justice and human rights.

**RATIONALE/  
DEFINITIONS**

---

18. <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals>

## IMPACT OBJECTIVES

1. The APC network's capacity to take action against the climate crisis in solidarity with the broader environmental movement is strengthened.

2. Practices, models and systems that are environmentally and socially sustainable are promoted, developed and adopted by the APC network.

3. Policy and regulatory frameworks ensure that the environmental impact of digital technologies – from production and development to disposal of the devices used to run and interact with them – is measured, understood and mitigated.

## ACTIVITIES

- Develop environmental impact assessment/action toolkits focusing on digital technologies.
- Develop a four-year action plan that will guide APC's work on environmental sustainability, including support for APC members through APC's subgranting programme, based on a review and assessment of the network's potential strengths and contributions.
- Reach out to and engage with civil society working in social justice and environmental fields to engage in internet governance processes.
- Research and promote circular digital economy models that are environmentally and socially sustainable, such as models promoting local production and use, use of local renewable energy sources, and adoption of circular and participatory practices for digital devices, software, internet access and services.
- Promote local-level mapping and grassroots capacity building on open data about environmental issues and in using tools to monitor the status of the environment and energy consumption.

Develop an APC policy advocacy agenda for internet governance processes at national, regional and global levels on mitigating the impact of the climate crisis and promoting environmental sustainability, which includes:

- Gathering evidence and building advocacy around the impact of digital technologies, the internet and the digital economy on the sustainability of communities and the environment to inform policy advocacy.
- In coordination with other organisations, participate in international forums and processes related to policy, environmental rights and ICTs, and work associated with recycling, re-using and the circular economy.
- Develop a framework that can monitor and hold global technology companies accountable based on the Aarhus Convention principles.<sup>19</sup>

---

19. The Aarhus Convention grants the public rights regarding access to information, public participation and access to justice, in governmental decision-making processes on matters concerning the local, national and transboundary environment. It focuses on interactions between the public and public authorities. <https://www.unece.org/env/pp/treatytext.html>

2010-2023 Strategic Plan

