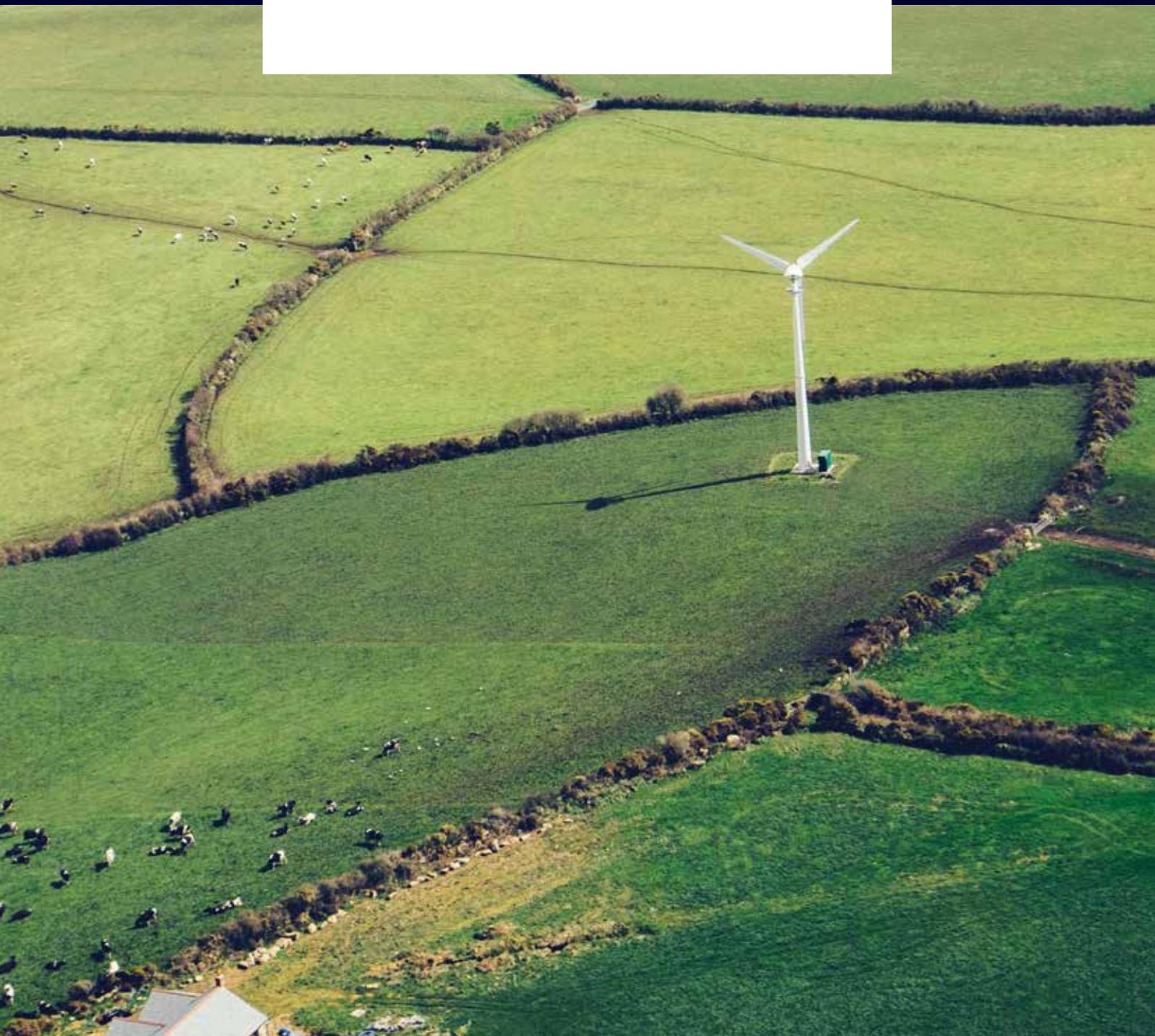


# 10

## Conclusion



# No one knows exactly how the Internet will evolve. We do know it will require new thinking, new approaches and new tools to adapt to this rapidly changing world.

People often make the assumption that the Internet will simply always be there; always on, serving our needs in a rapidly-shifting digital world. The reality, however, appears in stark contrast to this idea.

We have seen, through the many voices and perspectives reflected in this report, how those most closely connected with the origin, growth and development of the Internet are unsure, even fearful, for its future. They know that there are no guarantees for what lies ahead, only questions that need answering. They reflect the belief that if future generations are to continue to be able to interact with the digital world, then we need to be much more conscious of the path that we are creating today for the Internet of tomorrow.

One of the main ambitions with this project has been to illustrate these uncertainties surrounding the Internet's future. We have done this by looking at the interdependencies that exists between key driving forces of change and what they mean for some of the most important aspects of our society. From market developments to cyber security, to the relation between new technologies and the actions of governments, the possible outcomes are as varied as they are unknown.

Indeed, nothing is certain, but in the process of surveying and interviewing the community, a number of defining themes came the fore. Three in particular stand out.

## 1. Optimism and disillusionment exist in equal measure

There is a general sense that while the Internet still offers great opportunity and that many, particularly in the developing countries, see the Internet as an important means to empower communities, there is also a strong sense of disillusionment with what the Internet brings. The tool that was, in the words of one participant, "supposed to democracratise society" is now being used as a means for its control. This disillusionment is felt even more profoundly in developed countries where the Internet is on the cusp of changing significantly through new technologies and persistent security challenges.

## 2. We need to reassess what we believe we know

We have learnt that we can no longer afford to think about the Internet and its opportunities and challenges as we used to do. Technologies such as the Internet of Things and Artificial Intelligence are set to redefine our understanding of the world around us, reshaping economies and societies in unprecedented ways and necessitating *new thinking, new approaches and new models* to address a range of emerging issues.

### 3. People come first

The third, and perhaps most important theme running through the responses is the imperative of *putting the human, the user, first*.

Above all, there is an unshifting conviction that the Internet must continue to benefit people and create new social and economic possibilities, thereby fulfilling the premise on which it was built. Hyperconnectivity promises to reshape business, public services and other entities through greater efficiencies, immediacy, reach and delivery. With more comprehensive and effective data collection, analysis and use we can expect revolutionary change to come to healthcare, education, and other services, but none of this will be of any value if people are not the ones that benefit.

This report never set out to predict the future. Rather, by listening to the views of those who are part of the global Internet community, it serves as an indicator for the vast range of possibilities that exist. Whether it's understanding the future as an overwhelming range of "domino effects", or as a chessboard of actions and reactions, no reality today allows us to fully grasp a future that we have yet to see. The unknowns about technological development and the actions of various stakeholders are all the as-yet-undefined determinants of the Internet of tomorrow.

What *is* certain however is that there is a lot to do to keep the Internet on course to remain open, globally connected and secure. These core principles that have allowed the Internet to flourish as a tool for human empowerment have allowed people to connect, share, innovate and improve their lives. Throughout this project, it has been clear that people are looking at the future of the Internet through this lens. They all ultimately connect back to a vision where the Internet's capacity to promote human empowerment is preserved.

Achieving this vision in the years to come depends on collective action. We need a different mindset that helps us move from managing disruption to the way things are today, to inventing new frameworks for anticipating and managing the way things will be. To do that, we must have inclusive discussion and decision-making and we must think harder about the future together. Indeed, solutions to the changes occurring in our societies today may not be at all obvious because we have not yet done the work to fully adapt to our present circumstances.

The future of the online universe is ours and ours alone to shape. We can start by making decisions that preserve the values that underpin the Internet we know today.