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Report by the Secretary-General

ITU COUNCIL CONTRIBUTION TO THE 2016 UNITED NATIONS HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Summary

As per a letter dated 5 April 2016 (Annex 1), the President of ECOSOC invited the ITU Council to offer substantive inputs to the 2016 United Nations High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF).

The theme of the HLPF 2016 is closely linked to ITU's mission to ensure that everyone is able to benefit from the potential of information and communication technologies.

The draft input from ITU Council to the HLPF 2016 is presented in Annex 2 and will be transmitted to ECOSOC secretariat.

Action required

This draft input is provided to Council for information before its submission to ECOSOC secretariat.

Annexes: 2

ANNEX 1

Letter from the President of ECOSOC

The President
of the
Economic and Social Council

5 April 2016

Dear Mr. Min,

The United Nations High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) will convene under the auspices of ECOSOC at UN headquarters in New York from 11 to 20 July 2016 (with a ministerial segment on 18 -20 July).

The forum was created at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development in June 2012 (Rio+20) to provide high-level policy guidance and promote and review implementation of sustainable development.

The 2016 session of the HLPF marks the inaugural year of the 2030 Agenda. During this session the forum will fully assume its central role in overseeing a network of review and follow-up processes at the global level as mandated by the 2030 Agenda.

The theme of the 2016 session is "Ensuring that no one is left behind", which highlights the integrated and universal nature of the agenda and the indivisibility of the SDGs. It underscores the premise that no single goal or target will be met unless it has been met for the poorest or most vulnerable. All 17 SDGs will be examined from the perspective of the theme, which is also consistent with the thematic focus of the activities of ECOSOC.

The 2030 Agenda stipulates that thematic reviews of progress on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including cross-cutting issues, will also take place at the HLPF. These will be supported by reviews by the functional commissions of the Economic and Social Council and other intergovernmental bodies and forums, reflecting the integrated nature of the Goals as well as the interlinkages between them.

In this regard, I invite you to offer substantive inputs to the 2016 HLPF showcasing your intergovernmental body's contribution towards the 2030 Agenda in general, and particularly for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and respective targets that are substantial to your intergovernmental body's mandate. The following template, inspired by the report of the Secretary-General on global follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/70/684), could be considered in providing inputs:

(a) an assessment of the situation regarding the principle of "ensuring that no one is left behind" at the global level;

(b) the identification of gaps, areas requiring urgent attention, risks and challenges;

(c) valuable lessons learned on ensuring that no one is left behind;

(d) emerging issues likely to affect the realization of this principle;

(e) areas where political guidance by the high-level political forum is required;

(f) policy recommendations on ways to accelerate progress for those at risk of being left behind

This reporting template can be accessed at https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/hlpf and I would kindly ask you to send the completed template no later than 16 May 2016 to the Secretariat's e-mail pietracci@un.org.

I look forward to your contributions to the 2016 HLPF.

Sincerely yours,

Oh Joon
President of ECOSOC

ANNEX 2

ITU Council Contribution to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Contributions to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

ECOSOC functional commissions and other intergovernmental bodies and forums are invited to share relevant input and deliberations as to how they address goals and targets from the perspective of "*Ensuring that no one is left behind*".

Inputs could follow the following template, inspired by the report of the Secretary-General on Critical milestones towards coherent, efficient and inclusive follow-up and review at the global level (A/70/684).

Submissions will be publicly posted online at the United Nations Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform, at sustainabledevelopment.un.org, as input to the 2016 meeting of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development.

Please send the completed form no later than **16 May 2016** to the Secretariat's e-mail pietracci@un.org

Submission Form

1. An assessment of the situation regarding the principle of "ensuring that no one is left behind" at the global level:

ITU regularly monitors the digital divide each year, including the gender digital divide (see below), to assess and track who has access to Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and telecommunication networks, and where, with a view to "connecting the world", the mission statement of ITU.

2. The identification of gaps, areas requiring urgent attention, risks and challenges:

In adopting the Connect 2020 Agenda, at the ITU 2014 Plenipotentiary Conference, ITU Member States committed themselves to the shared vision of "an information society, empowered by the interconnected world, where telecommunications/ICTs enable and accelerate social, economic and environmentally sustainable growth and development for everyone". The latest edition of the Measuring the Information Society Report, published in December 2015, features key ICT data and benchmarking tools to measure the information society, including the ICT Development Index (IDI), and also includes an analysis of various aspects of the Connect 2020 goals and targets.

Access and use of Information and Communication Technologies

Currently available data show a figure for household Internet access of 43.9 per cent in 2014, rising to an estimated 46.4 per cent in 2015.

Data illustrating the development of Internet usage show a figure of 40.6 per cent in 2014, rising to an estimated 43.4 per cent in 2015. The increasing deployment of wireless-broadband networks in rural areas of developing countries and the displacement of feature phones by smartphones are expected to accelerate the pace of growth in developing countries.

The Combined Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) for household Internet access in developing countries, for the period 2005-2015, was 15.4 per cent between 2005 and 2015, and 15.7 per cent in the five years from 2010 to 2015. By the end of 2015, an estimated 34.1% of households in the developing world had access to the Internet.

The CAGR for household Internet access in LDCs was 33.9 per cent between 2005 and 2015, and 25.6 per cent in the five years between 2010 and 2015, much higher than for developing countries in general. Despite the high growth rates, LDCs are starting from a much lower baseline and therefore the progress in absolute terms is smaller – with an estimated 6.7% of LDC households having access to the Internet at the end of 2015.

The CAGR in Internet usage in developing countries for the period 2005-2015 was 16.4 per cent for developing countries, with an estimated 35.3% of the population in developing countries being online at the end of 2015. For LDCs, the CAGR in Internet usage was 28.4 per cent between 2005 and 2015, with an estimated 9.5% of the population in LDCs being online at the end of 2015.

Affordability of ICTs

Looking at the evolution of the global level for the fixed-telephone, mobile-cellular and fixed-broadband prices, there was a marked drop in fixed-broadband prices over the period 2008-2012, while price reductions in fixed-broadband services saw a slowdown between 2012 and 2014, despite the fact that average fixed-broadband prices are still relatively unaffordable in several developing countries. Fixed-telephone and mobile-cellular service prices also fell during the period 2008-2014, albeit at slower rates than fixed broadband given the initial lower levels of fixed-telephone and mobile-cellular prices.

Data concerning mobile-broadband prices for 2013 and 2014 show that there was a decrease in all four of the sub-categories used to assess mobile-broadband prices. Prices in all four cases remain substantially lower, in relation to monthly GNI p.c., in developed than in developing countries, but have fallen most markedly in LDCs.

The cost of a mobile-cellular service corresponded on average to 5.0 per cent of GNI p.c. in 2012, and fell to 4.4 per cent of GNI p.c. in 2014. Considering that by 2020 the cost of the service should, according to the Connect 2020 target, correspond to 3.0 per cent of GNI p.c., this means that 29 per cent of the price reduction required to meet the target has already been achieved in the period 2012-2014. The progress made towards achieving the target is somewhat lower for the fixed services: 26 per cent for fixed broadband and 21 per cent for fixed telephony. Significant progress has already been achieved in terms of improving the affordability of these three services, but sustained regulatory and policy attention will be required in the coming years to keep prices on track to meet the target. Concerning mobile broadband, the decrease in prices recorded is remarkable.

The difference in the affordability of fixed and mobile-cellular services between developed and developing countries fell steadily and significantly during the period 2008-2012, followed by a slowdown in the period 2012-2014, and even an increase in the case of fixed broadband in 2014. On the other hand, the difference in the affordability of mobile broadband between developed and developing countries narrowed from 2013 to 2014.

The gender digital divide

The gender digital divide was estimated in developed and developing countries in 2013 and 2015. These data, suggest that the Internet user penetration rate has been around 11 per cent lower for females than for males in both years. The gap between the two rates is lowest in developed

countries (at 5.4 per cent in 2015), significantly higher in developing countries (15.4 per cent in both years), and highest in LDCs (28.9 per cent in 2015). The data suggest that the gap has narrowed in developed countries between 2013 and 2015, while remaining stable in developing countries and LDCs. Only one region, the Americas, displays an Internet user penetration rate that is higher for females than for males.

ICT accessibility for persons with disabilities

The World Report on Disability, jointly published by the World Health Organization and the World Bank in June 2011, estimates that around 15 percent of the world population or more than one billion people live with some form of disability, the majority of whom are in lower-income countries or lower-income segments of their societies.

The importance of accessibility was recognized when United Nations Member States adopted in 2006 the *United Nations Convention for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (UNCRPD). The UNCRPD takes the view that persons with disabilities are "subjects" with rights, capable of claiming those rights and making decisions for their lives based on their free and informed consent as well as being active members of society. Especially, §§ (2)(g) and (2)(h) of Article 9 of UNCRDP requires that States Parties take appropriate measures:

i) 9(2)(g) "to promote access for persons with disabilities to new information and communications technologies and systems, including the Internet";

ii) 9(2)(h) "to promote the design, development, production and distribution of accessible information and communications technologies and systems at an early stage, so that these technologies and systems become accessible at minimum cost",

§ 18 of the Tunis Commitment, made at the second phase of the World Summit on the Information Society (Tunis, 2005): "We shall strive unremittingly, therefore, to promote universal, ubiquitous, equitable and affordable access to ICTs, including universal design and assistive technologies, for all people, especially those with disabilities, everywhere, to ensure that the benefits are more evenly distributed between and within societies, …"[1];

Cybersecurity and national strategies

Modern societies have a growing dependency on information and communication technologies that are globally interconnected. However, this interconnectivity also creates interdependencies and risks that need to be managed at the national, regional and international levels. Enhancing cybersecurity and protecting critical information infrastructures is essential to each nation's security and economic well-being.

At the national level, this is a shared responsibility requiring coordinated action related to the prevention, preparation, response, and recovery from incidents on the part of government authorities, the private sector and civil society. The formulation and implementation of a national framework for cybersecurity requires a comprehensive approach. This framework often receives a label of a National Cybersecurity Strategy (NCS).

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[1] Geneva Declaration of Principles §§ 13 and 30; Geneva Plan of Action §§ 9 (e) and (f), 12 and 23; Tunis Commitment §§ 18 and 20; Tunis Agenda for the Information Society §§ 90 (c) and (e).

National Cybersecurity Strategies, however, do not always take the form of a single, aptly titled, document; certain states chose a fragmented approach and decided to address different cybersecurity areas via multiple different instruments. Together, they form a National Cybersecurity Strategy. At the same time, strategies may receive a designation other than a National Cybersecurity Strategy. Documents titled, for example, National ICT Strategy or National Cybersecurity Masterplan should not be disregarded. What is more, certain states have multiple strategies.

ICT Applications

ICT applications, such as e-Government, e-Commerce, e-Education, e-Health and e-Environment, are seen as enablers for sustainable development, as they provide an efficient channel to deliver a wide range of basic services in remote and rural areas. ICT applications can facilitate the achievement of millennium development targets, reducing poverty and improving health and environmental conditions in developing countries. Given the right approach, context and implementation processes, investments in ICT applications and tools can result in productivity and quality improvements. In turn, e-applications may liberate technical and human capacity and enable greater access to basic services.

Climate change

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), such as satellites, mobile phones or the Internet, play a key role in addressing the major challenges related with climate change and sustainable development. ICTs are fundamental for monitoring climate change, mitigating and adapting to its effects and assisting in the transition towards a green economy. By raising awareness of the role of ICTs, ITU is promoting transformative solutions that can ensure a sustainable future for all. Explore the links below to find more about ITU's vision and mission in the area of environmental sustainability and climate change.

3. Valuable lessons learned on ensuring that no one is left behind:

"Ensuring that no one is left behind" has a very specific meaning in telecommunications – that of ***universal access and service (UAS***). A large number of countries have instituted legislation defining and protecting universal service, through: telecom regulatory frameworks; National Broadband Plans; legal rights for citizens; Universal Service Obligation Funds (USOFs); and/or some other combination.

Many National Broadband Plans focus on the expansion of broadband networks, raise common concerns regarding universal service, including: the inclusion of broadband service in the scope of universal service; the role of mobile communications in universal service; and funding universal service obligations. According to ITU data, some twenty countries have also made broadband and/or Internet access a right – either as a basic legal right, citizen's right or constitutional right (all of which carry different connotations, according to the legal framework in the country of origin). These include Costa Rica (2010), Estonia (2000), Finland (2010), France (2009), Greece, Spain and Switzerland.

In telecommunications, the marginal costs of connecting the very last subscribers to be connected escalate quickly, as these include people living in remote and hard-to-reach areas. The key to unlocking universal service is solid consideration of how to fund the last 5-10% of subscribers, and who should bear this financial burden.

According to ITU research, different regions have adopted different approaches to extending universal access. Europe has a marked preference for National Broadband Plans. Africa is also well-endowed with NBPs from fairly early on in the first decade of the new millennium, partly because ICTs have been included in a number of IMF/World Bank Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs). The region with the fewest National Broadband Plans is the Arab States, which have generally revised their existing Universal Service Obligations (USOs) to include broadband. The Americas and Asia-Pacific are the regions most likely to make use of a Plan in combination with a UAS definition.

USOFs can also play a role in extending access, usually overseen by Ministries or regulators. These are typically funded through a levy on operator revenues and may finance projects in certain areas (e.g., accessibility for persons with disabilities) and/or technologies in accordance with appropriate policies and/or regulatory frameworks. Many modern USOFs recognize the important role of competition and no longer assume that the fixed line incumbent is the sole (or even necessarily a) universal service provider (USP), and have typically broadened their scope to enable the Fund to take a converged approach to providing telecommunication services (e.g. India, Chile, Brazil, and the U.S.). However, there are some evidences to suggest that, in many countries, USOFs have made only limited disbursements. UAS programmes may also include demand-side initiatives.

Maximizing the accessibility and usability of telecommunication/ICT services, products and terminals through universal design will increase their uptake by persons with disabilities and older persons, and thereby increase revenues. For example, it is estimated that ensuring full compliance with accessibility standards in new public buildings adds generally very limited extra costs[4], which are much less than adapting existing buildings later on. It is also recognized that standards for everyday products and services cannot meet all needs, and that additional standardization for assistive products and assistive technologies may be necessary to meet certain requirements. Realizing that standardization can impact the design of products, services and environments and can therefore play an important role, ITU has been encouraging together with ISO and IEC to mainstream ‘universal design principle’ in their standardization.

Supporting Member States in addressing special needs of indigenous people as regards to equitable access, use and knowledge of information communication technology (ICT’s), based on the preservation of their heritage and cultural legacy contributes to leverage their social and economic community development and to promote, preserve and protect their indigenous culture development. ICT is an essential tool for the social and economic development of women and girls. Technology can also be used to provide education as well as jobs, literacy and life skills training.

Youth and children with access to information and communication technologies (ICTs) are coming of age as digital natives, the early adopters of ICTs and better positioned than their parents to harness the power of digital technologies in new and imaginative ways. Youth can only leverage the transformative power of ICTs when they have access to ICT services and are equipped with a range of digital skills. ICTs can enhance education, reduce youth unemployment and promote social and economic development.

Member states, policy makers, regulators and service providers have an important role to play to ensure that ICTs in their countries are accessible for persons with disabilities and to eliminate ICT accessibility barriers.

Capacity building also refers to strengthening the human and institutional capacity of developing countries to adapt to an evolving ICT and telecommunication sector. Building broad

telecommunication/ICT literacy enables citizens to access and contribute information, ideas and knowledge in order to create an inclusive and sustainable information society.

4. Emerging issues likely to affect the realization of this principle:

The growing cost of providing even basic telecommunication services means that universal service has become even more expensive to achieve. A recent ITU/UN Broadband Commission study estimated the cost of connecting the next 1.5 billion people with Internet access at around US$ 450 billion. The cost of connecting the total remaining 4.2 billion people without Internet access could be several multiples of this.

Soft measures encouraging the private sector to make ICTs accessible are not going to achieve all the expected results; mandatory legislations are also required. Policies that require government agencies to procure accessible ICTs are a proven force in ensuring that accessible ICTs are readily available in the countries that have such policies. Effective policies require a related standard to be used by procurers, manufacturers and service providers.

One of the key challenge is to contribute to enable developing countries to achieve smooth migration from analogue to digital broadcasting including terrestrial TV, mobile TV and sound broadcasting, and follow with the countries the post-transition activities like e.g. introducing new broadcasting services, allocation of the digital dividend. One particular aspect is to provide assistance on policy and regulatory frameworks for digital broadcasting and organising regional meetings for member states on the use of spectrum for broadcasting or other services.

5. Areas where political guidance by the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development is required:

The High-level Political Forum may wish to consider addressing the following key measures as a means of promoting access and use of ICTs, and in particular broadband, as a foundation for sustainable development:

1. Review and update ICT regulatory frameworks, including regulatory approaches to spectrum, and reducing differences in regulatory environments to create level playing-field to encourage innovation and reduce barriers to trade and competition;
2. Make Full Use of Universal Service Obligations Funds (USOFs);
3. Consider infrastructure-sharing and open access approaches to publicly funded infrastructure;
4. Consider measures to make broadband more affordable, including implementing international standards;
5. Reduce taxes and import duties on telecommunication/ICT equipment and services;
6. Promote investments in broadband infrastructure and applications in ecosystem;
7. Promote trainings and measures to stimulate demand;
8. Invest in the creation of local content in local languages;
9. Facilitate innovation in ecosystem for inclusive and sustainable development; and
10. Engage in Ongoing Monitoring of ICT Developments.

6. Policy recommendations on ways to accelerate progress for those at risk of being left behind:

A range of policy options are available to maximize access to broadband, and to capitalize on its benefits. These policy options can broadly be divided into both supply and demand sides' measures, although some policy measures can promote both – for example, the adoption of a National Broadband Plan promoting development of content and human capacities; monitoring; and tax reductions to reduce overall tariffs and promote affordability.

Examples of supply-side measures include:

- Promote co-deployment and infrastructure-sharing of telecommunication infrastructure and co-investment to reduce prices;
- Foster co-deployment with access to non-telecommunication infrastructure (addressing key obstacles, such as limits on access and rights of way);
- Ensure sufficient availability of quality spectrum to deploy mobile broadband networks (e.g. via spectrum assignment and trading);
- Focus on expanding network coverage (e.g. via coverage obligations included in the licenses);
- Develop effective international technical standards to achieve economies of scale and enhance quality of services;
- Promote effective and functional wholesale and retail markets to lower prices.

Various policy measures exist on the demand side:

- Ensure the availability and affordability of broadband-enabled devices and services for poor or at-risk households and other vulnerable groups;
- Enable the development of local and relevant broadband applications and content including in multiple languages;
- Improve broadband availability mapping to increase consumer awareness about choice of services and service providers;
- Enhance transparency and control of market information to inform consumers about market prices and their rights to enable them to make informed decisions;
- Undertake communication campaigns to increase trust and security;
- Engage in ICT literacy campaigns and digital skills courses to boost user capacities, awareness and interest.
- Promote effective ICT skills through training and education at all levels, formal and informal, with a special focus on girls and women.

To promote ICT accessibility for persons with disabilities, countries should put in place mandatory ICT accessible procurement policies and standards with an enforcement mechanism. This should be accompanied by raising awareness, providing technical assistances to users, building capacity of public procurers and including ICT accessibility as a competition criteria in procurement processes so that products are not evaluated only on price. It is also important to include ICT accessibility requirements in foreign development aid and to have accessibility standards linked to the provision of development aid and international cooperation. Harmonized international standards will ensure that ICTs will be accessible by default, lead to lower prices and innovative solutions. They could also consider the following specific policy measures:

1 develop, within their national legal frameworks, guidelines or other mechanisms to enhance the accessibility, compatibility and usability of telecommunication/ICT services, products and terminals;

2 encourage to develop national policies and regulatory frameworks for utilizing the USOFs to enhance the accessibility of telecommunication/ICT services and products;

3 introduce telecommunication relay services to enable persons with hearing and speech disabilities to utilize telecommunication services that are functionally equivalent to telecommunication services for persons without disabilities;

4 implement international standards on ICT accessibility and support self-representation by persons with disabilities in international standardization process so as to ensure their experiences, views and opinions are taken into account;

5 encourage the provision of differentiated and affordable service plans for persons with disabilities in order to increase the accessibility and usability of telecommunications/ICT for these persons;

6 encourage the development of applications for telecommunication products and terminals to increase the accessibility and usability of telecommunications/ICT for persons with visual, auditory, verbal and other physical and mental disabilities.