

Opening Debate: towards a future built on broadband

Summary

The objective of this session was to have Panelists debating on why broadband is important for the Americas and which initiatives can be undertaken by stakeholders in the region to encourage and promote broadband inclusion. Participated in this Session Minister Diego Molano, Minister of Information and Communications Technologies of Colombia; Carolyn Seepersad-Bachan, Minister of Public Administration of Trinidad & Tobago; Ambassador Philip Verbeer, Coordinator for International Communications and Information Policy of USA; John Davies, Vice President of INTEL; Santiago Fernandez Valbuena, CEO of Telefonica Latin America and Patrick Slim Domit, Vice President of America Movil.

The Session was moderated by ITU Secretary General, Dr. Hamadoun I. Touré who addressed the audience highlighting the importance of digital communication and its relevance for the economic and social development of the countries, stating that in the world there are yet too many unconnected and that this is the main reason why ITU is organizing the World Connect series. Dr. Touré addressed each of the Panelists with questions that surrounded the related topic, including challenges experienced.

During the Session, discussions centered around (1) the national experiences (2) the importance of digital inclusion as being essential to reduce poverty and generate opportunities (3) the role that government and market should play in order to improve broadband infrastructure and (4) government and Private Sector cooperation through Public-Private Partnerships (PPs).

Several challenges were raised during the discussions. The price, that is generally too high for the average user; low usage due to lack of awareness in regards to technology, applications and benefits; lack of school connectivity and appropriate capacity building programs for teachers and students; coverage is compromised due to high costs, resulting in low coverage, mainly in rural areas; low investments also affects the number of users that have access to ICTs; regulations at times have been an inhibiting factor, generating legal uncertainty for investment.

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In response to these and other challenges, many of the panelists shared their experiences and there was an overwhelming view that the solution to these challenges cannot rest on one person, group or organization. Both, the private sector and governments must work together. Governments must have clear policies and guidelines generating a predictable environment that would build investors' confidence for the long term investments needed. At the same time reductions in tax could not only work as a stimulus to investors but also generate profit for the government through the mainstreaming of ICT devices while accelerating the benefits and reaching to the base of the pyramid. Investment on education must be encouraged and public awareness and training programs for all users despite age, location or cultural differences must be implemented. There was a common understanding that the future will be a broadband world and no other.
