

Programme 6: Special Programme for least developed countries

1 Vision

The Special Programme for least developed countries (LDCs) will be valued for its quality and timely service aimed at integrating LDCs into the world economy through telecommunication development and its ability to impact positively on the delivery of assistance to LDCs. In this effort, BDT will work with all other stakeholders both externally and in-house to promote partnerships and sustainable development in LDCs.

2 Background

ITU assistance to least developed countries goes back to 1971, when the Union accorded special assistance to LDCs through the implementation of relevant Plenipotentiary Conference resolutions. Until 1992, ITU funds were utilized on an ad hoc basis to finance experts, equipment procurement, fellowships, etc. From 1992, the approach changed for the better with the introduction of a *programme approach* to assistance leading to implementation based on clearly defined priority areas. Although this innovation of programming funds for specific priority actions resulted in some improvement in the state of telecommunications in the LDCs, the small amount of funds available meant, however, that ITU assistance had to remain catalytic and was spread rather thinly for the increasing number of these countries. These meagre financial resources resulted in very few noteworthy successes. In 1998, a new strategy in providing assistance to LDCs was introduced. The strategy sought to concentrate the Union's efforts and resources on a small number of countries selected each year. The implementation of the programme drew support from the recipient country itself and other development partners that the Union mobilized to help.

3 Goals

- a) The Special Programme for LDCs seeks to provide focused and differentiated assistance to the world's least developed countries in all the activities of BDT, and of ITU in general.
- b) The programme seeks to fully meet the urban telecommunication needs of LDCs and to provide universal access in rural areas.

4 Objective

The programme seeks to increase the average telephone density to 5 main lines (ML) per 100 inhabitants and the number of Internet connections to 10 users per 100 inhabitants by 2010 (year of the fourth United Nations Conference for LDCs).

5 New strategy

Whilst the strategy of selecting a few countries to benefit from concentrated assistance on a yearly basis has improved the delivery of assistance, a new delivery mechanism is now needed. Even though the strategy of concentrating assistance to a few LDCs at a time was implemented with reasonable satisfaction during the cycle 1999-2002, a biennial approach will be adopted during the cycle 2003-2006. This means that instead of concentrating assistance on an average of six countries per year, assistance will be directed to about twelve countries for a period of two years. The larger period will permit closer and sustained follow-up of actions taken, including possible evaluation, and a mustering of partnerships through partnership round tables and any other means of mobilizing resources. The increased number of countries will widen the delivery of assistance without compromising the effectiveness of the initiative through the length of the delivery time of two years.

Given that half of the LDCs have now been covered under the old strategy (20 countries), the modified strategy will make it possible to deliver assistance to all the remaining countries during the next cycle and possibly to start a second round for the most needy ones. It should be stated, however, that ad hoc assistance would also be given to non-participating countries at all times within the constraints of resources.

Part of the new strategy is to run a parallel initiative of delivering assistance to a special group of countries within the LDCs grouping, i.e. countries emerging from war and civil strife as identified by the relevant resolutions of the Union. This special group of countries requires maximum possible assistance in various areas, especially in replacing their infrastructures destroyed by war and putting in place new networks. While the countries can still receive funds under the LDC programme, they need more financial injection and more support in all areas to jump-start their telecommunication sector.

6 Priority areas

It is of critical importance to define the priority areas for telecommunication development in LDCs. This is where the activities of BDT and its development partners should be focused during the cycle 2003-2006. If all stakeholders adequately address these issues, it is hoped that the major bottlenecks to development will be removed and the countries will be geared to high growth of their networks. A general programme of action is proposed below in the form of new priorities.

- a) *Development of rural telecommunications*: This priority area is designed to bring about **easy access** to telecommunication services in the rural areas where a majority of the population in LDCs lives. It should also stimulate rural industries, improve education delivery, usher in a host of social benefits and stem population migration to cities. Ultimately, it should bring about **universal access** to telecommunication services.
- b) *Development of infrastructure and introduction of new technologies and services*: It is intended to continue assisting LDCs in technological choice. The introduction of new technologies and techniques requires caution, so as to avoid prematurely withdrawing old equipment from service and incurring undue interworking penalties. Assistance will mainly be extended to cover telecommunication and information communication technologies and the associated services including the Internet and its applications and wireless access systems (both fixed and mobile).
- c) *Sector restructuring*: The priority here is designed to continue the process of sector restructuring, to bring about liberalization and competition and, possibly, privatization as applicable. All these should induce faster network growth and better management of the sector such that countries derive higher benefits from it. Assistance will be extended to the new regulatory bodies in various areas ranging from measures to implement universal access strategies to the creation of various tools required by the regulator. Assistance may also be extended to the new fledgling companies on a cost-recovery basis.
- d) *Human resources development/management*: This is an important all-encompassing area which must be maintained virtually *ad infinitum* because human resources are the most valuable asset of an entity. It will embrace the traditional HRD/HRM activities involving training and retraining of personnel in areas such as modern management techniques and management of telecommunication networks, including their maintenance.
- e) *Financing and partnerships*: Partnerships are essential for the implementation of the Special Programme for LDCs. These partnerships should be aimed at pooling resources and directing the aggregated resources to LDCs so as to avoid duplication of effort and wastage of resources as well as to avoid spreading the meagre resources thinly, resulting in no or little impact being made in beneficiary countries. For this reason, annual partnership round tables will be held for a group of countries benefiting from BDT's concentrated assistance. Tangible projects will be presented to development partners and clarification sought by development partners from country representatives.

Bilateral initiatives between the programme and its constellation of contacts will be promoted so as to attract financial inflows in LDCs. This is particularly important as most players are averse to getting involved in fragile environments such as those found in LDCs and would need to be approached tactfully and separately with individual projects.

The participation of the private sector and multilateral organizations is required so as to accelerate telecommunication development in LDCs.

7 Actions

Specific actions (within the ambit of BDT activities) will be prepared annually or biennially for the operational plan in accordance with the requests made by the countries concerned.

8 Resolutions and Recommendations relevant to this Programme

| Reference | Title |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| Resolution.16 (Rev.Istanbul,2002) | Special actions for the least developed countries |
| Resolution.17 (Rev.Istanbul,2002) | Implementation of national, regional, interregional and global projects |
| Resolution.25 (Istanbul,2002) | Assistance to countries in special need: Afghanistan, Burundi, Democratic Republic of the Congo, East Timor, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Somalia |
| Resolution.26 (Istanbul,2002) | Assistance to countries in special need: Afghanistan |

To maintain interest on the implementation of all other resolutions except those specifically on Assistance and support to the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and Special Technical Assistance to the Palestinian Authority.
