

ITU Regional Development Forum

Opening remarks

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Mr Jean Philbert Nsengimana,
Minister of Youth and ICT, Rwanda

- Mr Brahima Sanou, Director of ITU Development Bureau
- Mr. Lamin Manneh, Resident Coordinator of the One UN Family in Rwanda and dear friend,
- Mr. Andrew Rugege, ITU Regional Director for Africa
- Major Patrick Nyirishema, Director General, Rwanda Utilities Regulatory Authority (RURA),
- Distinguished ladies and gentlemen,

I have a great pleasure to welcome you all, on behalf of the Government of Rwanda, to this Regional Development Forum. I would like to extend my gratitude to the ITU for selecting Rwanda as the co-host of this important event, which only strengthens the excellent partnership between the Government of Rwanda and ITU. I would also like to thank RURA for proudly sponsoring this event.

May I remind that Kigali was the city that hosted the connect Africa Summit in 2007 whose main outcome was the investment of more than \$70 billion in Africa's digital infrastructure and the launch of regional centers of excellence, the first of which is Carnegie Mellon University Campus here in Rwanda. More recently, ITU and Government of Rwanda co-hosted the Transform Africa Summit which resulted in the Smart Africa Alliance, with its Headquarters here in Kigali since 2015 but with an already impressive track record that includes the One Africa Network projects whose promise is to turn Africa into a single digital market.

Every time we have an opportunity to meet as leaders from the public and private sectors, academia and civil society in ICT, we must use it to advance the role that new technologies are playing and can play in making this world, and our continent a better place. This forum wouldn't have come at a better time when we are all gearing up to implement that SDGs, that focus on empowering the People, protecting the Planet, achieving shared Prosperity , building Peace all through Partnerships. Those are important 5 Ps that we should all memorize and keep in mind in everything we do. The People, the planet, prosperity, peace and partnerships.

I would be preaching to the choir if I went into any greater length talking about how ICT will drive each one of the 17 SDGs. Today, I wanted to share a perspective on what in my view Governments should focus on to drive digital economies, which will in turn accelerate the socio-economic transformation that our continent, the Africa we want, needs and deserves. I will support those elements with some examples of the progress that Rwanda has made in this regard.

I have grouped them into 10 pillars, or 10 T, but look for the T sound at the end of the word, not the beginning. So what should be the role of governments?

1. **Connect:** provide broadband to citizen, government offices, schools, hospitals and business. In our Smart Rwanda Master Plan 2020, we committed to Universal access to broadband by 2017, using combination of a national fiber optic backbone network with more than 6000 km installed today and a last mile of 4G LTE planned to reach 95% population coverage by 2017. We are also deploying large scale WiFi networks as well as TV White Space based networks. Indeed, one of such WiFi networks is being rolled out in partnership with ITU, and I take this opportunity to thank them once again.
2. **Promote** - to drive awareness, adoption and use, prevent all sorts of gaps especial gender and rural/urban gaps

3. **Educate** - the next generation of consumers and producers of digital goods and services. Rwanda is the home of the largest deployment of OLPC in Africa. We are also the home of the first Africa's computer Assembly Factory that was set up to meet the needs of the Education Sector which has moved to Smart Classrooms but also the domestic and international consumer markets. Indeed, it's unacceptable that Africa continues to import smart devices for all its billion people. We are a big market and we should make our voice count. I believe that education is what is going to turn Africa from being passive consumers to active and competitive producers of technology goods and services.
4. **Demonstrate** – Governments must by example: GoR is transforming our public service into a 24/7, self-service, cashless and paperless experience, with transparency, efficiency, accountability and most importantly citizen convenience as key benefits. Works like queuing, waiting, kindly requesting, suffering, even travelling in search of government services will soon be history in Rwanda. Today, we have more than 100 government services online including e-procurement, e-recruitment, land registration, construction permits, business registration, tax payment, import and export handling, civil and voter registration. The World Economic Forum Global Information Technology Report 2015 ranked Rwanda as number 1 globally in the success of ICT promotion by Government. This could not have happened without the leadership of President Paul Kagame. I believe that indeed, leadership is the secret ingredient that makes digital transformation happen.
5. **Regulate** - provide a level playing ground for competition to thrive and grow the ICT industry as well as other productive and social sectors.
6. **Protect**: the rights of customers, investors, and especially children online. More broadly, government should seek to mitigate the risks that ICT brings - especially increase in inequality, cyber security, etc.
7. **Innovate** – Africa should not wait until the train of the next industrial revolution has passed to play catch up. As we strive to meet ever raising expectations of our people, we should look into technologies of the future such as IoT, Big Data, Digital Object Architecture, Robotics, Artificial Intelligence, Drones, etc. You may be aware that On October 14, Rwanda launched the World's first commercial delivery of emergency medical supplies by drones. We also host Africa's First Digital Hospital, called Babyl - offering online diagnostic and medication prescription on phone and online.
8. **Invest**: Government should be ready to take risk and invest especially in areas where the market is failing, to ensure universal services or introduce capabilities that the private sector is not or taking long to bring on the market. They should also provide funding for R&D, infrastructure if necessary and most importantly, invest in STEM education,
9. **Cooperate**: the African wisdom says that if you want to go fast you go alone, if you want to go far, you go together. We are here to find a way to create wisdom 2.0 – how to far and fast at the same time. This was the mission that was assigned to Smart Africa and we should all bring our support to the team that is led by our own Dr. Hamadoun Toure, who used to head this prestigious institution that is the ITU.
10. **Quit**: This last one my sound counter intuitive or contradictory to what I have said before, but its not. Indeed, Governments should Quit or retreat or vacate or take a back seat and leave the private sector in the driving seat. Governments have no business competing with the private sector. They have a business of enabling it, stimulating the market and preparing the society to a hyper connected future.

So in summary, governments should connect, promote, educate, demonstrate, regulate, protect, innovate, invest, cooperate then quit, retreat or vacate and leave the private sector in the driving seat.

I thank you and wish you a fruitful meeting.