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ITU SIDE EVENT – DEPLOYING BROADBAND FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Priorities for the LDCs and how to enable a secure and stable environment for

broadband deployment in these countries

1.0 Background

Over the last ten years various declarations, strategies and initiatives at international, regional and national levels under Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Brussels Plan of Action (BPOA), the Broadband Commission and others have been taken in order to foster and speed up socio-economic development and poverty reduction in developing countries with special focus on Least Developed Countries (LDCs) around the world. Those forums encompassed identification of specific and general challenges affecting social and economic development especially for LDCs; establishment of strategies/goals to address those challenges including formulation of Plan of Actions with clear targets and milestones.

Consequently, to the above efforts issues related to Information Communication Technology (ICT) infrastructure developments and ubiquitous access to Broadband services at households level in urban and rural areas and various studies/researches done (e.g. PICTURE AFRICA i.e. Poverty and ICT in urban and rural area in East Africa) have agreed to be among the key impetus in stimulating and supporting socio economic development and poverty alleviation among communities in LDCs countries. Currently, ICT Infrastructures and services deserve and must be treated with similar weight to other utilities and infrastructures such as roads, ports, electricity, water etc in all aspects of legal, policy, regulation, financing and investments.

In view of the above, it is therefore pertinent that a secure and stable environment for Broadband Deployment in LDCs is created and harnessed in order to stimulate and ensure sustainable social economic development and poverty alleviation for rural and disadvantaged communities in developing and LDCs countries. The above requirement were directly or indirectly articulated by MDGs, BPOA and Tunis World Forum, and in various international, regional and national forums. These developments necessitated adoption of several priorities and initiatives by LDCs focusing at creating secure and stable

environment for Broadband deployments. It should be noted that only around 40% of LDCs population own mobile phones with negligible access to internet. Hence, the tasks and priorities of transforming communities and increasing sustainable broadband access cannot be overemphasized.

2.0   Priorities for Secure and Stable Environment for Broadband Deployments in LDCs

As highlighted above, LDCs adopted various strategies/priorities in order to address challenges affecting sustainability and stability of Broadband infrastructure deployments and access to Broadband services. Generally, the adopted priorities are in line with various commitments, strategies and plan of action as per MDGs, BPOA including other regional and national forums.

2.1   Infrastructure Development - ICT

As it is for roads, energy and water infrastructures, ICT infrastructures play a pivotal role in stimulating and supporting socio-economic development leading to poverty alleviation, and have cross-cutting effects to all sectors of the economy and society. Consented strategic priority actions need to be taken in order to address sustainability, security and stability of the industry in the medium and long term perspective. So far, the priority concerns in this area include:

- Political will to understand the primary strategic nature of Broadband ICT Infrastructure and taking concerted action to ensure secure and stable ICT environment in LDCs countries

- Primary emphasis on financing and investments in development of ICT infrastructures as key stimulant to socio economic development and poverty alleviation. The emphasis should be of the same weight to those given to electricity, road and other utility infrastructures

- Effective cooperation in financing and investments effort by Governments, Public Private Partnerships (PPP) is vital in expediting a growth and deployments of ICT infrastructures in LDCs countries. It has already been proven that go alone strategy by Governments cannot work especially in ensuring deployments of Distribution/Metro and Last Mile broadband infrastructures that target majority communities in rural and urban areas. In Tanzania, Universal Communication Access Fund (UCAF) was established in order to speedup implementation of universal access policies through expansion and coverage of ICT services to rural and less

profitable communities. The Fund is being financed by the Government of Tanzania, operators, regulator and External Donors

- Electricity availability including alternative sources of clean energy as prerequisite to ICT infrastructure developments and access to it. Availability and affordability of electricity is among the key priority areas that need to be carefully addressed in order to enhance ICT infrastructure development and uptake. The theme should be no electricity no ICT, and hence no socio economic development and poverty increases

2.2 Coordination and Harmonization of ICT Initiatives

Among the challenges facing LDCs in their endeavor to ensure secure and stable deployment of broadband infrastructures with corresponding applications and services is ineffective coordination and harmonization of various ICT related initiatives nationally and regionally. Due to these uncoordinated initiatives, scarce financial resources are being wasted through double investments and/or counter investments including creation of "white elephants" leading to minimal or no positive impacts to socio economic development as compared to uncoordinated investment made. This gap is also noted on MDGs and BPOA where both are trying to address similar issues but at different timing and targets making it difficult to objectively monitor their individual impacts in poverty alleviation. Hence, the priorities in this area include:

- To establish effective mechanisms for coordination and harmonization of Broadband Deployment and other ICT initiatives at national and regional levels. At national level, some LDCs have already taken tangible steps in addressing this priority area by formulating national institutions that are responsible for coordinating and harmonization of all ICT related initiatives in respective countries, Republic of Rwanda is a good example on this aspect, Tanzania is in the process to initiate the ICT Commission, it is therefore not surprising that positive impact in bridging the digital divide are taking an encouraging stride in that LDC country. Similarly, other LDCs countries are taking action of the same direction

- Establishing legal and regulatory frameworks that encourage sharing and collocation of ICT infrastructures among players in the industry. The priority is not only friendly to the

environment but if well managed will lead to savings in financial resources for investors; the same could be utilized in expanding Broadband ICT infrastructures in other areas.

2.3   Awareness and Capacity building

It goes without saying that the bottom-line objective of deploying broadband infrastructures in LDCs countries is to make them closer and accessible to the households and communities in rural and urban areas. Hence, in order to ensure secure and stable broadband infrastructures in LDCs countries it is imperative that the deployed infrastructures are fully utilized by the public in order to enhance socio economic development. As highlighted earlier, only 40% of LDCs countries populations have mobile phones and majority are not aware of the internet. Hence, efforts must be taken in order to address public awareness and capacity building (tools and skills) in order to empower communities own and/or access/utilize deployed ICT infrastructures. In view of these facts, the priorities include:

- Review of education curricula to include ICT as a compulsory subject at all levels of education system including adult literacy on benefit and usage of ICT related services. The benefits of access to broadband should be well articulated in order to stimulate demand for ICT services across the society

- Employ political, economical and media policies and strategies in sensitizing the societies across countries on the benefit and need to utilize ICT infrastructures for socio economic development and poverty alleviation

- Build communities' capacity in terms of skills and tools that will enable them to access, utilize and exploit the benefits provided by the deployed broadband ICT infrastructures in order to stimulate social and economic development including alleviation of poverty. Appropriate policies must be put in place to enable communities to acquire tools that will facilitate access and utility of the deployed broadband ICT infrastructures

- In order to enhance awareness and stimulate usage of the deployed broadband infrastructures, LDCs Governments, private entities and donors cooperate and build useful contents relevant to

the daily lives of communities in rural and urban areas as to stimulate demand for and usage of affordable broadband ICT services and applications. Government should spearhead implementations of E-Life for the communities

- Build Community information centers – facilitate ICT accessibility to all households especially those with no capacity to own ICT equipments

2.4   Broadband Infrastructure and Services Support

In order to ensure sustainability of the deployed broadband ICT infrastructures in the long term, LDCs need to establish effective and proactive mechanism for management, operations, maintenance and upgrade of infrastructures, service and application. The concept of Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) can be employed depending of the environment for each LDC country

2.5   Policy, Legal and Regulatory Frameworks

Implementation of the said priorities will hardly be realized if the legal and regulatory frameworks are not in place to support the initiatives. ICT policies in LDCs need to be formulated or reviewed in a manner that will facilitate effective service delivery. The issue of infrastructure sharing and co-location is vital to enable use of the accrued saving to further ICT expansion in rural areas. Conducive regulatory framework that will facilitate cost-effective investment is of paramount importance i.e. converged licensing framework which is technology neutral and service oriented-currently used in Tanzania, has promoted communication investment in the country. Effective PPP policy is highly important considering that the Governments alone cannot afford to do everything.

3.0   Implementation progress of BPOA in Tanzania

For the past ten years (since 2001) Tanzania as a Least Developed Country, has been initiating various programmes and projects to implement BPoA. Tanzania started with formulation of an ICT Policy (2003), established an independent regulator through the Tanzania Communications Regulatory Act (2003), established a Universal Fund through Universal Communications Services Act (2006), construction of the National ICT Broadband Backbone which also provides connectivity to almost all neighbor countries including the landlocked ones. Recently, Tanzania enacted an Electronic and Postal Communications Act to guide and oversee the implementation

of various services like migration process to digital broadcasting by December 2012, ICT infrastructure sharing, establishment of the new addressing system and postcode systems in Tanzania. All these efforts have helped to promote the ICT industry in Tanzania including implementation of the converged licensing regime in 2005, which is technological neutral and provides investors with cost effective investment.