



ITU Backgrounders

ITU-D: DRIVING ICT-LED DEVELOPMENT WORLDWIDE

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For the millions of people for whom access to modern communications remains a dream, rather than a reality, ITU projects worldwide represent a concrete link to a brighter future.

While access to Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) is now widely recognized as essential to achieving human development goals, there is a long way to go in bridging the 'digital divide'.

Through a multi-stakeholder approach that harnesses the decision-making power of governments, non-governmental organizations and the private sector, ITU's [Telecommunication Development Sector](#) (ITU-D) and its executive arm, the Telecommunication Development Bureau (BDT), are working to promote socio-economic development through ICTs.

In addition to Member States, ITU-D's diverse membership includes over 300 partners from government as well as leading IT equipment manufacturers and software developers, regulatory agencies and regional and international development bodies. This gives the Sector the resources to make a difference through policy-making, information sharing, and grassroots projects that help build capacity through education and training.

The Sector's development goals, set via the [World Telecommunication Development Conference \(WTDC-14\)](#) in Dubai in April 2014, prioritize equitable access – across countries and within communities – with special focus on gender issues, youth access, the disabled, indigenous communities and remote populations.

ITU-D is also actively engaged in a special direct aid programme aimed at bringing modern communications to 49 UN-designated Least Developed Countries (LDCs), positively impacting about 850 million people.

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ICT training programmes

ITU's Development Sector offers extensive ICT skills development outreach through its [ITU Academy](#) initiative. The ITU Academy web-based learning management system enables access to ITU training interventions and resources, whether delivered face-to-face or through distance learning. The vision of ITU Academy is to strengthen the individual, institutional and organizational capacity of developing countries by making ICT learning and development opportunities available at the highest quality possible.

In addition, ITU has [60 Centres of Excellence](#) supported by a wide range of government and industry partners, which are designed to offer continuous education to senior ICT managers in the public and private spheres. These centres serve as regional focal points for professional development, research, and knowledge sharing, as well as providing revenue-generating specialist training services to external clients.



Complementing its Centres of Excellence, ITU's [Internet Training Centres Initiative](#) (ITCI) is helping developing countries build their own pool of 'new economy' professionals who will drive ongoing ICT growth at a local level. BDT has so far helped establish **77 ITCIs in 62 countries**, 22 of which are LDCs through the [Concentrated Assistance to LDCs](#) programme.

The ICT Eye website is the world's largest free-of-charge ICT information resource.

Making it all add up

ITU is recognized as the world's premier source of impartial and in-depth information on ICT.

BDT's ICT Data and Statistics Division collects around 100 [ICT indicators](#) annually for around 200 economies worldwide. These include data on mobile and fixed network penetration, Internet use, broadband access, pricing of ICT services, household ICT access, access to ICTs by gender, ICT industry revenue and investment, and more. Statistics are collected directly from telecommunication ministries, regulatory authorities and National Statistical Offices, which includes household surveys. ITU uses this comprehensive data to track the Information Society, to measure the digital divide, and to identify trends and market opportunities, helping decision-makers and investors establish policy and business strategies.

The [ICT Eye](#) website is the **world's largest free-of-charge ICT information resource**, collating ICT indicators and statistics, regulatory and policy profiles, national tariff policies, operator information, and contact details for a host of financial, scientific and development organizations.

In addition, a series of comprehensive regional and global reports track and analyze ongoing trends across the ICT industry. The Bureau's flagship annual publication, [Measuring the Information Society](#), is renowned for its impartiality and analytical breadth, as well as the reliability of its extensive sets of indicators, covering everything from fixed line networks to TV penetration and Internet access speeds and pricing.

In addition, BDT's annual [World Telecommunication/ICT Indicators Symposium \(WTIS\)](#) is the largest gathering of experts and practitioners in the field of information society measurement. Each year, it brings together around 300 delegates, from government ministers and business leaders to UN statistics-gathering organizations, national statisticians, leading academicians and ICT data producers and analysts.

ITU plays an important role in guiding countries in their data collection efforts by providing guidelines and definitions to measure the Information Society and track the digital divide. These include the ITU [Handbook for the Collection of Administrative Data on Telecommunications/ICT](#) and the ITU [Manual for Measuring ICT Access and Use by Households and Individuals](#).

ITU Interactive Terrestrial Transmission maps

The [ITU Interactive Terrestrial Transmission Maps](#), developed by ITU-D, are an authoritative ICT data mapping platform to take stock of national backbone connectivity, as well as of other key metrics of the ICT sector. Data collected from more than 150 operators worldwide are already available, and are updated constantly.



ITU's digital inclusion activities are designed to promote ICT accessibility and use for the social and economic development of people with specific needs, including persons with disabilities, women and girls, youth and children and indigenous peoples.

TOWARDS INTERNATIONAL COMPARABILITY

Reliable, standardized and internationally comparable data and benchmarking are indispensable to measuring the progress of the Information Society. That's why ITU, together with the [Partnership on Measuring ICT for Development](#), has curated a core list of ICT indicators that all countries are encouraged to collect. The Partnership is a group of 13 international and regional organizations including OECD, UNCTAD and the World Bank. Together, they provide guidelines, definitions and methodological assistance to developing countries.

Promoting an equitable regulatory environment

BDT's annual **Global Symposium for Regulators**, established back in the year 2000 to promote information exchange among regulatory professionals, has become the industry's flagship regulatory event, regularly attracting over 700 senior representatives from the world's national regulatory bodies as well as private companies.

BDT also offers a comprehensive portfolio of indispensable regulatory resources, including [Economic and Financial issues](#); the online [ICT Regulation Toolkit](#) jointly developed by ITU and infoDev; the up-to-date set of GSR best-practice guidelines; and special training packages aimed at regulatory authorities including the regional expert level training workshops on Effective Price Regulation for Broadband.

INFORMATION RESOURCES, MOST OF WHICH ARE OFFERED FREE-OF-CHARGE, INCLUDE:

- the TREG website, which provides links to the Global Regulators Exchange (G-REX) online forum and other useful information for ITU Members
- ITU's Regulatory Newslog reporting the latest regulatory news from around the world
- BDT's flagship annual Trends in Telecommunication Reform report, along with the thematic broadband reports and regulatory, economic and financial studies
- In-depth policy and regulatory information, national tariff policies including costing practices and country profiles available through the BDT's [ICT Eye](#) database

Digital inclusion for people with specific needs

ITU's digital inclusion activities are designed to promote ICT accessibility and use for the social and economic development of people with specific needs, including persons with disabilities, women and girls, youth and children and indigenous peoples.

The activities include sharing information and raising awareness on policies, legislation, regulations and business practices that promote digital inclusion. Examples include the [Girls in ICT Portal](#), the [Connect a School, Connect a Community toolkit](#), the [e-Accessibility toolkit](#), and publications such as [Making Television Accessible](#) and [Making Mobile Phones and Services Accessible](#). BDT also posts regular [blogs](#) and organizes local, regional and international awareness-raising events.



Affordable and accessible telecommunication/ICT networks are fundamental to promoting innovation and driving the development of national and global economies and the information society.

Technical conformance and interoperability

To facilitate the safe use of products and services worldwide, regardless of vendor or provider, it is crucial that technologies be developed in accordance with international standards, regulations and other relevant specifications.

A joint initiative across all three ITU Sectors, ITU's Conformity and Interoperability (C&I) programme seeks to ensure conformance. The C&I Programme is based on four pillars:

- **Conformity assessment**, evaluating a product's compliance with ITU's standards
- **Interoperability events**, analyzing the ability of products by different vendors to interoperate
- **Capacity-building**, educating policy-makers and business on the importance of conformance and interoperability testing
- **Assistance to developing countries** in establishing test centres and harmonized C&I programmes in different regions of the world.

More information is available at the [ITU C&I Portal](#).

New applications and services

In close collaboration with other UN specialized agencies and programmes, BDT has developed a number of applications and services supporting the deployment of ICT/mobile applications to improve people's lives worldwide. For example, ITU, in cooperation with WHO, launched the [Be He@lthy Be Mobile](#) initiative in 2013 to combat non-communicable diseases. Partnering with UN Women, ITU is leveraging the power of technology to promote gender equality through a Memorandum of Understanding which will see the two agencies collaborate on new joint initiatives from 2014 onwards.

ITU-D Study Groups

Affordable and accessible telecommunication/ICT networks are fundamental to promoting innovation and driving the development of national and global economies and the information society.

[ITU-D Study Groups](#) provide an opportunity for members from both government and private sector to share information and build knowledge on specific telecommunication/ICT issues important to their national development agenda.

These study groups focus on two main areas:

1. [Enabling environment for the development of telecommunications/ICTs](#)
2. [ICT applications: cybersecurity, emergency telecommunications and climate-change adaptation](#)

Each Study Group has its own Working Groups that strive to find sustainable and effective solutions to address key questions in these fields.

[ITU-D Study Groups](#) are open to participation by ITU Member States, ITU-D Sector Members, Associates and Academia. They provide a convenient entry point for those new to the activities of the ITU and the Telecommunication Development Sector, and a useful forum for launching debate on new and upcoming telecommunication/ICT topics. All input to the Study Groups, be it through surveys, contributions or case studies, is made available for immediate access by the membership using content management and web publication tools. Participation in the multilingual meetings of the groups can be either in person or via remote participation services.