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| Chairman, Joint ITU-ATU Regional Preparatory Meeting for WTDC-21 for Africa (RPM-AFR) | | | |
| Report by the RPM-AFR Chairman | | | |
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**Introduction**

The Regional Preparatory Meeting for Africa (RPM-AFR) was organized as a joint meeting between the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and the African Telecommunications Union (ATU), hosted by the Ministry of Digital Economy of Burkina Faso, and held online from 29 to 30 March 2021.

The objective of RPM-AFR was to identify regional topics of interest and challenges that need to be addressed at the regional level to foster the development of telecommunications/information and communication technologies (ICTs), taking into consideration contributions submitted by the ITU and ATU membership in the region. The meeting concluded with a set of proposals on priority issues that will serve as basis for the formulation of contributions to the World Telecommunication Development Conference, to be held in Addis Ababa (Ethiopia), from 8 to 19 November 2021 (WTDC-21). WTDC-21 will consider the ITU-D activities to be carried out over the next four-year period (2022-2025).

This report gives an account of the work and results of the RPM-AFR.

**Participation**

RPM-AFR was attended by 311 participants including 200 delegates representing 33 Member States from the Africa region, 20 participants from 8 ITU-D Sector Members from the region, 45 participants representing 19 Observer Member States, 16 participants from 7 Observer Sector Members, 2 participants from the United Nations system, 3 from ITU Academia and 25 guests consisting among others of representatives from the Generation Connect Africa Youth Group. Of this number, 113 were women and 197 were men participants. The list of participants can be found [here](https://www.itu.int/md/D18-RPMAFR-C-0025/en).

1. **Opening ceremony**

During the opening ceremony, keynote speakers made their opening remarks at the kind invitation of the ITU Regional Director for Africa as Master of Ceremony. The speakers appreciated the efforts made to prepare the joint ITU-ATU preparatory meeting, emphasized the need for improved digital technologies to connect the unconnected and committed to continue to support the preparatory process towards WTDC-21. The keynote speakers included:

**Ms Doreen Bogdan-Martin**, Director, Telecommunication Development Bureau, ITU ([link to speech](https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/bdt-director/Pages/Speeches.aspx?ItemID=348))

**Mr John Omo**, Secretary General, African Telecommunications Union (ATU)

**Dr Amani Abou-Zeid**, Commissioner of Infrastructure and Energy, African Union Commission

**Mr Oliver Chinganya**, Director for the African Centre for Statistics and Head of the Digital Centre of Excellence, United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA)

**Dr Mesfin Belachew Tefera**, Senior Strategic Advisor Ministry of Innovation and Technology, Ethiopia for **H.E. Dr Ahmedin Mohammed**, Minister of Innovation and Technology

**H.E. Ms Hadja Fatimata Ouattara Sanon**, Minister of Digital Economy, Posts, and Digital Transformation, Burkina Faso

The aforementioned speeches can be found on the [website](https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Conferences/WTDC/WTDC21/Pages/RPM-AFR.aspx).

Following the opening remarks, the Minister of Digital Economy, Posts, and Digital Transformation, Burkina Faso as the virtual host of the RPM officially declared the meeting open.

The ITU Regional Director for Africa also welcomed two representatives from the Generation Connect Africa Youth group, Ms Marvel Nyama from Cameroon and Mr Ian Makamara from Kenya, who shared a short video presentation with their contribution to the RPM with key messages to ensure youth empowerment for Africa’s digital transformation ([Document 24](https://www.itu.int/md/D18-RPMAFR-C-0024/)). Discussions around the contribution continued under agenda item 8.

A group photo was taken to mark the opening of the meeting.

1. **Election of the Chairman and Vice-Chairman**

The BDT Director and the ATU Secretary General facilitated the process to nominate the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the RPM. The ATU Secretary General explained the consultation process that had been undertaken to select the Chairman, Vice-Chairman and Rapporteurs.

Mr Richard Anago, Director of International Relations and Cooperation from the Burkina Faso Ministry of Digital Economy, Post and Digital Transformation was then endorsed as the RPM-AFR Chairman, Mr Jim Paterson from South Africa as the Vice-Chairman, and Ms Rebecca Mukiite from Uganda and Mr Mohamed Amine Benziane from Algeria as Rapporteurs.

It was also mentioned by the BDT Director that Mr John Omo, ATU Secretary General and Mr Andrew Rugege, ITU Regional Director for Africa would serve as the joint Secretariat for the RPM.

1. **Adoption of the agenda and time management plan**

[Document 1](https://www.itu.int/md/D18-RPMAFR-C-0001/) (Draft agenda) and [Document TD/1](https://www.itu.int/md/D18-RPMAFR-210329-TD-0001/) (Time management plan) were presented by the Deputy to the BDT Director, Mr Stephen Bereaux. It was noted that RPM-AFR had received **22**contributions for consideration, including **6** African Common Proposals, **5** contributions from Member States and ITU-D Sector Members, **6** from the ITU and ATU Secretariat, **2** reports from ATU working groups, and **3** reports from working groups of the Telecommunication Development Advisory Group (TDAG).

Chairman Mr Richard Anago requested the adoption of the draft agenda and time management plan. RPM-AFR adopted the agenda and agreed to accept all late contributions for consideration, with the understanding that this approach was being applied on an exceptional basis. This included the late documents from ATU, the Africa Common Proposals, the reports from the two ATU working groups, and the declaration from the Generation Connect Africa Youth Group. The time management plan was updated accordingly.

1. **Digital Trends in Africa**

[Document 2](https://www.itu.int/md/D18-RPMAFR-c-0002): The [Digital Trends in Africa 2021](https://www.itu.int/pub/D-IND-DIG_TRENDS_AFR.01-2021) report was presented by the ITU Regional Office for Africa, through Mr Andrew Rugege, Regional Director, Ms Anne Rita Ssemboga, Programme Officer in the ITU Area Office for Southern Africa, and Mr Serge Valery Zongo, Programme Officer in the ITU Area Office for Central Africa and Madagascar.

RPM-AFR noted with appreciation the document and detailed presentation provided by the ITU Regional Office for Africa.

1. **Reporting on the implementation of the WTDC-17 Buenos Aires Action Plan (including the Regional Initiatives), and contribution to the implementation of the WSIS (World Summit on Information Society) Plan of Action and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**

[Document 3](https://www.itu.int/md/D18-RPMAFR-c-0003): The Result-Based Management (RBM) implementation in BDT, was introduced by Mr Stephen Bereaux, Deputy to the BDT Director. In 2019, BDT embarked on a comprehensive review of its use of RBM to equip itself for the challenges of a rapidly changing development landscape and make itself fit for purpose. This reform introduced RBM for the implementation of all work programmes, as a managerial decision and monitoring tool, and to provide evidence to demonstrate BDT’s impact. RBM also serves as the platform to engage with internal and external partners, and to replicate and scale up successful projects and initiatives.

RPM-AFR noted the document and annexed presentation with an update on RBM implementation in BDT.

[Document 4](https://www.itu.int/md/D18-RPMAFR-c-0004): The Reporting on the implementation of the WTDC-17 Buenos Aires Action Plan (including regional initiatives), and contribution to the implementation of the WSIS Plan of Action and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), was presented by Mr Stephen Bereaux. Annex 1 to the document shares the Mapping linkages between thematic priorities, study groups, regional initiatives, SDGs and WSIS. Annex 2 with Detailed information on work towards the achievement of the Regional Initiatives for Africa, was presented by Mr Andrew Rugege, ITU Regional Director for Africa. He presented the status of implementation of the Regional Initiatives (RIs) to highlight among others, ongoing and completed projects, direct assistance activities undertaken and multi-stakeholder engagements. It was noted that whereas different challenges have been experienced during the past four years, there are also several opportunities, and it is thus fundamental that different implementation mechanisms are explored. This, for example, would include engagement with other initiatives such as Generation Connect and identification of relevant innovative funding mechanisms for the RIs.

The participants commended the efforts undertaken by the region to implement the RIs and acknowledged the challenge in funding. It was also suggested that concept notes for different projects can be developed to facilitate the resource mobilization process.

The discussion that followed focused on proposals for possible mechanisms to move from initiatives to impactful projects for which resources can be mobilized and enhance the understanding for how some of the existing projects can also be taken on board by additional countries.

There was interest around the subject of the Digital Transformation Centres (DTCs) and how these relate to the Centres of Excellence. It was clarified that they are two different initiatives and the DTCs operate more at the local level with an aim to provide training starting from the basic level. It was also indicated that the DTCs are still at a pilot stage and additional countries will be explored to scale the initiative.

Another suggestion from the participants was that some Member States can make a proposal, share their project ideas and funding mechanisms with the region for consideration. The suggestions on joint work and resource mobilization activities to identify potential partners were welcomed.

The issue of matching the Regional Initiatives to the budget required and the process of ITU that requires partners to deposit their contribution to ITU, was also raised. It was noted that this process is challenging to several Member States and it may be an area to reconsider. It was highlighted that the ITU Finance Department is reviewing the Cash vs In Kind contribution at the request of the Council Virtual Consultation which will be further discussed in the Council session in June 2021.

Following the discussion, RPM-AFR noted the document, its annexes and the presentation with an update on work undertaken with partners towards the achievement of the Regional Initiatives for Africa. The meeting commended the ITU Regional Office for Africa for its sincere reporting on progress and obstacles faced.

1. **Report on the implementation of outcomes of other ITU Conferences, Assemblies and meetings related to ITU-D work: PP-18, WRC-19, RA-19, and WTSA-16.**

[Document 5](https://www.itu.int/md/D18-RPMAFR-c-0005): The Report on the implementation of outcomes of other ITU Conferences, Assemblies and meetings related to ITU-D work: PP-18, WRC-19, RA-19, and WTSA-16, was introduced on behalf of the BDT Director by Mr Marco Obiso, acting Chief of Digital Networks and Society Department. The document provides an overview of the implementation of ITU conferences relevant to the work of ITU-D, based on a mapping exercise conducted by BDT to link the BDT thematic focus areas with the relevant ITU resolutions, the WSIS action lines, the ITU-D study groups, SDGs and the targets of the Connect 2020 Agenda.

RPM-AFR noted the document and its detailed annexes.

1. **Preparations for WTDC-21**
   1. **Update on WTDC-21 preparatory process by the host country Ethiopia**

[Document 14](https://www.itu.int/md/D18-RPMAFR-C-0014/): Dr Mesfin Belachew Tefera, on behalf of the Minister of Innovation and Technology, Ethiopia, presented a status report on the preparations for WTDC-21. He highlighted the different sub-committees created to support the preparatory process and the various ongoing activities.

A question was raised from the participants with concern on the current situation of COVID-19 and how this may impact a physical meeting for WTDC-21. It was highlighted, as mentioned in the document, the different options that are under consideration and if needed the conference may be postponed by a few months until the COVID-19 situation improves based on the approval from Member States. A [video](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=55&v=IOHXW0l9HxY&feature=emb_logo) on Ethiopia’s engagement in the preparations for WTDC-21 was also shared.

RPM-AFR thanked Ethiopia for kindly hosting WTDC-21, the first WTDC in Africa, and appreciated the update on host country preparation.

* 1. **Report on the ATU preparatory process**

[Document 23](https://www.itu.int/md/D18-RPMAFR-C-0023): Ms Meriem Slimani on behalf of ATU shared a brief report on the ATU structure for WTDC-21 preparations, the African Common Proposals, key topics for WTDC-21, African priorities for WTDC-21, ATU focal points for TDAG working groups and Inter Regional Preparatory Meetings (IRMs).

RPM-AFR noted with thanks the presentation from ATU with details on the structure of preparations for WTDC and commended ATU on the good progress made to date.

* 1. **Report of the TDAG Working Group on WTDC Preparations (TDAG-WG-Prep)**

[Document 6](https://www.itu.int/md/D18-RPMAFR-C-0006): The Final report of the TDAG Working Group on WTDC Preparations was presented by the Chairman of the working group, Mr Santiago Reyes-Borda. He highlighted the theme of WTDC-21: Connecting the unconnected for Sustainable Development, and emphasized the importance of identifying concrete actions that can be translated into deliverable projects to address the issue of the unconnected. The commitment of the working group was reiterated to continue to work closely with the region in preparation of the WTDC-21.

A question was raised on how the WTDC will be more results oriented and focused and what opportunities are available to ensure that this happens. It was mentioned that it is a collaborative effort to achieve this, and everyone is invited to participate and engage with all partners so that the priorities for the region can be achieved and other linkages to the thematic priorities can be delivered effectively.

RPM-AFR noted the document containing the Final report of the TDAG Working Group on WTDC Preparations, thanked the Chairman and the group for its stellar work which has allowed good progress to be made despite the pandemic.

* 1. **Report of the TDAG Working Group on WTDC Resolutions, Declaration and Thematic Priorities (TDAG-WG-RDTP)**

[Document 7](https://www.itu.int/md/D18-RPMAFR-C-0007): The progress report of the TDAG Working Group on Resolutions, Declaration and Thematic Priorities was presented by Dr Ahmad Reza Sharafat, Chairman of the working group. It was noted that the draft declaration should be clear, concise, and focused and may be discussed and amended up until and during WTDC-21. It was noted that the proposed new thematic priorities which include: Connectivity, Digital Transformation, Enabling Environment, Resource Mobilization, and International Cooperation, were formulated in line with the theme for WTDC-21 to Connect the Unconnected for Sustainable Development and developed in a consolidated manner to be more impactful.

RPM-AFR thanked the Chairman of the TDAG Working Group on Resolutions, Declaration and Thematic Priorities for the report and useful overview of the current status of work.

[Document 21](https://www.itu.int/md/D18-RPMAFR-C-0021): The Report of ATU Working Group 1 for ITU WTDC-21 preparation, was presented by RPM Chairman Mr Richard Anago, who is also the ATU Chairman for Working Group 1 (WG1) dealing with the Working Methods, Declaration, Action Plan, and Regional Initiatives.

[Document 22](https://www.itu.int/md/D18-RPMAFR-C-0022): The Report of ATU Working Group 2, was presented by the RPM Vice-Chairman Mr Jim Paterson, who is the ATU Chairman for Working Group 2 (WG2). ATU WG2 deals with General ICT Development Issues and programmes, including Study Group Questions, developed in line with the WTDC-21 theme, the SDGs and related to the proposed thematic priorities.

Following the presentations of the two reports, the RPM Chairman notes with appreciation the efforts of the two Working Groups and invited the meeting to take note of them.

The presentation of four related African Common Proposals (AFCPs) followed.

[Document 15](https://www.itu.int/md/D18-RPMAFR-C-0015): The proposal for ITU-D thematic priorities, presented by Mr Mohamed Amine Benziane (Algeria), proposed additional considerations for the five thematic priorities put forward by TDAG-WG-RDTP, highlighting the global interdependency between the topics treated under the thematic priorities.

RPM-AFR noted the AFCP on the ITU-D thematic priorities and asked members to continue enriching the proposals in the ATU working groups. ATU was asked to share the revised document also with the next TDAG-WG-RDTP meeting.

[Document 16](https://www.itu.int/md/D18-RPMAFR-C-0016): The proposal for the Draft Addis Ababa Declaration, presented by Mr Mohamed Amine Benziane (Algeria), highlights the region’s priority areas for inclusion in the draft declaration. These priorities are: Broadband in rural and remote areas, Cybersecurity, Spectrum management and bridging standardization gap (BSG), Emerging technologies, Innovation ecosystems, and WSIS outcomes review. It was clarified that the WSIS outcomes referred to are the outcomes from the WSIS+10 review process, however, outcomes from future WSIS outcomes reviews will also be taken into consideration.

RPM-AFR noted the AFCP on the Addis Ababa Declaration and asked members to continue enriching the proposals in the ATU working groups. ATU was asked to share the revised document also with the next TDAG-WG-RDTP meeting.

[Document 17](https://www.itu.int/md/D18-RPMAFR-C-0017): The proposal with ITU-D Study Group Questions, and distribution of 6 Questions under each of the two study groups was presented by Ms Shahira Selim (Egypt). A suggestion was made that in addition to the emerging technologies highlighted, such as OTT (Over the Top) and cloud computing, IoT (Internet of Things) should also be included. The usefulness of considering under economic aspects, economic evaluation methods for spectrum management, cost of deploying connectivity in rural and underserved areas, economic evaluation of next generation networks, was also mentioned. While the principles on economic evaluation already exist, a methodology and technical guidance to regulators on economic evaluation, would be useful.

The need to add universal access was also highlighted with reference to the contribution made by Ethiopia in documents 11 and 12. It was noted that the suggestions made would be taken into consideration and the relevant Questions adjusted accordingly with consensus from the concerned study group.

The meeting took note of the Documents which will be sent to the TDAG WG to go through the next preparations stages and for consideration of the additional proposals made.

RPM-AFR noted the document with the AFCP on revised ITU-D Study Group Questions for the next cycle and asked ATU and its working groups to take into account the comments made, continue their work on the Questions and share their progress with the next TDAG-WG-RDTP meeting and future Inter-Regional Preparatory meetings, as appropriate.

[Document 18](https://www.itu.int/md/D18-RPMAFR-C-0018): The preliminary proposals for the revision of WTDC Resolution 1 (Rev. Buenos Aires, 2017), were presented by Mr Antony Adopo (Côte d’Ivoire).

There being no further comments or questions, and RPM-AFR noted the document with the AFCP on the ITU-D working methods as contained in WTDC Resolution 1 and asked ATU to share the document also with TDAG-WG-RDTP.

* 1. **TDAG Working Group on Strategic and Operational Plans (TDAG-WG-SOP)**

[Document 8](https://www.itu.int/md/D18-RPMAFR-C-0008): The Report on the meeting of the TDAG Working Group on Strategic and Operational Plans (TDAG-WG-SOP) was presented Mrs Blanca González, chair of working group. It contains the report on the activities of TDAG-WG-SOP since its creation. It also includes some recommendations on the way forward that TDAG approved at its meeting in November 2020.

RPM-AFR thanked the Chair of the TDAG Working Group on Strategic and Operational Plans for the report.

[Document 19](https://www.itu.int/md/D18-RPMAFR-C-0019): The Africa Common Proposal with a review of ITU-D contribution to the ITU Strategic Plan by WTDC, was presented by ATU’s Ms Meriem Slimani and Ms Caecilia Nyamutswa (Zimbabwe). It was noted that due to different levels of participation by Member States at TDAG and WTDC, the proposal is to maintain, under a one ITU approach and consistent with the other sectors, the adoption of the ITU-D contribution to the ITU Strategic Plan with WTDC.

RPM-AFR noted the document with the AFCP on the review of the ITU-D contribution to the ITU Strategic plan and asked ATU to share the document also with TDAG-WG-SOP. The meeting expressed the need to ensure that there is good participation by African countries in the review of the ITU-D contribution to the ITU Strategic Plan and therefore keep this at WTDC instead of TDAG. The proposal is keeping the text in WTDC Resolution 1 and Resolution 24 (Rev. Buenos Aires, 2017) as it currently stands concerning the strategic plan.

1. **Identification of regional priority areas**

The regional priority areas, as expressed in the African Common Proposal on the WTDC-21 declaration, were highlighted to include broadband in rural and remote areas, cybersecurity, spectrum management and bridging standardization gap, emerging technologies, innovation ecosystem and WSIS outcomes review. Within ATU Working Group 1 the future African Regional Initiatives have been discussed and elaboration.

[Document 20](https://www.itu.int/md/D18-RPMAFR-C-0020): The African Common Proposal for draft African Regional Initiatives put forward four Regional Initiatives for the 2022-2025 cycle. These are: 1) Supporting digital transformation to usher a rapid transition to digital economy while accelerating innovation in Africa; 2) Implementation and expansion of broadband infrastructures, connectivity and emerging technologies; 3) Building trust, safety and security in the use of telecommunications/information and communication technology and protection of personal data; and 4) Fostering digital industries and innovation ecosystems.

The presentation of the draft Regional Initiatives was followed by some related contributions as per the following.

[Document 9](https://www.itu.int/md/D18-RPMAFR-C-0009): **Huawei Technologies** presented their contribution with proposals for the Regional Initiatives and highlighted the key points of the contribution to include connectivity, healthcare facilities, education, Universal Service Funds (USFs), spectrum policy, digital skills, and inclusivity and transformation of industries specific to Africa such as tourism and energy.

RPM-AFR noted the document and in the discussion it became apparent that the Huawei contribution had already been incorporated in the AFCP on Regional Initiatives.

[Document 10](https://www.itu.int/md/D18-RPMAFR-C-0010): **Afrinic** presented their contribution on Accelerating a secure Internet deployment in Africa beyond the COVID-19. The need to accelerate digital transformation, the increased demand for internet in Africa and the need to facilitate social development, were brought to the fore.

RPM-AFR noted the document and asked Afrinic to participate in the drafting group to work on the regional initiatives as well as contribute to ATU working group 2.

[Document 11](https://www.itu.int/md/D18-RPMAFR-C-0011) on Innovative way of using Universal Access Fund to support African digital transformation and [Document 12](https://www.itu.int/md/D18-RPMAFR-C-0012) on Connecting rural communities, a priority for Africa were presented by **Ethiopia**.

Different interventions were made following the presentation of the contributions from Ethiopia. These included the need to produce a financial model to implement the Universal Access Fund and identify methods to use universal access and private equity through a Study Group Question. It was noted that some countries have utilized their Universal Access Fund whereas others have not, and it is important to understand why. It was also pointed out that Universal Access Funds goes beyond building infrastructure in rural communities and includes access to devices and building of digital community centres and skills which calls for the need to look out for additional sources of funding. In addition to addressing these queries through a Study Group Question, the interventions should not only tackle financing but also seek models of implementation and include demand driven initiatives.

Following these interventions, RPM-AFR noted the documents and asked Ethiopia to participate in the drafting group to work on the regional initiatives, and also consider how the information shared in the contribution could further inform the revision of associated study Questions and other work. The efficient and innovative use of universal service/access funds combined with other financing is an area of key interest in the region. The contributions could inform the revision of associated study Questions, like Question 5/1, and other work within ATU Working Group 2.

[Document 13](https://www.itu.int/md/D18-RPMAFR-C-0013): The **Internet Society** presented their contribution on Expanding internet access to remote and rural areas, to close the digital divide and mitigate the impact of COVID-19. It was mentioned that some of the challenges faced by community networks include, among others, the regulatory framework, business fees, taxes and licensing models, and funding.

Different interventions were made towards this contribution. It was emphasized that a unique strategy for community networks needs to be developed and communicated. It is also important to identify the complementary role that community networks play in addition to the traditional networks to foster collaboration and minimise competition.

RPM-AFR noted the document and asked ISOC to participate in the drafting group to work on the regional initiatives, and also consider how the information shared on community networks in the contribution could be further elaborated to inform the revision of associated study Questions and other work within ATU Working Group 2.

[Document 24](https://www.itu.int/md/D18-RPMAFR-C-0024): Whereas the presentation by the [Generation Connect − Africa Youth Group](https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Regional-Presence/Africa/Pages/projects/2021/GC-Africa-Youth-Group.aspx) of the youth declaration had been made at the start of the RPM, there had not been an opportunity for comments and questions and as such the RPM Chairman opened the floor to allow for this.

It was noted that the youth in their contribution had highlighted privacy, data privacy, cybersecurity, intellectual property rights (IPR), limited internet connectivity and the need to be involved in the decision-making process. The meeting expressed its appreciation for the efforts of youth, and in particular the youth in Africa, and their contribution and indicated that their input would be given consideration as the youth is the future. An intervention by OIF (Organisation internationale de la Francophonie) on ICT-related youth activities was also noted.

RPM-AFR noted the document containing the Generation Connection − Africa Youth Group declaration with appreciation and asked that the drafting group on regional initiatives consider the critical points brought forth by the group.

At the end of Day 1 of the RPM, the RPM-AFR Chairman requested the drafting group on the Regional Initiatives to convene after the plenary, and report back to the RPM-AFR plenary the following day on their progress. [Document DT/2](https://www.itu.int/md/D18-RPMAFR-210329-TD-0002/) shares the result of the RPM-AFR Drafting Group on Regional Initiatives with the revised African Regional Initiatives which was adopted for further elaboration in ATU Working Group 1.

1. **Other business**

***Side event*: I-CoDI (International Center of Digital Innovation)**

A presentation on 29 March on the International Center of Digital Innovation (I-CoDI)([Information document 1](https://www.itu.int/dms_pub/itu-d/md/18/rpmafr/inf/D18-RPMAFR-INF-0001!!PDF-E.pdf)) was made by Mr Alex Wong, Senior Strategy Advisor, BDT, which was well received by the participants. Questions were raised regarding the process required to engage with I-CoDI and it was indicated that in case of interest, engagement and consultation with the Regional Focal Point would be done and a detailed discussion would be planned to understand the needs and requirements.

Additionally, an inquiry on the possibilities and options to leverage in-country opportunities with I-CoDI was put forward. In response, it was highlighted that for example countries that are receiving assistance on Digital Innovation Ecosystems and associated Innovation Frameworks can leverage this initiative. Overall, it may be more impactful to link a project or programme that is already ongoing in the country with the I-CoDI initiative to increase the impact and contribute to the innovative solutions. It was indicated that additional information on the initiative will continue to be shared.

***Side event*: Launch of Network of Women (NoW)**

A side-event on 30 March unveiled the [Africa Network of Women (NoW) for WTDC-21](https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Conferences/WTDC/WTDC21/NoW/Pages/Events/Regional/Africa/2021_03.aspx). Prominent women and role models in the technology sector in Africa convened to share, support and inspire others. The launch was facilitated Ms Caecilia Nyamutswa (Zimbabwe) who welcomed the initiative that aims to; empower women in different communities, share experiences, expand the network of women and mentor young female ICT professionals, among others. It was noted that NoW had already been launched in Europe and Asia-Pacific, and this event would mark the launch in Africa.

The BDT Director Doreen Bogdan-Martin in her remarks recognized the role of women in the digital sector and indicated that NoW will facilitate the exchange of experiences, identify ways to tackle challenges, engage in conversations with those who gained a lot of experience in the field and those who want to learn. The Director emphasized the need to develop creative ideas for WTDC-21 in line with the theme to connect the unconnected. The increased participation of women in delegations and leadership was also noted as an inspiration to create a women base as leaders in the digital sector. Following the remarks from the BDT Director, the Honourable Minister of Digital Economy, Posts, and Digital Transformation in Burkina Faso, Ms Hadja Fatimata Ouattara Sanon, highlighted that at its core NoW initiative strives for equality in the digital world and committed to continue to promote the role of women in the digital sector. It was indicated that Burkina Faso aims at an inclusive digital society − an Association for Young Women is already in place in Burkina Faso as set up by the Minister and engagements with young women are also planned for the Girls in ICT Day celebration in April 2021 to support, inspire, and encourage them.

Drawing from different experiences, Ms Elizabeth Migwalla, Senior Director Government Affairs, Qualcomm, shared some recommendations on how to enhance meaningful participation of women in ICT with lessons learned from a regional workshop with ITU-R and ATU that involved 60 participants. The two recommendations were to: request each African nation to nominate at least two female delegates that can be nurtured to participate in WRC-23 and to nominate at least two women to be part of the leadership structures. It was emphasized that advocacy for women participation and engagement at regional and sub-regional levels to Heads of Delegation is important, and women should be willing to take on challenges and opportunities of leadership for example chairing WTDC and Plenipotentiary Conferences.

Ms Irene Kaggawa Sewakambo, Acting Executive Director, Uganda Communications Commission, also emphasized the value of mentorship programs, supporting the learning process, stepping up, giving others the opportunity, and supporting them to deliver and champion proposals. She welcomed the initiative and appreciated the role of the men and their support for NoW.

Ms Regina Fleur Assoumou Bessou, Director for International Cooperation, Autorité de Régulation des Télécommunications de Côte d'Ivoire (ARTCI) and Chair of Study Group 1, commended all women and highlighted the Honourable Minister of Burkina Faso as a true example of a decision maker and mentioned that as the Study Group 1 Chair it was an honour to serve with other women in management, such as the Vice-Chairs and the Rapporteurs. She indicated that it is a monumental task and expressed her gratitude to all women and acknowledged that indeed WTDC-21 will be a roadmap for the next four years and as such it is important to have women’s participation. It was noted that indeed many African women are already involved in the preparatory process and while the digital space is no longer an enigma for women, coaching and mentoring is fundamental for women to take their rightful places in this space. She made an appeal to encourage women to apply for leadership positions and requested that their administrations continue to offer them the support needed.

The ATU Secretary General committed to continue including women within delegations and indicated that ATU will express gratitude to countries in the region with most women in their delegations in appreciation for championing the proposal to include women in delegations and hope that this will encourage other countries to do the same.

The United States also commended the BDT Director for promoting women’s empowerment and participation in leadership within BDT.

To wrap up the session, an appeal to administrations to include women in delegations, embrace the 50-50 challenge for equal men and women participation, stepping up and increasing participation in the digital sector was voiced. A proposal from the Generation Connect Africa Youth Group encompassed continuing to engage young women in the work of ITU and ATU. It was noted that for a successful WTDC-21, it is essential to bring women to the table. Although, women’s voices have been held back for long and gender parity is still not a reality, there is hope that participation and engagement of women in the digital sector will continue to improve. In conclusion, Ms Nyamutswa thanked all the participants for their contributions and appreciated the commitment made to support and mentor other women as decision makers and leaders in line with the NoW initiative. She also made a call to female participants to submit their names to join the coordination team for NoW which invitation was well received by the participants to the side event.

The RPM Chairman of the RPM opened the Plenary session and congratulated all participants on the successful launch of NoW initiative and opened the floor to discuss next steps for WTDC-21 and presented a draft Summary of Conclusions following the deliberations held from the previous day. The Chair invited the drafting group on the regional initiatives/priorities to present the outcomes of their meeting after Day 1. The drafting group noted that the suggestions made on the regional Initiatives and related contributions would be adopted. Specifically, it was mentioned that since wireless technologies go beyond 5G, it may be more prudent to refer to wireless technologies as a whole and not only 5G. Additionally, requests from the youth to consider connecting underserved areas, participating in decision making, inclusiveness and consultations, ecosystems to support start-ups and entrepreneurs will also be taken into consideration.

The ATU Secretary General noted that the next ATU Preparatory meeting will be held virtually and chaired by South Africa and the date will be communicated. He also thanked South Africa for offering to host the next Preparatory Meeting. The Secretary General also appreciated the opportunity provided by ITU to work together and hold a joint event and requested that all continue to use such common platforms to work together.

1. **Closing**

The ITU Regional Director expressed his sincere gratitude to all participants and appreciated their contributions during the two days of the RPM. He also thanked ATU, colleagues from ITU Headquarters and in the Region for their engagement and support in the entire process and committed to continue serving in the preparatory processes for a successful WTDC-21. He also recognized and appreciated the support of Burkina Faso as the virtual RPM host country.

A vote of thanks addressed to Burkina Faso was kindly delivered by Mauritius.

The Deputy to the BDT Director continued and highlighted that the preparatory process for WTDC-21 is a multifaceted approach that is unprecedented and invited all participants to engage in this process so that the outcomes of WTDC are meaningful, impactful, and implementable. He thanked the participants for their continued commitment and contribution and mentioned that the next Inter-Regional Preparatory meeting will be in May (12-14 May).

The RPM Chairman, in closing the RPM, thanked the participants for their contributions that will play a significant role in preparation for the WTDC-21 and encouraged continued commitment to ensure a successful WTDC-21. He then declared the meeting officially closed.

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