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| **Agenda item:** Item 4**Summary:** This document provides the common view of European countries on the vision of the ITU Development sector with its global role in connecting the unconnected with ITU-D’s primary task to support the use and deployment of digital infrastructure and technologiesin the field of telecommunication/ICT indicating the main focus areas. Contribution also suggest the main focus areas for BDT with emphasize of the ongoing BDT reform.**Expected results:**IRM-1 is invited to note this document, which is submitted to foster discussion among the regions. **References:**N/A |

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the world forever. It also made everyone realize the important role of technologies in our lives. In a situation where we are forced to limit social contacts, without digital tools we would not be able to ensure the continuity of business and education or maintain social relations, secure and healthy well-being. As it turned out, digital connectivity is not a luxury, it is a life saver. Unfortunately, many people around the world still do not have access to the network, and for many others they are prevented from using it for reasons of affordability, lack of relevant skills, or socio-economic factors, which means that the COVID-19 pandemic is exacerbating the already large areas of digital exclusion. The pandemic has shown us the urgency of leaving no one behind. In this context ITU-D must remain a development-focused, solutions-oriented sector that addresses challenges countries are facing in their digital transformation journeys as well as our struggle to connect the next 3.7 billion to the Internet.

Bridging the digital divide (‘connecting the unconnected’) must remain the main purpose of ITU-D, as it lies at the core of ITU’s mandate. To achieve this goal, ITU-D’s primary task should be to support the use and deployment of digital infrastructure and technologiesin the field of telecommunication/ICTas they accelerate connectivity where it is needed the most. A key element of this is the capacity building and technical assistance necessary for implementation of regulatory best practices to foster affordable connectivity and dynamic, economically sustainable telecommunications ecosystems. It is also important to support efforts to empower recipient communities with the necessary skills to fully embrace digital tools. By doing so ITU-D should always strive to promote inclusiveness and sustainable development with a view to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

We believe that BDT reform must result in broader reform of the workings of the Development sector. BDT should become more of a “learning organisation” - constantly learning lessons from its performance and applying them to develop a culture of continuous improvement. We hope that the BDT will be more widely recognised as an expert in its field, championing the needs of developing countries and the role telecommunications/ICTs can play in sustainable development.

BDT should be focused on measurable outcomes that demonstrably contribute towards the SDGs. It should continually assess its performance and innovate in light of “real world” outcomes. Results-driven management should guide the BDT’s ongoing reform at all levels in the organization, including at the regional level where there is a strong need for clarification of roles and responsibilities and for better coordination with the headquarters.

BDT should not act alone, considering how large the perimeter of digital connectivity is. The BDT should further strengthen partnerships with other organizations in order to increase its impact by combining human and financial resources and complementary expertise on the field. All efforts should be made to avoid duplication of actions, both within the ITU and with partner organizations (especially in the UN Development System).

BDT should continue to actively cooperate with the regional organizations, including the representatives of national administrations and NRAs to advance digital integration at the regional level and implementing the Regional Priorities[[1]](#footnote-1). It is essential for us to link regional priorities with regulatory activities; then the regulatory expertise and know-how can widely be shared with other stakeholders through our experts on such topics as broadband issues, capacity building etc.

BDT should select the projects with strong impact and a high sustainability potential for facilitating a global dialogue that focuses on sharing of best practices that allow for telecommunication/ICTs to be deployed efficiently and without constraint. BDT should use its limited financial resources as seed capital to leverage funding from potential partners. BDT can play an important role in matching the available resources that exist amongst the various stakeholders, for instance in capacity building, to those places, organisations and people who need them.

Reorganizing the BDT’s work around clear thematic priorities was a necessary step that needs to be further implemented in order to both increase awareness and appropriation of such priorities at all levels within the BDT and to improve the clarity of BDT’s action from the outside. More clarity will make it easier for the BDT to build partnerships and to foster the involvement of targeted communities. Increased collaboration with other sectors of the ITU must be the other main driver of the reform, so as to realize the concept of ‘One ITU’.

BDT should be an organization open to different points of view and involve different stakeholders**.** Matching the success of having a multi-stakeholder approach in other forums and organisations should provide important guidance for BDT to reform and meet the 21st century challenges in deploying telecommunications/ICT technologies, which involves actions and investment by a variety of stakeholders.

BDT’s priority should be to both retain existing members and to attract new ones. This could be achieved by focusing on the ITU’s core added value and by striking new partnerships with organizations in fields or areas where ITU’s added value is less obvious. When seeking funding partners for its projects, the BDT should strive to target such partners that could potentially become sector members of the ITU-D.Member states and sector members, especially from SMEs and academia,alike have much to offer in terms of sharing experiences and best practice: these contributions should be solicited and deployed where they can be most effective to ensure that all stakeholders can add their bit in helping to further the goals that global community has set upon themselves.

ITU-D should focus its efforts on developing countries, small island developing states (SIDS) and landlocked developing countries (LLDCs), and more generally on the most vulnerable groups (which are defined by the European Institute for Gender Equality as ‘groups of persons that experience a higher risk of poverty, social exclusion, discrimination and violence than the general population, including, but not limited to, ethnic minorities, migrants, people with disabilities, isolated elderly people and children’) and those areas where it can have most impact.

ITU-D activities should focus on fulfilling the Sustainable Development Goals, including the following areas:

Billions around the world still have no connectivity at all. In addition, many hundreds of millions more struggle with access that is too slow, too costly, and too unreliable to have made a meaningful difference to their lives. The BDT should focus on actions related to ensuring inclusive connectivity for all, broadband access for all.

The lack of digital skills remains a significant barrier to digital inclusion. Many adults worldwide are still not "digitally proficient", meaning that even if the Internet is available and cheap, many will not be able to use it. Today, almost every job requires digital communication, so equipping people with the skills to search, evaluate, communicate and share online content effectively and responsibly is key to their future and activities related to it should be one of the priorities undertaken by the ITU-D sector. Technology is part of the new world, it needs to be a part of education.

Due to the fact that the Academia has a special status within the ITU Membership, BDT should continue close cooperation with this community. Representatives of Academia have an insightful perspective that should be taken into account in activities aimed at the development of ICTs in the world.

Supporting young people in accessing broadband internet and in developing their digital skills should be a priority for the ITU-D sector, because today‘s youth hold the key to our future. BDT should continue its work and further promote actions aimed at youth/students empowerment with ICTs (in line with the commitments under PP-18 Rev. Resolution 198 and WTDC-17 Resolution 76) and take the necessary steps to implement the resolutions of the *Youth Strategy.*

The BDT should continue its work on activities related to ensuring digital inclusion of persons with disabilities and other persons with specific needs.

The unexpected changes that have occurred worldwide in connection with the coronavirus pandemic have shaken the global economy. SMEs face the enormous challenge of securing their business, maintaining financial liquidity and ensuring employee protection. In such circumstances, BDT should undertake increased activities promoting the smart use of information and communication technology (ICT) by companies and entrepreneurs. The coronavirus has also caused changes in the skills needed in the labour market, therefore BDT should support actions aimed at upskilling/reskilling of professionals.

The BDT could also dedicate resources to environmental and climate change issues, notably the impact of telecommunication/ICT on the environment or how the sector could contribute to reach Sustainable Development Goals. This could be done by making relevant information (e. g. on energy impacts associated with the use of digital technology) widely available to empower users to make informed choices and to promote pro-investment regulation.

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1. CEPT Com-ITU members are of the opinion that the term “Regional Priorities” better reflect the main idea of development preferences agreed by the region than the term “Regional Initiatives” used until now basing on the documents of ITU-D. In this regard, the needed modifications to the relevant documents will be proposed to ensure the correct and uniform use of terminology. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)