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| **Telecommunication Development Advisory Group (TDAG)**  **25th Meeting, Geneva, 2-5 June 2020** | C:\Users\comas\AppData\Local\Temp\Rar$DRa0.735\jpg\ITU official logo_blue_RGB.jpg | |
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| Director, Telecommunication Development Bureau | |
| summary of TDAG Web Dialogue on Regional Presence | |

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| C:\Users\comas\AppData\Local\Temp\Rar$DRa0.735\jpg\ITU official logo_blue_RGB.jpg**TDAG Web Dialogues**  **24-26 March 2020, Online** |
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| Document: **TDAG Web Dialogue on Regional Presence** |
| Date: **9 April 2020** |
| Submitted by: **Director, BDT** |
| Title: **High-level summary of TDAG Web Dialogue on Regional Presence** |
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**Summary**

At its session in June 2019, the Council adopted [Decision 616](https://www.itu.int/md/S19-CL-C-0133/)[[1]](#footnote-1) instructing the Secretary-General to recruit an independent external management consultancy to perform a comprehensive programmatic, strategic and financial assessment and review of ITU’s regional presence, taking into consideration contributions from the ITU membership.

The review is being carried out in accordance with the requirements and provisions of Resolution 25 (Rev. Dubai, 2018) of the Plenipotentiary Conference.

An international call for bids was launched and PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) was selected, and began its work in early November 2019; it will submit a report with recommendations to Council for action.

During the Web Dialogue on Regional Presence, which took place on 26 March 2020, PwC highlighted the terms of reference and approach for the review, presented its key findings from the current state assessment, and outlined the guiding principles for the design of a future regional model and themes of the high-level recommendations that will be presented to the membership.

Participants provided comments and suggestions to PwC during an interactive question and answer session.

**Setting the scene**

The COVID-19 crisis shows how important the field of telecommunications and information and communication technologies (ICTs) in which ITU operates is to global governance, to the future of the planet, and to connecting people at a time when it is difficult – if not impossible – to make physical connections.

In this context, it is important to ensure that ITU regional presence delivers on the needs of members and that regional offices in turn get the support they need from both headquarters and members to deliver on their mandates.

In the ongoing efforts to build a truly fit for purpose BDT, the Bureau sees this review exercise as an opportunity to strengthen the dialogue with the members and to look at how BDT contributes to the UN Development system.

**The framework**

PwC presented its framework for the review which is largely based on the evaluation criteria of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC). The framework includes 7 evaluation criteria: coherence, relevance, control, efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability.

PwC began the review in November 2019, engaging with members and ITU staff, based on these criteria. The scope and depth of engagement can be seen from the intensive consultations, desk reviews and qualitative analysis that have been carried out. PwC interviewed more than 100 internal (ITU staff) and external stakeholders;collected written contributions from ITU members through an online questionnaire (25 responses); briefed the ITU Coordination Committee and the meeting of the Council Working Group on Financial and Human Resources (CWG-FHR) in February 2020; reviewed more than 100 documents provided by ITU; conducted a quantitative analysis on the basis of a survey of regional staff and of a selected pool of ITU headquarters staff working in BR, TSB and the General Secretariat; carried out an exercise around allocating time of regional staffon different activities, programmes and ITU Sectors; carried out financial and human resources data modelling; looked at travel patterns, and reviewed a sample of selected projects.

**The key findings from the state assessment**

The level of integration between policy and planning documents was examined, essentially looking at two questions: what are the priorities? What is expected from the regional presence?

In terms of priorities, it was recalled that the policy and planning documents available are the final report of WTDC-17 and the action plan for 2018-2021 defined in that report, the overall ITU strategic plan for 2020-2023, enshrined in Resolution 71 (Rev. Dubai, 2018) of the Plenipotentiary Conference and, the third instrument, the operational plan that sets a number of outputs and outcomes expected from the regional presence. PwC highlighted the complexity of the different priorities and timeframes mentioned in these documents, particularly for an external partner or donor.

Looking at the expectations on the role of the regional presence, PwC noted that the strategic plan does not clearly spell out what that role should be. In addition, it was mentioned that global targets are not clearly set out at the regional level.

Similarly, in the operational plan, performance indicators do not include baseline targets.

The lack of reference in the operational plan on how risk is managed by region was also mentioned and discussed.

As regards the relevance of the regional presence, PwC asked the following question: Is ITU’s regional presence focusing on the right things?

PwC noted that activities of the regional and area offices focus heavily on meetings and events and that there may be a need to rebalance the focus of regional teams by defining a strategy of intervention at regional level, leading and implementing a programme of technical assistance that is coordinated and consistent across regions.

According to PwC, ITU is perceived as a technical agency, not necessarily as a development actor. This perception could hamper its ability to develop new partnerships at the local and regional levels, engage in global initiatives, and collaborate with regional stakeholders.

PwC also provided a preliminary opinion on the use of resources allocated to field offices.

It was highlighted that ITU’s thirteen offices only represent a mere ten per cent of overall ITU expenditures. According to PwC’s analysis, the scale of geographical coverage is good, but the limited resources that are spread so thin that they render the current operating model sub-optimal. In addition, it was noted that field offices do not have sufficient, technically-skilled staff to provide the wide range of services requested by members.

As regards the current structure, PwC mentioned that up to four management layers generally accommodate approximately 350 people. In the case of ITU field offices, there are only 57. Having so many management layers cascading from headquarters to regions to area offices results in a top-heavy, hierarchical, siloed and costly structure.

In a staff survey, regional directors were asked to quantify the time they spend on different activities annually. They were also asked to state how much time they spend travelling per year. In 2019, on average, PwC found that regional directors spent around 48 per cent of their working days travelling.

Performance reporting is currently essentially activity-based rather than about the actual results achieved. In 2019 each P and D staff in the regions handled on average five actions, two projects and six countries. In 2019, 13 per cent of the budget for regional activities and programmes at regional level was not delivered on.

A more consistent approach to results-based management would strengthen the effectiveness of the regional presence. PwC commended the work currently being carried out by the Bureau in this regard.

A qualitative review was carried out on 12 projects implemented in 2019 to see how they measured against what PwC typically considers pillars of project excellence: the budget, scope, timing, strategy alignment, impact definition upfront and impact assessment.

All 12 projects were clearly aligned with the SDGs and BDT strategic framework and comprised clear deliverables. However, only three had performed a properly-backed impact assessment, and only seven had defined the impact from the outset. Only two were in line with the initial project timeframe, and the others were delayed mainly because of external factors or national political reasons beyond ITU’s control. The projects were mostly supported by external donors. Impact assessments were not planned systematically from the beginning of the projects.

While demand is strong and donors are raising their investments in digital transformation, at ITU, regional projects, activities and programmes have declined in the last five years.

In ITU, the absence of a drive for impact has led to a marked drop in delivery over the last 20 years.

The review highlights that there is funding available for ICT development projects. The World Bank in 2018 committed around USD 1.2 billion for digital-related infrastructure initiatives. In contrast, ITU voluntary financing for projects and programmes is declining sharply. PwC noted that funds to finance ICT development opportunities exist, but ITU is not capturing a significant share.

**Guiding principles for the design of the future model**

PwC has established six guiding principles to design the future of the regional presence:

**Clarity of purpose**: Align the regional mandate and responsibilities with the vision and mission defined in the ITU strategic plan, providing a limited set of specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and timely objectives to the regional presence.

**Drive for impact:** Use resources efficiently and effectively to ensure the delivery of   
tangible results and address the challenges targeted by ITU, in proximity to developing countries. In doing so, look at where the focus is needed. Where can you get value for money given the limited resources?

**Accountability:** Balance empowerment with control, ensuring a level of autonomy for the regional directors to assess and react on opportunities, based on a comprehensive and regular assessment of their added value in the local environment.

**Part and parcel of the UN family:** Stress the notion of being part of a family. ITU, particularly at regional level, needs to work more closely than it is already doing with other UN agencies to attract funding.

**The One ITU:** Stressthe notion of being One ITU. Resolution 25 and Resolution 1143 of the Council are key in this. The regional presence must have the ability to deliver on the One ITU concept.

**Managed transition**: Adapt a proactive approach to minimize the impact of the envisaged solution on staff and on ensuring business continuity.

**High-level recommendations**

PwC’s recommendations will be organized around the following four themes:

**Strategic positioning**: Strengthen ITU's positioning as a shaper or doer, sharpen the programmatic focus, define priorities for UNCT engagement and consolidate strategic planning at regional level. Recommendations under this family will help ensure coherence and relevance to members.

**International coordination mechanisms:** Step up the corporate approach to risk management, streamline and improve key processes, reach out to membership and external stakeholders, leverage additional resources.

**Regional delivery models:** Consolidate the existing network, optimize the operating model at regional level, enhance the autonomy of the regional presence, nurture technical excellence and diversity.

**Change management:** Drive the political alignment process to confirm the way forward, set up project management mechanisms to implement the “action plan” from the review process, and monitor and manage the transition.

**Conclusion**

PwC noted that ITU needs to look at the range of different focus areas that go from the most strategic, around how to position the regional presence and what value it should strive to deliver to members, to the most operational aspects.

The report will contain a comprehensive set of adaptations, changes, or new ways of working.

PwC proposes an approach that gets the positive impact out there as soon as possible but that is managed in a way that ensures staff continue to do what they do well and also ensures a continuity of service to members, regions, and area offices.

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1. The terms of reference for an independent external management consultancy to review the ITU regional presence are contained in an annex to Decision 616, taken by the Council at its session in June 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)