Director, Telecommunication Development Bureau

Presentation of State of digital development and trends in the Africa Region:
Challenges and opportunities

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State of digital development and trends in the Africa region: Challenges and opportunities
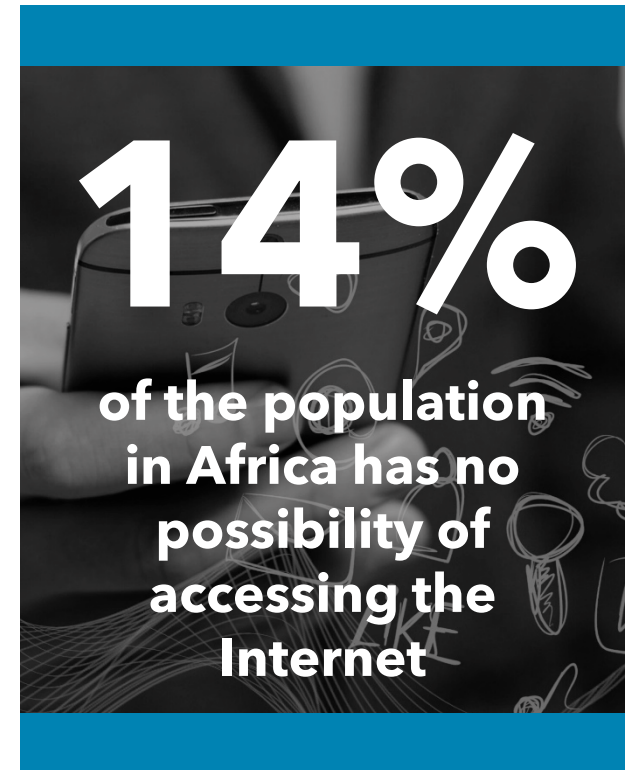
Document 3

Universal and meaningful connectivity: a policy imperative

- Universal and meaningful connectivity (UMC) is a policy imperative to fully leverage the potential of connectivity. It is a requirement for enabling digital transformation.

- UMC enables everyone to enjoy a safe, enriching, and productive online experience at an affordable cost.

- UMC does not mean everyone must be connected all the time but describes a situation where everyone can access the Internet optimally and affordably whenever and wherever needed.

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Digital Africa: Despite progress, significant gaps remain

- 38% of the population used the Internet in 2024, up from 25% in 2018, but still the lowest regional rate.

- Mobile broadband is the main technology for Internet access: 70% of population covered by 4G or 5G and 16% still relying on 3G and 14% without access.

- Youth and urban populations drive adoption.

- Key barriers: cost, digital illiteracy, limited rural infrastructure.

14% of the population in Africa has no possibility of accessing the Internet
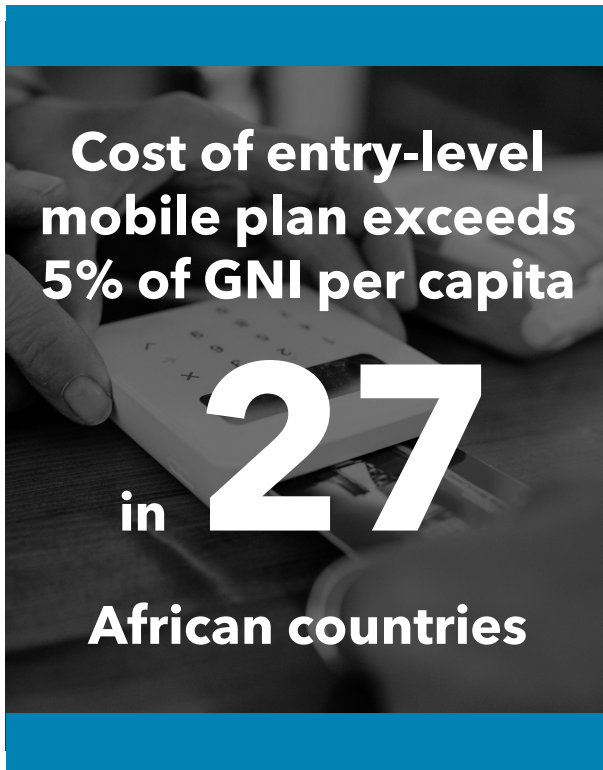
Persistent digital divides within countries

- Gender : 43% of men online vs. only 31% of women, yielding the lowest gender parity score (0.72) among all regions and almost no improvement since 2018 (0.69)

- Rural-urban: 57% of urban populations use the Internet vs. 23% in rural areas.

- Generations: 53% of youth (15–24) use the Internet vs 34% for the rest of the population
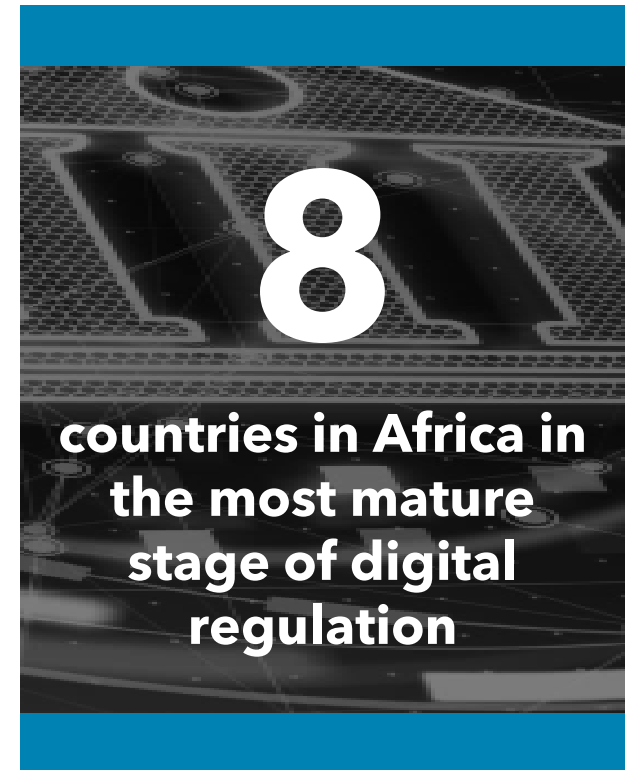
2.5x

In Africa, urban internet adoption is 2.5 times that of rural areas.

Affordability: A major barrier to adoption and meaningful use

Cost of entry-level mobile plan exceeds 5% of GNI per capita in 27 African countries

- Africa remains the least affordable region for Internet access.

- Affordability gap exacerbates digital divides and limits uptake, even in areas with coverage.

- Cost of entry-level mobile plan = 3.9% of GNI per capita (UN target = below 2%) vs

- Fixed broadband = 13.4% of GNI per capita

Improving ICT regulation and governance

- Only 18% of African countries reached G4 (most mature stage of regulation) vs. 38% globally

- Digital governance score: 43%, trailing global average (52%)

- Regulatory capacity strong (71%)–but digital market instruments weak

- Limited stakeholder engagement and inclusion strategies.

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countries in Africa in the most mature stage of digital regulation

Data availability: The hidden barrier

Malawi

1

country in Africa submitted data on ICT skills by level in 2024

- Data gaps hinder effective policymaking, investment, and planning.

- Data must be embedded into national digital strategies.

- Only 9 countries among 44 have ICT household data more recent than 2021.

- Malawi is the only country having reported data on ICT skills based on the latest ITU methodology.

- ITU provides extensive capacity development and technical assistance.

BDT4Impact: Featured case studies (1)

- **Ghana**: Visually impaired persons learned basic computer skills through specialized training programmes.

- **Uganda**: National initiatives improved digital literacy and expanded access to e-government services.

- **Republic of the Congo**: Broadcasting professionals received training to support the transition to digital terrestrial television.

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BDT4Impact: Featured case studies (2)

- **Malawi**: A new national policy was adopted to guide sustainable e-waste management.

- **Burundi and Ethiopia**: Women entrepreneurs enhanced their digital skills to strengthen and grow their businesses.

- **Equatorial Guinea**: ICT benchmarking activities supported regulatory capacity-building and regional collaboration.

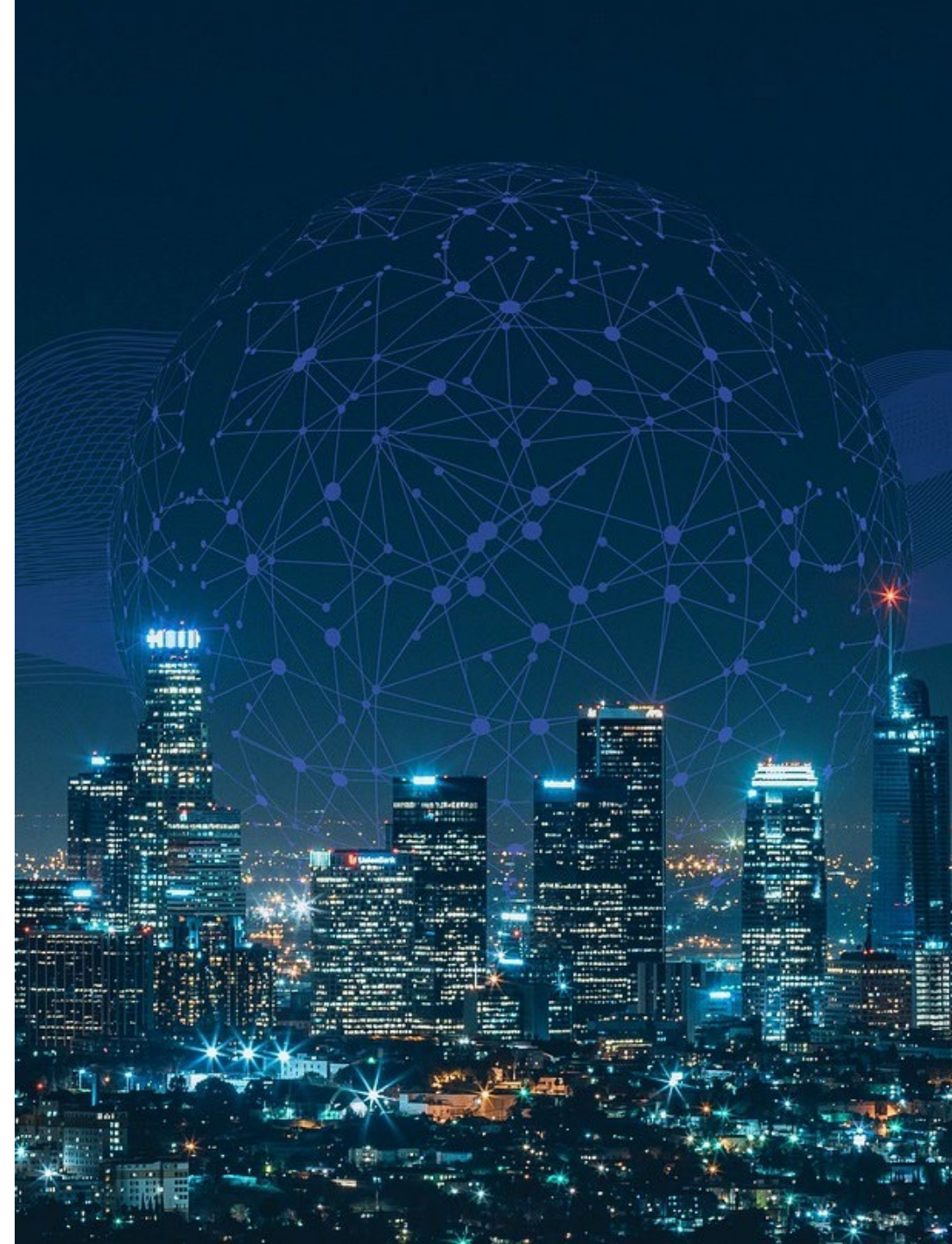itu.int/itu-d/meetings/wtdc25/rpm/afr

Risks and challenges

- Fragmented governance may widen digital divides

- Cybersecurity, misinformation, and e-waste risks rising

- Without targeted support and investment, LDCs, LLDCs, and SIDS may fall further behind in the global digital economy

- Stronger data, policy, and investment frameworks needed

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The road ahead

- Expand 4G/5G coverage, especially in rural areas

- Improve affordability of services

- Invest in digital skills and inclusive strategies

- Close gender, youth, and rural gaps

- Promote regulatory harmonization and cooperation

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Thank you!

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