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| Note by the Secretary-General |
| CONTRIBUTION FROM THE FEDERATIVE REPUBLIC OF BRAZIL“Measuring the information society” Report and ICT statistics in the ITU |

I have the honour to transmit to the Member States of the Council a contribution submitted by the **Federative Republic of Brazil.**

 Houlin ZHAO
 Secretary-General

CONTRIBUTION FROM THE FEDERATIVE REPUBLIC OF BRAZIL

“Measuring the information society” Report and ICT statistics in the ITU

**Introduction**

ITU should make it a strategic priority to enhance its ICT statistics capabilities and outputs in the next cycle. Particularly, two initiatives are essential.

First, the “Measuring the Information Society” Report (hereafter “MIS”) in its 2017 edition left out the usual studies, rankings and findings on prices and affordability of telecommunications/ICTs. These data are invaluable information for academics and decision-makers in all sectors of the telecommunication/ICT industry, and their absence from ITU’s main statistical report needs to be clarified and remedied.

Second, the ITU ICT statistics webpage and tools should improve to accurately present the data series, methodologies and findings of the MIS and other statistical ICT studies over the years.

**Discussion**

As an international organization and a UN specialized agency, ITU is expected to be the locus for global statistics, benchmark studies and measurement of progress in telecommunication/ICTs. ITU even advertises itself as such in the “About us” section of the ICT statistics website.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Since 2003, the ITU has been earning recognition as a reference in global ICT statistics. The Digital Access Index (DAI) was a reference in the measurement of access and use of ICTs. In 2007, the first MIS presented an innovative ICT index (i.e., ICT-OI) that compared progress across countries, and thus, was extremely useful in informing research and decision-making on telecommunication/ICTs.

The 2009 edition of MIS presented the ICT Development Index (IDI) and the ICT Price Basket (IPB) statistics comparing more than 150 countries across the four main dimensions of ICT development and uptake:

* Access;
* Use;
* Literacy/Skills;
* Price and affordability.

From 2009 to 2016 the MIS consistently improved in its methodology, findings, and number of countries assessed. The 2012 MIS introduced analysis on revenue and investment in the ICT sector. The 2013 MIS presented a mobile broadband price data set for almost 130 countries. The 2014 MIS introduced price data analysis *“to provide insights into the relationship between* ***affordability*** *and income inequality, competition and regulation.”* The IPB particularly improved, with more countries examined and better methodology and data gathering every year.

Then the 2017 MIS was published in November 2017 without the IPB study, findings, rankings, or policy recommendations, and without any mention or reference to the IPB methodology that had been published from 2009-2016. Prices of some ICTs are published in Volume 2, but only per country and without any explanation on their importance or meaning. There are no comparative rankings, no chapters on ICT prices or affordability. In fact, there is no use of the words “basket” or “IPB” anywhere in the report. Affordability is mentioned once, and it is in reference to the Connect 2020 targets, which do place affordability as a global priority to raise the inclusiveness of ICTs until 2020.

In comparison, the 2016 edition of MIS features Chapter 4 on “ICT prices” and Annex 2 on “ICT price data methodology”, and they have respectively 56 and 8 pages, or 64 pages out of a total 274. There are dozens of mentions of “affordability”; in fact, these quotes reflect the importance of affordability in MIS 2016:

* *“****affordability*** *is one of the key factors that continue to determine whether or not people will use ICTs”* (101);
* *“The* ***unaffordability*** *of fixed broadband in Africa goes hand in hand with the very low fixed-broadband penetration levels observed in the region”* (122);
* *“****Affordability*** *is the main barrier to mobile-phone ownership”* (155);
* *“For mobile Internet uptake, however,* ***affordability*** *is as important as ICT skills and less of an obstacle than relevant local content (GSMA, 2016a, 2016b)”* (172).

Affordability is clearly and evidently one of, if not the most important barriers to ICT uptake and digital inclusion. Affordability impacts directly and foundationally two of the three dimensions of the IDI: access and use. The cheaper ICTs are, the more people will access and use ICTs. Affordability also impacts the literacy dimension directly, given how ICTs improve access to education and knowledge.

Affordability is a number one priority in terms of policymaking and improving income in general, because as ICTs increasingly become an essential basic good, people have to allocate part of their income for ICT devices, services and applications. In the ITU, affordability is central to achieving Strategic Goal 2 (Inclusiveness), and is monitored statistically as one of the 17 strategic targets of the Union. In fact, affordability is so critical that it is part of the current (and the future) Mission of the ITU (Resolution 71):

*“To promote, facilitate and foster* ***affordable*** *and universal access to telecommunication/information and communication technology networks, services and applications and their use for social, economic and environmentally sustainable growth and development.”*

What motivated these drastic changes from the 2016 to the 2017 MIS? This needs to be clarified. These changes negatively affect the ITU. At the very least, ITU ceases to be a global reference for statistics related to price and affordability of ICTs. But the ITU suffers in additional ways, such as:

* Loss of trust in the ITU as the effective UN agency for ICTs;
* Loss of reputation of the ITU in general, but particularly as a source of statistics, information, studies and policymaking;
* Break in the historical series of data and loss of the ability to examine progress in ICT development over time;
* Loss of importance and relevance of the MIS and of ITU in general.

For the vast majority of global stakeholders interested and involved in telecommunication/ICTs (i.e., academics; business decision-makers; policymakers; regulators), ICT statistics and particularly the MIS are ITU’s most important output. Protecting the integrity, consistency and relevance of ITU’s statistics should be one of ITU’s highest strategic priorities.

To improve ITU statistics beyond the MIS, it is necessary to review ITU’s institutional approach to statistics, including all statistical tools, publications and websites. For example, the IDI data visualization tool only allows visualization and comparison between MIS 2017 and MIS 2016; it does not present IPB data; and it does not allow visualization of data before 2016. The IPB methodology website is also not available, even in the webpages for MIS 2009-2016.

**Proposal**

It is a strategic priority for ITU to invest in the improvement of its capabilities in ICT statistics in the next cycle. ITU should look into and mirror other organizations that are recognized for their excellence, consistency, reliability and efficiency in the presentation of data, statistics, reports and dynamic statistical tools, such as the World Bank, IMF, WTO, among others.

This way, ITU will strengthen its position as a reference in global ICT statistics, particularly on studies, data and information regarding the affordability and prices of ICTs. The IPB and affordability studies are a critical content in the MIS, and thus should always be treated as such.

ITU should, at the earliest possible date:

* Publish all data, rankings, benchmarks and studies on IPB and affordability for MIS 2017 as it did in MIS 2016;
* Publish a webpage explaining the IPB methodology;
* Improve the data visualization tool, publish all data gathered in every MIS, and allow comparisons over time;

The ITU Secretariat should examine the human and financial resources necessary to enhance ITU’s capabilities in gathering, producing and publishing meaningful data, information, statistics and reports, and advise PP-18 on necessary amendments to the ITU Financial plan for 2020-2023.

In addition, in preparation for PP-18, Brazil will examine the possibility of including the ideas presented in this document in amendments to Resolution 131 or in a new PP Resolution.

1. *“As the UN specialized agency for ICTs, ITU is the official source for global ICT statistics,”* <https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Pages/default.aspx>. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)