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| **Informal Experts Group on WTPF-21 Third meeting** |  |
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|  | **Document IEG-WTPF-21-3/4-E** |
|  | **15 June 2020** |
|  | **English only** |
| Comments by the Association for Progressive Communications (APC) | |

# ON THE THIRD DRAFT OF THE REPORT BY THE ITU SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR THE SIXTH WORLD TELECOMMUNICATION/INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY POLICY FORUM 2021

Proposed edits to the

# **Third Draft of the Report by the ITU Secretary-General for the Sixth World Telecommunication/Information and Communication Technology Policy Forum 2021**

Note

In commenting on this third draft, I have only included those paragraphs in which I am making a recommendation for an edit. Proposed changes are indicated in red. Further discussion on issues concerning Climate, Gender, and Telecommunications/ICT infrastructure can be found in the Association for Progressive Communications (APC) contributions to the open consultation for Draft 3.

**Thank you,  
Avri Doria (avri@apc.org)**

**2. Themes for WTPF-21**

2.1 By [Decision 611](https://www.itu.int/md/S19-CL-C-0128/en) (Council 2019), the 2019 session of Council decided that the theme for WTPF-21 is as set out in para 1.1.3

Some experts were of the opinion that this theme, as decided by Council 2019, comprises two components – a high-level theme (i.e. “*Policies for mobilizing new and emerging telecommunications/ICTs for sustainable development”)* and sub-themes (i.e. the paragraph that follows the high-level theme). As a result, they stated that the high-level theme is broad enough to encompass discussions on the sub-themes and more, and therefore, the Forum should focus on the high-level theme and not delve into the various sub-themes as individual topics. Other experts expressed the opinion that Council 2019 has decided on a comprehensive theme for WTPF-21, that the text in its entirety, as set out in [Decision 611](https://www.itu.int/md/S19-CL-C-0128/en) (Council 2019), is meant to be the focus of discussions at the Forum, and that, as a result, WTPF-21 can explore any aspect of the theme.

*In considering sub-themes, it should be noted that the* [*Decision 611*](https://www.itu.int/md/S19-CL-C-0128/en) *(Council 2019) list of sub-themes, “Themes for consideration include AI, IoT, 5G[1], Big Data, OTTs etc. “ is not given as a complete list of possible themes, but only a list of possible items for consideration that does not exclude other sub-themes, including new and emerging [digital technologies and trends] [telecommunications/ICTs] in Community Networks, that may contribute to discussion of the high-level theme.*

2.2 New and emerging [digital technologies and trends] [telecommunications/ICTs][2] have the potential to accelerate progress towards achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development by facilitating action on the Sustainable Development Goals, within the WSIS framework. As the world sees breakthroughs in technologies and trends transforming the global digital economy, it must address issues across diverse sectors such as health, education, employment, *environment,* transportation, agriculture, nutrition, disability, youth empowerment, social inclusion, gender equality and poverty reduction.

2.4 This transformative potential comes with both significant opportunities and complex policy challenges in various social, economic, technical, *environmental* and developmental fields. Some of these opportunities and challenges are not new, and the world has previously witnessed similar transformations across society, industry and economy that have led to new models of growth and innovation. There is a policy imperative to learn from these past experiences to better inform strategies to maximize the opportunities and address the challenges of these telecommunications/ICTs and foster innovation for sustainable development through balanced and considered policies.

**2.8 Some themes for consideration**

[Decision 611](https://www.itu.int/md/S19-CL-C-0128/en) (Council 2019) lists some themes for consideration[4] as indicated below.

Some experts noted that the following sub-themes should be addressed in the Secretary-General's Report through the lens of new and emerging telecommunications/ICTs. They recommended against including standalone sections on these sub-themes to align more closely with the WTPF-21 theme and the ITU's mandate. Other experts were of the view that [Decision 611](https://www.itu.int/md/S19-CL-C-0128/en) (Council 2019) recognized the following themes explicitly and therefore, recommended that each of them should be discussed separately and incorporated as standalone sections in the Report.

*The themes discussed below, as stated in Decisions 611, do not preclude the discussion of other new and emerging [digital technologies and trends] [telecommunications/ICTs], which were not specifically listed in the decision.*

**2.8.1 Artificial Intelligence (AI)**

2.8.1.1 AI solutions and technologies have the potential to transform areas as diverse and critical as education, healthcare, finance, mobility, agriculture, energy, accessibility and connectivity. They bring with them opportunities, challenges and risks.

2.8.1.2 Some examples of AI-related policy questions that could be considered include:

a. How can AI solutions and technologies promote sustainable development? What are the key policy imperatives driving decision-makers to explore and harness the potential of AI-based solutions and technologies to enable sustainable development, including the transition to a digital economy?

b. How can AI help the developing countries to better benefit from the use of advanced data-driven technologies? How can they benefit from AI?

c. What are the challenges facing the deployment and use of AI technologies?

d. How can stakeholders promote the development and use of AI technologies to support sustainable development?

*- How can AI be used to aid in developing solutions that do not threaten the environment.*

The text above was supported by some experts as a result of the discussions that are reflected below:

Experts recognized that the opportunities and challenges posed by AI are significant. Some experts were of the view that the best way to implement [Decision 611](https://www.itu.int/md/S19-CL-C-0128/en) (Council 2019) was to address AI in the Report through the lens of new and emerging telecommunications/ICTs. Therefore, they recommended against including a standalone section on AI in the Report and recommended to incorporate AI into other sections, focusing on policies to mobilize new and emerging telecommunications/ICTs to enable AI applications for sustainable development, aligning closely with the WTPF-21 theme and ITU's mandate. Some other experts were of the view that [Decision 611](https://www.itu.int/md/S19-CL-C-0128/en) (Council 2019) recognized AI explicitly among the topics for discussion in the theme for WTPF-21 and therefore, they recommended that AI should be discussed more broadly and incorporated as a standalone section in the Report.

Some experts noted that if there is a distinct section on AI, it should focus on broader questions relating to identification of opportunities and challenges for the purpose of mobilizing AI for sustainable development. Some other experts were of the view that it is important to address the specific opportunities, risks and challenges posed by such technologies.

**2.8.2 Internet of Things (IoT)**

2.8.2.1 The IoT and connected devices are driving improvements to economic growth and human wellbeing in a range of areas such as healthcare, water, agriculture, natural resource management, environment and energy. However, policy-makers and other stakeholders may need to address several challenges if they are to capture its full potential.

2.8.2.2 Some examples of IoT-related policy questions that could be considered include:

a. How can the development and deployment of IoT promote sustainable development?

B. What are the key challenges and opportunities that policy-makers and other stakeholders face in developing ecosystems that best support the cross-sectoral, public and private nature of such applications?

c. What steps can be taken by all stakeholders to safeguard users and infrastructure and promote affordability, accessibility, and inclusive access of IoT systems across countries and populations?

d. What role and priority tasks should be performed within ITU to create opportunities for the development and implementation of IoT in Member States?

*- What are the network security threats involved in IOT and how can policy-makers contribute to reduction of these risks to the network infrastructure?*

The text above was agreed by consensus as a result of the discussions that are reflected below:

Some experts were of the view that deliberations on IoT should be carried out with a focus on mobilizing the technology for sustainable development rather than referencing specific aspects such as development, deployment, affordability, public confidence or trust. Some other experts stated that it is necessary to consider all of these aspects in relation to IoT as they are important to understand the potential benefits posed by this technology.

Some experts noted that the consensus text above does not explicitly address concerns related to factors such as security or trust. Some other experts stated that security, in particular, is a key aspect for all countries and entities, and is a crosscutting priority across all the technologies dealt with in this Report, without being specific to the topic of IoT.

**2.8.3 5G**

2.8.3.2 In this respect, some essential questions include:

a. How can 5G promote sustainable development? What are some of the key uses/applications of 5G technologies that can drive adoption? What are the main challenges relating to deployment of such technologies? *How can 5G be deployed without contributing to increased digital divide among disadvantaged populations? Can 5G be deployed without negative environmental impact?*

b. What can policy-makers and other stakeholders do to develop policies and strategies that support effective solutions, including existing deployments and new 5G deployments, to provide benefit and access to all?

c. What steps can all stakeholders take to foster a 5G innovation ecosystem and new business models to maximize the benefits for all while minimizing associated costs, financial and otherwise?

In addition to the questions above, some experts were of the view that a cross-cutting question should also be included in order to draw focus towards the policies that can help mobilize 5G technologies towards enabling applications of Big Data and AI for sustainable development (for details, please see [Comment C-009](https://www.itu.int/md/S21-WTPF21PREP-C-0009/en)[5]). Some other experts expressed the view that as separate sections have been devoted to each of these technologies, and since the primary objective of WTPF-21 is to deliberate upon policies for mobilizing these technologies for sustainable development, it is not necessary to include a specific question for this purpose.

**2.8.5 OTTs**

2.8.5.3 In this regard, some examples of OTT-related policy questions that could be considered include:

a. What are some of the key policy opportunities and challenges associated with OTTs regarding sustainable development?

b. What are the key safeguards that policymakers, OTT players and other stakeholders could consider to ensure that the use of OTTs benefits all?

c. What approaches might be considered regarding OTTs to help foster an environment that promotes competition and improves the range of OTT services to all stakeholders?

d. How can OTT players and telecom operators best engage with one another at a local and international level?

Some experts were of the view that the WTPF-21 should explore what model partnership agreements could be developed. Some other experts were of the opinion that WTPF-21 should avoid delving into discussions that are too prescriptive, as may be the case with this question.

e. How can OTTs contribute to economic development?

*- What approaches might be considered regarding OTT’s to protect disadvantaged populations from exclusion?*

f. How should ITU further promote cooperation and dialogue among ITU Members as well as other stakeholders on activities related to OTT, including the dissemination of best practices, especially for developing countries?

In addition to the questions set out above, some experts proposed a few other questions for consideration (for details, please see [Comments C-008](https://www.itu.int/md/S21-WTPF21PREP-C-0008/en)[7] and [Comments C-012](https://www.itu.int/md/S21-WTPF21PREP-C-0012/en)[8]). These questions were considered by the IEG during the informal discussions that were conducted to determine the text for this section as a whole.

**2.8.6 Mobilizing New Solutions for Connectivity**

2.8.6.1 *~~Mobile~~* [Technologies and trends] [Telecommunications/ICTs] have the power to transform lives, offering life-enhancing financial, health, education, and many other services, the ability to participate in the digital economy, and the means to participate in communities.

2.8.6.3 To bridge these gaps, innovations in technology, business plans and funding models are being developed and explored by providers, governments, academia, and civil society actors. These include but are not limited to: low-cost solar-powered mobile radios that can open up rural areas to new connectivity options; new, high-capacity satellite services systems that can offer lower cost internet access to remote locations; and business models that deliberately ~~work to provide services to~~ enable local communities to be involved in providing services and ~~involve them in~~ bringing down barriers to technology use.

2.8.6.4 In this respect, some of the key questions to be considered include:

a. What types of technologies and business models should decision-makers learn more about when determining how to address connectivity, access and usage gaps in their own unique market contexts?

B. How can interest in innovation be mobilized in the private sector and *civil society* to solve unique market contexts of new and emerging markets?

c. How to more closely align funding mechanisms to mobilize new solutions for connectivity?

d. How to facilitate greater collaboration and knowledge sharing between innovators, investors and communities to accelerate the development of these innovations?

e. What are the challenges and opportunities mobilizing new solutions for expanding Internet connectivity, particularly to remote and under-served areas? What are the roles of governments and non-government actors in overcoming these challenges?

f. How can small/community/non-profit operators help in promoting the use of new solutions to increase Internet connectivity?

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