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| **Comments C-009-E**  **21 August 2019**  **English only** |
| **Comments submitted by the United States of America**  ON the FIRST DRAFT outline of the Report of THE ITU SECRETARY-GENERAL for the Sixth World Telecommunication/Information and Communication Technology Policy Forum 2021 |

**1. Preamble**

**1.1 The Sixth World Telecommunication/Information and Communication Technology Policy Forum 2021 (WTPF-21)[[1]](#footnote-2)**

1.1.1 Originally established by the 1994 Plenipotentiary Conference of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), the World Telecommunication/Information and Communication Technology Policy Forum (WTPF) has been successfully convened in 1996, 1998, 2001, 2009 and 2013. By [Resolution 2 (Rev. Dubai, 2018)](https://www.itu.int/en/council/Documents/basic-texts/RES-002-E.pdf), the 2018 Plenipotentiary Conference of the ITU has now resolved to hold the next WTPF in 2021.

1.1.2 The purpose of WTPF is to provide a venue for exchanging views and information and thereby creating a shared vision among policymakers worldwide on the issues arising from the emergence of new telecommunication/ICT services and technologies, and to consider any other policy issue in telecommunications/ICTs which would benefit from a global exchange of views, in addition to the adoption of opinions reflecting common viewpoints ([Resolution 2 (Rev. Dubai, 2018)](https://www.itu.int/en/council/Documents/basic-texts/RES-002-E.pdf)).

1.1.3 By [Decision 611](https://www.itu.int/md/S19-CL-C-0128/en), the 2019 Session of ITU Council decided that the theme for WTPF-21 will be “*Policies for mobilizing new and emerging telecommunications/ICTs for sustainable development”* and thatthe WTPF-21 would discuss how new and emerging digital technologies and trends are enablers of the global transition to the digital economy. Themes for consideration would include AI, IoT, 5G, Big Data, OTTs etc. and focus on opportunities, challenges and policies to foster sustainable development.

1.1.4 WTPF-21 shall not produce prescriptive regulatory outcomes; however, it shall prepare reports and adopt non-binding opinions by consensus for consideration by Member States, Sector Members, and relevant ITU meetings ([Resolution 2 (Rev. Dubai, 2018)](https://www.itu.int/en/council/Documents/basic-texts/RES-002-E.pdf)).

1.1.5 All information relating to WTPF-21 is posted on <https://www.itu.int/en/wtpf-21/Pages/default.aspx> .

**1.2 Preparatory process for the ITU Secretary-General’s Report**

1.2.1 Discussions at WTPF-21 shall be based solely on a single report by the ITU Secretary-General, and contributions from participants based on that report, prepared in accordance with a procedure adopted by the Council and based on the proposals of Member States and Sector Members, and on the views of Associates, Academia and stakeholders, and WTPF shall not consider drafts of any new Opinions that were not presented during the preparatory period foreseen for drawing up the Secretary-General’s report prior to the forum ([Resolution 2 (Rev. Dubai, 2018)](https://www.itu.int/en/council/Documents/basic-texts/RES-002-E.pdf)). This Report outlines a potential scope for discussions and presents some of the topics under consideration among different stakeholder groups on policies to mobilize new and emerging telecommunications/ICTs for sustainable development.

1.2.2 In accordance with [Decision 611](https://www.itu.int/md/S19-CL-C-0128/en) of ITU Council 2019, the ITU Secretary-General will convene an Informal Experts Group (IEG), each of whom is active in preparing for WTPF-21. A circular letter ([CL-19/34](https://www.itu.int/md/S19-SG-CIR-0034/en)) has been sent to Member States, the “State of Palestine,” Sector Members, Associates, Academia, and Organizations which have the right to attend ITU conferences and meetings as observers on 18 July 2019 calling for nomination of experts to constitute the IEG.

1.2.3 The preparatory process will be guided by the timetable set out as Annex 2 in [Decision 611](https://www.itu.int/md/S19-CL-C-0128/en) and in Table 1 below.

**Table 1: Timetable for the elaboration of the ITU Secretary-General’s Report**

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| **1 August, 2019** | A First Draft outline of the report by the Secretary-General shall be posted online for comments |
| **21 August, 2019** | Deadline for receipt of comments on the First Draft  Deadline for nominations for a balanced group of experts to advise the Secretary-General on further elaboration of the report and of draft opinions associated with it |
| **1st IEG Meeting (September 2019 during the CWG cluster)** | First meeting of the group of experts to discuss the First Draft of the report by the Secretary-General and the comments received |
| **1 November, 2019** | The Second Draft of the report by the Secretary-General will be posted online, incorporating discussions from the 1st IEG meeting  This draft will also be made available online for open public consultations |
| **23 December, 2019** | Deadline for receipt of comments on the Second Draft, and for contribution on broad outlines for possible draft opinions  Deadline for inputs from the open public consultations |
| **2nd IEG Meeting (January/February 2020 during the CWG cluster)** | Second meeting of the group of experts to discuss the Second Draft of the report by the Secretary-General and the comments received, including from the open public consultation |
| **1 April, 2020** | The Third Draft of the report by the Secretary-General will be posted online, incorporating discussions from the 2nd IEG meeting and including outlines of draft Opinions  This draft will also be made available online for open public consultations |
| **15 June , 2020** | Deadline for receipt of comments on the Third Draft, and for contribution on possible draft Opinions  Deadline for inputs from the open public consultations |
| **3rd IEG Meeting (September 2020 during the CWG cluster)** | Third meeting of the group of experts to discuss the Third Draft of the report by the Secretary-General and the comments received, including from the open public consultation |
| **1 November, 2020** | The Fourth Draft of the report by the Secretary-General will be posted online, including the draft Opinions, and incorporating discussions from the 3rd IEG meeting |
| **23 December, 2020** | Deadline for receipt of comments on the Fourth Draft |
| **4th IEG Meeting (February 2021 during the CWG cluster)** | Fourth meeting of the group of experts to discuss the Fourth Draft of the report by the Secretary-General, including the draft Opinions, and the comments received |
| **15 March, 2021** | The final report of the Secretary-General to WTPF will be posted online, including the draft Opinions |
| **Mid-May, 2021 (back to back with WSIS Forum 2021)** | Sixth World Telecommunication/Information and Communication Technology Policy Forum |

**2. Themes for WTPF-21**

2.1 By [Decision 611](https://www.itu.int/md/S19-CL-C-0128/en), the 2019 ordinary session of Council decided that the theme for WTPF-21 is “Policies for mobilizing new and emerging telecommunications/ICTs for sustainable development” and that it would discuss how new and emerging digital technologies and trends are enablers of the global transition to the digital economy. Themes for consideration would include AI, IoT, 5G, Big Data, OTTs etc. In this regard, the WTPF-21 will focus on opportunities, challenges and policies to foster sustainable development.

2.2 New and emerging telecommunications/ICTs have the potential to accelerate implementation of the WSIS framework as the foundation through which the ITU helps contribute towards the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Breakthroughs in telecommunications/ICTs have the potential to bring tremendous benefits and transform diverse areas including health, education, employment, transportation, agriculture, nutrition, disability, youth empowerment, social inclusion, gender equality and poverty reduction. Indeed, emerging telecommunications/ICTs are fostering innovation, increasing productivity, generating new services and creating new opportunities for individuals and businesses.

2.2 bis Improved mobilization of emerging telecommunications/ICTs depends on fostering an enabling policy environment that promotes investment and innovation through competition, transparency, flexibility and the active participation of all relevant stakeholders. Removing barriers to innovation and investment is essential to accomplish the full potential of emerging telecommunications/ICTs and will better enable the global transition to the digital economy.

2.3 The transformative potential of emerging telecommunications/ICTs also comes with complex policy challenges as they may have disparate effects within, and between, societies and economies.

2.4 The world has previously witnessed similar applications of technology across society, industry and economy that lead to new models of growth and innovation. There is value in learning from these past experiences to foster innovation and maximize the benefits promised by new and emerging telecommunications/ICTs.

2.5 Effective policy-making is critical for facilitating country efforts, particularly in developing and least developed countries, to promote innovation and contribute toward sustainable development. These issues include, *inter alia*, infrastructure needs, investment, regulatory environment, training and skills development, market environment, institutional cooperation, the role of development aid, etc.

2.6 In this regard, some of the broad questions that could be addressed while considering policies to mobilize new and emerging telecommunications/ICTs for sustainable development include:

2.6.1 Looking ahead, what are the new and emerging telecommunications/ICTs that ITU membership would consider the key enablers of sustainable development and the global transition to the digital economy? Given the inter-connections or -dependencies in the use and deployment of such telecommunications/ICTs, what is the role that policymakers can play to foster an enabling environment that creates an agile ecosystem to enable sustainable use of new and emerging telecommunications/ICTs?

2.6.2 How does ITU membership envision the role of new and emerging telecommunications/ICTs in contributing to sustainable development, keeping in mind the current and future needs of both developing and developed countries as well as all segments of the population? What are the trends and best practices in developing the whole-of-government, multi-stakeholder collaborative policy approaches that are forward-looking, flexible and evidence-based that can contribute to this goal?

2.6.3 What are the key opportunities and challenges facing the development and deployment of such new and emerging telecommunications/ICTs?

2.6.4 How can the benefits of new and emerging telecommunication/ICTs be made more accessible to all? Along with the challenge of connecting the unconnected through infrastructure, what can be done to promote affordable access for everyone, particularly women and girls; to build the skills necessary to leverage a changing environment where people can learn, share, and engage; and to foster incentives for continued innovation and an environment of trust and inclusion? How can better international cooperation contribute to these efforts?

2.6.5 How can the global community continue building local and inclusive innovation ecosystems that enhance consumer trust and enable the deployment and use of new and emerging telecommunication/ICTs?

2.6.6 What are the ways in which stakeholders can work together to drive progress to facilitate greater access to new and emerging telecommunication/ICTs?

2.7 *Note: These overarching questions will be considered in conjunction with more detailed and specific analysis of the theme for WTPF-21 and topics set out for consideration in* [*Decision 611*](https://www.itu.int/md/S19-CL-C-0128/en)*. Such analysis in each of these sections could potentially be broadly divided into three parts – opportunities, challenges, and policies to foster sustainable development.*

**2.8 Sub-Themes for Discussion**

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

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2.8.1.1 AI solutions and technologies have the potential to transform areas as diverse and critical as education, healthcare, finance, mobility, agriculture and energy.

However, they also bring with them several implications of risks to aspects such as security, trust and inclusion, as well as issues of transparency and accountability – in AI algorithms, tools, and the data they depend on.

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

a. What are the key policy imperatives driving decision makers to explore and harness the potential of AI-based solutions and technologies to enable the global transition to digital economy?

b. How do AI technologies support or challenge the development of telecommunications/ICTs? Conversely, how can telecommunications/ICTs enhance and disseminate inclusively the positive externalities of AI?

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

d. What are the challenges facing the deployment and use of AI technologies? How can issues such as trust, transparency, accountability, bias and representativeness be best addressed?

e. How can stakeholders foster innovation while also ensuring that the future of AI is synonymous with a safe, inclusive and sustainable future for all? **]**

**2.8.2 Internet of Things (IoT)**

2.8.2.1 The IoT and connected sensors are driving improvements to national growth and human wellbeing in a range of areas such as healthcare, water, agriculture, natural resource management, environment and energy.

2.8.2.2 Some examples of policy questions that could be considered to provide a better understanding of efforts needed to successfully deploy IoT include:

a. What role can policymakers play to support industry-led development of an IoT ecosystem at the national and international level that best supports the delivery of IoT solutions within and across sectors?

b. How can stakeholders ensure continued innovation in the development and deployment of IoT solutions?

c. What steps can be taken to promote access to the benefits from the deployment and use of IoT solutions?

d. How can stakeholders create an enabling environment for IoT that fosters innovation, investment and competition while ensuring IoT is secure, inclusive and sustainable for all?

e. Given the increasing number of devices connected to telecommunications/ICT networks, how can stakeholders best manage bandwidth, accessibility, and cybersecurity?

f. What policies can help mobilize IoT to enable applications of big data and AI for sustainable development?

**2.8.3 5G**

2.8.3.1 5G has the potential to enable tomorrow’s digital economy, linking everything from smartphones to wireless sensors and industrial robots to self-driving cars.

5G could play a key role in transforming cities and rural communities into smart cities/communities - allowing citizens and communities to realize and participate in the benefits delivered by an advanced digital economy.

Fostering the potential of 5G’s capabilities will require addressing several elements relating to its deployment including, inter alia, costs and infrastructure.

2.8.3.2 In this respect, some essential questions include:

a. What are some of the key uses/applications for 5G technologies that can drive global development and adoption? What are the main challenges relating to deployment of such technologies?

b. What is the role that policymakers can play to ensure that policies and strategies supporting 5G implementation aim to provide benefit and access to all?

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

d. What policies can help mobilize 5G technologies towards enabling applications of big data and AI for sustainable development?

**[**2.8.4.1 Big Data has the potential to create significant value for the world economy and consumers everywhere - enhancing the productivity and competitiveness of the private and public sector globally.

However, policymakers may need to address several challenges if they are to capture its full potential.

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

a. What tools, technologies and techniques can stakeholders apply to fully harness the potential of Big Data?

b. What are the key safeguards that policymakers could consider to ensure that the use and application of Big Data benefits all?

c. How can Big Data challenges be addressed? How can data be made available to all in a responsible manner? What can be done to ensure that Big Data applications also respond to those not generating data on their needs, i.e. typically those left furthest behind?**]**

**2.8.5 OTTs**

2.8.5.1 The emergence of OTTs has been driving growth, connecting people, and advancing innovation in the global economy. OTTs are reshaping and expanding the communications ecosystem, while also providing benefits to consumers worldwide and helping to advance sustainable development.

At the same time, the economic impact on the traditional model of the telecommunications industry and on telecom operators is being increasingly analyzed, including inter alia, the competitive environment, the level of regulatory exposure, the level of substitutability between OTTs and traditional telecom services and the interconnection between OTTs and public networks.

Resolution 206 of the 2018 ITU Plenipotentiary Conference provides a comprehensive policy framework for the economic implications of OTTs, including issues relating to consumer benefits, competition and innovation. The foundation of the Resolution recognizes that the mutual cooperation between OTTs and telecommunication operators can be an element to foster innovative, sustainable, viable business models and their positive roles in fostering socio-economic benefits. The Resolution encourages collaboration among Member States, Sector Members, international telecommunications service providers and OTTs in order to fully realize those benefits.

2.8.5.2 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?

b. How can stakeholders promote greater consumer trust in connection with OTTs?

c. What approaches might be considered regarding OTTs to help foster an environment that promotes competition and improves the range of all services to businesses, consumers, academic institutions, etc.?

d. How can OTT players and telecom operators best engage with one another at local and international level? Are there model partnership agreements that could be developed?

**2.8.6 Mobilizing New Solutions for Connectivity**

2.8.6.1 Mobile 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.

Yet millions of people in emerging markets lack access to these services, due to the limited reach of reliable, secure, and affordable communications infrastructure in many countries. In addition, low income populations with access frequently do not adopt services, because of constraints arising from limited affordability and social norms that can bar access to communications technology to certain vulnerable populations such as women and girls.

To bridge these gaps, innovations in technology and business plans 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, higher-capacity satellite services that can offer lower cost internet backhaul to remote locations; and business models that deliberately work to include women and broader communities in the provision of network services to bring down social barriers to technology use.

2.8.6.2 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 adoption gaps in their own unique market contexts?

b. How can the private sector’s interest in innovation be mobilized to solve unique market contexts of emerging markets?

c. How can we more closely align funding mechanisms with the already-active community of innovators working on these solutions, particularly where those solutions require risk capital to fully explore alternative business models? What tools should be used to help mitigate those risks, and how should those tools be combined with policy solutions that advance competition and vibrant civil society participation in the ICT sector?

d. How can we facilitate greater collaboration and knowledge sharing between the innovator and investment communities to accelerate the development of these innovations?

**2.8.7 Mobilizing an Enabling Policy Environment for New and Emerging Telecommunications/ICTs**

2.8.7.1 The mobilization of emerging telecommunications/ICTs depends on fostering an enabling policy environment that promotes investment and innovation through competition, transparency, flexibility and the active participation of all relevant stakeholders. Removing barriers to innovation and investment is essential for achieving the full potential of emerging telecommunications/ICTs and will enable the global transition to the digital economy.

2.8.7.2 In this regard, some examples of questions related to fostering an enabling environment include:

a. What policy or regulatory approaches can mobilize investment and innovation related to new and emerging telecommunications/ICTs?

b. What principles should guide stakeholders in promoting an enabling policy environment for mobilizing new and emerging telecommunications/ICTs?

c. What roles do various stakeholders play in promoting an enabling environment for new and emerging telecommunications/ICTs? How can policymakers foster greater stakeholder participation in efforts to create an enabling policy environment?

d. How can stakeholders foster skills development related to the creation of an enabling policy environment for new and emerging telecommunications/ICTs?

e. How can stakeholders mobilize an environment that fosters innovation, investment and competition in new and emerging telecommunications/ICTs that could enable big data and AI technologies for sustainable development?

**3 Conclusion**

This draft is intended as a preliminary outline for the Secretary-General’s Report to WTPF-21, serving as a reference for experts as they develop draft Opinions on some of the theme indicated in [Decision 611](https://www.itu.int/md/S19-CL-C-0128/en). This report will be further elaborated in subsequent drafts taking into consideration the written inputs received from experts as well as discussions during physical meetings of the IEG.

1. Note: The title of WTPF-21 is specified in ITU Council 2019 [Decision 611](https://www.itu.int/md/S19-CL-C-0128/en). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)