

# **ITU's Global event on Emerging Technology for Connectivity: Accelerating Digital Transformation in LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS**

## **Opening Remarks**

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Distinguished colleagues, ladies and gentlemen, good morning, good afternoon, and good evening.

It is a great pleasure to welcome you to the opening of ITU's first global event on Emerging Technology for Connectivity.

Over the next two weeks, we will be welcoming speakers from around the world, and across the ICT ecosystem, to share their views and expertise on how new technologies can improve lives, and particularly the lives of the billions living in LDCs, LLDCs, and SIDS with a focus on the SDGs. The past two decades have seen seismic shifts in the digital landscape.

In his vision statement for his second term in office, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres observed that advances in technology have left no aspect of life untouched, transforming and connecting the world in unimaginable ways, stimulating innovation, and serving as a key driver of progress for sustainable development.

And yet the digital transformation of our world is still in its infancy.

What are the new technologies and trends that will define the coming decade?

To frame our thinking, let's break this into three categories: Innovation, Implementation, and Impact.

Let's start with the innovative technologies.

Take 5G. Last week I was in Barcelona for Mobile World Congress, and the buzz around the potential of 5G for sustainable development was unmistakable.

The Internet of Things is one area that is particularly exciting for developing countries, where low-cost IoT devices are already helping revolutionize sectors like agriculture and resource management.

We can also point to a raft of core transformative technologies that are all gaining market traction: distributed ledger systems like blockchain; artificial intelligence; extended reality interfaces; robotics, and quantum computing.

There are lots of exciting innovations to watch out for.

What about implementation?

What will these emerging technologies mean for the way we live, and work?

The critical role digital now plays in people's lives means users are getting much more demanding about how technology works for them.

Trust, transparency and accountability are becoming paramount. People are demanding more agency and control over the systems they interact with.

Which brings me to our third pillar, impact.

Leveraging the true power of digital transformation is going to mean moving to a much more collaborative, people-centric model.

Every new product and service is now destined to become part of a much larger personal digital ecosystem, and needs to interact smoothly with other platforms and devices if it is to add real value to people's lives.

Distinguished colleagues,

In this final Decade of Action, digital technologies represent the catalyst we urgently need to accelerate progress towards our 17 Global Goals.

Many of the emerging technologies I've just mentioned could have their most compelling applications in the developing world.

From AI supporting voice-based interfaces in dozens of languages; to IoT sensors helping countries improve agriculture and resource management; and digital work and learning platforms opening up new horizons for rural and remote dwellers – to give just a few examples. With an eye to the objectives laid out at the 5th UN Conference on Least Developed Countries, as well as the UN High-Level Policy Forum which opens tomorrow under the theme of sustainable, resilient pandemic recovery for economic, social, and environmental development, the next two weeks will give us a platform for exchange, so that we can learn from each other, get inspired by success stories, and open our minds to new possibilities.

AI, Big Data, 5G, blockchain and other innovations can be great 'democratizers', and they urgently need to be put within reach of all.

The key to our success lies in keeping our focus firmly on people.

For LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS, that means:

- Involving grassroots entrepreneurs and communities in our work.
- Collaborating with them on new solutions.
- Harnessing the energy and enthusiasm of local youth. Promoting south-south collaboration.
- And empowering people and communities with the means to innovate for themselves.

In closing, I want to thank my fellow Directors Mario Maniewicz and Chaesub Lee, leading the Radiocommunications and Standards bureaus respectively, for joining us today, because we cannot have a meaningful discussion on emerging tech without understanding the spectrum implications, nor the standards process.

I am looking forward to following these discussions and to taking the outputs of this important event forward to our World Telecommunication Development Conference, so that we can inspire world leaders to put universal, affordable and above all, transformational connectivity at the top of every national agenda.

Thank you.