Outcome report

Opening Ceremony

Monday, 5 July 2021

Session Description: This opening session featured high-level, keynote speeches on emerging technology for connectivity and its role in the digital transformation of LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS.

Moderator: Ms. Kim Mallalieu, Deputy Chair of the Board of the Telecommunications Authority of Trinidad and Tobago

Speakers:

- Ms. Doreen Bogdan Martin, Director, Telecommunication Development Bureau, ITU
- Dr. Chaesub Lee, Director, Telecommunications Standardization Bureau, ITU
- H.E. Dr. Perks Clemency Ligoya, Permanent Representative Permanent Mission of Republic of Malawi to the United Nations in New York, United States
- H.E. Vianna Maino, Minister of de Telecommunications and information society, Ecuador
- Mr. Mario Maniewicz, Director, Radiocommunications Bureau, ITU
- Mr. Courtenay Rattray, Under Secretary General, High Representative of UN-OHRLLS
- Mr. Joshua Setipa, Managing Director, Technology Bank for Least Developed Countries
- Ms. Maria-Francesca Spatolisano, Assistant Secretary General, Officer in Charge, Office of SG's Envoy on Technology

Main highlights:

- In her opening remarks, Ms**.** Doreen Bogdan Martin, Director of the ITU Telecommunication Development Bureau, said that leveraging the true power of digital transformation will mean moving to a much more collaborative, people-centric model. She mentioned that AI, Big Data, 5G, blockchain and other innovations can be great 'democratizers', and they urgently need to be put within reach of all and that the key to success lies in keeping the focus firmly on people. She added that 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 his opening remarks, Mr. Mario Maniewicz, Director of the ITU Radiocommunications Bureau, said that the international framework is in place, but there is no one size fits all solution. He said that national regulators and policymakers play a key role in deciding which technologies and services best fit their needs, the best timing to adopt them, and the technology cost. He added that one of the greatest challenges to increasing the number of people connected to the Internet is to improve

- digital literacy and develop content that would be meaningful to the intended audience.

- In his opening remarks, Dr. Chaesub Lee, Director, ITU Telecommunications Standardization Bureau, said that the ICT industry continues to transform at an extraordinary pace; that all sectors are now transforming with the help of ICTs; and that the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the critical importance of digital infrastructure and the need for significant improvements in ICT services and applications. He observed that, unfortunately, infrastructure is not yet reaching everywhere (in particular LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS), and services as well as applications are still too difficult for many (such as the aged and people who need special assistance). He added that inclusive standardization processes help us move forward together and that with international standards, innovation can be shared worldwide.

- In his keynote speech, Mr. Courtenay Rattray, Under Secretary General, High Representative of UN-OHRLLS said that new advances in technology are spurring productivity growth and increasing innovation and competitiveness. He added that, in order for LDCs to catch-up, they need to embrace the on-going socio-economic transformation processes driven by technology, while ensuring that the net effect on the labour market and productivity is positive. He added that there is also a need to invest in digital education and skills development to close the digital divide and increase human capacity, so that LDCs in particular will be able to reap the benefits of digital transformation. He added that public and private stakeholders need to work together to build a more equitable and inclusive digital economy. He said that governments can do their part, including through tax exemptions applied to operators who engage in specific projects.

- In his keynote speech, Mr. Joshua Setipa, Managing Director, Technology Bank for Least Developed Countries said that meaningful access to emerging and existing technologies is critical for the LDCs, LLDCs and SIDs to build back better and attain resilient recovery that not only places them at pre-pandemic levels but enables them to develop and strengthen their productive capacities. He added that to benefit from the different types of emerging technologies, governments, the private sector, academia and other relevant stakeholders must invest in bridging the gap in ICT infrastructure, strengthening human resources and institutions including regulatory capacity and aligning complementary policies such as STI and industrial, trade and education policies.

- In her keynote speech, H.E. Vianna Maino, Minister of Telecommunications and information society, Ecuador, said that the Digital Agenda of Ecuador has a chapter dedicated to the Axis of Emerging Technologies for Sustainable Development, aimed at promoting its use and promoting innovation, development and research. She emphasized that Ecuador has a strong inclination towards big data and advanced analytics, in addition to cloud computing, artificial intelligence and robotics, followed by the Internet of Things, blockchain, virtual reality and the use of drones. In terms of connectivity, the regulatory and normative framework for the adoption of 5G in the coming years is being developed and pilots on new technologies such as TV white space are underway in educational institutions. Work is being done on regulation to enable the massification of this technology. The Minister pointed out that the country has one of the highest rates of online procedures in the region, and that efforts are

being made to get everyone online by 2025 to contribute to Goal 16 of the SDGs, "Promote just, peaceful and inclusive societies" as they create effective and transparent institutions.

- In his keynote speech, H.E. Perks Clemency Ligoya, Permanent Representative Permanent Mission of Republic of Malawi to the United Nations in New York, said that digital technologies have great potential to bring economic and social development benefits to LDCs and that for that to happen, considerable effort is required to empower and equip governments and the private sector with the capacity to leverage it. He added that there is also a need to invest in digital education and skills development to close the digital divide and increase human capacity so that LDCs will be able to reap the benefits of digital transformation. He added that once people are able to use the internet, digital technology can enhance financial inclusion, enable access to online learning, e-health, e-governance, and, boost online trade through expansion of e-commerce in LDCs.

- In her keynote speech, Ms. Maria-Francesca Spatolisano, Assistant Secretary General, Officer in Charge, Office of SG's Envoy on Technology said that ensuring universal affordable, meaningful connectivity for all must be an urgent priority for the international community and that a human-centred approach to connectivity must be taken, considering how to leave no one behind in addressing the digital divide. She added that as we strive to connect the unconnected, we must bear in mind that connectivity and access by themselves, do not constitute a solution to everything. Connectivity must be accompanied by measures to ensure the safety and the security of those brought online. Education, necessary digital skills, literacy, are essential so that all can be fully empowered and engaged. Other key aspects include addressing possible online harms and risks, and users' ability to avert online exploitation and abuse, and discern misinformation. The time to act, is now, she said. Connectivity remains the pressing issue to ensure that all can benefit from the vision of a more open, free and secure digital future as embodied in the digital roadmap. She urged that we need to consider emerging technologies that could drive the future and we also need to continue focussing on the LDCs, LLDCs and the SIDS and their particular needs.