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| C:\Users\comas\AppData\Local\Temp\Rar$DRa0.735\jpg\ITU official logo_blue_RGB.jpg**TDAG Web Dialogues**  **24-26 March 2020, Online** |
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| **Document****: TDAG Web Dialogue on WTDC** |
| **Date: 31 March 2020** |
| **Submitted by: Director, BDT** |
| **Title: High-level summary of TDAG Web Dialogue on WTDC** |
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**Summary**

This information document is a concise summary of essential points of the Web Dialogue on the reform of the World Telecommunication Development Conference (WTDC) held on 24 March 2020. The Web Dialogue provided the opportunity to delve into four main topics revolving around WTDC that are outlined in document [TDAG-20/DT/2](https://www.itu.int/md/D18-TDAG25.2-200602-TD-0002), and each topic was moderated by a representative of membership.

1. Preparatory process
2. Content and structure
3. Stakeholder engagement
4. Side events.

**The case for change**

The forthcoming World Telecommunication Development Conference (WTDC-21), to be held from 8 to 19 November 2021 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, at the kind invitation of the Government of Ethiopia, promises to be a landmark event to further the social and economic benefits of meaningful connectivity. In view of the importance of early preparations, a Web Dialogue was held on 24 March 2020, as a face- to-face meeting could not take place because of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has turned the world upside down. The Web Dialogue provided the opportunity to experiment with new tools, and attracted more than 170 participants.

This document presents a high-level summary of the discussions.

It is important to remember where WTDC has come from to understand where it must go. In 1994, the World Telecommunication Development Conference (WTDC-94) took place in Buenos Aires, Argentina, from 21 to 29 March. It adopted:12 programmes, 11 resolutions, two recommendations and a 166-page final report. This conference was convened to review the progress made in telecommunication development since the publication in 1985 of “The Missing Link” report. This report showed not just how access to telecommunication correlates with economic growth – but also drew international attention to the huge imbalance in such access between developed and developing countries.

Subsequent WTDCs were held as follows:

* WTDC-98, Valletta, Malta, 23 March -1 April 1998 with the following results: six programmes + LDC special programme, 22 resolutions, 11 recommendations contained in a 146-page final report.
* WTDC-02, Istanbul, Turkey, 18-27 March 2002 with the following results: six programmes, four special initiatives, 38 resolutions, five recommendations, two regional initiatives (same for all regions) contained in a 199-page final report.
* WTDC-06, Doha, Qatar, 7-15 March 2006 with the following results: six programmes + two activities, six special initiatives, 47 resolutions, three recommendations, one Decision and 25 regional initiatives contained in a 272-page final report.
* WTDC-10, Hyderabad, India, 24 May-4 June 2010 with the following results: five programmes, 60 resolutions, 30 regional initiatives (5 per region) contained in a 322-page final report.
* WTDC-14, Dubai, United Arab Emirates, 30 March-10 April 2014 with the following results: 11 programmes – five objectives, 68 resolutions, seven recommendations, 30 regional initiatives (five per region) contained in a 716-page final report.
* WTDC-17, Buenos Aires, Argentina, 9-20 October 2017 with the following results: 11 programmes – four objectives, 66 resolutions, five recommendations, 30 regional initiatives (five per region) contained in the 820-page final report.

**Topic 1 – Preparatory process**

Is the preparatory process for WTDC still fit for purpose? How can it be better integrated with the preparatory process of the regional telecommunication organizations? Should informal interregional meetings be organized, and, if so, what format should they take? Should informal interregional meetings be used to foster agreement ahead of the conference (for instance on administrative issues) to free up conference time to discuss critical ICT development issues?

**The challenge**

While WTDCs have enjoyed high success rates over their history, it is time to reshape the preparatory process to make it fit for purpose in a rapidly changing world. Participants in the Web Dialogue on WTDC agreed with this need for reform.

One observation was the six-month gap between the last regional preparatory meeting for WTDC-17 and the opening of this conference itself. In the run-up to WTDC-17, BDT organized one regional preparatory meeting per region for each of the six[[1]](#footnote-1)1 regions of ITU-D, two in the last quarter of 2016 and four in the first quarter of 2017. These meetings were held over six months consecutively from November 2016 to April 2017. The conference opened in October 2017, meaning that six months went by with no interactions between the regions.

While the regional preparatory meetings may have helped in consolidating regional positions, particularly on regional initiatives, they hardly provided any opportunities for consensus building on matters such as resolutions, study group Questions and inputs into the ITU strategic plan.

Considerable time was thus spent during WTDC-17 discussing and drafting study group Questions and the Declaration.

**Some proposals**

Publish online detailed results of the implementation of the Buenos Aires Action Plan to inform and guide all regional preparatory meetings. In the run-up to WTDC-21, BDT should consolidate and publish the results of each component of the Action Plan.

Use the regional preparatory process fully for revising or drafting resolutions and study group Questions and for seeking consensus on thematic priorities/clusters.

Introduce interregional meetings to improve the preparatory process to deliver real results and foster agreement ahead of WTDC-21.

Hold one interregional meeting the day after each regional preparatory meeting. The agenda for interregional meetings would be on matters that need interregional consensus such as resolutions, study group Questions, and showcasing intended development projects for funding.

Take a close look at the interregional workshops, organized by the Radiocommunication Bureau. They may offer insights that would help avoid lengthy discussions at WTDC. These interregional workshops are an integral part of preparations ahead of a World Radiocommunication Conference (WRC). Each WRC cycle includes workshops organized annually, with the last one taking place just before the conference.

Consider remote participation to boost the regional preparatory process.An important dimension of the regional meetings and the interregional meetings, in particular, will be to ensure that there is effective remote participation from within the regions on a basis of equality with those who are in the room. This will do a lot to ensure there is broad participation between the regions in the preparatory process.

Stress the role of regional organizations in identifying critical issues within a specific region. These organizations have been, and are, doing that. But it seems that the priority issues being highlighted are not attractive or visible enough to other partners. Create more vibrancy within the preparatory process in the various regions so that they can ensure that there is visibility, harmony and appetite for the activities they highlight as critical ahead of the conference.

Refocus WTDC: the attendance and participation in WTDC is made up of government ministers, policy-makers, technical experts, academicians, all talking to each other; but all are talking at different levels. This is a recipe for work not going forward much of the time. Agreement is needed on whether to prepare technical meetings separately. Would these be the interregional meetings? Agreement is also needed on who should drive WTDC. For some delegations it is the policy-makers, for others it is the technical experts and ministers. So when talking starts, it is very difficult to find common ground.

Strengthen coordination between BDT and regional organizations in the preparatory process for WTDC. BDT casts a wider net than other organizations. BDT has its own strengths and regional organizations have their own too. Collaborative cooperation, fostering closer working relations and mutual support will help avoid duplication. The goal of the preparatory process is to give voice to the regions. There is utility for regions coming together to share ideas and reach consensus.

Correspondence groups will be rebranded. For WTDC-17, TDAG correspondence groups were set up earlier. This time, the preference was not to establish them too early as that diverts the focus from current activities.

**Conclusion**

Preference was expressed for a preparatory process that starts earlier and attempts to highlight the main issues and resolves as many of them as possible before the conference begins.

Interregional meetings are considered a good step in improving the preparatory process to foster agreement ahead of WTDC-21 to free up conference time to discuss critical ICT development issues and close the conference as true partners of ICT development. But interregional meetings must have clear agendas and clear tasks – for example they could be given just two tasks on which to seek consensus.

**Topic 2 – Content and structure**

The discussion on this topic highlighted a common view that important development challenges are not sufficiently addressed at WTDC and that the conference content and structure must be reformed to attract high-level decision makers, global leaders, and donors. The intention is to generate clear outputs, actions and activities.

How can the agenda be improved to make WTDC a more relevant and attractive event? How can the scope of the conference be refocused on critical ICT development challenges and donor commitments to finance ICT4D projects? How can the WTDC contribution to the ITU strategic plan be improved?

How do we improve the linkage between the work of study groups and the thematic/programmatic work and how do we make study group outcomes more useful, relevant and timely? Should each region develop separate regional initiatives?

**The challenge**

WTDC needs to attract new and more diverse participants from the private sector and potential donors.

Any changes to the structure, roles, scope, and content of WTDC would include the role of TDAG and the Council, the preparatory meetings, and collaboration of all Sector advisory groups. Some of these changes would be more immediate (present cycle) and others should be gradual and focused in the preparations of the 2025 conference cycle.

If the WTDC is to address key development issues, then the conference should be focused on the most immediate needs of the development sector, such as the need for connectivity underlined in the present health crisis, and should attract high-level decision makers and policy-makers, funding partners, and sector stakeholders that will ensure the means of implementation.

There is also a case for reviewing the structure of the conference to ensure it supports the goals of the WTDC.

**Some proposals**

Refocus the work of the conference. TDAG-20 could create a working group on reform, with the mandate to report to WTDC. The group would contribute, for example, to the preparation of the draft agenda of WTDC-21 for consideration prior to the regional and interregional preparatory meetings that would allow membership the time to reflect on activities in line with development issues, funding partners, and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

A rebranded TDAG correspondence group could develop the ITU-D proposal and contribution to the ITU strategic plan for discussion through the Council in a framework that includes the other ITU Sectors before the Plenipotentiary Conference. This could free up time for WTDC to concentrate on development challenges.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Review the high-level policy statement format. This could be replaced by high-level panel discussions with interaction between decision-makers, donors, and global leaders on critical ICT development challenges.

Time-consuming elements such as Resolution 1, streamlining of resolutions, new resolutions and committee allocations could be worked on upstream by a TDAG working group.

ITU strategic plan could be discussed in an all ITU Sector framework. This could be carried out by Sector working groups that will report to the Council. This plan would be endorsed by TDAG before WTDC and the Plenipotentiary Conference.

Refine the work of study groups. This would mean ensuring Questions are not redundant, working on shorter timeframes, and publishing the results more frequently.

Use study group deliverables to support the preparatory process. Other Sectors use study group deliverables to identify, develop, and promote regional priorities. The deliverables of each study group are relevant to the preparatory process and regional initiatives.

Define common regional initiatives. Based on the regional telecommunication organization meetings and regional preparatory meetings held back-to-back where possible and including the development of interregional meetings.

Focal points, for example from the ITU-D study group membership, should be involved in the preparatory process at the level of interregional preparatory meetings to encourage common cluster/thematic priorities and synergies when the programmes, associated resolutions and regional initiatives are discussed in the regions and at WTDC.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Include discussions of the financing mechanisms during the preparatory process.

**Conclusion**

WTDC needs to prepare projects and develop strategies that generate donor participation. The content and structure, agenda and scope of the conference must bring together and engage key development ecosystem players by addressing key ICT development challenges, especially resource mobilization strategies and funding options, by focusing on critical ICT4D projects that are aligned with donor commitments, and by integrating sessions devoted to bringing these key players in from side-event status to be an integral part of the programme. Study groups need to focus on the number of deliverables. It is a struggle with a four-year cycle to keep the focus of the Questions relevant. The development of interregional meetings is conceptually sound, as is combining the regional telecommunication organization inputs and the regional preparatory meetings through back-to-back meetings.

**Topic 3 - Stakeholder engagement**

While over 1300 participants attended WTDC-17, only 69 per cent were delegates from ITU Member States and 21 per cent represented ITU-D Sector Members. To ensure an effective and meaningful WTDC, the participation of major key decision-makers and key influencers will be critical. Who are the current and new constituent groups that need to attend WTDC (e.g. governments including representatives from other ministries, other UN organizations, multilateral/bilateral finance institutions, CEOs, academia, civil society, youth), and in what proportion? What can we do at WTDC to ensure these constituents and their top-level decision-makers attend and participate actively? How do we engage these stakeholders in the WTDC preparatory process (e.g. online consultations, Town Hall type meetings, preparatory meetings)? In the present crisis, connectivity is a priority, but one that will only be championed if those who need it, and those who can provide it, are present at WTDC.

**Some proposals**

Invite participants to be part of the preparatory process to create cohesion and purpose by better understanding what they want from the process, the key issues which they wish to engage and talk on, and the ideal structure to attract key stakeholders such as the private sector, multilateral/international agencies and donors. CEOs and top-level decision-makers are looking for the relevance of the agenda of discussion, which needs to be aligned with their priorities and business.

Build on ITU-D experience and create a synergy with other sector events such as the Mobile World Congress to gain a sector-wide interest in development issues, one that allows engagement, and creates opportunity for stakeholders to participate and add value.

Invite stakeholders to a Chatham House rules-type event that brings together senior executives from mobile and technology players, ministers, regulatory authorities, data protection industry members, other international organizations etc. to exchange knowledge and enable opportunities for discussions and networking that foster broader and more inclusive dialogues. With limited time for the event, focus on making participation add value to them and the event.

Communicate what ITU-D can do to facilitate policy-makers, leaders and stakeholders to achieve their goals and add value to their objectives without using three days on policy statements.

Ensure that the Sector Members understand the active role they are invited to have in WTDC and that it is a platform where they can have an exchange and a dialogue with policy- makers and others. They need to be able to discuss with governments and they need to know what the priorities are, and how they can bring value to the development agenda.

Ensure that all members of government understand the far-reaching nature of ICTs, access and connectivity to engage a range of ministerial input and participation.

Bring industry together with other stakeholders to communicate and understand best practice and regulatory challenges.

**Conclusion**

ITU-D needs to create necessary motivation in key participants to attend the Sector’s flagship event, it needs to build and communicate the value proposition and the incentives that will bring Sector Members and Member States to WTDC.

ITU-D needs to know and communicate the value proposition for participants, it needs to communicate the structure and timing, it needs to know who will respond to the value proposition and incentives to create a mixture of high-level actors and stakeholders, and how their interaction will be supported by the structure of the event.

ITU-D needs to leverage the value chain of activity from now until the event, in the full knowledge that invitation is only one means to get participants to the meeting. Stakeholders should be involved in the preparatory meetings as they would be involved in the main conference.

**Topic 4 – Side events**

In recent years, thematic side events focusing on areas of interest for the membership (e.g. youth, WSIS, cybersecurity, etc.) have taken place on the margins of the conference. Should these in-depth discussions remain side events or should they become an integral part of the conference? What topics should be discussed during these side events and the Youth Summit? How should these topics be structured (e.g. thematic tracks, high-level programme, exhibition, etc.)? What should the output of these events be?

**The challenge**

Participants agreed that side events should be made an integral part of the conference, and rebranded to achieve impact.

Side events provide an excellent opportunity to highlight the sense of urgency of critical issues and trends that need to be addressed by the ICT sector in collaboration with other partners, to think outside the box and to capitalize on their goodwill to work together to find solutions to issues of global concern.

The COVID-19 pandemic and the impact it will have on all sectors of the economy shows just how critical and urgent it is to connect the unconnected. But to reach the dream of a connected planet, it is necessary to understand why there is still a divide 35 years after the publication of the *Missing Link* report. Side events have the great potential to attract high-level participants, including government and industry leaders, the development community and donors.

**Some proposals**

Rebrand and integrate side events into the conference. The name “side events” creates the connotation that these events are not important because they are scheduled outside conference hours and outside conference negotiations. Integrating side events into the conference sends a positive message of inclusiveness to all ITU stakeholders and partners, and gives an opportunity to all delegations to participate.

Design side events that create impact. In past conferences, there have been too many side events and this dilutes their value. Reduce the number of these events, make them more structured and focused and incorporate them into the overall conference programme.

Define the target audience and establish a list of stakeholders to invite. Hold the rebranded side events in the first days of the conference to be able to engage high-level participants.

Establish a clear, high-visibility agenda. The Ministerial Programme of GSMA offers some insights, as do the World Economic Forum's Annual Meeting in Davos and the World Bank’s spring meetings. As an integral part of the Mobile World Congress, the Ministerial Programme provides a forum for government ministers, regulators, international organizations and CEOs from around the world to discuss key developments and policy trends. The Davos meeting engages the world's top leaders in collaborative activities to shape the global, regional and industry agendas.

Choose a theme or themes that would generate interest among all participants and lead to substantive discussions that would feed into the outcomes of the conference.

People will come to the conference if there is something in it for them. What is the value proposition? What is the agenda? What is the theme? When inviting ministers of finance or health, for example, who are not regular customers of ITU, every effort must be made to ensure that the activity they have been invited to will produce an output they can take home and act upon.

Combine the rebranded side events with the high-level segment into interactive dialogues. Ministers and deputy ministers (or their equivalents) would then be able to engage in interactive dialogues that fit into the chosen theme(s) of the conference rather than the serial policy statements. The policy statements, if maintained, would only be posted on the event website, but not delivered.

Well-conceived and properly planned rebranded side events would generate great interest for the donors and innovation communities.

**Conclusion**

Rebrand side events to become game changers. Who are the challenge owners and who are the problem solvers? Do we have an enabling environment? How can we have challenge owners, problem solvers and resource owners come together to make meaningful commitment where each bring their useful contributions to address digital development issues?

An early start to identifying the issues to be discussed at side events will accelerate implementation of the above proposals. The conference should be planned around specific themes. As a starting point, a number of topics could be identified and circulated and promoted on every occasion until a decision is taken on those considered to be of high-visibility. The topics selected in this way would then be part of the thematic tracks of the conference.

Africa, where WTDC-21 will be hosted, has many success stories. A platform should be provided to them to share these stories and to other developing regions to showcase some of their activities related to the Sustainable Development Goals.

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1. 1 Africa, Americas, Arab States, Asia and the Pacific, Commonwealth of Independent States, Europe. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The ITU strategic plan is not covered as a statutory contribution of WTDC in either the ITU Constitution or the ITU Convention. The contribution is, however, noted in Article 1.8.2 of Resolution 1 (Rev. Buenos Aires, 2017) of the World Telecommunication Development Conference. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. At WTDC-17, study groups and the allocation of Questions were handled in Committee 4 but the study Questions in Committee 3. There were few synergies between programmes, regional initiatives and study Questions. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)