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| C:\Users\comas\AppData\Local\Temp\Rar$DRa0.735\jpg\ITU official logo_blue_RGB.jpg**2nd TDAG Web Dialogue on WTDC****30 April 2020, Online** |
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| **2nd TDAG Web Dialogue on WTDC** |
| Date: **13 May 2020** |
| Title: **Summary of the 2nd TDAG Web Dialogue on WTDC** |
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**Summary**

This document provides a summary of the Second Web Dialogue on the reform of the World Telecommunication Development Conference (WTDC) held on 30 April 2020, and which attracted over 200 participants.

In the first Web Dialogue held on 24 March 2020, four thematic areas emerged as a focus for WTDC change.

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

The second Web Dialogue provided the opportunity to firm up the preliminary proposals on WTDC reform and present them to the 25th meeting of the Telecommunication Development Advisory Group (TDAG) in June 2020 for wider consideration and decision.

The preliminary proposals were produced in cooperation between the secretariat and the moderators and fire starters from the first dialogue and relate to the four topics above.

**Introduction**

The World Telecommunication Development Conference (WTDC) is at the very heart of digital development. COVID- 19 has put a global spotlight on connectivity, injecting new urgency and momentum to connect the 3.6 billion who are still offline. In this sense, the 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 is the best chance to mobilize the global community around digital transformation and reshape the connectivity agenda.

**Topic 1: Preparatory process**

The context

The preparatory process should be robust enough to facilitate consensus so that WTDC is profitable to all participants in terms of time and value for money.

The main conclusions reached at the first dialogue were reiterated: It is desirable to introduce interregional meetings to improve the preparatory process to deliver real results and foster agreement ahead of WTDC-21.The agenda for those interregional meetings should be on all matters that need interregional consensus, such as resolutions, study group Questions, a declaration and development projects needing funding. The role of regional telecommunication organizations in identifying critical issues within a specific region should be stressed. Coordination between BDT and regional telecommunication organizations should be strengthened in the preparatory process for WTDC.

As a general conclusion, preference was expressed for a preparatory process that starts early and attempts to highlight the main issues and resolves as many of them as possible before the conference begins. In this sense, interregional meetings are considered a good step in improving the preparatory process, but they must have clear agendas and clear and specific tasks on which to seek consensus before the conference.

Two proposals were presented on the preparatory process.

The proposals

* **Proposal 1.1** A formal interregional conference preparatory process could be put in place by ITU. The goal of these interregional preparatory meetings (IPMs) would be to foster agreement between regions on key issues ahead of the conference. Three physical IPMs could be organized, each one to be held back-to-back with RPMs 2, 4 and 6, respectively.
* **Proposal 1.2** The Bureau could advise and assist RTOs with their preparations for the conference, while maintaining independence. This task would include advising the RTOs on the result of the streamlining process undertaken by TDAG and proposing editorial amendments to Resolutions, as appropriate.

The discussion

**Interregional preparatory meetings**: Participants unanimously agreed that interregional preparatory meetings would certainly help foster consensus and agreement on certain issues before WTDC, but that these meetings must absolutely have a clearly defined format and clear agendas. There is still the need to ponder over the fact that outcomes of interregional preparatory meetings are not binding on Member States, as they have the sovereign right to submit proposals to the conference, irrespective of the outcomes of interregional meetings.

**Financial implications of regional preparatory meetings (RPMs) and interregional preparatory meetings:** Noting that proposal 1.1 refers to holding six[[1]](#footnote-1)1 regional preparatory meetings (RPMs) plus three interregional meetings, a number of participants underlined the importance of considering the financial implications associated with all these meetings. It was suggested that the decision taken on this matter should be consistent with the financial resources available to ITU.

**Proper planning** **of regional and interregional preparatory meetings is critical to the sustainability of the preparatory process.** All regional telecommunication organizations have good practice, and some have already started defining their work plans for WTDC-21. In the Regional Commonwealth in the Field of Communications (RCC), which usually has three or four meetings, one of these meetings could be an RPM and would be useful for discussing different inputs concerning not only resolutions, but also regional initiatives and the declaration. In the Americas, the Inter-American Telecommunication Commission (CITEL) also has a preparatory process and sought to know whether it would be feasible or not to have an RPM which is tied to, or back to back with a CITEL preparatory meeting?
**Define the number of representatives from each region to attend interregional meetings**. Such representatives need to be empowered or mandated by their regional telecommunication organizations to share the opinions and proposals from their respective regions on the different topics of the agendas of interregional meetings.

**Decide on the chairmanship of interregional meetings**. It was proposed to use the example of the 2018 Plenipotentiary Conference, where informal interregional preparatory meetings were chaired by the Chairman Designate; organization of the work of the conference committees was agreed upon between the regions beforehand; and where proposals of chairmen and vice-chairmen were also first discussed and agreed informally between the regions beforehand.

**Establish a list of coordinators from each region for each topic on the conference agenda. Again, the** example used for the 2018 Plenipotentiary Conference of linking people leading different topics in different regions was considered useful. Participants agreed that a list of contacts of people from the various regions in charge of WTDC resolutions, declaration, and study group Questions would be helpful in starting informal discussions and would contribute to high-quality preparations for WTDC.

**Define a calendar taking into account the ITU-led and the regional telecommunication organizations preparatory processes.** It was proposed that interregional preparatory meetings could start in 2021 back to back with regional preparatory meetings. There was a request to consider the possibility of holding one interregional meeting either back to back with the last TDAG meeting before WTDC, or with any other relevant ITU meeting.

**Inter-Sectoral matters:** These mattersshould also be discussed during interregional preparatory meetings given that other ITU conferences review what is being done across the Union, and this is important to avoid duplication of effort and strengthen cooperation and joint activity on issues of mutual interest among the three Sectors and the General Secretariat, paying particular attention to developing country interests.

Study groups and their Questions**:** How will discussions on study groups and their Questions fit into the agenda of regional and interregional preparatory meetings? The conference maintains, terminates or creates study groups and allocates to each one of them Questions to be studied. In between the conferences, TDAG has a vision of the study groups and their Questions. Their were calls to:

* **Evaluate and analyse the work of study groups to see how effectively the issues raised at the previous conference have been resolved**. The issues submitted for consideration in the next cycle should take into account regional priorities. The management teams of ITU-D study groups have a key role to play in guiding Member States by giving their insights into what the future direction of the Questions might be.
* **Establish linkages between study group Questions and BDT activities:** It was stressed that study groups should not only consider the results of their study Questions, but also how the Questions are linked to BDT activities. How, for example, are Questions linked to the statistical issues such as the creation of the new ITU index, how do they relate to particular resolutions, because when talking about stakeholder engagement it is necessary for stakeholders to understand how they could participate in activities of study groups properly. Establishing these linkages would also assist countries to appoint the right people to participate in ITU-D activities in general, and in specific study group Questions.
* **Take a forward-looking approach in the development of study group Questions:** The development of study group Questions should be a forward-looking exercise. Some participants noted that topics of ITU-D study groups have not changed much over the years, despite the rapidly changing ICT development landscape. They stressed that during the preparatory process, the discussion on study Questions should have some focus on ICT trends, the digital ecosystem and digital transformation to help bridge the digital divide across the world.

It was agreed that BDT shall play an advisory role, in addition to sharing information about the preparations in different regions.

**Topic 2: Content and structure**

The context

It was recalled that the duties of WTDC are described in Articles 22 of the ITU Constitution and 16 of the ITU Convention. The WTDC structure is covered in Section 1 of Resolution 1 (Rev. Buenos Aires, 2017) of WTDC, on the rules of procedure of the ITU Telecommunication Development Sector; No. 213 of the Convention addresses the draft agenda of WTDC. Under the Constitution and Convention, WTDC is not required to review the ITU-D contribution to the ITU strategic plan. However, this task is reflected under Resolution 1 (Rev. Buenos Aires, 2017) which says that WTDC shall establish ITU‑D's contribution to the draft ITU strategic plan. Thus, participants considered it within the purview of WTDC to amend this task if it so wishes.

Building on the discussions and ideas of the first dialogue, seven proposals were put forward for further discussion and crystallization.

The proposals

* **Proposal 2.1** The main discussions at WTDC could revolve around how the development-related challenges identified during the preparatory process can be addressed and funded. Any approved action should be linked either to the existing ITU-D budget or to pledges made prior to or during the conference.
* **Proposal 2.2:** WTDC could consider delegating the discussion on the ITU strategic plan to TDAG in preparation for the [next Plenipotentiary Conference] , taking into account the results of WTDC.
* **Proposal 2.3** The High-Level Segment (which includes delivery of policy statements) could be repurposed to become thematic events to address development challenges and clearly identified priorities.
* **Proposal 2.4:** Discussions on resolutions could primarily derive from outcomes of the preceding TDAG meetings, which would undertake efforts on streamlining.
* **Proposal 2.5:** Study Group Questions could be identified during the preparatory process, in line with the membership needs and regional and interregional priorities.
* **Proposal 2.6:** The mapping of study group Questions from ITU-T to ITU-D and ITU-R to ITU-D could be improved with a view to identifying possible areas of overlap or convergence.
* **Proposal 2.7:** RTOs could elaborate a limited number of “Regional Priorities”, based on the defined development scope of the conference. RTOs could be encouraged to identify common priorities across regions which could be implemented within the budgetary limitations of BDT or linked to pledges and commitments made prior to or during the conference.

The discussion

Participants unanimously underlined that WTDC needs to be returned to being a development-focused conference and that there should be close alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to create value for the various stakeholders to come on board.

It was widely agreed that the structure and content should be tailored around addressing critical ICT development issues identified by the regions. There were calls for a theme for WTDC-21 to help focus deliberations going forward. BDT will launch a competition to develop a theme.

While supporting Proposal 2.1, it was underlined that membership should be always made aware of the available budget and of initial pledges or possible pledges. Given that some proposals coming out of regional preparatory meetings could go way beyond the budget, it will be necessary to devise a process of rationalizing or prioritizing.

A number of participants suggested that WTDC could appoint TDAG to discuss and agree on the ITU-D contribution to the overall ITU strategic plan through Resolution 24 (Rev. Dubai, 2014) of WTDC, on “authorization for the Telecommunication Development Advisory Group to act between world telecommunication development conferences”. According to this resolution, the conference can assign to TDAG specific matters between two consecutive WTDCs.

Given that streamlining resolutions is closely linked with the issue of inter-Sector coordination, some participants called for an early review and mapping of WTDC resolutions onto those of the Plenipotentiary Conference, the World Radiocommunication Conference (WRC), the Radiocommunication Assembly, and the World Telecommunication Standardization Assembly (WTSA), the aim being to remove any duplication. It was further suggested that BDT is well-placed to inform regional and interregional preparatory meetings on achievements or progress made on every resolution; and could therefore advise on new resolutions or on intended amendments to existing ones.

Some support was expressed for the proposal to repurpose high-level policy statements to become thematic events, while also noting that the conference should avoid being bogged down in many ad hoc groups created to resolve issues.

Study group Questions, too, take up a significant amount of conference time. But this should be weighed against coming up with good Questions that are not only reflective of the discussions that have happened in the last cycle, but also of the development needs and discussions that membership wishes to have moving forward. Mapping of study group Questions across the three Sectors should continue steadily to ensure there are no overlaps.

Regional initiatives should be turned into regional priorities. This change would help ensure that regional priorities are focused in a way that creates a wider interest, leads to financing, and proper implementation by BDT in all of the regions. The narrative of regional initiatives has tended to create great expectations against which sometimes ITU is unable to meet. BDT will assist in ensuring that the regional priorities identified can be developed into an attractive comprehensive package for the donor community, which also includes ITU members.

It was proposed to create at least four rapporteur groups for the following items: strategic plan, streamlining resolutions, declaration, and study group Questions. There was also a proposal to create a working group or ad hoc group of TDAG, tasked with identifying areas where WTDC-21 organizational and operational efficiencies could be achieved, and consequently assist BDT in establishing a streamlined and focused plan of action which responds to the needs of the ITU-D membership within its human and financial resource limitations. Some participants expressed support for this proposal (Document [TDAG-20/37-E](https://www.itu.int/md/D18-TDAG25.2-C-0037/en) ).

**Topic 3: Stakeholder engagement**

The context

The questions explored during the first dialogue resulted in three preliminary proposals to enhance participation of the right stakeholders within WTDC. Who are the current and new constituent groups that need to attend WTDC? What can be done to ensure that these groups and their top-level decision-makers attend and participate, and in what proportion? How do we actually engage these stakeholders in the preparatory process? A number of observations were made in answer to these questions.

WTDC lacks a broader stakeholder engagement. For example, only 21 per cent of private-sector representatives attended WTDC-17. To increase and incentivise participation, ITU needs to create ownership to be inclusive of these stakeholders. This has to happen from the start of the preparatory process.

WTDC has to be better tailored to the expectations and needs of participants. The value proposition has to be known and communicated to participants. This is crucial as participants need to understand who those actors are and to what value proposition they respond. Incentives need to be set to create a mixture of high-level actors and stakeholders, and the event needs to be structured in a way that allows and supports their interaction. To achieve this, design an agenda or part of the agenda that is more tailored to the different expectations of the different stakeholders.

Focus on fewer resolutions recognizing that not all participants come for the whole duration of the conference or maybe have sessions that are “by invitation only” and that have Chatham House-style rules to encourage frank discussions and networking.

There needs to be better communication and information about what WTDC is in order to create the necessary motivation for people to attend. For example, private Sector Members need to understand the active role they are invited to have in the conference and that it is a platform where they can actually have a dialogue with policy-makers and others.

Sector Members should get away from the perception that WTDC is first and foremost a Member States event, because that is not the case. The private sector can be more vested through understanding better what the conference is.

WTDC can also be used for educative purposes, ensuring that all members of government understand the far-reaching nature of ICT access and connectivity to engage in the range of ministerial input and participation.

The proposals

* **Proposal 3.1:** Create target lists of key invited participants by constituent group, including a short list of “stars”, and manage the targeting/invitation process against deadlines.
* **Proposal 3.2:** Improve, enhance the existing or create new preparatory events to engage target participants.
* **Proposal 3.3:** External stakeholders could “co-chair” specific tracks and sessions in the conference agenda, examples may be:
1. a track focused on international/bilateral development agencies and partners;
2. an educational track;
3. track on how to finance the ICT ecosystem.
* **Proposal 3.4:** Develop and execute a targeted promotional campaign for WTDC.

Proposal 3.1 was developed bearing in mind how best to bring to the event people who have limited time; the importance of managing the invitation process against the deadlines in order to secure high-level participants in the early stages of planning; and how to identify the key participants to target, based on the programme topics, while also recognizing that some programme topics may take longer to finalize.

Alignment is also necessary with the relevant procedures of Article 25 of the ITU Convention, covering admission to world telecommunication development conferences. Noting that the exact dates of WTDC-21 have been fixed in accordance with the provisions of No.42 of the Convention; and also noting that the invitations to Member States and Sector Members need to be sent out one year before the opening of the conference, adhering to these timelines would help secure high-level attendance.

The aim of Proposal 3.2 is not only to ensure good participation and engagement at formal events, but also how to capitalize on other events that bring together both the private sector and government to promote WTDC-21. One of the suggestions put forward is to host a special session at Mobile World Congress (MWC) 2021. Given the broad audience at MWC, the session could be split into two, with one part open to a wide audience other than just ITU Member States and Sector Members. The other part of the session would focus on members only in order to ensure that there is no dilution of the benefits of being an ITU member.

Other platforms where such special sessions could be organized to complement the formal preparatory process include the Africa Internet Summit, the Global Symposium for Regulators (GSR), and the WSIS Forum.

Suggestions behind Proposal 3.3 stemmed from the discussions around spending more time on relevant conference topics and perhaps less time on resolutions. Other ideas include capitalizing on Resolution 71 (Rev. Dubai, 2018) of the Plenipotentiary Conference, on the strategic plan for the Union for 2020-2023, to create special tracks and sessions.

The issue of lengthy sessions of adoption of resolutions has to be addressed. One way is to separate the conference into two parts, with one part dedicated to sessions for adoption of resolutions and other decisions.

There was a call to formulate a communications plan and look for channels to promote it. Ways to generate the desire for people to be there will be driven by the content. The value proposition is, therefore, needed primarily around agenda topics and what participants will walk away with in terms of WDC achievements.

The discussion

There is a need to strengthen cooperation with international financial institutions and donor organizations to fund ICT activities, including the projects or initiatives agreed to in the regions. It is important to have a bottom-up approach to stakeholder engagement. This means having a very active engagement and participation of civil society organizations, community networks, and particularly women, girls, indigenous peoples, and youth from developing and least developed countries.

When talking about funding or financing projects, it is not only about the donor community. The use of the term “donors” was clarified, as it has been restricting the debate. On the funding side, the intention is to welcome the donor organizations, financing organizations, investment companies and private-equity firms, and even go beyond that by inviting the rating companies, because sometimes funding a project requires rating companies to give a notation. Development agencies and banks are well-known donors, but there is a need to cover the entire financing value chain to make sure that they would engage with ITU.

Positive engagement of stakeholders in the preparatory process may signal positive results for WTDC. An important reference for stakeholder engagement is Resolution 157 (Rev. Dubai, 2018) of the Plenipotentiary Conference, on strengthening of the project execution and project monitoring functions in ITU. TheDevelopment Sector is all about fulfilling the Union's dual responsibility as a United Nations specialized agency and executing agency for implementing projects under the United Nations development system or other funding arrangements so as to facilitate and enhance telecommunication/information and communication technology (ICT) development by offering, organizing and coordinating technical cooperation and assistance activities.

Strengthening partnerships and stakeholder engagement is strengthening BDT project execution role in particular. Stakeholder engagement is already evident in a variety of areas: cybersecurity, innovation, regulatory and market environment, technology and network development.

**Topic 4: Side events**

The context

Participants were unanimous in acknowledging that the name “side events” is not conducive to convincing participants to attend. The case was also made that side events have to become an integral part of WTDC. One common observation was that all who have been to a WTDC have realized over the years that side events were not included in the conference itself, and were therefore not given the weight they deserved.

A value proposition and a clear agenda are needed that can be owned by ITU and all participants. There were calls for a distinct preparatory process to be introduced for side events, as reflected in Proposal 4.1.

It was suggested that some of the high-level policy sessions could be repurposed to the theme of the conference, allowing policy-makers to be part of a roundtable discussion to share challenges from their own countries for which they require others to offer solutions rather than delivering policy statements.

In terms of audience and speakers, it was suggested that four types of stakeholders could be considered, as described in Proposal 4.6.

The preparatory process should make sure that what comes out of side events is actionable and can be followed up beyond the conference.

The proposals

Design side events to create impact with carefully selected theme(s), stakeholders, clear agenda and value proposition.

For this purpose, there could be:

* **Proposal 4.1:** A distinct “side event” preparatory process.
* **Proposal 4.2:** Side events could be made an integral part of WTDC and constituting a “development” track in complement to the current programme of the conference.
* **Proposal 4.3:** A post-conference process after WTDC to further coordinate or implement “side-event” outcomes with the involved stakeholders.

Characteristics of the “development” track during WTDC: Proposal 4.1: A distinct “side-event” preparatory process.

* **Proposal 4.4:** The development track could be organized around key thematic areas, for example “regional priorities” should be diverse, interactive and dynamic.
* **Proposal 4.5:** The High-Level policy session (which includes delivery of policy statements) could be repurposed to become thematic events to address development challenges and clearly identified priorities. The thematic events could aim to find solutions to those challenges, including the financing aspects.
* **Proposal 4.6:** The speakers and audience could include four types of stakeholders (problem owners, solution owners, fund owners and beneficiaries) to increase chances of interaction and interest.
* **Proposal 4.7:** Outcomes of this development track could be new/finalized project proposals and initiatives in relation with the themes, expressions of interest/commitments to finance them, concrete work plans to follow up on them.

The discussion

There was unanimous support for renaming side events and making them an integral part of the conference. There were a number of proposals on how this could done, including the suggestion to look at ways that other conferences, other entities manage to achieve this.

There was also a word of caution that based on the WTDC-17 experience, the idea is to understand how to save time, not how to increase it on events which are not related to ITU-D activities and WTDC documents, such as resolutions and the declaration. If the number of side events increases without the necessary coordination and understanding of how they are linked to the work of the conference committees, that might be problematic.

A similar comment was that while appreciating side events, members also have to be cautious about how to balance side events with the main deliberations so that small delegations do not miss out on the benefits of the side events, and that plenary sessions are not left without the quorum to conduct their work.

Others stressed that side events are needed to attract as many people as possible, given their unique characteristics to discuss the development process of all sectors of society and not just the ICT sector. It was pointed out that many stakeholders, especially high-level participants, cannot attend the two weeks of WTDC. If side events are created in an impactful way to discuss critical ICT developmental issues, they would attract high-level participants from various stakeholders, participants who are not necessarily interested in resolutions.

One suggestion was that once side events have been renamed, they could be similar to the ITU regional development forum, but at a global level and would discuss the developmental track. ITU regional development forums provide a platform for open dialogue, cooperation and partnerships among telecommunication/ICT policy-makers, regulators, industry, academia, regional and international development agencies and organizations on specific regional telecommunication and ICT matters.

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1. 1 Africa, Americas, Arab States, Asia and the Pacific, Commonwealth of Independent States, Europe. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)