



PRESS RELEASE

Least Developed Countries on track to achieve SDG 9.c on universal and affordable Internet access by 2020

Investment in digital skills and infrastructure still needed though to bring more people online

Geneva, 24 January 2018 – Least Developed Countries (LDCs) are recording impressive progress toward achieving United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 9.c on increasing access to information and communication technologies (ICTs) states a new report released today by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU).

The report, *ICTs, LDCs and the SDGs: Achieving universal and affordable Internet in the least developed countries*, notes that all 47 LDCs have launched 3G services and over 60 per cent of their population are covered by a 3G network. These countries are also on track to reach on average 97 per cent mobile broadband coverage and to make Internet prices relatively affordable by 2020.

By the end of 2017, the number of mobile-cellular subscriptions in LDCs had increased to about 700 million, with a penetration of 70 per cent. At the same time, more than 80 per cent of the population in LDCs live within range of a mobile cellular network.

The report has been prepared jointly with the UN Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States (UN-OHRLS). It examines, in detail, progress that LDCs have made in achieving SDG 9.c , which seeks to “significantly increase access to information and communications technology and strive to provide universal and affordable access to the Internet in least developed countries by 2020.”

The report also indicates that ICTs have led to significant development outcomes in LDCs, in particular in the areas of financial inclusion, poverty reduction and improved health.

“Information and communication technologies are transforming lives everywhere and offering vast opportunities for advances in sustainable development,” said ITU Secretary-General Houlin Zhao. “This report indicates that Least Developed Countries are now importantly recognizing that, with strong government commitment and enabling policy and regulatory frameworks, universal and affordable Internet access for all can be realized.”

“It is vital that all ICT stakeholders from governments, civil society, the private sector and the UN system continue to build momentum through collaboration and sharing of innovative solutions. This will help to close the digital divide and support LDCs to accelerate the development of the ICT sector,” said Ms Fekitamoeloa Katoa 'Utoikamanu Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for UN-OHRLS.

“As this report highlights, Least Developed Countries are making major progress. This bodes well for achieving their sustainable development aspirations including those in the Istanbul Programme of Action and Sustainable Development Goals,” she added. “A robust ICT sector will spur home grown innovation, new business opportunities, improved health and education services, and help lift LDCs onto a more prosperous development pathway.”

The report also identifies key barriers to ICT and Internet use in LDCs, including the lack of digital skills. To address the digital skills gap, the report encourages governments to adopt strategic ICT sector plans on building digital skills and enhancing collaboration with the education sector. The report also highlights the importance of policy makers addressing broader socio-economic challenges that lie outside the ICT ecosystem, such as educational levels and gender equality.

“This report provides insights into the great strides that LDCs have made in regard to ICT access, and the opportunities digital technologies offer in accelerating the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals,” said Brahima Sanou, Director of ITU’s Telecommunication Development Bureau. “Universal and affordable Internet access can help LDCs to leap-frog in various areas, including education, health, government services, and trade. ICT services can also deliver innovative resources and applications and trigger new business opportunities.”

The report develops a three-dimensional framework on infrastructure, affordability and skills to help LDCs identify challenges and accelerate growth to bring more people online.

Key recommendations include:

- Address market concentration and foster competition in all building blocks of Internet connectivity;
- Build core Internet infrastructure through control over a locally managed Country Code Top Level Domain (ccTLD), Internet exchange points (IXPs), and the ability to host a root server to create more affordable and local content;
- Promote affordability and foster competition and infrastructure sharing, and review taxation policies;
- Build ICT skills by raising educational levels and developing strategic ICT sector plans that make links to educational policies.

Watch the Facebook Live launch of the report at 3pm Geneva time / 9am NY Time on 24 January at: <https://www.facebook.com/UNOHRLLS/>

The full report and executive summary are available for download at: <https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/LDCs/Pages/ICTs-for-SDGs-in-LDCs-Report.aspx>

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About ITU

ITU is the leading United Nations agency for information and communication technologies (ICTs), driving innovation in ICTs together with 193 Member States and a membership of nearly 800 private sector entities and academic institutions. Established over 150 years ago in 1865, ITU is the intergovernmental body responsible for coordinating the shared global use of the radio spectrum, promoting international cooperation in assigning satellite orbits, improving communication infrastructure in the developing world, and establishing the worldwide standards that foster seamless interconnection of a vast range of communications systems. From broadband networks to cutting-edge wireless technologies, aeronautical and maritime navigation, radio astronomy, oceanographic and satellite-based earth monitoring as well as converging fixed-mobile phone, Internet and broadcasting technologies, ITU is committed to connecting the world. www.itu.int

About UN-OHRLLS

The United Nations Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and the Small Island Developing States (UN-OHRLLS) was established by the United Nations General Assembly in 2001 through its resolution 56/227 with functions recommended by the Secretary-General in paragraph 17 of his report A/56/645. In this same resolution the General Assembly requested Member States, all United Nations system organizations, and other relevant multilateral organizations to extend full support and cooperation to the Office of the High Representative. <http://unohrlls.org/>