BDT COMMUNIQUÉ

Leveraging Africa's potential to accelerate sustainable digital transformation and universal and meaningful connectivity

5 October 2023, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

The annual ITU Regional Development Forum for Africa (RDF-AFR) was held from 3 to 5 October 2023 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia under the theme "Digital transformation for a sustainable and equitable digital future: Accelerating the implementation of the SDGs in Africa through digital transformation".

Organized by the International Telecommunication Union and hosted by the Government of Ethiopia, the event outlined the priorities, challenges, and opportunities to advance digital transformation in Africa.

"The Regional Development Forum for Africa provided a platform for stakeholders to meet face to face and discuss, exchange views and commit to collectively move the digital agenda with urgency to make universal and meaningful connectivity a reality, in a continent where 740 million people are still unconnected," said Dr Cosmas Luckyson Zavazava, Director of ITU's Telecommunication Development Bureau. "The Forum presented an opportunity for countries to present individual country priorities, and for the region to re-emphasize regional priorities, while partners expressed concrete commitments to operationalize their pledges for tangible outcomes that contribute to building a sustainable digital future."

The event welcomed around 300 participants from 41 countries.

"Ethiopia is committed to digital transformation, and we have made significant progress in recent years," said H.E. Huria Ali Mahdi, State Minister to National ICT and Digital Economy Sector speaking on behalf of H.E. Belete Molla, Minister of Innovation and Technology, adding that, "The ITU Regional Development Forum for Africa is an important platform for us to discuss challenges and develop solutions."

An interactive High-level Ministerial/Executive session set the scene for the event, sharing a vision for digital transformation for a sustainable and equitable digital future in Africa with its people at the center.

Participants exchanged experiences to build and create opportunities for further collaboration and implementation around common priorities, as expressed in the Regional

Initiatives for Africa adopted at the World Telecommunication Development Conference in 2022.

The urgency for action to achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals was underscored, and participants highlighted how digital can be leveraged towards this goal.

"The Regional Development Forum has brought together key stakeholders committed to connecting the unconnected and to the realization of the Regional Initiatives for Africa, approved at the ITU Telecommunication Development Conference held in June 2022," said Anne-Rachel Inné, ITU Regional Director for Africa.

Partner2Connect Matchmaking Roundtables

The Partner2Connect Matchmaking Roundtables allowed participants to review and report on the implementation of announced pledges and committed to match country and regional needs with concrete solutions. The roundtables discussed and identified effective mechanisms to coordinate and collaborate for better and optimal use of resources that will bring high impact and sustainable development in Africa and beyond.

The Forum also celebrated the Partner2Connect 800th pledge, submitted by SAP - an important milestone that brought the total financial value of pledges received so far to USD 31.88 billion made by 392 entities from 132 countries.

Highlights from the Regional Partner2Connect Roundtables matchmaking sessions include:

The provision by **Intelsat** of Wi-Fi internet access solutions to connect 50 schools in rural and remote areas including in Burundi, Central African Republic, Mali, Malawi, Niger, Zambia and Zimbabwe; the commitment by **ZTE** to build USD 400 million worth of ICT infrastructure annually by 2025, including in Ethiopia, Ghana and other countries in Africa; the provision by **Qualcomm** of wireless technologies to 3 million people in underserved communities in Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, Senegal, Tanzania by 2025; the commitment by **Eutelsat** to invest USD 250 million through its new generation KONNECT satellite with the objective of connecting more than 1 million people living in remote, rural, and unserved areas in 35 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa; the provision by **ICANN** of support, via the *Coalition for Digital Africa ccTLDs Track*, to strengthen 10 African ccTLD registries in the next two years; the commitment by the **Generation Connect Youth Representatives** to build strategies and tackle barriers about Digital Transformation in Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire and other countries in Africa; the commitment by **Smart Africa** to implement Digital Infrastructure Financing Strategy to broaden the base of contributors in 28 countries in Africa; the commitment by the **United Nations Technology Bank** to scale up its "Technology Makers Lab" project aiming to enhance digital skills for adolescent boys and girls in Niger, Senegal, Togo and other countries over the next three years with an estimated budget of USD 45 million; the commitments by **Liquid** to provide affordable meaningful ultra-high-speed connectivity to communities of hubs through its 'Hubs Connectivity Programme'; to focus on connecting schools in Africa by mapping locations, linking sources of financing to large scale university projects, deploying infrastructure using Liquid's fibre access, wireless broadband, last mile ISPs partners or satellites for the most remote locations; and, to collaborate with Microsoft to deliver internet access to 20 million underserved people in Africa by the end of 2025.

At the Forum, new Partner2Connect pledges and commitments were announced. Here is a snapshot:

SAP, marking the 800th pledge of the Coalition, committed to invest USD 3 million in innovative education models to enable pathways to employment and entrepreneurship in the digital and green economy for underrepresented, underserved and underprivileged youth between the ages of 16 and 24 in Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa; **IPSDI-Burundi** committed to advance with digital inclusion within rural areas and as a project to target a pilot school of 250 students (girls only) in the west of Burundi to provide them with basic digital skills and Child Online Protection (COP) Guidelines; the **Ethiopian Cybersecurity Association** committed to advocate for the establishment of national forum for promotion of cybersecurity awareness and culture development; the **Ministry of ICT and Innovation of Rwanda,** committed significant steps toward establishing a circular economy for electrical and electronic equipment (e-waste) management in line with Rwanda's National Circular Economy Action Plan and Roadmap; the **Ministry of Digital Transition, Post and Electronic Communications of Burkina Faso,** committed to the development and extension of fiber optic backbone in Burkina Faso; the **Ministry of Communications and Digitalization of Ghana,** committed to bridge the digital divide in Ghana through ICT infrastructure and capacity building and to boost digital competencies through the Digital Transformation Centres (DTC) project; the **Agency for Aerial Navigation Safety in Africa and Madagascar, ASECNA,** committed to set up innovative projects in line with its desire to work towards a Single African Sky in line with the AU's Agenda 2063.

Detailed information on the matchmaking sessions and new pledges will be featured in the official report of the Regional Development Forum for Africa to be posted on the Forum's website by 13 October 2023.

Resources and background information:
- Event website
- Photo gallery
- Highlights video

Discover what others are saying on social media and join the conversation by searching and posting with the hashtag #ITURDF

For questions, please contact:

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About the International Telecommunication Union (ITU)

The International Telecommunication Union (ITU) is the United Nations specialized agency for information and communication technologies (ICTs), driving innovation in ICTs together with 193 Member States and a membership of over 900 companies, universities, and international and regional organizations. Established over 150 years ago, 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. For more information, visit: www.itu.int