



Asia-Pacific Digital Societies Policy Forum 2017

Malcolm Johnson, ITU Deputy Secretary-General

Bangkok, Thailand

May 8, 2017

H.E. Pichet Durongkaveroj, Minister of Digital Economy and Society,
Kingdom of Thailand

Ms Areewan Haorangsi, Secretary-General APT

Mr. John Giusti, Chief Regulatory Officer, GSMA

Good morning.

It is a pleasure to be back in Bangkok for this joint initiative between GSMA and the ITU. We are grateful to GSMA for its cooperation, and the government of Thailand for hosting the event. Thailand is a great supporter of ITU, is a member of the ITU Council and hosts the ITU office for Asia Pacific.

This Forum is an important platform for government and industry to share their respective goals and create a framework for closer collaboration. This will be essential if we are to achieve the ambitious 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development which includes ending poverty and hunger,

providing quality education for all, and bringing clean water and sanitation to everyone by 2030. The Agenda applies to all countries, developed and developing and currently no country meets them all.

If we look at the 169 targets set to achieve the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) it is clear that they can only be met by widespread high-speed access to ICTs.

For example, halving the number of deaths and injuries on the road will only be achieved by using smart transport management techniques, including collision avoidance radar and autonomous vehicles. Doubling the rate of energy efficiency will only be achieved through the use of smart meters, and innovative energy saving solutions. Substantially increasing water-use efficiency will rely on ICTs to control irrigation and identify and remedy water leaks. Combating climate change can only be achieved by reducing greenhouse gas emissions through clean technologies.

The challenge is clear when we look at the statistics:

Less than half the world's population is currently online, which means that there are still some 3.9 billion people offline. Of these, two out of every three live in the Asia-Pacific region. More than half of the world's total offline population comes from just five Asian-Pacific countries, the majority from South Asia, where the share of the rural population is also highest. The good news is that most of the next 1.5 billion people to come online will likely come from this region. However, there are infrastructure challenges especially in Oceania (that is the Pacific Islands).

ITU is working with the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) in developing a map of the terrestrial telecommunication infrastructure throughout Asia Pacific to identify gaps.

This will assist the development of the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway, an ESCAP initiative that aims to improve regional broadband connectivity through a dense web of open access cross border infrastructure. It comes at a time when the use of cloud-based applications in the workplace, together with video streaming and social media, place far greater demands on the existing infrastructure than before.

The superhighway will be good news for competition and for new large-scale investment in broadband infrastructure.

It also means that Asian-Pacific countries have recognized the importance of connectivity for sustainable development, enabling more people across the entire region to take full advantage of the digital economy.

Most people now connect to the Internet through their smart phones. Mobile broadband is the fastest growing technology in human history and is the catalyst that will ultimately lead to hundreds of millions more being connected to a world of digital opportunities. The total number of smart phones with broadband connection has already reached 2.2 billion.

It means there is an increasing demand from more users wanting faster connection to download more and more data. This places great demand on the radio frequency spectrum. It has to be agreed internationally, otherwise these phones would not work when moving from one country to another, and the cost of phones would be much higher if they did not comply with global standards and benefit from the resulting economies of scale. It is

only through the international treaty on the use of the radio frequency spectrum, that ITU has been maintaining for the last 110 years, that this can be achieved. All these devices need to be able to interoperate and this can only be achieved by compliance with international standards, something ITU has been doing for even longer. The networks carrying all this data and communications traffic rely on ITU's international standards. The development of Internet of Things and 5G will place far greater demands on these networks.

Bringing the benefits of this technology to all the world's citizens is a major goal of the ITU. Encouraging countries to adopt the policies and regulations that will provide the incentives to investment in the provision of broadband services, that stimulate innovation and help develop the necessary skills, is the third pillar of ITU's work, which is why we are happy to work together with GSMA in the organization of these forums.

Governments are committed to report each year on their progress in meeting the SDGs. This means political engagement in each country, and commercial drivers, will be increasingly evident. This is a significant business opportunity. In a report for GeSI (Global e-Sustainability Initiative) in partnership with ITU, Accenture has estimated that implementation of the SDGs could see an estimated increase in ICT sector turnover of USD 2.2 trillion per year by 2030.

Achieving the SDGs will only be possible by close public-private partnerships. Collaboration, cooperation and coordination at the national, regional and international level will be essential. The SDG framework means working beyond ICT sectoral interests into other industrial and commercial sectors that previously had little interaction, and as a

consequence ITU needs to attract wide-ranging industrial interests to take part in its work, as well as co-ordinating with other intergovernmental agencies to avoid duplication of effort, pool our resources and bring our different competences to the common good.

Nevertheless, this remains a challenge and comes at a time when some in the Internet community have railed against the involvement - particularly in Internet governance issues - of any intergovernmental agencies, fearing that an increase in unwarranted, top-down national or foreign control will result. However, interacting with new and complex ecosystems outside the traditional ICT framework will be necessary to expand our ideas of partnership and policymaking, and other sectors such as healthcare or banking will require huge ICT investment.

Take banking as an example. It is estimated that 2 billion adults in the world are still without access to a bank account, but of these 1.6 billion have access to a mobile phone.

Mobile payment platforms are a start, and Asia-Pacific has some good examples. Thailand has launched PromptPay, part of the National E-payment initiative, and India has rolled out Aadhaar Pay, which allows consumers to pay with a mobile number, or with just a fingerprint.

The ITU Focus Group on Digital Financial Services recently concluded a two-year consultation process about the challenges raised by mobile money innovations. Its recommendations offer guidance in areas as sensitive and important as consumer protection, data privacy and digital identity. These are all available on the ITU website. We hope they will help drive greater access and opportunity through the delivery of more

affordable, accessible, secure, transparent and robust digital financial services for consumers and merchants in emerging markets.

But connectivity is not the solution in itself as statistics show. It is estimated that 85% of the world's population is covered by at least 3G services, but still we have less than 50% of the population connected. Services need to be affordable, content needs to be relevant and in the local language, people need to be educated as to the benefits of the technology, and how to make best use of it, and most importantly people need to trust it.

Which brings me to the subject of cybersecurity. ICTs can only be the solution if people feel secure and safe online. This is a big priority for ITU and is a precondition for achieving the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda.

In 2005, the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) entrusted ITU as the sole facilitator for the action line on building confidence and security in the use of ICTs. ITU's role has been to bring all the different organizations and stakeholders to join together to:

- forge meaningful partnerships to develop security standards,
- help countries define their national cybersecurity strategy,
- set up their computer incident response teams,
- deploy international security standards in their infrastructure,
- protect children online, and
- and to build the necessary human capacity and skills.

The WSIS Forum, the world's biggest ICT for development event, will take place this year in Geneva during 12-16 June. The Forum is devoted to how ICTs can help the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals

and will showcase many good examples of how this can be achieved. I hope to see you all there.

We need to build a people-centred, inclusive and development oriented Information Society, where everyone can create, access, utilize and share information and knowledge to achieve their full potential.

And clearly, women and girls have an important role to play in the Information Society, which relates to SDG5 on gender equality.

We can no longer accept a situation where there are so many more men online than women, and the situation is worsening. We went from an Internet user gender gap of 11% in 2015 to 12% in 2016, which equates to 257 million more men online in the world than women. That's about the entire population of Indonesia, and almost four times the population of Thailand.

While women in Asia-Pacific shine in terms of capability, and according to the World Economic Forum often outperform their male counterparts, the proportion of women in the ICT workforce is consistently lower than that of men across the region. There is a huge demand for more people with ICT skills, which is why we need to encourage more women to enter the ICT sector.

Two other Goals of particular importance for Asia-Pacific are SDG13 climate change, and SDG14 life under the sea.

According to ESCAP without climate-oriented development, climate change could force more than 100 million people from the region into extreme poverty by 2030, wiping out the gains in poverty reduction achieved over

the last decades; and GDP could decrease by as much as 3.3% by 2050 and 10% by 2100.

The economic costs associated with disasters across the region are also increasing. In 2015, Asia-Pacific continued to be the world's most disaster-prone region. It also bore the brunt of large scale catastrophic disasters with over 16,000 fatalities, more than a two-fold increase since 2014.

This shows the importance of a resilient telecommunications infrastructure to provide early warning and emergency communications.

In the GeSI Smarter 2030 Report it is estimated that the use of ICTs, especially in the polluting sectors such as energy, transportation, buildings etc. can reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 20% by 2030.

Oceans play a significant role in the food we eat, the air we breathe and have a big impact on climate and many economies, particularly in this region. There are many ways for ICTs to help us conserve and use the oceans in a sustainable manner. A lot of them relate to monitoring and reporting, which can lead to increased accountability. For example, big data from satellite-based monitoring can be used to analyse short-term and long-term trends in terms of biodiversity, pollution, weather patterns and ecosystem evolution. This is absolutely critical when putting in place policies and planning mitigation activities.

Before I conclude, and being in one of the world's mega cities, I have to mention SDG11 – sustainable cities and communities. By 2050, nearly 70% of the world population is expected to live in urban areas. This poses major challenges that only the advancement of technological innovation will meet.

The governance systems envisaged for smart sustainable cities need to use the technology for a close interaction between citizens and policy-makers to encourage start-ups and young professionals, women and other excluded communities, to increase economic growth, jobs, and drive innovation. As a follow-up to the work of a Focus Group on Smart Cities, ITU created a new ITU-T Study Group 20 on Internet of Things and Smart Cities and Communities and is engaged in several smart city pilot projects with various cities around the world to improve the feasibility and applicability of a set of key performance indicators that will enable cities to assess their smartness and sustainability. ITU also created a partnership with 16 other United Nations agencies and programmes called the “United for Smart Sustainable Cities” initiative to support sustainable urbanization.

So, I hope this overview of the importance of ICTs to sustainable development has helped set the scene for the discussions in this forum. Government policies that encourage innovation and investment will be essential. A common enabling regulatory framework in countries across the region, and across the world, will make it much easier for industry to do business and provide the ICT infrastructure that will be the foundation for our sustainable future. We need to work together to address the challenges that we face – governments, industry, academia, civil society, intergovernmental organisations and NGOs. Only through collaboration, coordination and cooperation will we succeed. I hope that this event over the next few days will play its part in bringing this about.

Thank you.