MIIT-ITU Seminar on Telecom Universal Service and

ICT for Poverty Alleviation

1-2 August 2019
Dunhuang, China

Dunhuang Initiative

Telecommunication universal service embodies the fundamental rights and interests of all citizens in a country. It is included in the supreme values upheld by the telecommunications sector over ten decades, with such profound connotations as protecting basic human rights, promoting social fairness and justice, and achieving balanced regional development and overall economic sustainability.

For a long time, the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) has been committed to supporting countries to bridge the digital divide and improve relevant policies and standards, and made fruitful efforts in the field of telecommunication universal service. Many countries have paid close attention to bridging the digital divide in their broadband development strategy and planning, and made significant inroads into achieving telecommunication universal service.

On August 1st and 2nd, 2019, representatives of governments, industry, academia, civil society, and international organizations gathered in Dunhuang, Peoples Republic of China to exchange ideas on the theme of "**Telecom Universal Service and ICT for Poverty Alleviation**." Learning from and inspiring each other, they put forward the following initiative in pursuit of common development:

1. ***Deepen the coverage of network***. *Cyberspace should be considered as a community of shared future for all humankind. Governments should scale up policy support to encourage telecom operators in actively enhancing the joint construction and coverage of broadband network in rural, remote, difficult and unserved areas. The principle of "equal access to network and equal speed of connection" should underpin this undertaking in both urban and rural areas.*

2. ***Accelerate the pace of technology innovation***. *A quicker pace of upgrading ever-changing information and communications technologies (ICTs) not only facilitates the high-quality development of industry, but also drives innovative development in all relevant aspects of economy and society. Governments and businesses should place full emphasis on technological innovation and business model innovation by encouraging and facilitating technology upgrades by the telecom operators. This would assist in exploring the integration of latest advanced, diverse and applicable ICTs.*

3. ***Expand the space for applications***. *Internet service providers should take the lead in the development of innovative applications. Education-oriented and future-oriented applications development can help level out basic education standards. They should also intensify innovation in the fields of basic public services such as medical care; further*

integrate network information technology with rural economy and social services; meet the demands of the disabled; and increase network access and affordability fees for the poor, sharing the achievements of network development with everyone.

4. ***Promote joint development***. *Governments of all countries should ensure access to public services for each ethnic group, furthering telecommunication universal service policies and improving network infrastructure in relevant geographic areas. Such policies should safeguard the rights of minority citizens to use and develop their own languages and help develop applicable software and hardware products to protect and preserve their traditional cultures.*

5. ***Improve legal system.*** *Law is the very foundation of governance. Under the prevailing law, a policy is only justified and sustainable if it strengthens existing primary legal framework. In order to effectively bridge the digital divide and drive economic and social advancements, governments should clearly define the legal obligations of provision of universal service to establish fair and open market rules.*

6. ***Strengthen international cooperation***. *Multi-level cooperation involving amongst others, governments, representatives of the civil society, international organizations and multinational companies etc., should cooperate to put together an industrial ecosystem promoting an extensive application of ICTs in developing countries and underdeveloped areas.*

7. ***Strengthen Competition***. *No regulatory measure helps more to bring down the consumer prices to affordable levels than competition. Relevant regulations must ensure that Universal Service interventions do not result in creation of local monopolies that may make the services unaffordable for the masses in previously unserved areas.*

8. ***Enabling people on supply side:*** *Broadband infrastructure projects may become over invested initiatives if we neglect the importance of adoption of ICTs by the targeted population. As a national policy, special consideration should be given to development of ICT knowledge and skills for users with disabilities. Next generation Telecom Universal service programs should also consider the availability of affordable low cost smartphones ownership, including the operating systems, to end-users.*

The aim of multi-level cooperation remains to overcome challenges and work together to shift telecommunication universal service to a new stage.