



ITU Regional Forum on Consumer Information, Protection and Rights for Africa 2017

14-16 March 2017

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



The International Telecommunication (ITU) Regional Forum on Consumer Information, Protection and Rights for Africa organized by the Telecommunication Development Bureau (BDT), in collaboration with the Government of the Republic of Benin, the Network of African Consumers in ICT (RÉCATIC) and the Regulatory Authority of Postal and Electronics Communications (ARCEP) was held in Cotonou Benin from 14-16 March, 2017.

The Forum provided a platform for sharing experiences to address existing as well as emerging challenges amongst telecommunication, broadcasting and converged ICT policy makers, regulators and the industry in the area of consumers' rights and protection in the digital age.



The Forum was attended by 131 delegates from 21 countries including regional institutions and academia such as African Telecommunications Union (ATU), Ecole supérieure multinationale des télécommunications (ESMT) and GSMA-Africa.

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The welcome address was delivered by Mr. Abilé Romain Houéhou, Secretary-General, Récatic followed by Mr. Ali Drissa Badiel, the ITU Area Representative for West Africa who emphasized ITU's commitment to a safe and secure connected world where consumer rights and interest are at the fore fronts. Mrs. Fanta Sangare Boureima, Member of the ARCEP Board in her remarks



expressed gratitude to ITU for honoring Benin to host the forum. The key note address was delivered by Mr. Serge Mahouwedo Ahissou, *Directeur de Cabinet du Ministre*, representing H.E. Ms. Rafiatou Monrou, Minister for Digital Economy and

Communication, Benin. He noted that digitalization is a priority for the Government of Benin and the inclusion of consumer interests in the policy and development process is a crucial part of the Benin's approach. He called for this approach to be replicated across the Region.

The forum reviewed a number of topical issues including;

- i. An overview of ICT4SDG and Consumer Protection and consumer protection and rights for Africa,
- ii. The Institutional Frameworks, policy , regulation & Advocacy for consumer protection at global and regional level and national level;
- iii. Connecting the Unconnected: Technology and Financing developments and challenges for infrastructure, broadband rollout plans and the need to revising UAS to achieve connectivity –
- iv. Consumer protection and Quality of service in the broadband & IoT era
- v. Consumer Affordability and Entrepreneurship. The session examined the tariff monitoring and regulatory approaches adopted to protect consumers from excessive pricing, the mechanisms for enhancing consumer price awareness in the digital environment including price bundles and OTTs
- vi. Platforms to empower consumers and entrepreneurship- Case studies on digital financial inclusion;
- vii. Emerging issues for consumers' for online protection, examining how consumers can be protected in a global world of e-commerce (mobile devices, mobile/online payments, counterfeit devices)
- viii. A round table discussion in commemoration of World Consumers Rights Day whose theme was 'Building a digital world consumer can trust'
- ix. Child online Protection and
- x. Effective Information, education and communication strategies to empower consumers in Africa and enhance their ICT knowledge and skills.

All presentations and materials are available at the Forum Website: <http://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Regulatory-Market/Pages/Events2016/Benin/Home.aspx>

2. The Forum acknowledged:

- i. The Commemoration of the World Consumers rights Day Celebration which featured a round table discussion with a theme building a digital world consumer we can trust” with a call for increased cooperation at national and regional level on the promotion of consumer rights and advocacy.

3. The Forum noted:

- i. The contribution of ICTs and particularly of the mobile sector in Africa to the attainment of the SDGs in particular by facilitating direct employment and enhancing efficiencies to all sectors of the economy;
- ii. The slow rate of digital transformation due to inadequate infrastructure, affordability, gender and rural urban inequities – this affects the potential and impact of ICTs for SDGs.
- iii. With the growing economic and social importance of digitalization, there is a need to protect consumers using Internet services and to ensure that they can continue to use these services safely and securely. Safeguarding children & vulnerable persons online, mitigating fraud and security threats, as well as the sale & use of counterfeit devices are major concerns for consumers in Africa.
- iv. The inadequate legal and institutional frameworks for ICT consumer protection at regional and national level and the limited support provided by Governments and Regulator to ICT Consumer Associations and networks are barriers to effective consumer protection when using ICTs.
- v. QoS and QoE remain a major concern for consumers in the region. This is heightened by an exceptional demand for data as well as by inadequate investment in infrastructure to match the demand and additional supply constraints such as high cost of international internet connectivity, insufficient power, counterfeit and poor quality networks and devices.
- vi. The growing significance of the APP economy in Africa; governments and regulators are still struggling to formulate responses to the multifaceted phenomenon; institutional frameworks, competition and consumer laws are lagging behind.
- vii. Traditional voice services have definite measurement criteria for tariffs and monitoring usage - i.e. per second or per minute call, the tools and mechanisms for monitoring data and bundled tariffs and the usage of data are not definitive and not known to the majority of ICT users in the region.

4. The forum adopted the following guidelines and recommendations;

- i. Strengthen partnerships between stakeholders to create knowledge exchange platforms and dialogue at national, regional and international level for consumer protection and rights in Africa;
- ii. Raise awareness of the ITU-D Global Symposium for Regulators 2014 Best Practice Guidelines (GSR14) as well as of ITU-D Resolution 64 (Rev. Dubai, 2014) and ITU-T Resolution 84 (Hammamet, 2016) on consumer protection at national and regional level and to integrate the protection and information on consumer rights in Africa into ITU activities;
- iii. Formalize the organization of a Forum on Consumer Protection to be held at least once every two years;
- iv. Promote the establishment of consumer associations, their professionalism, and assist in building their capacity building at national, sub-regional and regional levels.

- v. Establish effective mechanisms for education, awareness raising and dissemination of information on issues such as QoS parameters, tariffs, safety and use of internet in particular for children, women and people with disabilities.
 - vi. Adopt an inclusive approach at international, regional and national level for the promotion and implementation of SDGs, calling upon policy makers, regulators to integrate SDG targets in their national plans and to bring consumer interests and rights at the center of discussions of all socio economic development and policies.
 - vii. Expand Universal Access Strategies to include the promotion of consumer rights, information, education and awareness, particularly focusing on security and safety;
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