

Response from the UNESCO Chair in ICT4D to the ITU's consultation on its 2020-2023 Strategic Plan

What should be the key strategic priorities for ITU for the 2020-2023 period, taking into account the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals?

The ITU should focus on what it alone can do best. It is the UN agency and intergovernmental organisation responsible for reaching global agreements between governments on matters relating to telecommunication and ICTs, and should focus primarily on this. In this light, its key strategic priorities should be:

1. To ensure *closer agreement between governments* on key technical matters (primarily relating to standards and spectrum management). This will require much greater effort on co-ordination and trust building between governments
2. To work closely with other international agencies and organisations (especially ICANN and the IGF) to *streamline international discussions of ICT matters*, and reduce overlap of business.
3. To *identify and share good practices* in ICT and telecommunication strategy, policy and implementation, especially for financially poor countries with limited resources, so that poorer people and marginalised communities can benefit more effectively from the use of ICTs. Key areas for such work would include *inter alia* regulatory approaches, cybersecurity (including child online protection), and the implications for employment and education of mass automation.
4. *Closer co-operation with other UN agencies* and intergovernmental organisations to ensure that the role of ICTs in society is better understood, and that countries adopt holistic approaches to ensure that technology is used wisely.

Whilst the ITU should be aware of the context of the SDGs, it should not let these detract from its core business of ensuring that all governments work more effectively together to deliver safe and effective ICTs for the betterment of humanity.

What are the key technological trends ITU should consider while planning its strategy?

The overarching technological transformation that will impact human society in the period between 2020 and 2023 will be the ever closer interconnection between humans and ICTs. Key issues within this broad theme include:

- Implementation of 5G and the Internet of Things
- Increasing integration of technologies – implications for standards and regulation – policies should be principle-based and technology neutral
- Artificial Intelligence and increased biotechnology (including implications of increased human longevity for global resources)
- Growing concerns over the ethics of human-technology interaction (what are the ethical implications of being cyborgs?)
- Increased concerns and debate over privacy and security (especially in the context of big data, and its use by corporations and states)

What do you consider to be the top three challenges for the ITU and the top three achievements you would like to see the ITU accomplish in the 2020-2023 timeframe?

The top three challenges are:

1. Ensuring that the ITU is indeed seen as an organisation that can be *trusted and delivers effective services* for its member countries
2. Building *closer global agreement between countries* on key issues relating to ICTs (including telecommunications)
3. Turning *rhetoric about partnerships with private sector and civil society into reality* – this is a complex issue, but it is essential that the ITU's partnerships are based on a clear framework that actually delivers change on the ground, rather than just more rhetoric

Accomplishments we would like to see are:

1. *Greater global agreement on standards and spectrum management* – the ITU can play a key role in bringing governments together and helping to reach consensus on critical issues – this requires excellent moderation skills.
2. *ICTs used effectively by poor people and marginalised communities* to enhance their lives. This will also require ethical discussion about the balance of power in the sector, and especially the role of major global corporations.
3. *The ITU seen as a real thought leader* in key areas of ICT, especially in terms of sharing good practices for countries to follow in ensuring that their citizens can use ICTs effectively and safely.

Any other thoughts or comments you would like to make?

- In recent years, the ITU has expanded into many new areas, and has not always delivered effectively in them. There would be real value for it to focus

more effectively on its core business, and be seen to be a truly leading UN agency in actually delivering value to its member countries.

- The allocation of budget resources between different sectors and the central secretariat should be reviewed in line with the above comments to ensure that the allocation of resources is appropriate for delivering the required tasks.
- The ITU has many outstanding staff. More could be done to build on their strengths and diversity. The HR functions could usefully be reviewed to ensure effective career progression. The UN SG's emphasis on the role of women in the UN should be treated as a high priority, with more women being promoted to senior positions in the ITU, providing they have the relevant skills and experiences.