



WTPF
Backgrounder
Series

WTPF Strategic Dialogue

Building our Broadband Future

13 May 2013

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THE DAY BEFORE the opening of the World Telecommunication/ICT Policy Forum (WTPF), ITU will host a high-level Strategic Dialogue featuring key speakers from the public sector, NGOs and government. Debate will focus around a shared future ‘built on broadband’, the importance and challenges of investing in new high-speed infrastructure, and the changing nature of broadband policy and regulation.

The Internet comprises a huge range of disparate information services, content and applications running over a ‘network of networks’, encompassing some 42,000 individual systems. Much more than just the Web, the Internet supports a growing range of ‘smart’ services and machine-to-machine connectivity that is the foundation for the ‘Internet of Things’.

As the platform for Internet growth, broadband is now considered critical infrastructure, vital for national competitiveness in the modern global economy. The role of broadband in promoting prosperity, productivity and trade is by now well-established. Put simply, it is increasingly clear that no country can do without broadband.

The role of broadband in meeting global development goals is also vital. High-speed technologies are already transforming the provision of healthcare services and education in developed and developing countries alike. Broadband is a key stepping stone to improving people’s lives and accelerating progress towards the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and is increasingly widely recognized as a crucial element of the post-2015 global development agenda.





Encouragingly, individual Internet use has been growing exponentially, with 2.6 billion people now online. Worldwide, however, 4.5 billion – or around two thirds of the world’s population – remain to be connected. This unconnected group comprises many of the same citizens for whom the MDGs are most meaningful, and most relevant.

At the user level, should policy-makers consider broadband Internet a basic need, a fundamental right or a ‘luxury’ service available only to those with the means to pay a premium? Should this complex web of overlapping networks and the services they carry be subject to national regulation, self-regulation or no regulation at all? ‘Converged’ regulators – covering a range of services from broadcasting to Internet to voice telephony – are increasingly common, but it is not always clear that policy-makers are able to keep up with the scale and growth in modern data traffic and new services like social media. What is the role for public policy, and do National Broadband Plans really matter? Who is really driving change – policy-makers, operators, content providers, or end-users?

This year’s WTPF Strategic Dialogue will call on a wide range of different voices to outline their vision of how the Internet will evolve – and the opportunities and risks. This stimulating full day of debate will encompass the views of top industry executives and policy pioneers, civil society advocates and Internet freedom champions, to explore the shape of a future that will affect us all.

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