



Regional Preparatory Meeting for Africa Region for WTDC-25 (RPM-AFR)

Nairobi, Kenya, 8-9 April 2025



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Chair, RDF-AFR

Final Report of the Regional Development Forum

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**ITU Regional Development Forum for Africa
(RDF-AFR) 2025**

***Information and Communication Technologies for Attaining
Sustainable Development Goals***

organized by the International Telecommunication Union with the support of the Communications Authority of Kenya and in cooperation with the Africa Telecommunications Union (ATU)

**7 April 2025
Nairobi, Kenya**

FINAL REPORT

Introduction and General Overview

The ITU Regional Development Forum for Africa (RDF-AFR) 2025, organized by the Telecommunication Development Bureau (BDT) of the ITU, took place on 7 April 2025, in Nairobi, Kenya. The event was hosted by the Communications Authority of Kenya (CA), in cooperation with the African Telecommunications Union (ATU), and preceded the ITU Regional Preparatory Meeting (RPM) for Africa on 8-9 April 2025.

RDF-AFR facilitated high-level dialogue and collaboration among telecommunication/ICT policymakers, regulators, industry leaders, academia, and development organizations. It was crucial in paving the way and crafting strategic priorities for the BDT's regional work plan between World Telecommunication Development Conferences.

The RDF allowed ITU and its stakeholders, including Member States, Sector Members, Associates and Academia, regional organizations, development partners and financial institutions, to exchange views on achieving meaningful connectivity and sustainable digital transformation on the African continent.

Documentation

The agenda, programme and meeting documents are published on the RDF-AFR [website](#).

Participation

The event was attended by a total of 304 participants (113 female and 191 male), including 242 (80%) attending in person and 62 (20%) participating remotely. 35 Member States were represented by 227 delegates, along with participants from various stakeholder groups, 18 from ITU-D Sector Members, 11 Academia members, 36 observers and 12 ITU Staff. The final list of participants will be available on the RDF-AFR [website](#).

Opening Ceremony

The opening ceremony of the Regional Development Forum started with remarks from dignitaries, highlighting the importance of digital transformation, innovation, artificial intelligence (AI), capacity development and regional cooperation in promoting sustainable development. The opening remarks were given by the following speakers:

- **Mr David Mugonyi**, Director General and Chief Executive Officer, Communications Authority of Kenya (CA).
- **Mr John Omo**, Secretary General, African Telecommunications Union (ATU)
- **Dr Cosmas Luckyson Zavazava**, Director of the Telecommunication Development Bureau, ITU
- **Hon. William Kabogo Gitau**, Cabinet Secretary, Ministry of Information, Communications and the Digital Economy, Kenya

Mr David Mugonyi, Director-General of Kenya's Communications Authority (CA), thanked the ITU for selecting Kenya as the host country. Mr Mugonyi emphasized the significance of the RDF in evaluating Africa's digital development progress following the Kigali Action Plan and preparing for Africa's strategic participation in the upcoming World Telecommunication Development Conference in 2025. He underlined Kenya's advancements in telecommunications infrastructure, innovation hubs, and regulatory frameworks aimed at enhancing digital inclusion, while also acknowledging ongoing challenges related to bridging the digital divide across Africa

Mr John Omo, Secretary General, African Telecommunications Union (ATU), emphasized the forum's role in refining regional cooperation and addressing digital transformation challenges, such as infrastructure deficits and affordability gaps. He underscored the importance of aligning investments, policies, and skills development to accelerate Africa's digital progress, highlighting the 'Africa's

Innovation Challenge’ in collaboration with the ITU as a significant milestone.

Dr Cosmas Luckyson Zavazava, BDT Director, reiterated the ITU's commitment to supporting Africa through projects targeting universal connectivity, digital transformation, cybersecurity, and youth innovation. He elaborated on the crucial necessity for meaningful connectivity, stressing that robust digital infrastructure is foundational to leveraging emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, particularly given the continent's youthful demographics. Dr Zavazava also highlighted the ITU's success in mobilizing substantial resources and fostering international cooperation, which resulted in significant investments aimed at addressing infrastructure and connectivity gaps in Africa.

Additionally, Dr Zavazava commended Kenya for its proactive role and strategic contributions to digital transformation initiatives, including hosting key innovation centers and advancing regulatory frameworks. He called upon African nations to unite efforts, ensuring the continent's readiness to capitalize on digital opportunities effectively and inclusively, thereby enhancing social and economic development for all African communities.

Hon. William Kabogo Gitau, Cabinet Secretary, Ministry of Information, Communications and the Digital Economy, Kenya, welcomed the attendees and thanked Dr Cosmas Luckyson Zavazava, Director of the Telecommunication Development Bureau of the ITU, for his presence and the work of ITU. He emphasized Africa's capability to achieve independent and sustainable growth without persistent reliance on foreign aids. He articulated the importance of intra-African cooperation, highlighting Africa's abundant natural resources and significant human capital, and its demographic dividend, as key assets to foster the continent's development.

Mr Gitau called on African nations to adopt strategies centered on regional integration, technological innovation, and mutual collaboration, reducing dependency on conditional external funding. Additionally, he encouraged the exploration of homegrown solutions and development models aligned with Africa's unique socio-economic contexts. Mr Gitau concluded by stressing the need for strong political leadership, good governance, and strategic alliances within the continent to create an economically robust, self-reliant, and prosperous Africa. He encouraged fruitful discussions and reiterated Kenya's commitment to facilitating impactful dialogues on the future of digital development that is inclusive of all.

As part of his intervention, he also invited the Ministers in attendance to make a few remarks on the occasion of the RDF-AFR opening session. As part of these interventions, the following key messages were shared:

- **Hon. Samuel Nartey George (MP)**, Minister of Communication, Digital Technology and Innovation of the Republic of Ghana highlighted the importance of inter-country collaboration, urging African nations to share resources and expertise, especially around data management and technological advancements. He emphasized the need to reduce reliance on external funding through collaborative and sub-regional approaches to infrastructure development.
- **H.E. Dr Bosun Tijani**, the Minister of Communication, Digital Technology and Innovation of the Federal Republic of Nigeria advocated for substantial investment in fiber-optic infrastructure and artificial intelligence (AI) readiness to drive productivity across key sectors. He encouraged African countries to shift from a mobile-first approach to comprehensive digital solutions that foster real economic and technological growth. He also emphasized the need to ensure resilience of critical infrastructure in the digital era.
- **H.E. Ms Nthathi Moorosi (MP)**, Minister of Information, Communications, Science, Technology and Innovation, Lesotho, of the Kingdom of Lesotho stressed the critical importance of political support and public-private partnerships to achieve digital transformation goals. She urged

regional leaders to enhance their collective political will and foster stronger collaboration with the private sector.

- **H.E. Dr Boukar Michel**, Minister of Posts and Digital Economy of the Republic of Chad underscored the urgent need to enhancing technical capacities and infrastructure in Francophone Africa, seeking greater cooperation from more digitally advanced African nations. He emphasized the role of international partnerships and regional integration to bridge digital divides effectively.
- **Ms Patricia Amand**, member of the Council of regulation, representing the Minister of Communication and Digital Economy of Côte d'Ivoire shared on her country's ongoing efforts in digitalizing public services and strengthening cybersecurity frameworks. She reiterated Côte d'Ivoire's commitment to the regional initiatives, emphasizing inclusive governance and environmental sustainability as key components of digital transformation.

Appointment of the Chair of the Regional Development Forum

At the end of the opening session, **Mr David Mugonyi, Director General and Chief Executive Officer of the Communications Authority of Kenya**, was appointed as the Chair of the RDF for Africa by acclamation. Mr Mugonyi accepted the position, acknowledging the confidence placed in Kenya by regional stakeholders.

Roundtable Discussions:

1. ROUNDTABLE ONE: State of Digital Development and Trends - Challenges & Opportunities:

10:00 – 11:00	Moderator: H.E. Dr Bosun Tijani, Minister of Communications, Innovation and Digital Economy, Federal Republic of Nigeria
	Setting the Stage: ITU presentation by BDT, ITU
	Panelists: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – H.E. Nthathi Moorosi, Minister, Ministry of Information, Communications, Science, Technology and Innovation, Lesotho – Eng. John Tanui, Principal Secretary, State Department for ICT and Digital Economy, Ministry of Information, Communications and the Digital Economy, Kenya – Ms Bernice Edande Otye, Permanent Secretary, L'Assemblée des Régulateurs des Télécommunications de l'Afrique Centrale (ARTAC) – Dr Ally Yahaya Simba, Executive Director, East African Communications Organisation (EACO)

The first RDF roundtable covered regional digital development trends, challenges, and opportunities, emphasizing connectivity, regulation, and sustainability.

The session commenced with a presentation by the BDT summarizing key points from the "State of Digital Development and Trends in the Africa Region: Challenges and Opportunities" report (available through the [link](#)). The presentation emphasized that universal and meaningful connectivity has become a significant policy imperative. The report noted that despite considerable progress in the region, there are still connectivity challenges, with major barriers to internet usage including high costs, digital literacy and limited rural infrastructure. Without targeted support, LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS may fall further behind in digital development. Challenges with gender, geography and age groups leading to digital access divides were also highlighted. The report stressed the importance of data-driven ICT policies and regulations to address these gaps.

Additionally, the presentation featured six case studies illustrating the success of collaborative digital transformation projects across various domains, supported by ITU's expertise. It concluded that while challenges like affordability, cybersecurity, e-waste, and governance persist, the region is well-positioned to advance in digital transformation. This advancement necessitates ongoing investment, data-enabled policies and regulations, and enhanced regional collaboration to ensure inclusive and sustainable digital development.

The roundtable discussions provided valuable insights and perspectives as shared by the panelists. Key highlights of the discussions included:

- Digital transformation was emphasized as crucial for economic development, facing challenges like high internet costs, expensive devices, and cybersecurity concerns. Strategic investments in digital infrastructure, including broadband expansion, digital identities by 2028, and local device manufacturing were suggested to improve affordability and create employment.
- Advanced digital economies were noted for prioritizing national connectivity through fiber and satellite technology, ensuring digital equity, and strengthening continental digital resilience. Emphasis was placed on innovation, research, and local manufacturing of digital products to enhance Africa's digital economy and create jobs.
- Regional cooperation efforts were discussed, highlighting initiatives to improve connectivity infrastructure, implement regional networks, and support marginalized groups. Capacity building, digital sovereignty, local entrepreneurship, and affordability were identified as key elements for significant social and economic impacts.
- The session recognized the importance of regional integration, harmonization of ICT standards, mobile money services, data sharing, green ICT practices, and capacity building. Enhanced regional collaboration and conducting regional training programs were proposed to further develop the digital economy.

Overall, the session underscored the necessity of regional cooperation, reduced taxation on telecommunications, strategic infrastructure investments, and local manufacturing to effectively leverage digital transformation opportunities across Africa.

At the conclusion of the session, two key announcements were made. First, the launch of the Open Source Programme Office (OSPO) in Kenya under the Open Source Ecosystem Enabler (OSEE) initiative, in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and with support from the European Union (EU), was celebrated as a significant milestone in promoting collaborative digital innovation and open-source development. Secondly, the high-level framework for cooperation to develop a comprehensive Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) roadmap for Kenya with support of the German Federal Foreign Office and the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ). These initiatives underscore the country's commitment to fostering inclusive, sustainable, and resilient digital ecosystems.

2. ROUNDTABLE TWO: Matchmaking Roundtable on Fostering Partnerships on Infrastructure Development for Universal Connectivity

11:00 – 12:30	Moderator: ITU Regional Office for Africa
	State of Play – Partner2Connect Coalition: ITU presentation by BDT, ITU
	Panelists: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – H.E. Samuel Nartey George, Minister of Communication, Digital Technology, and Innovations, Ghana – H.E. Dr Michel Boukar, Minister, Telecommunications, Digital Economy and Digitalization, Chad – Mr Mike Silber, Group Executive Regulatory Affairs, MTN Group – Mr Min Fang, Managing Director for Southern Africa, ZTE Corporation – Mr Carlos Riopedre, Chief Operating Officer and Managing Director, Sateliot

The second RDF-AFR roundtable focused on fostering partnerships for infrastructure development to achieve universal meaningful connectivity. The session started with a presentation by BDT providing an overview of the Partner2Connect: The presentation highlighted that 189 pledges, totaling around USD 32 billion, had been received from 141 entities across 63 countries. The P2C Action Framework centers on four pillars: access, adoption, value creation, and acceleration. The presentation emphasized that the infrastructure development mandate of the BDT focuses on affordable, secure, and resilient connectivity and that 15 P2C projects are already ongoing with over CHF 27 million across Africa. BDT invited panelists to explore further ways to contribute to bridging the digital divide together in and for Africa.

The main highlights from the discussions are shared below.

- Emphasis was placed on scaling public-private partnerships to support last-mile connectivity and national backbone expansion.
- The importance of harmonizing regulatory frameworks to improve regional digital integration and reduce cross-border roaming charges was highlighted.
- Innovative financing strategies such as blended models were promoted to enable infrastructure development in low-return areas.
- Infrastructure sharing among mobile network operators (MNOs), spectrum pooling, and technology neutrality were advocated to enhance cost-efficiency and sustainability.
- Satellite, Internet, 5G, and fiber-optic technologies were identified as complementary solutions for addressing connectivity challenges in both urban and rural settings.
- The role of digital skills, local innovation, and community-centered service delivery was stressed as essential to maximize the impact of digital connectivity.
- A call was made for locally relevant content and services to promote meaningful digital inclusion.

At the close of the session, an announcement was made: the launch of the new project dedicated to Africa's National Broadband Mapping Systems (called Africa-BB-Maps for short). This four-year project, backed by the ITU and co-funded by the European Union, will establish national broadband mapping systems in 11 sub-Saharan African countries. The project aims to enhance broadband development and improve digital connectivity planning across the continent with an overall budget of EUR 15 million.

3. NETWORK OF WOMEN FOR AFRICA: Building Connections, Empowering Futures

12:30 -13:00	Moderator: Ms Caecilia Nyamutsa, Director of Legal Services, Postal and Telecommunications Regulatory Authority of Zimbabwe (POTRAZ)
	Opening Remarks: Dr Cosmas Luckyson Zavazava, Director of the Telecommunication Development Bureau, ITU
	Panelists: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – H.E. Dr Tatenda Mavetera, Minister of Information Communication Technology, Postal and Courier Services, Zimbabwe (remote intervention) – Ms Regina Fleur Assoumou Bessou, Director, International Cooperation, Autorité de Régulation des Télécommunications de Côte d'Ivoire (ARTCI), Côte d'Ivoire – Ms Magano Katoole, Legal Advisor for Legislative Drafting, Communications and Regulatory Authority of Namibia – Ms Meriem Slimani, Development Coordinator, African Telecommunications Union

The session on "Network of Women for Africa: Building Connections, Empowering Futures" provided a platform to address the inclusion and empowerment of women in the ICT sector across Africa. The panel featured distinguished women leaders who shared insights on strategies, challenges, and initiatives to foster gender equity in digital spaces. The session commenced with remarks by Dr Cosmas Luckyson Zavazava, Director, BDT, who emphasized the importance of gender inclusivity and the urgency of bridging the gender gap in ICT. He highlighted ITU's initiatives such as AI for good, digital inclusion projects in Burundi and Ethiopia, and the annual Girls in ICT Day, which in 2024 will include celebrations connecting Kyrgyzstan and Mauritania. Dr Zavazava stressed the importance of collaborative engagement between men and women, the need to support entrepreneurship among young women, and the protection of their innovations through intellectual property rights.

The Network of Women session discussed the role of professional networks in supporting gender parity in the ICT sector. It also featured initiatives designed to equip girls and women with fundamental digital skills, promoting their involvement in digital transformation and leadership roles. The key highlights of the session included the following:

- Strategic partnerships and mentorship initiatives are vital to empowering women in ICT and fostering professional networks.
- Countries are encouraged to institutionalize women's networks and create inclusive policies that promote their participation in digital innovation and leadership.
- Greater investment in STEM education for girls is needed to ensure long-term impact and sustainable gender parity in tech sectors.
- Recognizing, supporting, and scaling locally led women's innovations and contributions remain crucial.
- Social and cultural barriers, especially in rural areas, continue to limit women's access to ICT opportunities; thus, digital tools and remote learning must be leveraged.
- The importance of data collection and developing gender-focused digital statistics was emphasized to better inform policy.
- Inclusive leadership frameworks, quota systems, and balanced representation in delegations and decision-making bodies were identified as necessary to drive equitable change

At the end of the session, Dr Tatenda Mavetera, Minister of ICT of Zimbabwe, joined the session virtually to share her country's initiatives, including the 'Girls in STEM' and 'She Tech' programmes. These efforts aim to increase participation of women in ICT from primary education through professional development. The minister emphasized the importance of representation, with policies targeting 50/50 gender balance in ICT boards and decision-making roles. She called for deliberate legislation, increased awareness, and targeted training programs to ensure women are not left behind in the digital transformation. Her intervention concluded with a strong appeal to continue building platforms that support and promote African women in technology.

4. ROUNDTABLE THREE: P2C Matchmaking Roundtable on Fostering Partnerships for Development

14:00 – 15:30	Moderator: ITU Regional Office for Africa
	Panelists: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Mr Lakoun Ouattara, Directeur General, l'Autorité de Régulation des Télécommunications/TIC de Côte d'Ivoire (ARTCI) – Mr Kennedy Kipkemboi Sawe, Director, Public Policy and Advocacy, Mobile Money Programme, GSMA – Mr Andile Tsibiyane, Fixed Network Senior Solution Architect, Huawei Sub-Saharan Africa – Mr Idrissa Dia, Director, Economic and Social Infrastructure, Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) – Mr Charles Juma, Kenya Country Lead and Adviser, United Kingdom's Digital Access Programme, British High Commission Nairobi

The third roundtable offered a platform for collaboration and the formation of strategic partnerships aimed at development across the continent. The session focused on fostering partnerships for development, emphasizing collaborative models to bridge the digital divide, scale innovation, and build inclusive digital ecosystems across Africa.

The main highlights of the discussions included the following:

- Many rural areas across Africa remain underserved in terms of mobile and data coverage. Efforts are underway to address this via co-investment models and partnerships involving national regulators, mobile operators, and startups.
- Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) were emphasized as key to addressing the cost and scale barriers in digital infrastructure deployment, particularly in rural and hard-to-reach areas.
- Local smartphone assembly, tax reforms, and flexible payment systems were proposed to boost digital inclusion through device affordability.
- Closing the usage gap is critical: while mobile coverage may exist, many users lack digital or financial literacy to utilize services effectively.
- Cross-sector collaboration (e.g., finance, agriculture, ICT) is essential for designing inclusive solutions that reflect the realities of various sectors and communities.
- Regulatory harmonization across countries, particularly in areas such as Know Your Customer (KYC) protocols and mobile money regulation, is needed to facilitate regional digital trade and integration.
- Infrastructure sharing (e.g., fiber, power) and streamlined right-of-way policies were presented as critical enablers to reduce deployment costs and accelerate connectivity.

- Multilateral development banks called for coordinated investment strategies to meet the USD 136 billion infrastructure funding gap in emerging markets by 2030.
- Inclusive and accessible digital transformation strategies were recommended, incorporating local content development, universal design, and digital accessibility for marginalized populations.
- Innovative partnerships must be evidence-based, scalable, and focused on sustainability. Collaborating with academia, civil society, and the private sector was seen as central to success.

The session concluded with a shared call to action for stakeholders to move beyond siloed efforts and adopt integrated, collaborative, and regionally scalable digital development strategies that prioritize value creation and inclusion.

5. ROUNDTABLE FOUR: Roundtable on the Implementation of ITU Regional Initiatives for Africa

16:00 – 17:30	Moderator: ITU Regional Office for Africa
	Setting the stage: Presentation of the Implementation of Regional Initiatives by the Regional Director for Africa, ITU
	Panelists: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Ms Stella Erebor, Deputy Director, Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC), Nigeria – Dr Salomão David Cumbula, Director, Communication Services, Instituto Nacional das Comunicações de Moçambique (INCM), Mozambique – Mr John Omo, Secretary General, African Telecommunications Union (ATU)

The fourth session was dedicated to the implementation of the four Regional Initiatives for Africa that were adopted at the World Telecommunication Development Conference 2022, which are as follows:

- **AFR1:** Supporting digital transformation to usher in a rapid transition to a digital economy while accelerating innovation in Africa
- **AFR2:** Implementation and expansion of broadband infrastructures, connectivity and emerging technologies
- **AFR3:** Building trust, safety, and security in the use of telecommunications/information and communication technologies and protection of personal data
- **AFR4:** Fostering emerging technologies and innovation ecosystems

The session commenced with a presentation made by BDT on the implementation of the Regional Initiatives and reference was made to several flagship projects that benefit the countries in Africa. In addition, the presentation highlighted ITU's key role in achieving the objectives of these Regional Initiatives.

The key highlights of the panel discussion included:

- Regulatory and governance frameworks across Africa often lack coherence and flexibility, limiting the ability of countries to respond effectively to rapid technological changes. Modernizing regulations and encouraging greater institutional coordination were seen as urgent priorities.
- Many African countries face high ICT service costs due to multiple taxation layers, high spectrum and licensing fees, and limited infrastructure sharing. Addressing these challenges through policy reform and collaborative infrastructure development is crucial for reducing the cost of access.

- Dependence on imported ICT equipment and infrastructure deficits, particularly in power and connectivity, hinder sustainable development. Promoting local manufacturing and leveraging renewable energy, such as solar power, were suggested to mitigate these gaps.
- Universal service funds need to be restructured to go beyond traditional telecommunications objectives. They should support innovation, digital skills development, inclusive service models, and affordability for rural and underserved communities.
- Community-centered innovation was emphasized, with a call to move from designing solutions for people to designing with them. Encouraging local hubs, entrepreneurship, and context-specific digital solutions can enhance the relevance and uptake of services.
- Strong regional collaboration is needed to avoid duplicative efforts and unlock economies of scale. Harmonizing policies, sharing resources, and jointly seeking development finance are key to delivering impactful, scalable projects.
- Panelists underscored the need for cross-sectoral coordination at the national level, particularly among ICT, energy, education, and finance ministries, to ensure that digital transformation serves broader development outcomes.
- The shift from a competitive to a collaborative mindset—both within countries and across the continent—was repeatedly cited as essential for building inclusive and sustainable digital ecosystems.

The example and experience of Kenya in implementing a national innovation center were brought to the attention of the RDF.

After the panel discussion, BDT presented on the Innovation and Entrepreneurship Alliance, the Digital Transformation Lab's pilot framework to accelerate ITU Regional Initiatives (2023-2025), and collaboration with ATU on innovation challenges. The presentation highlighted the Regional Initiative (RI) Accelerator, which engages stakeholders to co-create project concepts, with full deployment planned after approval in Baku. South Africa requested the pilot's extension to Africa, which the secretariat acknowledged and undertook to take action. The presentation also provided insights on trends research, case studies, and the co-creation process intended to catalyse project activation.

Following this, the African Telecommunications Union (ATU) shared its insights on the countries with winners and invited them to share knowledge with other countries to ensure that their successful ways of nurturing young innovators could be replicated.

The session ended with the announcement of the ATU Africa Innovation Challenge finalists and training.

The announcement focused on empowering youth-led innovation and advancing regional digital development initiatives across Africa. A recurring highlight was the annual Innovation Challenge, organized in collaboration with various partners, to solicit AI-driven solutions from young people addressing societal challenges. This year's challenge received exceptional entries, with a strong representation from one country, prompting reflections on disparities in outreach and youth engagement across other regions.

Participants emphasized the importance of supporting young innovators through structured training, mentorship, and exposure. Finalists selected from countries including Kenya, Sierra Leone, Nigeria, Malawi, and Tanzania were invited to attend a week-long capacity-building program at Strathmore University, where they would develop their ideas into sustainable ventures.

This announcement reinforced the role of youth as key drivers of digital transformation and emphasized the need for cross-sector collaboration to nurture leadership, harness intellectual potential, and realize the continent's demographic dividend.

6. GENERATION CONNECT EVENT: Intergenerational dialogue on challenges and opportunities in the field of digital development in Africa

17:30 – 18:00	Moderator: Ms Damaris Mabeya, Founder, Aminia Dada Innovations, Kenya
	Opening remarks: Dr Cosmas Luckyson Zavazava, Director of the Telecommunication Development Bureau, ITU Panelists: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Dr Isaac Sissoko, Director, Veille Stratégique et de la Coopération Internationale, Autorité de Régulation des Télécommunications et des Postes (ARTP), Senegal – Mr Syed Mohammad Shaharyar Jawaid, Senior ICT Specialist, Economic Infrastructure, Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) – Ms Valarie Waswa, Generation Connect Youth Envoy Alumni, Kenya, ITU-Huawei Generation Connect Young Leadership Programme Fellow 2024 – Ms Gheida Abdala Omar Al-Mashjery, Generation Connect Youth Envoy – Mr Keith Clinton Nyaburi, Generation Connect Youth Envoy

The Generation Connect session served as a dynamic dialogue between youth leaders, policymakers, and development partners, focusing on empowering young people in Africa to take the lead in digital transformation. The panel brought together youth envoys, ICT specialists, and development actors to explore opportunities and challenges for digital inclusion and innovation.

The Generation Connect session started with opening remarks by the Director of BDT, who informed the forum on the recent Global Youth Summit, highlighting the participation of over 400 young people from 31 countries. He noted the importance of securing the information highway and bridging the digital skills divide and stressed the need to embrace emerging technologies responsibly and to ensure that no youth is left behind, in both rural and urban areas. As part of his remarks the [video](#) of the Global Youth Summit was shown.

The discussion centered around the following key highlights:

- The session emphasized the importance of including youth in decision-making processes, not just as participants but as contributors and leaders in digital policy and innovation. The ITU Generation Connect Youth Leadership Program was cited as a transformative platform providing youth with mentorship, training, and international exposure.
- Concrete examples from Senegal and other regions illustrated how collaboration between government, private sector, and foundations (e.g., MasterCard Foundation, Sonatel) can train tens of thousands of young people and launch incubators and start-ups. These initiatives have already led to significant youth employment, with targets set for thousands of start-ups by 2026.
- The Islamic Development Bank shared its new Digital Inclusion Operational Strategy with a \$250 million allocation and highlighted smart village models that connect girls in rural areas to quality education using remote digital platforms.
- Youth envoys highlighted the necessity of investing in foundational digital infrastructure such as fiber optics, 5G networks, and last-mile connectivity to extend broadband access to remote communities across Africa.
- Panelists stressed that cybersecurity is a necessity, not a luxury, for youth engagement. Training in digital safety and policy support is essential to protect young people online, particularly girls vulnerable to harassment.

- Personal testimonies demonstrated how youth-led initiatives foster creativity, confidence, and skill-building. Programs like the Huawei-ITU Generation Connect Youth Leaders Fellowship were shown to significantly impact the career trajectories of young participants.
- The session concluded with a call to stakeholders to provide financial, structural, and policy support to scale youth-focused digital programs. Strengthening intergenerational dialogue and adapting public policies to better serve Africa's youthful population were seen as critical steps forward.

7 Closing Ceremony

The closing ceremony of the 2025 Regional Development Forum for Africa was marked by reflections on the significant outcomes achieved throughout the event.

In his closing remarks, **Dr Cosmas Luckyson Zavazava**, BDT Director, delivered a certificate of recognition to the RDF Chair, followed by his closing remarks. He expressed gratitude to the Kenyan Administration for the commitment to hosting and organizing the event, acknowledging the significant resources required to make such a forum successful. He noted that the Forum brought together representatives from member states, sector members, and academia reinforcing the importance of multi-stakeholder collaboration in digital development.

He announced that the Regional Development Forum report would be submitted to the Regional Preparatory Meeting as an information document and be available online for comments over the next ten days before being finalized. He encouraged participants to engage in upcoming regional and interregional coordination meetings as well as TDAG taking place from 12 to 16 May 2025 to align outcomes across regions. He thanked all attendees for their dedication and urged them to continue collaborating toward a more connected and inclusive digital future.

Hon. William Kabogo Gitau, Cabinet Secretary, Information, Communications and the Digital Economy, Kenya, delivered his closing remarks, expressing delight in hosting the successful event in Nairobi, Kenya. He thanked the participants for the engaging conversations and reiterated the importance of digital development and transformation. The Roundtable discussions covered various topics, including digital development trends, challenges, and opportunities, infrastructure development, and others in the African region.

The ceremony concluded with an invitation to a reception hosted by Kenya.
