

Dr Cosmas Luckyson Zavazava
Telecommunication Development Bureau (BDT)
International Telecommunication Union (ITU)

Opening Remarks
at the World Telecommunication/ICT Indicators Symposium 2026 (WTIS-26)
Geneva, 7 September 2026

Madam Chair, Ms Rabia Awan,
Madam Secretary-General,
Distinguished speakers,
Ladies and gentlemen.

It is a pleasure and privilege to open this year's symposium under the theme, 'Guiding digital policy through statistics'. This year, we have an excellent programme before us.

I am confident that our discussions over the next two days will shape the future of ICT statistics, just as WTIS has done for three decades.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I must say this: What happens at our annual symposium is just the tip of the iceberg.

Reliable statistics are not created by chance. They are built on sound methodologies, careful data collection and validation, and international cooperation. Much of that work may go unseen, but it is essential.

You are the ones who ensure policymakers around the world rely on trusted evidence, thanks to the work of the WTIS, and that of our Expert Groups on Telecommunication/ICT Indicators and ICT Household Indicators.

And you do so even as digital technologies evolve rapidly.

On this note, artificial intelligence, new data sources and digital services are creating new challenges, and yet you are meeting those challenges with new forms of measurement.

I am pleased that at ITU, we have demonstrated our commitment and ability to helping countries strengthen their statistical systems.

That commitment is reflected in the ICT Data Week.

Ladies and gentlemen,

For the third consecutive year, WTIS is being held ahead of the annual meetings of our two expert groups on ICT indicators, EGTI and EGH, as well as a the practitioner workshop.

You already know that:

- WTIS is where we explore frontier topics, exchange ideas and learn from one another.
- EGTI and EGH are where these ideas are debated, refined and translated into practical guidance and international standards.

Bringing these meetings together creates a natural progression - moving from inspiration to action.

The same spirit of innovation is reflected in the ITU Data Hackathon, which we launched at WTIS-25. It attracted an outstanding 104 teams from around the world, all tackling the challenge of identifying digital deserts through innovative uses of data.

I take this opportunity to thank all the participants and warmly congratulate our three winning teams.

We look forward to listening to them presenting their innovative solutions tomorrow. What is even more exciting is that many of the participants are students and young professionals, reminding us that good ideas can come from anywhere.

The Hackathon is a demonstration of BDT's commitment to innovation, and forms part of our project, Promoting and Measuring Universal and Meaningful Connectivity.

I am pleased that, at ITU we have been a pioneer in harnessing big data and mobile phone data for official statistics.

We have developed methodologies and tools that enable countries to transform mobile phone data into statistics.

Today, the focus is on scaling up their use — helping more and more countries build the skills and capacity to practically apply these tools. In this effort, we are working closely with the World Bank on training and capacity development. I thank the World Bank for this valuable partnership.

Tomorrow's session on mobile phone data will feature some of these innovations and show how they are being put into practice.

Colleagues,

Our commitment to innovation is also echoed in the continued evolution of the ITU DataHub and the development of new AI agents that are making statistics more accessible and useful.

Reliable statistics give us a shared understanding of reality, one based on objective expertise rather than wishful thinking.

Let me briefly touch on one of our key products. Our annual Facts and Figures Report. It gives the world an authoritative picture of where we stand on digital connectivity, the progress we are making, and the gaps that still remain.

Because policies built on inaccurate or incomplete evidence will simply not deliver the results we seek. Moreover, official statistics earn their credibility through expertise.

They depend on sound methodologies, transparency, professional judgement and internationally agreed standards. For this, we should note that no single institution can do this alone. Governments, regulators, statistical offices, international organizations, academia and the private sector all have a role to play.

As I conclude, I want to remind you that the strength of official statistics ultimately depends on the dedication and expertise of the people in this room.

On that note, I want to thank all our speakers, moderators and participants for joining us this week.

I also wish to recognize the members of EGTI and EGH,

and everyone who contributes to the production of ICT statistics around the world.

Your expertise and dedication make this work possible.

My thanks also go to our Chair, Ms Rabia Awan, and all involved because it is their hard work that has made this Symposium possible.

I wish you productive discussions throughout the week.

Thank you.