

WSIS 2017: High-level session on 'ITU enabling the wireless ecosystem' 12th June, Montbrillant, 2nd floor, 16.30 - 18.15

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The ITU enjoys a credibility established over many, many years and the constant participation of so many Member States in its activities is testimony to the great work done by this institution. Treaty organizations are usually slow and so quickly become out-of-touch but the ITU succeeds in convening its Members together every four years to agree on updates and modifications to its Radio Regulations. It is not only consensual and efficient but it is also effective.

The ITU Membership is diverse bringing together the most developed economies and emerging economies on an equal footing. Satellites match this diversity: they are blind to national borders; blind to political regimes; they make no difference between rich and poor or between urban and rural citizens. This inclusive approach on both government and industrial level is what is needed if we are to successfully achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

It is thanks to the international regulations and standards of the ITU that the satellite sector is able to work with governments to deliver on so many different policy objectives and many countries participating in the WSIS 2017 are space-faring nations. To highlight just a few:

- **Vietnam** launched its first satellite in 2008 and in 2016 decided to use mobile satellite communications to bring connectivity everywhere in the country.
- **Burkina Faso** established a history of implementing true democracy by using satellite to make sure that as many citizens as possible can securely participate in elections, both in 2012 and again in 2015. In June 2017, it entered an agreement to provide education and healthcare via satellite across the country.
- Already back in 2003, **Pakistan** was a pioneer in offering free education via satellite.

There are many more examples¹ but the investment that has gone into providing these services would never have happened without the harmonization and certainty provided by the spectrum decisions taken by more than 150 countries at the WRCs of the ITU.

¹ **Education:** In Ghana the Ministry of Education is training teachers and disadvantaged girls by filming a Master teacher in the capital Accra and transmitting that feed live via satellite to up to 70 schools at the same time to both teachers and pupils.

Healthcare: In South Africa local companies are educating healthcare workers, patients, out-of-school youths and the general public by transmitting content on health-related topics such as HIV/AIDS, Ebola, TB & child survival as well as general & personal hygiene via satellite.

Money transfer or microfinance: In Kenya remote citizens can check and clear transactions and receive funds wherever they live without having to walk 100's of miles to get to a bank in a city centre thanks to ATMs and remote centers being connected via satellite.

The role of the ITU goes far beyond just spectrum: it has elaborated recommendations and reports that have guided the introduction of satellite broadcasting from the analogue world into the digital domain and now taking us into the era of high definition and Ultra High Definition TV. Today TV is more than just entertainment, it is a window on information that informs and educates and even makes the world a safer place. We only have to consider how many children are removed from the streets in poor and dangerous areas because they have been motivated by the sports they have been able to see on TV.

The role of the ITU in enabling disaster response by using emergency communications highlights yet another area of vital ITU work. Numerous mobile operators for example Ericsson Response work closely with ESOA members to make sure that victims of disasters can still use their mobile phones thanks to satellite backhaul even when mobile networks have been destroyed by hurricanes, earthquakes or other disasters. The only reason why mobile technology and satellite technology can work together like this is because the ITU has made sure that each one can use its own spectrum without the risk interference.

In reflecting on the diverse areas where satellite, mobile and other technologies play such an important role, we can appreciate the value of the thousands of expert and study group meetings that the ITU has organised over all these years, and how they in end effect, make a difference to real peoples' lives. This is so important today because **we live in a world of harsh realities** and "have not's" - those who have no food, have no education, have no healthcare - people cut off from the rest of the world because they have no Internet or even have no phone signal.



Such big problems require many solutions - fixed networks, mobile networks, satellite networks are all part of the solution and the ITU makes sure they can all be used where they are needed. Other fora do exist for the necessary technical discussions such as the 3GPP for instance, but there is none as non-discriminatory as the ITU, which places all on an equal footing, both technologies and countries.

Today the momentum to roll out 5G is dominant but not universal while so much of the world is still without 4G or even 2G/3G coverage. While in every continent we can see countries with 5G ambitions, the reality remains that with so much of the world without coverage, the momentum or will to roll out 5G cannot be universal. ESOA members share the ambition of making sure that every world citizen has a mobile phone or connectivity in some form or other but we cannot be blind to the fact that we are a diverse planet and the interests of every country must be taken into account.

This is particularly important for spectrum decisions because **if policymakers just followed “the noise” of 5G, the result would be to take from the poor to give to the rich.** So while we need to look at the future and embrace new services, we must make sure, that in our haste to do so, we do not harm the legacy of services and infrastructure that has been cautiously and carefully built over so many decades and that the world has come to rely on and will still rely on to solve some of those big problems.

The citizen comes first and it is incumbent upon policymakers to protect the incumbent services that already serve millions of them: broadcasting, emergency, aviation security, any other service - especially when new entrants do not offer any alternative. Without an organization like the ITU, the entire globe would be at the mercy of a few rich nations & large corporations: the world would become even more disparate with the urban elite benefiting from next generation services while other citizens go without.

Ultimately ITU mechanisms, study groups and Radio Regulations have served the wireless communication industries well in balancing the world’s connectivity needs and bridging digital divides. With today’s increasing pressures on spectrum and sharing, it is only by maintaining, not diminishing, the relevance of the ITU and its Radio Regulations that that we can assure global best practices that benefit all telecommunications industries and all regions of the world.