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MODERATOR: Ladies and gentlemen, it is a pleasure for me to address you at this important forum. Digital and information technologies are transforming our societies and reshaping the world of work. This process is affecting businesses and workers in every corner of the world. These changes bring many advantages and opportunities. These include growth in productivity, new market opportunities, greener working and business practices, better work/life balance. But they also create concerns. For example, the growth of the Gig economy. This type of work often lack it's social protection, voice, and presentation for the workers. There can also be negative health consequences. There is a fine line to draw between these challenges and opportunities. Finding the right balance is a delicate matter, but an essential one. The ILO is contributing to this process by bringing together government and employers and workers of organizations, our constituents, for discussions.
        >> MENI ANASTASIADOU: I believe we can start. Hello and welcome to the colleagues joining on site and online. My name is Meni Anastasiadou and Digital policy advisor. Today I have pleasure to highlight session number one entitled Bridging Digital Divides. We have a excellent lineup of speakers on site and online. Today we're looking at the state of play for stakeholders across the globe to bridge the digital divide.
        Before going into the session itself, I no he the time today is relimitted. I would like to remind the speakers that

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each have 4 minutes of intervention. If time permits, an audience interaction will take place at the end of the session.

        With that I hand it over to the WSIS Action Line Facilitator, Dr. Bilel Jamoussi, Chief of the Study Group Department Standardization Bureau International Telecommunications Union, who will provide more on the WSIS Action Lines.

        >> BILEL JAMOUSSI: Thank you very much. Good afternoon. I hope you had a good lunch and are ready for the afternoon sessions. As we heard this morning, the biggest challenge is connecting the world, connecting the unconnected, 2.7-billion people around the world.

        ITU has a diverse membership of 193 Member States and 800 private sector and academia members, and this is our strength in bridging the digital divide.

        In 2021, ITU launched the Partner2Connect Digital Coalition as a multistakeholder alliance in close cooperation with the Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Technology, and this coalition was established and envisioned to facilitate meaningful connectivity and drive digital transformation globally.

        The various focus areas of the coalition are in alignment with the WSIS Action Lines, as well as United Nations Sustainable Development Goals to achieve universal and meaningful connectivity.

        An equal access to technology as well as ability to use and employ emerging technologies is one of the biggest contributors to the digital divide. This also impacts the ability of developing countries to access, implement, contribute to, and influence international technology-oriented standards, and adoption across sectors.

        Recognizing the, the Bridging the Standardization Gap program of the ITU was conceived to foster the effective participation of developing countries in ITU Standards Development Process, so disseminate information about existing standards, and last but not least, to support developing countries in the implementation of standards.

        So the opportunities and challenges for us is that, really, the rapid technological advancements and the arrival of frontier technologies, such as artificial intelligence, IoT, and the metaverse such as the work that we launched last week on the forum, the first ITU Forum on the Metaverse, highlight the challenges and how the new technologies can further exacerbate the digital divide. This remains to be one of the main challenges in the context of bridging the digital divide. Thank you.

        >> MENI ANASTASIADOU: Thank you very much, Dr. Jamoussi

for your input in connection with the WSIS Action Lines. I'll go now to the first speaker for today, excellency, Jean-Pierre Doukaga Kassa, Gabon is one of the most connected countries on the central continent and track has large fiber backbone network connected with Congo and Cameroon, the connection with -- in addition to in addition to advances and infrastructure and connectivity, what are the next steps in the process of bridging the digital divide in Gabon? And secondly, your country has policy focus on the gender approach, and in this con architectures what are the connections that your ministerial department has taken to facilitate technology.?

>> JEAN PIERRE DOUKAGA KASSA: To give you an idea about the digital divide in Gabon, so for me it's a pleasure to be able to put myself in front of these all on behalf of our President of Gabon. It's strategic pillars, so this is why for us we always have been at the heart of these different changes.

So we've had different challenges such as the development or building of the technological structure, creation of hubs, training of young people, the development of the ecosystem, adapting to the creation in our country.

The effort enabled the country to be able to reach a high level of mobile penetration, 105% and 123 for the Internet connection. So this is a very long process. They have this acceleration plan. Gabon is still working on the policy of the development of the infrastructure to be able to accelerate the implementation of different private and public sectors by making sure that these data are secure throughout the national territory with a reference sector.

And putting in place cybersecurity and other measures to finalize the ratification process to use these accountability bridges in the different zones.

And I would like to emphasize that since 2015, the President of the Head of State, has declared the governance of the Women's decade and launched 50/50 and launching equality aspect and placing ICT at the center of socioeconomic development. Training, awareness raising, and women's promotion have been undertaken in order to integrate ICT with gender as well as people with disabilities. We aim to continue to address goal 5 on ICT and gender mainstreaming and create the creation of a governance society in which women and men can contribute and participate substantially in establishment and continue the promotion of women's initiatives in ICT.

Gabon, as I said, adheres to the WSIS Lines of Action to build better and accelerate the achievement of the SDGs to reach these objectives. Thank you very much.

>> MENI ANASTASIADOU: Thank you your excellency for the interesting developments on the ministerial level. Perfect

timing. I want to move to the Minister Eliud Owalo, cabinet secretary of ministry of information, communication and digital economy in Kenya. I would like to ask you what is necessary for promoting significant impact in the digital divide? And what are the key learning points in the execution of universal connectivity programs? The floor is yours. I'll give you my microphone.

>> ELIUD OWALO: Thank you very much. Excellencies, distinguished participants, ladies and gentlemen, the Republic of Kenya is truly honored to participate in this high-level digital divide, share our experiences, and learn from others to ensure we leave no one behind in the digital transformation journey.

Like many countries, Kenya continues to implement interventions to ensure we create a truly inclusive digital economy. Ladies and gentlemen, it's clear -- it's clear now that narrowing the digital divide is not the work of governments alone. There is a compelling need for the government; therefore, the involvement of other non-state county a actors, private sector and development community community to complement public-sector initiatives.

In this Kenya has since deploying broadband services. While the government continues to invest innovating this critical resource to our citizens, through policy and regulatory interventions, the private sector on its own has equally invested heavily in programs that ensure the most significant number of our citizens benefit from the ubiquitous benefits of broadband connectivity. In the current big-ticket plan by the Kenyan Government to deploy 1,000 kilometers of fiber; for instance, the government tends to assure 52% of the project. At the same time, we invited the private sector to take up 42%. This direction is borne out of the realization that the governments in their very true nature, may not have sufficient financial resources required to invest in programs, to avail critical communication services for the people.

The private sector holds immense capacity and innovation to take up and support these initiatives, and not only as part of their business interest but collaborators in the critical public. We have collaborated with development sector actors such as UNICEF and ITU GIGA Project, World Bank, British Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office that we have supported initiatives to narrow the digital divide, and the Association of progressive Communications, APC, and Dynamic Spectrum Alliance, that have worked hand in hand with their government -- with the government of the Republic of Kenya in development of frameworks for licensing of community networks and the use of TV-wide spaces for broadband deployment.

Therefore, the digital divide can only be fully addressed if governments deliberate in their approaches exploring the best possible interventions to ensure citizen access communication services. Governments must also be flexible and pragmatic enough to leverage emerging and cost-effective technologies to avail services mainly in underserved and unserved areas.

Over the past five years, the Government of the Republic of Kenya has been deploying projects to enhance universal access to communication services. These have focused mainly on availing mobile network services in unserved and underserved areas of the country, connecting public schools to broadband, and establishing areas or centers in the public.

So, there has also been the challenge of using -- we are considering policy interventions around these issues of how to assist our people to enhance their digital skills, content creation, and the resource and ripple effect of the ability of ICTs in unserved and underserved areas.

And then lastly, the involvement of people in designing and implementing projects that resonate with immediate realities.

Ladies and gentlemen, that is what our interventions are about, and the detailed report is here for members to discuss. Thank you.

>> MENI ANASTASIADOU: Thank you very much, your excellency. I would like to check if we have His Excellency Mr. Kwame McCoy on the line? I will then with remote intervention by excellency Micaela Sanchez Malcolm, Secretary of the Secretary of Public Innovation of Argentina and addressing main challenges in relation to digital divide and impacts by the country of Argentina to bridge the digital divides.

>> MICAELA SANCHEZ MALCOLM: It's a pleasure to take part of the panel of the world summit of information society Forum and to share Argentina's perspective on the relevant matter. When referring to digital divides, we must consider that we are facing two different challenging scenarios, and in order to achieve universal and meaningful connectivity, and both are fundamental. The coverage gap and the usage gap. We need to keep working for both people, those who are not connected to the Internet and those who having the possibility of connecting to the Internet, and cannot do due to different reasons.

Argentina is the 8th largest country in the world; therefore, our diversities in the territory entail differences in access to connectivity that we are addressing, especially in remote and rural areas.

Bridging the usage gap implies promoting that all people, especially women, diversities population in remote and rural areas, can have meaningful access to connectivity. This means

that all citizens can appropriately technology in order to make daily use in safe, reliable, and empowering conditions.

In public and private sector areas, the challenges are the same. Women and diversities in technology are still regulated due to the access barriers they face to enter the industry of ICT. This is a universal and historical problem and requires coordinated transversal solutions with a gender perspective. Reduction of usage gaps articulated those related to digital skills, is the priority of Argentine state, this is why our work includes the development and implementation of actions to promote digital inclusion and equal opportunities regarding access to ICT as an instrument of social inclusion.

In 2021, we launched the Center of Gender Technology with the aim of promoting a more equal labor inclusion on the training of women and diversities in the STEM sector, and for that public-private collaboration is the pillar of the center. We work alongside the leading technology companies of the sector, as Meta, Google, Amazon, Nokia Microsoft, NEC, Huawei. And finally in order to bridge the connectivity gap, in Argentina this year, this is a federal program to promote access to connectivity and new technologies that will provide high-quality broadband satellite Internet to 370 locations throughout the country with no or poor Internet access. It also includes the offer of digital services for citizens and the development of trainings. Through this program, the Argentine national government seeks to promote local development, empowering communities and productive actors. Thank you very much.

>> MENI ANASTASIADOU: Thank you, your excellency, the very action-oriented input on arcs made by Argentina to bridge the digital divide. I would now like to go to the next speaker. Bernard Maissen. Mr. Maissen many people do not still have access to the Internet. What is Switzerland doing to bridge the digital divide in terms of connectivity and to what extent to divides exist when it comes to using the Internet, example in terms of content or social platforms? Sir, you have the floor.

>> BERNARD MAISSEN: Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen, thank you for this question. According to the latest report by ITU UNESCO Broadband Commission for Sustainable development, the pandemic accelerated the uptick of broadband and adoption of digital. At the same time, 2.7-billion people are still without broadband and in some areas, the pandemic and other regional and global tragedies have held up or even set back the steady progress towards the connection to the unconnected.

One of our main tasks is to close the existing digital divide between the connected and the unconnected between

countries, between regions, and between genders.

Switzerland is proud to be a traditional strong supporter of the ITU in its mission to promote, facilitate, and foster affordable and universal access to communication networks. We are specifically supporting the GIGA initiative launched by ITU and UNICEF. GIGA aims to connecting every school worldwide to the Internet. We are convinced that GIGA will contribute to achieving equal opportunities for every child through acquiring at least a minimum level of proficiency in the sustainable digital skills.

Of course, GIGA's approach can and should be leveraged beyond school connectivity. We are convinced that with such targeted projects and together with all relevant stakeholders, we can foster broadband adoption and accelerate digital inclusion. We need to make sure that everyone has access to Internet, but then again we don't only see a digital divide with regards to access of infrastructure. The divide also exists when it comes to using the Internet. For example, with regard to access to content. We might not realize it, but the Internet and our respective online experiences can vary significantly from country to country. Besides the choices of service providers and sources for difference in our online experience, all the actions of governments, generally we can differentiate between legitimate and unacceptable reasons to block access to content.

The difficulty is in distinguishing them; however, it is very often the justifications are quite similar. Both legitimate efforts to restrict access to illegal or harmful content, as well as unacceptable efforts to restrict access to content that a governor simply doesn't like. Argue with a threat of a public safety or breach of domestic laws.

We do agree that it is necessary to discuss the roles and the responsibilities of social media and other platforms when it comes to conveying misinformation and hate speech. We also have to keep in mind that social media can be an important channel for our citizens to access information and to express their opinion.

And that these platforms can contribute to the functioning of democratic processes, so in our view, it's not only platforms that should act responsibly in order to keep our democratic institutions and political processes functioning. It's also the users, in particular, powerful actors like politicians or economic leaders that should act responsibly when using such platforms.

So, when we discuss about how such platforms should be regulated, we should also have a debate about roles and responsibilities of politicians and other powerful actors so

that our societies remain functioning and peaceful and that platforms are not instrumentallized, controlled, or silence people and citizens.

In this context, we welcome UNESCO's initiative to develop guidelines for regulating platforms so that they can contribute to strengthening our democracies and the fundamental rights of all of our people. We also welcome UNESCO's ambition to involve all stakeholders from all regions in this work.

Dear colleagues, we are aware that more contributions from all of us are needed to concretely facilitate the emergence of an inclusive information society and to take advantage of opportunities offered by information and communication technologies. We hope that many of you will join this common cause, and also we will work together the greater our impact for the next generation.

Finally, on behalf of Swiss Federal authorities and the City of Geneva, I'm pleased to invite you to a reception to be held this evening here. Thank you very much for your attention.

>> MENI ANASTASIADOU: Thank you very much, Mr. Maissen for your contribution and shedding light and all the efforts by Switzerland in bridging the digital divide. The next speaker will be joining us online, Mr. Nicolas Silva, the Executive Director Communication of Colombia. Mr. Silva, can I confirm that you're online?

>> NICOLAS SILVA: Hello?

>> MENI ANASTASIADOU: Yes, we can hear you. So I would like to go to you with two questions, come to you with two questions. Which measures are being taken by CRC to reduce the digital divide and how can these improve access to technology and the Internet in rural, remote, or hard-to-reach areas? Secondly, how is CRC addressing the existing barriers to overcome the digital divide? Sir, you have the floor.

>> NICOLAS SILVA: Dear excellencies and delegates, first of all I would like to thank the ITU for their invitation to this high-level policy session. To reduce the digital divide and improve technology of Internet access in rural, remote, or hard-to-reach areas, as a regulator, we adopt many measures. First of all, I want to recognize the importance of the infrastructure deployment for all citizens and regions in our country. We act as enablers of communities, social, and economic development. For this reason, we continuously promote a collaborative program with local authorities in order to eliminate barriers to telecom infrastructure deployment.

In Colombia, particularly CRC is responsible for issue concepts by each municipality in order to identify barriers, provisions or restrictions that limit the telecommunication network infrastructure deployment on these territories.

Regulator is also responsible for recommendation of
municipalities free of barriers.

     In that sense, we have published for data, a tool named
Best Practice Guide for the telecommunications infrastructure
deployment. We can be used to modify and adjust local rules to
facilitate infrastructure deployment.

     In the same way, currently we have 71% of the countries,
municipalities, free of barriers, and 25% -- I mean 192
municipalities belongs to rural and remote areas.

     Also, three years ago, CRC regulation made a reduction of
sharing infrastructure fees. Its approach, 74% and 54%. Since
that we did last year we quiz number of sharing agreements from
225 to 296, and we increased that 426 in the third quarter of
2022.

     Similarly, we promote the use of shared infrastructure for
deploying communication, not only between operators, but as with
players from other sectors in narrow collaboration with other
regulators, especially in the case of electricity sector.

     We are also currently looking for possible regulation for
other sectors, roads, urban furniture, streetlights and others,
in this way we contribute to reduce the investment and operation
cost for telecom operators.

     In the same way, we also promote network modernization in
order to provide higher quality of service. To that purpose, we
update recently the regulatory regime focusing now on mobile
technologies, particularly 4G and 5G in the future. And at the
same time we innovate in mobile data quality measurement,
adapting at crowd sourcing methodology, and generating savings
for around 90% compared with previous methodologies.

     Besides following the rules defined by the recent laws
that established in Colombia Internet as an essential service,
we create differential regulation to promote Internet access in
remote and hard-to-reach areas. In that sense, the operators,
they will have less rules in topics like the number of measures
of indicators, the reports, and other activities in order to
create benefits for the population of these areas, and that
concentrates about 36% of the population and is about 5.8
million households.

     Finally, about the barriers identified for closing the
digital divide. There are regulations and conditions in some
regional development plans in order to reach areas that probably
are not attractive for the operators. The way we have addressed
this challenge be is related to the concept of innovative
regulation, and involves some specific activities like the
implementation of regulatory sandbox, and also providing
information for actors, operators, academy, and others.

          >> MENI ANASTASIADOU: Mr.--

>> NICOLAS SILVA: I'm sorry?

>> MENI ANASTASIADOU: Thank you so much. In the interest of time, we'll have to continue with the next speaker. Dr. Jacek Oko, the President of the Office of Electronic Communications of Poland. What are the tools that Poland intends to provide for everyone with Internet access as a standard that allows for remote learning and work in the coming years and how has education delivered by state administration UKE changed on the epidemic and lockdowns?

>> JACEK OKO: Thank you, ladies and gentlemen, delegates, excellencies, our regulatory approach is very straightforward. We create tools that put the customer practically at the very center of the entire process. We set high requirements for operators looking and building networks, but we also try to support and motivate them in activities so that everyone, no matter where they are, can enjoy the benefit of high-quality Internet access. It's very important for us as a regulatory, and we are the expert for our government and we support this process.

In the result, in Poland, almost 67% of networks have remaining capacity of 100 megabytes per second, and fiber optics which is one of the fastest growing technologies, and already today it accounts for 43% of our networks, covering about 11-million households.

According to analysis, the number of FTTP, fiber optics lines in my country will grow at average annual rate of 13% to reach almost 6 million in 2026. Thus, up to 99% of lines will have the capacity of at least 100 megabytes per second.

The population in Poland is specific, and 80% of the population lives in only 20% of the territory. It can hardly be expected that fiber optics cable will reach every household in Poland. A different story will be the mobile network, especially 5G. On 20th of December last year, we launched the first phase of the action of 5G. Our objects is to provide consumers with the highest-quality Internet and we are talking about covering 99% of households, and more than 90% of the country with a network the same, at least 100 megabytes per second in the next five years.

It means that our estimation and estimation prepared by Analysis Maissen said that in 2026, over 80% of our population will use 5G access.

The pandemic was very dangerous time for all, especially for education. When we discuss with our teachers, children, pupils, especially during consumer survey of children, parents, and teachers, they show us prepared in 2020 and 2021, it is not always the case the best way. Parents and teachers model less effective and requiring more parental improvement. It means

that social contact and personal contact is most important, but we couldn't find technology to organize this kind of contact. In Poland, 97% of users owned cell phones and 90% had access to the Internet.

Our young people started between 7 and 10 years to use smart phones. In 8 years, over 40% has his own smart phone. It means that we can start technical education, technical education, but very important is prepare some very safety and prepare for them especially to save them with the information and privacy.

We organize some projects, especially nominated to the champion project -- I usually forgot about his name, and I should have read his name. Okay. Hashkip control. It's special project dedicated to young people and over the two years we discussed with over 200,000 young people. Time is finished. Thank you.

>> MENI ANASTASIADOU: Thank you so much. Thank you Mr. Oko. We take careful note of your input. I go to the next speaker also joining us online, it's Ms. Rebecca Escobar Briones, head of Studies Center IFT and confirming that you're online and then I would like to address two questions with regards to the connectivity gap in Mexico as in other countries, where progress has been made in recent years expanding fixed and mobile services. However, there are still areas and specific population groups that lack services. What services are more appropriate to close without further delay the connectivity gap? And as per the affordability and accessibility gaps, what role does the Mexican telecommunications regulator have in promoting digital skills, and what action must the regulator make to improve affordability for disadvantaged income groups? Madam, you have the floor.

>> REBECCA ESCOBAR BRIONES: Thank you. I'm very pleased to be here with you. I would like to share with you that based on the sector alone, the Mexican Regulator, IFT contributes with the Secretariat to infrastructure, communications and transportation to the object of universal connectivity and inclusion. IFT has powers to impose obligations under concession titles while the secretary implements universal service program.

Broadband is for us a key element for Sustainable Development Goals and well-being. In Mexico, progress in the provision of broadband services has been achieved. 92 people out of every 100 have coverage with mobile or fixed technology. Despite this progress gap between urban and rural areas remains and actions have to be taken to reduce the connectivity divide, giving priority to lower-income communities and with presence of indigenous and Afro-mexican population.

Tackling combines a use of public and private resources. Public intervention in the development of networks only applies in areas without service, and in Mexico tools are measures used to reduce the connectivity gap and combine the following. First, we have regulation. IFT has imposed coverage obligations to private operators in spectrum concession and has promoted efficient spectrum management, including the development of a secondary spectrum market. IFT has granted more concessions to expand and diversify supply, including community concession, it has carried out measures for use of sharing of infrastructure, better conditions for competition between operators, among others. IFT has tackled market failures, threw open access policies and fixed mobile broadband networks.

We also have public investment which is carried out through a state-owned company named SAF Internet (?) whose object is to provide telecommunication services in a nonprofit manner. There are public and private associations. There is a wholesale-only national wireless network offering services for retailers such as NNOs, MNOs and fixed.

We have seen micro-telecommunication companies offering also solutions in areas where the large operators do not consider it profitable to provide services. This is a case of wireless Internet service providers. Another barrier to adaptation of technology is affordability and lack of abilities. Service adoption has expanded mainly to a significant drop in the prices.

However, some population groups still cannot afford the service, especially in rural communities and lower-income urban segments. There are no consumer subsidies and deploying infrastructure in remote areas can cost twice as much where revenues are up to 10 times lower, a combination that only affects business models and will want to bring coverage to rural areas, but as to do it in a sustainable way.

Some good options are provided through the public site connectivity program and smart villages sustainable well-being project that provide it's free satellite connectivity to rural public sites.

On the other hand, SAF Internet for all has low-price offerings for mobile services available in areas lacking the service, and direct subsidies are being analyzed. WISP provides offering services at local level with low-cost technologies, innovative business models and strong links with the community. Then there are community licenses, which provide other options to tackle the affordability divide. In this way the community operates with the advice of civil association to which it belongs and who provides the technical knowledge and legal advice.

IFT provides digital literacy courses and talks focused on targeted groups, such as children, teenagers, as well as recommendations of safe browsing, the use of devices for elderly women and indigenous and Afro-mexicans. Features devices accessible to people --

>> MENI ANASTASIADOU: Thank you. Apologies to cut you off. Thank you for your intervention and for the information you shared on the efforts on promoting digital skills, specifically. We will have to go straight to the next speaker, Ms. Phyllis Barkman Ferrell, global head external engagement, Alzheimer's disease, and neurodegenerative Lilly and company. Provides health systems with more efficient care, can you provide thoughts on how technology can be used by providers and hospitals to better support the global aging population; and secondly, the regulatory landscape is not yet harmonized across countries for the use of digital technologies, are there real-world examples that you can provide that will help policymakers think about how to innovate to allow greater and more effective use of technology for the aging? The floor is yours. Thank you.

>> PHYLLIS BARKMAN FERRELL: Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to thank the ITU for the opportunity to speak at this high-level session on behalf of Eli Lilly a member of the Global Coalition on Aging. First of all, I think technology has a opportunity to bridge the digital divide. In addition to the conversations we've had today about infrastructure needs to ensure that we do so, what we know is that with the success in health care, aging populations and a lower birth rate, we have an aging -- a global aging population starting in Japan, the super aging society, and marching its way across the world.

So, as we look at health system preparedness, we realize that aging is not just an issue of health, and we were thrilled to see ITU, WSIS, and other multinational organizations join in the UN Decade of Healthy Aging, recognizing that this aging demographic impacts all aspects of our life, Social Security, financial systems, health systems, and of course technology.

When we see the opportunity for technology to improve health of the aging, that includes digital health that encouraging lifestyle modification and bringing healthy activities, and that includes technology and digital technologies deployed within health systems to increase the detection of cognitive impairment so that families that are at risk of Alzheimer's disease have the support that they need as early as possible and that therapies and treatments and support infrastructure can be provided to them.

We also see technology as a way of increasing the means of

caregiving, specifically in countries like Japan where there are 4 individuals supported by 1. There is not enough care support and technology has the opportunity to reach into the home and ensure that those that are living longer also live longer, healthier, happier, and safer lives.

Unfortunately, the regulatory environment has not been harmonized for digital health or for digital technology, and this makes deployment of digital solutions incredibly difficult, even more difficult in low and middle-income countries where they have the greatest opportunity to leapfrog some of the challenges that are faced even in high-resource countries today.

As part of the Alzheimer's collaborative and global health initiative modeled and created by the World Economic Forum in 2021, we're partnering across sectors to ensure that the health innovations, technological and beyond, are able to be accessed, regardless of where someone lives.

So, in closing, I would ask the technological leaders that are here today consider the aging population as part of the SDGs in health for all, and look for opportunities to ensure that technology increases access in the health system and outside of the health system in social support for our global aging population.

>> MENI ANASTASIADOU: Thank you very much, Ms. Barkman Ferrell for the very insightful input and the efforts and perspectives with the regards to the use of technology in the health sector.

Now I would like to move to the last but no means least speaker of the session, Dr. Caroline words a minute Wamala Larsson, adopted in 199 at Beijing platform to promote gender equality. 30 years later the world is still gender mainstreaming to promote gender equality in all aspects including bridging the digital divide. Why do you think that is and what do you think we should do instead of gender mainstreaming? Madam, you have the floor.

>> CAROLINE WAMALA LARSSON: Thank you so much, distinguished guests, as well as the ITU, I would like to thank you for inviting me to be a member of this panel. I have a few points to raise here in the sense that I think the morning has been very illuminating in a sense that we still have quite a lot of work to do when it comes to inclusive digital opportunities.

The world over shows that women in general tend to have less access. I think some of the statistics pointed towards 30% less women across low and middle-income countries are connected to the Internet in relation to 70% of men. So, there is still quite a lot of work to do there. We need to look at some of the methods that have been approached in terms of bringing more women online to evaluate their effectiveness. Gender

mainstreaming is a well-known mantra, being used globally to address the digital divide when it comes to bringing more women and girls to use the opportunities that are available online.

I think where we struggle with the notion of gender mainstreaming is the fact that gender is often synonymous with women. If gender was seen as a relational concept, the work and investment that goes into working with gender mainstreaming would look very different. When you talk about mainstreaming or gender mainstreaming in general, then the challenges is the fact that it is the women that need to be mainstreamed into society, a society that has no structural problems, and therein some of our challenges.

It has an impact, for example, on the resource allocation and the implementation strategies that would in other approaches really contribute to challenging some of the structures that continue to make online access difficult for women.

I also want to propose that the terminology of gender mainstreaming has perhaps lost some of its initial purpose of the feminist movement for social transformation, and work around gender mainstreaming has become very performitive in a sense that we tick boxes to count people and suggest that we have actually worked with gender.

Policies are in plenty. That isn't where the issue is. I think the challenge is in strategies working with resistant organizations, resistant societies, and the marginalization of gender activities or gender units, which are severely underfunded, and they need more support in this regard.

So what do we do instead? I would like to, at this point, talk about the organization Spider, and that is an acronym you will not forget. Stands for the Swedish program for ICT in developing regions and located at Stockholm University. I'm the Director of SPIDR and work with transforming societies across society. One of the sustainable methods that we invest in all of our digital work is to ensure that everything we do has a locally anchored research aspect, so we make sure that we evaluate an implementation in realtime to see that the transformation that we proposed is actually taking place.

We have found that the STEM movement needs more support, and as a part of this, I'm proud to mention that SPIDR is a strong and leading member within the EU program funded by the EU and affiliated with the global ECOs looking at bridging the gender digital divide. With that we have explored the ecosystems required to include more marginalized groups, women included, in innovation spaces. One more minute, so that this inclusion can help women and other marginalized communities to contribute to building their digital futures, and therefore I want to invite you on Friday morning to join the E (?) EU

Session. But within that he found that gender equality, gender mainstreaming requires global cooperation. We have to work at it from a global perspective, and that data is critical, as I mentioned earlier, but that within E (?) EU, we discovered that it is critical for women and other marginalized groups to be part of the innovation processes, the innovation spaces that will contribute to the digital transformation. This is one way to contribute to gender mainstreaming and bridging the digital twied that we keep talking about year in and year out (EQUALS-EU).

>> MENI ANASTASIADOU: Thank you very much for your contribution. I think we have some time to take contributions from the audience, joining us in person or online. I would like to give the floor to any questions? Yes, Selma, please take the floor.

>> SELMA: First of all, thank you so much for some excellent staples and highlighting some of the challenges and the work that's going on in your countries. I would like to congratulate Poland for the wonderful work that they're doing.

My point is to the professor. I totally agree about this WSIS platform, it's the best place to talk about the reality of making gender inclusion now that it's become part of the compact as well, inclusive digital transformation, and the word inclusive gender mainstreaming is always there.

I would like to see if there are any particular country, those remotely and here, that have something to say of how they've done something differently where the policy has actually been implemented to some transformational difference to women at the grassroots. Thank you.

>> MENI ANASTASIADOU: Please, go ahead.

>> CAROLINE WAMALA LARSSON: Yeah. Exactly. I think that question was for all of us. The fact that we need to revisit the concept of gender mainstreaming, evaluating why we're still talking about it 30 years on. I think I want to highlight the EQUALS-EU work that we're doing and some of the projects that SPIDR is engaging in, in that it's important to anchor the work that is being done and women and those still offline contribute to the innovation spaces and building their own digital futures. These are some of the methods, I think, I'll propose in terms of if we really want to work with gender holistically, we have to start from the design perspective and not just relegate those not online as mere users, and they need to contribute to building and creating the online sphere.

>> MENI ANASTASIADOU: Thank you, Professor, Larsson. Would you also like to answer?

>> BILEL JAMOUSSI: What we heard has many dimensions, rural versus urban, and user community, men versus women in

terms of access and connectivity, and youth, and able or disabled people, et cetera, et cetera. So the dimentions of the digital divide are quite numerous, but what we have heard from our Ministers and distinguished panelists both online and here is that there are various technology investments going on. We heard about the fiber optic connectivity which is a public/private partnership in Kenya. We heard from Secretary Malcolm from Argentina and satellite and the importance of using satellite for broader geographies.

We heard in Poland how 5G is penetrating even to the 80-year-olds with cell phones to helping the education system. So, the dementions of inclusivity to try to tackle the digital divide, there is a number of technologies that allow us to have the connectivity, but then once we have it, how can we make good use of it in terms of the aging population, in terms of the content as Switzerland mentioned, to be able to have the right content on the Internet.

So I think from kind of to summarize the various elements, the digital divide is present and growing with new technologies, such as the Metaverse, et cetera, but the good news is technologies are also there to allow us to quickly use fiber, use satellite, use mobile networks to provide the connectivity and then put the digital transformation platforms in place to address the various verticals from health care to education, et cetera. Thank you.

    >> MENI ANASTASIADOU: Excellent. Perfect segue into our closing of the session. I would like to thank all the speakers for their excellent contributions. It's indeed a very multidimensional approach in tackling the digital divide and great to see a firm commitment by all stakeholders to address the issue at hand.

Just to mention that your inputs are very well noted and will be presented in the final summary of the session provided during the Closing of the high-level policy sessions which will take place on Wednesday the 15th of March at 5:00 p.m.

With that, I would like to thank you all once more for joining us online and on site, and to all the speakers for their contributions. I wish you all a good day. Thank you.

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