Emerging Technology for Connectivity

Virtual event

Opening Speech

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Excellencies,
Distinguished guests,
Dear participants,

Good morning, good afternoon, and good evening to all of you,

It is a pleasure for me to address you today.

I strongly believe that technology is for all. For all people, in all countries. It can provide tremendous opportunities for social and economic development – especially during these COVID times.

In the ITU Radiocommunication Sector we are working to enable the development of emerging radio-based technologies. We do that through international regulations and standards.

The international framework for managing the use of spectrum and satellite orbits now accommodates developments and innovations that have great potential to provide affordable coverage for people who live in rural and remote areas.

To give you some examples, the last World Radiocommunication Conference has identified additional bands that may be used for High-Altitude Platform Stations (HAPS), and the next conference will consider the use of HAPS as IMT base stations. Moreover, the Conference defined a regulatory framework for large constellations of low and medium orbit satellites towards further improving coverage and reducing costs.

The international framework is in place, but there is no one size fits all solution. National regulators and policymakers have a key role in deciding:

- Firstly, which technologies and services best fit their needs,
- Secondly, what is the best timing to adopt them, and
- Thirdly, the technology cost.

First, regarding technology, some are suitable for countries with a high-population density, while other ones are more adequate for less dense rural areas. The choice of small island developing states, for example, would take into account their unique characteristic of remoteness, and their sparse population spread across the territory.

The second aspect is timing. When a new technology is launched, there is often a hype, a great expectation of what the service can deliver and all its benefits. At this point in time, it is difficult to evaluate whether the hype is justified or not. New adopters are often willing to pay higher prices to be at the forefront of technological evolution.

There are, however, advantages to adopting a technology only at its maturity stage. The risk is lower since the technology has successfully proven itself, the ecosystem is well established, and the cost of devices and network equipment is lower.

Which brings me on to the third consideration: the technology cost. The price impact is of utmost relevance to increase technology adoption in countries with considerably lower gross national income per capita. Landlocked developing countries and least developed countries, for example, would need to have a 2 USD per month price basket it they were to reach the target of 2% GNI per capita set by the Broadband Commission.

Finally, to use an emerging technology, the population needs to have the right skills and the interest. One of the greatest challenges to increasing the number of people connected to the Internet is to improve digital literacy and develop content that would be meaningful to the intended target audience.

Dear colleagues,

In the ITU, we have developed regulations and standards to support a wide range of emerging radio-based technologies that address the needs of all countries, from developed to least developed countries, from small island developing states to landlocked developing countries.

However, the international arena is just the starting point. It is down to each country to define the emerging technologies that are adequate for them, what is the right timing to adopt them, and at what price. These are national decisions that depend on the domestic priorities and needs.

We call upon you to push the frontiers of broadband connectivity. And please count on us to support you in this challenging and exciting path towards transforming our societies and our lives.

Thanks for your attention.