



Statement

by

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At the opening of the Regional Meeting of the African LDCs on
Accelerating the Implementation of the IPoA within the Context of
the 2030 Agenda: A focus on broadband

**Tuesday, 28 February 2017
Radisson Blu Hotel, Dakar, Senegal**

H.E. Mr. Birima Mangara, Minister of Budget, Ministry of Economy, Finance and Planning, Senegal,

Honourable Ministers from Participating Countries,

H.E. Amb Masud Bin Momen, Chair of the Global Coordination Bureau of LDCs,

Ms. Bintou Djibo, Resident Coordinator of the United Nations in Senegal,

Mr. Adou Xianjun, Deputy General Manager of Huawei,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the outset, let me express my gratitude to the Government of Senegal for their warm hospitality and for jointly convening this meeting with my office. Let me extend a warm welcome to all the honorable Ministers and Distinguished Delegates for attending this meeting. The theme of the meeting is timely for the United Nations and for the African LDCs. As you are aware, we concluded Midterm Review of the Istanbul Programme of Action for the least developed in June last year. At the Midterm Review, Governments, Civil Society, Private Sector and the United Nations system discussed progress, lessons learnt and challenges ahead.

The Midterm Review also touched upon an important matter that brings us here today. That is, the importance of fostering synergies between the Istanbul Programme of Action itself and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and other global development frameworks. As you know, the 2030 Agenda recognizes the special needs of the LDCs, not only by explicitly supporting the implementation of the Istanbul Programme of Action, but also through the inclusion of key priorities and the provision of specific targets to support them.

LDCs can apply all the lessons learned in the implementation of IPoA to date, and learn from national experiences. The importance of mainstreaming global development agendas into national strategies and budgets will help to foster policy coherence, prioritize reallocations of limited resources, increase partnership opportunities, and establish firm national ownership.

Proactive and capable governance institutions and strong monitoring and accountability mechanisms support the successful implementation of international policy frameworks as well as national development priorities. Vibrant parliaments, civil society, the private sector and media are a key part.

For African LDCs, the coherence also demands that it is taken together with the continental Agenda 2063 and other sub regional initiatives. Our discussions will explore how LDCs can leverage the synergies among the IPoA, Agenda 2030 and Agenda 2063 for structural transformation of their economies leading towards effective and accelerated graduation from the LDC category as well. I can also stress here that there is so much synergy between them. The Member States in formulating those Agenda made sure that they coherently reflect their aspirations in all these processes. Today, we have therefore very strong articulation of all dimensions, human development, economic growth and infrastructure development, building resilience and governance and stability in our development agenda at all levels.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Despite substantial progress in many LDCs, there are bottlenecks that seriously constrain the efforts towards sustainable development. Among these, energy, infrastructure, transport or information and communication technologies are fundamental enablers whose importance cannot be overstated.

In this connection, it is encouraging to see that the 2030 Agenda includes unconditional support to these areas. SDG 9 on resilient infrastructure, inclusive and sustainable industrialization and innovation contains among its targets to *“Significantly increase access to information and communications technology and strive to provide universal and affordable access to the Internet in least developed countries by 2020”*.

In an interconnected world, information and communication technologies are key to allow individuals and businesses to participate in the knowledge economy. The Istanbul Programme of Action identified the lack of adequate physical infrastructure, including the lack of information and communication technology, among one of the major challenges faced by the LDCs and called for actions to expand broadband connectivity.

Affordable and easily accessible broadband connectivity is an important enabler of economic growth, social inclusion and environmental protection. From achieving food security, eliminating poverty, preventing losses due to disasters, empowering women and girls to inclusive and sustainable economic growth, broadband access is a truly cross-cutting issue that is vital for achieving the SDGs in the LDCs.

According to latest figures, only 11.1% of households in the least developed countries had access to broadband in 2015, displaying a very low level of penetration when compared to the world average (52.3%) or other developing countries (41.1%).

This will require substantially scaling up of infrastructure development and making available the financial resources and expertise to the LDCs to achieve this goal and ensure that no one is left behind.

Affordability is a particularly pressing issue in LDCs. Many of them rely on expensive services – in many cases also of subpar quality – and face high operational costs. An important challenge for the least developed countries and their partners is to ensure the availability of affordable services and inclusion of the poorest and the disabled through cost-effective modalities and interventions.

While the importance of infrastructure cannot be overstated, extending access must be accompanied by the development of relevant content in different forms and new services in local languages. Among the 4.2 billion people who are not online, many are unaware of the Internet's potential, or cannot afford it, or do not have access to it or cannot use it because there is little or no useful content for them. Therefore, our interventions have to be holistic. This will also improve our data collection and monitoring.

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

A key element of our discussion today and tomorrow is how to finance investment in broadband.

The resources required to scale up or, in some cases, deploy, the infrastructure needed to rapidly expand broadband the African LDCs are considerably large. There are a variety of mechanisms and financing modalities that can be useful in this regard.

Besides purely economic arguments, Member States of the United Nations lent a strong moral argument to the broadband case when they stated that "*The spread of information and communications technology and global interconnectedness has great potential to accelerate human progress*".

Limited access to finance is one of the biggest challenges for countries that face resource constraints and, at the same time, confront competing priorities. Therefore, access to right technology, public, private partnerships and innovative mechanisms, including blended finance will be critical.

We all know that there are already many good experiences of how LDCs are leveraging investment in broadband to deliver development objectives.

In the area of e-health, for instance, sensor technologies and analytics to monitor and predict have been tested on Ebola patients in Liberia with the support from development partners.

In the area of water and sanitation, in Bangladesh a biosensor network of 48 manual arsenic sensors is being used to monitor water quality.

In Rwanda, the SWEET LAB programme uses sensor technology to monitor pump performance and waterflow technologies and delivers information on usage and performance on programmes on water, sanitation, household energy and rural infrastructure programmes in collaboration with various partners across these areas.

In Senegal here, you have taken the lead in West Africa in the ICT sector. You are working on digital tech part and CTIC Tech Hub to enhance its' focused development and create a better synergy between technology and economic activities. You have already reached 50% in internet penetration. That is impressive.

The African Virtual University, a pan-African Intergovernmental Organization established to increase access to quality higher education and training through the innovative use of ICT is an outstanding example in the area of education.

Scaling-up e-applications and services to cover the needs of the LDCs and in the spirit of leaving no one behind requires a substantial increase in bandwidth, access and affordability, thus the relevance of our discussions during these two days.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In conclusion, let me once again express my gratitude to all of you for being here today. I am grateful to the support provided by UNDP in organizing this event. We have ahead of us two days in which we will exchange views among the experts, practitioners and policy makers.

We wish you a productive conference and I am hopeful that it will help propel us to achieve transformative change in the lives of the people in LDCs, in an inclusive manner, through ICTs as a great development enabler. It is critical because business as usual is not a solution, and we need to accelerate and leapfrog the strategies of economic growth to meet our common aspirations.