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LEAST DEVELOPED COUNTRIES, LANDLOCKED DEVELOPING
COUNTRIES AND SMALL ISLAND DEVELOPING STATES

World's least developed countries on target to achieve universal and affordable internet by 2020

Press Release

NEW YORK, 24 January 2018 – The world's poorest countries are on track to close the digital divide as they make significant progress in achieving universal and affordable access to the Internet by 2020. This is according to a new report launched today which details progress that least developed countries (LDCs) have made in achieving [Sustainable Development Goal 9.c](#).

The report, [ICT, LDCs and the SDGs: Achieving universal and affordable Internet in the least developed countries](#), was prepared jointly by the UN Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States (UN-OHRLLS) and the International Telecommunication Union. Major achievements include the launch of 3G services in all 47 LDCs with over 60% of their population covered by a 3G network. Similarly, the LDCs are expected to reach on average 97 per cent mobile broadband coverage and to make Internet prices relatively affordable by 2020.

“It is vital that all stakeholders from: governments, civil society, the private sector and UN system continue to build momentum through collaboration and sharing of innovative solutions. These will help to close the digital divide and support the LDCs in accelerating the development of the ICT sector”, said Ms Fekitamoeloa Katoa 'Utoikamanu Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States. “As this report highlights, the Least Developed Countries are making major progress. This bodes well for achieving their sustainable development aspirations including those in the [Istanbul Programme of Action](#) and Sustainable Development Goals. A robust ICT sector will spur home grown innovation, new business opportunities, improved health and education services and help lift LDCs onto a more prosperous development pathway.”

Major progress was also made by the end of 2017 with the number of mobile-cellular subscriptions having increased to roughly 700 million and a penetration of 70 per cent. Currently, more than four out of five people in the LDCs have access to a mobile-cellular network. Among the areas where progress in the ICT sector are

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having a positive impact include: financial inclusion, poverty reduction and improved health services.

‘Information and Communication technologies are transforming lives everywhere and offering limitless opportunities for sustainable development’, said Houlin Zhao ITU Secretary-General. “Least Developed Countries with a strong government commitment, recognizing the importance of digital technologies for national development, and backed by enlightened policy and regulatory actions including steps to develop skills, can achieve universal and affordable access to the Internet.”

While the overall trend in LDCs to achieving universal access and affordable internet is highly positive, the report also notes areas where gaps remain. This includes capacity constraints in ICT skills but also wider socio-economic issues such as education levels and gender equality. To ensure that LDCs continue to build momentum in the ICT sector, the report lays out recommendations in areas including: fostering competition, infrastructure, taxation policies, education and developing ICT sector plans.

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