



UN-OHRLLS

United Nations Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States

Remarks

by

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**Launch of the Report entitled:
Broadband for national development in four LDCs: Cambodia, Rwanda,
Senegal and Vanuatu.**

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Insight: broadband for national development in four least developed countries: Cambodia, Rwanda, Senegal and Vanuatu

So many of us just take it for granted to use our cell-phones, tablets and instantly we are connected.

Connectedness means participation, it means inclusion, it means opportunities. Connection bridges space, connection is access to knowledge and innovation.

Connection is not an opportunity afforded to all. Many are still left behind. The group of least developed countries (LDCs) , some 47 countries, experience severe structural obstacles to their sustainable and inclusive development. The LDCs truly have been left most behind in the world's economic and social development scorecard.

While on some fronts remarkable progress took place in recent years, these countries do display among the lowest internet access rates in the world.

It is estimated that by the end of 2017, only 172 million people of the nearly 1 billion people living in LDCs used the Internet.

This corresponds to a usage rate of about 17.5 per cent. At slightly over 20 per cent per 100 inhabitants in LDCs, the mobile broadband subscription rates remain equally low. This is almost four times less than in developed countries.

Being connected means enhancing development potential. Thus, greater access to and enhanced literacy in and use of broadband services will be critically important to the sustainable development of the LDCs and their full participation in achieving the goals of Agenda 2030.

There is no time to waste. For this reason, a Working Group on vulnerable countries (LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS) was established under the auspices of the broadband commission. A key task of the Working Group is to fill the knowledge gap on how LDCs are leveraging investment in broadband for national development.

The synthesized report on *'Broadband for national development in four LDCs: Cambodia, Rwanda, Senegal and Vanuatu'* aims to contribute to filling that gap. This report is based on extensive case studies conducted in four LDCs in three regions: Asian LDC (Cambodia), African LDC (Senegal) with access to the sea, a landlocked LDC in Africa (Rwanda), and a small island developing state in the South Pacific (Vanuatu).

It is very impressive and highly encouraging to note that in just a few years, all the four countries were able to significantly increase broadband coverage and very importantly affordability. Rwanda is close to achieving universal coverage of mobile broadband. In 2016, over 90% of the Rwandan population could access a 3G signal.

It is of interest to note that the market conditions leading to these remarkable achievements differed considerably. This ranged from a mix of local access competition and wholesale PPP

interventions in Rwanda, to an unregulated and fiercely competitive market in Cambodia, a regulated market dominated by the incumbent operator in Senegal and the mobile “ duopoly “ in Vanuatu.

We though must also take note of the gap that remains between deploying the necessary infrastructure and then the utilization rates of the infrastructure to enhance development.

The report tells us that while broadband impacts have thus far had modest measurable impact, anecdotal evidence in turn suggests that narrowband services such as text messages in sectors including health, agricultural and financial services (mobile money) have achieved some degrees of traction.

The report makes 11 insightful recommendations for leveraging broadband at a faster rate in LDCs. These are:

1. A strong commitment towards approaching broadband as a holistic cross cutting General Purpose Technology that can trigger development transformation is needed at a high political level. A high-level champion in the government, such as in Rwanda, can ensure that the leveraging of broadband as transformational technology and receives the necessary political support and resources.
2. It is essential to find the right combination of complementary technologies to bridge the digital divide. This implies having technology-neutral digital strategies and national broadband plans.
3. Identify rural, remote, and low-population density communities that need broadband coverage and that cannot be served by terrestrial media. This urgent need to serve rural populations should be reflected in government policies and regulations.
4. Broadband applications that have notable economic and social impact must be made sustainable. While there is a tremendous requirement for donor assistance in LDCs, a more coordinated approach is required. Governments need to identify priorities for broadband support that will have widespread impacts. In addition, they should gradually assume responsibility for these interventions in their budgets to ensure sustainability.
5. Expanding broadband networks and making them more affordable generally has straightforward solutions. But choosing the best solution is often constrained by each country's governance context and risk adversity. Universal and affordable coverage of broadband technology will be achieved more rapidly by taking bold steps.
6. Digital literacy needs to be strengthened to enhance productive use of broadband and increase absorptive capacity. This includes actions targeting citizens, government and Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs).
7. Digital laws need to be adopted to ensure greater confidence among suppliers and users of broadband services. Most of the four countries are lacking some element of digital laws such as recognizing electronic transactions, protecting consumers online, strengthening cyber security and ensuring privacy and safeguarding of personal data. The latter is becoming particularly important with vast amounts of personal data moving from LDCs to multinational companies, as broadband use for global platforms increases.

8. Local e-Business needs to be supported to make productive use of broadband. This includes facilitating local entrepreneurship, access to capital and a supportive legal and regulatory environment.
9. There should be greater coordination between governments and the private sector to boost the broadband economy. This includes getting more MSMEs online by providing training and subsidized broadband packages where necessary.
10. As limited official data on the ICT sector restricts the scope for evidence-based policy making, national statistics systems need to be improved to better interpret the dynamics of broadband diffusion and impacts across the economy. National accounts data on the ICT sector is published at a highly granular level, without being broken-down by sub-industries. This makes it impossible to meaningfully gauge development of the broadband sector and identify weaknesses.
11. LDCs should strive to balance the different elements of their broadband ecosystems. Coverage, affordability and digital literacy are often lopsided. The four countries have made notable progress in expanding telecommunications infrastructure, growing international bandwidth and mobile broadband coverage. However, they still have room for infrastructure growth, a more notable gap is appearing in usage and applications. This is reflected in underdeveloped computer and information service sectors characterized by trade imbalances.

I sincerely hope this report and its attendant recommendations will contribute to furthering the ongoing conversation on how we can best support LDCs to connect to the emerging if not ever more rapidly evolving digital world and reap its developmental benefits.

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