



Ambassadorial Retreat on the Comprehensive High-level Midterm Review on the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action for the Decade 2014-2024

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**Your excellencies, dear colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,**

I am very pleased to be among all of you and bring the contribution of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) for this comprehensive review on the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action. In this presentation, I will highlight the progress made by LLDCs in terms of infrastructure development, the challenges these countries are facing, and I will touch upon some recommendations.

ITU as the UN agency for information Communication Technologies (ICTs) is harnessing the potential of ICTs/broadband, connectivity, access, and use, and ICT infrastructure growth in carrying out various projects, programmes and activities to enable the LLDCs to take advantage of the knowledge and information society.

ITU's efforts towards the implementation of the VPoA include, notably, providing help to partners to connect the LLDCs in the most effective and transformative manner to overcome their challenges. Among the six priorities of the VPoA for the LLDCs, **priority 2b** addresses the importance of "Infrastructure development, maintenance, and Information and Communication Technology infrastructure."

To accelerate the progress in the VPoA's implementation, ITU has handled large-scale projects to change people's lives to fast-forward the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Agenda which recognizes that "the spread of information and communication technology and global interconnectedness has great potential to accelerate human progress, to bridge the digital divide and to develop knowledge societies."

***Challenges on ICT development, key constraints and lessons learnt?***

The fundamental challenges faced by LLDCs are related to their geography which puts them at a distinct disadvantage in the development process. LLDCs lack direct territorial access to the sea, they are remote and isolated from world markets, they depend on neighboring and coastal countries for access to undersea cables and international internet bandwidths and are

usually afflicted by high transit costs that impose serious constraints on their overall socio-economic development.

High cost for ICTs and ICT prices in LLDCs remains high, there are difficulties in the rollout of terrestrial communication infrastructure throughout large areas. Long routes, complicated administrative transit procedures, multiple border crossings and inadequate infrastructure all are important factors increasing transport and trade transaction costs.

LLDCs also face severe challenges regarding broadband internet access, and in keeping up with the necessary infrastructure deployment. Broadband costs as a share of gross national income are much higher in LLDCs than in coastal countries. This is in part due to their remoteness from world markets and their high vulnerability to external shocks.

Because of their geographical position, there is low interest in investing in ICT Infrastructure development in LLDCs.

### ***Progress by LLDCs***

However, LLDCs have made progress. According to ITU data for indicators and the data provided by LLDCs countries for the last five years, there has been growth in population covered by at least 3G network; population covered by a mobile-cellular network; mobile-cellular subscriptions; mobile and fixed-broadband; and the proportion of people using the Internet. Fixed telephone subscriptions is the only area recording a slight decrease.

Many LLDCs have made rapid progress towards achieving universal and affordable access to the Internet, as measured by mobile population coverage and the price of a monthly mobile Internet package of at least 500 mega bites. Rwanda has achieved tremendous progress in access to the Internet through universal population coverage. And alongside Lesotho, exceeds the world average for mobile LTE population coverage.

In addition, a growing number of LLDCs have flexible mobile Internet plans catering to hourly, daily, weekend and weekly use, enhancing affordability for those who do not use the Internet every day.

However, the extent of this progress varies between countries, and infrastructure investment gaps exists. To tackle these gaps the ITU, alongside partners and governments, has spearheaded several programmes such as:

- The deployment of broadband infrastructure in Burundi, Burkina Faso, Lesotho, Mali, Rwanda and Eswatini.
- harmonized training to Burkina-Faso, Mali, and Niger to improve their knowledge and shared best practice approaches for infrastructure connectivity.
- And is reinforcing both institutional and technical capacities of Burundi to speed up sustainable broadband development by leveraging the potential of ICT/Broadband infrastructures as engines for growth.

### ***Key actions and recommendations***

Key actions and recommendations can include the following:

- Create an enabling regulatory environment and policies in support of ICT infrastructure development and sharing.
- Take collective measures to narrow the digital divide in LLDCs but also bridge the gap between rural and urban areas.
- Take measures to make ICTs/ broadband more affordable as it provides great development opportunities for the LLDCs.
- Promote digital inclusion, digital literacy, and use of ICT applications, and services.
- Foster development of appropriate skills to encourage increased use of internet of opportunities for everyone, develop local content and investment in both human and institutional capacity.
- Promote universal service funds.
- Create tax incentives.
- Nurture e-commerce and small medium enterprises.
- Encourage increased Official Development Assistance (ODA).
- Establish ICT public-private partnerships for viable business models, including long-term institutional investors, and encourage those partnerships to allocate a higher percentage of infrastructure in LLDCs. In addition, improve partnerships between transit countries and landlocked countries.

In a nutshell, we need to prioritize investment in ICT infrastructure and connectivity as this equates investing in people and accelerates the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action. It is an important part of ITU's mission to ensure that people wherever they live and whatever their means take advantage of the benefits of ICT and broadband infrastructures for an inclusive world.

**Thank you.**