

## ITU Intervention during the Preparatory Committee for the 5<sup>th</sup> UN Conference on the LDCs, 8 February 2021

Information and communication technologies (ICTs) bring great benefits for people, governments, and the private sector. Access to the Internet unlocks new development opportunities by providing access to information and services, increasing productivity and fostering innovation. ICTs and Internet access are key building blocks of the digital economy, and were recognized as important drivers of development already a decade ago, in the Istanbul Programme of Action (IPoA). But today, we know that they are not just important but absolutely critical. And it is increasingly clear that the success of this final Decade of Action in achieving the SDGs will largely rest on digital solutions.

As most countries across the world grapple with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, the role of ICTs and services, and the digital infrastructure that they ride and scale on has become central to continued economic and societal activity and to lessening the pandemic's impact. A recent study by ITU has highlighted that as an enabling technology, broadband creates value and reduces costs by supporting applications in many different sectors such as agriculture, education, financial services, government, health and disaster management. Case studies already show a quantifiable economic impact – for example, fixed and mobile broadband have facilitated e-commerce, which continues to expand, generating additional revenue and employment. In some LDCs, the indirect impact of these technologies is difficult to quantify, but economic and social effects are emerging, particularly in relation to improvements in the quality of education. For example, in Ethiopia and Zambia, e-education initiatives supported by broadband technologies are expanding opportunities for learning at the vitally important primary school stage and for tertiary study.

ITU, as the specialized agency for ICT, has mainstreamed the needs of the world's most vulnerable countries in all its activities and programmes and develops tailored programmes of assistance in such areas as technology and network development, regulation, capacity building, and emergency telecommunications. It works with private and public stakeholders to help LDCs to fully participate in the information and knowledge society. ITU tracks ICTs development in the LDCs and identify progress and challenges, in areas of access, affordability and ICT skills<sup>1</sup>. The latest ITU data show that about a quarter of the population in LDCs do not have access to a mobile-broadband network, coming short of SDG Target 9.c to significantly increase access to ICT and strive to provide universal and affordable access to the Internet in least developed countries by 2020.

While in early 2020, just over half of the world population was using the Internet, most people in the LDCs are not. Only one in five people in the LDCs was online. This highlights that while the world's most vulnerable countries have made great progress, more efforts must be made to understand, to track and to overcome gaps in technology, education and skills. Only then can we realize the benefits that digital solutions can offer and turn this final decade of action into one of true opportunities for the LDCs.

---

<sup>i</sup> Key ITU publications and websites on ICT access and use in the LDCs, include:

- Economic impact of broadband in LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS, see: [Economic impact of broadband in LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS \(itu.int\)](#)
- ICTs, LDCs and the SDGs: Achieving universal and affordable Internet in the LDCs, see: [ICTs, LDCs and the SDGs: Achieving universal and affordable Internet in the LDCs \(itu.int\)](#)
- Measuring digital development: Facts and figures 2020, see: [Measuring digital development: Facts and figures 2020 \(itu.int\)](#)