Question 7-2/1: Regulatory policies on universal access to broadband services

1 Statement of the situation

At the last meeting of ITU-D Study Group 1, held in Geneva in September 2004, it was agreed by all that the issue of **universal service** was of considerable importance for all countries, particularly developing countries, and that it should be investigated further under a revised Question during the 2006-2010 study period.

During the third ITU-D study period (2002-2006), the Rapporteur's Group on Question 7-1/1 ("Universal access/service") achieved its designated objectives and completed the Report on innovative solutions for the management and financing of universal service and universal access policies, with the help of experts from Study Groups 1 and 2.

As the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) and the Global Symposium for Regulators (GSR) have highlighted, the challenge facing policy-makers and regulators lies in the increasing development of broadband technologies and services, particularly in order to expand access to information and communication technologies (ICTs) in unserved communities, especially in landlocked or rural areas.

New applications using broadband access or Voice over IP have brought down the real cost of supplying voice or data services, thus allowing many countries, particularly developing countries, to give previously unserved communities access to ICTs at market prices. In this new environment, there is a need to study regulatory policies aiming to promote universal access to such services. A revised Question for the next ITU-D study period will therefore be proposed at WTDC-06.

At its meeting of 21 March 2005 in Geneva, the Rapporteur's Group drafted the revised Question, entitled "**Regulatory policies on universal access to broadband services**". It was proposed that the draft Question be circulated to all ITU-D members before being officially examined by Study Group 1 at its September 2005 meeting.

2 Question for study

2.1 In many countries, unprecedented technological advances are being made in the telecommunication sector, with the development of wired and wireless broadband systems that can provide voice, video and data communication services.

2.2 These changes call for analysis of both competition and regulatory measures and investment incentives with a view to expanding access to these technologies and making innovative services available to as many people as possible.

2.3 The regulatory implications relate mainly to the following issues:

– The Question will study aspects relating to ways and means of promoting economic development by universal access/service, especially in respect of broadband services.

– These new technologies raise new economic challenges. Tariff structure and economic strategies must be examined in order to assess their impact on incentives for operators to invest in all areas, including unserved areas.

– Unbundling of local loop access and interconnection between wired or wireless systems, as well as national roaming and site sharing in the case of mobile systems, are also subjects that it is important to examine.

– The identification of ways and means of promoting universal access/service in respect of broadband services will also be addressed by the Rapporteur's Group.

– The Question will analyse how competition in related markets can promote investment in broadband networks.

3 Expected output

During the next ITU-D study period (2006-2010), the Rapporteur's Group on universal access/service will examine various issues concerning **regulatory policies on universal access to broadband services**. These issues could be divided into the following categories:

– regulatory policy aspects linked to broadband services and technologies, in particular a summary of the experience acquired by telecom regulators in implementing universal access to broadband services in their countries;

– specific universal access aspects with regard to management of access and interconnection agreements and methods of financing universal service;

– aspects to keep up the technological neutrality principles inserting broadband access services to the universal services package;

– aspects relating to best practices in seeking funding sources and developing innovative financing mechanisms for accelerating universal access/service development in rural communities;

– aspects relating to ways and means and solutions for promoting universal access/service in respect of broadband services.

4 Timing

4.1 After two years, the draft report on the subject should be submitted to Study Group 1.

4.2 The draft final report and any proposed draft Recommendation(s) are to be submitted to Study Group 1 within four years.

4.3 The Rapporteur's Group will work in collaboration with BDT, and particularly with the centre of excellence programme, to implement on the ground, through training seminars, the lessons learned from study of the Question. The Rapporteur's Group will take the results into consideration, including the projects stemming from the second phase of WSIS.

4.4 The activities of the Rapporteur's Group will come to an end within four years.

5 Proposers

Developed countries, developing countries and LDCs.

6 Sources of input

Firstly, documentary research into the issue being studied will be carried out, as required, within and outside ITU. This approach will generate an inventory of sources of information and documents relevant to the study. Reports from international and regional organizations, studies by consulting firms and research bodies will thus be consulted.

Secondly, the Rapporteur's Group will complete its analysis with empirical research. Here, the experience of member countries of the Rapporteur's Group and projects stemming from the second phase of WSIS will be the main sources of information used to analyse reasons for success or failure. This work will be done by means of electronic exchanges. There will also be milestone meetings to discuss the content of the sources of input and of the draft outline for the final report.

7   Target audience

Target audience	Developed countries	Developing countries	Least developed countries (LDCs)
Telecommunication policy-makers	Interested.	Highly interested because of lack of experience.	Highly interested because of lack of experience.
Telecommunication regulators	Interested and have experience with different models.	Highly interested. Some countries have immediate need for information.	Highly interested. May also need specific models.
Service providers/operators	New entrants, regardless of size, extremely interested.	New entrants, regardless of size, extremely interested.	New entrants, regardless of size, extremely interested.
Manufacturers	Highly interested, as study will promote development of infrastructure.	Highly interested as study will promote development of infrastructure.	Highly interested as study will promote development of infrastructure.
Consumer associations	Interested.	Study will promote development of services adapted to the needs of communities.	Study will promote development of services adapted to the needs of communities.

a)   Target audience

The foregoing evaluation matrix shows that telecommunication policy-makers, regulators and service providers from least developed countries (LDCs) and developing countries will all be highly interested in the results of the study of this Question. Policy-makers and regulators from developed countries will also be interested. Manufacturers and consumer associations too will show a keen interest in this Question, given that the adoption of appropriate regulatory measures will facilitate development of infrastructure and of services adapted to the needs of communities.

b)   Proposed methods for the implementation of the results

The outputs of the study (report and guidelines) will be distributed as widely as possible in accordance with ITU-D working methods. However, given the importance of this issue, BDT could also conduct regional meetings/seminars, perhaps in conjunction with regional telecommunication organizations, to disseminate the results of the study of the Question. These results should be passed on to the annual ITU-D Global Symposium for Regulators whenever its themes include universal access, convergence or broadband services, and should be published by ITU for wider distribution.

8   Proposed methods of handling the Question

Within the framework of Study Group 1.

9   Coordination

Given that the issue of universal access is related to other issues currently being studied or programmes being managed by ITU, coordination will be required:

–   with ITU-D's routine activities;

–   with the other Questions being studied by the study groups;

–   with the work being done in the other ITU Sectors.

10   Other relevant information

Any other information that may become available during the period of validity of this Question.

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