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| United Nations Economic Commission for Africa | | | |
| Opening Session of the Regional Preparatory Meeting for the World Telecommunications Development Conference 2021 | | | |

**Talking Points**

* Good morning, good afternoon to everyone.
* Let me first convey sincere apologies from Dr. Vera Songwe, UN Under Secretary General and Executive Secretary of ECA for not being here due to other competing demands. She asked me to stand in for her.
* My name is Oliver Chinganya, Director of the ACS, at ECA
* On behalf of Dr. Songwe and on my own behalf, I would like to thank ITU for inviting ECA to deliver a good will message at the opening session of the Regional Preparatory Meeting of the World Telecommunications Development Conference.
* Africa has not been left behind in the digital revolution. Digital transformation is an integral element of Africa’s as well as global resilient and green recovery. During COVID-19 Pandemic, ICT facilitated continuity of service provision when Countries were in lockdowns, it provided a bedrock for alternative work arrangements, and means of delivering classes.
* Today, our continent is undergoing a revolution in ICT, characterized by a rapid increase in mobile phone penetration, and hence bringing services within the reach of hundreds of millions of people. Empowering them and providing them with the option to access knowledge economy
* Things of Internet and Internet of things are becoming the most important agent of the mutation of our societies. Artificial Intelligence is growing and will grow even faster in 2021, the 5G revolution is coming, etc.,
* At the same time, the digital divide is unfortunately a reality of life we are confronted with in many aspects of development co-operation, including:
  1. ***Connectivity* –** Africa's digital infrastructure is still in its early growth stages. As end of 2019, only 28.2% of the continent's population had internet access and 34% have access to broadband according to ITU. Africa further exhibit highest inter-regional variations. Achieving affordable and quality internet will require an investment of $100 billion by 2030.
  2. ***Cost of internet connectivity***- Where internet access is available, it remains unaffordable. For example; 1 GB of data costs 7.2% of average income with the rate in some countries as high as 20% compared to the affordable global benchmarck of 1-2% (source: Alliance for Affordable Internet).
  3. ***Digital Devide multifaceted*-** A persistent digital divide within countries and between countries remain a big challenge, only 17.8 per cent of households have Internet access at home and with the level of households’ access to computers at 10.7 per cent (ITU-2019). The gender gap with access and use of digital technologies has been growing. The proportion of women using the Internet globally is 22.6 per cent, compared to 33.8 per cent of men (ITU-2019).
  4. ***Legal ID:*** Social protection initiatives are hampered by the fact that more than 40 percent of Africans lack an official identity, which is crucial for identifying and targeting beneficiaries and key to inclusive growth.
  5. ***Data Protection****:* Concerns regarding cybersecurity, data protection and regulation are increasing.
* Therefore, this Regional Preparatory Meeting for the World Telecommunications Development Conference 2021 is an important step in the search for better ways to maximize the benefit of ICT for development as key to faster recovery from the Covid crisis and building forward better.
* Bearing this in mind, ECA welcome the organization World Telecommunications Development Conference in our continent . The choice of Ethiopia to host this Conference is a recognization of significant  progress made by the country  towards the telecom sector as enabling growth in various **sectors** such as healthcare, banking, education, energy, etc,.
* In this regards  I would like  to take this opportunity to commend once again our longstanding parthnership with ITU and reaffirm our commitment to fully support the Government of Ethiopia in the succefull organisation of this important initiative that aims at advancing telecommunication sector.

***ECA’s Work and Initiatives on Technology and innovation***

Cognizant of the developments of digital era within the context of the implementation of the AfCFTA and given their relevance for Africa’s development, the ECA through the *Digital Center of Excellence* plays a crucial role in supporting Member States in the development of key policy milestones for harnessing digitalization and innovation and will continue to provide technical assistance for the Member States.

* For example, ECA through the Digital Center of Excellence is working with member states in the various aspects of digitalization including: Identity, Broadband expansion, technical support on Digital strategy, Legal frameworks for ID, e-commerce platforms, taxation of informal sector and many more. The current work programme covers the following themes:

1. *African Framework of Good Digital Identity:* Digital identities are a fundamental building block of the digital economy and a minimum requirement for the actualization by Member States of the full benefits of AfCFTA. ECA is spearheading the adoption of the African Framework of Good Digital Identity to enable African Countries maximize the benefits of digital identification for development. This stipulates that these systems must be inclusive, privacy-respecting, secure and interoperable with existing and new system.
2. *Africa Digital Transformation Strategy:* The January 2019 meeting of the African Union Specialized Technical Committee on Trade, Industry mandated ECA in collaboration with African Union Commission and other partners to develop a comprehensive African Digital Transformation Strategy to enable member states to fully benefit from the 4th Industrial revolution and facilitate the AfCFTA implementation, and ultimately Africa’s economic and structural transformation.
3. *Digital Infrastructure/ Regional and intra-continental connectivity to support cross-border trade and the AfCTA: -* Digital infrastructure particularly broadband is key to facilitating effective and inclusive public service delivery. Access and affordability of broadband is a pillar of the digital economy. In this regard, ECA is supporting Member States to develop a conducive regulatory framework for broadband infrastructure development to enable effective private sector participation

* To leverage the digital revolution, ECA in collaboration with Partners and Member States came up with the following initiatives:
  + - 1. African Communication and Information on Health and Economy Platform for curating and sharing information on COVID-19 - A platform developed in collaboration with Telcoms and Member States with a view to connect over 700 million users of mobile phones for a two-way information sharing between Telcom users and policy makers, focusing on: prevention messages, impact and policy measures being enforced to contain the pandemic.
      2. African Medical Supplies Procurement Platform- to improve the ability of African countries to quickly source essential devices and products for their healthcare sectors. Today $56 million worth of merchandise are being processed.
      3. The establishment of an African Artificial Intelligence Research Centre in Brazzaville, Congo, with support from ECA in collaboration with ITU and UNIDO, could give momentum to this new movement in Africa through the learning and research programmes including making links to the industry.

To conclude ECA is fully in support of the initiative and I would like to express my best wishes for the successful outcome of this session. ECA will remain dedicated in helping to achieve the 2030 Agenda and I encourage all of you to remain committed as well.

**Thank you very much.**

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