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| C:\Users\comas\AppData\Local\Temp\Rar$DRa0.735\jpg\ITU official logo_blue_RGB.jpg**TDAG Working Group on WTDC Preparations**  **20 October 2020, Virtual** | | |
|  | | **Document TDAG-WG-Prep/21-E** |
|  | | **9 October 2020** |
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**Summary:**

This document contains proposals for the advancement of the work of the TDAG Working Group on WTDC Preparations.

**Action required:**

TDAG-WG-Prep is invited to endorse the proposals contained in this document for inclusion in the report to TDAG-20/3.

**Introduction**

The economic impact of COVID-19 will affect the path to economic recovery for both developed and developing countries for years to come. Telecommunications and ICT will play a critical part in this recovery. The ITU, through the ITU Development Sector, has the potential to play a pivotal role in bringing countries together to address the many challenges presented by the effects of the pandemic on the global economy.

This is why the success of the World Telecommunication Development Conference in 2021 is so important – a successful conference, which delivers real results and impact for members and stakeholders has the potential to position the ITU at the forefront of global economic recovery by mobilising the digital economy in the service of development.

In a constrained economic environment, where national governments will be making careful choices as to where to allocate development funding, we need to be clear about our objectives and work to maximise our time to ensure that the ITU’s all-important work to connect the unconnected can have the most impact where it is most needed.

Home to many Small Island Development States and Least Developed Countries, the Asia-Pacific region is vulnerable to the economic disruption borne by the pandemic. This leads us to support moves towards an effective, results-oriented WTDC-21 that can deliver tailored responses to the development needs of particular countries, regions and sub-regions. We would also support moves towards a partnership approach which maximised investment and impact to help promote economic growth, achieve the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals and help bridge the digital divide.

Australia and Samoa therefore strongly support the direction taken in this Working Group toward a successful WTDC-21 and would like to add our voice to existing proposals to this end as set out below, drawing on the structure taken in Document TDAG-WG-Prep/16-E submitted at the last meeting of this group.

**Inter-regional Coordination Meetings (IRMs)**

**How many IRMs should be held and when?**

We propose a maximum of twoIRMs:

1. The first meeting held after the RPMs, within Q2 of 2020, to clarify points of agreement and disagreement following from these meetings.
2. The second held after the conclusion of RTO preparatory processes in Q3/Q4 of 2021, to align regional perspectives in the lead-up to WTDC-21.

**What should be the format of IRMs?**

The IRMs should be held as virtual meetings and used as much as possible to come to a common position on key issues to be discussed at the WTDC-21. The IRMs should be no longer than three days.

**What should the IRM Agenda include?**

The IRM Agenda should cover the key issues under consideration in the three TDAG Working Groups, and cover revision of Resolutions and the WTDC Declaration as suggested by the Working Groups.

**Should attendance at IRMs be limited, and if so, how many representatives from each region should attend IRMs?**

If held as virtual meetings, attendance need not be limited. It is important to note that not all regions will have agreed positions on all issues, therefore it may not be possible for each region to be represented by a limited number of speakers.

**How will chairmanship of IRMs be decided?**

Given the IRMs are being held to coordinate positions in the lead-up to WTDC-21, we consider it appropriate for the BDT Secretariat or Chairperson of WTDC to chair the IRMs.

**What steps should be taken to ensure proper planning and coordination between RPMs, IRMs and RTO preparatory meetings?**

The IRMs should be used to create clarity and consensus after regional positions have been determined. It is therefore appropriate for the IRMs to be held post-RPMs and post-RTO preparatory meetings, i.e. the first IRM in Q2 2021 and the second IRM in Q3-Q4 2021, as outlined above.

**Promoting Wider Participation in WTDC**

**What constituent groups should be targeted for WTDC-21?**

We agree with the BDT’s position that the WTDC needs to attract new and more diverse participants from the private sector and the broader donor community such as the key International Financial Institutions, the academic community and other UN development agencies, such as UNDP, UNDESA and UNESCAP.

**How should WTDC-21 be promoted?**

We encourage the BDT to develop clear guidelines to inform how Members can work with the BDT Secretariat to use their networks to promote WTDC-21 and encourage prominent donors and development actors to attend.

This could take the form of BDT issuing guidelines for promotion via a circular letter and creating a dedicated coordination team within the BDT to liaise with Members seeking to promote WTDC-21 to third parties. This will empower Members to promote WTDC-21 and give BDT the necessary oversight to help them coordinate the conference and avoid any duplication.

BDT should also reach out to the Office of the UN Secretary General to help publicise and promote the conference and to encourage high level participation from other relevant UN development agencies.

**Which other high-profile forums can be used to raise awareness and interest on WTDC, and how should ITU go about doing this?**

WTDC should also be promoted across other ITU bureaux, namely the Standardisation and Radiocommunication Bureaux, other peak meetings of the UN development calendar, and in global and regional economic dialogues including the World Economic Forum and the G20.

**During the conference**

**Should the High-Level Segment be changed, and if so, what form should it take?**

Noting the time constraints experienced during WTDC-17, we support the suggestion in BDT’s concept note to repurpose the high-level segment of the conference and side-events into a ‘Partnership Segment’.

An important element in achieving any Action Plan developed at the conference is the ability to leverage and secure funding commitments to turn these plans into reality. Given the current global recession due to COVID-19, there is likely to be increased demand for funding and increased pressure on donors, both national and institutional, further emphasising the importance of developing clear, achievable goals with clear outcomes for both donors and recipients.

We therefore support the BDT’s proposal to merge the high-level segment of the conference and side-events into a ‘Partnership Segment’ to provide opportunities for interaction between stakeholders in the ITU Development Sector, including Member States, Sector Members, Non-Governmental Organizations and academia, and financial institutions and development banks to discuss relevant thematic issues and how to generate development projects that can effectively target particular areas of need.

These should be structured in such a way that stakeholders will be able to engage and collaborate during or after the conference to secure funding and create new development projects and initiatives as a result of these discussions.

**What theme or themes (connected to development challenges and membership priorities) should be established for WTDC-21, and how should the theme(s) be connected to the content and structure of the conference?**

The unprecedented challenge of the current pandemic emphasises the need for unity and for countries to come together to help meet the challenge, and places the ITU-D at the centre of the long-term solution given the opportunities afforded by the digital economy during the COVID era, and of course the importance of leaving no vulnerable or underserved groups or regions behind. So suggested themes could include: ‘The digital economy as a pathway to prosperity’ and ‘Fighting COVID together: an inclusive and inter-connected future for all.’

In this way the conference could examine how to translate the unexpected benefits of the pandemic to the telecommunication/ICT sector, and potentially to individuals and communities through virtual access to services and forums previously constrained by lack of resources, as well as to developing particular solutions for the most vulnerable countries, regions and groups that would benefit the most from increased connectivity.

At the very core of everything is connectivity – without focussing first on connectivity, the benefits of advances in telecommunications/ICTs cannot be realised for all and many risk being left further behind.

**What high-level participants should be invited to chair and/or deliver keynote speeches on the theme(s) selected?**

Senior office-bearers of other UN Development Agencies and International Financial Institutions, as well as government representatives and senior officials from SIDS, LDCs and LLDCs should be given priority on the conference speakers list.

Additionally, key private sector partners such as the heads of multi-national telecommunications companies should also be invited/selected to encourage and reinforce the partnership focus.

**Submit proposals for thematic tracks that can be incorporated into the conference.**

Thematic tracks should reflect the BDT themes.

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