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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** | | |
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**Summary:**

Attached is an Interamerican Contribution (IAC) to the work of the TDAG-WG-Prep that builds upon the contribution previously submitted to the WG by Argentina, Brazil, Canada and USA.

**Introduction**

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the fundamental importance of telecommunications/Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in all aspects of people's lives, such as health, education, work and entertainment. In this sense, the universalization and affordability of connectivity and ICTs should not continue to be something of an aspirational nature, but a concrete, implementable and mandatory objective in national development plans.

It is essential that the forthcoming ITU World Telecommunication Development Conference (WTDC-21) be an action-oriented environment with interactive dialogues between stakeholders aimed at developing a shared understanding of existing barriers and advancing effective, sustainable and innovative solutions for the expansion of connectivity throughout the world, particularly in developing countries. To this end, the structure and content of the WTDC-21 should be tailored around identifying and addressing critical telecommunication/ICT development issues identified by the regions. The Conference Structure should merge these future-looking aspects with the administrative elements and a celebration of the ITU-D’s work since Buenos Aires, all with a look towards building an ITU community within/among countries.

It is also expected that the WTDC will be the key international Conference that reflects coordinated efforts and innovative approaches among all the stakeholders involved in the ITU Development Sector, including Member States, Sector Members, Non-Governmental Organizations, Academy, Financial Institutions and development banks, etc. Likewise, we also consider it of great importance for the WTDC to recognize the roles and needs of all stakeholders, whose insights and experiences are fundamental for understanding where to prioritize collective efforts for maximum impact and to increase the relevance of BDT activities to stimulate broader stakeholder participation.

With a view to advancing the discussion on how to organize the logistics and thematic structures of WTDC-21, to address the above based on Annex IV of the Circular BDT/DDR/TDAG/052, dated 3 August 2020, the following proposals are presented:

**Before the conference**

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

* How many IRMs should be held and when?

Interregional meetings are a good step in improving the preparatory process to foster consensus ahead of WTDC-21 to free up Conference time to discuss critical telecommunication/ICT development issues. We suggest the realization of up to 3 IRMs, to be determined. One of those IRMs could be held right before TDAG Meeting in May 2021, as appropriate. In this sense, the following schedule is proposed:

IRM1 (Virtual): 11-12 March 2021

IRM2: (Hybrid: Virtual and physical): 20-21 May 2021

IRM3 (Hybrid: Virtual and physical): 6-7 September 2021

* What should be the format of IRMs?

Sessions should be organized encompassing the main issues that are naturally time consuming within the Conference (see below). Upon request, interpretation to the six official languages must be guaranteed.

* What should the IRM Agenda include?

WG-Prep and WG-RTPD should advise the TDAG to identify main issues, such as: Resolutions 1 and 2, Declaration, Resolution Streamlining, New Study Groups/Questions structure, and consolidation of Regional Priorities. Discussions could also include any expected changes to Resolution 31 to facilitate changes to the WTDC program.

SESSION 1: Resolutions streamlining

SESSION 2: Study Group Questions, structure and working methods

SESSION 3: Regional Priorities

SESSION 4: Declaration

SESSION 5: Stakeholders and High Level Segment engagement

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

Regional focal points and TDAG ad hoc chairs can coordinate the session presentations. IRMs should be open for all administrations and ITU-D Sector members who wish to attend them in person or virtually.

* How will chairmanship of IRMs be decided?

1 General Chairperson and 2 Vice-Chairpersons for each IRM and 1 Chairperson per Agenda Session. To foster inclusivity across the regions, consideration for these positions should include the WTDC host country and Chairs of the TDAG WG’s, RTOs focal points and TDAG Vice-Chairs, taking into account regional and gender balance.

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

As discussed in the Web Dialogues, the regional preparatory process should focus on defining Regional Priorities/Initiatives, revising or drafting time demanding Resolutions, addressing Study Groups and Study Questions related matters and developing guidelines and text for the Declaration.

On the other hand, specific stakeholders should be identified and invited to be part of the preparatory process to create cohesion and purpose to help in better understanding challenges, expectations and ideas regarding the themes of WTDC-21 and how to advance more sustainable outcomes in promoting adoption and deployment of telecommunications/ICTs, for example, development banks and other financial institutions and foundations. Being inclusive of a broader set of members and stakeholders in the preparatory process could also help generate more interest in the WTDC-21 itself. For the Americas RPM CITEL may invite: Interamerican Development Bank (IDB), the Development Bank of Latin America (CAF), other financial institutions.

Regional Thematic Seminars, in accordance with the Thematic Priorities of the BDT could be organized to support the preparatory process as a whole. Such workshops, and the RPMs generally, should leverage Study Group deliverables to support discussions and help advance ideas on new study question topics or to improve deliverables in the next cycle. Each region should identify one or two thematic tracks to deepen its preparatory process. Regional Development Forums (RDF) could be used as an environment to this end as well.

The Americas Regional Preparatory Meeting will be held in the first quarter of 2021. In this sense, our region should identify one or two issues to be addressed in a Thematic Seminar, such as: ICTs for critical/emergency situations, consumer trends, regional infrastructure and broadband expansion, digital transformation or others to be determined.

**Promoting Wider Participation in WTDC**

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

As agreed during the Web Dialogues, WTDC needs to attract new and more diverse participants from the private sector and potential donors. In this sense, we propose that institutions like the World Bank, Regional Development Banks, civil society organizations, representatives from marginalized communities, UN Women, ACNUR, UNICEF and others may be involved in the preparatory process, as appropriate, and assuming specific roles during the Conference.

* How should WTDC-21 be promoted?

Mainly by BDT, Regional Telecommunications Organizations and by Membership in general, addressing specific invitations to partners as those mentioned above. Participation could also be increased via a strong, clear theme and solutions-based agenda to help enhance the value proposition for stakeholders. WTDC-21 further can attract greater attention through the incorporation of some interactive aspects of the program – for example a hackathon could be organized with the private sector as part of the Youth Forum, or through tech demos. Virtual town halls, online forums and greater social media engagement could also be used to engage with constituent groups and raise awareness for the Conference.

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

Regional Regulators Associations Meetings, UN System meetings, Mobile World Congress, Satellite Annual Meeting, Global, Regional and National Internet Governance Forums, NAB Show, etc.

**During the Conference**

Consideration should be given to merging the high-level segment and the side events into thematic events, a “Development Track”.

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

The High-Level Segment and high-level Policy Statements could make way for a Development Track that would incorporate senior level panels, roundtables and thematic discussions of development topics related to the implementation of the Action Plan and establishment of the new Action Plan. The thematic or development track should be separate from the administrative aspects of the Conference, yet also incorporated into the work of the WTDC-21, in that it would be designed to help identify challenges and priorities of the membership, and provide roadmaps towards solutions and partnerships. Ideally these dialogues could lead to tangible actions and innovative approaches around designated themes for BDT’s future work.

This “Development track” could have a duration of 2-3 days and be integrated into the Conference, being held within the first days of WTDC-21.

It would thus be beneficial to identify a common topic or theme under which the activities planned for the High Level Segment (HLS) and Parallel Events (PE), if any, are included.

This does not mean that parallel events cannot be developed on other topics, but it does mean that a “thematic backbone” for the parallel events should be determined based on a convening or overarching theme. Such themes also should be connected to the BDT’s thematic priorities and the regional priorities identified by members.

In this sense, it may be useful if the high level speakers from Member States and other stakeholders be engaged in helping to refine thematic panels, Workshops or even in any parallel event (if agreed) to reflect their own expertise and experiences. Taking into account the historical number of speakers, it is very much likely that some of the thematic sessions would be dedicated exclusively to HLS speakers. What should be prioritized is that the HLS does not overlap with the administrative component of the Conference**.** Thematic events should be oriented towards advancing the work of the Conference. The development track also should aim to conclude after 2-3 days to maximize senior level participation and attendance.

Members also could consider options such as policy statements being recorded and presented on screens in the Conference venue, as well as on the WTDC online portal, and written statements being made available on the WTDC website or other methods to be determined.

For organizational purposes, the deadline to register representatives to the HLS must be determined well in advance and enforced. This will allow the BDT to sort out the space in which each Member will speak (with the possibility of new arrangements, as appropriate). Another suggestion is to give Member States and other Stakeholders the opportunity to choose in which session they will participate, with due consideration to regional and gender balance in each session.

It is also possible to think about a Round Table format where senior officials from Member States share a panel with representatives or high-level officials from other stakeholders, especially donor institutions. It would be expected that from the different deliberations, proposals for development projects would be identified, taking into account the regional priorities, in which the role of each stakeholder is determined, as well as the funding source and a future work plan.

* 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 theme should focus on promoting universal, secure, affordable connectivity and connecting the unconnected, with due consideration to the role of telecommunications/ICT connectivity in advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and addressing the uptake of ICTs/digital inclusion, including the particular needs of developing countries and vulnerable sectors (indigenous populations, women, the elderly, etc). In light of COVID-19, the Conference could focus on related experiences, challenges and opportunities and address its impact on advancing telecommunications/ICT connectivity. Stemming from this overarching theme, panels could elaborate upon certain areas such as rural infrastructure development, collaborative policymaking, digital inclusion, barriers to adoption and deployment of telecommunications/ICTs, or an exchange among donor agencies regarding ways to better attract funding and investment.

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

It would be important to identify a list of special guests, including a short list of "top or star guests." If the focus is on action-oriented dialogues, experts with operational/execution experience should be considered.

These guests could lead specific sessions within the Conference agenda, on topics such as financing of ICT development projects, operation of development agencies and banks and methodology to access their credit lines, etc.

For greater success, a strong promotional campaign of WTDC-21 must be developed and implemented, highlighting its new imprint**.**

**Conclusion**

In summary, the Proposals to advance the discussion on how to organize the logistics and thematic structures of WTDC-21 are:

* Realization of up to 3 IRMs before the Conference, being held in March, May and/or September;
* WG-Prep and WG-RDPT can advise the TDAG to formulate the Agenda for IRMs, that should include: SESSION 1: RESOLUTIONS STREAMLINING; SESSION 2: STUDY GROUPSQUESTIONS, STRUCTURE and WORKING METHODS; SESSION 3: REGIONAL PRIORITIES; SESSION 4: DECLARATION; SESSION 5: STAKEHOLDERS and HIGH LEVEL SEGMENT ENGAGEMENT
* Regional preparatory process to discuss Regional Priorities/Initiatives, revise or draft Resolutions, Study Groups/Questions related matters and guidelines for the Declaration;
* Realization of Thematic Seminars/Workshops both in the framework of RPMs/RDF and the WTDC;
* High-Level Segment with tailor-made events for senior level officials and stakeholders,;
* Recorded presentations of policy statements or other approaches could be considered.
* Engagement of High Level Authorities from Member States, Sector Members, Academia and other "external Stakeholders" (Non-Governmental Organizations, Financial Institutions and development banks, etc) to design development projects;
* Importance of involving and listening to developing countries and vulnerable populations;
* Issues in line with the SDGs, also taking into account the experience of COVID-19;
* Connectivity as a goal, especially considering the needs of vulnerable sectors (indigenous populations, women, the elderly, people with disabilities etc.);
* Accessibility of content and devices for people with disabilities and people with special needs, also considering multilingualism.

If adopted, these Proposals could increase the probability that the WTDC-21 would be an action-oriented environment with interactive dialogues between stakeholders aimed at developing a shared understanding of existing barriers and advancing effective, sustainable and innovative solutions for the expansion of connectivity throughout the world, particularly in developing countries.

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