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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**

The TDAG Working Group on WTDC Preparations (TDAG-WG-Prep) held its fourth meeting on 20 October and 4 November 2020, attended by **102 participants from 45 Member States and 9 Sector Members**. This meeting considered four contributions: a joint contribution from Australia and Samoa; a multi-country contribution from the United Kingdom, the Czech Republic and Lithuania; a contribution from AT&T; and a contribution from the Inter-American Telecommunication Commission (CITEL), bringing to 12, the total number of member contributions submitted to TDAG-WG-Prep.

All proposals from these 12 contributions were compiled and consolidated in a single document that served as a basis for the discussion at this meeting, which put forward a set of recommendations on the preparatory process and on conference arrangements, including content, thematic tracks, themes and stakeholders; and finalized its report to the TDAG meeting of 23 November 2020. All recommendations are featured at the end of the present report.

1. **Introduction**

Addressing participants on 20 October 2020, the Director of the ITU Telecommunication Development Bureau (BDT), Ms Doreen Bogdan-Martin, said it was heartening to see the unrelenting efforts of members to complete their work ahead of the TDAG meeting. The Director underlined that the work TDAG-WG-Prep was doing was crucial in ensuring that the World Telecommunication Development Conference (WTDC-21), scheduled to take place in Addis Ababa (Ethiopia) from 8 to 19 November in 2021, becomes a truly impactful, landmark ICT development conference.

The COVID‑19 pandemic has made starkly clear that people without fast, affordable connectivity are at a very significant disadvantage compared to those who are well-connected. “COVID‑19 has changed many things: the way we work, the way we coordinate, engage with our stakeholders and deliver assistance. It has also made us reflect on our work and has injected new urgency into **bringing safe, affordable and meaningful connectivity to the 3.6 billion people that are not connected**”, the Director stated. She announced that on 9 November 2020, exactly a year ahead of WTDC-21, ITU would launch the *Road to Addis,* a series of events to be organized to build momentum towards WTDC-21.

The **strategy to engage youth** in ITU activities is also gaining traction, the Director told participants, adding that: “We are working with young people as we are with members and other stakeholders to see how best we can collectively have an equally impactful Youth Summit, alongside WTDC‑21.”

The Chairman of the TDAG Working Group on WTDC Preparations, Mr Santiago Reyes-Borda (Canada), recalling a webinar held on 19 October 2020 to launch the child online protection guidelines in the Americas, commented that the need to **protect all children and provide them with affordable, reliable and safe connectivity** was yet another way to make WTDC-21 a landmark ITU conference.

1. **Liaison statement on who should establish the ITU‑D component of the overall ITU strategic plan**

Participants noted with appreciation the liaison statement from the TDAG Working Group on Strategic and Operational Plans (TDAG-WG-SOP), in which support is expressed for a multi-country proposal from Mexico, Canada and the United States to assign the task of establishing the ITU-D component of the overall ITU strategic plan to TDAG, taking away that role from WTDC. For this to happen, it would be necessary to revise provision 1.8.2 of Resolution 1 (Rev. Buenos Aires, 2017) and the pertinent provisions of Resolution 24 (Rev. Dubai, 2014) of WTDC. ITU-D membership would need to agree beforehand at the interregional coordination meetings to not deal with the strategic plan at WTDC-21.

Up until 2017, WTDC used to take place in the same year as the Plenipotentiary Conference, with just a few months apart. WTDC had thus been given the responsibility under 1.8.2 of Resolution 1 of WTDC to establish the ITU‑D contribution to the draft ITU strategic plan. Since 2017, WTDC takes place the year before the Plenipotentiary Conference. The proposed change would allow more time to prepare the ITU-D component of the overall ITU strategic plan; improve linkages with the action plan; bring the ITU-D strategic planning process in line with the other two Sectors of the Union: Radiocommunication and Standardization; and free up time for WTDC to focus on other priorities.

1. **Highlights from the contributions**

Australia and Samoa in their joint contribution expressed strong support for the direction taken in TDAG-WG-Prep towards a successful WTDC-21 and for the proposals from the multi-country contribution from Argentina, Brazil, Canada and the United States submitted to the third meeting of TDAG-WG-Prep.

In terms of theme(s), Australia and Samoa proposed: “**The digital economy as a pathway to prosperity” and “Fighting COVID together: an inclusive and inter-connected future for all”**, adding that the unprecedented challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic emphasizes the need for countries to unite to face this challenge and places ITU-D at the centre of a long-term solution, where no vulnerable or underserved groups or regions are left behind.

The multi-country contribution from the United Kingdom the Czech Republic and Lithuania proposed **"Building Back Better: Bridging the Digital Divide"** as the overall theme for WTDC-21, reaffirming the earlier proposal put forward by the United Kingdom and Lithuania to the third meeting of TDAG-WG-Prep.

Moving on to **rethinking the High-Level Segment,** the United Kingdom, the Czech Republic and Lithuania in their contribution expressed the view that while it is important to ensure there is room for high-level speakers to participate in WTDC, a change of format from a series of set-piece speeches, one after another, is needed. These countries proposed that High-Level Segment speakers should, thus, be engaged in conversations with one another through panels, or roundtable discussions, around key themes and subjects related to digital divides, with the objective of increasing the political will and commitment to bridging these divides.

Australia and Samoa added their voice to earlier proposals onthe High-Level Segment, as did AT&T. Noting the time constraints experienced during WTDC-17, the two countries expressed support for the suggestion in the BDT concept note to the third meeting of TDAG-WG-Prep to **repurpose the High-Level Segment of the conference and side-events into a “Partnership Segment”.** This, they stated, would provide opportunities for interaction between stakeholders in ITU-D to discuss relevant thematic issues and how to generate development projects that can effectively target particular areas of need. AT&T proposed that a refresh of the High-Level Segment and policy statements into a “Development Track”, featuring roundtables and panels, would enable senior-level representatives from Member States and other stakeholder groups to engage in interactive discussions around the most pressing issues related to telecommunications/ICTs and development and share lessons learned and best practices.

AT&T expressed support for the proposed **Youth Summit,** recognizing that it couldplay an important role in catalysing the interest of young people in telecommunications/ICTs. The suggested hackathon proposed in the multi-country contribution from Argentina, Brazil, Canada and the United States and in the contribution from CITEL, would provide a “hands-on” opportunity for youth to gain digital skills and help address a global or local development challenge. **If it is agreed to hold a hackathon, AT&T said it looked forward to helping support that effort.**

The Inter-American Telecommunication Commission (CITEL) contribution put forward the same proposals as the multi-country contribution from Argentina, Brazil, Canada and the United States submitted to the third meeting of TDAG-WG-Prep. Like these countries, CITEL stressed that **WTDC-21 should 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 WTDC-21 should be designed and developed in ways that address critical telecommunication/ICT development issues identified by the regions.

1. **The discussion**
   1. **The theme**

The theme is the first impression people will have of an event. Participants agreed that the theme for WTDC-21 must be eye-catching and easy to remember. It must also be fresh, inclusive and appealing and aligned with the purpose and objectives of the conference. It must be short so that it translates easily into the five other official languages of the Union and provides focus for the entire conference.

Participants acknowledged that many of the discussions, especially around COVID-19, have been about connecting the unconnected and using WTDC as an opportunity to truly close digital divides. They also noted that the Director has made a compelling argument over many meetings about the importance of connecting the unconnected, and so it would be desirable to retain this phraseology in the theme. On the other hand, the phrase “building back better” implies that everyone was connected already. It also gives the impression of rebuilding something that was not built properly. So this phraseology was dropped in the end.

Participants noted that discussions on themes are also ongoing in ITU-D Study Groups 1 and 2 to provide input to the TDAG Working Group on WTDC Resolutions, Declaration and Thematic Priorities (TDAG-WG-RDTP). These study groups have suggested **Digital transformation for SDGs”** or **“digital transformation for development”** as an initial proposal for the theme in the WTDC Declaration, underlining that this theme could foster a digital economy and provide digital information products and services to all people in emerging global situations such as the COVID-19 pandemic. However, decisions on these preliminary proposals would only be made during the final meetings of the 2018-2021 study period. ITU-D Study Group 2 is scheduled to meet from 15 to 19 March 2021 and ITU-D Study Group 1, from 22 to 26 March 2021. TDAG-WG-RDTP would then have definitive proposals for the TDAG meeting scheduled for May 2021.

Some participants commented that a theme of digital transformation for development was too general and would not really grab people’s attention because it does not convey a clear sense of the conference purpose. It was stressed that a theme must resonate well with the outside world. For example, someone from a development agency or a development bank whose work is related to digital divides would immediately see the relevance of a theme on bridging digital divides to his or her work. So the theme should be reasonably specific and its focus should be purely development in order not to mislead the industry and other stakeholders.

**“Connecting the unconnected to achieve sustainable development”,** was in the end, seen as the theme, with the caveat that TDAG may wish to revisit it in the light of developments in TDAG-WG-RDTP. Meanwhile, TDAG-WG-Prep would send a liaison statement to TDAG-WG-RDTP in order to coordinate the themes, because even if TDAG-WG-Prep has the mandate to determine the theme(s) of the conference, harmonization between the two groups is as important as it is necessary.

One Member State proposed “ICT resilience for a better future” as a possible option for consideration, underlining that while connecting the unconnected is one of the priority themes, it was an old (yet new) objective. A theme for WTDC-21 should reflect the current challenges such as the fight against the Coronavirus and the role of ICTs in this fight. WTDC-21 should as much as possible mirror the global challenges of our times to attract all stakeholders, and the theme should also show innovation.

* 1. **Interregional coordination meetings (IRMs)**

All agree that it is desirable to introduce interregional coordination meetings (IRMs) to improve the preparatory process to deliver real results and foster consensus and agreement on certain issues ahead of WTDC, but that these meetings must absolutely have a clearly defined format and clear agendas. TDAG-WG-Prep agreed on recommendations on these two points. However, a question mark still hangs over whetherattendance in IRMs should be limited, and if so, how many representatives should attend from each region, as views remain divided on this point.

Most participants expressed the view that IRMs should be open to all interested ITU‑D members because this would promote transparency, inclusiveness and a full exchange of views, sending a clear signal of an open WTDC.

Others expressed a similar view, but suggested that in practical terms, if an IRM attracts a big number of participants (500, for example), there should be a mechanism to ensure an effective and efficient meeting and that one way would be to limit the number of speakers. An example was given of the virtual consultation of councillors, where the number of speakers that can take the floor is limited to three per delegation.

Another view was that IRMs should be the place where the opinions of each regional telecommunication organization (RTO) are heard. Each RTO represents what it has developed, the issues on which it has agreed and the challenges. In this sense, it was argued that only representatives of RTOs should take the floor in IRMs to reflect the views of the organizations that nominated them. Proponents of this proposal highlight that if the idea is to have a broader meeting, with open discussion, then the format should be that of a global development forum and not an IRM.

As a way forward, RTOs are encouraged to consult among themselves and propose to TDAG their views on the question of attendance in IRMs. A clear decision is needed on this question.

1. **Recommendations on the preparatory process for WTDC**

Kindly refer to the report the group submitted to TDAG-20/3: document [TDAG-20/3/5](https://www.itu.int/md/D18-TDAG27-C-0005/en).

1. **Recommendations on conference arrangements, including content, thematic tracks, themes and stakeholders**

Kindly refer to the report the group submitted to TDAG-20/3: document [TDAG-20/3/5](https://www.itu.int/md/D18-TDAG27-C-0005/en).

1. **Conclusion**

TDAG-WG-Prep will submit its final report, along with these recommendations to the TDAG meeting of 23 November 2020 for consideration and endorsement. The Chairman thanked all participants for their active participation in the meetings, their spirit of consensus and for a job well-done. He also thanked the secretariat for all the support and assistance provided throughout the meetings.

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