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| **Telecommunication Development Advisory Group (TDAG)**  **27th Meeting, Virtual, 23 November 2020** | C:\Users\comas\AppData\Local\Temp\Rar$DRa0.735\jpg\ITU official logo_blue_RGB.jpg |
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| Chairman, Telecommunication Development Advisory Group (TDAG) | |
| Report of the 27th meeting of the  Telecommunication Development Advisory Group | |
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**Summary**

The 27th meeting of the Telecommunication Development Advisory Group (TDAG) took place on 23 November 2020, under the chairmanship of Ms Roxanne McElvane Webber. The meeting brought together 169 participants from 50 Member States and 15 ITU-D Sector Members. The purpose of the meeting was to consider reports prepared by the three TDAG Working Groups created in June 2020 to evolve the impact of, and preparation for, the upcoming ITU World Telecommunication Development Conference (WTDC): the Working Group on WTDC Preparations (TDAG-WG-Prep); the Working Group on the Strategic and Operational Plan (TDAG-WG-SOP); and the Working Group on Resolutions, Declaration and Thematic Priorities (TDAG-WG-RDTP). Together the outputs of these groups are helping to shape the ITU Development Sector (ITU-D) agenda for global telecommunications development 2022-2025, and herald further improvements towards a WTDC and ITU-D that will have greater impact in the world.

TDAG considered the final report and recommendations submitted by the TDAG-WG-Prep, which served as the harbinger for an evolved WTDC-21 over the preceding nine months. The report covered themes, preparatory process and conference arrangements, including content, thematic tracks, and stakeholders. TDAG also considered interim reports from the TDAG-WG-SOP and TDAG-WG-RDTP.

TDAG unanimously endorsed “Connecting the unconnected to achieve Sustainable Development” as the overall theme for the World Telecommunication Development Conference (WTDC-21), scheduled to take place in Addis Ababa Ethiopia from 8 to 19 November 2021. To actualize this theme, as proposed by TDAG-WG-Prep, the TDAG advises the Director to target a balanced cadre of new stakeholders, to include those seeking and those providing solutions, and incorporate them into the WTDC conference agenda, which should now feature high-level panels, roundtables and thematic discussions of development topics, rather than serial policy statements delivered at the outset of the conference. TDAG encourages the Director and her team to actively and widely promote the conference to all stakeholders, and recommends that inter-regional meetings be employed to advance the preparatory work of the conference.

Also affecting the WTDC agenda is the recommendation that emerged from TDAG-WG-SOP, which TDAG endorsed, that TDAG would review, progress and endorse the ITU-D component of the ITU Strategic Plan along its course to Council and the Plenipotentiary Conference, rather than undertaking this activity at WTDC-21. TDAG also recognized the well-advanced work performed by the TDAG-WG-RDTP, whose activities on resolutions, themes, study questions and the declaration will now come to the fore as membership commences national preparations for WTDC. TDAG underscored the importance of participating in the group’s activities, which will next meet on 21 January 2021.

TDAG invites the Director of the BDT to consider and act on the advice and recommendations referenced in this report, as ITU-D resolutely embarks on its preparations for WTDC-21.

This following summarizes the discussions and provides further details on these meeting outcomes.

1. **Meeting Introduction and highlights**
   1. **The Road to Addis**

Ms Doreen Bogdan-Martin, Director ofthe ITU Telecommunication Development Bureau(BDT), welcomed and thanked participants for staying actively engaged in all three TDAG working groups to ensure that WTDC-21 is a development‑focused, solutions‑oriented conference that addresses the challenges countries are facing in their digital transformation journeys and in the struggle to connect the 3.6 billion people that are offline.

The Director informed participants that the *Road to Addis* began on 9 November 2020, with the signing of the host country agreement between ITU and Ethiopia. On that occasion, the conference logo was unveiled. A new youth initiative called “[**Generation Connect: our future is just a click away**](https://www.itu.int/generationconnect)" was also launched to increase youth engagement in preparation for a global youth summit, which is planned to take place on 6-7 November 2021. The Director encouraged all ITU-D members to mobilize young people to take active roles in the WTDC preparatory process and in the conference itself. The *Road to Addis* is a series of events organized to build momentum towards WTDC-21.

Referring to the G20 Leaders Summit, which took place on 21-22 November 2020 just before this TDAG meeting, the Director stressed how “Our ICT community has demonstrated during this pandemic that we are an agile and adaptive community. I am confident that we can build back better or build forward better together with the guiding principle that leaving no one behind means leaving no one offline. The 3.6 billion people are counting on us.”

* 1. **A brief highlight from WTDC-21 host country Ethiopia**

TDAG noted with appreciation that the Government of Ethiopia had already assigned the chairmanship of WTDC-21 to His Excellency Dr Ahmedin Mohammed, State Minister at the Ministry of Innovation and Technology of Ethiopia. The Government has established three major teams: a National Committee comprised of various government and non‑governmental organizations, including the private sector, a Steering Committee, and a Subcommittee, also composed of government, private sector and relevant institutions to ensure that preparations for WTDC-21 are conducted at a very high‑level. Bringing this news, the delegate from Ethiopia underlined the country’s commitment to ensure the success of WTDC-21.

* 1. **Towards a two-track conference**

The Chairman of TDAG, Ms Roxanne McElvane Webber (**United States**), on behalf of the membership and all participants, thanked BDT for the extraordinary work it is doing. “With all the good work going on, it is certainly no surprise for those of us that are fortunate enough to work in this cutting‑edge industry that the activities we are undertaking are recognized by the G20 as central to the entire world,” the Chairman stated. She thanked Ethiopia for all the efforts being made to host WTDC-21. “We have every confidence it will be a wonderful event and we thank you for your investment to host all of us just under a year from now.”

The Chairman of TDAG then outlined the journey undertaken by members to evolve WTDC into an impactful, solution-based, development-oriented, exciting, and innovative conference, to be achieved through two tracks.

One is the **Administrative Track**, where members will communicate their ideas, views, challenges, needs, and successes through the contributions they make to the conference; in the resolutions which will instruct the BDT on their priorities and desired implementing actions and activities; in the involvement of new stakeholders; and in focusing on youth, vulnerable and marginalized communities, developing countries and least developed countries in particular.

The other is the **Development Track**, where activities that were formerly on the margins of WTDC are mainstreamed into the conference agenda so that development-oriented activities do not occur on the sidelines, but are at the heart of the conference. This, the Chairman of TDAG explained, is entirely in line with the ITU Constitution and the Convention.

Through these two tracks, members have the opportunity to produce a cohesive, unified output from WTDC that will indeed provide solutions and the impact that all can be proud of.

The Chairman thanked members of the TDAG Bureau for their dedication over these past eight months and 17 meetings, and introduced them to participants. The TDAG Bureau is made up of the chairmen and vice-chairmen of ITU-D Study Groups 1 and 2, and two vice-chairmen from each of the six ITU-D regions.

* **Africa**: Mr Christopher Kemei (Kenya), Mr Abdulkarim Oloyede (Nigeria),
* **Americas:** Mr Nicolás Karavaski (Argentina) and the newly appointed Mr Neil Checo Valera(Dominican Republic), as shown below.
* **Arab States:** Mr Al-ansari Almashakbeh (Jordan), Mr Tariq Alamri (Saudi Arabia)
* **Asia and the Pacific:** Mr Kishore Babu Yerraballa (India), Mr Nquyen Quyen (Viet Nam)
* **Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS):** Mr Arseny Plossky (Russian Federation), Ms Aichurok Maralbek Kyzy (Kyrgyz Republic)
* **Europe:** Mr Wim Rullens (Netherlands) and Ms Blanca González (Spain)
* Chairman of Study Group 1: Ms Regina Fleur Assoumou Bessou (Cote d’Ivoire)
* Chairman of Study Group 2: Dr Ahmad Reza Sharafat (Islamic Republic of Iran).

1. **Appointment of a new TDAG vice-chairman to a vacant position**

TDAG expressed gratitude to outgoing TDAG Vice-Chairman from the Americas region, Ms Amparo Arango (Dominican Republic) and appointed by acclamation (virtual) **Mr Neil Checo Valera** as a TDAG Vice‑Chairman.

1. **Reports from the TDAG working groups**
   1. **TDAG endorses report and recommendations on WTDC preparations**

Mr Santiago Reyes‑Borda (**Canada**), Chairman of the TDAG-WG-Prep, presented the group’s final report and recommendations, which may be found in document [TDAG-20/3/5](https://www.itu.int/md/D18-TDAG27-C-0005/en). Introducing the report, Mr Reyes‑Borda underlined that throughout its meetings, the group had stressed that WTDC should be an action-oriented conference, 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 meaningful connectivity for everyone, everywhere.

Mr Reyes‑Borda highlighted the overall consensus on the recommendations reached by the working group contained in the report, and recounted two issues which were not agreed that would need to be resolved by TDAG in its review of the group’s overall report. One issue was determining the conference theme; the other was whether attendance at inter-regional preparatory meetings (IRMs) should be limited, and if so, how. Mr Reyes‑Borda reported that TDAG-WG-Prep had almost reached consensus on “Connecting the unconnected to achieve Sustainable Development”. However, there was an alternative proposal from a Member State: “ICT resilience for a better future.”

* + 1. **The discussion**

TDAG reviewed and endorsed the matters in the Working Group’s report on which consensus had been reached, and discussed and reached consensus on specific questions as noted below.

**Theme for WTDC-21: Connecting the unconnected to achieve Sustainable Development**

TDAG unanimously endorsed “Connecting the unconnected to achieve Sustainable Development” as the overall theme for WTDC-21**.** Some of the compelling arguments for this theme were that the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are at the very heart of the international development agenda and are an urgent call for action by all countries and by all stakeholders. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the critical importance of connectivity. With 3.6 billion people still unconnected, there is a long way to go to accomplish this monumental task.

Another view was that connecting the unconnected was an old slogan and that for the sake of future generations a fresh theme was needed, for example: “ICT resilience for a better future”. “Digital transformation for SDGs” or “Digital transformation for development” were also suggested. TDAG noted that the latter two had been proposed by ITU-D study groups to the TDAG-WG-RDTP as initial proposals for the theme in the WTDC Declaration. These proposals are currently under discussion in TDAG-WG-RDTP, which will conclude its work in April 2021.

In order to accommodate the views expressed on a conference theme, TDAG agreed that the other candidate proposals could be considered in TDAG-WG-RDTP within the scope of ITU-D thematic priorities for the next four-year cycle or as possible concepts expressed, as appropriate, within the Declaration.

**Development Track**

Endorsing the recommendations of the group for the Development Track, TDAG agreed that thematic tracks during the conference should reflect the ITU‑D thematic priorities for the 2018-2021 period, and could include other ideas and priorities that may come from the regions or from TDAG-WG-RDTP, which is currently discussing ITU‑D thematic priorities for the next cycle. As a practical matter, the BDT will stay apprised of those ongoing discussions, the outcomes of which will be submitted to TDAG for approval in May 2021.

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

TDAG recognized that this would be the first time ITU-D uses IRMs in its preparatory process for WTDC. TDAG noted with appreciation the document presented by the United States of America, highlighting how past experiences in the other ITU Sectors demonstrate that an IRM open to all members is a valuable part of the preparatory process.

TDAG discussed the issue of participation in Inter-Regional Preparatory Meetings and reached the consensus that:IRMs will be open to all ITU-D membership, and each regional telecommunication organization (RTO) will decide who speaks on behalf of their region. Speakers can, for example, include government representatives, regulators, policy- makers, civil society, academia, Internet technical community, youth, gender equality organizations, and others.

TDAG expressed deep gratitude to all the chairmen of its working groups, and in particular Mr Reyes-Borda for this final report, which reflects his tireless efforts, immense work done in such a short period of time, and for his diplomacy and persistence.

* 1. **Working Group on Strategic and Operational Plan**

TDAG noted with appreciation the progress report from the TDAG-WG-SOP, which is chaired by Ms Blanca González (**Spain**) with assistance from Mr Christopher Kemei (**Kenya**) and Mr Wim Rullens (**Netherlands**). The report, which can be found in document [TDAG-20/3/3](https://www.itu.int/md/D18-TDAG27-C-0003/en)was presented by the group’s Chairman, Ms González. TDAG-WG-SOP has held two meetings and received one multi-country contribution from Mexico, Canada and the United States of America. Ms González reported that her group had approved the proposal from these countries to assign the task of establishing the ITU-D component of the overall ITU strategic plan to TDAG, thus removing that role from the WTDC. However, for this to happen, she noted, it would be necessary to revise Resolution 1 (Rev. Buenos Aires, 2017) and Resolution 24 (Rev. Dubai, 2014) of WTDC.

TDAG agreed with these proposed changes, including revising these resolutions, recognizing that this course of action would allow more time to prepare the ITU-D component of the overall ITU strategic plan; pave the way for a one-ITU approach in the production of the strategic plan of the entire Union through the Council Working Group; and improve linkages with the action plan from WTDC. TDAG-WG-SOP had already sent liaison statements to the other two TDAG working groups and they had welcomed the multi-country proposal.

Notably, and available as an information document from the BDT, TDAG participants are urged to review and follow the proposed [ITU Strategic Plan Workflow](https://www.itu.int/md/D18-TDAG27-INF-0005/en), which clarifies the timelines for member proposals on the ITU-D component of the ITU strategic plan, and the steps and key deadlines for contributions.

* 1. **Working Group on WTDC Resolutions Declaration and Thematic Priorities**

TDAG noted with appreciation the progress report from the TDAG-WG-RDTP, presented by its Chairman, Dr Ahmad Sharafat, (**Islamic Republic of Iran).** The report may be found in document [TDAG-20/34(Rev.1)](https://www.itu.int/md/D18-TDAG27-C-0004/en)and covers the Group’s activities to date, which already includes views for information and consideration on study group questions, resolutions, themes and the Declaration expressed by participants of the ITU-D Study Groups, as well as detailed mapping of resolutions replete with historical information and a clustering framework. As ITU membership moves to initiate national preparations for WTDC, the Chairman of TDAG encouraged participants to read this progress report, and take advantage of the significant amount of useful information provided that will help all delegations prepare for WTDC-21. In this regard, Dr Sharafat highlighted the upcoming schedule for participation in TDAG-WG-RDTP, which plans to hold three meetings to conclude its work: 21 January, 4 March and 9 April 2021. TDAG-WG-RDTP will submit its final report and proposals to the TDAG meeting scheduled for May 2021.

The Chairman of TDAG-WG-Prep added that he would send to TDAG-WG-RDTP a liaison statement containing the report and recommendations from his group to help facilitate consistency between the declaration and the theme of the conference.

1. **Any other business**
   1. **Generation Connect Global Youth Summit**

The BDT secretariat presented the Generation Connect Global Youth Summit which will be held on 6-7 November 2021, ahead of WTDC-21, in the African Union headquarters, in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

As stated in the concept note, young people comprise the largest single population group in the world today, with around 1.8 billion globally, close to 90 per cent of whom live in developing countries. A consultation process with young people will begin in early 2021, in which youth will brainstorm and guide BDT in the design, content, and format of the Generation Connect Global Youth Summit.

* 1. **Tools to assist membership to prepare proposals for WTDC-21**

The BDT secretariat announced that the Conference Proposal Interface (CPI) tool is being updated to include ITU-D baseline texts to assist members in preparing their proposals to WTDC-21. A limited version of CPI will be available beginning on 30 November 2020 and will allow members to download duly formatted Word files containing the existing texts (resolutions, recommendations and study group Questions) in the six official languages of the Union. Submission of proposals using this tool will not be possible at this stage. The full version of CPI is expected to be available on 30 June 2021.

1. **Remembering Abdoulaye Dembele**

At the beginning of the meeting, the Director of BDT called on participants to share a moment of silence and to pay tribute to an important member of the ITU family, who had just passed away, Mr Abdoulaye Dembele. To many participants, Abdoulaye Dembele, was a friend, a beloved and an excellent colleague, a renowned expert, and the Vice‑Rapporteur for Question 7/1 on access to telecommunication/ICT services by persons with disabilities and other persons with specific needs. He was also a distinguished delegate from Mali, who contributed immensely and supported the work of ITU on persons with disabilities for many years.

The Chairman of TDAG and all delegations who spoke, joined the Director in expressing their deep condolences to the family and friends of Abdoulaye Dembele and to the delegation of Mali. With a glance that missed nothing and a mind that retained everything, he was a tireless advocate for persons with disabilities and persons with specific needs. It is a great loss for both ITU-D Study Groups 1 and 2 because he followed all Questions with great energy. His memory will live on through his outstanding work and accomplishments.

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