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| Contribution submitted by the  United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland | |
| International internet-related public policy issues on harnessing new and emerging telecommunications/ICTs for sustainable development | |

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| **Summary**  New and emerging telecommunications/ICTs offer great opportunities to promote global development. However, there are significant barriers to realising the full potential of new and emerging telecommunications/ICTs for sustainable development. To overcome these barriers we need to 1) address the fundamental importance of affordable connectivity, 2) tackle sustainable development issues holistically and 3) harness local demand-driven applications of new and emerging telecommunications/ICTs. |

1. The United Kingdom government welcomes the opportunity to comment on international internet-related public policy issues on harnessing new and emerging telecommunications/ICTs for sustainable development. We are pleased to make this contribution to both the open meeting with stakeholders and to the closed, government-only meeting. We look forward to the discussions in both meetings.
2. Telecommunications/ICTs offer great opportunities to promote global development, transform economies, stimulate growth and change lives. In a fast-changing world, new and emerging telecommunications/ICTs afford us the opportunity to do more, as individuals and in collaboration with others. Telecommunications/ICTs give us the power to include, the power to reach, to inspire, to communicate, to educate and to change. However, significant barriers stand in the way of realising the full potential of new and emerging telecommunications/ICTs for sustainable development.
3. The UK is working with a range of development partners around the world to support sustainable development through new and emerging telecommunication/ICTs, as set out in the Digital Strategy 2018-2020 of our Department for International Development. Our experience working in these partnerships has identified three critical elements to harnessing new and emerging telecommunications/ICTs for sustainable development.
4. First, to realise the full potential of new and emerging telecommunications/ICTs for sustainable development, we must address the fundamental importance of affordable connectivity. Over four billion people around the world lack access to the Internet, and risk being left behind in a digital world. Sixty per cent of people in developing countries do not have access to the Internet, rising to 85% in the least developed countries. The divides in access are also large among demographic segments in those countries, in particular between rural and urban populations (10% and 23%), women and men (12% and 18%), youth and people aged over 45 (20% and 8%). And while Internet use continues to spread, the digital gender gap is actually growing and this is often coupled with a gap in mobile phone ownership. Without a focus on access and accessibility, there is a risk that the growth of new and emerging telecommunications/ICTs could exacerbate existing inequalities by making it harder for chronically excluded groups of people to access services.
5. Secondly, we need to tackle sustainable development issues holistically. Close to one billion people still live without electricity, 2.1 billion people lack access to safely managed water and 2.5 billion people do not have access to basic sanitation services. We cannot fully realise the benefits of new and emerging telecommunications/ICTs until these urgent priorities have been addressed. In addition, it is critical to develop an enabling environment for development, including strong public/private partnerships, measures to promote education and skills, predictable and proportionate regulation and an enabling environment for investment. We should not focus on telecommunications/ICTs in isolation but need to address all these issues holistically.
6. Lastly, we need to harness local applications of new and emerging telecommunications/ICTs. There are many examples of this. For instance, the GSMA Mobile for Development (M4D) Utilities programme has been using connectivity to achieve Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 6 and 7 for water, sanitation and energy for all. The programme has the support of the UK government and the Scaling Off-Grid Energy Grand Challenge for Development (SOGE), a global partnership founded to accelerate the growth of a dynamic, commercial off-grid energy market to provide clean, modern, and affordable energy access to the millions of households and businesses beyond the grid in sub-Saharan Africa.
7. M4D has supported partnerships between mobile operators and local utility service providers to unlock innovative new business models to deliver energy, water and sanitation to underserved communities. The programme has catalysed some of the most promising innovations for improving access to essential life services, including some of the first pay-as-you-go solar home system companies and has directly and indirectly benefited over 30 million people. These kinds of applications are critically important, not only because they are solving real problems for people but also because they drive demand for new and emerging telecommunications/ICTs and so help close the digital innovation divide.