

Statement

By

**H.E. Dr. Perks LIGOYA, Permanent Representative of Malawi to the UN
in NY and Chair of the LDC group**

**ITU's Global event on Emerging Technology for Connectivity:
Accelerating Digital Transformation in LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS**

Monday, 5 July 2021
8AM – 9AM (EST)

**H.E. Vianna Maino, Minister of Telecommunications and information society,
Ecuador,
USG Courtenay Rattray, High Representative for the Least Developed
Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing
States,
ITU Representatives,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Moderator and Panellists,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

First, let me start by congratulating USG Courtenay Rattray for assuming this important role of High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States. You have taken over the role at such a critical time. Given your remarkable experience, I am very confident that you will be a great advocate of the issues concerning the three groups of countries.

I also commend ITU for organizing such an important event. Thank you for dedicating an entire week towards discussing how to accelerate digital transformation in the LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS. This event comes at a time when the LDCs are still grappling with the issue of the digital divide. The event also comes at an opportune time as concrete and implementable solutions raised here could feed into the outcome of fifth UN Conference on LDCs. The Conference will be held in Doha in January next year.

The numbers speak for themselves, as has been mentioned before by other speakers. The proportion of people using the internet in the least developed countries is very low, only about 19 percent. This is far behind the rest of the

world. This has made it extremely challenging for most of the LDCs to cope with COVID-19 as remote working and remote education opportunities are scarce. Even access to e-health is not an option for the majority of the population.

Prior to Covid-19, we were talking about the disruptive nature of emerging technologies. Now, the importance of high-speed internet cannot be questioned. The future is here, and we must find solutions now so that the well-being of people in LDCs can be improved. At a macro-level, harnessing emerging technologies will enable LDCs to be more competitive. As we have often argued, the SDGs will only be globally achieved if the LDCs are also able to meet the SDG targets.

Distinguished Delegates,

Being able to connect digitally with the world is not a luxury but a precondition to attaining sustainable development.

As I mentioned earlier, the LDCs are in the process of coming up with a Programme of Action for the next decade. This period largely coincides with the SDGs. But, we also know that the world has significantly changed since the SDGs were agreed upon. Technology has become more advanced with significant implications on how goods are produced and also, the delivery of services. Emerging threats such as Covid-19 has among others, made us rethink how we live our lives and brought to the fore the urgency of being connected to broadband internet. Therefore, I reiterate the need for an ambitious and actionable Programme of Action for the LDCs.

A key challenge for us in LDCs that I want to highlight is how to ensure those living in rural areas and remote locations also have access to and can use the Internet. Investing in the necessary infrastructure, including subsequently deploying 5G, will require significant support from the private sector and the international community. We are aware that public funding is also key. However, given our countries' competing needs for limited resources, finding innovative ways of funding these important projects would go a long way in increasing the numbers of people that are using the internet.

There is need to enhance official development assistance dedicated to digitisation. I note however, from the Financing for Sustainable Development Report that only 1 per cent of project funding by multilateral development banks targeted the information and communications technology sector between 2012 and 2016.

But, there is a major challenge of affordability, including of entry-level internet-enabled phone. The deployment of emerging technologies 4G/LTE networks and 5G implies that people will need the more expensive smartphones. For many, access to smartphones will be out of reach.

In conclusion, I would like to highlight a few key points:

Digital technologies have great potential to bring economic and social development benefits to LDCs. For that to happen, considerable effort is required to empower and equip Governments and the private sector with the capacity to leverage it.

There is also a need to invest in digital education and skills development to close the digital divide and increase human capacity so that LDCs will be able to reap the benefits of digital transformation.

Once people are able to use the internet, there is so much that digital technology can do. Just to mention a few examples. It can enhance financial inclusion, enable access to online learning, e-health, e-governance, and, boost online trade through expansion of e-commerce in LDCs.

I therefore look forward to more partnerships coming out of this meeting to enable the LDCs accelerate their digital transformation.

I wish you very fruitful deliberations this week.

Thank you!