



Emerging technology for connectivity and its role in the digital transformation of LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS.

By

Mr. Joshua Setipa

Managing Director

UN Technology Bank for Least Developed Countries

Monday, 5 July 2021 (14:00 – 15:00 Geneva time/15:00 – 16:00 Istanbul time).

Moderator: Ms. Kim Mallalieu, Deputy Chair of the Board of the Telecommunications Authority of Trinidad and Tobago

- H.E. Vianna Maino, Minister of de Telecommunications and information society, Ecuador
- Mr. Courtenay Rattray, Under Secretary General, High Representative of UN-OHRLLS
- Maria-Francesca Spatolisano, Assistant Secretary General, Officer in Charge, Office of SG's Envoy on Technology
- H.E. Dr. Perks Clemency Ligoya, Permanent Representative Permanent Mission of Republic of Malawi to the United Nations in New York, United States
- Ms. Doreen Bogdan Martin, Director, Telecommunication Development Bureau, ITU
- Dr. Chaesub Lee, Director, Telecommunications Standardization Bureau, ITU
- Mr. Mario Maniewicz, Director, Radiocommunications Bureau, ITU
- **Dear participants**

Allow me to first express appreciation for inviting the UN Technology Bank for Least Developed Countries to this important event, a demonstration of partnership and collaboration between the ITU and UN Technology Bank for Least Developed Countries.

This important event is taking place in the new era of multiple complexities and crisis of which technology has demonstrated a possible path to achieving the sustainable development goals provided no one is left behind. This topic is critical for the LDCs that were already left behind prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Moderator,

Before getting to the core of the topic on emerging technologies, it is important to also recall that almost half of the world's population, including more than four in five people in the least developed countries, do not have **meaningful access** to the Internet. In addition, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated inequalities caused by the digital divides, connectivity and adequate infrastructure. Through multilaterals it is critical to make meaningful efforts towards providing universal and affordable access to the Internet in all least developed countries, landlocked developing countries (LLDCs) and small island states (SIDS) including through the provision of financial resources, capacity-development for both human resources and institutions, and encourage private sector to facilitate technology transfer.

As noted in the ITU Facts and Figures 2020, *“about a quarter of the population in LDCs and LLDCs, and about 15 percent of the SIDS population do not have access to a mobile-broadband network, coming short of the SDG Target 9c, to significantly increase access to information and communications technology and strive to provide universal and affordable access to the internet in LDCs by 2020.”*

The United Nations Technology Bank for LDCs working in collaboration with UN and non-UN entities continue to make efforts to help bridge digital divides and

expand access supporting initiatives and institutions such as the Connect 2030 Agenda for Global Telecommunications/Information and Communication Technology, Broadband Commission to enable LDCs to achieve Sustainable Development Goals. The Technology Banks has also partnered with Alliance for Affordable Internet towards the reducing cost of internet access while also noting that reliable connectivity and digital cooperation are necessary building blocks for strengthening science, technology and innovation, and also play a key role in bridging the digital divide and making technologies more accessible and inclusive.

As we now know, among the most significantly impacted groups are children in LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS where most of them have not able to continue with their education since March 2020, and we are witnessing at the moment, in some countries the threat of the 3rd wave will extend this disruption to their education even further. Another key disruption is that of the tourism sector in these countries. According to a recent UNCTAD report, the multiplier effect of the loss in GDP from tourism ranges from being onefold to threefold or fourfold depending on the backward linkages in the tourism sector, including the increased unemployment of unskilled labour.

Meaningful access to emerging and existing technologies is critical for the LDCs, LLDCs and SIDs to build back better and attain resilient recovery that not only places them at pre-pandemic level but enables them in particulate the LDCs to develop and strengthen their productive capacities. We should not lose sight of the fact that for most of these countries, even under normal conditions there was already not much to build back better to.

Emerging technology

New technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI), the Internet of things (IoT), big data, blockchain, 5G, 3D printing, robotics, drones, gene editing, nanotechnology etc. require digitalization and reliable connectivity to maximize their multiplier impacts.

To benefit from the different types of emerging technologies, the governments, private sector, academia and other relevant stakeholders must invest in bridging the gap in ICT infrastructure, strengthening human resources and institutions including regulatory capacity and aligning complimentary policies such as STI and industrial, trade and education policies. Emerging technologies such as AI will require development of legal, ethical, data protection and cyber-security laws to name a few. Engagement and participation of LDCs in understating the implications of embracing emerging technologies remains critical.

The upcoming Firth Conference for Least Developed Countries (LDC5) in February 2021 presents an opportunity for multilateralism to assist the LDCs **to leverage the power of science, technology and innovation to fight multidimensional vulnerabilities and to achieve the SDGs**. LDC5 should articulate transformative outcome that will enable LDCs to access, adopt and adapt emerging technologies that will support the furthest behind through the following:

1. Enhance the STI capacity in LDCs including integrating STI into national development plans.

2. Promote science and technology-led innovation ecosystem in the LDCs and align STI with industrial, trade and education policies.
3. Create enabling environment to attract private sector to introduce and embrace emerging technologies in LDCs and promote technology transfer and exchange of knowledge and know-how.
4. Continue pursuing Target 9.c to reduce the cost of access to [meaningful] internet especially for the LDCs.
5. Increase investment in research and development to increase productive capacities in LDCs including incorporating participation of girls and women.
6. Promote collaboration between academies of science in providing scientific advice to governments on policy formulation.

While the Technology Bank is focused on the LDCs, the above list of actions can enable the LLDCs and SIDS as they face similar challenges to leverage the power of emerging technologies.

Moderator

In closing, I also wish to embrace and applaud some of the initiatives that ITU is already involved in such as *Connect2Recover* to reinforce the digital infrastructure and ecosystems; *Last mile Connectivity* to connect the unconnected to the broadband and the joint **GIGA** to connect every school to the internet with UNICEF.

The Technology Bank is ready to support the LDCs not only to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic but to build resilience against future pandemics, embrace emerging technologies while also noting that the majority of the LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS have limited capacities that should be enhanced to maximize the full potential of emerging technologies.

I thank you