



REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT FORUM FOR ASP

SUMMARY OF DISCUSSIONS

1. Introduction

The ITU Regional Development Forum for the ASP region (RDF-ASP) was organized by the Telecommunication Development Bureau (BDT) of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) in Phnom Penh, Republic of Cambodia, on 29th April 2013, at the kind invitation of the Royal Government of Cambodia (Minister of Posts and Telecommunications, Cambodia).

This meeting was held on the eve of the ITU Regional Preparatory Meeting for the ASP region (RPM-ASP) with the main goal to consider setup key trends in the development of telecommunications/ICT over the past year. Its main objective was to have an open and interactive exchange of opinions and discussions to improve telecommunication/ICT in the ASP countries. Outcomes of the meeting will serve as an input to the RPM-ASP and preparatory process of the overall review of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS+10).

The meeting was attended by around 172 participants from 21 Member States of the ASP region and 1 other Member State, 4 recognized operating agencies, 4 scientific/industrial organizations and 3 other entities dealing with telecommunications and 8 regional and international organizations. The list of participants can be found [here](#).

Session 1: Harnessing Digital Opportunity through Broadband

The session reaffirmed the indispensable role of information and communication technology (ICT)/ broadband for sustainable socio-economic development, preservation of diverse cultures and the ecology, ensuring good governance, and enhancing the wellbeing and happiness of all people. The eight panelists deliberated a wide range of key challenges that developing / least developed countries face, primarily due to differences in geography, literacy rates, demography, level of development, as well as different national/political priorities, policy and regulatory barriers, and lack of access to sizable funds for investment in infrastructure. Some countries still do not harness the full potential of broadband for accelerated development.

The session identified key challenges in respect of ICT infrastructure including lack of access to, and cost of, International connectivity (for Landlocked Developing Countries), high international mobile roaming rates and very high international data roaming rates, high cost of access in rural / remote areas especially in countries with difficult terrains and Island nations, unavailability of suitable frameworks for infrastructure sharing, lack of local content in local languages, lack of availability of interconnected regional / national Internet Exchange Points, regulatory barriers to flexible and efficient rights to spectrum for broadband services and finally the need to build skill sets to adapt to the fast changing technological innovations.

Despite the challenges, the fast pace of ICT development, commitment of leadership for ICT / broadband as engine for socio-economic development, resolve for removing regulatory barriers, offers unprecedented opportunity for the industry to make sizable investment in backbone networks as well as developing mobile applications covering practically all aspects of human needs such as education, health, entertainment, emergency and finally achieving all Millennium Developments Goals and beyond. The following presents the main outcomes of discussions:

- The concept of the information society, and the terminology used in this sector, evolves with time. But ICT is ultimately about people and must not be understood as referring to technology alone. The objective is to create society that learns how to learn. Diverse approaches are prevailing in the region, including the development of ICT for the well-being and happiness of the people.
- Currently we experience transition from connected to digital life. In order to accelerate this transition there is a need for innovation, entrepreneurship and multi-stakeholder engagement.
- Broadband should be perceived as a basic human right to ensure accelerated socio-economic development and that it benefits all citizens. In this context affordability is one of the challenges to be addressed by several countries.
- In order to ensure accelerated roll-out of the broadband infrastructure considerations, should be given to the following: a) political will and understanding of issues, b) clarity, certainty and transparency in policy and regulatory framework to foster investment in ICT ecosystem, c) multi-stakeholder approach, including smart partnerships and/or public private partnership that ensures efficient and effective use of resources, d) infrastructure sharing, e) access to the right of way, including simplified and coordinated administrative procedures.
- Connectivity needs for landlocked developing countries as well as small islands include submarine cables, internet exchange points, as well as satellite connectivity. Bilateral, regional and international cooperation are required to address these existing challenges and create investment opportunities.
- Create incentives for encouraging investment in next generation backbone and next generation access (NGA) network that can support good quality wireless broadband. In this context diverse measures could be considered, including partnerships, use of universal service funds, tax rebates, spectrum management, licensing, switch over.
- Leverage opportunities arising from the transition from analogue to digital broadcasting, especially availability of digital dividend bands for wireless broadband, to provide affordable solutions to the citizens.
- Spectrum needs to be managed efficiently and effectively and creatively to promote affordable broadband wireless access.
- While creating affordable access, consideration should be given to promote cloud computing to develop platforms for creating multi-lingual local content and applications, taking into account the challenges of security, privacy, data protection, interoperability etc..
- Develop future strategies taking into account emerging trends and implications resulting from social cohesion and environmental challenges.
- Promoting international bilateral and regional cooperation for identifying investment opportunities and fostering partnerships, while developing joint projects to address key regional challenges, including infrastructure, ICT applications in field of health, education, agriculture, tourism etc. Mobilize requisite resources.

Session 2: Digital Empowerment for All

This Session addressed the pressing issues and challenges related to promoting digital engagement for all, including people with special needs who would benefit from increased socio-economic inclusion in the digital society, thereby contributing to their social and economic empowerment, while exploring ICT-enabled solutions and potential regional initiatives for accessibility, availability and affordability for all.

Several developing countries are facing serious barriers in improving ICT/internet access and usage particularly in poor rural and underserved areas. These include the cost of devices and connections, the low speed and quality of internet connections, limited availability of ICT services outside major urban areas and more generally, inherent development challenges related to poverty and literacy levels. Policy initiatives, public private partnership and awareness building with are some of the key

success factors to be taken into account when planning and implementing related initiatives and projects for the inclusive and sustainable development in ICT.

Sustained efforts are required to foster people-public-private partnerships (PPPPs) especially through the ITU to implement the dispositions of international Conventions, Resolutions, Declarations and Plans of Action related to people with special such as persons with disabilities (PwDs), women and girls, youth, ageing societies into national legislations, regulations and development programs.

The following presents the main outcomes of discussions:

- Connectivity and affordability in rural areas still remain a challenge to be addressed in the future. While mobile technologies are opening new opportunities for all global citizens empowering them and bringing ICTs to the edge, there is still a need to continue to create ICT centres that may play multiple-role in building country capacities in field of ICTs.
- Health sector witnesses a shift from communicable to non-communicable diseases. ICTs still remain key in development of assistive technologies. ICTs may also play an important role in civil registration, surveillance and monitoring of an epidemic nationally and cross borders through e/m health applications, what was identified as topic for further studies to give this idea a more formal shape.
- ICT service providers could consider provision of e/m-health care facilities as part of their strategy for social corporate responsibility.
- Support of government, in particular in creation of enabling environment for innovation and integration is desirable. In many cases close coordination between different sectors is required in order to ensure that ICT innovations are not refrained from the market because of old regulations. Very often ICTs require vertical integration at country or regional level that may be ensured through coordinated approach.
- Subsidy on ICT services/equipment to bring the unconnected within the connected circle could be considered and possible mechanisms could be developed.
- Innovation leads to several pilot projects providing evidence how impactful ICTs may be. There is a need for coordinated approach to ensure sustainability of some of these projects.
- Public private partnership is one of effective ways to foster innovation and to promote the usage of ICT solutions on the global scale. There is a need for quick solutions responding to real needs.
- Coordinated efforts are required at the national, regional and international level in field of accessibility, including standardization, popularization of screen readers, captioning, and video/audio description for blind, etc.. Several emerging technologies have been identified as those requiring special attention in the near future, including the following:
 - Speech synthesis for minority languages in each country
 - Tools for captioning
 - Tools for or audio description
 - Wireless telephone handset with accessibility features
 - Programs to facilitate the usage of telephony by people with disabilities
 - Tools for accessible website development and tools for accessibility checking
 - Standard software protocol for talking ATM
- Human capacity building still remains the challenge in many countries and should be addressed at national, regional and international level.

- Voluntarism is one of mechanisms to build the capacities in field of ICTs not only at the country level but at regional as well as international level which enable transfer of knowledge via involvement of youth in the process. Regional or global ICT volunteer programs may be a catalyst for ICT development.

Session 3: Creating a Smarter, Safer and Greener Society

The session deliberated on the growing recognition for the needs of creative and innovative ICT strategies for sustainable and inclusive development. The role of technological innovation as an enabler of development and socio-economic growth is now widely recognized. To encourage and support this, policymakers have turned their attention to initiatives that foster innovation and entrepreneurship. It is believed that business creators and the investors who fund them can play an important role in creating new industries and revitalizing national economies. To encourage this, both developed and developing countries have launched many national and regional public initiatives to encourage these activities. These strategies, manifested in policies and programs, are aimed at harnessing the full potentials of ICTs to improve the lives of people with greater emphasis on socio-economic outcomes. In the build-up to Smarter, Safer and Greener society, public-private-peoples' partnerships (4Ps) are essential encompassing multiple sectors or stakeholders.

The main outcomes of discussions include:

- Information management is necessary to harness the full potential of technology by attributes such as accessibility, availability and adaptability of information.
- The focus should be on management of big data using the new analytical, procedural and operational frameworks to foster innovation and effective use of ICT for socio-economic development. Transition from internet of things to internet of everything makes this challenge formidable.
- Smart ICT society needs both smart ICT systems and smart knowledgeable human capital that ICT needs to develop
- People-centered Innovation must be encouraged in every way possible, and barriers to entry and e-participation lowered, wherever possible, to encourage e-empowerment of all stakeholders.
- In addition to focusing on energy efficiency smart society should leverage on convergence of ICT to provide education, health, banking, tourism, etc.
- In an era where digital citizenship is clearly emerging as a trend, it may be useful to define the principles as well as lay down priorities frameworks that would manage fear of unknown through multi-stakeholder engagement emphasizing on global digital literacy.
- ICT development challenges involve many stakeholders and a multi-stakeholder approach (including public-private-people partnerships) can help to ensure that all interests, concerns and contributions are brought to bear
- In long term interest it is important to invest in technologies and frameworks that are robust to disasters. The issue of disaster is also linked with climate change mitigation and adaptation that should receive high priority.
- With the ICT becoming pervasive, e-waste management is critical to build global digital society.
- Smart use of established technologies, creation of disaster management, disaster eversion and disaster impact reduction
- There is a need for adoption of the harmonizing emergency numbers. International coordination will be indispensable in this regards. It is important for countries to have clear, single and well-advertised distress point of contact.
- Identifying the right technology for a specific time, place and community, there is a need to well manage ICT for sustainable urbanization.

- The growth of ICTs in all dimensions – data volumes, user populations, devices, applications etc. – introduces new complexities and challenges to human capacity, that need to be met with stronger emphasis on capacity building for management of these challenges.

Session 4: Multi-Stakeholders Roundtable: Ways Forward

This session provided an opportunity for a roundtable discussion on all issues considered in sessions 1, 2 and 3 of the Forum, with participation of representatives of all ASP countries, ITU-D Sector Members, as well as invited participants. Having discussed and recognized the needs and challenges in creating Digital Intelligent Greener Innovative Transparent Accessible Living (DIGITAL), this Session aimed to review the outcomes of all three Sessions and brainstorm amongst multi-stakeholders to propose the priority areas that can be considered for Asia-Pacific Regional Initiatives and Development Agenda at the Asia-Pacific Regional Preparatory Meeting (RPM-ASP), as well as to identify regional views, trends and recommendations to constitute an input for the preparatory process of the Overall Review of the Implementation of the WSIS Outcomes (WSIS+10).

Participants took note on the summaries of each session presented above, while additional considerations were articulated:

- The ASEAN region has an ICT Master Plan 2015 comprising three pillars focusing on economic transformation, people empowerment and engagement as well as innovation. Development of infrastructure, human capital and bridging the digital divide are necessary foundations of the Master Plan. Some of the key issues included cybersecurity, spectrum management, broadband proliferation and empowerment of people.
 - The importance of political will and development of human capital was recognized and the need for building digital citizenship and inclusion, advocating digital literacy and empowerment, as well as addressing privacy and security concerns were considered as priorities.
 - Need was also recognized to encourage innovation in the use and application of ICTs, to focus on encouraging permission and enablement of innovation, to continue lowering barriers to innovation, and to propose innovation and creativity as integral aspects of digital literacy.
 - Unique needs of Pacific Islands Countries were recognized including high cost of infrastructure, emergency communication, telecommunication, new wired, wireless and broadcasting technologies, broadband access and uptake, relevant policies and regulation.
 - Need was recognized for smart partnerships, including Government Leadership, Strategic Alliances (the importance of multiple stakeholder PPPs), relevance (Content, training, learning eservices broadband access support), affordability (At least 50% subsidy and low interest rate loans over 24/35 months), availability (Ease of ordering process, marketing strategy), sustainability plan.
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