ITU Expert Group on Telecommunication/ICT Indicators (EGTI)
& Expert Group on ICT Household Indicators (EGH)

Follow-up Meeting on the ICT Development Index

29 September 2020 – 14:30-15:30 (virtual format)

The Secretariat advanced a [proposal](#) for publishing the ICT Development Index (IDI) in 2020 (Circular [BDT/DKH/IDA/057](#)). The proposal was presented to the Expert Groups on Telecom/ICT Indicators (EGTI) and on Household indicators (EGH) on 14 September 2020 for their consideration. Since it was not possible to reach a conclusion owing to a lack of time, a follow-up meeting was organized (Circular [BDT/DKH/IDA/060](#)) on 29 September 2020 to complete the discussion and reach a conclusion.

SUMMARY

1. The follow-up meeting on the IDI was chaired by Mr. Alexandre Barbosa, Head of the Regional Center for Studies on the Development of the Information Society at the Brazilian Network Information Center.

2. <u>The meeting was attended by 158 participants from 46 Member States and 12 ITU-D Sector Members.</u>

3. The Chair opened the meeting by thanking the participants and noticing the large number of participants which revealed the importance of this issue. He then explained the reasons for the expert groups to re-convene today, following the joint session on 14 September. At that session, the Secretariat had presented a proposal for the release of the ICT Development Index (IDI) in 2020. The proposal was discussed, questions asked, and clarifications sought. This follow-up meeting was convened to conclude the discussion.

4. He clarified that the intention was not to re-open the discussion on the methodology and selection of indicators. Instead, the meeting was intended to only provide clarifications on the methodology and the governance of the process and to reach a decision.

5. The Chair then reminded the participants of the reasons that led the Secretariat to advance the proposal. In June 2020, the Secretariat was encouraged to continue to work with the expert group on the development of an index based on a robust and sound methodology, with the view of publishing an accurate index as soon as possible, taking into account Resolution 131 (Rev. Dubai 2018).

6. He said that at the previous meeting most participants had expressed support for the efforts made by the Secretariat to meet the demand for an index to be released this year. He invited all the participants to adopt a pragmatic approach to recognize that the present proposal for the IDI is feasible and workable, noting that the suggestions received for improvement regarding specific elements of the proposal could be considered and discussed in the context of future work.

7. The Chair then gave a [summary](#) of the September 14th meeting, mentioning the key features of the proposed IDI methodology and summarizing comments and suggestions made during the meeting. He referred to relevant documents available on the [EGTI](#) and [EGH](#) meeting pages, including the [Secretariat's presentation](#) and the [background document](#).

8. Following the chair's opening remarks, Mr. Antoine Dore, Senior Legal Officer, ITU, explained that Resolution 131 instructs the BDT Director to publish annually the IDI on the basis of a methodology developed and approved by the expert group, and to ensure that ITU statistics are based on reliable, transparent and scientifically proven methodologies that reflect the real development of ICTs. Mr. Dore also recalled Council's advisory role in relation to the implementation of Resolution 131 (Rev. Dubai, 2018) in the case of a deadlock, which it did in June 2020.

9. As part of his clarifying remarks, Mr. Thierry Geiger, head of ITU's ICT Data and Analytics Division, explained that the revised IDI of 2017 represented the 'least common denominator', that is the last framework that members agreed on, thus making it a natural starting point for developing a proposal. He then presented the framework, and clarified technical aspects related to the exclusion of three indicators in the proposal. He insisted that it is not because an indicator was not part of the IDI meant it was not relevant. He reminded the audience that ITU collects over 200 indicators that collectively provide an accurate picture of the state of digital transformation. Among them, is the indicator on ICT skills. He also called for stepping up efforts to collect more and better data. He furthermore clarified the reasons for including fixed-broadband subscriptions and dividing by population rather than by the number of households. Finally, he explained the reason why the definition of a computer should not be extended to mobile devices, as there are many applications that do not work with a mobile device.

10. The Chair acknowledged the fact that participants had raised valid points during the last meeting, but reminded that any index poses a challenge in capturing the great complexity and diversity of scenarios related to ICT development in different regions and countries, because different regions take different ICT development paths. He said that the proposal was the best feasible solution at this time for having an index whose main objective ultimately is to inform policymaking. He urged members to consider the trade-offs between time constraints, sound methodology, rigor, and quality and availability of data. He concluded that there was no ideal index but there was a feasible index and opened the discussion.

11. In the ensuing discussion, many members expressed or re-iterated their support for the Secretariat's proposal and for publishing the IDI in 2020. Among those members, some re-iterated their suggestions for specific methodological changes, but offered their support.

12. Despite this broad support, no agreement could be found as some members expressed sustained objections.

13. Some members did not agree with the process for approving the index methodology, arguing that the decision of approving the methodology rests with Council, not with the expert group. Mr. Antoine Dore responded that the decision to publish an IDI had already been taken since it is reflected in Resolution 131. He explained that the expert group only had to approve the methodology: if the methodology under consideration was approved, the Secretariat would be in a position to publish the IDI, as instructed by Resolution 131. He explained that the responsibility of Council is not to approve methodology but to make recommendations in case of a deadlock. He said that the Secretariat would be reporting back to Council irrespective of the outcome of the meeting.

14. There was also concern about publishing the IDI without setting a long-term direction. In this context, members mentioned a new index related to the Sustainable Development Goals as a promising lead. A few members expressed concern about rushing through a decision, especially in the current context.

15. A few members members did not agree on specific methodological aspects of the proposal, notably in relation with fixed-broadband subscriptions, the definition of 'computer' that excludes smartphones, the omission of certain concepts.

16. Towards the end of the meeting, a few members maintained their objections to the proposals. Attempts by the Chair to rally them proved unsuccessful. The Chair therefore concluded that no consensus could be reached, that the proposal was rejected, and that no index would be published in 2020. He thanked the participants and ended the meeting.

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