Industry Advisory Group for Development Issues and Private Sector Chief Regulatory Officers' meeting (IAGDI-CRO)

AN INDUSTRY PERSPECTIVE ON DEVELOPMENT AND REGULATORY ISSUES

GLOBAL SYMPOSIUM FOR REGULATORS 2024, KAMPALA, 2 JULY 2024

Outcome Statement

The meeting of the Industry Advisory Group on Development Issues and the Private Sector Chief Regulatory Officers (IAGDI-CRO) was held back-to-back with the Global Symposium for Regulators (GSR-24) on 2 July 2024.

The IAGDI-CRO meeting focused on the need for collective action to achieve 100% connectivity. Recognizing that this requires multifaceted incentives, which are crucial for maintaining sustainable investments, fostering local engagement, building human and systemic capacity, and developing both national and regional innovation ecosystems powered by universally accessible, affordable, and secure connectivity, the private sector collectively deliberated on strategies to address these needs.

The diversity of industry participants offered insights that helped refocus efforts on addressing regulatory challenges and seizing opportunities, reaffirming the commitment of private sector to support regulatory endeavors globally.

Participants emphasized the urgent need to expand internet access for the remaining 2.6 billion unconnected people by 2030. The discussions highlighted the necessity of intensified collaboration between terrestrial and non-terrestrial service providers, as well as between service providers and regulators, to adapt regulatory frameworks. Establishing fair market access conditions including a level playing field, ensuring spectral efficiency, reducing sector-specific fees and taxes, including the high cost of spectrum (e.g., high annual spectrum fees) and ensuring smartphones are affordable, streamlining licensing regimes, enabling predictable and sustainable network investment, and encouraging partnerships with local operators were identified as critical components in this effort.

The importance of rural connectivity to advance digital inclusion was underscored, highlighting the need for better investment incentives, public sector financing and funding, including the reform of Universal Service Funds (USF), and interoperable infrastructure to bridge the digital divide. Additionally, the integration of Non-Terrestrial Networks (NTN) and Terrestrial Networks (TN) was highlighted as a key strategy to enable high-speed connectivity in both un-served and underserved areas. Regulatory challenges for global satellite operators were also highlighted, particularly for terrestrial spectrum based D2D services. The importance of creating regulatory constructs and/or licensing regimes that facilitate these services and bridging the communication gaps in areas lacking terrestrial services was emphasized.

IAGDI-CRO recommended that regulators create a predictable and transparent regulatory environment that enables competition, innovation, and long-term investment in transformative technologies. This should be complemented by a technologically-neutral approach to meeting connectivity targets, providing consumers and service providers flexibility to choose the technology that best fits local needs. Reducing or eliminating foreign direct investment (FDI) restrictions, equipment tariffs, and requirements for local manufacturing were also suggested to facilitate the deployment of new connectivity services. Licensing frameworks should be flexible and adaptable, allowing for regional, national, or service-specific licenses. Aligning regulations with international standards ensures global interoperability and minimizes barriers. Furthermore, it was recommended that regulators and governments prioritise innovation

through funding for R&D, provide tax incentives, and ensure low barriers to entry through adequate antitrust laws and transparent licensing.

IAGDI-CRO also highlighted the promotion of public-private partnerships to accelerate deployment in underserved areas and recommended implementing regulatory "sandboxes" to test new technologies on a smaller scale. The creation of a technical advisory group to provide targeted technical expertise was also suggested to ensure effective collaboration and avoid overregulation. Moreover, it was emphasized that dedicated institutional capacities are needed for continuous monitoring and guidance regarding AI, along with engaging a broad range of stakeholders and collaborating on global standards and regulatory sandboxes to drive adaptable and agile regulations.

The meeting reaffirmed the Private Sector's commitment to supporting governments, particularly regulators, in achieving common goals in both the near and long term. Participants agreed to play a more active role in supporting digital development work, promote the ITU-D Sector to recruit more private sector members, and use existing networks to advance national digital transformation agendas.