

# Global Symposium for Regulators (GSR) 2024

**Global Symposium for  
Regulators 2024**



Remarks from the Executive Director,  
Uganda Communications Commission (UCC)  
Hon. Nyombi Thembo

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The Guest Of Honour,

Secretary General of the ITU Ms. Doreen Bodgan Martin

Hon. Ministers Present and Heads of Delegations

The Director BDT, Dr. Cosmas Luckson Zavazava

Distinguished participants,

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is reckoned that the number of people globally who have no access to the internet is 2.6 billion people. This statistic has been quoted at a few occasions this year - at the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting in Davos in January, and more recently in Geneva at the annual meeting of the International Telecommunication Union Council in June. This translates to **ONE THIRD OF THE GLOBAL POPULATION** who are in digital darkness. This calls for urgent action. Telecommunications regulators must be at the forefront of enunciating dynamic regulatory interventions to ensure that this number of unconnected people reduces rapidly. Access to the Internet is no longer a luxury; it has become an absolute necessity, denial of which means denial to essential services like education, medical care, financial inclusion to mention but a few.

**Connectivity** does not function as a Lone Ranger. For connectivity to have impact, we must ensure that the appropriate and relevant **content** exists.

Once that is tackled, the looming question we have to answer is, “Do our respective stakeholders have the **capability** of understanding and relating with the content that we have designed?”

Furthermore, there is need to ensure that affordable smart devices are available to enable optimal usage of the internet.

United Nations Secretary-General, António Guterres said this past June that, “Bridging that divide is not only an economic necessity, but a **moral and humanitarian** imperative.” I totally agree.

We therefore welcome you to Uganda, the Pearl of Africa, where we will be discussing **Regulating for Impact** as we look at the economic, social, political, and moral necessity of bridging the digital divide.

We can see how digital connectivity has shifted from being a luxury to an absolute necessity by looking at how so many services as well as new products are available online. The lack of connectivity curtails not only the socio-economic development of individuals but it cascades upwards and affects an entire nation. We can not talk of poverty reduction and sustainable development without interrogating how these can be impacted by enhanced and global usage of the internet. Our young people, more so in sub-Saharan Africa are yearning for enhanced connectivity-as they have become increasingly aware that the opportunities, we have been denied for centuries, we can catch up on through global connectivity. The young people want to punch above their weight-they want to do things differently and the internet holds the key to this, so we must not betray their dreams.

As we all in here know, lack of connectivity affects several dimensions of our existence as humans: it affects us from getting out of poverty, it affects us from accessing key information, it affects us from civic engagement and participation.

We are in a race against time because the technological advancements are progressing at a dizzying speed, and it is honestly far easier and more effective for us to engage in digital inclusion initiatives **now** than playing a catchup game at a later stage.

Time, really, **is** of the essence.

The fact that we are gathered here in Kampala Uganda, speaks to a collective commitment to **Regulate for Impact** and bridge this digital divide. Our convening here shows that we espouse the shared belief that access to the Internet is now a right, and not a luxury, as it once was.

The range of topics that will be discussed illustrate the breadth and depth of what we grapple with in the telecommunication regulatory space.

From **Digital Regulation** to executive roundtable discussions on **Charting the Course of Transformative Technologies**...from **Development Issues and the Private Sector** to high-level ministerial panel discussions on **Maximizing Digital Opportunities for Impact**, these are just the tip of the iceberg on the areas in which we want to make an impact.

GSR 24 presents us with an opportune platform for dialogue to not only gain and share insights and best practices on current issues, but to also brainstorm on technological advancements as well as challenges we anticipate in the near future.

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, the **only** way that we can achieve our goal of making an impact in our sector - which is also linked to us achieving the Sustainable Development Goals - is

through **collaboration**. Without collaboration, all our individual efforts – as admirable and ambitious as they are – at making an impact on the different stakeholders we serve will remain a siloed effort.

**Collaboration** is our only viable solution. So, *what does collaboration look like for us?*

I believe collaboration entails two-way, frequent, and dynamic communication amongst governments, the private sector, civil society, telecommunication regulators, and the average citizen. We need to adopt a collaborative approach to formulating policies that are inclusive and make significant investments in building the infrastructure that will lead to the unconnected populations receiving connectivity, and also being effectively empowered on using the various digital tools available.

Our ultimate goal, distinguished ladies, and gentlemen is for digital inclusion and digital equity; a connected world where each individual can purposefully thrive in the digital era.

While the task ahead of us in bridging the digital divide seems immense, it seems so, only because we are looking at it through individual lenses. What makes this challenge surmountable is if we look at it through a collaborative lens. What this task requires of us is vision, focus, and determination. We applaud the private sector which has driven connectivity efforts at speeds never anticipated some 30 years ago. It is incumbent on the governments and regulators to ensure that these efforts are rewarded through dynamic fiscal incentives. On the part of the private sector-we expect dynamic product development that will ensure quick

connectivity of the unconnected-there is no forensic science in this-it **JUST MAKES BUSINESS SENSE.**

Let us use GSR 2024 as an opportunity to re-affirm our commitment to **Regulating for Impact.**

I would like to once again warmly welcome you to Kampala, Uganda. You will have an opportunity to experience our warm and hospitable nature – here at Munyonyo, as well as beyond the confines of this conference. Whatever little time you save, ensure that you stroll around Kampala-and even beyond. At the end of the conference, after we have mapped how to partake enhanced regulating for impact, you will also agree with us the indeed Uganda is the Pearl of Africa. Let the conversation begin.

I wish us all fruitful deliberations.

For God and my country.