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>> TIMEA SUTO: Okay. I think we are ready to start this session. Thank you, everyone. Please take your seats. Welcome to high level policy session number 4 on bridging digital divides on the 2022 WSIS forum. This is essential discussion to those that we have here at WSIS. It brings us together to discuss the progress made in bringing ICTs to everyone and access -- and assess what remains to be done. As you know in recent years we have seen he enormous progress in expanding connectivity and the

opportunities that it brings across the globe. Today 94% of the world's population is covered by some sort of mobile broadband network, however, the International Telecommunication Union estimates that only 63% of the global population were using the Internet actually in 2021, which leaves around 3 billion people still offline or unconnected properly.

The COVID-19 pandemic clearly showed the value of connectivity fostering social resilience in the face of crisis, and enabling people to continue their usual economic and social activities during the worldwide lockdowns of 2020 and 2021. However, this lifeline was only available to those who possessed three key ingredients of meaningful, relevant digital services and effective skills to use these services. Although there continues to be significant increases in Internet adoption, inequalities persist and will do so, unless we both work to cover the usage gap and the coverage gaps.

For this, we need dedicated and effective actions on both the supply and demand side of the connectivity, and we need an appropriate mix of economic, technical and regulatory approaches that link largely on both public and private sector investment.

Today, we have a distinguished panel of speakers here with us to discuss justice, however their countries and organizations approach a digital divide, what are some of the best practices and lessons learned they would like to share with us that we can build on and what does the road ahead look like. Let me just quickly introduce them to you, I will not read out their bios as I won't be able to do them justice. I ask you to check the session discussion where you will find more about them.

The ITU, we have here the head of emerging technologies division with us. Thank you for being here. And after his remarks, we will be taking a roll to work, because many of our speakers are joining online from their home countries with with us we have her ex lensy is, ambassador at large Ministry of Foreign Affairs from Estonia, the executive director of the telecommunications and transport regulatory authority of Bolivia, who is joining us remotely, the chairperson of the independent communications authority of South Africa, the director of telecommunications of Trinidad and Tobago. The communications services of Uruguay, also connecting virtually. The director for broadband and universal access

and services of the Botswana communication regulation authority, an e-commerce programs and standards department director at the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology at Qatar and I'm not sure if he's joining us online or not, but we are also expecting the president and chairman emeritus of C. MAI Association of India.

Thank you all for joining us to discuss today this most important topic, and without further ado, let us get started. So I'm going to turn first to the WSIS Action Line Facilitator from the ITU, and invite him to give us a little bit of background and set the scene for the session and share with us how the Action Lines closely link to our session are being implemented by the ITU.

>> PREETAM MALOOR: Thank you, Chair, and good afternoon, everyone. So as a high level facilitator just highlighted the statistics tell a clear story, under, you know, half the world's population don't have access to the Internet. Many of them live in the LD Cs, the LLDCs and the Small Island Developing States and even those who are making progress, you know, are at the risk of sliding back, either because they are exposed to natural hazards, they have large rural areas where connectivity gaps are particularly serious, or for various other reasons.

And this is where, you know, ITU has been focusing its attention on. You know, we have been forging partnerships to help expand access to affordable and reliable connectivity in some of the world's least, you know, well-connected countries.

We work with UNICEF to connect every school with the Giga connectivity and the mobile health applications with UNDP on building digital capacity and many others. These are examples. ITU Member States will take up the connectivity agenda at the upcoming WDDC which starts next week as well as the PP plenipotentiary conference in September. I would also like to highlight that there's a growing concern that emerging technologies such as AI, as they become more and more wide spread, the technology divide between the countries will also grow wider, and this is why we need to place greater emphasis on capacity building and emerging technologies especially in developing countries where people need the digital skills to take advantage of the technology, as well as developing the necessary digital infrastructure here.

So let me just quickly conclude by stressing that much work needs to be done, and we at the ITU look forward to

working with all of you and hearing your recommendations on this panel.

Thanks timea.

>> TIMEA SUTO: Thank you very much for that intervention and for setting the scene for our discussion. For our first speaker, he will turn to Her Excellency, ambassador at large, for digital affairs ministry of foreign affairs at Estonia. There's a lot of projects that Estonia is implementing. I would like to hear you how digital cooperation and support can overcome and then hear more about a practical example. Estonia is part of the Golf stat global and you announced the public goods alliance which follow your commitment to sharing best practices and data for digital public goods. So it would be great to hear from that perspective what you can share with us, how Golfstec came about and how it can help the WSIS community.

>> NELE LEOSK: Thank you so much, and thank you for inviting me, but also for this kind words, as indeed, Estonia did manage very quickly to build a very inclusive digital society and also a digital society that is being put to use and is being used.

So when you ask about challenges and a quick answer, I would say our challenge is in maintain what we have achieved. To give, perhaps a little bit more elaborate answer to, that I would like to point out, perhaps four factors that have been crucial in Estonia's digitalization journey that are increasingly challenged and the first one is actually infrastructure.

It's -- it was, indeed 20 years ago, when Estonia quickly managed to connect schools and every house in a fast Internet, but the first free, open and secure Internet is challenged in all countries including -- including in Estonia and this, of course, is related to investments, really the financial resources one needs to maintain that infrastructure.

The second is development. It's happening at an increased pace and it's difficult to keep up with what is happening in the world, of course, it's no secret that -- and technological trends have not been borne in Estonia. They are increasingly been born somewhere else, but we have always been smart smart users or adopters of these technologies, and this actually comes to my third point which is related to this our government, but also private sector and everybody else is more challenged in knowing

what is happening in the technological scene and how to -- how to use this technology. So we can say that when our government 20 years ago both really a very small, smart client for private sector because we really knew what we wanted to do. We knew how to order this digital development, it's increasingly more difficult, and increasingly more complex because of the different set of skills and, I would say the depth of these skills that's the government needs.

And the fourth factor here relates to what I would call digital trust. It is indeed Estonia put very clear principles and rules in place at the very beginning of our development, but at the same time, the government needed to provide services that were needed and used and functioned and that is an important aspect, because trust is an emotion that also comes through practice and gets somehow embedded into you.

It's not only about security or regulations. So it's a combination of these three.

But where the challenge here comes is that the virtual world is becoming one. So our clients -- our citizens may not even separate private sector services and the risks that come from there, let's say, related to the use of social media platforms, for example, to those that come from public sector. So we can definitely see that let's say this increasing mistrust over the use of data and privacy and the concerns may also influence, actually, public perception of public services, and it is clear that these problems are tackled by one nation state or in our case, the European Union, these are global issues and, of course, increasingly the partnership between the government and the technology companies, including the Big Tech.

So we have to establish ourselves as partners and -- and the technology companies also need to hopefully understand that we are not only the bad cop regulators but we are actually wanting the same thing. We want the citizens to be happy in the virtual world.

And now, I understand I have to come to the second question, as quickly as possible, right? Because my time is about to end. Of course, after 20 years of development, we have all come to realize that our needs and our problems in this digital world are quite similar and this is how the GOFSTACK between the government of Germany, Estonia and ITU and Dial and basingalely what it does, is it breaks digital governance into different building blocks and the building

blocks that can be reused, that can be integrated with already existing systems. They can be integrated with each other and basically GOFstack promotes the open source reusable digitalization and, of course one of the examples that Estonia has been sort of famous for is our interoperability layer, that has been put to practice in more than 20 countries. So GOFstack builds more of these different tools and solutions that all governments but not only governments need, and I see Yolanda from ITU and Honey, who are a lot more up to date with the recent developments. So we can all share information later, but currently, I believe around 12 different solutions are soon ready or going to be made available also to everybody to use.

It's my pleasure to announce the WSIS prize, which is called the GovStack and so we ask you to take the open source and the reusable approach in developing digital services. So I hope that by next year, we have a lot of practices coming from you, that you can also share with also and also increase our -- our GovStack community and our global efforts in this domain. So I'm looking forward very much. Thank you for taking two minutes.

(Applause)

>> TIMEA SUTO: Thank you. Thank you very much, ambassador, for that very comprehensive view of what Estonia is doing and, but also for this exciting new opportunity for the eGovernment projects. So next year, I hope to see many entries for the prize for the GovStack prize and now from Estonia, we are jumping over to Bolivia. And I would like to invite the executive director of the fiscal authority of telecommunications and transport in Bolivia to also answer two questions. Firstly, to let us know what were the regulatory measures that were considered to promote sustainable development in Bolivia through ICTs, and also what are the most important ICT tools to promote sustainable development in Bolivia. Sir, you have the floor.

>> NESTOR RIOS RIVERO: Thanks.

Well, based on the contribution of the ATT, in the capacity of regulation and working within the frameworks of interventional recommendations with the promotion of social and sustainable development service, using information technologies as the main tool and communication.

Likewise, as a result of the pandemic unleashed by the COVID-19 virus, it was important to have measures to

increase access to the telecommunication services in the sense with our regulators and with other government agencies, the development of the infrastructure was promoted.

The effective use of the bandwidth of the operators' networks was coordinated tools to develop the communication access to telecommunications, and giving ourself the great work in the use of the Internet in our country.

In this regard, based on the studies of records and records as of December of 2021, 81% of the population has 2G coverage and 77% with 2G coverage and 63% with 4G coverage.

Well, the question, what are the most important ICT tools to promote sustainable development in Bolivia, information and communication technologies is a whole -- it's possible to reduce the digital gap. Understanding that the content that is needed requires an infrastructure data that allows access and that's why to develop technology, it's important to develop policies and regulations that promote the information technologies and to improve services, accessibility and us this regulate and the sustainable development of our country.

Likewise, regulations provide legality to the mechanisms that briefly replace use of paper and other consumables contributing significantly to current environment. That is why the approach to achieve the goals of the 17 sustainable development goals by the United Nations, the ITT's main objective is to promote the development and use of ICTs in the nation state of Bolivia.

Thank you.

>> TIMEA SUTO: Thank you very much, sir. And thank you very much for keeping to the time. I forgot to tell panelists that we each have five minutes to speak. So thank you to Bolivia for bringing us back on time with our session, even though we started a little bit late.

Now, jumping again once more, one continent, I'm going to turn to the chairperson of the independent communications authority of South Africa. There are also two questions that I would like to ask you, and if you could respond in one. We all know that South Africa just recently completed first ever spectrum auction. We would like to hear more how was your experience with that process and what that means for South Africans. And also, what would be the social benefits of this licensing intervention for the people of South Africa, and how does that support

the implementation of the sustainable development goals?

>> KEABETSWE MODIMOENG: Thank you, and greetings to -- to all the colleagues who are here in our endeavor to grow communications, connectivity, and to preach the digital divide.

Indeed, South Africa has completed its historic, first ever spectrum licensing process through an auction. And I think the ITU should be proud that a number of engagements over the many years, the many agencies in which the ITU has always preached for technology neutrality. The ITU has always preached spectrum licensing through transparent and competitive processes. In our market, in our country, there's finally, you know borne fruit.

We licensed spectrum across a number of bands, focusing largely on the sub one gig spectrum that is very good for wider reach in the outlying areas of our country. And this we see as the key strategic enabler for bridging the digital divide, but what we also recognize in South Africa is the question of not only connecting the unconnected but ensuring that there are connected in an indiscriminant manner. Meaning the quality of service in urban areas should be the same as quality of services rendered in our outflung rural areas.

The COVID-19 pandemic has illustrated that it's not enough to have network towers in villages, if the quality of network in those villages would not be the same as the quality of service in urban areas. When COVID-19 hit, as a regulator, we immediately introduced what we've, of course, learned as emergency spectrum licensing. We introduced it overnight, mobile operators were given spectrum for free, or access to use the frequencies with very defined obligations, the connectivity to schools, because we know that in rural areas, where the majority of our people reside, there would not be adequate broadband connectivity.

Clinics which were issuing in the form of e-health. Now with the more permanent licensing, the obligations for the auction, as you have alluded, we compared operators to connect over 500 police stations, over 1,700 government hospitals, over 18,000 public schools and close to 4,000 government clinics, as part of the social obligations linked to this spectrum licensing. So that at the end, spectrum does not only go to the highest bidder, but they can be tangible, benefits, derived on the back of is this licensing endeavor. So we believe that our message, the key giveaway that we would give to the world today is let's

not only focus on connecting the unconnected but let's make sure that the quality of service provision is the same, because the pandemic has taught us that the quality is also important, otherwise, you cannot work virtually from villages and affordability is also another critical aspect of it.

Thank you very much.

>> TIMEA SUTO: Thank you very much, sir, for that important caveat. We need connectivity but we need connectivity to be meaningful and reachable for all.

To continue on, on this line of thought, I'm turning to Trinidad and Tobago to the director of Telecommunications Authority, sir, could you tell us more about the digital inclusive survey that you are implementing in your country and tell us about the actions that Trinidad and Tobago is bringing to bridge the digital divides?

>> TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO: Thank you, everyone. I'm from the government of Trinidad and Tobago. We have completed a digital divide survey. And it emphasized focusing on drawbacks where we need to be to make us look towards where next in the next eight years.

So the idea index, as we measured from 2021, we moved from 6.04 to 7.86 now. Our access category increased by 11%. Our usage category increased by 31%, and skills category increased by 78%.

I know my time is limited here. I want to give some interest and statistics on the digital divide survey. 80.39% of our population owns a mobile phone, while there is a mobile subscription rate of 144% that tells us more than one person owns dual phones on different networks.

And then we have 81% of households have Internet access, 79% are in rural areas, and 83% in urban areas. About 60% of households use the Internet from a computer device only. And the rest are mixed here.

So let's look at some other statistics. The majority of household subscribers to internet packages about 10 megabits per second and higher. And let's look at the usage now. 76% of the population use the Internet with 82% being female. So we know that a lot of females are using our Internet in our country, and 76% of them are male. 15 to 24 years are the age groups that have the highest target rates. And I just want to bounce off in terms of costs and pricing, I believe we are doing well in Trinidad and Tobago. We are about 1.1% to 2.3% of our gross national

income, which is fair according to the ITU's recognized bandwidth rates.

And the majority of the population has basic ICT skills, such as typing, sending emails, while 30% of the population has standard skills, copying and pasting, filing, and only 4% has advanced skills, such as programming and script writing.

Now, to the second part. The question, what are we going to do from the digital divide survey, it revealed to us that it's important for us to improve the levels of computing ownerships in our country with only 60% owning a computer. So we would like to work with relative stakeholders to identify and promote low-cost options for procuring computers for whom use we want to target municipalities and communities with limited access for development of a free WiFi spot.

We have been expanding on the free WiFi, the initiatives using our universal service fund. We have implemented free WiFi across health centers, schools, transport hubs and soon it will be in communities with lack of reliable high-speed broadband Internet.

We would want to move our next step in charting a way forward is to promote usage of online services and eGovernment services, and improving eCommerce penetration. What we are seeing is that our -- we have a low amount of persons with credit card usage in the country. So we would like to find alternative means of accessing eCommerce in the islands, and we will also like to improve the level of confidence of using available online services. Some of these specific things that we want to do is develop an all government approach to respect user protection, privacy and ethical use of data collection via online platforms, develop an appropriate framework for treating with cybersecurity as well, and also create mechanisms for regular dialogue on cybersecurity.

And in closing, we -- in terms of ICT skills, we want to expand competence based in the ICT level skills and increase the level from basic going on to regular skills, and moving on up to developing applied learning such as ICT training opportunities for youth between ages of 15 to 24.

Thank you very much and I hope this gives us an idea of Trinidad and Tobago's insight of our ICT development.

>> TIMEA SUTO: Thank you very much for sharing those prospective and very ambitious actions but also in reminding us that any policies we design need to be written

in data and evidence. So thank you for sharing that information from the survey for us as well.

We are turning online and we are going to Uruguay and I will ask the president of the communication services regulation decorate of Uruguay to share with us your views and your country's perspectives related to the digital divide, and what are the -- what are the actions that your country is taking to bridge this divide?

>> MERCEDES ARAMENDIA: Hi, thank you very much for the invitation. It's always a pleasure to have the opportunity to share this time learning from the countries.

A simple way to see the digital divide it's a gap between the reality of the access to ICT and our responsibility to universalize it. There are different focuses in which we need to work to make that universalization a reality, because it's no longer enough to have access to a cell phone. We need, among other things, to consider connectivity, devices, services, affordability, gender gap and limitation in digital skills.

In December of 2021, we had a national territorial coverage by 4G and 3 LTE of more than 92%. We know that there are rural areas and we are not attending the demand in the way we should. To cover all the territory, we are coordinating and working to find new ways to universalize the service as as soon as possible. Also we know that it's not enough to have coverage. We need the capacity to develop new technology as 5G at a national level. So we have done trials in 26 gigahertz, soon in 3.5 gigahertz and we are looking to make a spectrum auction this year.

In two years, there was a remarkable increase. Fixed broadband grew more than 70% and rural broadband more than 100%. With err glad that the net and the service providers could respond appropriately. Still, it's necessary to continue working because our society has new needs and we have to work to attend them.

This year, we launch portability in mobile services, that have a clear impact on the market. And simple analysis show that the monthly price on the contract was reduced by 10% in three months, also the price per gigabyte by about 50% and the performance increased by 50%, as well as that impact the facilities access to the devices.

In that sense, it's important to remark that in Uruguay, in 2007, more than 15 years ago, we launch a plan that allowed all the kids of our country to have access to a computer. Also, there is a specific plan to attend tempt

who are 62 years old. Last year we published a gender report that allowed us to meet the reality of our market. As we previously supposed we had to work to minimize the gender gap. We are developing some actions to reduce the gender gap. Also we are working for our national allocation to inform it considering the new requests N. this sense, the national plan of science, technology and innovation is being evaluated to learn from our own experience and consider new necessities.

The pandemic of COVID-19 accelerated the digital transformation and new technologies such as blockchain, artificial intelligence, the digital reality requests our attention and work on them. We know that changes are needed and we had to work animation decisions on time so we need and have to work and listen to the entire system. That is key to bridging the digital gap. We need to increase coverage, capacity, affordability and minimize the gender gap.

To make this process sustainable, we have to work on actions coordinating and collaborating constantly and it continues dialogue with entire ecosystem to develop digital skills and correct innovation, and trust and analyze our current relations to simplify what is necessary. The entire ecosystem must be aware of the importance of working together, developing trusting relationships to universalize access and bridge the digital divide.

Thank you very much.

>> TIMEA SUTO: Thank you very much for those important perspectives. It's quite a lot there to unpack and it's a lot too, but thank you for also highlighting the need to work in pa partnerships and have a holistic view of this situation to be able to move forward.

Going back to the room, I'm going to ask Madam Director from Botswana, director for broadband and universal access and services at the Botswana communication regulatory authority, if you could share with us, please, the key policy measures that have you have implied to bridge the digital divides and how has it improved the lives of rural communities after those were implemented.

>> MAISEO RATLADI: Thank you, and good afternoon, to all participants both online and who are here at the ITU.

I will go straight to the answer. Botswana aims to take advantage of the opportunities presented by the fourth Industrial Revolution to move the country towards knowledge-based Internet. This is by the presidency of the

republic of Botswana at both national level and international platforms. Information communications technology infrastructure development and digital services are recognized as key pillars under digital transformation. The digital transformation implemented in 2020 is an action plan that aims to deliver Botswana's digital aspirations as set out in the national ICT policy, as well as the national broadband strategy.

It aims to deliver smart and sustainability for the country and no one is left behind. The national broadband strategy called for the establishment of the universal access and service fund, which is currently being used successfully to connect rural areas.

Several programs have been delivered and that the UASF since 2014. These include provision of high-speed mobile broadband networks, which is 4G, in 105 rural areas. Provision of broadband Internet and ICT devices to more than 77 government schools in remote areas. In 2020, the government of Botswana conceived the village connectivity program through smart Botswana initiative, which aims to connect 500 villages across the country, with high-speed, ranging between 100 mega bits per second to 200 megabits per second.

There's an ongoing way to connect over 110 villages to 4G, to broadband networks. The ultimate goal is to have government facilities connected to high-speed broadband internet, and rural areas should have 4G technology or better.

For the second questions, the availability of the mobile broadband networks in this rural areas, the communities are enabled to access digital financial services. This include mobile money applications, cell phone banking. It has enabled people to transact and trade without costs and transporting to urban centers. All mobile operators are offering mobile services and there's high uptake of these services because they pay the exchange payments in the rural communities.

Most of the banks also have cell phone banking services, and customers are able to transact without the need to visit the banks. The digital application have also enabled online government services such as payment of taxes, utility bills, company renewals, et cetera, and these services are -- they don't need to go to the urban centers for them.

Thank you, Chair.

>> TIMEA SUTO: Thank you very much, for those wise words and for reminding us that connectivity does not only bring connectivity to digital. It brings connectivity to finance, to education, and to opportunities. So that's very important to keep in mind as we talk about this topic.

So let me turn now also in this way to the director for eGovernment programs and standards department and acting director for Qatar eGovernment, portal department at the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology of Qatar. Madam, if you could share with us a little bit your views around the adoption of ICT services. We all know that one of the challenges facing governments today is the lack of citizen adoption of new ICT services, how does the state of Qatar address this challenge?

>> ALJAZAY SALEH RASHID AL-SULAITI: Thank you. And good afternoon, for all the participants. My name is Aljazay Al Sulaiti.

The state of Qatar had implemented a hybrid model which combines best policies and technology adoption with a change management model, called AKAC, which is awareness, knowledge, and ability and reinforcement.

As we know, the governments can develop the best ICT applications and services in the world, but they might face a failure in achieving the desired adoption. So accordingly, the state of Qatar started by building the awareness among different individuals in the country, by explaining why the government need to change, and why it is the appropriate time for the change. And by obtaining also what is -- how this is going to be impacting their daily life, in order to create the desire between the individuals to support the government plans of change. Besides the awareness, the government focuses on understanding the different factors that influence the individuals' desire to change.

The government also pays attention very carefully to motivate individuals by different ways. For example, by offering the participation and the design phase of important ICT application and services and also to always keep monitoring and having they're feedback on newly developed applications and services in the country. In order to make sure the government meets the individual's expectation.

Furthermore, the government measures the knowledge base of different individuals and their ability to collaborate, in order to develop the best education and

training plans among different government agencies, schools, universities and colleges.

Of course, it's to ensure that any newly developed ICT applications and services is, frankly, for all the users affordable, accessible for all, adopted to the local needs from language and from the culture, support the sustainable development by developing policies and by ensuring that all the government agencies is compliant with these policies announced by the government. So the last important thing is sustainable, the reinforcement by making sure that the government has sustained the change and the individuals will not revert back to their hold ways of using the services in the country. So in conclusion, the state of Qatar is focusing on leading impacted people and the state of leading the technical change in the country.

Thank you.

>> TIMEA SUTO: That is very nice put there at the end. It's a metaphor, I think we can all embed in our own thinking and thank you for sharing for those perspectives.

Thank you, everyone, for the contributions. Very enlightening examples, policy actions, projects that are implemented on the ground. I have been making notes and I will try to summarize this during the closing of the high-level portion of the forum, that will take place between 5 and 6:00. So I do invite you all to come and then you can tell me after if I gathered all the ideas well from this very rich discussion.

Thank you, everyone, for being here and taking the time. Thank you, everyone, for being online. I though it wasn't most ideal for some of the time zones there.

So thank you again, and please enjoy the rest of the forum and the rest of your afternoon.

(Applause)

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