

Building global collaboration among the ICT industry / Bringing the ICT industry together to bridge the digital divide

Industry Round Table

A gathering of ICT industry leaders in preparation for ITU Virtual Digital World 2020

Meeting by invitation only

Background

The ICT industry has made considerable progress in expanding global connectivity in the last decade. However, further effort is needed to expand the opportunity of digital solutions to all. Following the invitation to the global dialogue on broadband development, sent by the ITU Secretary General Mr Houlin Zhao ([Circular Letter/CL-20/3](#)) in January 2020, positive feedback was received and interest was demonstrated by the ITU membership.

Furthermore, the COVID-19 crisis has demonstrated the importance of being connected and exposed the significant difference that still exists in the world in terms of connectivity. This has highlighted once more the critical role of broadband networks in areas such as remote learning, teleworking, videoconferencing, digital health, commerce or access to information and entertainment.

This round-table aims to set the scene for the discussion at the ITU Virtual Digital World 2020, building on the discussions on broadband development carried out in a series of fora and initiatives¹ throughout the course of 2020. This programme of virtual activities will in turn set the framework for the next physical event, ITU Digital World 2021, taking place in Ha Noi, Viet Nam, in October 2021.

The broadband challenges

ITU has published “Connecting Humanity - Assessing investment needs of connecting humanity to the Internet by 2030”, a comprehensive new study that estimates that a total of USD 428 billion will be required to achieve universal, affordable broadband connectivity for all humanity by the end of this decade.

Although lack of predictability on the availability of financial resources required to connect the world is the main challenge, broadband development still faces a series of problems that include, amongst others, a lack of effective guidance on industry policies; slow network roll-out; geographical imbalance; insufficient growth, long ROI; reliance on governments investment; many diversified and emerging technologies that complicate the ICT environment; lack of clear definition and upgrade path; the relatively scattered nature of various industry standard organizations and the need to establish global collaboration mechanisms.

While, it is noted that construction of broadband networks has now been incorporated into the development strategies of many countries, only through public-private collaboration, the involvement of new stakeholders and the ability to identify the right solution to reach everyone everywhere, we will be able to mobilize this unprecedented level of investment. That is why, an active participation of the ICT industry is fundamental to help define the way forward, to begin to connect the unconnected, based on innovation and best practices; on the deployment of new technologies and new investments they are being considered; and taking into account the need for universal, affordable, high-quality connectivity, and resilient networks.

While governments have the responsibility of defining the ICT visions and setting up the right policy and regulatory environments, and ensuring fully-collaborative forms of engagement with industry stakeholders, the private sector should proactively lead through the historic digital movement and join the efforts from the international community to mobilize resources and invest in the

¹ These include meetings of the Broadband Commission, at the 2020 World Economic Forum in Davos and the virtual annual fall meeting, the G20 Digital Economy Task Force, the virtual WSIS Forum 2020, or the key actions for Global Connectivity outlined in the UN SG’s Roadmap for Digital Cooperation

deployment of networks, services and applications to close the digital divide by 2030, in particular by:

- *Joining the dialogue* to bridge the digital divide by 2030, reinforcing the high-level commitment to make investing in broadband a top priority for faster and better recovery;
- *Coordinating efforts* to identify current technological, economic and regulatory barriers for the expansion of broadband networks, services and applications;
- *Coordinating planning to identify synergies in investments* in future networks, so that future investments complement and not compete with other initiatives from public or private sector.

Industry Roundtable

The Industry Round Table will be organized in a dialogue style, chaired by Mr Houlin Zhao, ITU Secretary-General.

Date: 14 October Time: 13:00 – 15:00 CEST Please do login <u>30 minutes in advance</u> for final technical adjustments	Platform: Zoom Interpretation: No
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Guiding questions

1. Challenges

What are the main challenges, technological, economic and regulatory barriers that industry players have been facing when planning the expansion of broadband networks? What type of recommendations could be made to government leaders and policy makers to promote the set up of the right policy and services to scale up the deployment of broadband networks and the uptake of digital solutions?

2. Suggestions & Implementable Initiatives

Broadband connectivity is the cornerstone for industry 4.0 and fundamental for the development of national digital economies. Collaboration among all ICT actors is essential to connect operators, equipment manufacturers, investors and vertical industries including SMEs to build a unified service. Can you suggest some initiatives and innovative ways of multi-stakeholder collaboration for the deployment of networks that is working towards closing the digital divide by 2030? How can key influences from the private sector help to implement the recommendations of bodies such as the Broadband Commission and create a positive momentum towards expanding connectivity?

3. Invitation To A Global Dialogue On Broadband Development

ITU can offer several platforms to analyze and discuss the need to accelerate progress towards bridging the broadband divide effectively and rapidly. How can we ensure a well-coordinated approach among all ICT actors to accelerate progress toward Connecting Humanity? How can ITU help you realize your priorities? Could ITU platforms such as ITU Digital World help to mobilize further action from the private sector to bridge the broadband gap?

All industry key stakeholders are invited to join this dialogue and to identify joint actions to reinforce and coordinate the global collaboration mechanisms, as a necessary step to start working together on bridging the digital divide by 2030.

Expected Outcome and Action Items

Developing a framework to implement better collaboration between governments and the private sector with global mechanisms, to accelerate connectivity and adoption of digital services.