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World Telecommunication and Information Society Day

Better life in rural communities
with information and
communication technologies

Dr Hamadoun I. Touré
ITU Secretary-General



Editorial

■ Information and communication technologies (ICT) are reshaping the way the world communicates, creating opportunities for a better life through long-term development, not least among the most disadvantaged sections of our society. Today, ICT are the powerhouses of the global economy, offering real solutions to the challenge of generating sustainable economic growth and prosperity. ICT also act as catalysts in accelerating progress towards meeting the United Nations Millennium Development Goals.

This year, as we celebrate ITU's 146th anniversary, we focus on the world's rural communities in our quest to connect the remotest regions to the benefits of ICT. In the rural context, ICT and related e-applications enhance opportunities to generate income and combat poverty, hunger, ill-health and illiteracy, and are key to improving governance and rural services.

Half the world's population (close to 3.5 billion people) resides in rural districts or remote communities. They are the deprived cousins of the world's urban citizens. Among them are as many as 1.4 billion of the world's extremely poor people, who are also among the least connected to the benefits of ICT. We cannot allow this situation to continue.

ITU is committed to connecting the world and ensuring that the benefits of ICT reach the remotest corners as well as the most vulnerable communities. We have successfully developed standards for ICT, managed vital spectrum and orbital resources, mobilized the necessary technical, human and financial resources, and strengthened emergency response in the aftermath of devastating natural disasters.

Now, with more than 5.3 billion mobile subscriptions worldwide, is the moment to deliver content through enhanced broadband access, establishing information and communication highways that will feed both rural communities and urban centres with the means to meet their development goals. ITU's leadership role in the Broadband Commission for Digital Development seeks to accelerate the roll-out of this state-of-the-art technology, with the aim of establishing a universally accessible knowledge-based information society.

Let us celebrate World Telecommunication and Information Society Day this year by focusing on rural communities, knowing that by connecting people around the world and harnessing the full potential of ICT, we can all enjoy a more productive, peaceful and better life. ■