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Connecting the unconnected

Bridging the digital development divide

By Houlin Zhao, ITU Secretary-General

At the recent World Telecommunication Development Conference (WTDC), leaders brought together by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) explored new avenues to connect the unconnected for sustainable development.

WTDC – held in Kigali, Rwanda, between 6 and 16 June – has cemented ITU's status as a key development partner in education, health, the environment, and other vital areas. More than a technical agency, ITU plays a pro-active role in mobilizing partnerships for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations.

With just over seven years left to achieve the SDGs in the UN Decade of Action, we must step up our work to promote digital technologies for the good of all.

This is why I have called on ITU's membership of 193 Member States, along with industry, academia, international and regional organizations, and other stakeholders, to join us in promoting sustainable development through digital transformation.

Equitable access to digital technologies is not just a moral imperative, it is essential for global prosperity.

Initiatives like the Partner2Connect Digital Coalition – a centrepiece at WTDC – are showing the way by mobilizing governments, the private sector, and others behind ground-breaking commitments that align connectivity strategies with the SDGs.

I am sincerely grateful to Rwandan President H.E. Paul Kagame and the Government of Rwanda for hosting ITU's all-important development conference at such a crucial juncture. The current *ITU News Magazine* highlights some of the rich discussions we had in Kigali.



“We must step up our work to promote digital technologies for the good of all.”

Houlin Zhao

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Rwanda welcomes world digital leaders to WTDC in Kigali



From left to right: Chaesub Lee, Director of the ITU Telecommunication Standardization Bureau; Doreen Bogdan-Martin, Director of the ITU Telecommunication Development Bureau; Houlin Zhao, ITU Secretary-General; H.E. Paul Kagame, President of Rwanda; Carlos Slim, Co-Chair of the ITU/UNESCO Broadband Commission; Hon. Paula Ingabire, Minister of Information, Communication Technology and Innovation of Rwanda; Mario Maniewicz, Director of the ITU Radiocommunication Bureau; Ellen Taylor, Youth Representative of the Generation Connect Global Youth Summit.



See the opening [video](#) for WTDC in Kigali



“
We must continue to show the world what ITU can do, not only as a technical body but also – and equally importantly – as a development agency.”

Houlin Zhao

ITU Secretary-General

(Speaking at the WTDC
Opening Ceremony)



“
*This conference
features new elements
that have been
designed to shift our
thinking – to mobilize
our collective energies
in new ways.*”

Doreen Bogdan-Martin

Director of the ITU Telecommunication
Development Bureau

(Speaking at the WTDC
Opening Ceremony)



“

We must prioritize public-private partnerships to expand affordable digital access and equip vulnerable citizens with digital literacy skills.”

His Excellency Paul Kagame

President of Rwanda

(Speaking at the WTDC
Opening Ceremony)



“
This WTDC is our
chance to achieve
consensus on
key issues we will
deliberate so that we
can bring the 2.9 billion
people worldwide
into the digital world
they currently do
not know.”

Honorable Paula Ingabire

Minister of Information,
Communication Technology
and Innovation of Rwanda

(Speaking at the WTDC
Opening Ceremony)



“
There is no shortage
of powerful innovative
and creative young
people who are ready
to lead us to tackle
complex problems
that will improve our
collective future.”

Ellen Taylor

Youth Representative of the Generation
Connect Global Youth Summit

(Speaking at the WTDC
Opening Ceremony)





Tackling digital development challenges in Rwanda

Recent months have seen Rwanda's capital, Kigali, take several leaps forward in digital development, underlining the rapid momentum of the East African country.

Last November, the [Rwanda Innovation Fund \(RIF\)](#) was launched to support [disruptive and innovative companies](#) that offer solutions to the region's challenges, through a public-private partnership between the government and investment manager Angaza Capital.

A few weeks later, Swedish investment fund Norrsken Foundation [opened its first hub outside Scandinavia](#). The Kigali facility is expected to host 1000 entrepreneurs in its first year of activity.

These two examples show how Rwanda is quickly becoming one of Africa's major innovation hotspots. The country ranks eighth among start-up ecosystems across the Middle East and Africa, and fourth in Africa as a whole, with Kigali ranking fourteenth among cities in the region, according to the [2022 Global Startup Ecosystem Index](#).



We see ourselves as a proof-of-concept destination for innovative companies and start-ups to launch, test, and scale. ”

Hon. Paula Ingabire

Rwanda's Minister of Information, Communication Technology and Innovation

Over the past two decades, forward-looking digital policies have served as major drivers of Rwanda's economic transformation. Although the scope remains wide to build further on these changes remains wide, several milestones already demonstrate practical results.

The technology sector currently represents 3 per cent of Rwanda's annual GDP. But the [government's goal is to more than triple this figure and reach 10 per cent within a decade](#). "We see ourselves as a proof-of-concept destination for innovative companies and start-ups to launch, test, and scale," says Hon. Paula Ingabire, Minister of Information, Communication Technology and Innovation, who also [chaired the World Telecommunication Development Conference](#) (WTDC) in Kigali from 6 to 16 June.

Stellar ambitions

The country's aspirations to set regional benchmarks focus on building up digital capacities with a positive social impact. These include the Rwandan satellite programme which began with a cube satellite that helps monitor water supply and anticipate natural disasters.

Rwanda launched its first telecommunications satellite, Rwa-Sat-1, into space in 2019 in partnership with the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA). The "CubeSat" now obtains data from terrestrial sensors to help keep the government informed on national water resources, agriculture, meteorology, and disaster risks.

The agreement with Japan also includes training specialists in the design and production of mini satellites. The [Rwandan authorities ultimately aim to build their own capacity](#) to collect and analyse geospatial data and apply these insights to different areas of government, Ingabire said.

Following the creation of the Rwanda Space Agency (RSA) in 2021, the government intends to promote the aerospace business and industrial development and eventually nurture competitive products and services for export.

Last October, Rwanda [filed an application with the International Telecommunication Union](#) (ITU) to launch two satellite constellations: Cinnamon-217 and Cinnamon-937. These groups of satellites – both planned for launch by the end of 2023 – are meant to function as a unified system to enable permanent, near-global connectivity.



Ramping up e-waste awareness in Rwanda

Less than 20 per cent of e-waste – or discarded electrical and electronic devices – is collected from homes and institutions globally, according to the 2020 Global E-waste Monitor, a report from the Global E-waste Statistics Partnership.

Rwanda, with about 7000 tonnes of e-waste generated annually, has set out to do far better – and to set new benchmarks for African countries and the world in the sustainable use of digital devices and technologies. The country of 13.5 million people is already, as CNN noted last year, among the continent's earlier adopters of e-waste legislation.

[Read the full article.](#)

Visionary e-waste policies

Without policies focused on sustainability, accelerated digital transformation can result in negative effects.

Take for instance the **53.6 million tonnes** of discarded electronic waste – or e-waste – generated globally every year. As of 2019, only 78 countries were covered by some kind of e-waste legislation, policy or regulation, according to ITU's **2020 Global E-waste Monitor**.

Today, Rwanda is **one of only 13 African countries with specific legislation in place on e-waste**. The **law passed in 2016** establishes common principles for the management of discarded electronic devices, as well as shared responsibilities on this topic among the country's institutions.

Four years later, in 2020, the country inaugurated its first e-waste management plant.

The **Enviroserve Rwanda Green Park**, promoted through a partnership between the government and Dubai-based company Enviroserve, can process up to 10 000 metric tons of e-waste per year. This facility offers services such as repair and refurbishment of electrical products, e-waste collection services, dismantling and recycling, and provides technical assistance to individuals and organizations handling e-waste.

Enviroserve's services **give a second life to computer monitors, old phones**, and other devices, which, once repaired, can be sold at a lower price. Several countries in the region have expressed interest in the facility as an example of how sustainable digital development can reduce environmental impact, spur economic activity, and create jobs.

"Enviroserve has already deployed 20 e-waste collection centres across the country," according to Minister Ingabire. "The programme is set to be expanded through the World Bank-funded **Digital Acceleration Project**, which will add 30 collection centres across all 30 districts of the country."

Rwanda actively promotes the **regional e-waste management strategy of the East African Communications Organisation (EACO)**, together with Burundi, Kenya, South Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda. The initiative seeks to jointly enhance regional infrastructure, strengthen coordination at the regional and national levels, and promote research and innovation to build circular economies.

In 2020, Rwanda inaugurated its first e-waste management plant.

"Together with ITU, we are working on a project to introduce and implement the Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) concept in our regulatory frameworks," says Minister Ingabire. "This project includes an **awareness campaign** to teach the public how to treat e-waste, and procedures for disposal at designated collection points to increase collection rates and public participation in the exercise."

WTDC at a glance

“Connecting the unconnected to achieve sustainable development.”

Global information and communication technology (ICT) leaders convene to develop new models of collaboration for connectivity and digital solutions in this final Decade of Action to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

Outcomes:

Kigali Declaration

Reinforcing the political support for the mission and strategic objectives of the ITU Telecommunication Development Sector (ITU-D)

.....
ITU-D's contribution to the
ITU Strategic Plan for 2024-2027
.....

Kigali Action Plan

Regional initiatives; new and revised resolutions and recommendations;
new and revised questions to be studied by ITU-D Study Groups

A rich two-week programme featuring:

A high-level plenary segment

Strategic discussions



Generation Connect Global Youth Summit

Partner2Connect Digital Development Roundtable

Launch of the Global Connectivity Report

Network of Women (NoW) events

Annual meeting of the ITU/UNESCO Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development

WTDC in numbers

Total participants

Present in person

1304

Remote attendees

848

2152

Female

779

Male

1373

36%

64%

1415

from
150 Member
States



340

from
96 companies
and
organizations*



Academia

21



UN system

19



ITU-D: ITU Telecommunication Development Sector
*ITU-D Sector Members and partners

Quick clicks to WTDC



Video interviews



See all WTDC
video [interviews](#).

Several thought leaders from the private and public sector were interviewed on the sidelines of WTDC. They answered a variety of questions related to the event's overall theme: *Connecting the unconnected to achieve sustainable development*. Below is a small sample:

H.E. Xavier Bettel

Prime Minister of
Luxembourg



“

Imagine the COVID pandemic
20 years ago – no education,
no e-health, no home working. ”

H.E. Nape Moses
Nnauye

Tanzania's Minister
for Information
Communications and
Information Technology



“

In our country we are now
reviewing how to subsidize to help
especially the people in rural areas
to have devices. ”

H.E. Emma Inamutilla
Theofelus

Namibia's Deputy
Minister of Information
and Communication
Technology



“

This part of the Partner2Connect
development forum is just that –
working towards connectivity using
public and private partners. ”

Nicola Bellomo
European Union
Ambassador to Rwanda



“

This conference provides a unique opportunity to engage, to exchange about sustainable digitalization and also to be an active and constructive actor in these global discussions.”

Aarti Holla-Maini
Secretary-General of
the Global Satellite
Operators Association



“

Satellite operators are very conscious of the responsibility that is incumbent on them to make sure that satellite can play its rightful role in helping to bridge the digital divide.”

Ernest Mafuta
Katoka
Chair of the Internet
Society's Affordable
Internet Access Special
Interest Group (SIG)



“

It has been noted that for many people in rural areas the challenge mostly is not about connectivity – the challenge is about literacy.”

WTDC Highlights video



What it takes to close the digital gap: Interview with WTDC Chair

ITU interviewed Hon. Paula Ingabire, Rwanda's Minister of Information, Communication Technology and Innovation and Chair of the World Telecommunication Development Conference held in Kigali, Rwanda.

This was the first WTDC to happen in Africa since the establishment of ITU's Development Sector in 1992. What does it mean for the host country, Rwanda?

🌟 **Paula Ingabire:** For Rwanda, it's been a privilege to host the very first WTDC in Africa. We're going to be part and parcel of shaping the [digital development] agenda over the next four years. More important is the ability to host and give the delegates and visitors a taste of Africa and Rwanda, which in many ways we've been able to achieve outside the conference facilities.

The first week included a number of events, including the Generation Connect Global Youth Summit that brought together youth representatives from about 115 countries. It was a highly energized, powerful summit. Youth were keen and very engaged in shaping the telecommunication agenda going forward. Listening to their asks and how they really wanted to contribute was very exciting.

What are the key outcomes from this landmark development conference?

🌟 **Paula Ingabire:** Recent resolutions adopted during the plenary session include [continued support for] the school connectivity project, Giga. As we come out of the COVID-19 pandemic, education is one of the sectors that has been heavily affected. School connectivity is essential as we bridge the digital divide.

As we recover better and stronger, this becomes a priority initiative for all of us going forward. Think about the 2.9 billion people [worldwide] that remain unconnected. What will we do differently over the next four years to connect them?



Everyone has a better sense of what it's going to take to close the digital gap. ”

Hon. Paula Ingabire

Rwanda's Minister of
Information, Communication
Technology and Innovation

What are some affordable and innovative ways of deploying infrastructure quickly? How do we equip [people] with the right skills, devices and content that will also push [to close] the usage gap? So many people live in coverage areas but haven't been able to benefit from that.

What do you think will be the major opportunities and challenges for the digital development sector over the rest of the current decade?

🌟 **Paula Ingabire:** In terms of opportunities, one is to understand the challenge at hand. Everyone has a better sense of what it's going to take to close the digital gap. Whether it's a declaration, an action plan, or resolutions – all give a broad framework under which respective countries are going to deploy resources to close the digital divide.

In terms of challenges, you have different maturity levels in the digital landscape. Finding a one-size-fits-all set of strategies that will close the gap in different parts of the world may be quite a challenge.

Even as we deploy resources and build the right partnerships to close the digital divide, figuring out how we measure that [progress] is still a sticky point, as is aligning on a set of criteria for how we measure readiness, maturity, and growth.

Telecommunications has not historically been a sector where women have been heavily involved, or where gender parity has been a priority. What are the ingredients needed to ensure full mainstreaming of a gender perspective in ICTs?

🌟 **Paula Ingabire:** Things are changing. We're starting from a common ground of understanding that it's urgent and important to think about gender mainstreaming in the different initiatives that we're taking forward.

At WTDC, you can see deliberate efforts from different countries that want to include women in delegations, so they are part of decisions. Women are capable and can be given opportunities to serve and contribute to the telecommunication development agenda.

Looking forward, we need to think about how to create a critical mass of women who are capable and able to contribute – starting from the education system. How do we encourage more women and girls to take up STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) careers?

And then expose them to leadership opportunities, [with] training, upskilling throughout, so they have the right skills to contribute in a significant way.



What are some affordable and innovative ways of deploying infrastructure quickly? ”

Hon. Paula Ingabire

You are a living example of this! How did you get to where you are today?

🌟 **Paula Ingabire:** It all starts with faith – believing in the opportunity and the right to empower women and young people. In Rwanda, that has not been a problem – the leadership has been working on that.

Secondly, being given the right tools and capacity building programmes that allow me to serve adequately in these capacities. I am one of many [women] that have been given the opportunity to serve. Today, our cabinet has over 51 per cent representation of women; our parliament has over 62 per cent.

We're seeing a lot of that happening in the private sector as well: a deliberate focus on empowering young girls to take up STEM subjects. Over the next few years, we'll start to see a critical mass of young women leaders at the helm of this transformational work – not just in Rwanda, but across the continent.

Tell us about some of Rwanda's biggest digital development milestones, particularly in the five years since the last WTDC. How has Kigali managed to position itself, in a relatively short period of time, as one of the key digital entrepreneurship poles on the continent?

🌟 **Paula Ingabire:** By establishing an enabling environment for entrepreneurs and innovators to flourish. We see ourselves as a proof-of-concept destination for innovative companies and start-ups to launch, test, and scale. The public sector's investment in Kigali Innovation City is a well-known example.

We are also willing to co-create policy and regulations with all concerned parties; for example, through the Start-up Acts and the Fintech Sandboxing Policy [currently] under development.

We also offer numerous immigration and tax incentives for companies to set up shop in Rwanda as their operating base for an Africa-wide market. Rwanda was ranked the second easiest place to do business in Africa and the 38th globally in the World Bank's 2020 Doing Business [report](#).

What are the basic principles driving Rwanda's digital policies in recent years?

🌟 **Paula Ingabire:** Over the years, we have adopted a citizen-centric approach to Rwanda's digital policies by being:

1 Inclusive: We ensure a seat at the table for all key stakeholders from the private sector, civil society, academia, and others, including citizens in general, during the consultation phase of any policy or regulation development.



Over the next few years, we'll start to see a critical mass of young women leaders at the helm of this transformational work – not just in Rwanda, but across the continent. ”

Hon. Paula Ingabire



We are also willing to co-create policy and regulations with all concerned parties. ”

Hon. Paula Ingabire

2 Focused on impact and outcomes: Policies, proposed projects and programmes under development must show clear evidence of positive impact and alignment with the [intended] outcomes of our national digital transformation agenda.

3 Data-driven decision-makers: We leverage data to draw insights and ensure that proposed policies are practical for implementation and can drive sustainable socio-economic development. We also use data to monitor the effect of policies and refocus them over time.

4 Pro public-private partnerships: We have high ambitions to transition from an agriculture-based economy to a knowledge-based economy, and we can't do it alone. Our policies make us open to partner with the private sector in developing and implementing projects for mutual benefit.

Our policies are designed to support Rwanda's participation in the local, regional, and global digital economy, including on exports of skills and services, and position Rwanda as an African innovation hub and proof-of-concept market, exemplary of the African knowledge-based economy.

How is the government addressing the need for sustainable e-waste management within Rwanda's digital development policies and through solutions such as the Enviroserve Rwanda Green Park?

Paula Ingabire: As a country that's placing information and communication technologies (ICTs) at the core of our development efforts, we are very cognizant that the growth of our ICT sector and advancement into a digital economy comes with greater generation of electronic and electrical waste.

The global record high of e-waste generation – more than 50 million metric tonnes (Mt) in 2019 – was quite alarming, so we committed to aggressively implementing mechanisms that can help manage e-waste responsibly while strengthening our circular economy, as well as creating green jobs and new revenue streams.

Some of the mechanisms we have in place include national regulation around e-waste management and Enviroserve Rwanda, an e-waste recycling facility that has deployed 20 e-waste collection centres across the country. Together with ITU, we are working on a project to introduce and implement the Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) concept in our regulatory frameworks. This project includes an awareness campaign to teach the public on how to treat e-waste, along with procedures for disposal.

This interview has been edited and condensed for length.



[Listen to the full interview with Hon. Paula Ingabire.](#)



WTDC Kigali: Fostering global connectivity to build better lives

By Doreen Bogdan-Martin, Director of the ITU Telecommunication Development Bureau

The eighth World Telecommunication Development Conference (WTDC) concluded in Kigali, Rwanda, last month with agreement on a new Declaration and Plan of Action to bring meaningful connectivity to all the world's people and communities.

It was an intensive two weeks, in which we welcomed 2152 delegates from 150 ITU Member States, along with 340 Sector Members and partners.

We talked, we walked. We listened, we deliberated. We even sometimes disagreed. We compromised, we partnered, and we sipped a lot of that amazing Rwandan coffee. We discussed and debated 215 proposals, and we succeeded in finding consensus on the way forward for information and communication technology (ICT) development worldwide.

The resulting Kigali Declaration calls on us "to spare no effort towards the expansion and use of telecommunications and ICTs and digital infrastructures, applications and services for building and establishing truly sustainable digital economies and societies."

This is a solid global agreement built on core principles and consensus. Fostering such agreements has been a key purpose of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and its delegates for 157 years.

In pursuing this latest example, we were very ably led by our WTDC Chair, Hon. Paula Ingabire, Minister of Information, Communication Technology and Innovation of Rwanda, whose wisdom, guidance, incredible patience, and razor-sharp focus ensured we reached our destination in a timely manner.



WTDC brought ICT leaders together from the four corners of the world to set global digital development priorities for the next four years. ”

Doreen Bogdan-Martin

Director of the ITU
Telecommunication
Development Bureau

An amazing host country team brought efficiency, skill, and dedication, delivering a world-class conference experience. Yves Iradukunda, Permanent Secretary in Rwanda's Ministry of Information, Communication Technology and Innovation and Host Country Focal Point, truly set the gold standard – and did so in record time, with less than four months to prepare after ITU members determined the final conference venue.

People and planet first

WTDC brought ICT leaders together from the four corners of the world to set global digital development priorities for the next four years.

The Kigali Action Plan, while building on the strengths of our 2017 Buenos Aires Action Plan, is designed to meet the new challenges of today's fast-evolving digital landscape. It amplifies what has been working well and rectifies what has not. And it opens doors to new types of collaboration, so that we can work more effectively together to achieve that goal of a fully connected planet by 2030.

As we gathered in Kigali, I urged our delegates to be bold; to be creative; to dare to go the extra mile. I challenged them to put the interests of people and planet first. And I encouraged them to make this conference a landmark in the history of global development, one that future delegates will look back to in our shared journey towards universal digital inclusion.

I think we all rose to that challenge, and I am immensely proud of what was achieved.

We agreed on 14 new Study Group Questions for the ITU Development Sector (ITU-D). We confirmed 28 regional initiatives and revised 45 resolutions. We also adopted four new ITU-D Resolutions.

I look forward to working further with ITU's members and partners to implement the Kigali Action Plan, using that ambitious blueprint to help map out a better future for all.



Clearly, young people don't want to just inherit their digital future. They want to be part of creating it. ”

Doreen Bogdan-Martin

Levers of change

This conference happened at the right time, in the right place, with the right people. And three key levers were instrumental in mobilizing WTDC's energy, innovation, commitment, and engagement.

The first was the [Generation Connect Global Youth Summit](#) – an amazing curtain-opener as we arrived in Kigali. This inspirational event, co-created by youth, brought together engaged, energetic young people from around the world to discuss cybersecurity, digital transformation, emerging technologies, online protection, entrepreneurship, leadership and much more.

Clearly, young people don't want to just inherit their digital future. They want to be part of creating it.

The second lever was the [ITU-D Network of Women](#), with an outstanding Qualcomm-hosted luncheon on how to achieve gender parity; a breakfast hosted by Australia on empowering women as policy-making delegates; and the Walk2Connect Walkathon, which raised awareness about gender mainstreaming as part of Kigali's Car Free Day.

Women at WTDC strengthened their connections, exchanged insights and experiences, and helped boost the solidarity and commitment of the whole global digital community to gender empowerment.

The third lever was the [Partner2Connect \(P2C\) Digital Development Roundtable](#), which stands out because of the extraordinary and unprecedented response, both from our membership and from new partners – and because of what these pledges could mean for the lives of people who are still digitally excluded.

This is where we really got the chance to “walk the talk” and ramp up our partnerships to move the dial on connecting the unconnected. The 418 validated pledges obtained by the end of WTDC are estimated to be worth over USD 25 billion.

I warmly thank every government and every entity that has committed resources. I also applaud the adoption of a new resolution incorporating the P2C Digital Coalition into ITU's ongoing work programme.

The P2C pledging platform, of course, remains open, and new pledges are still coming in.



Women at WTDC strengthened their connections, exchanged insights and experiences. ”

Doreen Bogdan-Martin



The P2C pledging platform, of course, remains open, and new pledges are still coming in. ”

Doreen Bogdan-Martin

The power of positive decision-making

At the start of this landmark conference, I mentioned one of my all-time favourite movies: *It's a Wonderful Life*. I spoke about that film's message around the truly profound effect that our decisions can have on the lives of others.

I urged WTDC delegates to remember that, through our actions, each and every one of us holds the power to change the world. I think we tried to do that in Kigali last month.

My great hope is that our work – dedicated to bringing connectivity to all – will soon help give the chance to people everywhere to live a wonderful life.



My great hope is that our work – dedicated to bringing connectivity to all – will soon help give the chance to people everywhere to live a wonderful life.

Doreen Bogdan-Martin



WTDC Highlights video



The Kigali Action Plan charts a course for digital development that aligns closely with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set out by the United Nations for 2030. It also defines the workplan of the ITU's Development Sector (ITU-D) until the next WTDC.

Regional initiatives adopted at WTDC

Africa

- | | |
|-------------|---|
| AFR1 | Supporting digital transformation to usher in a rapid transition to a digital economy while accelerating innovation in Africa |
| AFR2 | Implementation and expansion of broadband infrastructures, connectivity and emerging technologies |
| AFR3 | Building trust, safety and security in the use of telecommunications/information and communication technologies and protection of personal data |
| AFR4 | Fostering emerging technologies and innovation ecosystems |



Americas

- | | |
|-------------|--|
| AMS1 | Deployment of modern, resilient, secure and sustainable telecommunication/information and communication technology infrastructure |
| AMS2 | Enhancement and expansion of digital-literacy, digital-skills and digital inclusion programmes, especially among vulnerable populations |
| AMS3 | Effective support for the digital transformation and innovation ecosystems through scalable, funded and sustainable connectivity projects |
| AMS4 | Development of enabling policy and regulatory environments to connect the unconnected through accessible and affordable telecommunications/information and communication technologies that support achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and progress towards the digital economy |



Arab States

- | | |
|-------------|--|
| ARB1 | Sustainable digital economy through digital transformation |
| ARB2 | Enhancing confidence, security and privacy in the use of telecommunications/information and communication technologies in the era of new and emerging digital technologies |
| ARB3 | Developing digital infrastructure for smart sustainable cities and communities |
| ARB4 | Building capacities and encouraging digital innovation, entrepreneurship and future foresight |
| ARB5 | Developing means of digital regulation |



Asia-Pacific

- | | |
|-------------|--|
| ASP1 | Addressing special needs of least developed countries, small island developing states, including Pacific island countries, and landlocked developing countries |
| ASP2 | Harnessing information and communication technologies to support the digital economy and inclusive digital societies |
| ASP3 | Fostering development of infrastructure to enhance digital connectivity and connecting the unconnected |
| ASP4 | Enabling policy and regulatory environments to accelerate digital transformation |
| ASP5 | Contributing to a secure and resilient information and communication technology environment |



CIS Commonwealth of Independent States

CIS1 Developing infrastructure to promote innovation and partnerships in the introduction of new technologies – the Internet of Things, including the industrial Internet, smart cities and communities, 5G/IMT-2020 and next-generation NET-2030 communication networks, quantum technologies, artificial intelligence, digital health, digital skills and environmental protection

CIS2 Cybersecurity and personal data protection

CIS3 Creating an enabling legal and regulatory environment to accelerate digital transformation

CIS4 Digital skills and information and communication technology accessibility for the public, in particular for persons with disabilities

CIS5 Development of smart cities and communities



Europe

EUR1 Digital infrastructure development

EUR2 Digital transformation for resilience

EUR3 Digital inclusion and skills development

EUR4 Trust and confidence in the use of telecommunications/information and communication technologies

EUR5 Digital innovation ecosystems



For more details on regional initiatives and their guidelines for implementation, see the [Provisional Final Report](#) (accessible to ITU members).

Study Questions for ITU-D Study Groups

Study Group 1

Q1/1	Strategies and policies for the deployment of broadband in developing countries
Q2/1	Strategies, policies, regulations and methods of migration to and adoption of digital technologies for broadcasting, including to provide new services for various environments
Q3/1	The use of telecommunications/information and communication technologies (ICTs) for disaster risk reduction and management
Q4/1	Economic aspects of national telecommunications/ICTs
Q5/1	Telecommunications/ICTs for rural and remote areas
Q6/1	Consumer information, protection and rights
Q7/1	Telecommunication/ICT accessibility to enable inclusive communication, especially for persons with disabilities

*Enabling
environment
for meaningful
connectivity*



Study Group 2

Q1/2	Sustainable smart cities and communities
Q2/2	Enabling technologies for e-services and applications, including e-health and e-education
Q3/2	Securing information and communication networks: Best practices for developing a culture of cybersecurity
Q4/2	Telecommunication/ICT equipment: Conformance and interoperability, combating counterfeiting and theft of mobile devices
Q5/2	Adoption of telecommunications/ICTs and improving digital skills
Q6/2	ICTs for the environment
Q7/2	Strategies and policies concerning human exposure to electromagnetic fields

Digital transformation

ITU Telecommunication Development Sector (ITU-D) Study Groups are tasked with drafting reports, guidelines, and recommendations on a range of topics related to information and communication technologies (ICTs) in the context of digital development.

Learn more about [ITU-D study groups](#).

New resolutions

Digital transformation for sustainable development

Drive efforts to advance digital transformation for sustainable development, recognizing the enormous potential that information and communication technologies (ICTs) have to create positive, meaningful and lasting change.

Connecting every school to the Internet and every young person to information and communication technology services

Ensure every school is connected to the Internet through the joint ITU-UNICEF Giga initiative.

The ITU Partner2Connect Digital Coalition

Confirm the Partner2Connect Digital Coalition as the primary platform to foster new partnerships around meaningful connectivity and digital transformation globally, focusing on the hardest-to-connect communities.

Fostering telecommunication/ICT-centric entrepreneurship and digital innovation ecosystems for sustainable digital development

Create a thriving environment for entrepreneurship and digital innovation ecosystems to help accelerate the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

In addition to four new Resolutions adopted at WTDC, ITU members modified a number of Resolutions on a range of topics including telecommunications and information and communication technology (ICT) services in rural, isolated and poorly served areas; assistance to countries in special need; the role of telecommunications/ICT in disaster preparedness, early warning, rescue, mitigation, relief and response; bridging the digital divide; capacity-building initiatives; mainstreaming a gender perspective in ITU to enhance women's empowerment, to name just some.

For more details on new and revised resolutions, see the [Provisional Final Report](#) (accessible to ITU members).



Partner2Connect Coalition mobilizes over USD 26 billion to connect the unconnected

A global pledging event organized by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) rallied unprecedented support from governments and companies to expand Internet access everywhere as a key aspect of sustainable development.

The [Partner2Connect \(P2C\) Digital Development Roundtable](#) which took place in the Rwandan capital concluded with the announcement of over 360 pledges representing an estimated combined financial value of USD 18.55 billion. By 18 July, the dashboard revealed 425 pledges representing an estimated value of USD 26.06 billion.

The ambitious pledging event, held between 7 and 9 June, was a highlight of the ITU World Telecommunication Development Conference ([WTDC](#)), which aligns global connectivity strategies with the wide-ranging Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations (UN).

Over 400 ground-breaking pledges promise to improve billions of lives around the world

“

The Partner2Connect Digital Development Roundtable will prove to be a tipping point.”

Houlin Zhao

ITU Secretary-General

The drive for universal and meaningful connectivity represented in the P2C pledges will directly benefit billions of people around the world, especially in developing countries where connectivity is lagging.

The funding, services, technical support, and other assistance detailed in the pledges will improve people's access to – and readiness for – digital technologies, as well as fostering digital ecosystems and incentivizing investment in digital transformation.

"The Partner2Connect Digital Development Roundtable will prove to be a tipping point," said ITU Secretary-General Houlin Zhao at the close of the pledging sessions. "The pledges and commitments made in Kigali and in the months leading to this Roundtable send a powerful message that together we can ramp up investments in ICT development to leave no one offline."

Some 2.9 billion people – or more than one third of the world's population – have still never connected to the Internet.

Rwanda's Minister of Information, Communication Technology and Innovation, Hon. Paula Ingabire, Chair of WTDC, said: "We need everybody to pull together in the same direction if we are to successfully address the challenge of ensuring universal meaningful connectivity globally. Partner2Connect is one of the best avenues through which we can catalyse and engage in productive partnerships towards sustainable connectivity for all."

Ground-breaking commitments

The P2C pledges come at a critical inflection point, with the protracted COVID-19 pandemic underlining the importance of fast, reliable broadband connectivity as an essential service.

The pledges announced at the Roundtable were not only financial – they also included ground-breaking commitments, policies and advocacy plans to bridge the digital divide, creating fertile ground where new partnerships and alliances for global connectivity can flourish.

"After months of collective work developing the Partner2Connect Action Framework and the pledging platform, together with ITU Member States, civil society groups, philanthropic organizations, private and youth-led organizations, we are now setting a major milestone by gathering under one umbrella an unprecedented number of commitments to advance universal and meaningful connectivity," said Doreen Bogdan-Martin, Director of the ITU Telecommunication Development Bureau.



Partner2Connect is one of the best avenues through which we can catalyse and engage in productive partnerships towards sustainable connectivity for all.

Hon. Paula Ingabire

Rwanda's Minister of Information, Communication Technology and Innovation and Chair of WTDC



We are now setting a major milestone by gathering under one umbrella an unprecedented number of commitments to advance universal and meaningful connectivity.

Doreen Bogdan-Martin

Director of the ITU Telecommunication Development Bureau

In a major announcement during the 3-day Roundtable programme, ITU's host country Switzerland pledged that Geneva would host the headquarters of Giga – a joint ITU-UNICEF initiative to connect every school in the world to the Internet by 2030. Announcing the plan, the Swiss Confederation said the new Giga Office in Geneva would serve as a unique collaboration point, bridging the world of finance with the world of international relations and development.

Diverse engagement

The Partner2Connect Digital Roundtable engaged over a thousand participants onsite in Kigali, who were joined by more than 350 connecting remotely. Alongside announcements of pledges and commitments, the event featured 10 high-level panel discussions involving senior representatives from government, the private sector, international organizations, civil society, and youth-led groups.

Speaking at the closing ceremony, H.E. Ursula Owusu-Ekuful, Minister of Communications and Digitalisation of Ghana and Focus Area Leader of the P2C Coalition, said: "Our Partner2Connect Coalition commits us to accelerate our efforts to connect the unconnected and achieve sustainable global development. Let us implement all our pledges for our collective benefit."

Five spotlight sessions held over the 3-day event highlighted crucial digital development topics: Partnering to transform education; Advancing the LDC5 Doha Programme of Action through P2C; Discovering the secret ingredients to last-mile connectivity investment; Accelerating universal meaningful connectivity through the UN Digital Compact; and a special session on Assistance and Support to Ukraine for rebuilding its telecommunication sector.

The [Partner2Connect interactive dashboard](#), newly launched at the P2C Roundtable, will enable users to search for specific pledges and contributors, as well as view overall tracking analytics.

For more information, check out the Partner2Connect [website](#).



Let us implement all our pledges for our collective benefit.

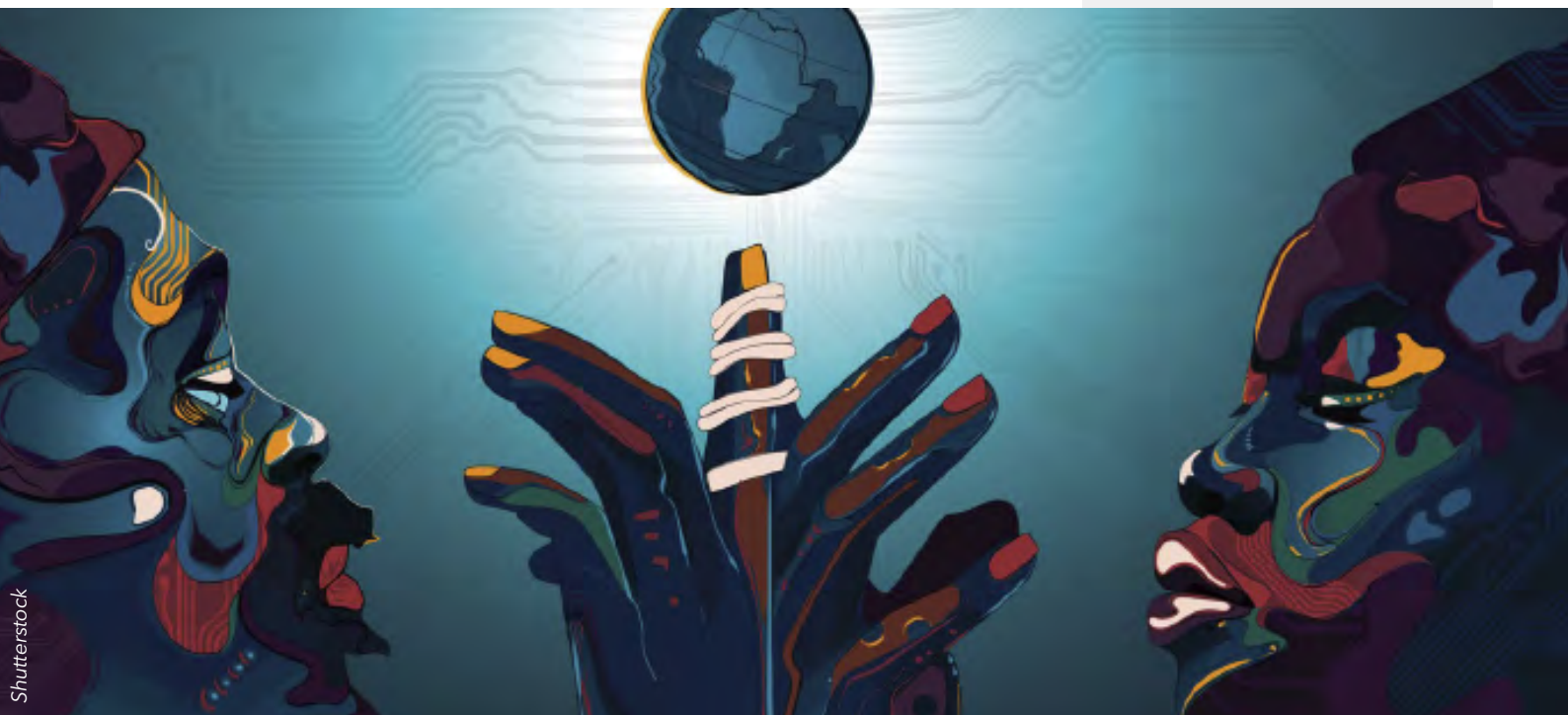
H.E. Ursula Owusu-Ekuful

Ghana's Minister of Communications and Digitalisation and Focus Area Leader of the P2C Coalition



Watch the ITU Partner2Connect highlights [video](#).





Global Connectivity Report: Potential of the Internet remains largely untapped

The ITU's new Global Connectivity Report 2022, presenting a unique and comprehensive global assessment of digital connectivity, the associated drivers and enablers and how they have evolved over the decades, was launched at the World Telecommunication Development Conference 2022 (WTDC).

The immense potential of the Internet for social and economic good remains largely untapped despite 30 years of steady growth, according to the report. It argues that while easy, affordable access to fast broadband is near-ubiquitous in most rich-world nations, vast swaths of humanity remain excluded from the immense possibilities offered by the online experience, stunting economic development and deepening global inequalities.

The report advocates for putting "universal and meaningful connectivity" at the centre of global development.

While the number of Internet users surged from just a few million in the early 1990s to almost five billion today, 2.9 billion people – or around one third of humanity – still remain totally offline, and many hundreds of millions more struggle with expensive, poor-quality access that does little to materially improve their lives.

The report advocates for putting “universal and meaningful connectivity” – defined as the possibility of a safe, satisfying, enriching, productive, and affordable online experience for everyone – at the centre of global development. It also evaluates how close the world is to achieving that universal and meaningful connectivity, using the [connectivity targets for 2030](#) recently released by ITU and the [Office of the United Nations \(UN\) Secretary-General's Envoy on Technology](#).

The cost of broadband subscriptions and digital devices remains a major barrier to connectivity, the report confirms. While Internet access has become progressively cheaper in richer countries, getting online is still prohibitively expensive in many low- and lower-middle-income economies.

And although the cost of broadband – especially mobile broadband – has fallen significantly over the past decade, the majority of low- and middle-income economies still fall short of the global affordability target of 2 per cent or less of gross national income per capita set by the [Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development](#).

“Equitable access to digital technologies isn’t just a moral responsibility, it’s essential for global prosperity and sustainability,” said ITU Secretary-General Houlin Zhao. “We need to create the right conditions, including promoting environments conducive to investment, to break cycles of exclusion and bring digital transformation to all.”

While the COVID-related surge in demand for Internet access brought some 800 million additional people online, it also dramatically increased the cost of digital exclusion, with those unable to connect abruptly shut out of employment, schooling, access to health advice, financial services, and much more.

“Universal, meaningful connectivity has become the global imperative for our decade,” said Doreen Bogdan-Martin, Director of the ITU Telecommunication Development Bureau, which produced the report. “It’s no longer just about linking people – the catalytic role of connectivity will also be absolutely critical to our success in achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals.”



ITU/UNESCO Broadband Commission urges faster global action on digital development

Commissioners met in Kigali ahead of the opening of WTDC to outline next steps for accelerating inclusive universal connectivity.

Read the [press release](#).



Equitable access to digital technologies isn't just a moral responsibility, it's essential for global prosperity and sustainability. ”

Houlin Zhao

ITU Secretary-General

Still looking for the 'missing link'

The “[The Missing Link](#)” report, published in 1984 by the Independent Commission for World-Wide Telecommunications Development set up by ITU, identified a clear correlation between access to telecommunications and socio-economic development and urged all countries to make connectivity a priority.

Nearly 40 years on, that ‘missing link’ still persists, but has morphed to **multiple digital divides**:

- The **Income Divide** – the level of Internet use in low-income countries (22 per cent) remains far below that of high-income countries, which are approaching universal use (91 per cent)
- The **Urban-Rural Divide** – the share of Internet users is twice as high in urban areas as in rural areas
- The **Gender Divide** – globally, 62 per cent of men are using the Internet, compared with 57 per cent of women
- The **Generation Divide** – in all regions, young people 15–24 years are more avid Internet users (72 per cent online) than the rest of the population (57 per cent)
- The **Education Divide** – In nearly all countries where data are available, rates of Internet use are higher for those with more education – in many cases, far higher.

The report notes that the biggest challenges in connecting the unconnected are no longer related to network coverage, but rather to uptake and use.

With just 5 per cent of the global population still physically out of reach of a mobile broadband signal, the “coverage gap” is now dwarfed by the “usage gap”: some 32 per cent of people who are within range of a mobile broadband network and could theoretically connect still remain offline, due to prohibitive costs, lack of access to a device, or lack of awareness, skills, or ability to find useful content.



It's no longer just about linking people – the catalytic role of connectivity will also be absolutely critical to our success in achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals. ”

Doreen Bogdan-Martin

Director of the ITU
Telecommunication
Development Bureau

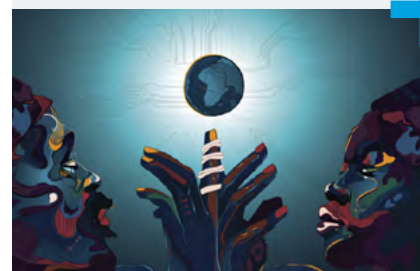
Youth

While young people are enthusiastic users of online platforms and services in all parts of the world, gaping divides between and within countries limit the ability of many young people to harness the online world to improve their lives.

Only 40 per cent of school-age children have home access to the Internet, with many only able to access online services via a mobile phone with limited functionality for activities like e-learning.

As the digital environment becomes more complex, children and youth also need greater competence to critically understand the digital world in which they are increasingly immersed. Access and digital skills are key to ensuring that children and youth enhance their prospects, and there is growing recognition that all stakeholders need to collaborate more effectively to protect youth from online risks and harm.

Issues directly affecting young people's digital access and experience were debated at ITU's first-ever [Generation Connect Global Youth Summit](#), which took place in Kigali, Rwanda, from 2-4 June, just ahead of the opening of the WTDC (see next section).



Global Connectivity Report 2022

Achieving universal and meaningful connectivity in the Decade of Action.

[Access the report.](#)



Young participants voice key priorities

At the first-ever Generation Connect Global Youth Summit kick-off session, Youth Envoys shared their motivations for attending the three-day gathering in Kigali, Rwanda.

“

I hope this is the first of many summits where we the youth are able to show everyone that we are motivated to make a difference and prove that we are capable of doing so.”

Ali Al-Toblani
(Bahrain)

“

Investment in youth is an investment for the future.”

Omurbek Abdullaev
(Kyrgyzstan)

“

I want to make sure that the people who still live without a connection – while their governments probably do not prioritize this issue – are at the centre of the conversation.”

Milagro Suiira (Panama)



“

I expect a wide range of ideas and perspectives to be presented, resulting in rich and critical conversations that produce solutions and results. ”

Tayma Abdalhadi
(Palestine)

“

I am looking forward to meeting them in person in Kigali, along with the rest of the Generation Connect Youth Groups across the globe, to form meaningful and impactful long-term relationships and exchange ideas. ”

Rejoice Amutenya
(Namibia)

“

I expect to give as much as possible with my knowledge and experience from the South-East Europe region, hear what the youth from other regions of the world are facing as issues and challenges, try to share solutions, problems, and ideas to help each other, but also to help youth in general. ”

Marko Paloski (North Macedonia)

“

The summit will show how important youth engagement is for the future of safer technology and the digital environment. ”

Sahnigar Dogan (Azerbaijan)



“

I am hoping that I can create linkages between my island... and other developing and developed countries, so that we can all leverage our information and resources through a collaborative process.”

Shergaun Roserie
(Saint Lucia)

“

I hope with all my heart that the contributions and discussions during the summit will enable a significant change in young people's interest in digital.”

Emmanuella Ablé
(Ivory Coast)



Read [full article](#).



See more [photos](#) on flickr





Generation Connect Global Youth Summit mobilizes young digital development leaders

At the first-ever [Generation Connect Global Youth Summit](#) held at Kigali's Intare Conference Arena from 2 to 4 June, more than 500 young people aged 15–29 from around the world gathered to discuss a wide-ranging “tech for development” agenda ahead of WTDC.

Organized by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) with host country Rwanda, the three-day summit aimed to drive meaningful youth engagement, consultation, collaboration and participation in determining policies that will shape our increasingly digital world.

How youth can help
shape an inclusive
digital future for all



The United Nations system needs to become more inclusive as we strive to build a better world for our children to inherit. ”

Houlin Zhao

ITU Secretary-General

With a total of more than 1500 delegates from over 115 countries and 5000+ joining online, it brought young leaders, entrepreneurs, social change-makers, engineers, policy specialists, and students together with today's regional and global business leaders, decision-makers and community advocates in the run-up to ITU's World Telecommunication Development Conference (WTDC).

"The United Nations system needs to become more inclusive as we strive to build a better world for our children to inherit," said ITU Secretary-General Houlin Zhao. "Among the concrete steps taken to address this, the ITU Youth Strategy calls for supporting youth empowerment, bringing young people together for direct engagement, and fostering youth dialogue and participation in decision-making processes."

Key topics at the three-day Youth Summit included the global digital divide, youth access to online education and digital skills, the digital gender gap, online safety, e-waste management, the future of work, digital entrepreneurship, the role of technology in climate change, and more.

Addressing young delegates gathered at the Intare Arena this afternoon, Rwandan Prime Minister, Rt. Hon. Dr Édouard Ngirente, said: "The extent to which our economies can grow will depend on the ability to ensure equitable access to technology as well as upskilling and reskilling our populations, especially the young people. These are global opportunities that require global cooperation. It is in this spirit that the Generation Connect Global Youth Summit is kicking off, because young people around the world are central to the vision to connect the unconnected."

The high-level representatives welcomed at the opening ceremony also included Hon. Rosemary Mbabazi, Minister for Youth and Culture, who told assembled delegates that "The advancement of technology in today's world is a constant factor, and youth are the early adopters, developers of these new technologies. Given an enabling environment, youth can bring the change and transformation needed in the world."

“

It is in this spirit that the Generation Connect Global Youth Summit is kicking off, because young people around the world are central to the vision to connect the unconnected. ”

Rt. Hon. Dr Édouard
Ngirente

Prime Minister of Rwanda

“

Given an enabling environment, youth can bring the change and transformation needed in the world. ”

Hon. Rosemary Mbabazi

Rwanda's Minister for
Youth and Culture



Building 'Our Digital Future'

The summit programme, co-designed with young people from ITU's global Generation Connect Youth network, culminated with a series of recommendations to enhance youth engagement in building an inclusive, sustainable digital future for all. Key aims include direct participation of youth in devising government digital strategies, as well as in the work of ITU and the wider United Nations system.

Doreen Bogdan-Martin, Director of the ITU Telecommunication Development Bureau (BDT), encouraged young delegates to be bold, and be creative. "As the first true generation of digital natives, your youthful perspective, combined with your digital skills, offer us a real chance to navigate a new and better path, to break down old barriers, and to finally create that elusive, equitable, digital future we want," she said.

Addressing diverse needs

ITU's [Youth Strategy](#) is aligned with the vision and objectives of the [United Nations Youth Strategy: Youth 2030](#) – "working with and for young people". As part of this, summit participants shared the positive and negative impacts of technology on their lives.

The programme featured a special focus on the needs of young women, young people with disabilities, and young indigenous people. It also highlighted the challenges of young people who are not yet connected to the Internet, or who struggle with connectivity that is too limited to help them flourish and realize their dreams and ambitions.

“

As the first true generation of digital natives, your youthful perspective, combined with your digital skills, offer us a real chance to navigate a new and better path, to break down old barriers, and to finally create that elusive, equitable, digital future we want. ”

Doreen Bogdan-Martin

Director of the ITU
Telecommunication
Development Bureau



The Generation Connect Global Youth Summit's global footprint reflected preparatory activities at over 70 hubs in over 40 countries. Hosted by academic institutions, not-for-profits, and private-sector companies, these hubs have mobilized close to 5000 youth, who connected live throughout various summit sessions.



Understanding the global landscape for youth: From pre-COVID to today

By Othman Almoamar, Amani Alkhiami, Ali Al Farhan, and Yara Ghouth – the Saudi youth delegation to ITU's Generation Connect Global Youth Summit

Those under 30 years of age comprise approximately half of the world's population today. As a result, a fundamental question repeatedly comes to mind: are today's young people ready for their future?

Read the [full article](#).

[See more photos on flickr](#)





“Through my work, I witness every day how young people are always answering to the challenges in their communities. I find it amazing that despite the different challenges that young people are facing from all fronts and aspects of their lives, young people continue to be one of the most resilient agents of change. With all of these qualities, I think it’s only right that we refer to young people not only as digital natives – but also as digital leaders.”

Jayathma Wickramanayake

United Nations Secretary-General’s Envoy on Youth, who actively participated in the consultation process and during the Youth Summit.





Giga transforms lives in rural Rwanda, one school at a time

Giga – an initiative by ITU and UNICEF to connect every last one of the world's schools.

As the developed world explores Web3 and upgrades to 5G cellular networks, many rural communities in developing countries remain far away from basic infrastructure like a simple Internet connection.

Even people with access often struggle to stay connected or to benefit meaningfully from their connectivity. Rwanda – host of the World Telecommunication Development Conference ([WTDC](#)) of the International Telecommunication Union ([ITU](#)) – provides a case in point.

While nearly all schools in the East African country lie within 30 kilometres of a fibre network or mobile broadband coverage areas, 43 per cent of them – or 1796 schools – still lack Internet access.

Prototyping connectivity

Enter Giga – an initiative by ITU and UNICEF to connect every last one of the world's schools. In 2019, the initiative joined forces with the Government of Rwanda to implement a prototype operational model in the country.

The pilot project in 63 schools resulted in a quadrupling of capacity and a 55 per cent cost reduction compared with the fixed wireless solution to the 4G connectivity that schools used to receive. This prototyping exercise also aims to explore ways to extend connectivity from schools to their surrounding communities.

As a first step, the government worked with Giga to aggregate the demand for connectivity across schools in the country's Eastern Province. The partners then launched a common bid to provide broadband Internet connectivity to 63 schools: 50 in the predominantly rural Eastern Province and 13 in refugee camps that had no electricity.

One of the selected prototype schools was G.S. Nyagihunika, located in Eastern Province's Bugesera District on the outskirts of Rwanda's capital Kigali.

Witnessing change

On 8 June, G.S. Nyagihunika staff and local district mayor Richard Mutabazi welcomed visitors from Rwanda's government, the private sector, and development partners UNICEF and ITU.

The visit, coinciding with WTDC sessions held 40 kilometres away at the Kigali Convention Centre, aimed to showcase how connecting schools can unlock more inclusive educational opportunities, as well as demonstrate Giga's progress in Rwanda.

Following a tour of the school led by the headmaster, visitors participated in brief interactive lessons to observe how Internet-connected laptops are helping local educators teach students.

"The Internet gives us access to videos and songs, which not only makes it easier for the children to learn but also to focus on the content," Jeanine Mutesi, a teacher at G.S. Nyagihunika, told ITU News.

Students are enjoying the benefits, she added.

Internet access has also made the classroom experience more rewarding for teachers, enabling them research and demonstrate specific concepts in meaningful and engaging ways.

As a first step, the government worked with Giga to aggregate the demand for connectivity across schools in the country's Eastern Province.



The Internet gives us access to videos and songs, which not only makes it easier for the children to learn but also to focus on the content. ”

Jeanine Mutesi

Teacher at G.S. Nyagihunika

“Some concepts are not easy to teach using the analogue method of writing on a blackboard,” said Allan Kirenga, who teaches science at the school. Internet access enables him to project images or show simple experiments, as well as complement his lesson planning.

“Sometimes the books we are provided with don’t have sufficient information,” added Kirenga. “The Internet expands our scope of knowledge and the content that we teach.”

Community benefits

The benefits of connectivity also extend to residents of the Bugesera district.

“Some community members come to the campus area to use our Internet connection,” noted Kirenga. “You find some of them uploading CVs in response to job offerings, while others use it to read the news.”

Strengthening the school’s connection could help more residents gain Internet access from outside the school premises. Offering community hotspots with free connectivity – a trend found in some areas in Kigali – could be another solution, Kirenga added.

The visitors headed back to Kigali with these ideas for improvement in mind, along with first-hand insights on how Giga is transforming education at G.S. Nyagihunika and beyond.

Starting with computers and an Internet connection, other underserved communities in developing countries can follow similar steps, advancing towards meaningful universal connectivity one school at a time.

Meanwhile, back at WTDC, ITU Member States [adopted a resolution](#) on “*Connecting every school to the internet and every young person to information and communication technology services*”, mentioning Giga as key vehicle to achieve this goal.

Switzerland pledged to host the headquarters of Giga in Geneva. Announcing the plan, the Swiss Confederation said the new office would serve as a unique collaboration point, bridging the worlds of finance and international digital development.



The Internet expands our scope of knowledge and the content that we teach. ”

Allan Kirenga

Teacher at G.S. Nyagihunika



Women's network puts gender equality at centre of development priorities

The ITU Development Sector ([ITU-D](#)) Network of Women ([NoW](#)) has put gender concerns at the forefront of global initiatives to connect the unconnected. The World Telecommunication Development Conference ([WTDC](#)) included key discussions organized by the NoW in ITU-D.

In their conversation at a [Working Luncheon](#) supported by US-based wireless technology group Qualcomm on 9 June, conference participants recommended ways to strengthen women's presence in the digital development sector.

The NoW in ITU-D is focused on boosting women's leadership and participation in high-level development policy-making processes in the sector, including ITU conferences.

The NoW in ITU-D is focused on boosting women's leadership and participation in high-level development policy-making processes.

Discussants included Elizabeth Migwalla, Qualcomm's Vice President for International Government Affairs; Director of the ITU Telecommunication Development Bureau, Doreen Bogdan-Martin; Cristiana Flutur, Head of International Affairs at Romanian regulator ANCOM; and Rwanda's Minister of Information, Communication Technology and Innovation, Hon. Paula Ingabire, who also chaired WTDC.

Stepping up gender mainstreaming

Follow-up discussions at a [Women's Breakfast](#) on 15 June, supported by Australia, zeroed in on enhancements to strengthen WTDC Resolution 55 – a key conference commitment to mainstream gender in ITU's development activities.

The breakfast also served to collate broader ideas on promoting gender equality in the rapidly evolving – but largely male-dominated – field of telecom and digital technologies.

In her address, Lisa Gittos, First Secretary, Australian Permanent Mission to the United Nations in Geneva, urged delegates to keep up the momentum on women's empowerment ahead of the ITU Plenipotentiary Conference, to be held in Bucharest, Romania from 26 September to 14 October.

Dr Kim Mallalieu, Deputy Chair of the Telecommunications Authority of Trinidad and Tobago and Senior Lecturer, Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering, The University of the West Indies, called on women to step up in their quest to be heard, and to continue to reference data in measuring progress.

Key findings of the [GSMA Mobile Gender Gap Report](#) shared at the breakfast underlined the slow progress – in some cases reversal – in the equal digital inclusion of women. Max Cuvellier, Head of Mobile for Development (M4D) at mobile telecom industry association GSMA, stressed the need for coordinated efforts to ensure that women are not left behind in an increasingly digital world.

A Women's Breakfast during the WTDC aimed to strengthen Resolution 55.



The mobile gender gap

There are still 264 million fewer women than men accessing mobile Internet. Efforts are urgently needed to reduce the gender gap and ensure that women can participate fully in a more digitized society.

Learn [more](#) in GSMA's Mobile Gender Gap Report.

Walk2Connect to bridge the gender digital divide

On 12 June, conference delegates and local residents in Kigali alike joined Walk2Connect, a seven-kilometre walkathon organized by ITU in collaboration with the Ministry of Information and Communications Technology and Innovation, the Rwanda Utilities Regulatory Authority, and the City of Kigali.

The walkathon aimed to raise awareness on the pressing need to bridge the gender digital divide and promote equal participation of women in the global digital agenda.

Mentorship

Mentorship opportunities offered through the Network of Women in ITU-D support and encourage mentees to step up to senior leadership roles at key ITU conferences and other meetings of ITU's governing bodies.

During the recent WTDC cycle, the mentorship programme brought together 318 delegates, both new and experienced, from 100 different countries, who were then paired off as mentor and mentees to share their knowledge and experience.

NoW objectives

ITU-D's Network of Women was created in 2021 with the following aims:

- Build, in the medium and long term, a community where female delegates support each other, expand their network, advocate and share experience and knowledge.
- Promote the active participation of women in the activities of ITU and the sector in general.
- Give visibility to women and empower them for larger responsibilities in their respective delegations, at WTDC and in future similar platforms.
- Encourage experienced female delegates to mentor ICT professionals in order to create a stronger base for women in the digital space.

Learn more about the [Network of Women in ITU-D programme](#).



Walking the path to gender parity in digital policy-making

A walkathon during the WTDC helped to raise awareness on the pressing need to bridge the gender digital divide.

Read the [full article](#).



Next stop, Plenipot: ITU's key conference



The countdown is on for the governing conference of the United Nations specialized agency for information and communication technologies (ICTs).

From 26 September to 14 October, ICT leaders from around the world will gather in Bucharest, Romania for PP-22 – the upcoming [Plenipotentiary Conference](#) of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU).

With just over two months left until the conference, delegates from ITU's 193 Member States are preparing to grapple with questions ranging from the upsurge of satellite launches and harmonizing 5G networks to ensuring everyone gets meaningful Internet connectivity.

Rallied under a call to "Connect and Unite", they will set the high-level agenda for ITU's radiocommunication spectrum, standardization, and development activities over the next four years. The Plenipotentiary – known informally as "Plenipot" or "PP" – selects the top management for the ITU Secretariat, sets out key strategic objectives, and affirms common positions among ITU Member States worldwide.

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As digital transformation picks up pace around the world, an anticipated 2500 decision-makers will set out the roadmap for the organization's work for 2024–2027.

Electing new leadership

As happens every four years, representatives of all those Member States will elect 48 of their number, including both developed and developing countries across six world regions, to sit on the next [ITU Council](#), which governs the entire organization between Plenipotentiary Conferences.

Member States attending PP-22 will also elect new officials to top leadership positions, including Secretary-General and Deputy Secretary-General.

Elections will also be held for the directorship of each of the three bureaux that support ITU's work in the key sectors of radiocommunication, standardization, and development. The Radiocommunication Bureau coordinates global radio spectrum allocations; the Telecommunication Standardization Bureau facilitates ITU members' development of international technical standards; and the Telecommunication Development Bureau helps promote digital inclusion for under-served communities, including the 2.9 billion people still unconnected to the Internet today.

Candidates are also up for election to the 12-member [Radio Regulations Board](#), which guides ITU in applying the legally binding [Radio Regulations](#) treaty, registers Member States' frequency assignments, and addresses cases of unresolved interference.

Green, inclusive, and gender-responsive

As a Plenipot "first", the ITU Secretariat has set out to make the quadrennial conference gender-responsive, green, and inclusive of youth – in line with the Sustainable Development Goals set by the United Nations for 2030.

In the traditionally (and still today) male-dominated field of tech, PP-22 aims to advance gender equality and inclusion pro-actively. ITU and host country Romania are encouraging all Member States to infuse their official delegations with larger shares of women, as well as to include young people.

This strong focus on gender equality and youth will also underpin conference agenda-setting, governance, and decision-making.

This conference aims to be the greenest and most sustainable in the history of ITU Plenipots – which date all the way back to [1865](#)!

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Watch this space

The upcoming Plenipotentiary Conference offers an opportunity for ITU's full membership to connect, unite and build global consensus around key technical and sustainable development issues in a rapidly changing world. It also maximizes ITU's value as a public-private cooperation forum with global reach.

Uniquely among UN agencies, ITU's membership comprises not just Member States, but also over 900 companies, universities, and international and regional organizations from around the world.

Global gatherings enable ITU members to raise awareness about the importance of closing the digital gap and harnessing new and emerging technologies for a sustainable future.

To follow the conversations and outcomes of PP-22, [subscribe to the ITU Newsletter](#), and follow #Plenipot on social media.

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ITU photography competition

In the run-up to PP-22, ITU is calling for photos telling the story of "Technology for good" in the categories: #Gender #Youth #Green.

Submit your entry by 12 August.

[Learn more.](#)



#Gender



#Youth



#Green

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