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GSR-21: REGULATORY ASSOCIATIONS (RA) MEETING

**THE ROLE OF REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS IN PROMOTING
BROADBAND MAPPING TOOLS TO FOSTER INVESTMENT AND COMPETITION FOR INCLUSIVE
AND SUSTAINABLE CONNECTIVITY
TUESDAY, 22 JUNE 2021 (14:45-16:00 CEST) ZOOM**

REPORT BY THE CHAIR

**Ms Bridget Linzie, Executive Secretary of the Communications Regulators' Association of
Southern Africa (CRASA), RA Meeting Chair**

The 2021 annual Regulatory Associations (RA) meeting was chaired by Ms Bridget Linzie, Executive Secretary of the Communications Regulators' Association of Southern Africa (CRASA). In her opening remarks, Ms Doreen Bogdan-Martin, ITU BDT Director, stressed that the world continues struggling to manage the COVID-19 pandemic, and the role of ICTs in providing solutions has become even more clear and relevant. Digital technologies have proven to be critical tools for the continuity of our daily lives, the growth of our economies and simply our ability to connect with each other. Unfortunately many people in rural and isolated areas remain unconnected due to a lack of investment in ICT infrastructure, and they are thereby denied from essential services that ride on this infrastructure. To address this issue, the [*ITU Broadband Map tool*](#) come useful to member states, regulators, the private sector and ICT stakeholders in their efforts towards infrastructure mapping systems that could identify ICT infrastructure availability to leverage infrastructure sharing strategies, and reduce the cost of infrastructure deployment and service provision. In addition, Ms Bogdan-Martin encouraged the participation of the Regulatory Associations in the preparations of the World Telecommunication Development Conference (WTDC), through their available channels, so that "we can have the collective voice of all regions and generate the impact we all want to see in our connectivity agenda" she said.

Ms Bridget Linzie, RA Meeting Chair, in her welcoming remarks highlighted that this dialogue is very important, at this very moment, as we are living in very uncertain and difficult times. COVID-19 has driven public service delivery, commercial and social activities online and now broadband access has become an ever-crucial commodity in securing continuity of business and social activities. COVID-19 has clearly revealed that there are gaps in access to broadband. In the developing world, it has become clear that we have huge lack of adequate broadband infrastructure that is contributing to an apparent digital divide and poor quality of service. Those who live in urban areas and rural district centres, have

had disruptions to their livelihood of lesser magnitude comparing to those in areas with no broadband access. In this regard, it is essential that regulators have a good understanding of broadband mapping tools, to ensure that we work towards offsetting these negative equity impacts of COVID-19.

Connectivity is a very timely subject now in many of the regions, it is very essential for national regulatory authorities to have a good understanding of broadband mapping and that help to ensure to work towards offsetting some of these negative impacts of COVID-19.

A presentation on **ITU Broadband Mapping tool** was delivery by Mr Vladimir Daigele, Senior Officer Telecommunication Network & spectrum Management Division, ITU/BDT. His presentation focused on the importance of community engagement. Regulatory Associations play an important role to fostering the dialogue and collaboration with ITU and within the regions on mapping the available infrastructure and identify gaps. Harmonization of mapping procedures is also relevant to allow that different stakeholders (regulators, operators, investors, etc.) can provide and use appropriate information on infrastructure expansion through infrastructure sharing and investment.

The RA Chair then moved to the interactive discussion on how Regulatory Associations can promote the use of Broadband mapping tools to foster investment and competition for inclusive and sustainable connectivity? Counting with the intervention of the following Regulatory Associations:

1. **Mr Francisco Chate**, Executive Secretary, Association of Communications and Telecommunications Regulators of the Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries ARCTEL-CPLP
2. **Mr Mohamed Chemani**, Permanent Secretariat, Arab Regulators Network of telecommunications and information technologies AREGNET
3. **Ms Bernice Otye Edande**, Secrétaire Permanent Assemblée des Régulateurs des Télécommunications de l'Afrique Centrale ARTAC
4. **Mr John Omo**, Secretary General, African Telecommunication Union ATU
5. **Ms Annemarie Sipkes**, Incoming Chair 2022, Body of European Regulators for Electronic Communications BEREC
6. **Mr Oscar Leon**, Executive Secretary, Inter-American Telecommunication Commission CITEL
7. **Mr Selby Wilson**, Caribbean Telecommunication Union CTU
8. **Ms Nataliia Lado**, Representative, Eastern Partnership Electronic Communications Regulators Network, EaPeReg
9. **Mr Abdoul Ly**, Antoine Samba Chair, Réseau Francophone de la Régulation des Télécommunications FRATEL
10. **Mr Almazbek Apandievich Kadyrkulov**, Deputy Director General, RCC Executive Committee
11. **Ms Paola Bonilla Castaño**, Representative, Foro Latinoamericano de Entes Reguladores de Telecomunicaciones, REGULATEL
12. **Mr Jigme Wangdi**, Chairman, South Asian Telecommunication Regulators' Council SATRC

During all the various discussions it was a common agreement that broadband mapping is very critical for both ICT Policy makers and regulators to allow them to make informed decisions, especially in identifying where there is need for investment in broadband infrastructure. These tools are also important to encourage effective competition for inclusive and sustainable connectivity. It was noted that advanced work is being done by various regional regulatory communities, where guidelines have been developed and provided to regulators for them to utilize in mapping of broadband networks. It was also noted the need for regulators to look on how to bridge the gaps in the supply of broadband and noted that this kind of information really can be collected by regulators in cooperation with network operators and investors.

On analyzing the demand side in regards to broadband services, it was noted the requirement for regulators and policymakers to also look on how to enhance digital skills for end users. This is something that could be integrated in the mapping guidelines, as well as, the need to critically look at quality of service in regards to broadband connectivity.

Of course, the question of funding was also brought, how can we fund this type of initiatives? Panelists agreed that RAs have to take advantage of the tools provided by ITU. It is very important that we all bring in harmonization in terms of broadband mapping. ITU can play a pivotal role or be the hub for all Regulatory Associations on Broadband Mapping and support on harmonizing the different guidelines.

Regulatory Associations have a critical role to play in broadband mapping, especially in disseminating tools and guidelines developed among their countries members. Collaboration is essential at regional but also inter regional level. Regional Regulatory Associations need to be the driving force through ICT information.

It was agreed by panelists that connectivity is still uppermost on the regulatory agenda. As such, it is vital to accelerate broadband rollout and improve coverage. Bridging the digital divide is even more critical given the pandemic and how it has impacted lives, livelihoods and every aspect of daily existence.

The RA Chair concluded by encouraging all Regulatory Associations to reach out to ITU in terms of broadband mapping, and to use ITU tools but also as a hub to harmonize the methodologies and collect best practices that can be used in terms of broadband mapping. Fostering dialogue and collaboration with ITU and within and between regions on mapping the available infrastructure will allow different stakeholders to provide and use relevant information for infrastructure deployment through infrastructure sharing and investment. Having access to such information will not only allow for better expansion of infrastructure, but also cost reduction that could drive to affordable access for consumers.
