



UN-OHRLLS

## COMPREHENSIVE TEN-YEAR REVIEW CONFERENCE OF THE ALMATY PROGRAMME OF ACTION

### **Chair's Summary Adopted at the Thematic Meeting on Enhancing ICT development and connectivity for the Landlocked Developing Countries**

**Held on 31st October 2013, at the United Nations Conference Centre,  
Nairobi, Kenya**

#### **I. Introduction**

Geographical factors put Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs) at a distinct disadvantage in the development process as they incur substantially higher transport and other trade transaction costs when compared to coastal countries. The First International Ministerial Conference of Landlocked Developing Countries, Transit Developing Countries and Development Partners held in Almaty, Kazakhstan in 2003 adopted the Almaty Programme of Action (APoA) which was a partnership framework to address the special needs and challenges faced by the LLDCs.

The General Assembly, in its resolution 66/214, decided to hold a comprehensive ten-year review conference of the Almaty Programme of Action in 2014 to be preceded, by regional and global as well as thematic preparations. It is in this context that the ITU and OHRLLS organized a pre-conference event on *Enhancing ICT development and connectivity for the LLDCs* as part of the 2013 Global South-South Development Expo to review major achievements in ICT development in LLDCs, showcase the best practices; discuss how partnerships in particular South-South and Triangular cooperation at regional and international levels can help enhance development of ICTs in LLDCs, and suggest concrete recommendations that can be included in the preparation of the outcome document of the 10 Year Review Conference on the Almaty Programme of Action.

The meeting brought together about 40 participants including senior officials from landlocked and transit developing countries, representatives of donor countries, regional

development banks, UN system organizations, regional and sub-regional organizations, academia and civil society.

## **II. Summary of the Panels and Main Issues Raised**

The meeting began with an opening session where remarks were delivered by Mr. Gyan Chandra Acharya, Under-Secretary-General and High Representative, Dr Hamadoun Touré, Secretary-General, International Telecommunication Union (via video) and Ms. Sahle-Work Zewde, Director-General of United Nations Organization Nairobi. The opening session was followed by two panel discussions on (a) key issues on ICTs and Broadband, LLDCs challenges, best practices, country experiences and solutions, and (b) initiatives partnerships and solutions that can work to improve ICTs development for LLDCs. This section presents a summary of the panels and the key issues that were raised.

The meeting noted that the LLDCs had special needs for ICT development as noted in the resolution on “special measures for landlocked developing countries and small island developing states for access to international fibre optic network” unanimously passed by the ITU World Conference on International Telecommunications (WCIT-12) held in Dubai in 2012. The meeting noted that significant progress has been made in the last decade in the development of the ICT sector in LLDCs. However despite the progress, a significant digital divide still exists between the LLDCs and the other groups of countries.

The meeting identified some of the achievements made by LLDCs in ICT development including the following:

- Some LLDCs had introduced liberalization in the ICT and telecommunication sector and this has boosted the role of the private sector particularly in providing mobile telephone services. However the meeting stressed that the government still had to play a major role in areas where the private sector has not addressed – such as development of the broadband infrastructure network.
- There has been remarkable increase in ICT penetration especially of mobile telephony and internet use.
- The regional and sub-regional level efforts are being made to enhance the development of ICTs and Broadband in LLDCs. For example: in Asia through the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) development fund, the South Asia Sub-regional Economic Cooperation (SASEC) Information Highway Project is establishing a regional fiber optic-based network to provide high speed Internet services in Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, and parts of Northern India, Regional Training Networks in each country and in each country, and also to develop website portals that would provide information on distance education, telemedicine, e-commerce, and social networking.

The meeting noted some best practices that have been achieved in some LLDCs. These include:

- Some LLDCs have integrated ICT into national socio-economic development agenda, by mainstreaming it into key socio-economic sectors such as Education, Healthcare, Business, Agriculture and other sectors thereby ensuring that optimal benefits are realized from use of ICT.
- Liberalization of the ICT sector.
- Some LLDCs had successfully developed capacity building initiatives for communities including community e-centers, public information kiosks and community information centers.
- Some LLDCs have implemented Single Window electronic system and the Automated System for Customs Data (ASYCUDA) which have greatly improved customs clearance and procedures.
- Set up and effective use of a universal fund for expansion of ICT into the rural areas.
- Establishment of e-learning to increase the knowledge and use of ICT by the public.

The meeting indicated that the LLDCs still confronted challenges on the development of ICTs/Broadband. Some of the key challenges include:

- Lack of expertise to formulate custom designed policy, legal and regulatory framework suitable for the specific needs of the country;
- Lack of consistency in the policy, legal and regulatory regime, which gives rise to lower confidence in the private sector for investment;
- The unnecessary delays in the process of decision making on important issues like licensing and spectrum have been obstacles to stiff competition, diversification and introduction of the state of the art technologies;
- Limited broadband penetration in LLDCs and limited access to international Internet Bandwidth has emerged a major challenge for service providers.
- Limited funds for developing broadband infrastructure;
- High cost of connectivity to the international broadband infrastructure and the resulting higher costs of ICT and broadband services in LLDCs. For example A study carried out in ECOWAS region on access to submarine cables by the LLDCs in 2011 revealed that the wholesale price of international fibre connectivity for a purchasing level of capacity on E1 (2MB) in Niger is about US\$ 900 per MB per month whereas in a coastal country remain two to five times lower than the LLDCs. The higher price paid by landlocked countries for international capacity is linked to the transit costs that they have to pay to coastal countries to route their traffic across the terrestrial network of the coastal country;
- Low levels of ICT awareness and inadequate complementary services such as national electricity grid;
- Many of the governments and the regulators have not been able to adopt a unified licensing regime, have not addressed the policy, legal, regulatory and institutional arrangements to cater for convergence brought about by the development of

- devices, networks and technologies. The service providers are ready to provide multimedia services but governments and regulators are not ready;
- Many governments have realized the importance of e-governance for its obvious advantages. But the traditional bureaucracy is not ready for assimilating such changes. The IT and the telecom infrastructure for the implementation of e-government programs remains a great challenge; and
  - Cybersecurity remains critical to enhance public confidence in the use of ICTs.

### **III. Recommendations**

Discussions in the meeting suggested the following recommendations to support the LLDCs to fully harness ICT for their development.

#### **National ICT and Broadband policies**

LLDCs should develop a national broadband policy and strategic plans ensuring allocation of adequate resources for its implementation. The policy and strategic plan should include how to develop a modern ICT infrastructure and Internet access that can provide universal access. Such a strategy should be anchored in strong regulatory frameworks and domestic ICT laws that conform to international standards, including the Global ICT policy. The national ICT plan should fully reflect the cross-cutting nature of ICTs and their pivotal role in national development. LLDCs should include in their national ICT plan a strategy of how ICT can be used to promote trade facilitation and address the major challenge of landlockedness.

Improve development and convergence of relevant policies and regulations in domains such as radio spectrum policy and management, cross-border radio frequency management, digital media/broadcasting policy and broadband policy.

#### **Rapid development of the ICT infrastructure in LLDCs**

Expand ICT infrastructure in order to improve the access of LLDCs to international high-capacity submarine fibre-optic cables, low-price international voice services, higher-speed internet access, and high-bandwidth backbone networks to connect towns and cities within countries, across borders. The government should play a major role to ensure the development of the fibre backbone infrastructure for broadband required for increased utilization of ICT.

More efficient technology is required to meet market demand and requirements for access to high-quality broadband. LLDCs and their neighbours should promote implementation of infrastructure sharing between transport, energy and ICT sectors.

#### **Increased use of the established infrastructure**

Participants recommended the need for intensified use of the established infrastructure in order to optimize the returns to infrastructure.

### **Increased investments from the private sector**

Policy makers in LLDCs should promote investment in the ICT sector by creating an enabling environment with investment-friendly policy frameworks, regulatory certainty and fair competition in order to promote the role of the private sector. Encourage public private partnerships through providing technical assistance.

### **Enhanced regional ICT connectivity and cooperation**

Strengthen sub-regional and regional broadband infrastructure, promote harmonization of ICT policies and regulatory frameworks and customs and border crossing procedures at sub-regional or regional levels so as to provide for faster transit and border crossing of goods from LLDCs. Regional organizations should strengthen initiatives to support LLDCs to establish inland fibre networks in order to reduce the cost of broadband. Foster knowledge and experience sharing amongst the LLDCs themselves to allow partners to benefit from each other's experiences.

### **Improved ICT use to promote trade facilitation**

LLDCs and transit countries should increase the utilization of ICT to simplify, facilitate trade and transport, in conjunction with harmonization of customs systems and documentation. ICT is especially effective in applying the concepts of pre-clearing goods before they actually arrive at a customs post, of pre-clearing vehicles and drivers and of risk management and selectivity processes.

### **Increased use of ICT to spur economic growth in the production and industrial sectors and to support broader sustainable development.**

LLDCs should scale up utilization of ICT to improve efficiency and increase productivity in all production sectors especially industry, agriculture and mining, thereby enhancing process and value addition in order to reduce commodity dependence. They should mainstream the use of ICT for SMEs and in the delivery of social services such as health, and education, as well as in disaster preparedness, early warning, rescue, mitigation, relief and response.

### **Capacity-building**

Benefiting from ICTs requires substantial complementary investments in learning, and reorganisation by all stakeholders. Increased capacity-building programmes to increase ICT literacy in LLDCs, including women, children, the elderly, people with disabilities a workforce and manpower with high levels of ICT proficiency and expertise. Establish and scale up community based capacity building programmes such as community kiosks, community information centres and others. Encourage the introduction of ICT at all levels of education. The use of social networking such as facebook has contributed to people's interest in the use of internet. Such interest should be generated for e-health, e-education, e-governance etc. as well.

### **Improved data collection**

Strengthen collection of ICT statistics and indicators and regular reporting at all levels – national, regional and global to facilitate policy decisions and monitoring the effectiveness of past policies.

**Support from Bilateral and multilateral development partners**

Bilateral and multilateral development partners should increase their technical and financial assistance to support ICT development in LLDCs. In particular the following areas: Support LLDCs to develop the necessary infrastructure to access international optical fibre networks; Improve the ability of LLDCs to use satellite by lowering acquisition costs; Facilitate access to technologies and transfer of know-how on ICTs; and Support the Aid for Trade initiative, giving special consideration to the requirements of LLDCs.

**South-South cooperation and triangular cooperation**

South-South cooperation should foster and scale up partnership in the transfer of relevant technologies and innovations, capacity building and financial assistance to LLDCs.

**United Nations, International, Regional and Sub-regional organizations**

Organizations of the United Nations system, and other international organizations, the Regional Development Banks, and Regional Economic Communities, are invited to provide more and better targeted technical assistance to support an accelerated ICT development in LLDCs in particular technical assistance on how to utilize ICT to lower trading costs, boost trade, and stimulate structural transformation. They should also promote sharing of best practices and advise on new technologies.