LEVERAGING BROADBAND FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

A CALL TO ACTION FROM THE BROADBAND COMMISSION TO RIO+20

Renewing our commitment towards sustainable development

1.   We, the Members of the *Broadband Commission for Digital Development*, address this **Call to Action** to world leaders, policy-makers, industry leaders, participants and citizens in advance of the 2012 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20). With this **Call to Action**, we present the context for the global community to acknowledge the potential of broadband for progress and sustainable development in the outcomes of the Rio+20 Conference and to include *broadband inclusion for all* as one of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

2.   Improving the livelihoods of citizens around the world through sustainable development represents one of the greatest challenges facing humanity today. The necessity to manage the resources of the planet in a way that allows the long-term needs of a sustainable society to be met, while respecting the finite resources of the planet's ecosystem and achieving poverty eradication, is a challenging, but achievable, task. Broadband is unique in that it has the potential to address many sustainability challenges, while simultaneously increasing socio-economic development and quality of life. Broadband facilitates transformative change in a wide range of key sectors from power, transportation, buildings, education, health and agriculture. The impact of broadband on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) is now widely acknowledged. We believe broadband is a fundamental technology to achieve sustainable development that should also be recognized in future Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

3.   In this context, we would like to spread knowledge about what broadband can bring to the sustainable development agenda, particularly among policy-makers. **We hereby present our personal and joint commitment** to work together towards reinforcing sustainable development globally.

Broadband can integrate the three pillars of sustainable development

4.   We believe that networked information and communication technologies (ICT) can help to achieve a sustainable development model, as broadband-enabled innovation in applications and services promote the integration of 'smarter' and more energy-efficient economic growth, social development and environmental protection – the three pillars of sustainable development. For this reason, we believe that the potential to leverage broadband infrastructure and broadband-enabled applications and services should be considered in the outcomes of the Rio+20 Conference.

5.   Investments in broadband infrastructure and broadband-enabled applications and services facilitate long-term sustainable economic development, economic productivity and growth [1] and job creation [2] and generate significant returns. Investments in broadband are necessary, if developing countries are to achieve poverty eradication and take part in the in the digital economy of the 21st century.

6.   Failure to invest sufficiently in broadband will expose developing countries to risks of exclusion from the economic and social benefits of broadband connectivity and innovation in essential services such as online health and education. Broadband also promotes social equity and facilitates the free flow of information, providing the ability to communicate, access and exchange online information and knowledge in real-time. Broadband promises to do more than just give the developing world a voice – it promises to empower people to gain a better understanding of the challenges they face at the local, regional and global levels, and enables them to make informed choices and decisions. Therefore, expanding access to broadband infrastructure and broadband-enabled applications and services to all must be a top policy priority for all countries.

7.   Investments in broadband infrastructure and broadband-enabled applications and services help to protect the environment and encourage more efficient use of natural resources. Creating a greener and more sustainable economy means transitioning from the resource-intensive physical infrastructure of the 20th century to the more efficient information infrastructure of the 21st century. Broadband has significant potential to help shift the world towards a low-carbon economy and address the challenge of climate change.[3]

8.   The growth of mobile broadband in particular offers exciting potential for raising awareness of sustainable development issues, by connecting, informing and educating many people around the world – especially in developing countries. For it is only by encouraging and empowering all citizens to take direct action to protect and preserve the world's precious resources, and creating incentives for governments and companies to be transparent and accountable for their actions, that we can hope to avert future environmental crises.

Turning vision into action

9.   During the *Broadband Leadership Summit*, which took place in Geneva on 25 October 2011, we challenged the global community to work together to promote "broadband inclusion for all" as a means of accelerating progress towards achieving the MDGs by 2015.

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[1] World Bank (2009) found a direct correlation between a rise in broadband penetration and increased economic growth – see Information & Communication for Development Report (2009). In China, a 10% increase in broadband penetration could boost GDP growth by 2.5% – see "A 2010 Leadership Imperative: The Future Built on Broadband", ITU/UNESCO Broadband Commission (2010), available at: http://www.broadbandcommission.org/Reports/Report_1.pdf.

[2] For example, McKinsey & Company estimate that bringing broadband penetration levels in emerging markets to today's Western European levels could potentially add US$300–420 billion in GDP and generate 10–14 million jobs (McKinsey & Company, Mobile broadband for the masses, page 3).

[3] "The Broadband Bridge: Linking ICT with Climate Action for a Low-Carbon Economy", Broadband Commission (2012), available at: http://www.broadbandcommission.org/work/working-groups/Bridge.aspx

10.   Through our *Broadband Challenge*, we called on global leaders to make broadband policy universal, develop policies to expand access to health and education through broadband, and ensure that at least half the developing world's population and 40% of households in developing countries are using broadband Internet by 2015. We also invited the private sector to contribute to this goal by developing innovative business models to realize this vision. This *Broadband Challenge* is today more relevant than ever.

11.   To turn this vision into action, we urge the global community to acknowledge the potential of broadband for progress and sustainable development in the outcomes of the Rio+20 Conference, and to consider *broadband inclusion for all* in the formulation of the sustainable development goals (SDGs) to move the sustainable development agenda forward.

12.   We underline the crucial role of the media and broadband for public information on sustainable development, as well as the considerable potential of social media and ICT networks in this domain. We call on global leaders to commit to principles of freedom of expression, press freedom and access to information and knowledge.

13.   The time is right to make the best use of all the opportunities at hand to eradicate poverty and move the sustainable development agenda forward together. The time is right to leverage the transformational power of broadband to support the outcomes of the Rio+20 Conference.

14.   With this statement, we submit our pledge to support a sustainable future for all. We shall continue our advocacy work as the *Broadband Commission for Digital Development* to accelerate the achievement of the MDGs by 2015 through the opportunities afforded by digital inclusion for all and to support the definition of the post-2015 sustainable development framework.