Broadband Commission Open Statement

5th United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries (LDC5)

Disclaimer: The information and statistics presented in this publication are accurate as of January 2023 and will not reflect any subsequent changes or developments. Please note that a previous version of this statement was presented to the first phase of LDC5 in March 2022.

LDC**5**
5TH UNITED NATIONS
CONFERENCE ON THE
LEAST DEVELOPED COUNTRIES

BROADBAND COMMISSION
FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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Open Statement from the
Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development

5th United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries (LDC5)
Doha, 5-9 March 2023

The Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development addresses this Open Statement to the 5th United Nations Conference of the Least Developed Countries (LDC5) convening every 10 years, launching the Doha Programme of Action (DPoA) in 2022 and holding the conference in 2023 at a critical time, as the final decade of action for the 2030 agenda gathers pace.

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the critical need for broadband technologies and increased broadband adoption for areas like education, sciences, virtual healthcare and work-from-home. However, as the world continues to embrace digital business practices and services, progress towards digital inclusion continues to be slow, especially in LDCs. Closing the digital and knowledge divides by mainstreaming digital skills and by providing affordable infrastructure, devices and services, particularly for girls and women, is critical to the sustainable development of the LDCs. The time is now to accelerate impactful change.

The Commission is convinced that achieving universal and affordable connectivity is essential for meeting the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030 and to ensure no-one is left behind in the hardest-to-access communities. In line with the Universal Connectivity Manifesto and the UN Secretary General's Roadmap for Digital Cooperation, the Broadband Commission is calling on governments, the private sector, IGOs and civil society to join forces for the LDC5 Conference in making concrete pledges and putting forward initiatives towards broadband access to the Internet through existing platforms and tools, including the Partner2Connect Digital Coalition, the Digital for Development Hub (D4D Hub) and the IGF Dynamic Coalition on Internet Universality Indicators. These policy, financial, advocacy and programmatic commitments could help tackle barriers to digital inclusion to incentivize multistakeholder-shaped Internet analysis, infrastructure deployment, digital competency and policy developments, access to information and knowledge, and localized broadband usage in LDCs.

For more than a decade, the Commission has been advocating through the 2025 Broadband Advocacy Targets to expand broadband infrastructure, capacity building, access to information, and effective utilization for sustainable development, and to provide the unconnected and under-connected populations around the world with accessible, affordable, and meaningful Internet access.

In the world's 46 LDCs, only 36% of the population was online in 2022. According to the International Telecommunication Union's (ITU) and UN-OHRLLS 2021 report *Connectivity in the Least Developed Countries*, a lack of awareness of what the internet is, is the largest barrier to adoption. Other critical barriers faced in LDCs include affordability, digital competencies and enabling environments, including, as identified by UNESCO, a lack of linguistic diversity in cyberspace, scant locally relevant content and weak accessibility for persons with disabilities in the digital ecosystems. These challenges

should be addressed by both public and private sector stakeholders to reduce usage gaps significantly and rapidly.

The Broadband Commission's second Advocacy Target aims to make broadband prices in developing countries affordable by 2025, with affordability defined as the availability of broadband access at a price that is less than two per cent of the monthly GNI per capita. According to ITU, of the 103 economies worldwide that met the target with respect to the data-only mobile broadband basket in 2022, only two were LDCs. Additionally of the 71 economies that met the target with the fixed broadband basket, only one was an LDC.

A significant gap remains between uptake and targets – which underlines an urgent need for policies that prioritize demand-side challenges and address barriers to Internet adoption. There is also a need to address specific barriers to girls' and women's internet adoption, as a significant digital gender divide persists, particularly in LDCs, including through creating gender responsive digital learning environments

It is the goal of the Broadband Commission to realize universal connectivity, as stated in its *Universal Connectivity Manifesto*. Reaching this goal for LDCs "will require collective, collaborative efforts by all stakeholders" to:

(1) Establish a baseline for universal digital connectivity,
(2) Identify and support public-private financing of universal broadband,
(3) Advocate for enabling ICT regulatory environments, capacity and content development & online safety.

To reach this goal, Broadband Commissioners have developed several recommendations for addressing key barriers to achieving universal connectivity to 'build back better with broadband' and support LDCs in their digital transformation and sustainable social and economic development. As part of the implementation of the UN Secretary-General's Roadmap for Digital Cooperation, the International Telecommunication Union, the Office of the UN Secretary-General's Envoy on Technology and their partners, including some Commissioners, have established a set of aspirational targets for 2030 to help prioritize interventions, monitor progress, evaluate policy effectiveness, and galvanize efforts around achieving universal and meaningful connectivity by the end of the decade. Additionally, the Broadband Commission Working Groups on Smartphone Access and Connectivity for MSMEs are conducting research and case studies to develop policy recommendations and action plans for increasing access to and use of broadband services and devices in LDCs, while the Broadband Commission report on AI capacity building underlines the need to strengthen competencies of civil servants to develop, implement and manage digital transformation strategies adapted to local contexts.

It is the belief of the Broadband Commission that this work and advocacy is critical to leveling the global playing field and truly reaching *meaningful* universal connectivity, and the capacities to derive socioeconomic value from it.

Signed,

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About the Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development

The Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development was established in 2010 by ITU and UNESCO with the aim of boosting the importance of broadband on the international policy agenda and expanding broadband access in every country as key to accelerating progress towards national and international development targets. Led by H.E. President Paul Kagame of Rwanda and Mr. Carlos Slim Helù of Mexico, it is co-chaired by ITU's Secretary-General and UNESCO's Director-General. It comprises over 50 Commissioners who represent a cross-cutting group of top CEO and industry leaders, senior policymakers and government representatives, and experts from international agencies, academia and organizations concerned with development. Learn more at: www.broadbandcommission.org