

Broadband Commission Input to HLPF 2022

High Level Political Forum
24 February 2022



HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM
ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

BROADBAND COMMISSION
FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT



THE BROADBAND COMMISSION

HLPF 2022 inputs

As of 24 February 2022

Theme of HLPF2022:

The General Assembly also in resolution 75/290 B defined the theme of the 2022 HLPF to be “Building back better from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”.

*The HLPF in 2022 will review progress toward **SDGs 4 on quality education, 5 on gender equality, 14 on life below water, 15 on life on land, and 17 on partnerships for the Goals**. The Forum will take into account the different and particular impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic across these SDGs and the integrated, indivisible and interlinked nature of the Goals.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Introduction to the Broadband Commission:

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, the Commission is co-chaired by ITU's Secretary-General Mr. Houlin Zhao and UNESCO Director-General Ms. Audrey Azoulay. It is comprised of over 50 Commissioners, representing a cross-cutting group of top CEOs and industry leaders, senior policymakers and government representatives, and experts from international agencies, academia and organizations concerned with development.

For more information, visit: <https://www.broadbandcommission.org>

2. HLPF Guiding Questions:

- 1. Progress, experience, lessons learned, challenges and impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the implementation of SDGs 4, 5, 14, 15 and 17 from the vantage point of your intergovernmental body, bearing in mind the three dimensions of sustainable development and the interlinkages across the SDGs and targets, including policy implications of their synergies and trade-offs;**

(Taken from https://www.broadbandcommission.org/wp-content/uploads/dlm_uploads/2021/12/State_of_Broadband_2021-E-comp.pdf)

As the world plans a transition out of the pandemic, Internet connectivity continues to play a pivotal role for countries, communities and individuals. Remote work remains the norm where possible.

Distance learning, or hybrid structures, remain in place in hardest hit countries. Internet-enabled telehealth services continue to gain regulatory approval and general adoption. The prominence and importance of Internet infrastructure and connectivity have been further underlined in public life, along with increasing recognition of the need for relevant and timely information, literacy skills and reliable, factual content. In terms of connectivity infrastructure, governments at national and sub-national levels exhibit renewed and urgent interest in addressing disparities of access, adoption and affordability. Network operators and service providers are investing heavily not only to expand networks but also to increase capacity and respond to the acceleration in broadband demand. Regulators, not just in telecommunications but in other sectors, increasingly recognize the importance of digital technology across all facets of economic activity.

From the perspective of the Broadband Commission, the massive spike in the use and importance of Internet connectivity, triggered by the COVID-19 crisis, stands in sharp contrast to the slowing growth in Internet users globally, and the persistent, pernicious digital divide. While Internet connectivity has proved to be a crucial tool in responding to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and in coping with massive economic, social shocks, countries that were most vulnerable (because of more limited resource bases) are also those with the poorest Internet adoption levels. In 2019, the year before the start of the crisis, close to 87 per cent of individuals in developed countries were online using the Internet, while in stark contrast only 19 per cent of individuals in the least developed countries (LDCs) were online.

The digital divide is also associated with a wide range of factors related to education, age, gender, income status, skills, and residence. The ‘human element of connectivity’ describes the digital skills readiness and the type of solutions, tools, education resources and content needed to empower learners, teachers, and entire surrounding communities. To ensure connectivity that closes all digital divides, each of these elements must be addressed and advocated for in national regulation, connectivity investment and policies.

Progress is being made in closing gaps and expanding the impact of broadband for all people on the planet. While some form of network coverage reaches nearly every single human on the planet either via terrestrial or satellite networks, further effort is needed to densify network infrastructure and close the usage gap by increasing capacity and improving affordability. To respond to massive demand for broadband connectivity and the shift to online activity as a result of the COVID-19 crisis, extraordinary measures have been taken by governments, ministries, regulators, service providers, and many other participants in the global connectivity ecosystem.

This global health emergency highlights the urgency of the Broadband Commission’s core mandate and ongoing agenda, and the work of its various Working Groups. Including those that are focused on a broad range of areas such as, identifying new 21st century financing models for broadband access and connectivity; expanding broadband connectivity in Africa; mapping, connecting and financing connectivity for all the world’s schools; accelerating better health care responses through virtual care options; and the deployment of broadband to facilitate public private partnerships to enhance epidemic preparedness. (adapted from https://broadbandcommission.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Agenda4Action_English2020.pdf)

- 2. Assessment of the situation regarding the principle of “leaving no one behind” against the background of the COVID-19 pandemic and for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, within the respective areas addressed by your intergovernmental body;**

Despite progress on Internet access and adoption, more effort is needed to ensure success and concrete movement towards the global 2030 Agenda and to leave no one behind. Additional investment and inclusive, open partnerships can advance progress towards universal broadband – which in turn will accelerate economic growth, help alleviate poverty, impact social development, and address climate change. Policy and regulatory actions will not only encourage and incentivize greater investment and Internet adoption but will also address inequitable access sparked by market failures.

Putting individuals at the centre as we build digital infrastructure and progress towards the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development continues to require a concerted effort. This involves moving beyond mindsets focused on technological fixes and focusing on those user issues that limit adoption – socio-demographics, skills, affordability, relevance, content and trust. Efforts are required to direct funding to address the challenges of the unconnected. As new waves of innovation in digital infrastructure go mainstream concerted efforts must be made to ensure these developments particularly benefit low- and middle-income countries as well as developed countries.

Key elements of any policy focused on digital transformation must ensure prioritization of people, inclusivity, fundamental rights and equality of opportunity; focus on core development issues such as agency, power, and structure in this digital age; employ a comprehensive ecosystem approach recognizing spillovers; be inclusive, leaving no one behind and prioritizing the protection of the most vulnerable; be integrative, not additive; and require leadership and ownership.

3. Actions and policy recommendations in areas requiring urgent attention in relation to the implementation of the SDGs under review;

The Broadband Commission believes investments in education, gender equality, climate change solutions and financing mechanisms, among others, not only rely on digital connectivity but in some cases are spurring direct investment in digital infrastructure to support investments and service delivery in other sectors.

We see a need for innovative approaches to addressing these SDGs that require public-private collaboration to connect the unconnected, as well as ‘coopetition’ whereby seemingly competitors in the private sector can benefit by working together, with a higher vision of jointing impacting efforts to meet the Sustainable Development Goals. For these partnerships to succeed, certain conditions are required:

- Policy frameworks which incentivize investment and ensure sustainable competition;
- Policies which encourage the digitization of industry, leveraging cutting-edge technologies;
- Empowering citizens by ensuring that trust is built in by design, through smart regulation which can keep pace with the speed of technological change.

4. Policy recommendations, commitments and cooperation measures for promoting a sustainable, resilient and inclusive recovery from the pandemic while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda;

The global community has an opportunity to effectively leverage broadband and adoption of high-speed digital infrastructure to achieve significant progress towards the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda. To do so, however, requires concerted effort in line with the various recommendations presented by the Broadband Commission in previous editions of its annual State of Broadband report, as well as

other Working Group and research reports. This includes:

- Ensuring public confidence in participating online in the digital economy by increasing efforts to prevent cybercrime and cybersecurity incidents in ways that also protect individual privacy;
- Increasing funding levels and addressing issues of fragmentation (of funding, legislative and regulatory frameworks, investment and distribution) and coordination across regions, government levels, and between public and private sector entities in order to achieve universal broadband adoption;
- Supporting and engaging in innovative partnerships that leverage the unique strengths of each participant in digital infrastructure in order to translate roadmaps and action plans into concrete achievement;
- Addressing environmental impacts of digital infrastructure and unleashing the potential of connectivity to make an outsized contribution to addressing the climate emergency both by helping to build resilience to climate stresses through the use of digital technologies, as well as by demonstrating leadership and investment in commitments to reach net zero, and beyond, in terms of carbon emissions; and
- Employing a people-centric approach, with a focus on individuals and inclusivity in order to ensure no one is left offline.

Based on its 3 pillars of (1) resilient connectivity, (2) affordable access and (3) safe use of online services for informed and educated societies, the Broadband Commission's [Agenda for Action](#) proposes 8 actions as part of its medium-term covid management and recovery agenda. These recommendations recognize digital as the hidden hero of this unprecedented global crisis, and call for:

1. Acceleration and implementation of digital cooperation and digital strategies and policies, including emergency health response, safer use policies, and strategies to promote greater digital inclusion, and identifying gaps for effective response and better preparedness.
2. Elevation to the G20 level of resilient broadband networks as a basic right.
3. Implementation of agile and flexible regulatory measures to support inclusive and competitive digital environment.
4. Adoption of strategies aimed at promoting universal, affordable broadband connectivity by mobilizing public and private funding and investment, especially in Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States.
5. Implementation of streamlined actions and partnerships to promote the expansion of broadband connectivity, digital services and digital inclusiveness to unconnected communities and populations still lacking access.
6. Emphasizing and promoting the ongoing importance of connectivity for education, access to information and online user empowerment through media and information literacy.
7. Highlighting of areas where connectivity is playing a key role in the COVID-19 pandemic response and sharing of these stories to help build better and more resilient societies.
8. Identifying major partners for public financing of connectivity of vital services including schools, and actions to attract institutional finance investors looking for a compelling market opportunity.

5. Key messages for inclusion into the Ministerial Declaration of the 2022HLPF.

Due to the ubiquity of digital infrastructure across business, government and at the individual level, approaches to policy on broadband are increasingly incorporating other sectoral issues, and vice-

versa. The increasing reliance on digital infrastructure, services, and applications in nearly every sector and facet of economies and societies is made clear by the overlaps and engagements in policy issues between sectors and the subsequent government departments and ministries responsible for the sets of issues in those domains, especially in response to the global pandemic.

Inclusive, innovative partnerships that leverage the unique strengths of each participant in digital infrastructure development are required to translate roadmaps and action plans into concrete achievement by the United Nations' 2030 target date and effectively build back better from the covid crisis.

Broadband Commission for Sustainable
Development