



Making Global ICT Truly Global

InterComms talks with Dr Hamadoun I. Touré, Secretary-General, International Telecommunication Union (ITU)

ITU is the specialized agency of the United Nations concerned with information and communication technology. ITU is committed to connecting all the world's people – wherever they live and whatever their means. ITU currently has a membership of 193 countries and over 700 private-sector entities and academic institutions.

Q: What is the mission of ITU? How does it manage to be such a strong and unique organization?

A: ITU is one of the specialized agencies of the United Nations, but in fact we are much older than the UN itself. This year, we celebrate our 148th year of existence, making us the world's oldest international organization. It's clear today that information and communication technologies (ICT) are driving the social and economic life of every country. Last December, we reached 6.2 billion mobile phone users, 2.4 billion Internet users and over one billion people connected to the net via broadband. Broadband is

driving the world today. Mobile broadband, in particular, is the future, as we enter the age of the 'Internet of Things'. We hope that by 2015 – the target date for the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) – all citizens of the planet will be reachable via a mobile phone. By 2020, according to some industry estimates, there will be over 50 billion devices connected. It is our job at ITU to ensure that there is adequate radiofrequency spectrum for that to happen, and that there is adequate technical standardization so that devices manufactured in different countries and by different manufacturers can seamlessly interoperate worldwide.

Q: What do you see as the most significant challenge to achieving that goal?

A: One important challenge we face is bringing down the cost of communicating. ITU is a passionate advocate of 'the right to communicate' as a basic human need. This was defined by the World Summit on the Information Society



Overview of 8th meeting of the Broadband Commission for Digital Development, 21 September 2013, New York City, New York. Courtesy ITU.

► (WSIS) in 2005. Every citizen of this planet needs access to information, but access is not enough – we need to be able to use that information too. In addition, every citizen of this planet should be able to create information – that’s what will make us part of Knowledge Society. And finally, every citizen of this planet needs to be able to share information. When we reach this goal, we’ll be able to say that we’ve achieved a real milestone in connectivity.

Q: What are the key components of cyber world? What is ITU’s take on current issues in the ICT sector, such as the transition to IPv6, cybersecurity etc?

A: The transition to IPv6 is very important, and ITU has been working hard for some time now to ensure that we do all we can to help all countries make the move. This will be increasingly important as we move towards the Internet of Things, where just about every object will have its own IP address. It will be crucial to future development – but the transition has to be made in partnership with all stakeholders, including the private sector.

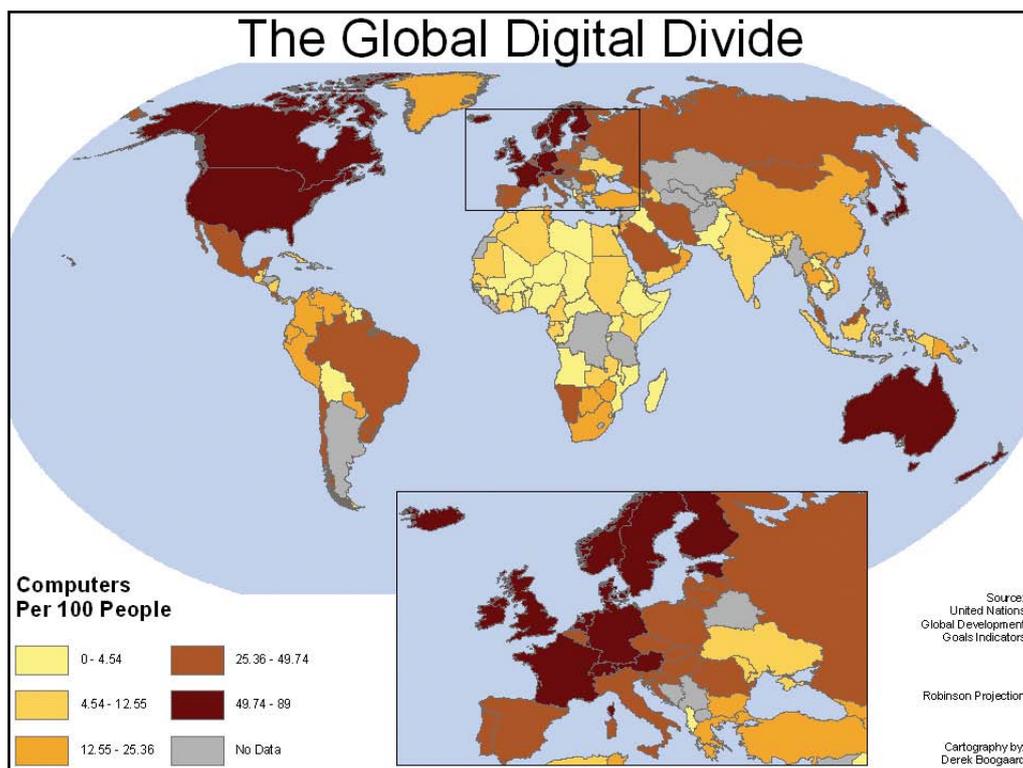
Another very important area we are working hard on is cybersecurity. The Internet is a vitally important tool, but it needs to be affordable, and it needs to be safe. Some people pit safety and privacy against one another, or safety and freedom against one another, but you cannot have freedom when you are not safe, and you cannot have privacy when you are not safe. In a global network, cybersecurity is not just one country’s problem. It’s a problem that affects everyone. All countries need to work together to promote both national and international coordination. Because network security is not only the problem of the Ministry of

Communication, it is an issue that impacts the Ministries of Defence, Interior, Education, Health and more – because they are all using the networks.

One very important element of cybersecurity is technical readiness. That’s why we are working with IMPACT, the International Multilateral Partnership Against Cyber Threats, an international public-private initiative dedicated to enhancing the global community’s capacity to prevent, defend and respond to cyberthreats. IMPACT’s state-of-the-art global headquarters in Cyberjaya, Malaysia, is the physical home of ITU’s Global Cybersecurity Agenda (GCA), and the organization is now offering cybersecurity services to over 130 ITU Member States.

Q: Cybersecurity in particular is a sensitive arena. One country’s “terrorists,” can be another’s “freedom fighters,” and yet ITU has a great history of bringing seemingly opposed sides together.

A : Indeed, that’s why the World Summit on Information Society mandated ITU to take charge of global cybersecurity issues. We’re an impartial global organization with a truly impressive tradition of brokering agreement between countries worldwide. Sometimes, just bringing everyone together at the same table is the most difficult thing. This is why I launched ITU’s Child Online Protection initiative. Protecting children is an urgent priority for everyone, and it’s something we can all agree on. Children are the biggest users of the net. But in cyberspace, through naivety, three out of five children are likely to give information to people they have never met, personal information about themselves or their families. They are our future and we



Source: UN Global Development Goals Indicators

- ▶ need to protect them, but we can only do this by working together.

Q: What is the mission of ITU in terms of filling the digital gap between developing countries and developed countries?

A: Over the past five years, the ICT landscape has changed in extraordinary and unexpected ways. We have seen the number of fixed-line subscribers fall for the first time in telecommunications history, matched by extraordinary growth in mobile over the same period. The best news is that almost all of this growth has been in the developing world, which grew by over 270% and added over two billion of the 2.5 billion new mobile cellular subscriptions globally. The same is true of the growth in internet users, where 600 million of the 777 million new internet users over the past four years have come from the developing world. We have also seen social media skyrocket. Today more than 50 million tweets are sent every day and Facebook has over 400 million users. Does that mean we've achieved our goal in bridging the digital divide? Unfortunately it does not. While close to two thirds of people in the developed world now have access to the internet, four fifths of people in the developing world still do not.

These are dramatic figures, but they also demonstrate the extraordinary opportunities that lie ahead. ICTs – and in particular broadband networks – offer perhaps the greatest opportunity we have ever had to make rapid and profound advances in global social and economic development.

Q: What are your assessments about international roaming rates? Does ITU have studies on this issue? What are your efforts for extending the usage of broadband globally?

A: To sustain the enormous and beneficial growth we have seen in mobile, operators worldwide are now moving to

quickly deploy IMT-Advanced-compliant mobile broadband networks. At the same time, governments need to move to slash or even abolish onerous taxes on ICT equipment and services that could stifle the future growth of the sector. Consumers today expect to be connected to the Internet, to their social networks and to their data anywhere, anytime. As we enter the era of true mobile broadband, it is in everyone's interests that people are able to use their mobile devices intuitively and spontaneously, taking advantage of premium high-speed services like live video streaming and new apps we haven't yet dreamt of. Operators who price their services competitively will reap the full benefit of the next wave of explosive growth. At the same time, governments should beware of levying unfair taxes on ICT goods and services, and instead need to recognize ICTs capacity to stimulate economic growth and social development.

Q: By providing broadband connectivity, how many people worldwide do you expect will be able to benefit from such telecommunication services over the next 10 years?

A: One of ITU's important tasks is to chart the progress of global connectivity, with the issuing of regularly updated statistics. These show that – even now in 2013 – around 700 million people worldwide do not have mobile phone coverage. Most significantly, however, 4.5 billion people are not yet online. Over the coming decade, closing that gap must be a priority target. In order to participate fully in modern globalized society, communities everywhere, no matter how remote, will need broadband Internet access. The new ITR treaty agreed in Dubai last year is the roadmap for reaching that goal of connectivity for all. It is a promise for the future that we must strive to fulfil.

For more information visit:
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Broadband Commission for Digital Development Co-Chair H.E. President Paul Kagame expresses his views during the 8th meeting of the Broadband Commission at the Yale Club, New York. Courtesy ITU.