Bangkok Ministerial Roundtable Highlights Document

ITU Telecom World 2016

Growing the digital economy

The Ministers and representatives of the Governments of Azerbaijan, Bahamas, Bangladesh, Belarus, Bhutan, Cambodia, Cote d’Ivoire, Ethiopia, Gabon, Guinea, Hungary, Iran, Japan, Madagascar, Malaysia, Maldives, Nigeria, Oman, Philippines, Rwanda, Samoa, Switzerland, Thailand, Tuvalu, Vanuatu and Zimbabwe gathered in Bangkok, Thailand, on 15 November 2016 for the ‘ITU Telecom World 2016 – Bangkok Ministerial Roundtable’ to discuss “Growing the digital economy: the role of government”.

The Ministers:
- Reaffirmed that Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) are a means of socio-economic development, competitiveness, value generation, imparting knowledge to society, and improving the overall condition of the population.
- Highlighted that the growth of the digital economy realized by ICTs should in particular contribute to improving the quality of life for all people everywhere and to achieving sustainable and inclusive development.

Principles
The Ministers:
- Agreed that the benefits of the digital economy depend on increased digital connectivity and access to ICT for everyone.
- Recognized the importance of fostering innovation and driving entrepreneurship, for the continued growth of the digital economy.
- Reaffirmed that a multi-stakeholder approach is crucial to addressing the global challenges and to achieving sustainable and inclusive growth of the digital economy, through the active participation of all stakeholders from all nations.

Key priorities
The Ministers:
- Agreed on the need to promote affordable and high-quality access to ICT and digital literacy for everyone, to bridge digital divides and enable people anywhere in the world to connect, collaborate, exchange information, and enjoy the benefits of the digital economy.
- Emphasized the need for the development of infrastructure and policies that support the expansion of ICT infrastructure, products, and services including broadband Internet access to all people.
- Underlined the need to build an environment conducive to innovation that empowers entrepreneurship and enables the launch of new businesses and services.
- Stressed the need to develop ICT human capital and to help small and medium enterprises (SMEs) increase productivity and reach new markets through ICTs.
- Highlighted the need to strengthen comprehensive international cooperation and collaboration with all stakeholders toward maximizing the potential of the digital economy, with special focus on contributing towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

* Published: 7 Dec 2016
National plans and commitments

Azerbaijan
“Development of ICT infrastructure is key to meeting increasing demand, trade activity and relations and increased services, unlocking huge economic value. Azerbaijan is committed to developing an internet banking payment system, continuing to grow e-commerce after its dramatic 5-fold increase over the past two years, and creating an innovation infrastructure through tech parks, industrial zones, tax and customs incentives for ICTs, and grants and subsidies for SMEs.”

Bahamas
“Supported by the government’s national development plan, we will ensure that our Smart Bahamas initiative drives the use of ICTs in a sustainable manner and utilizes eGovernment to encourage more efficient and competitive enterprises, provide full equality 21st Century jobs and improve quality of life for those in Bahamas.”

Bangladesh
“The key element to achieve the ‘Vision-2021’ of Bangladesh is ‘Digital Bangladesh’. Bangladesh is committed to create an enabling ecosystem for ‘digital economy’. Our target is to achieve 100% teledensity and 65% internet penetration including 40% broadband penetration by 2021. The government is driving the citizens’ demands for not only e-Governance but also an entire range of e-services including e-education, e-health, e-agriculture and e-commerce. Government’s initiatives already contributed to the creation of large number of rural SMEs. We are calling for greater collaboration on venture capital investments for SME startups, greater public private partnerships, increasing confidence on the use of ICT, combating domestic and cross border cyber threats, formulating e-commerce policy frameworks, eliminating digital divide between men and women and harnessing the potential of Digital Financial Services. We are calling for major foreign investments in our high-tech and software parks with favorable tax exemptions.”

Belarus
“The President and the Government of the Republic of Belarus pay significant attention to modern ICTs and consider the future sustainable development of this sector as one of the key drivers of steady economic growth within the country. Belarus elaborated and is currently implementing a comprehensive National Strategy for the creation and development of the digital economy. The Strategy is comprised of several program documents for short-, mid- and long term. In particular, up to the year 2020, the Republic of Belarus will be actively developing multi-service communication systems, including digital TV and a next generation mobile communications network; the roll-out of mobile broadband will increase to 90%; all basic public services will be provided in electronic form. Belarus will continue to actively engage in the development of modern ICTs to contribute to the achievement of the Connect 2020 goals and the UN Sustainable Development Goals. The information and communication sector of the Republic of Belarus is open to foreign investments, including direct ones, welcoming and reiterating its readiness to consider and endorse the proposals for the development of mutually beneficial cooperation in the field of ICTs.”

Bhutan
“In Bhutan we are guided by our ICT policy, which is based on a vision to have an ICT-enabled knowledge-based society as a foundation for gross national happiness. Gross national happiness is the driving force for our development over the last 30 to 40 years. The three major outcomes based on the vision is to have ICT for good governance, ICT for a Bhutan Information Society and of course ICT as an enabler for sustainable economic development.”
Cambodia
“Cambodia’s ICT sector is positioned at the core of the sustainable economic and social development and is a driver and enabler of economic development. The Government of Cambodia outlined four teams of economic development and opened the dialogue for stakeholders from the ICT industry and investors at a local and at national level, as a platform to build upon the collaboration between industry, investment ability, policymakers, regulators, and entrepreneurs.”

Cote d’Ivoire
“Our commitment starts by communicating with and engaging all the actors of the digital sector. We must further capitalize the advantage that represents the digital economy, continuously involve the government and improve its operation through the modernization and simplification of its procedures. Finally, we must democratize ICT and make it affordable. We will invest in creating a homogenous learning environment for all of our citizens, fostering innovation, and empowering our youth towards the objective of becoming a startup nation.”

Ethiopia
“Knowing the impact of digital economy, the Ethiopian government has doubled its effort in developing the digital statue of the country. Comprehensive digital strategy documents have been recently developed to guide the development of the digital economy. The ICT policy of the country is reviewed to guide the further development of Ethiopia’s ICT sector. The other policy document worked out is the National Broadband Plan. The plan features a set of targets for individual and institutional coverage and connectivity as well as demand side targets which can contribute to the country reaching its goal of achieving middle-income status.”

Gabon
“The idea of ICTs and the integration of African states, with the example of Smart Africa, where leaders of African nations came together to create a common environment enabling the development of ICTs, tangible opportunities for social and economic develop and common projects relevant to the needs of the people of Africa.
The cost for digital infrastructure is often beyond the means of one state alone, so joining together with know-how and financing is critical, as is innovation funding and common legal and regulatory approaches, making business easier to do across a wider region. “Regional organization can also help Africa in developing the digital economy and providing the necessary human resources to reach these objectives,” reiterated the Minister, concluding that “digital is the future of the country and the solution for the future of Africa”.

Guinea
“Building capacity, training youth, building infrastructure, innovation, competition, creating content and applications, all of those activities must be looked at, to have competent, well-trained human resources. This is the role that the government must have and we will see the opportunities that it brings, creating centers of excellence for developing ICTs. We must also promote collaboration. No country on its own can have all of the advantages of an ICT ecosystem.
Our government has a dynamic vision, which is pointed towards transparency. Our government is oriented to stabilizing the ICT sector and we are waiting for you because if you invest in Guinea, you invest in Western Africa.”

Hungary
“Hungary is more than ready to meet the challenges of the transformation of the digital economy. We have a powerful IT sector, 12% of our GDP comes from ICT companies, and the impact of digital technologies on other industries is estimated to be a factor contributing to 22-24% of the GDP.
Hungary works on the implementation of its National Infocommunication Strategy 2014-2020, which is aligned with the Digital Agenda for Europe, launched by the EU in 2010. Another key element of our strategic vision is the Digital Welfare Program.”

Iran (Islamic Republic of)  
“Our policy is to expand infrastructure and facilities, and enhance services with better quality, by using national resources and domestic capabilities. We believe that harnessing the potential of ICT in today’s world is absolutely necessary for facilitating and stimulating investment, empowering use and creating employment in all sectors of the economy.  

Iran aims to provide 80% of all households with broadband at 20 mbps; increase broadband services to villages; concentrate national research and development on IoT, big data and cloud technologies, and provide an extensive array of e-services over the national broadband network. Of the 16bn plus euros that will be invested in the ICT sector over the next 5 years, one quarter will come from the government, and the balance from the private sector, including foreign investment and partnership.  
The unique strategic location of Iran will enable it to open up new, shorter transit routes with advanced facilities and multiple border connections to augment existing links with Asia and Europe.”

Japan  
“For bridging digital divides, We, the government of Japan, commit to promoting the public-private initiative named “Quality Infrastructure Investment” which will be deployed overseas as a package including high-quality and highly reliable infrastructures, capacity building and technological transfer.  

We believe this initiative will contribute to increasing economic growth and addressing social challenges in developing countries.  
In parallel, making fair and transparent policy and legal frameworks is a key factor for encouraging competition and investment.”

Madagascar  
“The vision of our President is to make Madagascar a modern and prosperous nation. This is where the development of ICTs finds its place. This is a cross-cutting sector contributing to the development of our economy. The modernization of the country does not only translate to the building of infrastructure, but we also need to set up our regulatory framework that answers the wishes of potential investors and also the existing operators; this is a pre-condition. This has been our priority since 2014.  
From 2017 we have the intention to have startup centres to accompany engineers and to have R&D activities to encourage innovation and creativity”.

Malaysia  
“As a matter of strategy we are focusing on three key areas for implementation. First, it is to enhance our network infrastructure for industries to ride on the digital bandwagon and to have consumers, businesses, and government transact on a large scale and it is incumbent upon us to make sure that the network infrastructure can support this. Connecting communities in remote, rural areas will be paramount and will require various parties to work together.  
Secondly, we need to develop enabling platforms to increase the volume of digital transactions and to harness the data as a resource.  
Finally, more transactions required the regulator to already start a digital ID initiative with relevant agencies, including mobile and other companies, aiming to establish a digital ID in the near future.”

Maldives  
“The government has recognized ICT as a powerful tool to fight poverty, accelerate economic growth, improve human welfare, and foster good governments. The ability to interpret people in the far-flung corners of the world also opens collaboration and development.”
On mobile telephony, we now have over 200% penetration, making us as one of the highest mobile penetrated countries in the world. We have now achieved 100% 3G mobile broadband coverage. To address the needs of the coverage, quality, and affordability, we have issued a national broadband policy aimed at providing broadband Internet services to all parts of the nation.”

**Nigeria**

“To grow the digital economy, Nigeria proposes a national strategy plan implementing a fast-track e-government policy, national centres to promote and increase ICT capacity, state teams to mitigate cybersecurity threats and a range of policies to ensure bandwidth requirements including additional satellite capacity. Nigeria is keen to find investment partners to achieve a win-win relationship in its huge potential market, fertile ground for investment with abundant resources, an improved infrastructure, and security and investor friendly policies.

**Oman**

“The Government recognizes its crucial role in creating the policy framework that promotes the growth of the increasingly digital economy. This is reflected through several government initiatives such as investing in developing and executing a national e-Oman strategy which is supported by a national broadband strategy to make the broadband network available at affordable price to all business and citizens, as the broadband creates the platform for the digitization. The government has also played an exemplar role in the way to digitization and has digitized many of its services to lead and pave the way to digital transformation in the country.”

**Philippines**

“ICTs as an enabler for education, for livelihood and for societal participation in democratic processes, is a necessity, but it is important to balance the right to freedom and the right to privacy in the context of cybersecurity. Beyond connection, the second duty of government is to educate its citizens, on the use and applications of technology, but also on human values. It is not enough to leave a legacy, it must be a constructive legacy, enabling social, economic and human growth.”

**Rwanda**

“Governments should systematically follow different steps to grow their digital economies. For Rwanda, to connect people, government and business to broadband was the first priority. To ensure the digital divide between urban and rural areas is bridged, the whole country will be connected to 4G LTE by 2017. When connected, to promote the adoption and use, will prevent all sorts of gaps especially gender gaps. To educate citizens, especially youth, the next generation of consumers and producers of digital goods and services is key for sustainability. To lead by example, the public sector aim is to have 24/7, self-service, cashless and paperless. Today, Rwanda has more than 100 government services online including e-procurement, e-recruitment, land registry, construction permitting, tax payment, civil and voter registration. To regulate provides a level playing ground for competition to thrive, and protect customers, investors and children. Innovation led by entrepreneurial mindset extended services to people and business. The host of the world first commercial delivery of emergency medical supplies by drone and first digital hospital, Babyl - offering online diagnostic and medication prescription on phone and online are seen the starting point in this area. To mitigate risks that digital brings such as inequality, cyber-crimes will go hand in hand with investment by even taking risk, to provide funding for R&D, infrastructure if necessary, support innovation. Finally, the government will quit by ‘taking a back seat’ and leave the private sector in the driving seat. By applying those principles over the last 15 years has led to many benefits, and by way of an example WEF global info report which ranked Rwanda as follows: number 1 in Africa and 4 globally on the Importance of ICT to the Government Vision, number 1 in Africa and 2nd globally in Government Success in ICT promotion, number 1
in Africa in Use of a ICT for Government efficiency and number 5 globally, number 1 in Africa on use of ICT for access to basic services such as education, health and financial services.”

Samoa
“Samoa is tackling the challenges of a Small Island Developing State with scarce resources, remote and isolated location and scattered population by using mobile broadband as a critical infrastructure for ICT services in health, finance, commerce, education, government and tourism. Priorities are a National Broadband Highway to connect all government agencies especially hospitals and schools, as well as the proposed new international submarine cable connection funded by the World Bank, Asian Development Bank, Australia DFAT and private local investments. Public and Private Partnership (PPP) financing is essential to improve internet connectivity, increase capacity and affordability, and exploit ICT capacity to mitigate the harmful effects of climate change. Public private partnerships will enable development, with one incentive for foreign investment policy that is now a new law which includes an offer of citizenship to all investors in the country. It is also critical to learn about digital transformation and digital economy expertise from other nations on a similar path.”

Switzerland
“Switzerland has been developing national strategies and action plans with regard to the information society since the 1990s. In April 2016, the Swiss Government adopted its new overall strategy “Digital Switzerland.” It acknowledges the importance of ICTs and digitization as critical drivers of prosperity and sustainable development in all areas of life. It sets out how all stakeholders, including academia, civil society, the economy, political decision-makers and public authorities can work together, with a view to proactively shaping digital transformation for the benefit of the Swiss and global communities.”

Thailand
“Thailand is moving toward Thailand 4.0 in order to re-structure the country into an innovation-driven society. We have launched a masterplan of ‘Digital Thailand’ to put in place a foundation in the next two years. This includes upgrading Thailand’s broadband network, promoting the use of digital technology for the social and economic sector as well as developing human resources and creating a regulatory environment. Key projects are, for example, ‘Telecommunication Infrastructure Upgrade’ focusing on the early harvest fiber network infrastructure investment and the creation of national infrastructure sharing, or ‘Digital Community Centers Network’ promoting digital literacy through the centers’ services for individuals and start-ups in over 2,200 communities in rural areas.”

Tuvalu
“We look at ICTs, we aspire for smart cities, and we hope to be able to develop our digital economies. We currently have coverage of 30%, and already in our national strategic plan we are hoping by the year 2017 to be able to improve coverage to about 60%. To improve our situation, we will be looking at enabling environments, use of friendly legislation, and we will be reducing artificial barriers and pricing to foster ICT and technology growth. Let us invest in our infrastructure in partnerships, and let us look to strong leadership in government, and in the ITU to continue to bring us together to learn and share from one another and improve our own digital economies.”

Vanuatu
“The role of Government in bridging the digital divide is to create conducive business environment through establishing of pragmatic policy and legal frameworks that foster economic growth (including ICT and telecommunication). SME’s are the backbone of small island economies, especially in the services sector such as telecommunications, and Governments must continue to support them. Vanuatu as a small island
developing state is a strong believer in the collaboration of private-public-partnership to see the digital economy transform the lives of our people.”

Zimbabwe
“We must shift away from the old paradigm and develop a national agenda where ICTs are part of that national agenda, and then the entire government is encouraged to adopt ICTs as included in that national agenda.
We are also concentrating on SMEs to include them in the mainstreaming of the economy. They contribute about 64% to the GDP, so it is very important to include them.”