WSIS Forum TalkX

Improving connectivity by using (satellite and terrestrial) radiocommunications in small island states and developing countries

Virtual Meeting

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Statement

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Good morning, good afternoon and good evening to everyone,

It is my pleasure to welcome you today to this WSIS TalkX on Improving connectivity by using (satellite and terrestrial) radiocommunications in small island states and developing countries.

Today we will mainly focus on the Caribbean islands, and I am glad to have with me a wonderful panel of speakers that will share with us their approaches to increase connectivity in the Caribbean countries.

Certainly, I would have preferred to speak to you from a beautiful Caribbean island, knowing that the sun and the sea were just outside, but we continue following the measures to curb this pandemic.

Fortunately, I can still talk to you thanks to underlying telecommunication networks that enable us to connect.

Connectivity is so vitally important for the world and for Caribbean countries, in particular, because of the transformative power of information and communication technologies.

Connectivity has the potential to enable remote learning solutions, to increase automation in industries, and to expand access to real-time weather information and early warnings that are particularly important in this region.

During the past years, the number of Internet users has increased considerably in most Caribbean countries. Nevertheless, the average remains low. According to the ITU Report Facts and figures of 2020, at the end of 2019, only 52 per cent of the population of Small Island Developing States was using the Internet. This is due several factors, including the gap between urban and rural connectivity and the affordability of ICT services.

This figure reflects the challenges faced by the Caribbean countries to close the digital divide.

Certainly, the geographical location of Small Island Developing States can be an obstacle to international connectivity of telecommunication networks due to the high costs of submarine, regional and national fiber. Moreover, vast rural areas are difficult to reach, and the solution may not be commercially feasible.

Albeit the challenges, it is the mission of the ITU to connect the world and to leave no one behind. And we do so by convening leading engineers and experts in mobile, fixed and satellite technologies to support the development of radiocommunication services. ITU also works with international stakeholders such as governments and private sector members to find and establish innovative ways to provide affordable connectivity to all.

Many of the outcomes of last World Radiocommunications Conference, which was held in 2019, reflect developments and innovations that have the potential to provide broadband connectivity and extend the coverage of telecommunication services in rural and remote underserved areas at an affordable price. As for example, the definition of a regulatory framework for large constellations of non-geostationary orbit satellites.

Looking forward to the next Conference in 2023, agenda items that may be especially important to addressing priorities of small island states include the modernization of Global Maritime and Distress and Safety Systems and support of e-navigation, as well as the discussions on aeronautical services, recognizing the very high importance of aeronautical and maritime services to the economy and to the safety of those travelling in the Caribbean.

National administrations can also improve access to connectivity, by:

1. Updating the National Table of Frequency Allocations and making sure that the spectrum required by a connectivity solution is available,

2. Adopting globally harmonized bands for each service to ensure equipment benefits from economies of scale.

3. Approving licensing regimes and making them public and operational. So that companies that are willing to deploy services can easily find and follow the rules, and

4. Imposing licensing fees that are consistent with the business case of the application.

In general terms, Administrations can reduce regulatory barriers that impede the expansion and modernization of services, develop a digital transformation plan, and promote a strategy that puts the deployment of high-speed and high-quality networks on top of the national agenda.

The Radiocommunications Sector of the ITU has worked closely with the Caribbean countries in the last couple of years. Having provided radiocommunication seminars, space workshops, and technical assistances.

And I will be delighted to continue this conversation with each of you to understand how we can strengthen even further the bond of the ITU with the Caribbean.

ICTs and connectivity can surely help overcome the difficulties encountered by small island states and developing countries. Even more so under the current circumstances, with COVID-19 and the world's rapid transition to a digital economy.

The expansion of connectivity depends on us. Let's work together to ensure the transformative power of ICTs can benefit both society and the economy.