



CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Industry Advisory Group for Development Issues and the Private Sector Chief Regulatory Officers' (IAGDI-CRO) meeting

Regulation for Digital Transformation - Accelerating inclusive connectivity, access and use in the era of Pandemics.
An industry perspective.

Online, 22 June 2021

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Industry and private sector leaders gathered online on 22 June 2021 to discuss collaborative regulations for digital transformation, creating a more friendly win-win enabling environment in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and the recovery phase.

Organized on the occasion of the **Global Symposium for Regulators (GSR-21)**, the meeting adopted an **outcome statement**, which was presented to GSR-21, representing an industry perspective on development and regulatory issues.



In her opening remarks, **Ms. Doreen Bogdan Martin, the BDT Director**, highlighted the incredible **opportunity** the ICT sector had been presented with during the COVID-19 crisis. She emphasized the **important role the private sector and industry play** along with all other stakeholders to connect the remaining half of the world's population.



Mr. Bocar Ba, CEO of SAMENA Telecommunications Council and Chairman of the meeting, gave an **overview of IAGDI-CRO** and its mandate in accordance with **WTDC-17 Resolution 71**. He encouraged ITU Sector Members and Member States to support ITU-D's work and promote the sector.

Multi-stakeholder collaborations

Participants agreed that **enhancing collaborations is crucial** for the society to address the challenges of COVID-19 and **connect the unconnected**. The sanitary crisis has revealed that enabling frequent dialogues could lead to fast response to the pandemic, and the industry called for more conversations with regulators. Simply put "it takes a village" to pull through crisis, and to ensure that **no party is working in vacuum**.

Mr. David Kirkpatrick, **Founder and Editor-in-Chief of Techonomy**, highlighted the importance of mobilizing the private sector in **stronger, durable, and innovative partnership approaches**. Taking the example of the GIGA project, he believed that the private sector could bring endless creativity to connect people all around the world and there should be new ways of working together.

Ms. Kui Kinyanjui, **Head of Regulatory and Public Policy at Safaricom**, used the **example of the education sector** to show how partnerships between the government and various former competitors of the private sector could be realized with a purpose. During the pandemic, efforts to make online learning accessible, both in terms of hardware and contents, had **enabled transformative, easy access to quality education**.

Another example to take note of was described by Ms. Maria Alexandra Velez, **Senior Director of Government and Regulatory Affairs at SBA Communications**, where the industry service in Brazil worked hand-in-hand in a **partnership with the municipal authorities**. Their myriads of expertise in connectivity and deployment of infrastructure were shared and expressed, to bring forward a creative regulatory environment **-serving the benefit of all relevant sides and the general public**.



Flexibility of policies and regulations to allow for accelerated and sustainable innovation

The sector and industry members were keen on emphasizing the need for **flexible regulations** that would allow telecommunication service providers to answer to **the needs of local and global communities**. Mr. John Giusti, **Chief Regulatory Officer at GSMA**, stressed the need for governments to provide **flexibility for network traffic management and quality service parameters**.

An example that underscored the value of flexibility was shared by Mr. Khaled Hegazy, **Chief Corporate Affairs Officer at Etisalat**. Etisalat Egypt was able to **get approvals** from the relevant bodies to deploy network in quarantine hotels **in 24 hours rather than usual protocol** of 45 days to three months, which enabled connection to students and other individuals in need.

Besides flexibility, **agility could be an essential aspect of regulatory interventions**. The regulators can give due space and control to telecommunication companies for them to be the first point of contact during the pandemic, which notably could support successful outcomes.

In light of crisis responses, such as relief and spectrum assignment, there was an argument for the need to **customize regulations that benefit the citizens**. Regulatory bodies have the **authority and the latent power to mobilize polices** to allow for quick and efficient solutions. This goes beyond the flexibility concept; showcasing the innovative disposal of regulation and implementation when the situation calls for it.

Welcoming financial policies for sustainable investment

The COVID-19 crisis has led to higher demand for internet access. Whether it was teleworking, schooling at home, or the transmission of disease control information, the telecommunication industry is faced with the **responsibility to provide reliable services**. This has led to issues such as **spectrum allocation and investments for connectivity**.

Mr. Maxim Naidoo, **Executive Head of Technical Regulation at Vodacom**, called for enabling policies supporting **long-term investments in telecommunication infrastructure**. These long-term investments would ensure future resilience of the network infrastructure **against short-term shocks**, producing more durable outcomes.

In this era, the private sector would appreciate **long-term incentives for sustainable investment** in networks, which offers stability and predictability for long-term business strategies. Mr. Rahul Vatts, **Chief Regulatory Officer at Bharti Airtel India**, underlined the urgent need for **adoption of a holistic view** by regulators and governments to not only promote but also protect investments in high-speed broadband networks.

Mr. Gil Santaliz, **Founder and CEO of New Jersey Fiber Exchange**, spoke of the need for support to infrastructure investments. He mentioned the **fair marketplace**, where private enterprises could predict and have **expectations for their invested capital**, without facing regulatory “guardrails”.

During the meeting, a polling was conducted to engage all the participants and learn from their opinions.

1. EXPECTATIONS FOR THE UPCOMING WTDC

More emphasis on partnerships and resource mobilization

Having a strong resolution on the role of private sector in ITU-D

Declaration which is pro industry engagement

All of the above [Most Voted]

2. WHY JOIN ITU-D AS A MEMBER

Opportunity to participate in events and get networked [Most Voted]

IAGDI-CRO provides a voice for industry and private sector [Most Voted]

Opportunity to participate in BDT win-win projects

IAGDI-CRO as a dynamic, forward-looking group

3. INNOVATION DRIVEN AREAS BY INDUSTRY AND PRIVATE SECTOR FOR BUSINESS CONTINUITY

Education [Most Voted]

E-commerce

Health

Other

Going forward, planning the future with “emergency and preparedness”

As the industry envisions the post-pandemic development of ICT, participants expressed their eagerness to support the ITU mission and **efforts to boost connectivity and prepare for future emergencies.**

Ms. Amy Alvarez, **AVP of International External & Regulatory Affairs at AT&T and Vice-Chair of IAGDI-CRO**, highlighted the necessity to also drive changes from the demand side. Although great efforts had been made to enrich the supply of connectivity and ICT applications, **stimulation from the demand side** would lead to improved outcomes. This could involve **expanding digital skills trainings, making locally-relevant content and services available online, and promoting access to and ownership of devices.** The complementary efforts in the demand and the supply side would create a win-win situation for the people, the government, and the industry.

COVID-19 brings long-term transformation in ICT rather than a temporary disruption. As the industry prepares for the post-COVID world, it would be helpful to take on a mindset of changes. Ms. Aarti Holla, **Secretary-General of ESOA**, warned the governments as well as the private sector to **hold back on their excitement in the transitioning phase** once we step out of the pandemic period. Being able to **carefully plan the way forward** would be a luxury that must be seized.

Collective efforts will continue to be indispensable for issues such as cybersecurity, cross border data transmission, and regulations of emerging technologies. Ms. Oyeronke Oyetunde, **General Manager of Regulatory Affairs at MTN Group Management Services and Vice-Chair of IAGDI-CRO**, proposed the **harmonization of data sovereignty** as an alternative approach to data localization. While enabling harmonization of data sovereignty is part of **lifting the hurdles to drive greater scale of digital transformation**, the creation of a level playing ground would facilitate long-term industry development and drive conversations further.



In his closing remarks, **Mr. Cosmas Zavazava, Chief of the Partnerships for Digital Development Department, BDT**, expressed the value ITU-D holds in **the voice of the industry and the private sector.** He believes that the progress of the IAGDI-CRO group, and all the ITU-D members, could lead to **progress in advancing sustainable connectivity.**

[CLICK HERE FOR THE MEETING'S OUTCOME STATEMENT](#)

IAGDI-CRO Governance



Mr. Bocar BA, Chairman
CEO, SAMENA
Telecommunications Council



Ms. Amy Alvarez, Vice-Chair
AVP - International External &
Regulatory Affairs, AT&T



Ms. Oyeronke Oyetunde, Vice-Chair
General Manager: Regulatory Affairs,
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