



Background Paper The Global Internet Governance Forum (IGF) 2021

Commonwealth Hard Talk for Action

Session Title:

Commonwealth Hard Talk for Action

Duration:

1hr

Theme:

Fostering Meaningful Connectivity for Digital Transformation

Introduction

The United Nations Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres at the General Assembly plenary meeting in January 2021, noted that the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has had a devastating impact on the life and livelihoods of many around the world especially the most vulnerable. This has in turn set back the path to achieving 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The circumstances have changed drastically and ensuring that all people everywhere have meaningful and safe access to the Internet is a priority identified by the Secretary General.

Despite this setback, national governments and supporting development agencies must continue their efforts to implement the 2030 Agenda. It is imperative that they analyse the lessons learnt from COVID-19 and identify gaps that they need to address through whole-of-society, inclusive approaches, and cooperation in technology and innovation. Through the effective adoption of information and communication technologies (ICT), countries can accelerate meaningful connectivity and foster digital transformation and country-driven development at all levels of society.

Ensuring an enabling environment of policies, legislation and regulations is essential for the attaining the goal. An appropriate regulatory framework that promotes efficient allocation and coordination of spectrum will enable broader spectrum access especially in the underserved and unserved areas. This will in turn result in affordable and quality access to ICTs.

There is, however, a need for developing mechanisms facilitate collaboration between diverse stakeholders for developing standards to ensure interoperability of ICT, assisting Countries to build out physical infrastructure and strengthen cybersecurity.

Commonwealth Telecommunications Organisation

The Commonwealth Telecommunications Organisation (CTO) is the largest and oldest Commonwealth membership organisation committed to using ICT appropriately and effectively for development. The CTO is committed to helping Commonwealth Countries leverage the potential of ICT to achieve the 2030 agenda. The current COVID-19 pandemic has made this role more urgent and crucial. Many Countries, having realised that ICTs are now vital for social and economic development are moving to accelerate adoption.

In recent years, the CTO has undertaken a substantial volume of consultancy and advisory work on behalf of its member governments, donor agencies and the private sector. CTO's consultancy, advisory, and capacity building services have become essential tools for digital transformation.



The CTO brings extensive, practical experience in strategic planning, institutional design and diagnostics, organisational strategies, regulatory frameworks, e-governance, capacity building, research for informing strategic planning processes, policy development, and regional policy harmonization. In this era of unprecedented uncertainty, the CTO is taking steps to ensure its continued relevance in the unfolding environment and to provide support for digital transformation to the Commonwealth and beyond.

The CTO also recognises the negative impact of COVID-19 on the achievement of the 2030 Agenda in least developed and developing countries and small islands which form a significant part of the Commonwealth family. It therefore calls for the strengthening of cooperation among partners since the global response to pandemics and other emerging challenges requires unity and solidarity.

Towards 21st Century Government¹

The connection between a national government and its population is unique. It is the only institution that interacts with all citizens at all stages of their lives, from birth to death. The government therefore has a responsibility to build and maintain institutions that efficiently serve their requirements and enable them to successfully participate in the country's growth.

To improve citizens' end-to-end experience of public services and satisfy their individual demands in the third decade of the twenty-first century, government services must be personalised and responsive. Early adoption of ICT and the instillation of a "citizen first" ethos and mind-set in service delivery would be required.

A 21st Century Government will make effective use of ICT through universal access and meaningful connectivity to:

1. Enhance the delivery, quality, adoption and usage of government e-services to all citizens.
2. Provide every citizen without discrimination with accurate government information and allow for their active participation in the public policy development and feedback process.
3. Realise organisational transformation, cost efficiencies and interaction in government through the seamless sharing of systems, processes and information.
4. Strengthen economic competitiveness by fostering an environment of collaboration with the private and business sectors to promote innovation and sustainable development.

The goal is to improve service quality, encourage transparent and efficient interactions, increase public confidence in government, and improve citizen experience. This will require every citizen to have affordable connectivity with meaningful and safe access to the Internet.

Session Overview

The Commonwealth Hard Talk for Action session seeks to cut through the platitudes and excuses for the deficits in meaningful connectivity and digital transformation to come up with practical solutions for the issue at hand.

¹ Caribbean Telecommunications Union – Towards 21st Century Government



Agenda Items

1. The need for political will.
2. 21st Century Government: A step on the Digital Transformation Journey.
 - a. Enhancement of the quality and breadth of government services provided to all citizens.
 - b. Can ICT be seen as a critical value-added sector and pillar of diversification for the economy?
 - c. More targeted and personalised service delivery, providing satisfied, engaged and better overall experience for citizens.
 - d. All Citizens will be more satisfied, engaged, and have a better overall experience because of more targeted and personalised service delivery.
 - e. Identify service gaps can make rural digital infrastructure more citizen-centric and inclusive.
3. Leveraging infrastructure and technology innovation and development:
 - a. How can the significant expansion of mobile infrastructure around the world, as well as other existing and emerging technologies such as satellite, fibre, and wireless networks, be used to expand meaningful access?

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Theme: Fostering Meaningful Connectivity for Digital Transformation

Time (Minutes)	Topic	Proposed Presenter
05	Introduction	H.E. Dr. Ekwow Spio-Garbrah (TBC) Ghanaian diplomat and politician
15	Engendering Political Will for Digital Transformation	Hon Minister Estonia
10	21 st Century Government - A step on the Digital Transformation Journey	Ms. Bernadette Lewis Secretary General Commonwealth Telecommunication Organisation
10	Technology for Meaningful Connectivity	Representative One Web
15	Let us do Something different	Dr. Avinash Persaud (TBC) Chairman CARICOM Commission on the Economy
05	Conclusion	