

**Open Letter from the
Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development
to the UN High-Level Political Forum 2017 (HLPF 2017)**

Broadband for Achieving the SDGs

“Eradicating poverty and promoting prosperity in a changing world”

July 2017

The UN Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development addresses this Open Statement to the UN High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) in New York, United States, from 10-19 July 2017.

We, the *UN Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development*¹, affirm our sincere belief in the vital role of broadband in achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and for eradicating poverty and promoting prosperity in today’s changing world. We urge attendees to the **UN High-Level Political Forum (HLPF)** to recognize the need for the global roll-out of broadband infrastructure, devices, applications and services to make progress towards achieving the SDGs.

Digital technologies and broadband are changing the way we produce, distribute, manage food and feed people, while providing an accelerator for innovation and creating a major driver for economic growth and e-commerce, including additional GDP² and positive employment effects³. They can contribute to deliver the promise of the *2030 Agenda*, which is to leave no one behind. ICTs present unparalleled opportunities for rural people to access the services and information they need. Broadband technologies, along with the digital literacy skills to use them, enable people, groups, and communities, according to their local circumstances, traditions and situations to create their own sustainable solutions.

To end poverty and hunger under SDGs 1 and 2, broadband can help farmers, fisherfolk, collectors, pastoralists, women, youth and traditional communities to be more productive, sustainable and resilient, and to assist all countries and relevant actors in implementing and monitoring the SDGs. Digital technologies provide useful tools to improve nutrition by enhancing agricultural systems, improving access to healthy diets, improving knowledge for food choices, increasing resilience of food systems. Broadband technologies can assist farmers with weather tracking, crop harvesting, and using open data

¹ The UN Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development was launched in May 2010 by ITU & UNESCO, comprising top industry leaders, government leaders, international agencies & development organizations: www.broadbandcommission.org.

² Huawei’s Global Connectivity Index 2017.

³ www.oecd.org/newsroom/new-technology-still-under-used-by-businesses.htm

to increase agricultural efficiency. However, we should always remember that people – not technologies – should remain at the centre of our attention.

To improve human health and wellbeing under SDG 3, broadband digital health applications and systems such as electronic health records (EHR) can transform healthcare systems, by making use of the greater information and real-time analysis and communications. Wisely used and widely applied, digital health can expand coverage through increased access to healthcare, improve the quality of care and efficiency of health systems, and empower patients to take more responsibility in the management of their own health⁴.

To promote gender equality under SDG 5, access to broadband can enhance literacy and digital skills, enabling women to access new and better-paying jobs. The Internet can be used to find and understand information about women’s rights and resources⁵. However, there are currently 200 million fewer women online than men (ITU, 2015). Overcoming the digital gender divide should be a major priority.

Broadband technologies enhance infrastructure, transform industry and enable innovation on an unprecedented scale and as such are essential to the achievement of SDG 9. Indeed, the pace of technological innovation has also transformed traditional ways of conducting trade. Broadband technologies promote prosperity through the rapid growth of e-commerce, helping to reduce trade costs, improve market information, expand market access, reach a broader network of buyers and participate in global value chains, while offering new opportunities for employment, training and skill improvement. Broadband promotes financial inclusion and mobile banking, bringing financial services to the estimated 2 billion adults worldwide still without access to a bank account, with greater benefits throughout the broader economy.

However, while broadband connectivity and access to ICTs are necessary, they are not sufficient for people to benefit automatically from the greater opportunities made possible through online trade – a range of economic and regulatory barriers, such as a lack of market competition can hinder the broader uptake of e-commerce and must be addressed in order to spark the catalytic potential of broadband as an economic driver.

For SDG 14, the ocean covers 71% of the Earth’s surface. Contrary to popular perception, each and every citizen on the planet is affected by what is happening in and on our oceans – from the 2.6 billion (35%) of the world’s population who rely directly on the ocean for food to the literally billions of people who rely on ocean-driven monsoon seasons and rainfall patterns. Broadband can assist in the monitoring of the ocean ecosystem in various ways – from satellite monitoring of temperatures, algal blooms and pollutants, to tagging and tracking ocean wildlife as well as shipping activities. SDG 17 rightly recognizes that sustainable development can happen most effectively and efficiently by working together in partnership.

⁴ Broadband Commission Working Group on Health: “[Digital Health: A Call for Government Leadership and Cooperation between ICT and Health](#)”, February 2017.

⁵ Broadband Commission Working Group on Digital Gender Divide’s “Recommendations for Action”, March 2017.

BROADBAND COMMISSION

FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT



We must work together to harness the opportunities and benefits of ICTs, new and emerging technologies such as big data and Artificial Intelligence, as well as broadband-based technologies, while safeguarding against their downsides and risks. This will be critical to achieve the SDGs and realize the future we want. Let us seize the historical opportunity of the SDGs to build a model of sustainable development anchored by universal access to affordable broadband technologies and digital literacy in order to fulfill a future where no one is left behind.

Members of the UN Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development

New York, July 2017