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Title of the Session: Disaster Risk Reduction through the use of modern Information and Communication Technologies

Date: 05/06/2016 to 18/06/2016

Summary

Countries have different levels of vulnerability in the face of climate change and hazards. Small Island States have extreme vulnerability owing to their geographical circumstances, small size, remoteness, and isolation. Information and Communication Technologies can make a difference in climate change monitoring, early warning and better preparedness.

Context

The international community is now busy implementing the Samoa Pathway which is the outcome of the Third International Conference for Small Island Developing States held in Samoa in September 2014. The significance of the Conference for SIDS is that it addresses the ever-pressing environmental challenges faced by many countries and in particular, Small Island Developing States (SIDS). Environmental degradation, sea-rise, vulnerability to external economic shocks and natural disasters and isolation characterize the plight of SIDS. Yet, SIDS not only provide shelter to some of the richest reservoirs of flora and fauna on the planet, but these biodiversity hotspots are home to over 60 million people.

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) can help mitigate the challenges confronted by these countries through remote sensing, geographical information systems, and improved communications systems. These technologies have now brought the information society within our grasp. ITU statistics show that by end of 2016, seven billion people (95% of the global population) live in an area that is covered by a mobile-cellular network. Mobile-broadband networks (3G or above) reach 84% of the global population but only 67% of the rural population, and 3.9 billion people (53% of the world's population) is not using the Internet. SIDS are registering high growth particularly in Internet and broadband uptake.

While each Small Island Developing State is unique in terms of location, level of development, culture and topography, SIDS face several common vulnerabilities, whether it is their remoteness, size, dependence on international trade, or their extreme susceptibility to natural disasters. Most of all, these 32 states face the unprecedented risk of losing a significant part of their already limited territory due to the expected sea-level rise from climate change. If current trends continue, several of them will completely disappear in just a few decades time. This is something the world cannot accept.

At this juncture, we must think big. We must launch innovative solutions to address the challenges met by Small Island Developing States, and indeed other developing countries.

In doing so, our actions will contribute to the successful implementation of Third International Conference on Small Island Developing States held in Apia, Samoa, from 1-4 September 2014. The Conference produced a forward looking action plan to ensure their

long-term sustainability. ITU is taking every measure to deploy appropriate technologies to help these countries cope with these challenges. The recently ITU launched Satellite Connectivity Project for Pacific Island SIDS, is a case in point.

ITU's commitment to Small Island Developing States

We must increase our efforts to combat the environmental danger these beautiful islands face, and ICTs will play a central role in this mission. Not only do they support SIDS in bridging the digital divide, but they are essential in preserving SIDS' environments and their rich cultural diversity.

Over the past years, ITU has proactively addressed the special ICT needs of SIDS whether resulting from high communications costs, or limited resources in developing policies for ICT usage. ITU has been, and continues to be, committed to assisting Small Island Developing States to monitor, predict, mitigate and adapt to the adverse effects of climate change.

ITU assists SIDS to develop and establish early warning systems and emergency telecommunications, to better manage and respond to climate change and disasters. By working with key regional partners, both public and private, ITU has and will continue to deploy assistance to SIDS in the aftermath of disasters. For example, ITU has pioneered Disaster Risk Reduction strategies through Early Warning Systems that focus on emergency communications, preparedness and mitigation.

Our commitment will be renewed at the upcoming World Telecommunication Development Conference to be held in Buenos Aires, Argentina in October 2017. This will build on the World Telecommunication Development Conference that was held in Dubai in 2014. The Dubai Declaration, a major outcome of this conference, stated that:

"Telecommunications/ICTs can make a substantial contribution to monitoring, predicting, mitigating and adapting to the adverse effects of climate change. All countries, particularly small island developing states (SIDSs), least developed countries (LDCs), landlocked developing countries (LLDCs) and low-lying coastal countries, which are vulnerable to global climate change and rising sea levels, should have means to use telecommunications/ICTs to mitigate and address the effects of climate change, exploring all opportunities provided by telecommunications/ICTs in reducing the negative impact of human activities on the environment."

Sustainable future for all with ICT

I urge all SIDS to further emphasize the role of ICTs as an enabler for sustainable development in any future post-2015 plan of action, whether social, economic or environmental. The Third International Conference on Small Island Developing States was a perfect moment to seize this opportunity. SIDS' decisions have a significant bearing on the continued implementation of the 2030 Development agenda. I also believe that ICTs are an integral part of the solution for SIDS's commitment to set our planet on a sustainable path.

With ITU's support, there is no doubt, we are on our way to achieving our goals. Not only in tackling climate change and enhancing emergency telecommunications in SIDS, but also in promoting social and economic development for all.

Sendai Framework (adopted at the Third UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction in Sendai, Japan, on March 18, 2015)

It aims to achieve the substantial reduction of disaster risk and losses in lives, livelihoods and health and in the economic, physical, social, cultural and environmental assets of persons, businesses, communities and countries over the next 15 years.

Through well-thought strategies in deploying ICTs, this will ensure support to the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 which outlines seven clear targets and four priorities for action to prevent new and reduce existing disaster risks: (i) Understanding disaster risk; (ii) Strengthening disaster risk governance to manage disaster risk; (iii) Investing in disaster reduction for resilience and; (iv) Enhancing disaster preparedness for effective response, and to "Build Back Better" in recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction.