
Broadband is essential for social and economic development

Open Letter from the Broadband Commission to the G20 Leaders Meeting, June 2012

The Broadband Commission for Digital Development¹ addresses this open letter to world leaders, policy-makers, industry leaders, participants and citizens attending the G20 Leaders Meeting.

As the G20 Leaders prepare to meet in Mexico, we urge you to support the development of the broadband infrastructure and broadband-enabled applications and services which enable digital economies to grow and provide benefits to societies across the globe.

Investments in broadband have a vital role to play, both in moving the global economy back onto a higher growth trajectory, and in generating sustainable social and economic growth. Like water, roads, rail and electricity before it, broadband is of fundamental importance to the social and economic development of all nations. However, Investments must not be focused only on infrastructure development – they must also provide for advanced online services, locally relevant content and services, and support for media and information literacy development to address inequity and deliver broadband inclusion for all.

Networked information and communication technologies (ICTs) play an ever-increasing role in all societies, with 2.4 billion people using the Internet, more than a billion mobile broadband subscriptions worldwide, and telecommunications service revenues now exceeding two trillion US dollars annually.

In the Information Society of the 21st century, countries must make the necessary investments to enable their citizens to participate in and benefit from the digital economy and globally-spread innovation – or risk exclusion. In particular, broadband enabled technologies are stimulating **fresh innovation** and inspiring a new generation of **digital entrepreneurs** to create new applications, services, and content. Broadband moves innovation into people's hands and homes, allowing end-users to take on new roles as entrepreneurs, software developers, lobbyists, activists, journalists and other content generators.

The digital era will produce a whole new range of digital careers and industries which do not yet exist and are hardly even imaginable today. ICTs and broadband generate great technological dynamism and reduce barriers to entry, offering opportunities for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and entrepreneurs to challenge existing hierarchies, to innovate, to compete, and to grow.

In planning the roll-out and development of broadband networks, a mix of technologies will typically be required, recognizing the varying needs of users and the complementary roles of both fixed and

¹ The Broadband Commission for Digital Development, launched in May 2010 by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), comprises government leaders from around the world along with top-level representatives of relevant industries, international agencies, and organizations concerned with development. A full list of Broadband Commissioners can be found at www.broadbandcommission.org.

mobile solutions. The aim is not to promote any particular technological solution, but to deliver the benefits of broadband to all citizens.

While fixed networks continue to provide the necessary backbone and core data capacity, they are complemented by mobile networks and devices that put broadband applications and services directly into the hands of users. High-speed broadband enables online collaboration (including social networking and crowdsourcing), user-generated content, and locally relevant new services to drive innovation, helping to transform people's lives in both developed and developing countries alike.

For global broadband roll-out to contribute most to development, human activity must transform information into *knowledge* that can support individual empowerment and sustainable social and economic development, including institutional and political transformation and the development of knowledge societies that rest on four pillars: freedom of expression; quality education for all; universal access to information and knowledge; and respect for cultural and linguistic diversity. Broadband development cannot be limited to technical infrastructure; the availability of relevant broadband-enabled content, applications and services in multiple languages should also be ensured.

While government plays a key role – for example in helping to put in place pro-competitive and pro-investment policies for communications markets, lowering barriers to entry, as well as direct investment, where appropriate – the business sector remains a fundamental part of the equation.

With the enormous potential of broadband in mind, the *Broadband Commission* endorsed four advocacy targets for making broadband universal and boosting affordability and broadband uptake – and we urge governments to work towards achieving these targets:

- **Target 1: Making broadband policy universal.** By 2015, all countries should have a national broadband plan or strategy or include broadband in their Universal Access / Service Definitions.
- **Target 2: Making broadband affordable.** By 2015, entry-level broadband services should be made affordable in developing countries through adequate regulation and market forces (amounting to less than 5% of average monthly income).
- **Target 3: Connecting homes to broadband.** By 2015, 40% of households in developing countries should have Internet access.
- **Target 4: Getting people online.** By 2015, Internet user penetration should reach 60% worldwide, 50% in developing countries and 15% in LDCs.

To realize the full potential benefits of broadband access for all, developing country populations must also be engaged and have the same opportunities as those in the developed world to contribute to the evolution of the global digital economy.

We therefore ask the G20 leaders to consider the vital contribution that broadband and broadband-enabled applications and services can make to global and sustainable social and economic development and recognize broadband as a key enabling framework.

The ongoing work of the *Broadband Commission for Digital Development* will assist in promoting the development of the Internet economy in the G20 member states as well as across all other economies.

We look forward to further opportunities to work together towards our common goals.

Signed,

Chairs & Co-chairs
On behalf of the Broadband Commission for Digital Development