ITU Council Working Group on International Internet-related Public Policy Issues (CWG-Internet) - Open Consultation on International internet-related public policy issues on harnessing new and emerging telecommunications/ICTs for sustainable development

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Submission by the Web Foundation and the Alliance for Affordable Internet

<u>**Summary**</u>

With only half of the world's population connected to the internet today and the digital gender gap widening, there is much to do to achieve the SDG goal 9.c *to significantly increase access to information and communications technology and strive to provide universal and affordable access to the Internet in least developed countries by 2020* and SDG goal 5.b *to enhancing the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women.* The Web Foundation and A4AI believe that there are opportunities and challenges with harnessing new and emerging technologies to achieve these sustainable development goals and others, such as the need to address the issues of affordability, consumer facing taxations on social media and mobile data, as well as expanding alternative innovative business models to expand access to the internet. The following is our responses to the four main questions posed by the CWG-Internet.

1. **How will new and emerging telecommunications/ICTs impact both the internet and sustainable development, including the digital economy?**

Achieving universal affordable access to ICTs for all in Africa, the region with the lowest broadband internet access in the world today, will be a game changer. To become tomorrow's innovators, entrepreneurs and leaders, Africa's youth need to be empowered with the digital skills and access to technology, ideas and markets that are essential to thrive in an increasingly digitized global economy and take advantage of emerging technologies. What is required is a "digital moonshot" where exceptional and coordinated efforts are made to achieve a seemingly impossible goal, namely to ensure that all Africans have universal and affordable access to ICTs by no later than 2030. A4AI advised the World Bank's report for the UN Broadband Commission on how to reach this 2030 universal access goals; the full report can be found here.

2. **What are the opportunities and challenges for the adoption and growth of the new and emerging telecommunications/ICTs and internet?**

As more people come online, digital inequality is becoming even more pronounced. Our studies indicate that **affordability** is the number one barrier to internet access. We have articulated that

stakeholders must work together to achieve the UN Broadband Commission's [1 for 2 affordability target](), but most low and middle income countries have not achieved these targets. **Consumer facing taxation on social media and mobile data** are also making internet access even more unaffordable. Please review the following reports for more information:

- [Affordability Report]()
- [Mobile broadband pricing and affordability]()
- [Understanding women's experiences of social media taxation in East and Southern Africa]()
- [Impact of Taxation on Affordability: the case of Benin]()

Moreover, as the ITU has noted and we have [argued for years](), the [digital gender gap]()is widening as more people come online. This is alarming and more must be done to close this gap.

3. How can governments and the other stakeholders harness the benefits of new and emerging telecommunications/ICTs?

Governments and policymakers can harness the benefits of new technologies and also work towards digital inclusion by taking immediate steps through a REACT framework - focus on **R**ights, **E**ducation, **A**ccess, **C**ontent, and **T**argets to close the digital gender gap. Following are examples of how the Web Foundation has encouraged policymakers and governments to integrate digital inclusion into their policy frameworks.

- [https://webfoundation.org/2019/08/including-women-and-girls-in-the-digital-revolution-lessons-from-west-africas-eskills4policymakers-workshop/]()
- [https://webfoundation.org/2019/04/championing-gender-responsive-policies-in-the-digital-sector1/]()

4. What are the best practices for promoting human skills, institutional capacity, innovation and investment for new and emerging telecommunications/ICTs?"

In order to bring the remaining 50% of the population online, non-traditional business models must be used. Community networks, satellites, and other alternative innovations to reach rural and hard to reach communities where traditional MNOs do not reach will be critical. Read here for an [example on Mexico's public access solutions]() **.** In addition, universal service funds are often underused and they should be creatively utilized in [a more targeted approach to reach the hard to reach populations](), including to close the digital gender gap.