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Message from ITU Secretary-General, Houlin Zhao

World Telecommunication and Information Society Day
17 May 2016

ICT ENTREPRENEURSHIP FOR SOCIAL IMPACT

Last year, in 2015, we celebrated ITU's 150th anniversary, reaffirming its reputation worldwide as one of the most resilient and relevant organizations devoted to connecting the world with the most innovative means of communication.

As we celebrate World Telecommunication and Information Society Day 2016, marking the establishment of ITU on 17 May 1865, we continue to look to future advances in communications. We focus our attention this year on "ICT entrepreneurship for social impact".

The ICT sector is amongst the most profitable and successful and has revolutionized the way the world communicates. Through a combination of forward-looking government policies and regulatory reforms, international standards, industry innovation and investment in infrastructure, and new services, billions of people have been brought into the information society in a remarkably short period of time. This is a shared achievement for which we can all be proud.

Building on this foundation, we are now in an increasingly smart, networked environment encompassing cloud computing, big data, and new applications in diverse areas from health to finance, while moving towards a future of smart transport systems and cities. As we advance the roll-out of infrastructure and connectivity, the role of services and applications will grow along with the potential for many innovative smaller players to enter the market with solutions to address local needs. ICT entrepreneurship is set to bring about a paradigm shift in making significant social impact. We need their expertise, innovation and investment to achieve our common goals of sustainable economic and social development.

Small to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), start-ups and technology hubs are the drivers of innovative and practical solutions for catalysing progress especially in developing countries. SMEs make up more than 90 per cent of all businesses worldwide, and represent a 'path out of poverty' for many developing countries.

The fundamental role of ICT innovators and SMEs is also reflected in the outcomes of the World Summit in the Information Society (WSIS). World leaders recognized the economic potential of ICTs for SMEs as well as their specific needs, such as increasing their competitiveness by adding value to their products and services, streamlining administrative procedures, facilitating their access to capital, and enhancing their capacity to participate in ICT-related projects.

WSIS also encouraged a series of related measures, including incubator schemes, venture capital investments, government investment funds, investment promotion strategies, support for research and development networks and software export activities, as well as for software parks.

As the specialized agency of the United Nations dealing with state-of-the-art telecommunications and information and communication technologies, I call upon our partners – governments, industry, academia and technical experts – to promote the role of small, young, and innovative firms in the ICT sector; encourage the spread of digital social innovation; prioritize economic policies which promote innovation; ensure the availability of necessary human capacity; support the establishment of comprehensive entrepreneurial ecosystems as well as assist entrepreneurs in moving from idea and innovation to sales and revenue.

Let us put our resources together to harness the catalytic role of ICTs in achieving sustainable development and delivering on economic growth, social inclusion and environmental balance.

HOULIN ZHAO
ITU Secretary-General

<https://www.itu.int/en/wtisd/2016/Pages/message-zhao.aspx>