Summary of Side Event Building the pathway to sustainable digital transformation

2 May 2023 10:00 – 11:30 EST

Background on the event (one paragraph)

ITU, together with the Rwanda Utilities Regulatory Authority, have jointly organized the STI Forum 2023 "Side Event – Building the pathway to sustainable digital transformation".

Over the past few years, science, technology and innovation have become a necessary reality. However, digitization and sustainability are often viewed as mutually exclusive. As the global climate crisis persists, sustainability and digital transformation are well-positioned to be seen as complementary growth drivers.

Sustainable digital transformation has many foundational elements, such as circular economy, greening digital networks and efficiency of information and communication technologies (ICTs), that drive change. Having all of these pieces together can accelerate the progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), reduce greenhouse gas emissions and ultimately achieve global agreements and commitments.

Key Issues discussed (5- 8 bullet points)

- The session emphasized that digital transformation is no longer just a buzzword or a trend; it is now a necessity for governments and sectors to keep up with in today's rapidly evolving world. However, we must also recognize that digital transformation can have significant environmental impacts that need to be carefully managed to ensure sustainable outcomes.
- The speakers highlighted that digital technologies and ICTs are increasingly pervasive in our daily lives and have significant environmental and social impacts, including through their production, use, and disposal.
- The speakers noted that to achieve these goals, we must leverage international standards - they provide us with the necessary requirements to drive a sustainable digital transformation.
- The session discussed the double-edged nature of ICTs and emphasized the importance of standards in promoting sustainability in the digital transformation era.
- The session explored the twin transition of going green and digital, emphasizing that we are living in a pivotal moment in history where two of the greatest transitions in human history are underway - digital transformation and sustainability transformation.
- Panelists underlined some key considerations that need to be kept in mind as we embark on our digital transformation journey. These included the importance of implementing circular practices in all aspects of the value chain, and the enablement effect of ICTs and the role of digital technologies in keeping the ICT sector on track to reach Net Zero.

Key recommendations for action (5 - 6 bullet points)

- It was recommended to seize this opportunity to uncover how the ICT sector can lead the charge in creating a better tomorrow. Together, we can achieve our goals and secure a sustainable future for all.
- The session brought to light the importance of standardization while also underscoring the necessity of regional participation in our pathway toward sustainable digital transformation. It recommended the cities get involved in the standardization process.
- It was recommended to get involved with ITU and especially ITU-T Study Group 5 on "EMF, environment, climate action, sustainable digitalization, and circular economy" and participate actively in the development of international standards promoting the use of ICT for accelerating a sustainable digital transformation.
- The session stressed the importance of implementing international standards, adopting sustainable ICT practices by implementing circular and sustainable practices when designing, developing, and deploying ICT solutions. This includes improving energy-efficiency, minimizing e-waste, and promoting digital inclusion.
- The session concluded by encouraging all participants to take the insights and learning from this session and apply them. By working together to build sustainable digital transformation pathways, we can create a better future for ourselves, our communities and the planet. And pave the way to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals

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