

Jean Philémon Kissangou

Republic of the Congo

Candidate
for the post of
**Director of the
ITU Telecommunication
Development Bureau**

What is your view on the role of digital technologies in a rapidly changing world?

Compared to the first one, the fourth industrial revolution in which we find ourselves today will have been 10 times faster, 300 times greater in terms of scale, and 3000 times larger in terms of impact. In the future, the so-called disruptive digital technologies will bring more changes to the way we live, produce, work, and interact. The resulting transformations will be different from those humanity has known so far; it is difficult to imagine a sector that will not be affected.

Artificial intelligence (AI), blockchain technologies, cloud computing, Internet of Things, big data, machine learning, and other innovative technologies to come are expected to enhance the impact of technologies, including in building resilience to climate change. Given the challenges of achieving integral development for the 8.7 billion individuals who will inhabit the world by 2030, digital technologies must be integrated and global. This implies all stakeholders, including the public sector, the private sector, academia and civil society, being fully engaged.



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◆ *How should the work of ITU's Telecommunication Development Sector evolve to maintain relevance in today's world?*

The ITU Telecommunication Development Sector (ITU-D) was only created in 1992, when an Additional Plenipotentiary Conference held that year reorganized the Union. The initial process failed, however, to transfer key functions from the ITU Telecommunication Standardization Sector – specifically those of ITU-T Study Group 3 – to the new Sector (ITU-D). From the outset, ITU should have transferred all its development-related attributions to ITU-D, including those related to telecommunication commercial services and applications. As a result, ITU-D was born weakened, even disarmed.

Today, 30 years later, nothing much has changed. ITU-D's portfolio should at least incorporate the Internet dynamic, which has seen the number of Internet users growing from fewer than one billion in 2000 to almost five billion in 2021.

ITU's development offering will become more visible and relevant when all issues related to development – the economic, social, commercial, and regulatory aspects – are dealt with via ITU-D.

ITU-D, for example, could then host different economic and commercial negotiations related to the exploitation of new telecommunication services and applications, or for telecommunications regulations in the wake of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) process.

ITU-D should become the place for balancing different forces, imparting new competencies, and negotiating with all on an equal footing.

◆ *If elected, what are your top three priorities and how do you plan to achieve them?*

1. Continuously improving, through **training**, the qualifications of the Bureau staff and their actions on the ground around the world.
2. Getting down to work to have **access to broadband networks and services** through innovative partnership mechanisms.
3. Working, with the support of research, towards the more efficient collection and exploitation of **international data and statistics on digital technologies**, with a view to producing equally efficient policies and regulations that respond to the actual problems faced by people around the world.

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How can the ITU Telecommunication Development Sector contribute to progress on the UN Sustainable Development Goals?

ITU-D is central to the unique role which ITU should play to accelerate the realization of the United Nations (UN) 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and associated Sustainable Development Goals.

This means engaging in innovative projects that contribute to the decarbonization of the telecommunication industry.

In practice, we must work to:

- Develop policies and regulations promoting clean and safe energy systems;
- Encourage the use of green energy; and
- Reduce the energy consumption of information and communication technologies (ICTs) through continuous innovation.

Ultimately, BDT and ITU-D need to pursue work on innovation, to achieve energy efficiency in the digital technology industry, so that the Earth can continue to support life.

Tell us about your achievements in leadership and building consensus.

Between 2006 and 2021, I held a total of seven senior-management posts – director, head of service, advisor, senior consultant – across the public and private sectors, and civil society. Throughout my 17 years in various management positions, I have displayed leadership in consensus building, influencing and guiding the women, men and teams that have worked under my leadership.

What else would you bring to the table as the next Director of ITU's Telecommunication Development Bureau?

I will be a director who, through a pedagogical approach, shows how more effective, inclusive telecommunications development will also require a reformed ITU-D. The bundle of responsibilities that served us in the 1990s is not fit for today's world – in terms of either its structure or its missions, and even less so its mandate.

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We will strive to gear Bureau activities more towards concrete projects, for which outcomes are regularly evaluated and communicated to the ITU Council, the World Telecommunication Development Conference (WTDC), the Plenipotentiary Conference as ITU's highest body, and ultimately to the press and public.

For my part, I will already help mobilize support for this ambitious strengthening of ITU development work at the 2022 Plenipotentiary Conference. We will propose amendments to the ITU Constitution and Convention, calling for a stronger BDT – geared more towards development projects, able to make proposals that carry weight, and equipped with negotiating power. This enhanced BDT would represent a departure from the structure often previously reduced to administrative support, before, during and after working group and study group meetings or around each edition of WTDC every four years.

◆ Is there anything else you would like to add?

Yes, on two points:

- The UN accorded ITU the mandate to develop telecommunications around the world. In the mid-1980s this mission took on a new form, with a focus on completing “The Missing Link” (Maitland Report, 1985). Yet today, we remain a long way from doing so, with an estimated 390 million people around the world still lacking a broadband connection. These people remain excluded from the social and economic opportunities afforded by digital technologies. Thus, the non-completion of that missing link through broadband remains a burning issue for ITU and the fundamental challenge in telecommunications.
- Plans to resume the calculation and publication of the ICT Development Index, envisaged as measuring the status of the information society worldwide, should be suspended. The results and rankings represented in this index never seem to reflect realities on the ground. How, for example, can the Republic of Korea be compared with the Republic of the Congo based on the same formulas and parameters? The veracity of the data provided by countries is in any case questionable. Specialists should guide ITU in arriving at results that reflect reality, based on efficient data and an appropriate methodology that is regularly adapted.



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