

Gisa Fuatai Purcell

Samoa

Candidate
for the post of
ITU Deputy Secretary-General



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

New and emerging technologies are growing at an unprecedented pace, which is affecting every country's existing policy and regulation frameworks. Recent studies, including those done by ITU, have found that as a result of this, governments and regulators are facing difficulties in identifying and addressing challenges to cope with the impact of this technological progress and fast innovation.

This rapid change also impacts the widening of the digital skills gap. Capacity building is key if this gap is to be bridged. Furthermore, all efforts in developing information and communication technologies (ICTs) and telecommunications must be people-centred; otherwise, citizens – especially those of least developed countries (LDCS), small island developing states (SIDS), landlocked developing countries (LLDCs) and countries with economies in transition – will continue to be left behind.

Connecting the world's 2.7 billion unconnected people is no easy task. Such issues must be addressed now to help countries achieve the Sustainable Development Goals set by the United Nations for 2030.

The important role of digital technologies in this rapidly changing world is to bridge the digital, gender and geo-political divides that impede the development of all humanity.



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How should ITU evolve to maintain relevance in today's world?

It should strengthen regional and area offices on every continent. These offices are closer to ITU Member States and are the eyes, ears and face of ITU to the world.

ITU must pay special attention to LDCs, SIDS and LLDCs – those United Nations (UN)-recognized categories where the largest share of the unconnected come from. Coordination of ITU's Sectors must also be strengthened to ensure better-organized assistance to developing countries. The outcome will be a much stronger ITU reflecting the combined efforts of its membership.

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

My top three priorities are:

1. **Maintaining ITU's relevance;**
2. **Capacity building;** and
3. **Boosting collaboration among ITU Sectors.**

These priorities are enhanced by more specific objectives, such as:

- **Strengthening regional and area offices.**
- Ensuring programmes are **focused on the most vulnerable members** in developing countries, paying special attention to LDCs, SIDS, LLDCs and countries with economies in transition.
- **Improving digital skills** at a pace matching technological change, with skills and other capacity building treated as a key cross-cutting issue to reach critical poverty reduction and economic growth targets, helping countries achieve the SDGs.
- Providing a **combined package** of telecommunication/ICT development, standards, and harmonized frequency/spectrum solutions, with **all three ITU Sectors** fully engaged to maximize the benefits for Member States.

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With seven years remaining in the UN Decade of Action, how can ITU, the UN specialized agency committed to connecting the world, help accelerate progress on the Sustainable Development Goals?

With seven years remaining in the UN Decade of Action, ITU must focus on utilizing ICT and digital technologies in a people-centred approach, helping the most vulnerable members achieve the SDGs.

Tell us about your achievements in leadership and building consensus.

My achievements in leadership and building consensus go back to the preparatory phases of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), where a draft declaration mentioned only developing countries. I was able to articulate my reasons and ensure ITU would pay special attention to the LDCs, SIDS, LLDCs and countries with economies in transition. As a member of the Drafting Committee, I felt like a lonely voice. But in the end, I convinced the Chair and members of the Committee this was an issue pointing directly to ITU's relevance.

At the 2006 World Telecommunication Development Conference (WTDC-06), I put forward a proposal from my country to include SIDS in ITU's programme for LDCs. After I submitted the Samoa proposal, I started lobbying the members, highlighting the similar needs of LDCs and SIDS and how this was an intervention that would keep ITU relevant. Ultimately, the proposal was adopted with not one country opposed.

In 2019, as Acting Secretary-General of the Commonwealth Telecommunications Organisation (CTO), I organized the first-ever meeting of heads of UN and regional organizations to discuss their programmes on digital transformation, aiming to ensure a collaborative effort in identifying challenges, as well as solutions to achieve a much stronger approach for people worldwide.

Unfortunately, COVID-19 interrupted the process, and as ITU's Deputy Secretary-General I would seek to restart this, building consensus before high-level UN signings.

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What else would you bring to the table as the next ITU Deputy Secretary-General?

I hold the chiefly title Gisa, and I understand the pressures of looking after and leading an extended family and a village. As the next ITU Deputy Secretary-General, I will bring both national and international leadership experience; passion for developing digital technologies that are inclusive of women and girls, youth, and people with special needs; integrity; and honesty. All these are required to help the Secretary-General and ensure the relevance of the ITU is maintained, capacity-building efforts are targeted to vulnerable countries, and above all, ITU Sectors are better coordinated to the benefit of the membership.

I led the reform of Samoa's telecommunication sector that brought mobile phones there for the first time, making Samoa the first country in the Pacific to liberalize its mobile market and establish its regulatory office. At ITU, I represented the organization at UN meetings on the SDGs, 2030, and more.

After heading a division for ITU, I took on a similar job at CTO, serving as Director of ICT Development and two months later being appointed Acting Secretary-General until September 2020, when I resigned to take up my national duty as the regulator of Samoa.

Is there anything else you would like to add?

My vision is of utilizing ICTs to improve the standard of living for all. Therefore, my focus is on true and meaningful connectivity that is inclusive, secure and affordable.



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