Connect2Recover, a Joint MIC-ITU Project to Support Developing Countries

A project with the ITU to strengthen digital infrastructure and facilities to improve the usage environment and help prevent the spread of COVID-19

1. Background

In response to the worldwide explosive spread of COVID-19, various countermeasures have been taken in many countries, such as city blockade, quarantine, and people's refraining from going out. These countermeasures help suppress the spread of infection. On the other hand, they also stagnate economic and social activities and severely affect people, such as increased unemployment, decreased income, and reduced education and medical care opportunities.

Under these circumstances, the international community positively evaluates the effectiveness of providing measures to maximize economic and social activities by utilizing digital technologies, such as telework, e-commerce, distance learning, and telemedicine, while preventing the spread of COVID-19. Simultaneously, the need to strengthen the digital infrastructure that makes such measures possible is reaffirmed. As a countermeasure against COVID-19, the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), the World Bank, the GSM Association, and the World Economic Forum took the initiative to formulate a joint action plan called Digital Development Joint Action Plan and Call for Action. The Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development formulated its Agenda for Action for the COVID-19 crisis. Both the Digital Development Joint Action Plan and Call for Action and the Agenda for Action have proposed the importance of effectively utilizing digital technology and strengthening digital infrastructure to control and prevent the spread of COVID-19.

2. Rationale

Considering the above movements, MIC proposed implementing a joint project to the ITU early in May this year to contribute to countermeasures against COVID-19 in the international community actively. As a result of repeated discussions on specific details, MIC reached an agreement with the ITU in supporting the formulation of African countries' national strategies for strengthening their digital infrastructure and improving the usage environment that will contribute to the prevention of the spread of COVID-19. African countries have the lowest broadband penetration rates and the potential for increased poverty due to the spread of COVID-19.

This year's G20 presidency, Saudi Arabia, will participate in this joint project and cooperate mainly in implementing a pilot project based on a national strategy formulated according to a survey. The participation of Saudi Arabia is expected to strengthen the execution part of the strategy besides the formulation of the national strategy.

3. Project overview

(1) Name

Connect2Recover - Digital Infrastructure and Ecosystem Reinforcement Against COVID-19

(2) Target countries

Several countries selected from Africa (Ethiopia, Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, People's Congo are expected)

(3) Executing agencies
    ITU, MIC, and King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Center (KSRelief)

(4) Scheduled period
    October 2020 through September 2023

(5) Actions
   (a) Developing methods for verifying gaps and bottlenecks in the use of communications networks and digital technologies to prevent the spread of COVID-19 (including preparations for new conditions and future spread of infectious diseases)
   (b) Creating an analysis report for the target countries
   (c) Formulating national digital strategies to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and prepare for new conditions in the target countries
   (d) Planning and implementing pilot projects based on formulated national digital strategies
   (e) Requesting the participation of other donors, including the World Bank, in expanded projects