I. Introduction and Context

Country Context

Due to its geographic expanse, large population size and abundance of natural resources, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has the potential to become one of Africa’s powerhouses. The DRC is the largest country in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) with a land surface area of 2.3 million square kilometers. Surrounded by nine countries, it is mostly landlocked with only about 37 km of coastline along the Atlantic Ocean. With close to 75 million people, it has the third largest population in SSA after Nigeria and Ethiopia. Natural resources can be found throughout the country and include petroleum, natural gas, coal, cobalt, diamonds, gold and copper. Located in the Great Lakes region and with its complex networks of waterways, DRC also holds the potential of becoming a significant producer of hydroelectric power – today, about 90 percent of domestic consumption of power is hydroelectric.
However, decades of wars have deeply impoverished its population and destroyed its infrastructure. The country continues to recover from a series of conflicts during the 1990s and early 2000s that killed more than 3.5 million and displaced more than 2 million people. Economic growth has resumed in recent years, but per capita income continues to decline and is much lower than in the late 1980s. With a per capita Gross National Income (GNI) of US$220 (2012), it is among the poorest countries in the world. More than 71 percent of the population lives under the US$1.25 a day poverty line (2006).

Human development indicators are strikingly low for the DRC. In 2012, the United Nation’s Human Development Index ranked DRC last among 187 countries. Gender inequality is high, with gender-based violence a bleak day-to-day reality for a large number of women. Life expectancy at birth is 48 years (2009), under-5 child mortality is at almost 170 per 1,000 live births (2010), and maternal mortality is estimated at about 670 per 100,000 live births. Despite some progress in recent years, education outcomes remain low, with gross enrollment ratios estimated at 91 percent for primary, 36.5 percent for secondary, and about 6 percent for tertiary education. Primary completion rates are low at 65 percent for males and 49 percent for females. Amongst young adults aged 15-24, the male literacy rate is only 73 percent, and even lower for women at 62 percent. The population remains vulnerable to food price shocks due to the continued low performance of the agricultural sector, poor infrastructure and logistics, and their impact on trade and commerce. Food represents on average over 62 percent of household expenditure. Population growth has accelerated to about 3 percent in the last decade. Currently, 47 percent of the country's population is under the age of 15. Unemployment is major problem, particularly for the youth, with only an estimated 300,000 jobs (about 1.2 percent of the workforce) in the formal sectors (from 2006 to 2009).

The economic situation in the past few years has, however, been improving and the country remains largely unaffected by the global financial crisis. Economic growth recovered from 2.8 percent in 2009 to 7.2 percent in 2010, which was sustained at 6.9 percent in 2011. It is projected to remain over 7 percent which is attributable to the recovery of the agricultural and trade sectors, and growth in the capital-intensive mining sector. Export receipts (goods and services) jumped by 80 percent in 2010, as a result of favorable prices for exported minerals, and increased further, by 18 percent, in 2011, before stabilizing in 2012. The exchange rate has also stabilized, and favorable terms of trade have allowed for an accumulation of foreign exchange reserves in excess of US$1.3 billion at end 2011, representing about two months of imports. Inflation also fell from over 50 percent in 2009 to below 10 percent in 2010.

Information and communications technologies (ICT) could potentially play an important role for the road to recovery and in the pursuit of sustainable development in the DRC. ICT provides leapfrogging opportunities, by enabling new ways of communicating, sharing and storing information, delivering services and conducting business. Global experience has shown that a vibrant ICT sector in which telecommunications service providers can compete on a level-playing field leads to provision of affordable ICT services, even in low-income countries – which in turn, lowers the cost of access to information. Increased access to information would benefit various segments of society, for example, it would empower entrepreneurs and traders to expand their business within the DRC and to facilitate trade regionally and globally. ICT's can further be used to deliver services to people even in rural areas such as in education, health and government services, significantly reducing the transaction costs for the citizen and the provider of service. While it is increasingly acknowledged that ICT is an enabling input for various sectors, the ICT sector itself can be a source of job
creation; the value-added information technology sector, for example, could create modern and salaried jobs for DRC’s youth.

**Sectoral and Institutional Context**

Although the DRC’s telecommunications sector at first glance seems competitive, operator networks are severely fragmented and the existing regulatory environment is not conducive for competitive behavior. Despite having four fixed-line operators in the sector, DRC’s fixed-line telecommunications network is severely limited. In 2012, the number of lines in service stood at 58,000, and a household penetration of 0.4 percent which, compared to the regional average of 6.7 percent, is strikingly low. Thanks to new operators using local loops (WiLL) such as Standard Telecom and Sogetel, the DRC population can benefit from new wireline services. Almost all lines are in the capital city, Kinshasa, and in Lubumbashi, the second largest city in the country, with just a handful scattered throughout the other main cities. Because of erratic power supply and the outdated status of the network owned and operated by the state-owned Société Congolaise des Postes et Télécommunication (SCPT), previously known as l’Office Congolais des Postes et Telecommunication’s (OCPT), only 50 percent of its 3,500 lines are believed to be in working order at any given time. The limited telecommunications infrastructure is largely reserved for government use. A few very rich individuals have their own fixed lines, but most prefer to use the wireless networks as they are more reliable and a better alternative in terms of price of service. Privately owned companies in the DRC often build-out and operate their own independent networks. For example Gecamines, a mining company, operates its own network under the Sogetel/StarNet banner, allowing limited access to the public through public payphones. Wireless network operator Vodacom also operates a public phone service, with around 35,000 GSM lines allocated for that service.

Therefore, even though the country's wireless network is also fragmented and incomplete, wireless communications is the main form of communications in the DRC. The wireless or mobile market has grown rapidly, first with the introduction of GSM-based services and secondly with the entrance of foreign investors. At the end of December 2001 there were just 150,000 mobile subscribers across the country, a figure which jumped to nearly 22.7 million by the end of March 2013, with penetration rate of 30.1%. In March 2013, there were six operational wireless network operators: Vodacom, Airtel DRC, Tigo DRC, Orange DRC, Africell and SuperCell, with Airtel and Vodacom currently holding 37.5% and 34% market shares respectively.

Provision of Internet service in the country is also dismal. With the state-owned fixed line network in such poor condition, the incumbent operator the Société Congolaise des Postes et Télécommunication (SCPT) is unable to offer internet access, and as a result a number of private companies have established niches for themselves by offering predominantly wireless-based services. Prices are too high for most people, limiting Internet access to large businesses, government institutions and the expatriate community. With the exception of VSAT satellite services, coverage is largely limited to Kinshasa. Deployment of conventional fixed-line broadband (i.e. fibre optic cable) is unfeasible due to the poor legacy network, the size of the geographic country and political instability. Hence, as with voice telephony, wireless solutions are also best suited for the provision of Internet services in the DRC.

The main issue of the telecommunications sector include the following:

- Lack of fixed infrastructure and lack of Broadband connectivity. The fixed-line telephone
network is almost completely depleted, with much of its equipment either out of date or broken. There is no national fiber optic backbone and no broadband connection available on the existing infrastructure. DRC is one of the few African countries that remain fully dependent on satellite for international bandwidth. This is despite the large number of telecommunications operators in the country – this point to regulatory bottlenecks to real competition in the market. The current cost of bandwidth is US$4,000-5,000 per Mbps per month, which is extremely high by regional standards. By comparison, the equivalent price in East Africa is approximately US$500 per Mbps per month and continues to decrease as a result of intense competition between submarine fiber-optic cables. In March 2013, the total number of broadband Internet subscribers was 24,450, representing 0.2% of the household penetration (with a 6.7% average penetration in the region). This is partly explained by the very high cost of service—US$74 per month—which is typical for a country lacking access to submarine cables. This situation is unlikely to improve until the country develops links to the submarine cables along the West African coast.

- Lack of consistency in the management of the existing broadband networks and the constraints pertaining to interconnection between separate network infrastructures. Seamless interconnection between communications networks should be at the core of telecommunications infrastructure planning and implementation. Telecommunications networks can be interconnected in a number of ways and there can be many different channels through which customers connect to the global telecommunications network and to the World Wide Web. The interconnection of networks in a large country such as the DRC requires significant planning to ensure that linkages between the networks are maximized. The arrival of submarine cables will significantly increase bandwidth capacity coming into the country, but challenges will remain in extending capacity beyond the coast to the urban centers, and later to the rural areas. Furthermore, the lack of interconnection across the central Africa region also leads to scarcity of affordable broadband bandwidth, which in turn discourages interregional trade and private sector development in the DRC. Establishing interconnection arrangements between the existing operators in DRC will pose the first challenge. The World Bank has already expressed concerns regarding the need to adopt a consistent approach to interconnection arrangements (interconnection regimes between operators) and take into consideration the multiple initiatives carried out by different stakeholders in DRC, in particular for telecom infrastructure, such as the South African Power Market Pool (SAPMP) network, existing and planned projects implemented by the Ministère des Postes, Telephones et Telecoms (MPTT). The lack of interconnectivity between the different networks is a significant hindrance to sector development.

- Restructuring of the incumbent fixed operator. SCPT, with less than 3,000 properly functioning telephone lines, does not have a financially viable operation and therefore requires restructuring. The COPIREP (Comité de Pilotage de la Réforme des Entreprises du portefeuille de l’Etat – Steering Committee in charge of the Reform of the Public Companies) has already documented and laid out the case for the restructuring of the SCPT. The proposal for restructuring SCPT was officially disclosed on March 26, 2013, and it includes the following options: (i) SCPT is spun-off into two separate legal entities, one for postal services and the other for telecommunications services; (ii) sharing of assets and liabilities between the two branches of activities. For both options, a social plan needs to be implemented for retrenchment of staff. Experiences in other countries show that governments have been slow if not unable to initiate a strategic repositioning of their state-owned incumbent operator. The restructuring of the incumbent operator is understood as a necessity, but any restructuring plan would require drastic reduction of employees in order to make the operator attractive to buyers and subsequently debt recovery.
possible for the government. Experience shows that political pressures to stall such restructuring should not be underestimated, and such pressures have prevented some countries from completing the reforms they started.

- Legislation, regulation and sector policy. The current 2002 legislation is not adapted to the existing market realities and does not take into consideration new converging technologies that have emerged in the past several years such as mobile broadband (e.g. 3G/4G/LTE). Therefore a new legal and regulatory framework has been drafted and is about to be submitted to the Parliament (initially scheduled for the March 2013 parliamentary session which has been postponed to September 2013). The adoption of secondary legislation and the implementation of the new legal and regulatory regime would be supported by the proposed Project. This would, among other things, help strengthen implementing agencies such as the regulator, Autorité de Régulation de la Poste et des Télécommunications du Congo (ARPTC). With the current law, roles and responsibilities between the key players, public or private, in the sector are not well-defined. This confusion creates inconsistencies in the application of the law as well as overlapping of role and prerogatives, particularly between the Ministry and the regulator (consultancy funded by the PSD project).

- Excessive taxation of operators. With tax revenues from the telecommunications sector accounting for one-third of the Government’s revenues, the sector is seen as a “cash cow”. Fierce competition in the mobile sector has resulted in a decrease of retail tariffs and, eventually, of tax revenue, leading the Government to dramatically increase the taxes on numbering and frequency in 2009, with the consequence to increase the existing tax rates without offsetting the value dilution. More recently the Government has established a new tax on the installation of fiber optic networks (Ministerial decree of December 2012). Based on international experience this may have been a short-sighted decision. Once competition is triggered, in particular in the mobile phone segment, revenues may initially drop. However, due to increased affordability, subscription rates usually rise rapidly, increasing revenues again well-above the levels prior to competition.

- Weak regulatory oversight of the telecommunications sector. While the establishment of ARPTC in 2002 (Law n°014/2002) was a commendable achievement, the overall accomplishments of the regulator have thus far not met expectations, one reason for which is insufficient funding and resources. The few decisions that have been made by the regulator have had little impact on market performance, partly due to the lack of political power to implement decisions and partly due to the lack of clarity of the respective roles between the ARPTC and the MPTT. In order to address these shortcomings, the new legal and regulatory framework has been drafted and should be adopted by the Government before this project is approved.

Relationship to CAS

The new Country Assistance Strategy (CAS) for the DRC was approved by the Board of the World Bank on May 7th, 2013. The improvement of access to quality broadband network and services at reduced cost has been clearly identified under CAS Outcome 2.3. Key outcome indicators expected to be impacted by Bank-supported activities are: (i) increased total broadband penetration (household penetration); and (ii) increased international Internet bandwidth.

Starting in 2004, the World Bank provided intensive support to the telecommunications sector in the DRC through a series of technical assistance activities to: (i) create and support the regulator (Private Sector Development Competitiveness Project 2004-2008 and policy dialogue in FY09, FY10 and FY11); (ii) support the MPTT to develop an Information and Communication
Technologies (ICT) Strategy, ICT Policy and Broadband Strategy; and (iii) support the revision of the legal and regulatory framework identified as key actions in the ICT Strategy and Policy documents. Building on these past activities, the Minister of Finance sent a letter to the Bank in April 2013 confirming interest in the Central African Backbone (CAB) Series of Projects (SOP) program and announced the Government’s intention to formally request a Project Preparation Advance (PPA). The PPA would: (i) identify connectivity projects to be financed; and (ii) prepare the Ministry of Portfolio as the Implementation Agency through its existing project management unit, the Comité de Pilotage de la Réforme des Entreprises Publiques (Steering Committee in charge the Reform of the Public Companies – COPIREP).

II. Proposed Development Objective(s)

Proposed Development Objective(s) (From PCN)
The development objective of the proposed project is consistent with the PDO for the CAB Program: to contribute to increase geographical reach and usage of regional broadband infrastructure and to reduce the price of services to enable more people in the DRC to access ICT services.

Key Results (From PCN)
• Decrease the cost of international bandwidth
• Increase access to broadband services in the three identified cluster regions: Kinshasa, Lumbumbashi, and Goma.
• Increased number of designed and concluded MoU reached between DRC and neighboring countries to implement of a regional interconnection Regime for broadband fiber optic networks

III. Preliminary Description

Concept Description
The proposed project would become the fifth phase of the Central African Backbone (CAB) Series of Projects (SOP) Program. The Bank has been actively supporting the connectivity agenda in Africa under regional projects such as the Regional Communications Infrastructure Program (RCIP) in Eastern and Southern Africa (started in 2007), the West Africa Regional Communications Infrastructure Program (WARCIP) (started in 2010), and the CAB program (started in 2009). These programs have addressed connectivity challenges, such as increasing access to submarine connectivity, managing cross-border links to promote seamless and redundant regional connectivity, and expanding national networks to deliver broadband Internet to first and second tier urban centers.

The proposed CAB5 project builds on the overall regional program, and would have potential benefits within the DRC and across the borders it shares with nine other countries. The World Bank report, “Reviving the Great Lakes: A World Bank Group Regional Initiative for Peace, Stability and Economic Development,” which was submitted to the Board of Directors in June 2013 and which lays out a strategy for regional development looking at linkages between peace security and long term development in the great lakes region, mentions the CAB Program and the proposed CAB5 project as examples of the World Bank Group’s regional approach to development: “The CAB5 project brings the prospect of linking the east of the DRC to Kinshasa and to east African countries and the world. All countries in the region have an interest in exploiting ICT for development and for pursuing regional connectivity and regional ICT solutions.” The strategy was developed in support of the February 24, 2013 Peace, Security and Cooperation framework for the DRC and the region.
More specifically, the second pillar of the Great Lakes’ Regional Development Initiative, which is centered on Economic Cooperation and Regional Integration, stresses that all countries in the Great Lakes region have a common interest in developing infrastructure to increase regional connectivity. It also mentions that the proposed CAB5 Project would not only establish communications links connecting the east of the DRC to Kinshasa, but also increase DRC’s connectivity to the region and globally, allowing for opportunities in trade and improve coordination of security efforts. The second pillar further promotes the “important opportunities for close coordination of the CAB5 project and the RCIP project which is being implemented in Burundi, Rwanda and Uganda and other countries in east Africa”.

IDA financing would be an important catalyst for continued and efficient infrastructure development in the DRC and surrounding countries. DRC’s telecommunications networks are severely fragmented, with many operators having a presence in just a portion of the country. Without any coordination national connectivity will likely be hindered which would in turn diminish the role that DRC could potentially have in furthering connectivity in the region. The role of IDA financing would therefore be two-fold: (i) a World Bank project would support the establishment of a nationwide—as opposed to fragmented—connectivity network that would lead to greater provision of broadband Internet; and (ii) IDA financing would not only fill the funding gap that is required to fully leverage the various connectivity investments within the country, across borders, and to the submarine cables, but also would provide assurance to private companies to overcome their reluctance to invest in the sector because of the security situation in the region. Countries participating in the regional connectivity programs are required to endorse a set of key principles –. The key principles include, committing to an Open Access Policy and promoting Public Private Partnerships (PPP). An Open Access Policy would ensure that rules are put in place so that all market players have fair access to the necessary infrastructure including backbone infrastructure which tends towards a natural monopoly due to its high upfront investment requirement. Furthermore, in order to avoid a natural monopoly, a PPP vehicle could ensure communal ownership and/or management of the high-investment backbone infrastructure, facilitating continued national and regional infrastructure development, especially in countries where individual operators have limited investment capacity and opportunities.

A PPP scheme could become a viable vehicle to connect Central Africa with South Africa and East Africa (including to submarine cables on the west and east coasts of Africa), significantly increasing provision of bandwidth capacity to the DRC. Through previous policy dialogue facilitated by the Bank, including an ongoing activity funded by the Private Pubic Infrastructure Advisory Facility (PPIAF), private telecommunications operators in the DRC have suggested exploring the feasibility of a PPP that would address national and cross-border connectivity by leveraging private investments and operating expertise to meet national objectives of better connectivity and regional integration. The Government of DRC (GoDRC) announced by letter CAB/VM2/MIN/PTT/BGS/JB/ vw/125/2011 dated February 2011 and letter CAB/VM2/MIN/PNTC/LKNG/JB/pak/746/2012 dated April 2012 that it was willing to implement a PPP approach for the new international connectivity and has officially indicated its interest in participating in the CAB SOP Program and aligning to the aforementioned key principles, such as Open Access and non-discrimination.

The DRC has recent experience in operating in a PPP environment. A recently established company called Congo Singa or Congo Cable, with government shares, is currently participating in the West Africa Cable System (WACS) consortium which in June of 2013 installed a landing station for submarine cables in Moanda and a fiber optic cable between Moanda and Kinshasa. In order to
complement and secure this network, and to expand infrastructure in other parts of the country, the GoDRC has requested Bank support to build and commercialize, on a wholesale basis, telecommunications networks in three key economic clusters: Kinshasa, Lubumbashi, and Goma. Furthermore, the proposed Bank support would help ensure that the DRC connects to submarine cables via the most efficient routes (e.g. WACS for Kinshasa and other cross-border connections for Lubumbashi and Goma).

The proposed CAB5 Project would aim to trigger and contribute to the deployment of about 3,700 km of the 7,000 km target fiber optic network to be built in a modular way. The cost of this 7000 km target network is estimated to be US$200million. The rationale behind the proposed network design is to provide the DRC with access to international connectivity through the submarine cables running down the two coasts of Africa (i.e. WACS, SAT3, ACE, Seacom, Eassy, LIONS, Teams) and to connect the three key economic clusters, Kinshasa, Lubumbashi, Goma, including appropriate cross border connections. These three key economic clusters will then be connected together utilizing existing links from Mbuji-Mayi to form a comprehensive national broadband infrastructure. The proposed project would finance $103 million in infrastructure (of which $46.5 million would come from private stakeholders).

Network deployment under the proposed project would be conducted through a PPP (to be established) and defined Open Access arrangements between the relevant operators. The project would use a cooperative PPP model (i.e. infrastructure sharing consortium) between operators in the DRC to share costs through a common vehicle. Special attention will be devoted to ensure that small operators are included in the PPP structure. The settlement of a cooperative PPP structure in the DRC has been extensively discussed since September 2012 with the industry stakeholders under a Bank-supported technical assistance project, DRC ICT Regulatory Advisory Services (P132812). This intense policy dialogue led to the finalization of a MoU between GoDRC (COPIREP and MINPTT) and the private operators in the country. All participating that would develop, operate and commercialize on a wholesale basis the network it builds. In light of these developments, a Project Preparation Advance (PPA) has been requested to help establish the PPP as a legal entity prior to Board approval of the CAB5 project.

Project Components. Four components have been identified: Component 1 – Enabling environment at the regional and national levels; Component 2 – Connectivity and purchase of bandwidth; Component 3 – Promotion of ICT sector and digitalization; Component 4 – Project management and monitoring & evaluation.

Bank funds would be provided through Investment Project Financing, Series of Projects (SOP) . The Project would be executed over a five-year period with total financing of around US$138 million, including US$46.5 million contribution from the private operators. Consistent with the overall CAB program framework, the project components would consist of:

Component 1 - Enabling environment at the regional and national levels (US$15.50 million). This component would include the following activities: (i) support completion of the transaction for the PPP vehicle which would be defined under a PPA during project preparation; (ii) TA for the review, improvement and development of “cyber” legal and institutional framework (cyber-security, cybercrimes, privacy, promotion of ICT sector, support to national entities in charge of ICT, etc.); (iii) TA on taxation and fiscal study to assess the impact that ICT sector specific tax is having on economic and social development; (iv) feasibility study and purchase of equipment for radio
frequency management; (v) feasibility study and purchase of equipment for a Regional Interconnection Pool to establish and maintain a cross border interconnection regime in the Great Lakes region; (vi) preparatory study, training and purchase of equipment for regulatory instruments to monitor and evaluate concession contract obligations; and (vii) preparatory study for restructuring of SCPT.

Component 2 – Connectivity and Purchase of Bandwidth (US$103 million, of which $46.50 million from private investors). This component would focus on improving connectivity domestically (i.e. linking the three main economic clusters) and ii) internationally with the nine neighboring countries. It includes the following activities, (i) financing three interregional links (Kinshasa, Goma, Lubumbashi) to neighboring countries (including fiber-optic cables, terminal equipment, switches), through the establishment of an open access network (open to all operators) and leveraging private sector investment and ensuring interconnectivity among neighboring countries, and (ii) financing pre-purchase by GoDRC of capacity for public use (administration, universities, etc.).

Component 3 – Promotion of ICT sector and digitalization (US$12.50 million). This component would build ICT skills and digitalization: (i) Digital SwitchOver (DSO) - Preparatory Study Plan and investment plan; (ii) e-Waste (the process of recycling electronic equipment) - Preparatory Study, capacity building activities investment plan (including the construction of the e-waste center) as well as the organization of awareness campaigns to ensure effective use of the e-waste center; and (iii) Government Intranet - Definition and preparatory study, construction of the network and purchase of equipment.

Component 4 – Project Management (Total cost $7 million). This component would finance contract staff for project management, procurement, financial management, and monitoring and evaluation (M&E), internal and external audit, communications expertise, operating expenses, and equipment for project administration and related environmental studies. It would also fund the contract of the investment bank that would carry out the establishment of the SPV and conduct the transaction. This activity would be mostly financed by the PPA during project preparation.

IV. Safeguard Policies that might apply

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V. Financing (in USD Million)
Total Project Cost: 138.00  
Total Bank Financing: 91.50  
Financing Gap: 0.00  

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