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| Director, Telecommunication Development Bureau |
| ITU-D Projects |
|  |
| **Summary:**The International Telecommunication Union has a dual responsibility as a United Nations specialized agency and as an executing agency. The Telecommunication Development Sector (ITU-D) in fulfilling the Union's dual responsibility, has the key function of implementing projects under the United Nations development system or other funding arrangements so as to facilitate and enhance telecommunication development by offering, organizing and coordinating technical cooperation and assistance activities.This document presents an overview of the work undertaken by the Telecommunication Development Bureau in project development and implementation in the six ITU-D regions: Africa, Americas, Arab States, Asia-Pacific, Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and Europe, as well as multi-regionally. **Action required:**TDAG is invited to note this document and provide guidance as deemed appropriate.**Reference:**Resolutions 17 and 52 (Rev. Buenos Aires, 2017) of the World Telecommunication Development Conference (WTDC) and Resolution 157 (Rev. Dubai, 2018) of the Plenipotentiary Conference. |

# Introduction

In accordance with Resolutions 17 and 52 (Rev. Buenos Aires, 2017) of the World Telecommunication Development Conference (WTDC) and Resolution 157 (Rev. Dubai, 2018) of the Plenipotentiary Conference, the ITU Telecommunication Development Bureau (BDT) holds the responsibility of fulfilling ITU´s mandate of implementing projects under the United Nations development system or other funding arrangements so as to facilitate and enhance telecommunication/information and communication technology development by offering, organizing and coordinating technical cooperation and assistance activities.

BDT projects are demand-driven, people-centered and focused on the development of digital solutions in support of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda. Since 2007, BDT has implemented a total of 315 small, medium and large-scale projects at national, regional, interregional and global levels benefiting around 150 developing and least developed countries[[1]](#footnote-1).

# ITU project portfolio: On-going projects

## Overview and regional distribution

As of 31 December 2020, the ITU project portfolio stood at 75 ongoing projects, valued at CHF 86.1 million, with the rest of the funds committed and a balance of CHF 24.0 million uncommitted. Figure 1 presents the overall distribution of these projects by region, and the overview of funds allocated to these projects.

**Figure 1 – Overview of on-going ITU projects by region
(figures in k CHF)**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Region** | **Number of Projects** | **Cash external** | **Cash** | **Cash** | **Total** | **Balance of funds as of 31/12/20** | **% Balance** |
|  | **ICT-DF** | **OP** | **Cash** |
| AFR  | 13 | 7,554.6 | 538.8 | 407.5 | 8,634.2 | 5,925.9 | 69% |
| AMS  | 11 | 40,023.2 | 111.2 | 240.8 | 40,375.2 | 5,190.8 | 13% |
| ARB  | 11 | 5,183.1 | 668.2 | 209.1 | 6,060.4 | 1,755.2 | 29% |
| ASP | 6 | 3,833.0 |  | 222.0 | 4,257.5 | 4,105.6 | 96% |
| CIS  | 4 | 409.3 |  | 340.2 | 749.5 | 187.7 | 25% |
| EUR | 3 | 3,803.7 |  | 304.3 | 4,108.1 | 2,756.9 | 67% |
| MUL | 27 | 13,720.5 | 3,208.1 | 2,376.9 | 21,879.6 | 4,106.9 | 19% |
| **Total** | **75** | **74,527.5** | **4,526.4** | **4,100.7** | **86,064.5** | **24,028.9** | **28%** |

## New projects signed in 2020: Growth resulting from new partnerships

A total of 24 new projects were developed and signed in 2020, with a value of CHF 14.9 million, representing the largest volume of projects signed since 2010 (see figure 2). These projects were signed in partnership with other organizations, such as national government agencies, bilateral cooperation entities, not-for-profit institutions, private sector, and agencies from the UN-wide system. This outcome is a result of the strategic synergies among the Resource Mobilization and Partnership Division Membership Service, and Projects Support Divisions within the Partnerships for Digital Development Department of the BDT[[2]](#footnote-2)

**Figure 2 – New projects signed 2010-2020**

The diverse group of partners that are involved in the set up and implementation of ITU’S telecommunications/ICT projects is a clear demonstration that the BDT is acknowledged as a leader and neutral platform. This is a good development as it contributes to the Fit-4-Purpose continuous re-engineering of the BDT which is essential in addressing increasing connectivity and deployment of digital solutions challenges across the globe – challenges that are beyond the capacity of a single organization.

Some examples of this are:

* the Giga initiative[[3]](#footnote-3) (a joint ITU-UNICEF programme aimed at connecting every school to the internet);
* the Digital Transformation Center Initiative[[4]](#footnote-4) (a programme co-funded by ITU and NORAD that seeks to create a global network of centres, whose main purpose is to develop digital skills at basic and intermediate level for citizens) and,
* the Connect2Recover initiative[[5]](#footnote-5) (a global initiative co-funded by Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communication (MIC) of Japan and the King Salman Relief and Aid Center of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia that aims to reinforce the digital infrastructure and ecosystems of beneficiary countries to provide means to support the COVID-19 recovery efforts and preparedness for the 'new normal' and potential future pandemics).

These and other ITU projects show that by working through partnerships ITU can have a greater impact and provide a greater support to ITU Membership in advancing digital development.

## Projects signed during the first quarter of 2021

The intense work in attracting new partners has continued in the first quarter of 2021, during which BDT signed 11 projects valued at around CHF 5.5 million and 8 more projects expected to be signed during the second quarter of 2021 with of a value of CHF 4.3 million. These projects are multi-regional, regional, and national in nature. The list of these agreements can be found in [Document INF/2](https://www.itu.int/md/D18-TDAG28-INF-0002/en).

# Funding sources for ongoing ITU projects

ITU projects are funded mostly through extra-budgetary resources. Projects have four types of funding sources: Funds in Trust (FIT), ICT Development Fund (ICT-DF)[[6]](#footnote-6), voluntary contributions, and the ITU regular budget (OP)[[7]](#footnote-7). Based on the ongoing budget for the implementation of projects as of 31 March 2021, the funding for on-going ITU projects corresponds approximately 90 per cent to Funds in Trust, 5 per cent to the ICT-DF and 5 per cent to the BDT operational plan (see figure 3).

**Figure 3 – Funding sources for ITU Projects (on-going projects)**

## Council allocated funds for the implementation of WTDC-17 Regional Initiatives

For funding projects which implement the WTDC-17 regional initiatives, ITU Council-18 allocated CHF 2 million for the period 2018-2019 from the 2017 operational plan and included CHF 3 million for 2020-2021 in the Financial Plan 2020-2023. In principle, these funds are granted as seed money, normally up to 50 per cent of the total cost of a development project, to attract funds from potential partners to support implementation of the regional initiatives.

At the date of preparation of this report a total of 26 projects had already been signed with funding from the Council allocated funds for the implementation of WTDC-17 regional initiatives. These projects represent a portfolio of CHF 10.9 million (including in-kind contributions), with an ITU contribution of CHF 3.4 million. The last batch of 8 projects to be funded with remaining funds allocated by Council are expected to be signed during the second quarter of 2021.

# Efforts being made to establish robust project management practices in ITU

During the last 12 months, BDT has continued to strengthen project management practices across all ITU projects, through the organization of a broad range of activities aimed at reinforcing the governance of ITU projects, building capacity of ITU project managers, standardizing project management practices across ITU and reinforcing the monitoring and evaluation of projects. These activities include:

* ***Set up of the BDT Projects Board****:*Established by the BDT Director in November 2020, the BDT Projects Board aims at assessing and evaluating project proposals’ viability and relevance before they evolve into projects, review and approve projects before they are agreed on with partners, based on the formal project evaluation process participate in the face-to-face quarterly project assessment meetings with related project management teams and provide oversight on project implementation and closure where issues arise. The terms of reference and composition of the Projects Board are attached as **Annex 1.** The Projects Board is an oversight mechanism independent of the formal project management practices that include governance issues, reporting, monitoring and evaluation, as defined by the ITU Project Manual.
* ***Adoption and Implementation of the new ITU Project Management Manual****:* Launched in July 2020, the new ITU Project Manual was produced based on international best practices on project management, as well as on the accumulated experiences from ITU project managers in the implementation of projects for digital development. The principles established through the Manual have a mandatory nature for all ITU project managers. The Manual is in use as reference material.
* ***Strengthening of project governance****:*Project governance has also been reinforced at the project level, with the establishment of RACI charts, project sponsors and, when applicable, steering committees for all ITU projects. This reinforced project governance is a key pillar of the new ITU Project Management Manual.
* ***Project management certification programme****:* ITU continued in 2020 with the certification programme in project management started in 2019. With the completion of the second programme, a total of 75 staff from BDT are now certified in the PMD Pro methodology. The programme will continue in 2021 with the launch of a new “Community of Practice of ITU Project Managers” and with the organization of a “train the trainers” programme.
* ***Reinforce project monitoring****:*AllITU projects are monitored on a quarterly basis by the Projects Support Division. The result of this work is made available to all ITU management and project managers via the Quarterly Assessment report, an interactive report that has been completely redesigned to provide an early assessment on the status of implementation of each project. The report allows to identify projects that may be deviating from the original workplan, and which may require special support to be brought back on track.
* ***Project post-implementation assessments****:* BDT has conducted post-implementation assessments for several ITU projects. These assessments aim to review the key performance indicators set to assess the achievement of results, efficiency and effectiveness related to project implementation, as well as the impact of achieved results, centred on results-based management principles. The outcome of each review is based on an objective analysis of the results achieved, as well as the drawing of lessons learned that may help improve the design and implementation of future ITU projects. The results are captured in assessment reports, some of which are published on [BDT Projects website](https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Projects/Pages/Implementation-Reviews.aspx).

# Conclusions

1. BDT has many years of proven experience in project execution for the benefit of developing countries and in some cases, developed countries. However, as the ICT sector evolves, so too does BDT, which is committed to adapting its processes, exploiting new opportunities, and effectively addressing challenges in project development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.
2. The implementation of projects has proven to be an efficient way of responding to the specific needs of ITU Member States and serves as an excellent mechanism to deliver with impact.
3. BDT projects are also an effective tool for implementing the regional initiatives, which were defined by Member States as priority areas for specific regions.
4. BDT is continuously innovating to respond to opportunities as well as challenges related to projects, by improving its project execution function, processes and reporting, in order to uphold accountability, efficiency and effectiveness in the implementation of projects.
5. The three recently adopted strategies on ITU-D Membership, Partnerships and Resource Mobilization, and Project Management have helped to tie the loose ends together and bring synergy which is resulting in coordinated performance in delivering impact on the ground for the benefit of the Membership. This is also supported by collaboration with both ITU internal and outside stakeholders.
6. For more information on projects implemented by ITU, visit:
[http://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Projects/](http://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Projects/Pages/default.aspx)

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1. *An overview of the ITU project portfolio is available at* [*www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Projects/*](http://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Projects/) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *More information about ITU-D partnerships and resource mobilization is available at to documents TDAG-21/7-E and Document INF/2, and TDAG-21 Document 12 on ITU-D Sector Members, Associates, and Academia.* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *More information about Giga is available at* [*https://gigaconnect.org/*](https://gigaconnect.org/) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *More information about the DTC initiative is available at* [*https://academy.itu.int/main-activities/digital-transformation-centres-initiative*](https://academy.itu.int/main-activities/digital-transformation-centres-initiative) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. *More information about Connect2Recover is available at* [*https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Pages/connect-2-recover.aspx*](https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Pages/connect-2-recover.aspx) [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. *Further information about the ICTDF is available at document C21/034 available at* [*https://www.itu.int/md/S21-CL-C-0034/en*](https://www.itu.int/md/S21-CL-C-0034/en) [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. *OP resources include the funds allocated by Council for the implementation of WTDC-17 regional initiatives* [↑](#footnote-ref-7)