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| **Telecommunication Development Advisory Group (TDAG)**  **30th Meeting, Geneva, Switzerland, 19-23 June 2023** | A close up of a sign  Description automatically generated |
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|  | **Document** **TDAG-2****3/37(Rev.1)-E** |
|  | **9 June 2023** |
|  | **Original:** **English** |
| Australia and Papua New Guinea | |
| Regional initiatives to address telecommunications/ICT-related  challenges in the Pacific region | |
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| **Summary:**  This Contribution outlines key regional initiatives currently being implemented by Pacific island countries to address the telecommunications/ICT development needs of the region. Many Pacific island countries face an exceptional set of challenges including remoteness, limited resources and skills shortages, susceptibility to natural disasters, and severe impacts of climate change. This overview aims to assist TDAG with tracking the implementation of the Kigali Action Plan 2022 priorities as they relate to the Pacific region and highlights the importance of regional ITU presence as a key enabler to effectively and efficiently deliver on the Development Sector’s goals and priorities.  **Action required:**  TDAG is invited to note the initiatives.  **References:**  Kigali Action Plan 2022  WTDC Resolution 24 (Rev. Dubai, 2014) – Authorization for the Telecommunication Development Advisory Group to act between world telecommunication development conferences | |

1. **Introduction**

The Pacific Small Island Developing States (PSIDS), a group of islands in the Asia-Pacific region, is characterised by geographic isolation spread across a vast expanse of 30 million square kilometres of the Pacific Ocean, small land area, and low population sizes.[[1]](#footnote-1) Due to geographical location, the PSIDS face an exceptional set of challenges including remoteness, limited resources and skills shortages, susceptibility to natural disasters, and severe impacts associated with climate change. Socio-economic progress, which largely relies on technological advancements including in the telecommunications/ICT sector, is further hindered by high communication, infrastructure, energy and transportation costs.

The PSIDS currently receive inefficient and inadequate international support to address their telecommunications/ICT development needs. There is consensus that the current “one-size-fits-all” and “fly-in, fly-out” approaches do not effectively cater to the much-needed extensive support required by PSIDS for the successful delivery of programs and strategic priorities. Any further delay in implementing targeted and sustainable solutions will likely exacerbate existing vulnerabilities and hamper PSDIS’ ability to meet the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The PSIDS telecommunications/ICT needs can only be addressed if development assistance accounts for the unique challenges faced by the region, offers targeted and sustainable evidence-based solutions, and is well coordinated by all parties involved (avoiding duplicative efforts).

1. **Regional initiatives**

The PSIDS continue to punch above their weight, working tirelessly to address their telecommunications/ICT development needs at a national, sub-regional and regional levels, by mobilising resources through bilateral and multilateral partnerships. But the PSIDS cannot continue to do this alone. As the United Nations’ specialised agency for telecommunications and ICTs, ITU plays a critical role in supporting the delivery of this assistance.

The importance of regional cooperation to address shared telecommunications/ICT needs is well understood in the Pacific region. In the past decade, Pacific ICT Ministers through the Pacific Island Forum (PIF) met several times to agree common priorities and task their respective governments with implementing national ICT strategies. The last meeting (held in 2015) resulted in the 2016 – 2020 Pacific Regional ICT Strategic Action Plan, which sought to enhance social and economic sustainable development, good governance and security through better access and use of ICT across the region. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic hindered the delivery of activities and strategic goals, and much work remains.

With strong support from the Pacific region including Australia, in 2022 Papua New Guinea took a leadership role to revitalise regional discussions on telecommunication/ICT matters at the Ministerial level and announced its willingness to host the next Pacific ICT Ministerial Meeting on 28-29 August 2023. The Ministerial discussions will focus on the strategic themes of Digital Transformation, Access and Infrastructure, Security, Digital Skills and Regional Cooperation, in strong alignment with the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent developed by PIF, and the Pacific Community (SPC) Working Group on Technology and Connectivity in particular.

As a first step to prepare for the Pacific ICT Ministerial Meeting 2023, Papua New Guinea convened the Pacific ICT Agency Heads Dialogue (the Dialogue) in February 2023. The Dialogue brought together officials from 11 countries (Australia, Cook Islands, Federated State of Micronesia, Kiribati, New Caledonia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Vanuatu), and the Council of Regional Organisations in the Pacific (CROP) and Global Forum on Cyber Expertise (GFCE) as observers. The Dialogue received strong support from the Government of Papua New Guinea, with the Prime Minister, the Hon James Marape MP highlighting the need to bring telecommunications/ICT issues to the attention of PIF Leaders.

Under the ‘Smart Pacific, One Voice’ motto, the Dialogue paid particular attention to improving coordination across the Pacific, to amplify the voice of the region in relevant multilateral forums such as ITU and the Asia Pacific Telecommunity (APT). This way, the specific needs of the Pacific can be heard, well understood and accounted for. In similar vein, the Dialogue also addressed the issue of strengthening ITU’s regional presence and discussed the potential establishment of an ITU area (sub-regional) office in the Pacific as a means to address regional challenges, but appreciated ITU’s current financial situation and its limited mandate. These issues are expected to be discussed further at the Pacific ICT Ministerial Meeting 2023.

* 1. **Feasibility Study**

To build a solid evidence base and identify the best sustainable suite of solutions to address the telecommunications/ICT development needs of PSIDS, Australia committed to funding a feasibility study (‘The Pacific Small Island Developing States telecommunications/ICT needs analysis and potential solutions’, or PSIDS Study) using Australia’s annual voluntary contribution to ITU. The concept note for the PSIDS Study was developed in close consultation with the project beneficiaries (the PSIDS), as well as the ITU-Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (as delivery partner).

The scope of the PSIDS Study includes a situational analysis to identify telecommunications/ICT needs of the region, existing governance structures and ongoing development assistance provided by ITU and other similar agencies. Based on the analysis, the PSIDS Study will identify and evaluate a number of options, including options to strengthen ITU’s presence in the Pacific region, and make recommendations for the subsequent consideration of PSIDS and the broader ITU Membership. The PSIDS Study will be conducted by a Pacific liaison officer, supported by experts with knowledge of the region, for a maximum period of two years. The deliverables will include reports produced at the end of each phase, along with a final report and recommendations.

The implementation of the project will be regularly reported on at relevant international meetings, such as at Ordinary Sessions of ITU Council (by Australia as Council member and project sponsor, and by ITU), at TDAG meetings (by ITU-RO) and at APT regional preparatory meetings for the World Telecommunication Development Conference (WTDC)-2025.

The PSIDS Study will contribute to the Union’s ongoing efforts to enhance its overall global effectiveness and impact over the longer term, and to respond effectively to the unique circumstances of the Member States they are serving.

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1. Cook Islands, Federated State of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu (as defined by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)