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| Director, Telecommunication Development Bureau | |
| **Innovation and Entrepreneurship Alliance for Digital Development** | |
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| **Summary:**  This document provides an update of the [Innovation and Entrepreneurship Alliance for Digital Development](https://www.itu.int/itu-d/sites/innovation-alliance/) established to respond to significant unmet needs of ITU membership in the area of innovation, as articulated in the Kigali Action Plan adopted at the World Telecommunication Development Conference 2022 (WTDC-22 ) and the relevant resolution of the ITU Plenipotentiary Conference 2022 (PP-22) as referenced below.  The Alliance will contribute to the implementation of the five WTDC-22 Priority areas and, the one on Digital Transformation.  The document presents the progress made with the Innovation and Entrepreneurship Alliance for Digital Development and gives insights into its upcoming implementation activities. This initiative will contribute to the successful implementation of projects under the Regional Initiatives related to Innovation and Entrepreneurship.  **Action required:**  TDAG is invited to note this document and provide guidance as deemed appropriate.  **References:**  WTDC Resolutions 90, 89 and 85 (Kigali, 2022)  ITU Regional Initiatives AFR4, AMS3, ARB4, ASP4, CIS3, CIS5, EUR5  PP Resolution 205; ITU Strategic Plan (PP Resolution 71, Rev. Bucharest, 2022) | |

1. **Background**

The Innovation and Entrepreneurship Alliance for Digital Development was established on 25 January 2023, by the BDT Director to respond to significant unmet needs of ITU Membership in the area of innovation, as articulated in the Kigali Action Plan adopted at the World Telecommunication Development Conference 2022 (WTDC-22) and the Outcomes of the ITU Plenipotentiary Conference 2022 (PP-22).

The Alliance aims to create “a more equitable and digital future for all” and deliver on two outcomes of ITU-D priorities:

* Strengthened capacity of the ITU membership to integrate telecommunication/ICT innovation and digitalization in their national development agendas and to develop strategies to promote innovation initiatives, including through public, private and public-private partnerships.
* Enhanced human and institutional capacity of the ITU membership in telecommunications/ICTs to foster digital transformation.

The work of the Alliance is aligned with:

* WTDC Resolutions 90, 89 and 85 (Kigali, 2022) providing clear guidance on the role of innovation in digital transformation of society;
* ITU Regional Initiatives for all regions further calling for greater attention to this area;
* PP Resolution 205 on ‘Fostering ICT-centric innovation to support the digital economy and society’ reiterated the leading roles of BDT in innovation for digital development;
* ITU Strategic Plan (PP Resolution 71, Rev. Bucharest, 2022).

The Alliance **Vision** is to “support ITU-D Membership with new, more resilient, and forward-thinking approaches to guarantee they can safely navigate a digital world that is increasingly Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous (VUCA) and achieve outcomes of the Kigali Action Plan.”

The Alliance **Mission** is to “bridge the Digital Innovation Divide and empower ITU-D membership to overcome challenges on their path through digital transformation and accelerate their ecosystems’ impact on cross-cutting sectors for an inclusive and sustainable society.”

The Alliance will support countries in building local capacities in innovation and entrepreneurship to achieve five strategic objectives:

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| **Trends research readiness** | Enable countries to get ahead of the curve and make sense of the evolution of technology, policy and innovation dynamics. |
| **Open technology innovation** | Harness technological know-how into global goods through open innovation and multistakeholder mechanisms, accelerating access to emerging technology for all. |
| **Entrepreneurship and SMEs growth** | Accelerate the uptake of digital innovation-driven entrepreneurship and opportunities for talent to achieve socio-economic inclusion in their communities. |
| **Policy experimentation** | Develop agile policies that provide stakeholders with safe space for experimentation, encouraging innovation and attracting investment in the digital ecosystem. |
| **Ecosystem initiatives acceleration** | Promote collaboration and synergies that scale digital innovations and create value across economic sectors for a competitive digital economy. |

The Alliance is committed to deliver the above outcomes through three vehicles:

* A Digital Transformation Lab,
* A Network of ITU Acceleration Centres, and
* A Digital Innovation Board.

Together, these vehicles effectively deliver new products and services for ITU Membership to be more agile, adapt to the changing digital environment and capture its value.

1. **Main vehicles**

BDT has operationalized the three vehicles over the year through a learning model to ensure each vehicle is fit for impact. This section highlights each vehicle's rationale and its current readiness, learning and experimentation objectives, and next steps.

* 1. **Digital Transformation Lab**

The Digital Transformation Lab (DT Lab) has a dual role in supporting the design and implementation of the Network of acceleration centres and providing technical assistance to enable countries currently lacking capabilities in experimentation and initiative development to accelerate digital ecosystem building through innovation and entrepreneurship.

So far, BDT has operationalized the DT Lab by:

1. Creating a physical space at ITU Headquarters that can used to develop and conduct face-to-face or hybrid co-creations and meetings with stakeholders to deliver services related to the objectives of the Alliance (Office T306 Geneva), and
2. Developing, testing, and operationalizing frameworks, tools, and processes as knowledge products, such as playbooks for the Alliance and its vehicles.
3. Helping deliver services related to the playbooks to support the delivery of technical assistance beyond the network of Acceleration centres.
4. Helping support the capacity building for the knowledge products for the Alliance centres.

The DT Lab team is developing several thematic playbooks related to the five strategic objectives to ensure that each centre has the agency to deliver on its vision and mission. Additionally, the DT Lab is developing companion operational enablers’ playbooks to support agile, transparent and effective management of the Centres. The playbooks serve as Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) for the delivery of the related services in accordance with their objectives. The following playbooks have been developed and/or are in the process of development and testing before being operationalized: Strategic foresight playbook, SME & Entrepreneurship scale-up playbook, Ecosystem initiative development playbook, Open technology innovation playbook, Policy experimentation playbook, Joint programme design playbook, Resource mobilization and partnership playbook, and Communication and outreach engagement playbook.

Each playbook has clear Key performance indicators attached, which will help measure each centre’s performance during operation.

The DT Lab conducted two trend research readiness workshops (Last Mile healthcare readiness strategic foresight workshop in Lucknow in July 2023 and the strategic foresight workshop to achieve the SDG in New Delhi in October 2023) and helped establish a showcase event track (“Innovation and Entrepreneurship for SDGs”) at the India Mobile Congress.

The DT Lab also intends to experiment with making available to the BDT Secretariat the products and services designed for the Alliance to enhance the delivery of technical assistance to countries. In this regard, a few regional colleagues have started exploring the benefits of the DT Lab to provide better services to ITU Membership. For example, the Arab States Regional Office has commissioned the DT Lab to support the development of country-level projects with the UN country team and various departments of the Government of Egypt.

A new project, the Regional Innovation Initiatives Accelerator, secured $250,000 in funding from MIIT, China. Through the DT Lab, the accelerator will bring together relevant internal stakeholders (e.g., subject matter experts from all ITU sectors, HQ and regional offices) and national stakeholders, in particular from developing countries, LDCs and SIDS (e.g., government ministries, regulators, innovation centres, and other relevant ecosystem stakeholders) to unlock the potential of ITU RI on innovation, turning them into high-impact digital development initiatives.

* 1. **Network of Acceleration Centres**

The Network will unite national, regional and global Acceleration Centres to enhance local innovation capabilities for technology, policy and flagship initiative development. The various centres will amplify in-country capabilities to accelerate local innovation, entrepreneurship, and the digitalization of economies to enhance the competitiveness of economic sectors.

[17 organizations from around the world have been selected to host the centres](https://www.itu.int/itu-d/sites/innovation-alliance/events/news/member-communique-2023-september/) from 16 countries.

Each Acceleration Centre aims to achieve specific strategic objectives. The products and services to be delivered by Centres need to be designed and customized using standard thematic playbooks developed in the DT Lab.

An operational guideline has been developed to provide a framework for the collaboration between ITU and participating ITU Acceleration Centres. This guideline is part of the cooperation agreement that every centre is expected to sign with ITU before starting operation. The guideline covers many things, including quality assurance and performance assessment by ITU, similar to other progammes of the ITU.

ITU held the [first meeting of the Network of Acceleration centres](https://www.itu.int/itu-d/sites/innovation-alliance/events/news/acceleration-centre-event-dubai/) from from 4-8 March 2024 in Dubai, UAE. This hosting was in implementing TDRA’s Partner2Connect pledge to invest AED 5 million in capacity building through the global ICODI workshop. 35 participants from 15 centers and 14 countries participated in an interactive and hands-on experience during the workshop with two of the playbooks of the Alliance: Strategic Foresight and Ecosystem initiative Development.

To further support the capacity building of centres, BDT is developing a series of courses based on a competency framework supporting the capabilities needed for the Alliance. A general course on [Strategic Foresight 101](https://academy.itu.int/training-courses/full-catalogue/strategic-foresight-101) aimed at teaching trend research readiness to the general public was launched on 15 March 2024. The course equips learners with the competencies to integrate strategic foresight into their specific domains, fostering strategic thinking and innovation in digital development initiatives. More specialized courses are being developed for the Centres.

BDT will start operationalizing the centres in the second half of this year after going through rigorous design and capacity building with centres. There have been a number of requests to increase the number of Acceleration Centres from non-represented regions for more diversity. BDT recommends that a new call and selection of a new cohort of Acceleration Centres be implemented early next year to give time for the current Centers to demonstrate impact on the ground to draw lessons learned.

* 1. **Digital Innovation Board**

The Digital Innovation Board was established to provide strategic guidance, expertise and advocacy regarding its mission of building critical local enablers and fostering innovation and entrepreneurship in digital development, to create a more inclusive and equitable digital future for all. [23 distinguished individuals were selected to serve as members of the Digital Innovation Board](https://www.itu.int/itu-d/sites/innovation-alliance/events/news/announcement-board/) based on their expression of interest and a nomination process. They serve on a pro-bono basis and not renumerated.

As the Alliance aims to accelerate innovation capacity and create linkages at the national, regional, and global levels, the Board will advance the Alliance's efforts at the global stage, leading the dialogue on fostering innovation and entrepreneurship in digital development with relevant stakeholders and prospective partners, including UN agencies, governments, and the private sector.

The [Inaugural Digital Innovation Board meeting](https://www.itu.int/itu-d/sites/innovation-alliance/events/news/inaugural-board-meeting/) was held from 19 – 20 March 2024 in Geneva, Switzerland. Board members convened to lay the groundwork for the Alliance’s operations and strategize on advancing global digital innovation. The meeting brought together 21 of the 23 board members, representing diverse countries and organizations, to commit to a collective mission of fostering an inclusive and sustainable digital future.

One key outcome of the board meeting was the request for the development of a resource mobilization mechanism and communication strategy to ensure the Alliance’s vehicles receive adequate funding to scale and make an impact. Another was to increase the number of acceleration centres and board members. BDT will seek new board members based on search for expert and upon nominations process by the BDT Director. For the acceleration centres, the BDT will finalize onboarding the first cohorts of centre this year and a new call for new centres will be taken up early next year.

1. **Way forward**

BDT continues to operationalize all Alliance vehicles and mobilize resources to support countries.

Many new expressions of interest for the Alliance centres have been received, but BDT's main aim is to operationalize and learn from the first cohort before engaging with new centres. In the interim, the DT Lab serves as a vehicle for partnership, and members are encouraged to work with the DT Lab or the network of acceleration centres to engage with the Alliance’s work.

BDT will continue to strengthen the development of the Alliance and its initiatives with the following activities, to cite a few:

* Continue development and implementation of playbooks and capacity building for the Alliance centres;
* Continue discussions with other Sectors of ITU to collaborate within the Alliance framework;
* Continue strengthening the Innovation Centre in the ITU Area Office for South Asia;
* Develop comprehensive resource mobilization, communication and partnership strategies;
* Conduct an Alliance Members’ Forum to share initial outcomes of the network, and best practices;
* Roll out the new project of the Regional Initiative Accelerator for innovation-related regional initiatives from WTDC-22;
* Conduct a new call and selection of a new cohort of Acceleration Centres early next year;
* Develop further partnerships with the UN and other relevant international organizations;

TDAG is invited to note this report and provide advice as deemed necessary.

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