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| **Telecommunication Development Advisory Group (TDAG)**  **31st Meeting, Geneva, Switzerland, 20-23 May 2024** | A close up of a sign  Description automatically generated |
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| Internet Society | |
| Implementation of Resolution 11: Capacity Development of Indigenous,  Rural Communities and Geographically Isolated and  Disadvantaged Areas (GIDA) in Asia Pacific | |
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| **Summary:**  This submission builds on the successful implementation of capacity-building initiatives in Latin America and Africa to facilitate setting up, managing, and maintaining telecommunication networks in the Asia Pacific region. In alignment with Resolution 11 (Rev. Kigali, 2022) of the World Telecommunication Development Conference (WTDC), which emphasizes enhancing telecommunication/information and communication technology services in rural, isolated, and poorly served areas, the Internet Society proposes a robust capacity-building program for local ICT network managers. This initiative aims to equip local communities with the necessary skills and knowledge to create, maintain, sustain, and replicate community-led communication and telecommunication projects throughout Asia Pacific. Drawing upon the methodologies and outcomes of programmes implemented by the ITU and its partners in Latin America, this proposal also builds on the approved initiatives for similar programs in Africa discussed in the 2023 TDAG meeting by the Association for Progressive Communications (APC). Through this proposed program, the Internet Society seeks to address the unique challenges faced by indigenous populations, rural communities, and the region's geographically isolated and disadvantaged areas (GIDA) while also promoting sustainable development and digital inclusion.  **Action required:**  Action.  **References:**  <https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Digital-Inclusion/Indigenous-Peoples/Pages/default.aspx> | |

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| **Lessons learned and suggested best-practices (if appropriate):**  Addressing meaningful access issues in rural, indigenous, and remote communities requires locally sustainable solutions that have a significant impact. Globally, extensive experience has been accumulated in developing training programmes tailored to the livelihoods of the targeted communities. Notable initiatives include the ITU and partners’ Training Programme for ICT Network Managers in Indigenous and Rural Communities in Latin America, and the [National Schools of Community Networks (NSCN)](https://cnlearning.apc.org/national-school-of-community-networks/) implemented by APC and Rhizomatica in Brazil, Indonesia, Kenya, Nigeria, and South Africa, since 2020. These programmes effectively utilize Participatory Action Research (PAR) methodology for the design and implementation, fostering community involvement at all stages - from design to execution and maintenance.  The Internet Society has played a pivotal role in promoting community networks worldwide. This support has enabled the launch of impactful projects, creating significant value, technical and financial assistance, and training and networking among community networks. In the Asia Pacific region, these initiatives have positively impacted the capacity for the creation, maintenance, and sustainability of these local connectivity solutions. In particular, these initiatives have provided essential resources, guidance, and technical support, notably improving services in community networks in Nepal, Pakistan, India, and Papua New Guinea, among other places.  In addition, the Internet Society has been at the forefront of advocating for policies that support the sustainable development of these networks, recognizing their importance to global connectivity and the empowerment of local communities. That’s why the Internet Society has been facilitating processes to strengthen the community network movement in the region, like the [Asia-Pacific Regional Community Networks Summit](https://cnlearning.apc.org/resources/asia-pacific-regional-community-networks-summit-2021/) in 2021.  Key lessons include the importance of technology projects where local communities take leadership in deploying, managing, and maintaining their networks to ensure long-term sustainability. Training programs must be adapted to the target communities' local context and learning methods, ensuring they are not just passive recipients but active designers and implementers of these solutions. |

The Internet Society extends its gratitude to the Telecommunication Development Advisory Group (TDAG) for the opportunity to participate in the submissions following WTDC-22. The Internet Society is committed to advancing global access to the Internet to enhance livelihoods in rural and indigenous contexts. Connectivity, the core of digital innovation across Asia, is markedly uneven, with regions ranging from hyper-connected to severely under-connected. South Asia alone has an unconnected population of over one billion, significantly more than East Asia's 426.6 million. Addressing these disparities through tailored, community-focused digital infrastructure projects is crucial for fulfilling TDAG's pivotal role in advising the ITU-D Sector on telecommunications development strategies, policies, and fostering community empowerment through the digital economy.

Since 2005, we have worked with ITU's Telecommunication Development Sector, through its Digital Inclusion programme and in collaboration with the Regional Bureau for the Americas, to implement tailor training programmes that enhance the ICT capacities of indigenous communities. These programmes were based on Resolution 46 of the 2017 World Telecommunication Development Conference (WTDC), which recognized the need to further promote the training of local technicians based on their cultural practices and technological innovation solutions, while ensuring the availability of resources and spectrum to support the development and sustainability of telecommunication and ICT networks operated by indigenous peoples and rural and remote communities.

The Latin American programme, driven by the ITU Americas Bureau and the ITU BDT Digital Inclusion Office, in collaboration with civil society organizations in the region, has been successful in focusing on the training and learning needs of communities. The four generations, since 2019, of this comprehensive programme have resulted in a robust network of more than 100 community project managers across 15 countries, who significantly benefit their communities through the projects they develop and have the capacity fostering new leaders, notably among women and youth.

In the Asia Pacific, the Internet Society, through a collaboration with ITU and its partners, aims to replicate these successful models, utilizing the Participatory Action Research methodology used in previous programmes. The replication of the model in Asia Pacific will strengthen the technical, organizational, economic, and social capacities of people in indigenous and rural communities. This approach will foster technical and organizational skills and create robust networks of local leaders and communities of practice. Establishing a regional advisory committee aims to support the training and implementation needs of telecommunications and communication projects in rural and marginalized communities.

It is worth noting that beyond contributing to the implementation of Resolution 11, this proposal supports the implementation Resolution 37 “Bridging the Digital Divide”. By encouraging innovation and accelerating the use and adoption of emerging digital technologies, this initiative will help develop new business models and other innovative solutions. These efforts are aimed at assisting telecommunication operators, and complementing access in telecommunication/ICT to reduce costs and overcome geographical challenges, ultimately accelerating digital inclusion to bridge the digital divide.

It is kindly requested that this proposal be considered and, if accepted, that the necessary steps be taken to ensure it is included in the year's BDT plan. This inclusion is crucial not only for advancing telecommunication capabilities in Asia Pacific´s indigenous, rural, and geographically isolated and disadvantaged areas (GIDA), but also for fostering sustainable development and comprehensive digital inclusion for the region.

As has happened in the other two regions, it is necessary that in Asia Pacific there are conditions for replicability of the training programmes that have managed to establish the training bases and bring together people from the indigenous, rural, and remote communities themselves. This will allow us to continue with the ITU's mission of Leaving No One Behind.

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