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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 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 January 25, 2023, by the BDT Director. This initiative addresses significant unmet needs of ITU Membership in the area of innovation, as outlined 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 digital future for all” and focuses on achieving two key outcomes related to ITU-D priorities:

* Strengthening the capacity of ITU members to integrate telecommunications and ICT innovation and digitalization into their national development agendas. This includes developing strategies to promote innovation initiatives through public, private, and public-private partnerships.
* Enhancing the human and institutional capacity of ITU members in telecommunications and ICTs to foster digital transformation.

This is supported by various regional initiatives and resolutions, including WTDC Resolutions 90, 89, and 85 from Kigali in 2022 and PP Resolution 205. These resolutions emphasize the importance of fostering ICT-centric innovation to support the digital economy and society and reaffirm the leading role of the BDT in promoting innovation for digital development, in line with the ITU Strategic Plan outlined in 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 an increasingly Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous (VUCA) digital world and achieve the outcomes of the Kigali Action Plan.”

Since its launch, the Alliance has been dedicated to fulfilling its mission to “bridge the Digital Innovation Divide and empower ITU-D membership to overcome challenges in their journey of digital transformation.” The goal is to accelerate the impact of their ecosystems on various sectors, fostering an inclusive and sustainable society. The Alliance achieves its objectives through three key mechanisms:

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

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 next section outlines the progress made with each mechanism and how it helps achieve the goals of the Alliance.

1. **Main activities and outcomes**

Innovation is about experimentation and agility in creating value, and BDT continues to operationalize the three mechanisms and adjust strategies and tactics as lessons are learned from the process. This section highlights updates for each mechanism, their success stories, lessons learned and next steps.

* 1. **Digital Innovation Board**

The Digital Innovation Board guides the Alliance’s work to ensure effectiveness, accountability, and strategic progress on the Kigali Action Plan while facilitating high-level advocacy and reporting on key workstreams to achieve the goals. The board comprises distinguished individuals who serve in their personal capacity and ensure that the Alliance adheres to ITU missions and strategic plans and the BDT Mandate.

The current board composition includes [31 members, including the BDT Director, a founding member and a co-chair](https://www.itu.int/itu-d/sites/innovation-alliance/board-members/). The current guidance and advice from the board can be found in the reports from two key meetings: the [inaugural board meeting held in Geneva, Switzerland](https://www.itu.int/itu-d/sites/innovation-alliance/wp-content/uploads/sites/35/2024/05/Inaugural_Meeting_of_the_Digital_Innovation_Board_-_Summary_rev1.pdf), from March 19 to 20, 2024, and the [second board meeting in Valletta, Malta](https://www.itu.int/itu-d/sites/innovation-alliance/wp-content/uploads/sites/35/2024/12/Second-Meeting-of-the-Digital-Innovation-Board-28-October-2024-Summary.pdf), during the Global Innovation Forum on October 28, 2024.

During each board meeting, members actively participated by sharing their experiences, proposing future initiatives, offering support for Alliance projects, suggesting actionable steps for progress, and reaffirming their commitment to advancing the ITU mandate. Key discussions centered on the functions of the board, the development of a high-level work plan, fostering collaboration among its three vehicles, and outlining mechanisms to achieve its mission.

The second meeting of the Digital Innovation Board for the Innovation and Entrepreneurship Alliance for Digital Development 2024 brought together board members both in person and virtually. The main objective of this meeting was to review the progress made in implementing the recommendations adopted during the first board meeting. This included evaluating the high-level work plan, the strategic communication plan, the monitoring and evaluation framework, the terms of reference for working groups, resource mobilization mechanisms, and platforms for networking and collaboration.

The board also listened to presentations from the ITU Acceleration Centres and discussed their challenges and opportunities, as well as the impact of their work on the SDGs and the ITU Regional Initiatives.

Further progress included the board’s approval of the [Terms of Reference for the Expert Network](https://www.itu.int/itu-d/sites/innovation-alliance/wp-content/uploads/sites/35/2024/11/Draft-Terms-of-Reference-of-the-Expert-Network-of-the-Digital-Innovation-Board.pdf). The purpose of the virtual Expert Network is to act as a vehicle to implement the decisions of the Digital Innovation Board through brainstorming and research. The group will contribute to enhancing the Alliance’s overall impact, sustainability and innovation capital. BDT is currently operationalizing this network to support the Board.

The board has also approved a comprehensive work plan for 2024-2026 that focuses on two key areas:

1. **Developing a Foresight Series**: This workstream will consist of a series of reports that envision equitable futures. It aims to guide the development of future scenarios and shape them to address an evolving world, ensuring that the digital ecosystem is prepared and competitive in response to emerging trends.
2. **Fostering Partnership Ecosystems**: This workstream aims to create a collaborative network of organizations that share resources, expertise, and services. The goal is to accelerate global cooperation and create opportunities for innovation and entrepreneurship.

This plan emphasizes active engagement from board members through the Expert Network, allowing them to express their preferences for specific topics and engage with the network.

The board endorsed a compendium of topics for this series and received a presentation on the first report, “Shaping Education for Tomorrow,” which will be published soon. This report employs ITU’s foresight approach to show how countries can respond to evolving global educational challenges and opportunities by developing their digital innovation ecosystems.

* 1. **Network of Acceleration Centres**

The ITU Acceleration Centres network enhances global, regional, and national innovation capabilities, leveraging technology, policy, and flagship initiatives development while boosting local innovation and entrepreneurship to accelerate digital transformation.

In 2024, BDT sought to operationalize all [17 organizations selected to host the centres](https://www.itu.int/itu-d/sites/innovation-alliance/events/news/member-communique-2023-september/). Each selected host was required to:

* Sign a cooperation agreement with BDT to govern their center’s conduct and its relationship with ITU,
* Have sufficient financial and political support to embark on the transformative journey, and
* Participate in the design process and receive capacity-building support from ITU regarding the playbooks to achieve their desired strategic objectives.

In 2024, three hosts were removed from the approved list because they failed to sign the cooperation agreement or lacked adequate financial or political support to continue. Four hosts have yet to sign the cooperation agreement due to administrative delays in their countries.

As of now, ten centres have completed their design processes and are currently undergoing capacity building and service deployment. The BDT will continue to implement a capacity-building curriculum for centres using the ITU Academy platform (e.g., [strategic foresight 201](https://academy.itu.int/training-courses/full-catalogue/strategic-foresight-201) and [ecosystem initiative development 201](https://academy.itu.int/training-courses/full-catalogue/ecosystem-initiative-development-201)) and iCodi workshops co-organized by TDRA in the UAE. It’s important to note that centres are launching at their own pace, and as soon as they meet the requirements set by ITU. Some centres are already operational and receiving assistance and follow-up to ensure their compliance with these requirements and deployment of their services.

The ITU Acceleration Centres are complementary to other ITU capacity-building initiatives. Some organizations that host ATCs are also hosts of the ITU Accelerations Centres. The ITU Accelerations centres provide programming to drive digital innovation focused on key topics such as strategic foresight, policy acceleration, and more. It leverages future thinking, design thinking and system thinking to drive institutional capacity. This is different from the other ITU-accredited centres, such as the ATCs and the DTCs, which focus more on skills development.

The Digital Transformation Lab creates this programmatic knowledge using a cross-stakeholder approach, which is then used to train centres’ staff and wider stakeholders through the ITU academy platform or iCodi workshops. The content is primarily driven by ITU rather than outside stakeholders, as is the case with digital skills centres. This new approach enhances the work of the BDT and engages all stakeholders in a new form of capacity building through co-creation, co-design, and the provision of standard operating processes to allow the centres to be a real service centre for any initiative related to the strategic objectives in scope. This model is also reinforced by the sharing of knowledge and community of practice facilitated in the Expert Network established by the Digital Innovation Board.

BDT held the second meeting of the Acceleration Centres on the sidelines of the [Global Innovation Forum](https://www.itu.int/itu-d/meetings/gif-24/wp-content/uploads/sites/30/2025/01/Global-Innovation-Forum-Malta-2024-Outcome-Report.pdf). This meeting gathered representatives from the Centres to review progress, identify challenges, and explore solutions to ensure the sustainability of the Centres and their alignment with ITU Regional Initiatives. The discussions focused on enhancing collaboration across the Network of Centres, addressing systemic challenges, and creating strategies for impactful and sustainable digital transformation. Some of the issues raised included difficulties in securing funding, recruiting skilled personnel, and building robust ecosystems tailored to the specific contexts of each country. Opportunities were highlighted for fostering collaboration among the Centres to share best practices, lessons learned, and resources, which can enhance their collective impact. The meeting concluded with a shared commitment to operationalize the Expert Network, deepen collaboration between Centres, and develop strategic, goal-oriented plans for each Centre.

As discussed in last year’s report to TDAG, BDT planned to postpone new acceptance for centers until lessons learned from the first cohort were addressed and the readiness of the secretariat to accept new hosts was established. BDT is pleased to announce that two new organizations—the Department of Communications and Digital Technologies of the Republic of South Africa and the Communications, Space, and Technologies Commission of Saudi Arabia—have been accepted to host ITU Acceleration Centres. This decision was made in response to requests from the administrations and was supported by thorough due diligence to ensure that all requirements for hosting centers were met. Moving forward, new applications for centers will be accepted on a rolling basis, depending on requests from administrations and the availability of resources for engagement.

* 1. **Digital Transformation Lab**

The Digital Transformation Lab (DT Lab) builds innovation knowledge programmes to capacitate the Network of Acceleration Centres and supports Centres in getting their policy and ecosystem initiatives off the ground. It has a dual role to leverage the knowledge gained through the Alliance to support the BDT in accelerating Digital Development and collaboration across stakeholders.

Thanks to funding from MIC Japan, the digital transformation lab has developed eight playbooks for the Alliance. These include a core playbook that addresses the Alliance’s strategic objectives, specifically the strategic foresight playbook, ecosystem initiative development playbook, open technology innovation playbook, policy experimentation playbook, and SME and entrepreneurship growth playbook.

Additionally, the BDT has created two cross-cutting playbooks that are highly relevant for any center aiming to ensure operational agility and sustainability. These are the joint programs design playbook, the strategic communication playbook, and the resource mobilization and partnership playbook.

BDT also started collaborating with TSB to support the development of a playbook on bridging the standardization gap. The main role of the DT lab is to use its approach of ecosystem thinking, which includes system design and human-centric approaches, to enhance existing work done by TSB, convert it to a model that can be used by the acceleration centre, and provide a new approach for capacity development support in the process.

Playbooks and tools are designed for use by the centres but can also be repurposed to offer new services for the BDT. This is why the DT Lab has embarked on the development of services, including powering the strategic foresight practice of ITU, developing the Innovation Café service for regional offices, and others. These services are being successfully deployed and receiving great interest from countries.

The DT Lab is collaborating with the Innovation Centre at the ITU Area Office for South Asia to roll out foresight reports and establish innovation cafés. Additionally, the DT Lab supported the Arab States Regional Office by facilitating a workshop aimed at shaping the next regional initiatives in the Arab States through the use of foresight methodology.

Thanks to funding from the MIIT in China, the BDT has established a regional initiative accelerator service (RI Accelerator or RIA) to enhance regional offices’ capacity to effectively address regional priorities. This new regional initiative accelerator is a pilot project with two main objectives:

1. To initiate the ideation and definition of regional initiatives (RIs) and project concepts through stakeholder engagement.
2. To support the definition and implementation of critical milestones related to ITU Regional Initiatives.

The Regional Initiative Accelerator (RIA) is an open platform curated by the BDT, designed for interested stakeholders to collaborate and co-create project concepts. This initiative aims to accelerate ITU Regional Initiatives by leveraging innovative capabilities and facilitating resource mobilization for developed projects.

The RIA is an open platform designed for stakeholders to work together on creating, refining, and implementing projects that align with ITU Regional Initiatives. The RIA framework offers the necessary structure to integrate policy, research, advocacy, partnerships, and program development, all intended to promote meaningful and scalable digital transformation. This mechanism is complementary to other initiatives within the BDT.

The BDT hosted the first cohort for this accelerator from February 3-5, 2025, in Podgorica, Montenegro. This event brought together representatives from five countries in the Western Balkans to co-design and validate five projects with a total value of $20 million.

The next phase of the accelerator for this cohort will focus on resource mobilization and project activation, adopting a systematic approach to addressing regional priorities.

The BDT will continue to experiment with this innovative mechanism to ensure the accelerator meets the needs of various regional initiatives. In 2025, new cohorts are expected in Asia and the Pacific and other regions that may be interested in the accelerator. ITU Membership is encouraged to reach out to BDT to learn how to engage with this new mechanism.

1. **Way forward**

BDT will continue operationalizing all Alliance vehicles and mobilizing resources to support countries.

BDT will 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;
* Assist centres in delivering their first services to their communities and mandated scope;
* Accept applications for new centres on a rolling basis, contingent upon due diligence and resource availability;
* Continue collaboration with TSB within the Alliance framework, with the aim of having some testing of the new approach at a regional event;
* Continue strengthening the Innovation Centre in the ITU Area Office for South Asia;
* Operationalize resource mobilization, communication and partnership strategies through the Expert Network of the Digital Innovation Board;
* Increase experimentation with the Regional Initiative Accelerator and create a draft toolkit for Membership;
* 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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