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Accelerating sustainable and inclusive digital transformation in SIDS: A 10-step plan for SIDS

Turbo-charging the achievement of the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** is crucial for addressing the significant vulnerability and unique development challenges faced by SIDS, such as climate change, high exposure to disasters and natural hazards, economic instability, and limited access to resources and heavy reliance on external markets and dependence on external debt.

The landmark **Fourth International SIDS Conference (SIDS4)** seized a once-in-a-decade opportunity to chart new pathways and build partnerships to unlock the full potential of these nations. The **Pact of the Future and the Global Digital Compact, adopted by world leaders in September 2024**, reaffirmed the commitment of the international community to take bold, ambitious, accelerated, just and transformative actions to implement the 2030 Agenda, achieve SDGs and leave no one behind.

In collaboration with UN sister agencies, funds and programmes, **ITU is committed to supporting SIDS in making decisive progress to achieve inclusive and meaningful digital transformation** and accelerate resilient prosperity in SIDS in the next decade.

Based on the [ITU Kigali Action Plan](#) and the mandate of the ITU Telecommunication Development Bureau, **here are the key action areas in which ITU can support SIDS in accelerating the implementation of the Antigua and Barbuda Agenda for SIDS (ABAS):**

STEP 1 - BUILD STRONG INSTITUTIONS

Strengthen institutional capabilities and arrangements. Foster agile, collaborative and anticipatory governance of digital and emerging technologies and evidence-based decision-making. Enhance engagement with state and non-state actors through whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches and public sector innovation. Integrate strategic planning and foresight in policy and decision-making to identify emerging policy issues and weigh policy options. Craft cross-sectoral regulatory and governance approaches and enhance policy design and implementation, and regulatory enforcement.

STEP 2 - PRIORITIZE DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION POLICIES

Mainstream sustainable, inclusive, human-centred and risk-informed digital transformation, through sound policies for digital governance, emerging technologies and digital market competition. Develop frameworks for sandboxing and ensuring transparency and the ethical use of data and emerging technologies (e.g. in AI, deep learning, big data), and engage businesses in incorporating user protections, accessibility and diversity considerations in all digital products and initiatives. Create legal and regulatory frameworks and mechanisms to augment the collection and recycling of e-waste to facilitate sustainable digital transformation and the retention of valuable materials.

STEP 3 - FAST-TRACK DIGITAL ECONOMY AGENDAS

Build cross-sectoral, forward-thinking national digital economy strategies. Create policy, financial and economic incentives to enhance digital entrepreneurship and the creation of decent jobs and livelihoods as a driver for reducing brain drain. Create multistakeholder ecosystem initiatives, build implementation synergies, pool resources and coordinate efforts across the ecosystem (e.g. across government, financiers and among private sector actors) to leverage digital solutions for structural transformation and economic resilience.

STEP 4 – SCALE UP DIGITAL INVESTMENT

Create a level-playing field in digital markets to enable abundant, strategic and sustainable digital investment. Scale up innovative financing mechanisms for accessible, safe and resilient energy and digital infrastructures and emerging technologies, including joint investment, public-private partnerships, green and social impact bonds and blended finance models. Facilitate access to finance for green-field businesses, including venture capital and equity financing. Increase and streamline digital finance from international financial institutions and donor agencies, also tapping into climate finance to build digital and climate resilience.

STEP 5 – ENHANCE NATIONAL DIGITAL CAPABILITIES

Work proactively to create enabling national and regional digital ecosystems through developing national strategies, locally led technology and business frameworks and operating models to create fundamental building block for enhancing digital government services and the digital economy, such as digital public infrastructures and digital public goods. Ensure robust statistical capacities of users and producers of ICT statistics, and sound data and information governance across the data lifecycle to improve data quality and their use for policy formulation, programme planning and evaluation, and budget allocation. Prioritize the establishment of robust cybersecurity frameworks and cyber incident response facilities. Facilitate technology transfer on mutually agreed terms towards enhancing national data, digital and innovation capabilities to bridge digital divides, strengthen SIDS' market competitiveness and sustain growth.

STEP 6 – BET ON INNOVATION

Leverage the local digital sector in SIDS as an engine of innovation, economic prosperity and job creation, generating positive spillovers on the broader economy. Build digital innovation ecosystems to orchestrate synergies between public and private sector actors and between SIDS. Fast-track investment in science, technology and innovation. Establish national and regional innovation hubs and digital acceleration centers to support public sector innovation and local entrepreneurship. Hubs can host research, training and incubation of innovative solutions, in particular for emerging technologies, digital financial inclusion, digital health and education, and tourism.

STEP 7 – FACILITATE ENTREPRENEURSHIP, E-COMMERCE AND TRADE

Facilitate the integration of SIDS into global digital supply chains, industries and marketplaces through enhanced regional and international cooperation, including trade agreements for digital services and alignment with global standards. Promote the development of interoperable digital identity systems, e-payment and e-commerce platforms. Tailor business-oriented capacity building initiatives to the unique needs and potential of SIDS. Ensure equal access to e-trade and business financing opportunities, especially for local start-ups and small businesses. Integrate e-commerce and trade into blue and green economy strategies, for example by accelerating the digitization of businesses, promoting ICT and digital goods and services trade, developing integrated and sustainable maritime transportation systems, and transitioning to renewable energy sources for digital infrastructures.

STEP 8 – BOOST DIGITAL SKILLS, LOCAL CONTENT AND LEARNING PATHS

Implement widespread digital skills development initiatives for diverse demographics, including youth, women, local, indigenous and rural populations and persons with disabilities. Collaborate with educational institutions and private sector partners to create locally relevant digital content and content in local languages. Strengthen STEM+ and digital entrepreneurship programmes and integrate them across academic disciplines. Integrate digital channels and curricula in formal and vocational training to create learning-to-earning opportunities for all.

STEP 9 – BUILD CLIMATE RESILIENCE

Craft inclusive climate change adaptation strategies and build multi-channel early warning systems for climate change-induced disasters and other emergencies to ensure that warnings reach people at risk in time to take action. Leverage digital technologies, such as mobile early warning systems including cell-broadcast as well as community-based infrastructures and locally-led feedback mechanisms to ensure emergency communications are understandable and actionable. Develop and integrate digital solutions tailored to the multi-dimensional vulnerabilities of SIDS, including for climate-sensing, nature preservation and disaster preparedness.

STEP 10 – FORGE NEW PARTNERSHIPS AND INNOVATIVE DEVELOPMENT MECHANISMS

Accelerate progress on the SIDS agenda through pooling resources and new project and programme delivery mechanisms leveraging North-South, South-South and triangular cooperation and synergies between SIDS. Fast-track the implementation of existing key projects and initiatives with development partners, governments, local authorities, civil society and the private sector and broaden the base for new joint impact programmes. Design and orchestrate such programmes with the needs of future generations in mind. Support development cooperation, policy harmonization and regulatory interoperability at the regional and global level and between SIDS.

LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND

Leave no one behind is the central, transformative promise of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its SDGs.

In all ten action areas above, implement policy programmes and ecosystem initiatives for meaningful digital inclusion for women, youth, persons with disabilities or other vulnerable groups traditionally marginalized or under-represented. Create mechanisms that empower and actively encourage the multistakeholder participation of all in relevant decision-making processes. Leverage online tools, in particular official information and citizen participation platforms and digital public services delivery channels.

ITU TELECOMMUNICATION DEVELOPMENT BUREAU: KEY DOCUMENTS RELATED TO ASSISTANCE TO SIDS

- ITU Kigali Action Plan (KAP)
- World Telecommunication Development Conference (WTDC) Resolution 16 (Rev. Buenos Aires, 2017) 'Special actions and measures for the least developed countries, small island developing states, landlocked developing countries and countries with economies in transition'
- WTDC-22 Americas Regional Initiatives, AMS4: Development of enabling policy and regulatory environments to connect the unconnected through accessible and affordable telecommunications/information and communication technologies that support achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and progress towards the digital economy (including in SIDS)
- WTDC-22 Asia-Pacific Regional Initiatives, ASP1: Addressing special needs of least developed countries, small island developing states, including Pacific island countries, and landlocked developing countries
- ITU Plenipotentiary Resolution 30 (rev. Bucharest, 2022) 'Special measures for LDCs, SIDS, LLDCs and countries with economies in transition'

HIGH-LEVEL MAPPING OF ITU-D PRIORITIES AND ENABLERS AND ABAS PRIORITY AREAS TO THE 10 STEPS*

Antigua and Barbuda Agenda for SIDS (ABAS) and Kigali Action Plan (KAP)

II. What do SIDS want?

III. How do small island developing States get there?

ABAS Priority Areas → ITU-D Priorities and Enablers ↓	A. Build resilient economies	B. Foster safe, healthy and prosperous societies	C. A secure future	D. Environmental protection and planetary	E. Mainstream disaster risk reduction	G. Data collection, analysis and use	H. Science, technology, innovation and digitalization	I. Productive populations	J. Partnerships
P1 - Affordable connectivity (incl. Network and digital infrastructure, Emergency telecommunications)	S4	S3, S9	S4	S9	S9	S4	S6	S3	S10
P2 - Digital transformation (incl. Digital applications and services, Digital innovation ecosystems)	S6	S5, S6	S5	S4, S7	S5	S6, S8	S6, S7	S7, S8	S10
P3 - Enabling policy and regulatory environment (incl. Policy and regulation, Capacity development, Statistics)	S2, S8	S1	S1, S2	S9	S5, S9	S2, S5	S5, S6	S3, S8	S10
P4 - Inclusive and secure telecommunications/ICTs for sustainable development (incl. Cybersecurity, Digital inclusion)	S5	S5	S5	S9	S9	S2, S5	S8	S5, S7	S10
P5/E6/E7 - Resource mobilization, partnerships and international cooperation	S10								
E1 - Membership-driven	S1 - S10								
E2 - Regional presence	Programmatic focus and one-UN cooperation								
E3 - Diversity and inclusion (incl. Digital inclusion)	Leave No One Behind								
E4 - Commitment to environmental sustainability (incl. Environment)	S9	S9	S5	S9	S9	S5	S6	S5	S10
E5 - Excellence in human resources and organizational innovation	Organizational excellence (ITU internal)								

* Note: 'Steps' 1 to 10 are abbreviated above as S1 to S10.

How to read the table: The 'Step' at each intersection addresses common themes in KAP and ABAS.

For more information on ITU's work in SIDS: [itu.int/go/sids](https://www.itu.int/go/sids)

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