

APC Contribution - notes for workshop summary

Topic: Addressing the financial and regulatory barriers faced by Community Connectivity Providers in supporting deployment of digital infrastructure in developing countries

Community networks, municipal networks and other social enterprises are helping to address the lack of access to connectivity for people in unserved and underserved communities, however these complementary connectivity providers (CCPs) struggle to access startup capital.

APC, with Swedish and UK government support, has been contributing to an enabling ecosystem for the emergence and growth of community-based connectivity initiatives in rural and remote areas in Latin America, Africa, and Asia. In this context, we are very pleased to see the recent developments in 2022 at both the World Telecommunications Development Conference and the ITU Plenipotentiary Conference in which community networks have been recognized under the rubric of "complementary connectivity solutions". Specifically Recommendation ITU-D 19, Item 3 states that complementary networks "supported by a variety of initiatives where necessary, should also be supported by universal service funds as an essential component of rural communications".

To support this process, in 2022, APC, together with its partners the Internet Society (ISOC) and Connect Humanity, published an in-depth research report¹, on community network financing and business models, taking a deep look at how they can be financed. Similarly, a workshop requested by the Communications Authority of Kenya was co-organized by APC and ITU to share best practices to implement their USF strategy. Similar workshops to discuss enabling environments for complementary connectivity providers have been co-organized since WTDC-22 by APC and ITU in Nigeria² and Cameroon³, and APC would be honored to co-organize many more.

Other relevant national examples include:

- Papua New Guinea – the national regulator, NICTA included 10% of the budget for 2022 (570K USD) for Community Networks.
- Canada -The universal service fund provided startup finance for Broadband Communications North (BCN) a not-for-profit regional Indigenous broadband provider which supports about 50 local community networks in Manitoba.
- UK – the Gigabit Voucher Scheme⁴ has provided up to £210M worth of voucher funding for people experiencing slow broadband speeds in rural areas. A participating ISP can claim the vouchers upon delivery of gigabit broadband to a household or business. Complementary network B4RN was able to take advantage of this scheme to expand its network.
- Kenya, a community network operators license was recently created by the national regulatory authority, and the USF strategy 2022-2026 is now looking into financing mechanisms to support these networks and other complementary connectivity providers.⁵
- Argentina – The Roberto Arias Programme, but of the NRA's is a special USF specifically created to support complementary networks.

There are other government fund that are not specifically Universal Service Funds, but still act to support complementary connectivity in uncovered areas, such as the the Village Fund in Indonesia, the Ministry of Science and Technology in South Africa, and the Ministry of Education in Brazil.

1 <https://www.apc.org/en/pubs/financing-mechanisms-locally-owned-internet-infrastructure>

2 <https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Regional-Presence/Africa/Pages/EVENTS/2022/workshop-nigeria.aspx>

3 <https://www.apc.org/en/news/cameroon-focus-community-networks-complementary-connectivity-solutions>

4 <https://gigabitvoucher.culture.gov.uk>

5 <https://www.ca.go.ke/document/draft-usf-strategic-plan-2022-2026/>

