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| **Agenda item: PL 2** | **Document C24/79-E** |
| **21 May 2024** |
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| Contribution by Australia |
| PROMOTING EFFICIENCY AND EFFECTIVENESS IN THE OPERATIONS OF REGIONAL AND AREA OFFICES |
| **Purpose**This contribution proposes administrative improvements to increase the efficacy of the Regional and Area Offices based on Australia’s experience delivering projects in our region. Improvements are suggested in the areas of recruitment, strategic alignment of projects, financial reporting and project delivery delegations.**Action required by the Council**The Council is invited to **consider** this proposal and **instruct** the ITU Secretary General, in collaboration with the Director of the Telecommunication Development Bureau (BDT),to **consider** ways these improvements to the Regional and Area Offices could be implemented and **report to the next CWG-FHR** details on the outcomes of their consideration, including specific measures to address identified shortfalls. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**References** [*PP Resolution 157 (Rev. Bucharest, 2022)*](https://www.itu.int/en/council/Documents/basic-texts-2023/RES-157-E.pdf) *- Strengthening of the project execution and project monitoring functions in ITU*[*WTDC Resolution 52 (Rev. Dubai, 2014)*](https://www.itu.int/en/publications/ITU-D/pages/publications.aspx?parent=D-TDC-WTDC-2022&media=electronic) *- Strengthening the executing agency role of the ITU Telecommunication Development Sector*[*PP Resolution 71 (Rev. Bucharest, 2022)*](https://www.itu.int/en/council/Documents/basic-texts-2023/RES-071-E.pdf) *- Strategic Plan of the Union 2024-2027* |

**Introduction**

Australia commends the ITU’s Regional and Area Offices on their excellent work delivering country-level assistance to members. The support provided by the Regional and Area Offices is crucial to ITU members, directly benefitting developing countries, and ensuring ITU can adequately address the diverse needs of each region. Ensuring the efficacy of ITU’s Regional and Area Offices is important, as the assistance provided by the offices greatly impacts ITU’s operations

**Discussion**

Through our experience delivering projects in the Asia Pacific Region, Australia has identified a number of areas where enhancements could greatly improve project delivery, maximising the benefits of ITU’s activities in the regions.

1. Recruitment

A significant challenge faced by the Asia Pacific Regional Office has been the recruitment and retention of personnel with appropriate project management expertise. Based on Australia’s experience, ITU currently spends six (6) to twelve (12) months out of a two (2) to three (3)-year project on identifying and recruiting relevant experts. Australia understands this has been a challenge across many areas of ITU, including other Regional and Area Offices.

Implementing improvements to recruitment processes and tools in Regional and Area Offices would enable the identification and recruitment of talent with relevant project management expertise within the Regional Offices in a timely manner, which would mean delivering projects within the set timeframes. By ensuring timely project delivery, ITU can ensure that its assistance remains relevant and meaningful in a fast-evolving telecommunications/ICT environment.

Moreover, strengthening project management expertise in the Regional Offices will ensure ITU is able to deliver timely and targeted assistance to member states. Additionally, if specific expertise is required to deliver a project, ITU should consider signing project documentation once relevant experts are identified as notionally available to avoid significant delays in project implementation.

1. Strategic alignment of projects and KPIs

As part of effectively managing the work program and project delivery, the activities of the Regional and Area Offices should explicitly align with the goals and priorities outlined in the ITU Strategic Plan and the WTDC Action Plan, including its Framework and associated KPIs. These established KPIs can also be used to measure the outcomes of activities undertaken by the Regional and Area Offices (including development projects and events), and to identify opportunities for improvement to make meaningful impact. Using these KPIs will provide a clear indication of how the Regional Offices are progressing the priorities identified by the ITU Membership.

1. Financial reporting

A lack of financial information has posed numerous difficulties for Australia in financing projects. In our experience, it often takes about eight (8) weeks to receive updates on the status of our accounts, by which time the information is out of date. We understand that a key challenge in providing financial information to donors is the centralisation of financial and project management functions in HQ (Geneva).

Allowing Regional Offices to access the ITU’s financial management tools as appropriate and to report on this information on a timely or as-requested basis, could greatly improve ITU’s responsiveness, transparency and accountability. These principles are highly valued by donors, and enhancements in this area would enable more effective financial management of projects and faster delivery.

1. Project delivery delegations

Australia has found that project delivery delegation levels hinder project progress, leading to long wait times for projects to commence. In some cases, Australia has experienced delays of up to eighteen (18) months for projects to be approved. To overcome this issue, ITU could review its project decision-making process and delegations, with the view to ensuring Regional Office Directors have the relevant and appropriate authorities to enable effective project delivery. Noting that it remains preferable for project oversight to be maintained in HQ (Geneva), where appropriate, ITU could consider lowering delegations to Regional Office Directors for some approvals, such as recruitment of junior staff, local procurement and activities under a certain amount.

**Proposal**

Australia requests that Council consider implementing the administrative improvements to the Regional and Area Offices detailed above in order to strengthen the ITU’s project execution function in line with PP Resolution 157 (Rev. Bucharest, 2022) and WTDC Resolution 52 (Rev. Dubai, 2014).

Australia commends the significant progress made by ITU on transformation in the General Secretariat, and the ITU’s commitment to achieving organisational excellence. Our proposal offers an opportunity to enhance existing processes as they relate to Regional and Area Offices, in order to successfully deliver on the strategic goals outlined in the ITU Strategic Plan over the period of 2024-2027 and beyond.

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