



Meeting Report

Summary Report: Innovation Café on Innovative solutions to sustain and scale Smart Islands in the Pacific

14 February 2025

Suva, Fiji

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Innovation Café Report: Insights, Collaboration, and Next Steps

Topic: Innovative solutions to sustain and scale Smart Islands in the Pacific

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Background

The **Innovation and Entrepreneurship Alliance for Digital Development** is established to respond to significant unmet needs of ITU Membership in innovation, as articulated 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).

As one of the vehicles of the Alliance, the Digital Transformation Lab (DT Lab) contributes to developing frameworks and methodologies, providing technical assistance, and supporting capacity building of Membership to enhance local capabilities for innovation and entrepreneurship.

As part of this effort, the framework for the Innovation Café has been developed through the DT Lab, offering a dynamic approach to facilitating ecosystem-driven collaboration, capacity building and problem solving.

Introduction

The ITU Innovation Café is a structured platform for co-creation, knowledge exchange, and collaborative problem-solving to address diverse digital transformation challenges and opportunities, democratising innovation practices and enabling ecosystem-driven approaches and strategic partnerships. As an extension of ITU's commitment to innovation, the Café provides a participatory environment where policymakers, industry leaders, academia, entrepreneurs, and innovators come together to brainstorm, share insights, and develop actionable solutions.

In an era of rapid technological transformation, bridging gaps between different sectors and aligning resources is essential for shaping resilient digital innovation ecosystems. The Innovation Café, thus, plays a pivotal role in making innovation accessible to ITU Members by:

- Facilitating strategic dialogues that translate ideas into tangible outcomes.
- Enabling knowledge sharing to enhance impact.
- Strengthening partnerships through collaborative innovation.
- Leveraging ITU's Innovation methodologies to build capacities and unlock new opportunities.

As part of its comprehensive suite of innovation frameworks and tools, ITU employs structured methodologies to assess, strengthen, and accelerate digital ecosystems. Each Innovation Café is uniquely designed to leverage a context-specific tool, grounded in an established framework, ensuring that discussions are focussed, actionable, and aligned with regional priorities.

Workshop Overview

The Innovation Cafes were launched for the first time during the Digital Transformation Workshop for the Pacific member states that took place in Fiji from 12-14 February 2025. With the presence of 11 member states, representing industry, academia and international organisations, the workshop presented a good opportunity for its pilot engagement.

ITU's Smart Islands initiative follows a transformative approach in bringing the benefits of digital transformation to rural and remote Pacific communities. Given the region's geographic remoteness, small populations, and high costs of connectivity, sustaining and scaling Smart Islands requires innovative solutions tailored to these unique challenges.

By integrating advanced technologies, sustainable business models, and cross-sectoral partnerships, Smart Islands can enhance healthcare, finance, education, and climate resilience. However, scaling this initiative nationwide demands a collaborative approach to identifying, adapting, and implementing solutions that are practical, cost-effective, and aligned with local needs.

The Innovation Café on Smart Islands focused on understanding the gaps which could be filled with innovative solutions across areas such as healthcare, education, financial services, and agriculture. The Café further delved into the need for financing, public private partnerships and better governance to sustain and scale Smart Islands in the Pacific.



Stakeholder Involvement

The Innovation Café was attended by 11 Pacific member states including Fiji, PNG, FSM, Nauru, Kiribati, Palau, Samoa, Tonga, Solomon Islands, Tuvalu and Australia. Other participants included donors such as the World Bank, EU, Asian Development Bank, UNCDF, PITA and the Pacific Disability Forum, and UN organisations including UNDP, UNESCO, ILO, FAO, UNOHCHR, UNODC, UNICEF and UNOPS among others.

Sustaining and scaling Smart Islands in the Pacific requires not only innovative solutions but innovative approaches to partnerships. Therefore, this innovation café tapped into the unique perspectives that different countries, donors and international organisations brought to the discussion. This multistakeholder approach at the Innovation Café enriched the discussions and helped ensure more holistic and representative outcomes.



Co-Creation Findings, Outcomes and Key Takeaways

Leveraging ITU's framework on digital innovation ecosystems and guided by its Partnership Strategy Canvas, the Innovation Café on 'Innovations to Sustain and Scale Smart Island Initiatives' used Mentimeter as a participatory engagement tool to gather participants' perspectives and insights.

The following key questions framed the co-creation discussions:

Q1. Where are the biggest sustainability challenges when it comes to Smart Islands in the Pacific?

Q2. What kinds of partnerships are most needed to scale and sustain Smart Islands, and what key areas should they support?

Q3. What are the biggest challenges or gaps that partnerships must address to make Smart Islands scalable and sustainable?

Key Insights from the co-creation activity:

- This innovation café focused on discussing the Smart Islands initiative, a project with a long history and deep engagement in the Pacific. The discussion began with initial remarks from Papua New Guinea (PNG) on the Smart Village and Smart Islands (SVSI) initiative, emphasizing scalability and flexibility as key factors for success. It was noted that programmes must be demand-driven from the outset, ensuring that they address real community needs.
- Sustainability emerged as the foremost consideration, with all initiatives being embedded within a strong monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework to track impact effectively.
- A key challenge discussed was funding for long-term sustainability. The participants reflected on the initiative's sustainability challenges, the need for a business model for self-sustenance, and the importance of buy-in from the community and all stakeholders.
- In Kiribati, it was observed that telecentres were not functioning effectively, whereas community-based assistance models, such as Starlink deployments, proved more successful.
- Similarly, Tonga highlighted the need to clearly communicate the benefits of digital initiatives to customers as a fundamental aspect of ensuring sustainability. Mapping community members right from the design phase was also identified as a critical step in creating inclusive and effective digital solutions.
- Another key recommendation was the need for a local presence of technical experts who could provide immediate redressal of issues, reducing downtime and enhancing service reliability.
- Public-private partnerships (PPPs) were strongly emphasized as a necessary mechanism to drive investment, innovation, and long-term viability.

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Q1. Where are the biggest sustainability challenges when it comes to Smart Islands in the Pacific?
36 responses


Continued funding	Scattered island over a huge ocean
Fragmentation	Evaluation of impact
Connectivity	Ict Infrastructure connectivities
Population side	Energy, pricing and access, buy-in
Staff retention	Overpopulation, infrastructure



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Q2. What kinds of partnerships are most needed to scale and sustain Smart Islands, and what key areas should they support?
19 responses


Public private partnerships	academia
Government	Community participation.
Private sector	All Government ministries should work together
Community representative	Community engagement
All	



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Q3. What are the biggest challenges or gaps that partnerships must address to make Smart Islands scalable and sustainable?
10 responses

Community-Led and Decentralized solution	Funding, capacity
Financial sustainability and limited access to financial models	Connectivity, Integration, Investment, Governance, Sustainability.
Financial Stability and Transparency (Benefit for the Community) must be clearly stated	Address the digital literacy in the islands, it will enable the clear understanding which will come with high acceptance which will be able to enable their participation and give rise to sustainability.
Centralized Communication and Decentralized Connectivity	



In this context, thus, the Partnership Strategy Canvas served as the key tool to identify, align, and mobilize strategic partnerships needed to sustain and scale the Smart Islands initiative. This tool provided a structured approach to mapping key stakeholders, assessing partnership needs, and designing collaborative models that drive long-term impact.

Through a co-creative assessment of partnership opportunities, gaps, and targets, the Canvas helps stakeholders define priority areas, identify potential partners, and develop targeted strategies to ensure Smart Islands remain scalable, sustainable, and responsive to the needs of Pacific communities.

Partnership Canvas

Indicate Name / Context

Vision and objectives What is the vision for partnerships? What are the objectives?		SWOT for Partnership What are the strengths? What are the weaknesses? What are the opportunities? What are the threats?		Monitoring and Evaluation What are some indications for M&E?
Stakeholder Who should you engage with?	Type What type of partnership do you seek?	Target What are the targets and needs?	Gaps What are the gaps?	
Systems and Tools What enabling systems are needed to ensure goals can be met? Hint: strategic mechanisms, MoUs, etc. What are the communications actions needed to raise awareness?				
Action Plan Who Stakeholder → Type → Why or What we need → What we can offer them → Interest / Power Low/High Low/High → Action				

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Next Steps

- Organise a matchmaking session with potential partners including donors, private sector and other entities who could add value to the existing Smart Islands initiatives in the Pacific.
- Organise a session with donors on existing funding options and grants, and how to access them, to sustain and scale the Smart Islands initiative in the Pacific.