



GLOBAL INNOVATION FORUM 2024

# OUTCOME REPORT

Shaping our Digital Futures for Prosperity and Well-Being for All

December 2024

## OVERVIEW AND KEY OUTCOMES

### **The 2024 edition**

The Global Innovation Forum 2024 held in Valletta, Malta, from 28 to 30 October 2024 focused on the transformative power of digital innovation across economies and societies. Under the theme ‘Shaping our Digital Futures for Prosperity and Well-Being for All’, the Forum served as a platform for sharing knowledge and best practices, networking and promoting the development of digital innovation ecosystems and entrepreneurship across the globe.

This third edition of the Forum – also the first face-to-face event in the series – was convened by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and hosted by the Ministry for Economy, Enterprise and Strategic Projects of Malta. H.E. Mr Silvio Schembri, Minister, Ministry for the Economy, Enterprise and Strategic Projects, Malta served as the esteemed Chair of the Global Innovation Forum 2024. The Malta Digital Innovation Authority provided invaluable support in making the event a success.

50+ speakers from diverse walks of life discussed pressing challenges brought about by emerging technologies, the opportunities unleashed by digital innovation and pathways to a sustainable and inclusive digital transformation. From interactive dialogues to fireside chats to tech masterclasses to innovation awards, the event offered multiple experiences and discussion formats across three stages – Forum, Experience and Collaboration.

The event brought together nearly 500 participants from 64 countries, including 27 Ministers and Deputy Ministers, along with high-level officials from governments, academia, and the private sector and the United Nations system.

### **Programme and stakeholder engagement**

Across the three Forum stages, discussions covered topics such as:

- Leading in a changing world to achieve digital prosperity
- Visioning our digital futures for societal good
- Tackling global innovation gaps, especially in South-South and triangular contexts
- Building and strengthening the Global Innovation and Entrepreneurship Alliance for Digital Development
- Accelerating policies for equitable digital development
- Highlighting the role of youth leadership in fostering innovation
- Boosting startups and SMEs in globally connected markets
- Hearing frontline stories from digital changemakers
- Fast-tracking partnerships and accelerating Regional Initiatives
- Developing innovation clusters through South-South and triangular cooperation
- Mastering innovation frameworks.

Over three days, the Global Innovation Forum was a vibrant hub of ideas, dialogue and collaboration. Thanks to the inspiring contributions of speakers, moderators and all participants, the discussions across the Forum’s stages offered invaluable insights into building successful digital ecosystems. The community explored innovative strategies, groundbreaking frameworks and forward-thinking initiatives that not only address today’s challenges but also leverage

foresight to stay ahead in the digital age. These conversations have highlighted how sustainable, inclusive digital growth depends on aligning talent, resources and opportunities — showcasing remarkable examples of this in action.

In the margins of the event, the Digital Innovation Board of the Innovation and Entrepreneurship Alliance for Digital Development held its second meeting and adopted an ambitious work programme for the next two years. The Network of Acceleration Centres of the Alliance also came together to discuss strategies to accelerate the impact of their digital innovation ecosystems across various sectors.

### **Key takeaways**

Key insights and takeaways that emerged during these transformative discussions included:

- Innovation is the essence of business, the secret to competitiveness and productivity. We need to be strategic and create policy and business environments that allow digital innovation to scale.
- We need to increase investment in science, technology and innovation, as local innovation capabilities are critical infrastructure to re-energize economies.
- Investing in innovation also means investing in people – in governments, private sector and academia.
- Investment in innovation does not necessarily need to be money, but anything that allows to capitalize on technology and innovation, from knowledge sharing to capacity building to ecosystem initiatives.
- Creating bankable digital projects is a strategy for local development, retaining talent, creating jobs – especially for youth, but we also need to build the ecosystems and the value chains to sustain these. ‘Bankable’ should always go hand-in-hand with sustainable and human-centred.
- Futures thinking helps nations develop strategies to adapt to changing technological, social, and environmental challenges, ensuring they remain agile in a volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA) world.
- Agile, anticipatory and cross-sector regulation allows aligning with the rapidly changing technology landscape. Sandboxing can be used to de-risk regulation, allowing to weigh the opportunity cost of regulating vs not regulating new and emerging technologies and business models.
- Digital innovation is an opportunity to bridge the gap between citizens and government and rebuild trust, to lift the economy and drive prosperity.
- Without collaboration between public and private stakeholders, across sectors and beyond borders, we can’t rise to the level of global and local digital development challenges.
- Innovative partnerships across the ecosystem unite expertise and resources, making it possible to advance digital solutions more effectively and at a greater scale.
- South-South and Triangular Cooperation in particular can help bridge digital innovation gaps by connecting countries with common challenges, facilitating the transfer of technology, skills and resources to drive inclusive digital growth and resilience.
- Last but not least, we need to build effective mechanisms to share good practices among stakeholders more generously, so that more people can benefit and we can achieve a greater impact.

Sharing and learning from each other is what the Global Innovation Forum and its community is all about and ITU will continue to spread the good practices and facilitate a collective thinking on advancing digital transformation through responsible and meaningful innovation for positive impact.

## FORUM STAGE OPENING



### Opening remarks

**H.E. Myriam Spiteri Debono**, President, Malta

### Speakers

**H.E. Mr Silvio Schembri**, Minister, Ministry for the Economy, Enterprise and Strategic Projects, Malta

**Dr Cosmas Luckyson Zavazava**, Director, Telecommunication Development Bureau

### Master of Ceremony

**Mr Gavril Flores**, Chief Officer, Malta Digital Innovation Authority (MDIA), Malta

In her opening remarks, **President Myriam Spiteri Debono** underscored the critical role of technology in addressing global challenges, from economic inequalities to food insecurity and climate change. She highlighted how digital innovation is no longer optional but essential for success in an increasingly interconnected and competitive world.

However, H.E. Ms Debono also emphasized the stark digital divide that persists globally. While technological advancements are thriving in high-income countries and large corporations, many small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and low-income regions remain excluded. In Europe, for example, only 24 per cent of SMEs achieve high levels of digital adoption compared to 68 per

cent of larger businesses. In Malta, where over 33'000 SMEs form the backbone of the economy, overcoming this gap is vital for sustainable growth.

Malta's proactive measures, such as the establishment of the Malta Digital Innovation Authority and a focus on STEM education, were highlighted as examples of national efforts to foster innovation and bridge digital inequalities.

The President concluded with a call for global collaboration, urging participants to ensure technology serves everyone equitably. She encouraged the forum to generate inclusive solutions that empower all, leaving no one behind in the digital age.

In the opening speech at the Global Innovation Forum, **H.E. Mr Silvio Schembri**, Minister for the Economy, Enterprise and Strategic Projects of Malta celebrated Malta's enduring legacy of innovation, linking Valletta's 16th-century design – built with foresight and resilience – to the nation's modern digital ambitions. Highlighting Vision Malta 2050, a strategy aimed at enhancing quality of life, the Minister stressed the importance of addressing global challenges like climate change, technological disruption and demographic shifts.

Malta's pioneering achievements in digital innovation were showcased, including its AI sandbox and legal frameworks for virtual financial assets. Beyond the national level, these have informed EU-wide regulations. The establishment of the Malta Digital Innovation Authority and the soon-to-launch European Digital Innovation Hub further underline Malta's commitment to fostering emerging technologies and entrepreneurship.

Ethical applications of AI in education and healthcare in the Maltese experience were spotlighted, with significant improvements in student performance and efficient healthcare forecasting. Reflecting on Valletta's historical focus on public well-being, Mr Schembri framed technology as a tool for inclusive progress.

The Minister concluded by inviting participants to leverage the Forum as a space for collaboration, honouring Malta's legacy of innovation while shaping a future of shared prosperity and well-being.

In his opening remarks, **Dr Cosmas Luckyson Zavazava**, Director of the ITU Telecommunication Development Bureau emphasized the urgent need to bridge the digital divide, particularly in vulnerable regions such as least developed countries, small island developing states, and landlocked nations. Highlighting the dual nature of emerging technologies as both accelerators of development and potential tools for harm, Dr Zavazava called for equipping people with the necessary skills to navigate and utilize these innovations responsibly.

The BDT Director commended Malta for its commitment to digital transformation, noting its achievements in AI strategy, Internet connectivity, and support for startups and small businesses. The forum was lauded as a platform for policymakers, innovators, and business leaders to collaborate on strategies for digital inclusivity, aligning with the UN's vision of leveraging technology for a prosperous and equitable future.

Key initiatives were spotlighted, including the Generation Connect Young Leadership Program and partnerships focusing on AI skill development for young women. The BDT Director stressed the importance of inclusivity, urging efforts to close gender and disability gaps in digital access. Reflecting on global partnerships and Malta's leadership in innovation, the remarks concluded with optimism about the forum's potential to inspire transformative solutions for a sustainable digital future.



## FORUM STAGE

### MINISTERIAL: Leading towards prosperity in a VUCA world



#### Moderator

**Dr Cosmas Luckyson Zavazava**, Director, Telecommunication Development Bureau

#### Speakers

**H.E. Ms Enkelejda Muçaj**, Deputy Minister of Infrastructure and Energy, Ministry of Infrastructure and Energy, Albania

**H.E. Ms Marsha Caddle**, Minister, Ministry of Industry, Innovation, Science and Technology, Barbados

**H.E. Ms Laurence Ndong**, Minister and Government spokesperson, Ministry of Communication and Media, Gabon

**H.E. Ms Nthathi Moorosi**, Minister, Ministry of Information, Communications, Science, Technology and Innovation, Lesotho

**H.E. Ms Agnė Vaiciukevičiūtė**, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Transport and Communications, Lithuania

**Ms Nancy Caruana**, Permanent Secretary, Ministry for the Economy, Enterprise, and Strategic Projects, Malta

**H.E. Mr Bosun Tijani**, Minister, Ministry of Communications, Innovation and Digital Economy, Nigeria

**Ms Jocelle Batapa-Sigue**, Undersecretary of ICT Industry Development, Department of Information and Communications Technology (DICT), Philippines

**H.E. Mr Mondli Gungubele**, Deputy Minister, Minister of Communications and Digital Technologies, South Africa

The Ministerial Roundtable brought together global leaders to discuss the pivotal role of digital innovation in shaping the future of nations and the international community. Across the discussions, a common theme emerged: digital innovation offers immense opportunities for nations to modernize governance, drive economic growth and create inclusive, forward-facing solutions.

**Barbados** emphasized the importance of understanding the roots of digital divides in order to eliminate them and advance the national economic agenda through agile governance for emerging technologies. The government's commitment to leveraging innovation to create future-facing solutions was underscored by their launch of an innovation sandbox. This initiative seeks to explore how technology can be harnessed as a tool to solve developmental challenges, particularly in education and digital skills.

**Gabon** highlighted its push for digitalization, with a focus on e-government services as a crucial step toward advancing the economy and improving the lives of citizens. The Minister stressed that without embracing digital technologies, their economy would not be able to move forward or provide a sustainable future for their people. Digital services are seen as integral to modern governance and economic growth in Gabon.

**Malta** is transforming public administration through digital innovation, embracing technologies like blockchain, AI and smart city initiatives. With a focus on accessibility, efficiency and transparency, the country offers advanced e-government services, from e-health to business registration, exceeding EU benchmarks. Investments in assistive technologies empower persons with disabilities, fostering inclusivity. By prioritizing digital infrastructure, skills, and emerging technologies, Malta is building a forward-thinking, citizen-focused, and secure digital-first government aligned with EU ambitions.

**Albania** reflected on its solid digital framework, which has enabled the country to be an early adopter of digital innovation. However, the focus now is on actively facilitating its spread and ensuring that the benefits of digital technologies reach every corner of society. The country aims to create an enabling environment where digital solutions can thrive and serve the broader public good.

**Nigeria** framed digital innovation as an opportunity to bridge gaps between citizens and government. By focusing on rebuilding trust, creating jobs and driving economic growth, Nigeria sees digital transformation as a vital tool for its national development. The Minister emphasized that while infrastructure investment is crucial, partnerships and collaborative efforts with the private sector are necessary to build solutions that are sustainable and inclusive. He also underscored the need for a strong digital agenda that aligns all sectors for maximum impact.

**Lesotho** spoke about the importance of creating opportunities for youth and fostering private sector growth. Digital public infrastructure, the Minister emphasized, is key to bridging the urban-rural digital divide and enhancing public service delivery. The government is focused on driving sustainable innovation, and collaboration across sectors is seen as critical to ensuring that



digital solutions are inclusive and far-reaching. The government's work with initiatives such as Giga and GovStack aims to strengthen digital identities and services, laying the groundwork for future progress.

**South Africa** emphasized the importance of robust digital infrastructure, recognizing it as a foundational element for digital prosperity. The Minister called for an increase in investment in this critical area. He highlighted the need for innovative funding models to support digital Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs), particularly in emerging markets. For South Africa, digital innovation offers hope for systemic economic growth, providing a pathway to greater prosperity for the country.

**The Philippines** shared its commitment to advancing women's participation in digital innovation through the Digital Innovation for Women Advancement (DIWA) initiative, which empowers women to take on new roles and jobs in technology. The Undersecretary emphasized the importance of international collaboration, stating that no country should be an island. The shared lessons and experiences from global partners are crucial to ensuring that digital innovation benefits all countries, regardless of size or resources.

**Lithuania** highlighted the importance of regulatory sandboxes, where digital innovations can be tested and refined before full-scale implementation. The Deputy Minister spoke about Lithuania's experience in mainstreaming these sandboxes to foster innovation. She called on stakeholders to work together to secure the necessary funding and support to set up experimental spaces that will pave the way for digital breakthroughs.

In conclusion, the roundtable discussants reinforced the message that digital innovation is not merely about adopting new technologies but about creating opportunities for growth, sustainability and inclusion. The discussions underscored the need for strategic investments in digital infrastructure, inclusive policies, and international cooperation to unlock the full potential of digital innovation. By focusing on collaboration, inclusivity, and the responsible use of technology, countries can leverage digital innovation as a powerful tool for sustainable development and long-term prosperity.

## DIALOGUE 1: Digital futures – from vision to impact



### Moderator

**Ms Elaine France**, Founder, Flow in Action

### Opening remarks

**Mr Jaroslaw Ponder**, Head of ITU Regional Office for Europe, ITU

### Speakers

**Mr Waleed Hamdi**, Head, Information Society Division, African Union

**Dr Jean-Marie Mifsud**, Chief Officer for Innovative Technology, Malta Digital Innovation Authority (MDIA), Malta

**Professor Rafael Popper**, Director, Futures Capacity Academy

**Mr Hao Guang Tse**, Assistant Director, Ministry of Digital Development and Information, Singapore

Dialogue 1 delved into how futures thinking can equip countries to navigate the complexities of the Fourth Industrial Revolution while fostering equitable and resilient societies. As technology and socio-political dynamics evolve at an unprecedented pace, traditional planning and policy-making approaches often fall short. The discussion highlighted the importance of innovative strategies to address pressing challenges, seize emerging opportunities, and prepare communities for an uncertain future.

*Key takeaways:*

- One significant challenge is the reliance on outdated visions that fail to align with the rapidly shifting socio-economic and technological landscape. Decision-makers often prioritize immediate crises, constrained by limited time and resources, leaving little room to consider long-term strategies. Policy and coordination gaps across fragmented governance structures further hinder the development of future-ready policies.
- However, futures thinking presents several opportunities to address these gaps. Engaging diverse stakeholders, particularly marginalized communities, is critical to ensuring that the benefits of innovation are equitably distributed. Building resilience through investments in digital infrastructure, innovation ecosystems and human capacity can empower nations to adapt to unforeseen challenges. Governments must also transition from reactive policies to proactive approaches that anticipate long-term trends and needs.
- Key pathways to success include embedding futures thinking in education systems and fostering lifelong learning to prepare future leaders. Capacity building in digital skills and cross-sector collaboration can enhance the ability to harness emerging technologies. Flexible governance frameworks that adapt to rapid technological and environmental shifts are also essential.
- Practical steps for implementing futures thinking include localizing solutions to address unique national contexts, promoting critical thinking through education and strengthening international collaboration to facilitate knowledge sharing and resource mobilization.
- Ultimately, futures thinking is about preparing for multiple possibilities. By focusing on adaptability, inclusivity, and resilience, governments can craft sustainable strategies that align with the rapidly changing dynamics of the modern world.

## FORUM STAGE

### DIALOGUE 2: Developing bankable initiatives to shape vibrant digital ecosystems



#### Moderator

**Mr John Biggs**, Editor-in-Chief, Hemi Labs, United States of America

#### Speakers

**Ms Laila Al Hadhrami**, Managing Director, Communities Connect Cities (C3), Oman

**Mr Miguel Borg**, Chief Executive Officer, Malta Venture Capital, Malta

**Mr Idrissa Dia**, Director, Economic & Social Infrastructure Global Practices Department, Islamic Development Bank

**Professor Hao Liu**, Executive Dean at the School of Global Governance, and Vice Dean at the School of Management, Beijing Institute of Technology, China

**Mr Craig Meyer**, Director of Innovation and Special Projects, Department of Communications and Digital Technologies, South Africa

**Mr Muhammad Saiful Azzam Haji Sarpudin**, General Manager, Brunei Innovation Lab (BIL), Brunei Darussalam

**Dr Tounwende Alain Sawadogo**, Senior Digital Development Specialist, World Bank

Dialogue 2 centered on creating impactful digital initiatives through collaboration, strategic policies and inclusivity, emphasizing that fostering innovation requires genuine collaboration across government, private sector, academia, and civil society. Building these connections is a complex but essential task. A robust ecosystem holds a transformative potential for economies

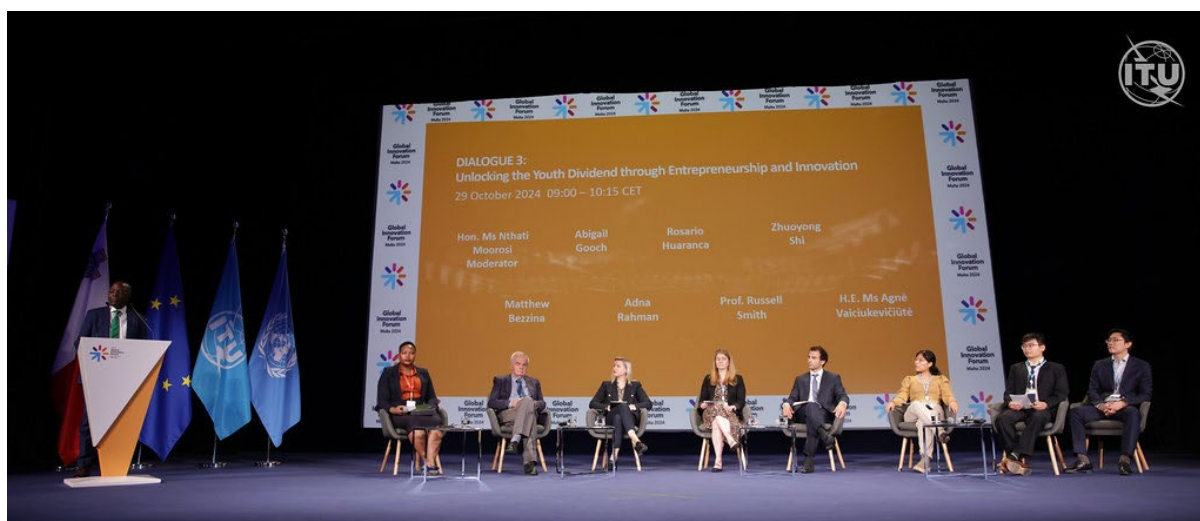
and societies. Bankable ecosystem initiatives rely on deliberate partnerships that pool expertise and resources, transcending the capacity of individual actors. Development finance institutions were recognized for their role in aligning efforts, reducing duplication, and ensuring resources reach those in need.

Key takeaways:

- **Investing in people:** Innovation thrives when we invest in people. This calls for coordinated efforts across all sectors to develop talent, support startups, and foster entrepreneurial ventures. Educational curricula and youth-focused initiatives should blend technological training with business fundamentals, equipping young people with practical skills to harness digital innovation effectively. This approach not only empowers individuals but ensures that innovation serves broad societal needs.
- **Enabling environments and scalability:** Effective regulation was recognized as crucial for translating innovation into action. Policies must prioritize inclusivity and sustainability while facilitating bankable initiatives. Governments must create frameworks that integrate venture capital, academia and private sector efforts, demonstrating that public and private financing are complementary. Strategic investments should scale digital innovations to power development and increase competitiveness in global markets.
- **Knowledge sharing:** Participants stressed the importance of generously sharing successful practices and exploring new ways of collaboration to maximize impact and accelerate progress. Platforms for exchange can help stakeholders, especially those in developing contexts, to leapfrog challenges and adopt proven solutions.
- **Innovation for Development:** Technology and innovation must be directed toward solving real-world challenges, from education and talent development to sustainable growth and resilience. Initiatives like the Brunei Innovation Lab demonstrate how whole-of-ecosystem approaches, combining strategic partnerships and innovative tools, can drive scalable, tangible outcomes. At its core, innovation should aim to connect people, bridge resource gaps, and deliver equitable, lasting benefits, advancing global development goals through collaboration and inclusivity.

## FORUM STAGE

### DIALOGUE 3: Unlocking the youth dividend through entrepreneurship and innovation



#### Opening remarks

**Dr Cosmas Luckyson Zavazava**, Director, Telecommunication Development Bureau

#### Moderator

**H.E. Ms Nthathi Moorosi**, Minister, Ministry of Information, Communications, Science, Technology and Innovation Lesotho, Lesotho

#### Speakers

**Mr Matthew Bezzina**, CEO, eCabs Technologies, Malta

**Ms Abigail Gooch**, Global Corporate Responsibility, Strategy Activation Leader, EY

**Ms Rosario Huaranca**, GenerationConnect Youth Leadership Programme Fellow, Bolivia

**Mr Adna Rahman**, Head of Entrepreneurship Innovation Centre, Ministry of Education, Brunei Darussalam

**Mr Zhuoyong Shi**, Generation Connect Youth Envoy, China

**Professor Russell Smith**, Director of the Centre for Entrepreneurship and Business Incubation, University of Malta, Malta

**H.E. Ms Agnė Vaiciukevičiūtė**, Deputy Minister, Minister for Transport and Communications Lithuania

Dialogue 3 emphasized the critical importance of empowering young innovators to address global challenges and drive socio-economic progress. In an era of rapid technological change and economic uncertainty, participants agreed that investing in youth entrepreneurship is essential for fostering resilience and sustainable development.

#### Key takeaways:

- Young people face significant barriers, including limited access to decision-making spaces, outdated education systems and structural hurdles such as regulatory inefficiencies and restricted access to capital. These obstacles, particularly pronounced in developing regions, continue to stifle the full potential of youth-led initiatives.
- Transformative approaches are needed to overcome these challenges. Collaborative ecosystems that integrate government, academia and the private sector were identified as key to supporting youth entrepreneurship. Early exposure to entrepreneurial and digital skills, alongside innovative and adaptive education models, was viewed as critical to preparing young people for jobs in emerging industries and equipping them with the tools to thrive in uncertain environments.
- The importance of holistic support systems that combine financial resources, mentorship and capacity-building was underscored. Examples such as grassroots robotics initiatives in underprivileged communities and corporate engagement through mentorship programmes demonstrated scalable models for fostering creativity, resilience and long-term impact. Engaging youth in transformative technologies like artificial intelligence and robotics was seen as a pathway to unleashing untapped potential and driving societal transformation.

The session concluded with a clear message: the future depends on deliberate and inclusive investment in young people. Empowering youth entrepreneurship requires evolving outdated systems, fostering innovation-driven environments and building support networks that sustain and amplify their efforts. Only by prioritizing these actions can we unlock the immense potential of the next generation of digital innovators and accelerate a more resilient, equitable and prosperous global development.



## FORUM STAGE

### DIALOGUE 4: South-South and Triangular Cooperation as catalyst for emerging technology clusters



#### Moderator

**Ms Dima Al-Khatib**, Director, United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation (UNOSSC)

#### Speakers

**Mr Dulguun Damdin-Od**, Executive Director, International Think Tank for Landlocked Developing Countries, Mongolia

**Hon. Mr Anthony De Bono**, Former Malta Ambassador to Jordan and Former Chairman, Commonwealth Telecommunications Organisation

**Mr Rafik Feki**, Industrial Development Officer, Division of Digital Transformation and Artificial Intelligence Strategies, UNIDO

**H.E. Ms Nele Leosk**, Ambassador for Digital Affairs, Estonia

**Mr Peter Marien**, Team leader Digital-Governance, Science, Technology, Innovation and Digitalisation, Directorate General for International Partnerships, European Commission

**Dr Li Tian**, Head of Standards and Strategy and Vice President, ZTE, China

#### Remarks

**Dr Cosmas Luckyson Zavazava**, Director, Telecommunication Development Bureau

Dialogue 4 provided an in-depth exploration of the mechanisms, challenges, and opportunities for leveraging South-South and Triangular Cooperation to drive digital transformation and innovation across diverse regions.

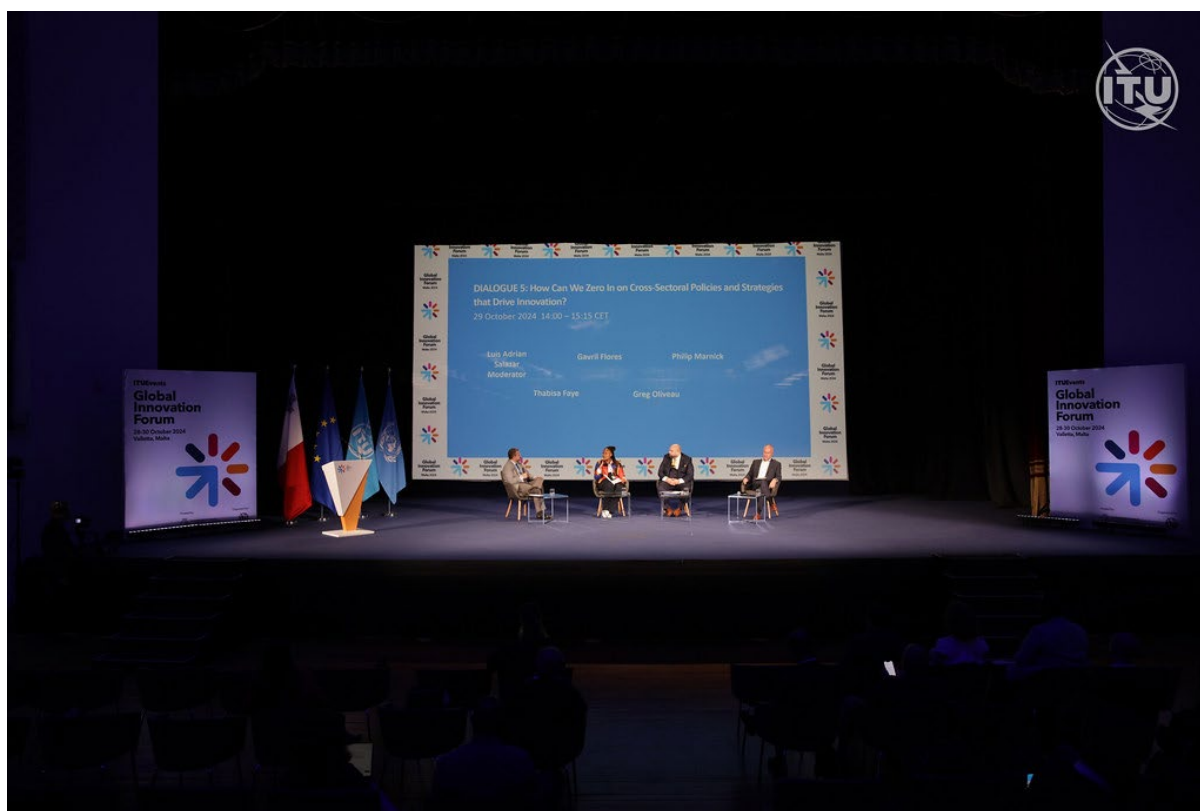
*Key takeaways:*

- The immense potential of the Global South was emphasized, both as a source of demand and innovation, urging the development of value chains that nurture local capacities and align with South-South and Triangular Cooperation principles.
- The foundational importance of addressing the persistent digital divide through investments in infrastructure and skills, reinforcing governance systems and creating economic opportunities for all was highlighted. True progress requires starting with the basics, such as interoperable systems, reliable data registers and robust digital infrastructure, to create an enabling environment for emerging technologies. Without these building blocks, scaling innovation remains unattainable. Genuine collaboration among governments, the private sector and civil society was seen as critical for scalable and interoperable solutions.
- The transformative role of open innovation ecosystems in promoting competitiveness and inclusion was underscored. Open industry standards and systems ensure equitable access and benefits of digital technologies and solutions. Concrete examples demonstrated tailored approaches can generate tangible outcomes, such as solar-powered broadband networks in Liberia and AI-driven education initiatives in Africa. Success stories from countries like Malta, Estonia and Kenya likewise illustrated that progress is achievable through sustained effort and innovative partnerships, even with limited resources.
- Recognizing technology as a critical foreign policy issue, panellists advocated for the expansion of digital diplomacy as a key driver of SSTC and global development. Effective governance of digital technologies, independent of corporate interests, was highlighted as essential for building sovereign digital states. Integrated, society-wide approaches to digital transformation were seen as vital to fostering inclusivity and scalability.
- Multilateral initiatives like the EU Global Gateway and UNIDO's AI Alliance for Manufacturing were praised for bridging gaps in digital access and capacity. The Global Digital Compact was celebrated as a milestone in fostering global collaboration to narrow divides, though panellists called for better orchestration and alignment of efforts.

The session concluded with a compelling call to action: to harness collective expertise, pool resources and leverage regional and global instruments to promote and scale digital innovation. By fostering inclusive ecosystems and building sustainable digital capacities, SSTC can serve as a powerful tool for achieving equitable digital transformation and accelerate the Sustainable Development Goals.

## FORUM STAGE

### DIALOGUE 5: How can we zero in on cross-sectoral policies and strategies that drive innovation?



#### Moderator

**Mr Luis Adrian Salazar**, Professor, Universidad de Costa Rica and Former Minister of Science Technology and Telecommunication, Costa Rica

#### Speakers

**Ms Thabisa Faye**, Councillor, ICASA, South Africa

**Mr Gavril Flores**, Chief Officer, Malta Digital Innovation Authority (MDIA), Malta

**Mr Philip Marnick**, Director General, Telecommunication Regulatory Authority, Bahrain

**H.E. Dr Neeraj Mittal**, Secretary, Department of Telecommunications, India

**Mr Greg Oliveau**, Head of Licensing & Regulatory Affairs EMEA, Project Kuiper, Amazon

Dialogue 5 centred on finding the right balance between regulation and innovation, emphasizing the need for flexible, adaptive regulatory frameworks that support technological progress. A major theme of the discussion was the recognition that regulations often fail to keep up with the rapid pace of technological evolution, leading to barriers that discourage new market entrants and stifle investment in emerging. The panel acknowledged that the critical question is no longer whether to regulate, but rather the opportunity cost of regulating versus not regulating. In other

words, policymakers must weigh the potential benefits and drawbacks of their regulatory decisions.

*Key takeaways:*

- Regulatory sandboxes are a practical solution, which offers controlled environments for testing innovations and refining existing regulatory frameworks. Sandboxes allow both regulators and innovators to experiment with new approaches, ensuring that regulations evolve in real time and remain relevant to market needs. Sandboxes also address the fundamental issue that ‘you cannot regulate something you don’t understand.’ By engaging directly with innovation, regulators can gain insights into emerging technologies, enabling them to design regulations that are not only reactive but also forward-thinking. The necessity of cross-sectoral collaboration was also emphasized, as regulators from different sectors must work together to prevent fragmented policies that could limit innovation.
- ‘Flexibility by design’ of regulatory frameworks should be the new normal. Rather than imposing rigid rules, regulators must design policies that can adapt over time, ensuring that they remain aligned with technological advancements. This flexibility can also reflect the level of risk involved; for instance, low-risk technologies may require fewer regulations, while high-risk areas such as AI may warrant more stringent oversight. The panel emphasized that an agile regulatory framework, one that adapts in response to both market dynamics and technological developments, is key to fostering innovation without overburdening entrepreneurs.
- Early engagement between regulators and innovators is key. By opening channels of communication and establishing a culture of collaboration, regulators can help create policies that balance consumer protection, market competition and national sovereignty, while also facilitating innovation. As one participant aptly put it – regulators do not give permission to innovate; their role is to facilitate people and businesses trying out new technologies and services and support them.

The dialogue concluded with a call for a shift in mindset. We cannot solve today's challenges with the same thinking that created them. Regulators should focus on fostering environments where experimentation and failure are viewed as normal part of the innovation process and progress in general. By closing the gap between policy and innovation, regulators can unlock new opportunities for economic growth, societal achievements and long-term prosperity.

## FORUM STAGE

### DIALOGUE 6: Preparing for the growth of startups and SMEs in globally connected markets



#### Moderator

**Ms Marta Arsovska Tomovska**, Advisor to the President of the National Assembly of Serbia, Serbia

#### Speakers

**Ms Justina Bieliauskaite**, Innovation Director, European DIGITAL SME Alliance

**Mr Iusef Abdel Hafith**, Program Manager, SuperCharger Ventures, Malta

**Ms Raki Kane**, Executive Secretary, Senegal Connect Startup, Senegal

**Dr Ilia Kolochenko**, CEO, ImmuniWeb

**Mr Sofien Sidhoum**, Managing Partner, Vertis Capital

**H.E. Mr Bosun Tijani**, Minister, Ministry of Communications, Innovation and Digital Economy, Nigeria

Dialogue 6 emphasized the transformative power of startups and small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in driving digital innovation and resilience for transforming economies. As engines of growth, start-ups and SMEs face distinct challenges that require targeted support to thrive in increasingly competitive and interconnected digital markets.

*Key takeaways:*

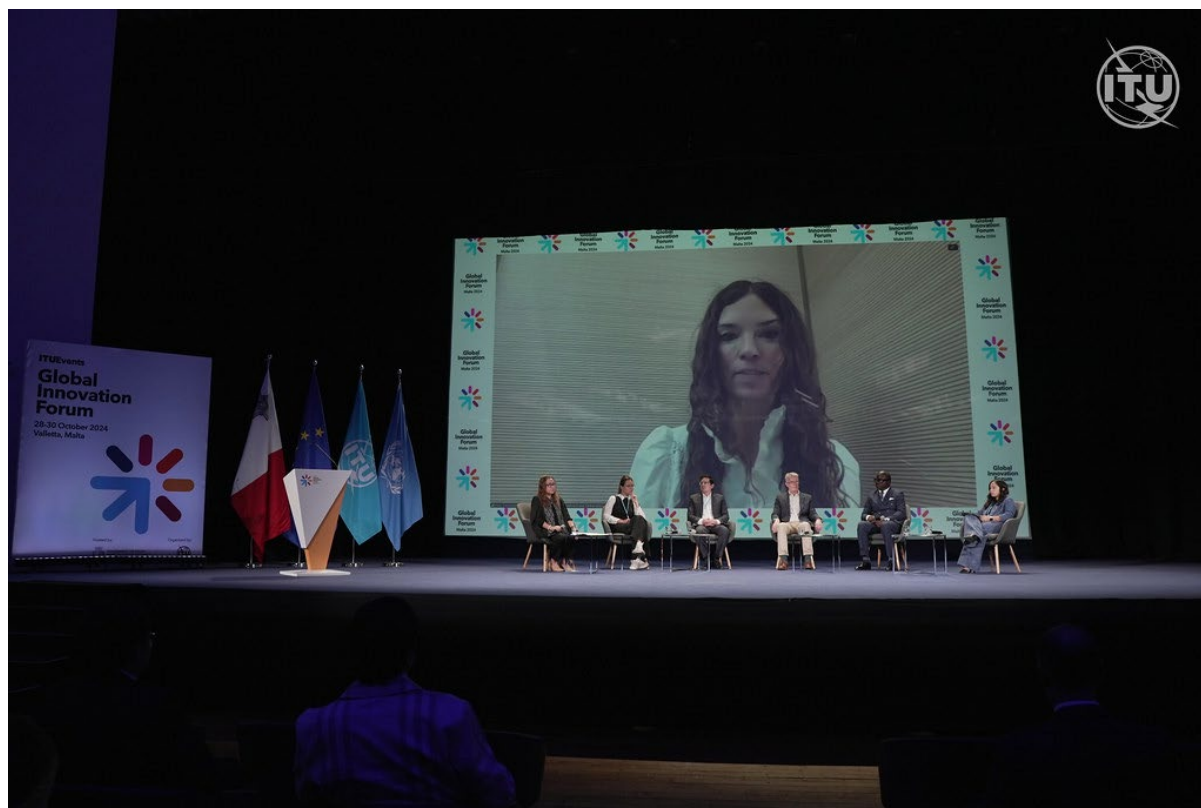
- Startups rely on innovation and adaptability but are constrained by bureaucratic processes and inconsistent regulatory environments. Market barriers, particularly in areas such as cybersecurity and cross-border trade, may further hinder their potential. What's more, in many regions, investor ecosystems remain underdeveloped, offering insufficient funding and mentorship, especially for emerging markets.
- Public investment in research, development and digital infrastructure is important to address these challenges. Examples such as France's early adoption of fibre networks and Malta's comprehensive rollout of 5G showcase how pioneering government-backed initiatives can establish a robust foundation for growth. Building interconnected digital ecosystems through digital identity and interbank systems and cross-border platforms, like in Nigeria, allows startups to access larger markets, streamline operations and secure financing.
- Cross-sector and international collaboration were identified as essential for creating trust and resource-sharing among startups, governments and investors. Mentorship programs, accelerator initiatives and education for both founders and investors were emphasized as pivotal for fostering scalable and sustainable ventures. Startups must also prioritize building crisis-resilient models, global intellectual property protection and adaptive strategies to remain competitive in volatile markets. UN organizations were seen as a key partner in facilitating the creation of and sustaining innovation ecosystems in developing regions.

The discussion concluded with a call for streamlined regulatory frameworks, targeted training programs for both investors and founders and the establishment of partnerships that connect local startups to global opportunities. By aligning digital infrastructure, supportive ecosystems and education, startups and SMEs can achieve the scale and impact needed to drive economic transformation in globally connected markets.



## FORUM STAGE

### DIALOGUE 7: Ecosystem4impact - Ecosystem builders in the frontline



#### Moderator

**Ms Jocelle Batapa-Sigue**, Undersecretary for ICT Industry Development, Department of Information and Communications Technology (DICT), Philippines

#### Speakers

**Ms Yevgeniya Bikmurzina**, Head of the Innovation Ecosystem Department, Innovation and Digital Development Agency, Azerbaijan

**Mr Matthew Caruana**, CEO, Junior Achievement (JA Malta), Malta

**Mr Fraser Graham**, Director Public Policy, Ooredoo Group

**Dr Nkundwe Moses Mwasaga**, Director General, ICT Commission of Tanzania, Tanzania

**Ms Lissette A. Pacheco Fdez**, Head of the Digital Innovation and Development Laboratory, OGIC, Dominican Republic

**Ms Kelly Ommundsen**, Head of Digital Inclusion and Member of the Executive Committee, World Economic Forum

Dialogue 7 highlighted the vital role of ecosystem builders in driving digital transformation and addressing challenges such as resource scarcity, inclusivity and sustained engagement in long-term and multi-stakeholder partnerships. Ecosystem initiatives are at the forefront of reshaping



the innovation landscape, tackling barriers to access to emerging technologies and turning them into opportunities for socio-economic impact.

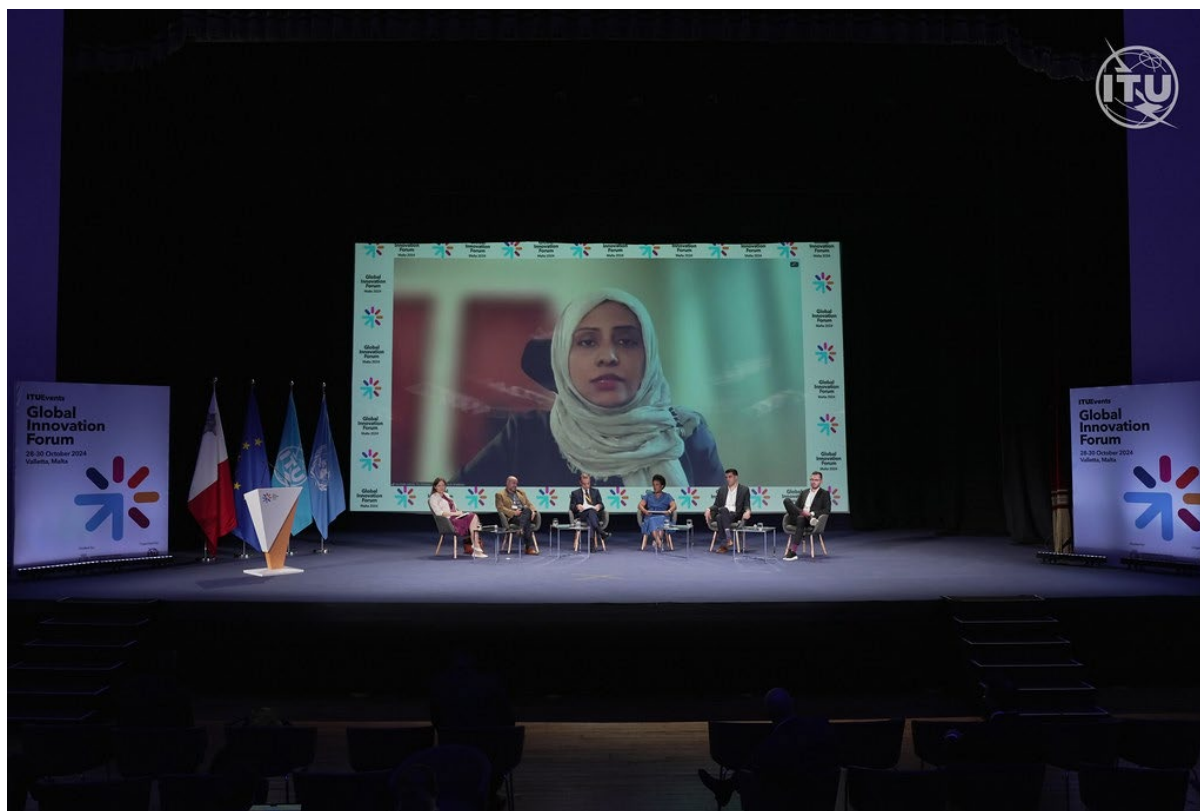
*Key takeaways:*

- The difficulty in securing adequate financial and human resources, which limits the scale of initiatives, is a critical challenge. Additionally, ensuring meaningful connectivity for underserved populations remains a major obstacle. Ecosystem builders also face the ongoing challenge of maintaining momentum, particularly in long-term initiatives requiring diverse stakeholder collaboration.
- Key opportunities identified include the need for a more holistic approach to connectivity, integrating infrastructure, digital skills, and content localization. Building strong partnerships across sectors was seen as critical to creating synergies and accelerating digital ecosystem integration. Furthermore, increasing the involvement of governments and policymakers in these efforts is essential to ensure long-term sustainability.
- To ensure success, fostering community engagement emerged as a core strategy. Involving stakeholders at all levels fosters a sense of ownership, which is essential for sustaining efforts. Investment in education and digital literacy is also crucial, empowering communities to leverage digital tools and access online services. Lastly, the session emphasized the importance of setting flexible, long-term goals to adapt to challenges while maintaining a focus on inclusivity.

The discussion concluded with a call for continued collaboration between public and private sectors, localized digital solutions tailored to regional needs, and effective monitoring and storytelling to track progress and inspire wider participation in the digital transformation process.

## FORUM STAGE

### DIALOGUE 8: Building innovation networks and platforms to achieve national ambitions



#### Moderator

**H.E. Ms Marsha Caddle**, Minister, Ministry of Industry, Innovation, Science and Technology, Barbados

#### Speakers

**Ms Aishath Adnan**, Co-Founder, Women in Tech, Maldives

**Mr Aaron Boyd**, Managing Partner, Welchman Keen

**Mr Petros Galides**, Deputy Commissioner, Cyprus Regulatory Authority for Electronic Communications and Postal Services and the Digital Security Authority, Cyprus

**Ms Johanna Jochim**, Lead, UN Innovation Network

**Mr Marius Stanciu**, Founding partner, Buju Stanciu & Associates, Romania

**Mr Johan Zammit**, President, Malta Innovation Forum, Malta

Dialogue 8 reframed innovation as a collective endeavour rooted in collaboration, adaptability and shared purpose. Achieving national ambitions in digital transformation and emerging technologies requires moving beyond fragmented efforts. A critical path towards that goal is building innovation networks and platforms to support, connect and empower digital start-ups, entrepreneurs and other organizations.

*Key takeaways:*

- Innovation networks thrive when structured with clear objectives, supported by strong leadership and underpinned by effective governance. Such networks facilitate knowledge exchange, joint problem-solving and resource optimization, ensuring that efforts are neither duplicated nor fragmented. Examples such as the UN's innovation network has built a global innovation community of experts across thematic areas offering multiple networking and collaboration opportunities. Malta's example highlighted how even small nations can achieve exponential impact through strategic alignment of stakeholders and clear governance frameworks. For smaller states, leveraging limited resources through strategic alignment and robust stakeholder coordination proved essential to amplifying impact.
- Technological solutions can make legal, business and digital services more accessible and efficient. Practical applications, such as digital platforms simplifying land transfers and business registrations, showed how innovation could reduce intermediaries and foster entrepreneurship. However, regulatory bottlenecks in many countries were identified as significant hurdles, requiring streamlined frameworks and greater agility in governance.
- Effective networks require not only regulations that support innovation but also trust-driven collaboration among governments, innovators, and businesses to ensure processes are streamlined and responsive.
- Inclusivity is a cornerstone of successful innovation ecosystems. Engaging marginalized groups and youth, as demonstrated in community-driven projects in the Maldives, ensures that solutions are both impactful and culturally sensitive. These projects showcased how local leadership and how diverse perspectives can drive sustainable and scalable outcomes.

The session highlighted innovation networks and platforms as vital enablers of inclusive digital transformation, fostering trust, adaptability, and co-creation to address shared challenges. Panellists stressed the importance of cross-border collaboration and agile regulatory frameworks to turn such networks and platforms into a force for meaningful progress and sustainable ecosystem development.

## EXPERIENCE STAGE

### POWER SESSION: Young minds and emerging technologies



#### **Moderator**

**Ms Victoria Masso**, Consultant, ITU

#### **Opening remarks**

**Baroness Beeban Kidron**, Founder and Chair, 5Rights Foundation

#### **Speakers**

**Ms Zarina Caeiro**, Senior Technology Consultant, EY, Malta

**Ms Abigail Gooch**, Global Corporate Responsibility, Strategy Activation Leader, EY

**Mr Muhammad Zubair Madni**, GCYLP Fellow from Pakistan, Founder of DIGITAL ROHI

**Ms Selma Kaymakci**, Generation Connect Youth Envoy from the Czech Republic, Czech Republic

This Power Session brought together young entrepreneurs to discuss challenges and solutions for empowering youth in the digital age. Key topics included the persistent digital exclusion affecting 2.6 billion unconnected individuals globally, the growing skill gaps as education systems struggle to keep up with technological advancements, and the lack of diversity in STEM fields, where women represent only an estimated 22 per cent of the global AI workforce. Trust and safety issues in digital spaces, such as cyberbullying and misuse due to inadequate digital literacy, were also major concerns.

*Key takeaways:*

- **Scalable education initiatives:** Programs like EY's partnership with Technovation, targeting 25 million girls in AI by 2030, and Digital Rohi's portable internet solutions for nomadic populations demonstrate innovative ways to expand access to education.
- **Public-private collaboration:** Initiatives such as the AI Skills Passport showcase the potential of partnerships between corporations, NGOs, and governments to overcome systemic barriers.
- **Localized solutions:** Tailoring approaches to the unique needs of communities ensures relevance and long-term sustainability.
- **Holistic skill development:** Combining technical skills with adaptability, design thinking, and ethical awareness equips youth to thrive in evolving tech landscapes.
- **Policy advocacy:** Reforming education policies and promoting age-appropriate technology standards are vital for systemic change.
- **Mentorship and innovation:** Platforms like the EY STEM app and gamified learning tools break traditional barriers, while mentorship networks inspire and guide youth.

The session highlighted the transformative potential of empowering youth through inclusive and innovative technologies. Participants emphasized the need for collaborative efforts and scalable solutions to address systemic challenges. As one speaker affirmed, success in technology is within reach for all, provided the right skills and proactive support are in place. By investing in youth, the digital age can become an era of widespread opportunity and meaningful change.

## EXPERIENCE STAGE

### MASTERCLASS: Storytelling for Impact



#### Moderator

**Ms Victoria Masso**, Consultant, ITU

#### Speakers

**Ms Laila Al Hadhrami**, Managing Director, Communities Connect Cities (C3), Oman

**Mr Marius Stanciu**, Founding Partner, Buju Stanciu & Associates

This Masterclass focused on the transformative role of storytelling in effective communication, particularly in policymaking, entrepreneurship and sustainability. Participants discussed the challenges of translating complex, technical content into accessible narratives and emphasized the potential of storytelling to inspire action and foster understanding. The session highlighted the importance of empathy, emotional connection and inclusivity in crafting compelling messages that resonate with diverse audiences.

#### *Key takeaways:*

- **Clarity and simplicity:** Simplifying complex information and avoiding technical jargon enhances accessibility and comprehension.
- **Emotional connection:** Engaging the audience's emotions fosters trust, empathy and a deeper connection, making the message more impactful.
- **Empathy and understanding:** Tailoring stories to the audience's cultural background and perspectives strengthens their relevance and resonance.

- **Data-driven storytelling:** Integrating credible data into narratives bolsters trust and reinforces the message's impact.
- **Iteration and feedback:** Continuously refining stories based on audience feedback ensures they remain engaging and effective.

The session emphasized practical steps to maximize the power of storytelling, including developing frameworks to structure narratives, utilizing tools like empathy mapping and providing training on storytelling techniques for stakeholders. Participants were encouraged to share successful stories across sectors to foster collaboration and learning. Mechanisms for evaluating the impact of storytelling initiatives were also identified as a critical component of long-term success.

The discussion reinforced that storytelling is not merely a communication tool but a means to build trust, inspire change and promote inclusivity. By connecting with audiences on an emotional and intellectual level, storytelling becomes a catalyst for driving meaningful action and fostering collective understanding.



## EXPERIENCE STAGE

### MASTERCLASS: Strategic Foresight



#### Moderator

**Ms Udit Chaturvedi**, Consultant, ITU

#### Speaker

**Professor Rafael Popper**, Founder and Director of Strategy, Futures Diamond Ltd, United Kingdom

This Masterclass introduced participants to ITU's Strategic Foresight frameworks designed to help countries harness digital innovation in fast-evolving and uncertain environments. Led by a globally recognized expert, the session explored tools and methodologies that turn technological disruption into opportunities for innovation and development. Participants learned how to anticipate change, foster collaboration and build resilience in technology, policy and innovation landscapes.

#### *Key takeaways*

- Foresight enables organizations to explore multiple potential futures, unlike traditional forecasting, which focuses on predicting one outcome.
- Tools like the Foresight Diamond and SMART Futures Jigsaw help map out drivers of change and prepare for a range of scenarios.

- ITU's Strategic Foresight Playbook, with its five phases – Framing, Scanning, Mapping, Visioning, and Transforming, provides a structured approach to identifying risks and opportunities.
- Real-world examples, such as in healthcare and cybersecurity, demonstrate how foresight aids in identifying risks, anticipating disruptions, and informing proactive decision-making.
- Collaboration and stakeholder engagement are key to successfully navigating complex challenges and driving transformational change.
- Global best practices, such as Singapore's urban foresight and Estonia's digital transformation, showcase how foresight can guide strategic planning and innovation.
- Participants were encouraged to adopt a futures mindset and continue learning through [ITU's free Strategic Foresight 101 course on the ITU Academy](#).

Participants gained practical foresight tools and were encouraged to adopt a futures mindset, focusing on long-term, proactive planning. By applying foresight methodologies and fostering collaboration, public and private stakeholders are better equipped to navigate uncertainties and create sustainable, transformative strategies in a rapidly changing world. The session concluded by inviting participants to embrace foresight as a tool for building resilient organizations and ecosystems.

## EXPERIENCE STAGE

### MASTERCLASS: Resilience and well-being in the digital age



#### Moderator

**Ms Lucy Antrobus**, Founder, Aequaland and Refugee Voices

This Masterclass explored strategies to navigate the growing pressures of modern life while fostering emotional and cognitive strength. The session highlighted a 200 per cent increase in global disasters causing significant damage, emphasizing the urgent need for proactive resilience measures. The hyperconnected nature of today's world, while offering unparalleled opportunities for connection, also creates mental strain and challenges to maintaining creativity and productivity. Cultural resistance to adopting resilience practices pre-emptively was identified as a key barrier, with individuals and organizations often addressing well-being reactively.

#### *Key Takeaways:*

- **Interpersonal connections:** Building strong relationships promotes resilience by triggering positive neurochemical responses, such as oxytocin, which enhance emotional and cognitive functioning.
- **Cultivating joy:** Shared experiences and celebrating achievements can boost creativity, performance, and well-being.
- **Anchoring in purpose:** A clear sense of purpose helps individuals and organizations stay focused, motivated, and innovative during difficult times.
- **Well-being foundations:** Prioritizing essentials like sleep, proper nutrition, and physical activity provides a robust base for resilience and high performance.

The session outlined practical steps to integrate these principles into daily life and organizational cultures. Interactive workshops focusing on connection, joy, and purpose were proposed to help internalize resilience practices. Organizations were encouraged to design work environments that prioritize well-being and embed proactive resilience strategies. Facilitators also stressed the importance of purpose mapping exercises to align actions with long-term goals. Extending these practices to underserved communities through community support models was identified as a way to maximize their impact.

As the facilitator remarked, 'Without resilience, well-being is like a leaky bucket.' The session reinforced the importance of building resilience as a preventative measure to prepare for and thrive amid future challenges.

## EXPERIENCE STAGE

### PITCH COMPETITION: Jury Pitch for Digital Innovation Award



#### Moderator

**Ms Victoria Masso**, Consultant, ITU

#### Members

**Mr Trevor Sammut**, Senior Technology Architect, Malta Digital Innovation Authority (MDIA), Malta

**Ms Aishath Adnan**, Co-Founder, Women in Tech Maldives

**Ms Cinthya Arias Leitón**, Council President, Superintendence of Telecommunication (SUTEL), Costa Rica

**Dr Gift Kallisto Machengete**, Director-General, Postal and Telecommunications Regulatory Authority of Zimbabwe (POTRAZ), Zimbabwe

**Mr Bernardo Mariano Jr.**, Chief Information Technology Officer (CITO), UN OICT

**Mr Daud Elvin Suleman**, Director General, Malawi Communications Regulatory Authority (MACRA), Malawi

**Dr Li Tian**, Head of Standards Strategy, ZTE Corporation

**Ms Marta Arsovska Tomovska**, Advisor to the President of the National Assembly of Serbia



The Pitch Competition for the Digital Innovation Award provided a dynamic platform for entrepreneurs, small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and ecosystem builders to showcase their innovative solutions addressing pressing challenges. Participants received critical feedback from the jury while engaging with a diverse audience, with the event focusing on impact, sustainability and alignment with global development goals.

The competing initiatives were judged by a high-level Jury composed of:

- Mr Trevor Sammut, Senior Technology Architect, Malta Digital Innovation Authority (MDIA) and Head of the Jury of the Global Innovation Forum 2024
- Ms Cinthya Arias Leitón, Council President, SUTEL, Costa Rica
- Ms Marta Arsovska Tomovska, Advisor to the President of the National Assembly of Serbia
- Dr Gift Kallisto Machengete, Director-General, POTRAZ, Zimbabwe
- Mr Bernardo Mariano Jr., Chief Information Technology Officer (CITO), UN OICT
- Dr Li Tian, Head of Standards Strategy, ZTE Corporation

The Competition received 65 applications, with ITU experts pre-selecting 14 initiatives to pitch their projects at the forum. Over the first two days of the Forum, the distinguished jury evaluated the projects, narrowing the field to six exceptional finalists.

The innovator pitches offered solutions to turn development challenges into inclusive opportunities, through digital innovation and emerging technologies.

*Key takeaways:*

- **Technology as a community enabler:** Beyond solving technical challenges, digital tools and platforms can empower communities to take ownership of solutions, fostering local leadership and resilience in addressing issues like healthcare and digital inclusion.
- **Rethinking collaboration for equity:** Collaboration should not only aim at scalability but also focus on equitable resource distribution, ensuring that smaller organizations and underserved regions have a fair stake in transformative opportunities.
- **Cultural and environmental sustainability:** Open-source platforms and digital tools provide powerful means to preserve cultural heritage, while sustainable design principles can address environmental challenges and promote innovation.
- **Tailored and inclusive solutions:** Localized approaches that respect cultural, linguistic and regional economic contexts are crucial for the success and long-term sustainability of entrepreneurial initiatives.
- **Iterative growth and impact measurement:** Effective monitoring mechanisms and pilot projects are critical to refining solutions, demonstrating proof of concept, and building credibility with stakeholders. Iterative feedback loops enable continuous improvement and sustained impact.

Innovators underscored the importance of building partnerships between governments, international organizations and private sector entities. Tailored solutions that respect regional needs, such as cultural and linguistic contexts, were deemed essential.

## COLLABORATION STAGE

### DIGITAL INNOVATION BOARD – Visionary Dialogues



#### Chairmen

**Dr Cosmas Luckyson Zavazava**, Director, Telecommunication Development Bureau

**H.E. Dr Neeraj Mittal**, Secretary of the Department of Telecommunications (Vice-Minister), Ministry of Communications, India

**H.E. Mr Bosun Tijani**, Minister, Ministry of Communication and Digital Economy, Nigeria

#### Members

**Ms Aishath Adnan**, Co-Founder, Women in Tech Maldives, Maldives

**H.E. Eng. Omar bin Hamdan Al-Ismaili**, Executive President, Telecommunications Regulatory Authority, Oman

**Ms Dima Al-Khatib**, Director, United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation (UNOSSC)

**H.E. Mr Mohamed bin Thamer AlKaabi**, Minister, Ministry of Transportation and Telecommunications, Bahrain

**Ms Cinthya Arias Leitón**, Council President, Superintendence of Telecommunication (SUTEL), Costa Rica

**Ms Marta Arsovska Tomovska**, Advisor to the President of the National Assembly of Serbia, Serbia

**Mr Bocar Ba**, CEO, SAMENA Telecommunications Council



**Mr Carlos Baigorri**, President, National Telecommunications Agency (Anatel), Brazil

**Mr Jabiri Kuwe Bakari**, Director-General, Tanzania Communication Regulatory Authority, Tanzania (United Republic of)

**Ms Jocelle Batapa-Sigue**, Undersecretary for ICT Industry Development, Department of Information and Communications Technology (DICT), Philippines (Republic of the)

**H.E. Ms Marsha Caddle**, Minister, Ministry of Industry, Innovation, Science and Technology (MIST), Barbados

**Ms Julissa Cruz Abreu**, Executive Director, Dominican Institute of Telecommunications (INDOTEL), Dominican Republic

**Mr Hossam El-Gamal**, Telecom Executive, Egypt

**H.E. Mr Mondli Gungubele**, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Communications and Digital Technologies, South Africa

**H.E. Mr Naadir Nigel Hamid Hassan**, Minister, Ministry for Finance, National Planning and Trade, Seychelles

**H.E. Mr Takuo Imagawa**, Vice-Minister for Policy Coordination, Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications (MIC), Japan

**H.E. Ms Emma Inamutila Theofelus**, Minister, Ministry of Information, Communication and Technology, Namibia (Republic of)

**Mr Bernardo Mariano Jr.**, Assistant Secretary-General, United Nations Office of Information and Communications Technology (OICT)

**Mr Gift Kallisto Machengete**, Director-General, Postal and Telecommunications Regulatory Authority of Zimbabwe (POTRAZ), Zimbabwe

**H.E. Ms Nthathi Moorosi**, Minister, Ministry of Information, Communications, Science, Technology and Innovation, Lesotho

**H.E. Ms Enkelejda Muçaj**, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Infrastructure and Energy, Albania

**H.E. Ms Laurence Ndong**, Minister & Government Spokesperson, Ministry of Communication and Media, Gabon

**H.E. Ms Margaret Nyambura Ndung'u**, Cabinet Secretary, Ministry of Information, Communications and the Digital Economy, Kenya

**Dr Bimal N. Patel**, Vice-Chancellor, Rashtriya Raksha University, India

**Mr Nestor Rios Rivero**, National Executive Director, Regulatory Authority for Telecommunications and Transportation (ATT), Bolivia

**Mr Daud Elvin Suleman**, Director-General, Communication Regulatory Authority, Malawi

**Mr Li Tian**, Head of Standards Strategy of ZTE & Vice-President of China Association for Standardization Corporation, China

**Mr Ciyong Zou**, Deputy to the Director General and Managing Director, United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO)

**Speaker**

**Dr Ahmad Reza Sharafat**, ICT4Dev Expert

On the first day of the Forum, the Digital Innovation Board of the Innovation and Entrepreneurship Alliance for Digital Development held its Second meeting. The Board took stock of the achievements of the Alliance and discussed future plans to support global socio-economic development through concrete initiatives.

During the meeting:

- 26 out of the 31 eminent Board Members or their representatives engaged in in-depth discussions on the Alliance work and strategy.
- The Board **reviewed progress** made in implementing the recommendations of the first Board Meeting, including 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 adopted the **high-level work plan for 2025-2026**, building on existing activities and launching new impactful initiatives to unleash digital innovation for sustainable and equitable growth.
- The Board established the **Expert Network** of the Alliance bringing together members from governments, industry, international organizations, academia, non-governmental organizations, and experts from the ITU Acceleration Centers. The Network will bring the Board's vision to life by conducting a series of foresight studies, collaborating on research, and developing practical solutions that address key digital development challenges.
- **ITU Acceleration Centers** joined the Board to discuss challenges, opportunities and the impact of their work.
- The Board endorsed the comprehensive **monitoring and evaluation framework for ITU Acceleration Centres**, which is being implemented to align the Alliance work with ITU Regional Initiatives and the SDGs.
- The Board endorsed the launch of an **Initiative Accelerator** to jump-start the development of innovation ecosystem initiatives and the ITU Regional Initiatives by bringing stakeholders together to co-create and refine projects concept to accelerate impactful digital solutions.
- The Board took note of the creation of a pilot community collaboration platform, the [ITU Innovation Platform](#), as a one-stop-shop that offers an easy way to engage with the Alliance community and its initiatives.
- The Board recognized the **critical contribution of the Digital Transformation Lab** (DT Lab) in creating knowledge programmes, knowledge products, playbooks and tools on the five main areas of work of the Alliance. The Board particularly appreciated the development of hybrid curriculums covering topics such as [Strategic Foresight](#), Entrepreneurship, [Ecosystem Initiative Development](#), Policy Experimentation, Open Innovation, Program Development, Strategic Communication, and Resource Mobilization.
- The Board endorsed a roadmap for a **new Foresight series** as part of the global digital advocacy portfolio of the Alliance. A compendium of topics was endorsed, including transforming the education, health, utilities, finance, manufacturing, startups and SMEs

and smart cities sectors and leveraging digital solutions across economic and social sectors.

- The Board endorsed the **expert report ‘Shaping Education for Tomorrow’** applying strategic foresight approaches to transforming education through digital solutions. The report will be the first launched in the new Foresight series.

An advisory dialogue concluded the Board meeting emphasizing the importance of aligning strategies with regional and global initiatives and resources. Furthermore, the Board supported triangular cooperation as a collaborative mechanism, recommended the development of an innovation fund, and encouraged the use of the ITU Acceleration Centres as global hubs. This approach aims to navigate rapid technological changes, facilitate leapfrogging, and enhance overall impact.

The conversations and connections made here will lead to impactful outcomes in the months and years ahead.

The full reports of the Board meetings are [available online](#).

## COLLABORATION STAGE

### ITU ACCELERATION CENTRES – Second Meeting



#### Participating centres:

- Ministry of Infrastructure and Energy, Albania
- Innovation and Digital Development Agency, Azerbaijan
- China Branch of BRICS Institute of Future Networks, China
- China Academy of Information and Communications Technology (CAICT), China
- Government Office of Information and Communication Technologies, Dominican Republic
- Ministry of Communication and Digital Economy, Gabon
- Communications Authority of Kenya, Kenya
- Malawi Communications Regulatory Authority, Malawi
- Ministère de la Transformation numérique, de l'innovation et de la Modernisation, Mauritania
- Department of Information and Communications Technology, Philippines
- Ministry of Information, Communication, and Information Technology, Tanzania
- Postal & Telecommunications Regulatory Authority, Zimbabwe

This session brought together representatives from 17 ITU Acceleration Centres to review progress, identify challenges and explore solutions to ensure the Centres sustainability and alignment with ITU Regional Initiatives. The discussions focused on improving collaboration across the Network of Centres, addressing systemic challenges and creating strategies for impactful and sustainable digital transformation.

#### *Key takeaways*

- Centres face persistent challenges in securing funding, recruiting skilled personnel and building robust ecosystems tailored to country-specific contexts.
- A disconnect between technological advancements and regulatory frameworks hinders the pace of digital transformation in many countries, necessitating better alignment.
- Adopting a ‘digital innovation by design’ approach ensures tailored solutions that address the unique needs of different countries and regions.
- Strategic partnerships with diverse stakeholders are essential for the long-term sustainability of Centres and sustaining progress in building national and regional innovation ecosystems.
- Effective collaboration mechanisms across governments, private sectors and academia are crucial to fostering cohesive ecosystems that support innovation, and Centres should actively leverage such mechanisms.
- Fostering collaboration among Centres to share best practices, lessons learned and resources can enhance their collective impact.
- Establishing an Expert Network to connect Centres and provide targeted support was identified as a priority initiative, as formally endorsed by the Digital Innovation Board.

The session concluded with a shared commitment to operationalize the Expert Network, deepen inter-Centre collaboration and develop strategic, goal-oriented plans for each Centre. By leveraging these initiatives, the ITU Acceleration Centres aim to create sustainable and inclusive digital ecosystems that drive impactful transformation globally.



## COLLABORATION STAGE

### PARTNERSHIP ECOSYSTEM: Global collaboration to accelerate digital innovation and entrepreneurship



#### Moderator

**Mr Jaroslaw Ponder**, Head of ITU Regional Office for Europe, ITU

#### Speakers

**Mr Clint Betts**, CEO and Co-Founder, CEO.com and Silicon Slopes

**Mr Aaron Boyd**, Managing Partner, Welchman Keen

**Ms Indhira Castro**, Project Analyst, Government Office for Information Technologies and Communication, Dominican Republic

**Mr Geoffrey Farrugia**, Founder and CEO, HandsOn System

**Ms Enkelejda Imeraj**, Director General, Agency of Innovation and Excellence, Ministry of Economy, Culture, and Innovation, Albania

**Cinthya Arias Leitón**, Council President, Superintendence of Telecommunication (SUTEL), Costa Rica

**Mr Bernardo Mariano Jr.**, Chief Information Technology Officer (CITO), Assistant Secretary-General, Office of Information and Communications Technology

**Ms Solomiya Omelyan**, Chief of the Regional Bureau for Europe and Central Asia, United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO)

**Dr Tounwende Alain Sawadogo**, Senior Digital Development Specialist, World Bank

The session emphasized collaboration as a key driver of digital innovation, advocating for stronger partnerships among international organizations, governments, the private sector, and grassroots stakeholders. Participants explored challenges such as fragmented ecosystems, resource limitations, and the difficulty of scaling successful pilot projects. Inefficiencies in forming partnerships were attributed to differing priorities and operational approaches, while the lack of financing models for local innovation and underrepresentation of marginalized communities further impeded equitable digital ecosystem development.

#### *Key Takeaways*

- **Inclusive ecosystems:** Building interconnected ecosystems where diverse actors align objectives can maximize impact and ensure inclusivity.
- **Capacity development:** Upskilling local workforces and fostering entrepreneurship are critical to the sustainability of partnership initiatives.
- **Alignment of needs and resources:** Strengthening links between local needs, global funding, and expertise ensures projects are both relevant and sustainable.
- **Emerging technologies:** AI and blockchain can modernize partnership frameworks and accelerate digital innovation.
- **Diverse financing sources and mechanisms:** Establishing innovative funding models and broad multi-stakeholder partnerships in emerging technology fields is crucial to addressing resource gaps.
- **Trust and governance:** Transparent governance frameworks are vital for fostering trust, reducing risks, and ensuring resource-sharing among stakeholders.

By aligning stakeholders around shared goals and leveraging innovative tools, the session demonstrated the transformative potential of collaboration in driving digital innovation. Moving forward, participants agreed on the need to develop frameworks for actionable collaboration, pilot bankable projects that address local and global priorities and enhance funding models through innovative public-private partnerships. Mentorship and capacity-building initiatives were also seen as essential to supporting local entrepreneurs and ensuring the scalability of digital solutions. Connecting the Innovation and Entrepreneurship Alliance for Digital Development with like-minded organizations and initiatives was noted as an important step towards enhancing global and local digital ecosystems.



## COLLABORATION STAGE

### WORKSHOPS: Young Women in AI



#### Speakers

**Dr Cosmas Luckyson Zavazava**, Director, Telecommunication Development Bureau

**Ms Zarina Caeiro**, Senior Technology Consultant, EY, Malta

**Mr Gavril Flores, Chief Officer**, Malta Digital Innovation Authority (MDIA), Malta

**Ms Abigail Gooch**, Global Corporate Responsibility, Strategy Activation Leader, EY

The session centered on addressing the gender gap in artificial intelligence and technology by empowering young women with the skills, confidence, and opportunities needed to succeed in these fields. The discussion brought together insights from academia, industry, and policymaking to explore the barriers women face in AI, highlight opportunities for change, and propose concrete actions to foster inclusivity and innovation. Practical initiatives such as AI skills accelerators and mentorship programs were highlighted as pathways to creating a more equitable digital future aligned with sustainable development goals (SDGs).

#### *Key takeaways:*

- **Representation matters:** Women comprise only an estimated 22 per cent of the global AI workforce, underscoring the need for systemic changes to unlock their potential and foster inclusivity.
- **Bridging gender divides in STEM:** Less than 30 per cent of STEM jobs are held by women, despite increasing demand for digital skills in the workforce. Outreach and early education programs are crucial to closing this gap.

- **Empowering through education:** Workshops, summer camps and scholarships are vital for sparking interest in AI among young girls, especially in underrepresented communities.
- **Collaboration as a driver of change:** Partnerships across industries and global organizations are essential for addressing skills gaps and promoting sustainable development goals.
- **Inclusive Leadership:** Normalizing women's leadership in AI and fostering mentorship opportunities can inspire the next generation and drive sustainable change.

The session concluded with a call for action to scale education programs and foster inclusive environments where women's contributions are valued equally. Participants emphasized the importance of role models and collaboration, envisioning a future where women's presence in AI is the norm, not the exception. Initiatives like Her Digital Skills aim to upskill over 1000 girls across 12 countries, contributing to a larger goal of equipping one million girls with digital skills by 2026. These efforts reaffirm the transformative potential of empowering young women in AI to drive innovation and equality in technology.

## COLLABORATION STAGE

### YOUTH LEADERSHIP DEEP DIVE: GenerationConnect Young Leadership Programme – Case Studies



#### **Moderator**

**Mr Roman Tolstosheyev**, GenerationConnect Youth Leadership Programme Fellow from Azerbaijan

#### **Speakers**

**Ms Jocelle Batapa-Sigue**, Undersecretary for ICT Industry Development, Department of Information and Communications Technology (DICT), Philippines

**Ms Eva Marie Ecklu**, Generation Connect Youth Envoy from Ghana, Ghana

**Ms Rosario Huaranca**, Generation Connect Youth Leadership Programme Fellow and Founder, NGO Robotics Training project, Bolivia

**Mrs Mariem Landolssi**, Generation Connect Youth Envoy, Tunisia

**Mr Muhammad Zubair Madni**, Generation Connect Youth Leadership Programme Fellow and Founder, DIGITAL ROHI, Pakistan

**Mr Zhuoyong Shi**, Generation Connect Youth Envoy, China

#### **Master of Ceremony**

**Ms Sarra Kouada-Lakdhar**, Consultant, ITU

This session showcased youth-led digital initiatives that are transforming vulnerable communities and contributing to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Participants, including Generation Connect Youth Envoys and Young Leadership Programme fellows, shared how they are leveraging mentorship, innovation and technology to bridge the digital divide and co-create an inclusive digital future. It showcased solutions for overcoming infrastructural, financial, and policy barriers while fostering collaboration and capacity-building.

#### *Key takeaways*

- **Innovative solutions to challenges:** Youth-led projects are addressing infrastructural barriers in underserved areas, such as portable connectivity solutions in remote regions and communities facing geographical, economic and social challenges.
- **Localized education tools:** Initiatives such as the development of robotics books and augmented reality tools in Bolivia are making digital education more accessible and relevant to local contexts.
- **Mentorship and networking:** The session highlighted the importance of connecting young innovators with experienced mentors and professional networks to enhance project scalability and impact.
- **Technology for transformation:** Advancements in AI, robotics and precision agriculture present significant opportunities to address local challenges and drive sustainable development.
- **Youth influence in policy:** Youth leaders emphasized the need for formalized platforms and councils to engage with policymakers, ensuring that their voices shape inclusive digital policies.
- **Scalable models:** Train-the-trainer approaches and community-driven strategies, as seen in Cholistan, Pakistan, empower local leaders to sustain and expand digital literacy programs.
- **Global collaboration:** Strengthened partnerships between governments, academia, NGOs, and the private sector can co-create innovative, scalable solutions to digital inclusion challenges.

The session underscored the pivotal role of youth in leading digital transformation and emphasized practical next steps. These include prioritizing connectivity in underserved regions, scaling localized educational programs, and institutionalizing youth representation in policy dialogues. By investing in mentorship, leveraging technology, and fostering cross-sector collaboration, initiatives like Generation Connect are paving the way for a more inclusive and sustainable digital future.

## FORUM STAGE

### DIGITAL INNOVATION AWARD CEREMONY



#### Speakers

**Dr Cosmas Luckyson Zavazava**, BDT Director, ITU

**Mr Trevor Sammut**, Senior Technology Architect, Malta Digital Innovation Authority (MDIA)  
Malta

The ITU Global Innovation Forum 2024 Pitch Competition showcased groundbreaking digital initiatives that highlight the transformative potential of innovation. The competition, designed to celebrate those advancing digital innovation and creating lasting community impact, brought together entrepreneurs, SMEs, policymakers and ecosystem builders driving progress through digital transformation.

The three key categories across which the initiatives were evaluated by the Jury and the winners are:

- **‘Digital Changemaker’ category** recognizing those addressing local community challenges through innovation:  
**Ms Mais Taha**, MTiPX, Malta
- **‘Ecosystem Practice’ category** celebrating efforts to foster entrepreneurship and build robust ecosystems:  
**Malawi Communications Regulatory Authority**, Muuni Fund- ICT Research and Innovation Fund, Malawi

- **‘OpenTech4Impact’ category** honouring projects leveraging open-source solutions to address pressing global challenges:  
**Dr Teddy Nalwanji**, Bulamu Bridge AI Technologies, Uganda, and
- **‘Special Recognition’** for innovative and entrepreneurial Talent:  
**China Academy for Information and Communications Technology**, SMEs Integration Innovation Platform, China

Each finalist exemplified the power of digital solutions to drive inclusivity, growth, and sustainable development, contributing uniquely to advancing digital innovation. The Jury recognized that the winners collectively demonstrated how innovation can be a force for positive change. Their creativity, passion, and commitment provide the foundation for an inclusive, prosperous digital future in their countries and communities.



## FORUM STAGE CLOSING



### Speakers

**Dr Cosmas Luckyson Zavazava**, BDT Director, ITU

**Mr Kenneth Brincat**, CEO, Malta Digital Innovation Authority (MDIA), Malta

### Master of Ceremony

**Ms Roberta Albanese Dalli**, Head of Secretariat, Ministry for the Economy, Enterprise & Strategic Projects, Malta

The Forum closing session reflected on global learnings and good practices from the discussions on the three Forum stages. The audience appreciated key takeaways from the three-day event and a call to accelerate innovation in ‘Shaping our digital futures for prosperity and well-being for all’.

The **BDT Director**’s closing remarks highlighted the success of the Global Innovation Forum 2024 as catalyst for innovation and meaningful change in the digital world. He provided an overview of the main outcomes of the various events across the three stages of the Forum and praised the event for fostering rich discussions and showcasing impactful initiatives that reshape digital ecosystems. The forum provided a platform to explore strategies and frameworks to advance equitable digital development and align efforts with SDGs and national ambitions. Acknowledging the importance of sustainable, inclusive initiatives, he emphasized that the insights, partnerships and solutions from the forum will drive progress and unlock opportunities, particularly for youth and digital innovators, in the unfolding digital age.



The BDT Director handed a certificate of appreciation to the Chair of the Global Innovation Forum, **H.E. Mr Silvo Schembri**, for his outstanding leadership and contribution throughout the Global Innovation Forum 2024. The certificate was received by Mr Kenneth Brincat on behalf of the Minister.

The closing remarks of **H.E. Mr Schembri** delivered by **Mr Brincat** reflected on the success and inspiration of the Global Innovation Forum 2024. He praised the event for fostering thought-provoking discussions, innovative ideas and meaningful collaboration among diverse stakeholders. The Minister emphasized Malta's commitment to advancing digital innovation, particularly in artificial intelligence, to enhance public services and quality of life. He acknowledged the valuable role of partnerships and knowledge exchange in building a prosperous digital future. Expressing gratitude to ITU, the Maltese government and all participants, he encouraged continued efforts to build new synergies and reinforce existing partnerships to fast track digital innovation for global good.