

The **High-Level Dialogue on Financial Mechanisms for Digital Development** – featuring South Africa, Senegal, ZTE, Microsoft, EBRD, and ADB – focused on paragraph 67 of the WSIS+20 UN General Assembly outcome document (A/RES/80/173), which calls on the ITU, as UNGIS secretariat, to assess gaps and recommend strengthened financial mechanisms for digital development in developing countries.

The discussion addressed financing national connectivity ambitions, AI infrastructure, and regional digital transformation. A central theme was that no single actor can meet these challenges alone, underscoring the need for collaboration, blended finance, and risk-sharing to attract investment. Governments highlighted the importance of common frameworks and coordinated national plans to align investments and scale inclusive connectivity.

South Africa highlighted its SA Connect strategy and the Digital Infrastructure Investment Study developed by the Development Bank of Southern Africa (DBSA) and the National Planning Commission (NPC), which estimates that approximately US\$8.2 billion is required to achieve universal broadband connectivity, with the private sector contributing US\$3.5 in 2025. Senegal outlined an ambitious USD 1 billion, 10-year program to expand network coverage, connect public institutions including schools, townhalls and health centres, and advance digital inclusion, innovation, and accessibility. Private sector and multilateral development bank participants emphasized moving beyond accounting exercises toward greater coordination, transparency, and common metrics to build a stronger pipeline of projects. They also stressed the importance of mobilizing private capital, strengthening government leadership, harnessing innovative finance models, and improving coordination, including efforts to centralize funding for implementation. Multilateral development banks further underscored the role of technical assistance in helping governments access specialized skills and institutional support, particularly in cybersecurity, digital skills development, and AI readiness, positioning AI as a potential equalizer between societies. The need to shift from AI ambition to AI readiness was also highlighted.

During the session, ZTE, Microsoft, and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) announced new Partner2Connect pledges, reinforcing momentum toward universal, meaningful connectivity. ZTE committed USD 450 million over three years to advance collaborative AI ecosystems; Microsoft pledged significant investments in AI, cloud, and satellite-enabled connectivity, including rural access and skills development; and ADB outlined its Asia-Pacific Digital Highway, aiming to mobilize up to USD 20 billion to improve connectivity for up to 650 million people. The session concluded with the announcement that Partner2Connect has surpassed its USD 100 billion target, reaching approximately USD 121 billion in commitments—a significant milestone in efforts to bridge the digital divide.