SMART ISLANDS: BRINGING DIGITAL EXPERIENCES TO COMMUNITIES

A black and white logo

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An island surrounded by water

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The Smart Islands programme adopts an innovative approach to deliver connectivity and digital services to disadvantaged island communities in a scalable and sustainable manner. It aims to transform rural and coastal communities, improving their livelihood and well-being by connecting them to a range of digitally enabled services. The programme, built on the ITU-led [Smart Villages initiative](https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/ICT-Applications/Pages/smart-village.aspx) (piloted in Niger and under development in Egypt and Pakistan), leverages shared services delivery infrastructure capabilities to provide digital services over connected devices (tablet, mobile phone, computer etc.).

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Small Island Developing States (SIDS) face a host of challenges, including geographic isolation, lack of human resources, low availability and quality of infrastructure, and vulnerability to external shocks.  In remote areas and in outlying islands, access to information, government services, transport, health, finance, commerce, and education needs prioritized attention.

The high costs of electricity and lack of affordable connectivity exacerbate the above challenges for SIDS. Not only does the absence of digital technology contribute to the digital divide, but it also deprives small island communities of the opportunity to leverage digital solutions to obtain better access to essential services. The Smart Islands programme adopts a whole-of-government approach that accelerates progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through digital transformation.

SMART ISLANDS IN THE PACIFIC

A preliminary needs assessment of South Malekula village in Vanuatu, undertaken by the ITU as part of its support to the Government of Vanuatu, demonstrates the following outcomes that digital connectivity can positively contribute towards: (i) reliable and quality communication; (ii) digital training on the use of smartphone and other devices that improve business activities; (iii) improved educational environment, and (iv) improved health environment with digitally literate health workers. Following this assessment, the Government of Vanuatu has adopted Smart Islands in South Malekula as a national programme.

A person reading a book

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ITU has further received expressions of interest for Smart Islands from Fiji, Kiribati, Republic of Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Nauru, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. ITU is also engaged with UN agencies and other partners and stakeholders, in order to establish and promote a new holistic and inclusive approach to small island development, through the Smart Islands programme. Partnerships for financing of the programme are also being explored with development partners, UN SDG Fund and other international and national agencies.

SMART ISLANDS SOLUTION: WHOLE-OF-GOVERNMENT APPROACH AT COMMUNITY LEVEL

Digital transformation has become a high priority for countries. To meet these ambitions, and to support post COVID-19 socio-economic recovery, an integrated multi-sector approach is required. This approach includes technical assistance and investments in the agriculture, education and health sectors to generate employment, as well as the digitization of services (e-commerce and/or e-government), particularly in the outer islands.

The Smart Islands programme is based on a whole-of-government approach. It is demand-driven, user-centric, flexible, and focused on sustainability, scalability, and multi-sector collaboration. It is designed to manifest digital transformation at the community level with an emphasis on vulnerable populations (women, youth, persons with disabilities, older persons) in order to leave no one behind. The initiative leverages the four pillars of (i) improving broadband connectivity (ii) making broadband affordable (iii) enhancing digital skills and (iv) providing digital services, to impact people's lives based on their local priorities.

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Source: ITU

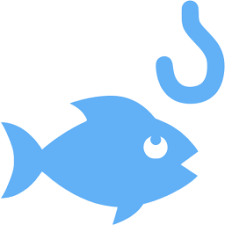
The Smart Islands programme can improve the provision of digital services across various sectors:

**Health:** the deployment of telemedicine and mHealth services to improve access to diagnosis, while also reducing the cost to the healthcare system. For example, mHealth programmes for diabetes prevention and control could be deployed based on the ITU-WHO joint ‘Be Healthy Be Mobile’ initiative.

**Education:** access to open and distance learning opportunities will enable capacity building for teachers and education administrators, while also providing equitable access to quality literacy, lifelong learning and skills programmes for children, youth, and adults. Local teachers could improve their qualifications and experiences of their students by using engaging education content, curated and uploaded on digital school units. 

**Agriculture:** e-Agriculture services can support efficient and productive farming capabilities among farmers, making rural communities more resilient from both the economic and nutritional standpoints. A specialized app could be provided that would help farmers better access markets or detect and treat pests in a timely manner, based on the analysis of photos taken by conventional smartphones.

**Multi-hazard early warning and response:** ICT systems can support hazard risk monitoring, alert, and provide post-alert guidance and information. For example, an early warning system based on meteorological data analysis algorithms can provide messaging services to prevent potential damage due to hurricanes. 

**Digital financial services:** provide access to much needed digital financial services and accelerate financial inclusion goals.

**Tourism and fishing:** the applications could support access to e-commerce and e-marketing to improve income opportunities and in turn support livelihoods.

The Smart Islands programme adopts an approach focusing on evidence-based policy making, future proofing by integrating emerging technologies, partnerships, and whole-of-government.

WHY SMART ISLANDS?

Timeline

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*Smart Islands – Implementation Approach*

Transformation of small islands into Smart Islands will bring about a positive change in local communities' quality of life by providing them with connectivity and new ICT-enabled services, while also promoting interoperability, cooperation, and holistic demand-driven response to SDG-related needs. It will enhance the ability to augment the COVID recovery efforts, address socioeconomic challenges and accelerate the achievement of the SDGs.

In the digital world post COVID, the Smart Islands programme aims to accelerate development, leaving no one behind.

Smart Island Website

https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/ICT-Applications/Pages/smart-islands.aspx

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