Technical Training Workshop:
Universal Service Efficiency and Quality Infrastructure Data
– The foundation for inclusive and affordable connectivity

Date and time: 2-4 May 2023 | 9:00-17:00 West Africa Time
Place: Radisson Blu Mammy Yoko Hotel, Freetown, Sierra Leone
Website: http://itu.int/go/2023-training-workshop-sierra-leone

Introduction

Across the African continent, governments are increasingly recognizing the transformative potential of digital technologies in their national development plans. They are also noting the importance of government in driving movement towards an interconnected digital economy and society which harnesses the power of technologies as a driver for economic growth and innovation. The key to realizing this potential lies in expanding digital adoption and inclusion across the whole-of-society, as well as in improving whole-of-government coordination of digital services extension and delivery. Infrastructure for energy and broadband have become the inalienable backbone of progress in terms enabling improved outcomes for sectors such as education and health, while having tremendous impact on improving the quality of life for individuals and households. Conversely, the lack of these requisite infrastructures signals barriers to growth and overall development. Therefore, a collaborative to approach mapping and data on infrastructure giving insight into status and gaps can help countries to strategically plan and provide high quality and efficient infrastructure and systems that support increased socio-economic inclusivity to produce higher economic growth.

Background

The aftermath of the decade-long civil war left Sierra Lone in a weak and vulnerable state with less effective physical infrastructure essential to national development. Over the past decade, Sierra Leone has demonstrated the desire to grow past these limitations amidst social and economic challenges, by prioritizing investment in rebuilding the country's infrastructure with support from development partners. Sierra Leone in collaboration with development partners have made significant investment in broadband and energy infrastructures spanning communities of critical need across the country. In addition to these infrastructural gains, there has been efforts on the policy and legislative front in addition to relevant regulations which build a solid foundation upon which the connectivity initiatives, such as the Giga school connectivity initiative, can thrive in the long term. These efforts are in conformity with the national aspiration set out in the Medium-Term National Development Plan, regional (African Union, Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Mano River Union (MRU), West African Telecommunications Regulators Assembly (WATRA), African Telecommunications Union (ATU) and International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030 and related national targets.

While these efforts are laudable, challenges to their implementation are substantial both in terms of funding and critical human expertise to drive through this anticipated vision forward as a country. In which case an understanding of the status of what is existing, potential gaps and ongoing efforts that could be leveraged can be boost the design of a cohesive and collaborative plan for connecting all schools in the country to the internet, leaving no one behind. This stakeholder workshop is being held with this in mind.

Objectives

This three-day workshop is organised by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), Universal Access Development Fund (UADF) and the National Communications Authority (NatCA) in collaboration with the Ministry of Information and Communications and the Ministry of Energy.

The stakeholder focused event aims to bring together regulators, mobile and internet service providers, development partners, policy makers in relevant ministries and agencies, and development partners. The goal of the workshop is, among other things, to deepen collaborative inter-agency partnerships and strengthen broader stakeholder engagement with a view to creating a platform for inclusive and sustainable public-good connectivity model for Sierra Leone. It seeks to leverage ITU's Universal Service Financing Efficiency toolkit to expand the knowledge and understanding of public officials in selected government ministries, agencies and departments (MDA) in need of universal service interventions. The gathering also provides useful insight into how Sierra Leone can leverage energy and connectivity related programs for synergies and sustainability within the health, agriculture education and local government sectors further advancing on some areas of Giga in Sierra Leone. The workshop will equally discuss the status and good practices of infrastructure mapping and the need to adopt a roadmap that views infrastructure data as a strategic tool for planning and developing high quality and efficient infrastructure systems that support growth in the country.

- **Day 1 and 2: Universal service financing efficiency: Capacity building for productive use of the Universal Access and Service Fund**

Public funding is limited, and as such must be used strategically in order to achieve broad national aspirations, and get the desired return on social, economic and financial investment. The primary goal of this 2-day training is to increase the understanding of public officials, policy makers, regulators and digital development focal persons of priority sectors in the national development agenda in order to achieve acceptable universal access and digital services outcomes. It will provide practical insight for impactful and sustainable universal access and service implementation by using analytical tools, examples, and templates that are grounded in practical experience and designed to help them navigate common questions and challenges they face when using public funds to design, implement and finance programmes and projects that facilitate access to digital technologies and communication infrastructure. It will further create an open space where participants will have the opportunity have practical follow up interaction from the online training session with a view of having deep dive discussions in the context of Sierra Leone's universal access and service aspirations.

- **Day 3: Infrastructure mapping, the foundation for informed investment and inclusive access**

Today, energy termination and internet connectivity are increasingly becoming inseparable from public good utility services that form the bedrock for equality, inclusivity, and the attainment of sustainable development goals. Day 3 of this workshop will be a gathering of technical experts whose interaction is aimed at supporting the objectives of Pillar 2- Digital Infrastructure and Access as articulated in the National Digital Development Policy & Strategy (NDDP/NDDS-2021). This will allow senior technical officers from mobile and internet service providers to join participants on days 1 and 2. It will serve as platform for participants understand the state of telecoms and energy infrastructure in Sierra Leone, while equally discussing good practices across the region and the value in building collaborative framework for infrastructure data and mapping.

Expected outcomes

Participants will have the opportunity to gain useful knowledge to build on knowledge acquired on the ITU online Universal Service Financing Efficiency Toolkit. It will unpack the digital financing toolbox, looking into traditional and innovative financing approaches. Effective procurement processes and grant project design; monitoring and evaluation of universal service and access programs. A central piece at this workshop will be sharing and discussing country experiences, challenges and good practices around the management programs. participants are expected to:

- Enhance the understanding of universal access and service (UAS) policy, strategy, and regulation, as well as how it can be efficiently utilized in the context of the national digital development agenda.

- Enhance knowledge in best practices from around the world regarding procurement and grant management, as well as universal service strategy design and evaluation.
- Provide useful insight that will create the awareness and value of building a culture of developing quality infrastructure data and mapping ecosystem as a critical foundational piece to pillar-2 (digital infrastructure and access) in the national digital development strategy.
- The outcome of the infrastructure data and mapping component of the workshop could lead to the modelling of whole-of-government approach to sustainable access to digital services with specific emphasis on health, education, agriculture and local government.
- Establishment of a technical working group in support of and to implement the conclusions.

Participants

The event will bring together traditional and non-traditional partners of ITU= in Sierra Leone, including, officials in charge of energy/telecom/ICT such as those in the Ministry of Information and Communications, Ministry of Energy, Energy Regulator, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Ministries of Education, Directorate of Science Technology, and Innovation, Ministry of Agriculture and Ministry of Local Government. The workshop will also bring onboard private sector players, including independent energy providers, mobile and internet service providers.

Practical information

Format of the event: The in-person Universal Service Financing Efficiency training workshop will be held for 2 days, starting from **2 to 3 May 2023**, to be followed by a technical workshop on the **4 May 2023** focused on infrastructure data and mapping. The final day will bring together ministry and regulator representatives, CEOs and development partners. The event will be held at Radisson Blu Mammy Yoko hotel.

Languages: The working language of the event will be English.

Registration: All participants are required to register online and would be required to produce their confirmation of online registration at the venue of the workshop. Relevant details about the event will be periodically updated on the **Technical Training Workshop on Universal Service Efficiency and Quality Infrastructure Data** event website. Considering the importance of your presence at the event and to further help in planning event logistics, we look forward to receiving confirmation of your participation **before 21 April 2023**.

Arriving at the venue: All participants are expected to arrive at the venue before 8:45 am to ensure that the event can start at 9:00 am.

Website: The event website is being updated with all information relevant to the **Technical Training Workshop on Universal Service Efficiency and Quality Infrastructure Data.**

Contact: Please contact the organizing committee for further information about the event at: itu-ro-africa@itu.int.