

KEY OUTCOME OF THE INDUSTRY-FOCUSED STAKEHOLDERS ENGAGEMENT SESSION OF THE UNIVERSAL SERVICE PROVISION FUND (USPF) – 2025.

INTRODUCTION:

The Industry-focused Stakeholders Engagement session, organized by the USPF in collaboration with the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and co-sponsored by the UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO), was held on March 13, 2025, at the Marriott Hotel Ikeja, Lagos. The session, themed ***“Fostering Connectivity and Access in Unserved and Underserved Communities: Collaborating for Sustainable Growth”***, aimed to strengthen collaboration among relevant stakeholders in the telecommunications sector to develop sustainable strategies for expanding connectivity and enhancing digital inclusion in Nigeria’s underserved and unserved communities.

Prior to the event, the organizing committee developed questionnaires to gather and analyze responses from key stakeholder groups. These responses, covering key challenges, priorities, and collaboration opportunities, were intended to facilitate targeted discussions during the in-person event.

The event hosted over one hundred and twenty (120) attendees from within and outside the country, bringing together a diverse group of stakeholders, from policymakers to telecom industry leaders, from rural community representatives to technology enthusiasts, with one shared mission—to shape the future of universal service and access in Nigeria.

Communique:

1. Advocate for the development of policies and regulatory interventions to incentivize the deployment of infrastructure to unserved and underserved areas in Nigeria.
2. Benchmark with NCC to establish working groups within the USPF to address connectivity challenges and identify areas for collaboration.
3. Leverage ITU’s Universal Financing Efficiency Toolkit.
4. Explore innovative financial strategies.
5. Set clear and measurable targets for connectivity expansion.
6. Ensure regular performance monitoring and reporting.
7. Prioritise stakeholder consultation and engagement to achieve seamless collaboration across key players in the industry.
8. Prioritize community engagement and education.
9. Incorporate capacity-building initiatives.
10. Build capacity and develop skills within USPF.
11. Rebrand USPF to align with USFs around the world.
12. Re-think the current project models of the USPF.

Next Steps:

1. Community Engagement and Capacity Building:

- Conduct pre-deployment education and awareness campaigns.

- Equip communities with requisite digital skills to drive connectivity uptake.
- Involve local leaders and communities in project planning and ownership.
- Develop community networks tailored to local needs.
- Partner with NGOs and educational institutions to drive digital inclusion.
- Identify community-based connectivity champions for sustained engagement.
- Engage with community leaders on the provision of local security.
- Train instructors in local dialects to ensure effective knowledge transfer.
- Incorporate training on data privacy and cybersecurity in all awareness and sensitization campaigns.

2. Collaboration with communities:

- Build strategic partnerships with communities;
- Establish community networks.

3. Engagement with key stakeholders: Expand the range of participant groups in future sessions to ensure broader representation and inclusivity.

4. Liaise with FMCIDE and NCC to facilitate the development and upgrade of Laws and Policies to reflect current economic and technological realities: Identified interventions include:

- Tax incentives;
- Policies that incentivize the use of renewable energy solutions;
- Intervention on subsidized licensing and spectrum rate;
- Facilitate E-waste Regulation;
- Policies that promote open-access models for fibre-optic networks and towers.
- Comprehensive regulatory intervention package that will include tax breaks, custom duties waivers, reduction on regulatory fees etc.
- Frameworks for community networks.

5. Explore innovative funding mechanisms:

- Examine the Universal Service Financing Efficiency Toolkit to identify and implement key relevant components.
- Partnering with international organizations to access funding.
- Explore local funding sources before moving into the international space.
- Explore financial strategies to include alternative funding mechanisms, blended finance models.
- Serve as a focal point to consolidate local funding for rural connectivity to maximize value.

6. Collaboration across key stakeholders:

- Develop comprehensive plans outlining achievable objectives and effective models for connectivity expansion, to inform effective engagement with relevant stakeholders.
- Work with MNOs to detect access gaps, aimed at reducing generic deployment and meeting targeted needs.

- Engage with politicians to ensure strategic and economically viable infrastructure placement.
- Partnering with device manufacturers to provide smartphones and routers.
- Implement infrastructure-sharing models amongst service providers.
- Collaborate with CSOs to drive the implementation of effective policies.
- Leverage Advocacy Networks to amplify public awareness, mobilize grassroots support with strategies such as communicating in their local languages, and provide evidence-based recommendations to policymakers, ensuring regulatory decisions that prioritize faster and more inclusive connectivity deployment.
- Establish joint initiatives with advocacy groups, such as creating steering committees that includes village heads, community representatives, and key stakeholders to ensure inclusive decision-making and effective implementation of connectivity projects.
- Identify strategic areas for collaboration with international organizations by assessing connectivity gaps and infrastructure needs to detect where technical expertise and funding are required.
- Explore PPPs.

7. Re-think current project and implementation models:

- Structure resource/finance sharing model to be milestone-based, distributable between the USPF and key players in the industry such as MNOs, OEMs etc.
- Develop clear frameworks for establishing PPPs to ensure transparency and accountability.
- Increase OPEX subsidy for up to 3 years for locations that are not commercially viable. This should be hinged on KPIs/breakeven points.
- Incorporate the usage of renewable energy in the implementation of all USPF projects.
- Introduce diverse co-funding models tailored to different community categories, including frameworks that entail covering a higher percentage of costs in high-priority areas, by USPF.
- Introduce performance-based incentives to encourage efficient delivery.
- Implement strict cost control measures to optimize resource allocation, set Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to measure the impact of the injected resources.
- Create monitoring, control and evaluation frameworks to ensure the effective use of the resources.
- Ensure effective distribution of the available technology or infrastructure to positively impact the various communities and cities.
- Build digital lab centres domiciled in Computer Engineering Departments in institutions, to facilitate the development of software and ICT equipment.
- Develop PAYG or subsidized internet plans for low-income earners.
- Provide income-generating digital training (e-commerce, social media marketing).

8. Benchmark with NCC and establish Working Groups in USPF to study connectivity challenges that will inform targeted solutions.

9. Benchmark with USF best practices, the USPF should:

- Rebrand itself to attract funding and technical expertise.
- Set clear and measurable targets for itself.
- Use a data-led approach to select projects.
- Build capacity and develop skills within the USPF.

Conclusion

The session reinforced that achieving universal connectivity requires sustained collaboration, capacity building, policy harmonization, funding and targeted investments. With concerted efforts from stakeholders, USPF is poised to bridge digital divide and empower all citizens with inclusive and sustainable strategies.

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Date: March 2025