6-10 July 2026
Geneva, Switzerland

Session Outcome Document

High-Level Dialogue on Financial Mechanisms for Digital Development

International Telecommunication Union

Wednesday, 8 July, 17:00 – 18:00

https://www.itu.int/net4/wsis/forum/2026/Agenda/Session/468

Key Issues discussed

- The session focused on paragraph 67 of the WSIS+20 UN General Assembly outcome document (A/RES/80/173), which calls on ITU, as UNGIS secretariat, to assess gaps and recommend strengthened financial mechanisms for digital development in developing countries.
- Participants discussed financing national connectivity ambitions, AI infrastructure, and regional digital transformation, emphasizing that no single actor can meet these challenges alone.
- 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 DBSA and the National Planning Commission, which estimates that approximately USD 8.2 billion is needed for universal broadband connectivity, with the private sector contributing USD 3.5 billion in 2025.
- Senegal outlined an ambitious USD 1 billion, 10-year programme to expand network coverage, connect public institutions including schools, town halls and health centers, and advance digital inclusion, innovation, and accessibility.
- Private sector and multilateral development bank participants emphasized the need to move beyond accounting exercises toward greater coordination, transparency, and common metrics to build a stronger pipeline of projects.

- Participants stressed the importance of mobilizing private capital, strengthening government leadership, harnessing innovative finance models, improving coordination, and centralizing funding for implementation.

Key Outcomes of the session

- The discussion reinforced the need for collaboration, blended finance, and risk-sharing to attract investment and support universal, meaningful connectivity.
- A key insight was the need to shift from AI ambition to AI readiness, with technical assistance helping governments access specialized skills and institutional support, particularly in cybersecurity, digital skills development, and AI readiness.
- ZTE, Microsoft, and the Asian Development Bank 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.

Key Recommendations and Forward-Looking Actions

- Strengthen coordinated national digital investment plans and common frameworks to align public, private, and development finance around inclusive connectivity priorities.
- Scale blended finance, risk-sharing instruments, and innovative financing models to mobilize private capital and accelerate implementation in developing countries.
- Improve transparency, common metrics, and project preparation support to build a stronger pipeline of bankable digital infrastructure projects.
- Expand technical assistance to strengthen government capacity in cybersecurity, digital skills, AI readiness, and institutional coordination.
- Use Partner2Connect and related mechanisms – including Giga, the Digital Infrastructure Investment Catalyser, and Connecting Humanity Action Blueprint – to lay the foundation, track commitments, centralize support for implementation, and sustain momentum toward WSIS implementation by 2035.