UNDERSTANDING THE COMMUNITY NETWORKS PROJECT

By

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INTRODUCTION

The Centre for Information Technology and Development (CITAD) is implementing a project entitled **Supporting Community-led Approaches to Addressing the Digital Divide Nigeria** coordinated globally by the Association for Progressive Communications (APC) support from the United Kingdom’s Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) through their Digital Access Programme (DAP).

This is part of a global project to catalyze the flourishing of community networks as a means of connecting the unconnected.

The project focuses on selected locally managed community networks in three regions, Africa, Asia and Latin America, to strengthen their impact, reach and sustainability.

This group of community networks will form the core of a peer community that can connect and broaden support for community-based connectivity initiatives, nationally, regionally and internationally.

The project will achieve its objectives through peer learning and exchange, awareness raising, technical assistance, capacity building for the development of scalable, innovative and sustainable networks, policy and regulatory advocacy and community mobilisation.

The project runs from 2020 to 2022.
### SEGMENTATION OF THE PROJECT

<table>
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| Macro   | • Technical capacity  
          | • Information and opportunities                                          |
| Meso    | • Internal capacity  
          | • Linkages between micro and macro                                        |
| Micro   | • National actors  
          | • Policy environment                                                     |
OBJECTIVES OF THE PROJECT

The objectives of the project are segmented at three levels as follows:

Micro levels
Provide Business management and technical capacity development programmes to communities and their organizations for local people to start and maintain efficient networks.

Address both accessibility and affordability gaps since most underserved communities are poor and unprofitable to the market, we need to develop low cost access models that are viable, sustainable and affordable to the poor.

Improve awareness of local, marginalised communities with regard to both potential dividends and harms generated by digital technologies through greater access to information on opportunities and risks hinders the adoption of inclusive digital access for development in many underserved communities and provision of digital literacy skills and knowledge to manage the above challenges.
Meso Level

Address the problem associated with the fact that Infrastructure is not generally considered as part of the digital rights package and there are very few people with the appropriate professional and academic backgrounds available to take on these issues.

Enhance the capacity of Meso organisations act as representatives and intermediaries for micro organisations to engage in advocacy at macro level to engender a more conducive policy space for community networks.

Create linkages between meso organisations and micro organizations that directly work with the people to enable them to communicate and negotiate with institutions at the macro level organization, such as regulatory agencies.

Create opportunities and spaces for cross-country and peer learning amongst meso organisations.
MACRO LEVEL

Institutions and individuals at the macro level are not sensitized to or familiar with the particular needs and context of community networks. This lack of knowledge and awareness hinders the formulation of policies and regulations that enable innovative and inclusive connectivity models. The project aims to address this.

Even in cases where policy makers and regulators are sensitized and willing to create a more enabling environment, other key stakeholders such as the treasury and the tax authority may present different obstacles due to a perception of telecommunications sector as a revenue-making sector rather than a public utility.
WHAT IS COMMUNITY NETWORKS?

ISOC, the Internet Society defines community networks as “telecommunications infrastructure deployed and operated by a local group to meet their own communication needs”

This communication needs can be voice, data, etc and can be point of convergence for community to come together to address their common community problems

Community networks take different forms with some extending access using commercial networks, other building their worn source of challenge, etc

Because they usually connect the unconnected, they are considered as extending connectivity to the last file. However, because they are bottom up initiatives, than top-down, they are more appropriately described as providing connectivity to the first mile
BENEFITS OF COMMUNITY NETWORKS

Benefiting end-users and the community networks themselves with cost-oriented approaches;

Providing service that is tailored to the unique needs of the community;

Empowering local people, and thereby encouraging involvement in other grassroots efforts, community affairs, and political processes;

Encouraging digital literacy;

Providing a “stepping stone” for people to become part of the global economy;

Creating new working opportunities; and

Promoting the virtuous cycle by improving both access to and creation of local content and services.
ADVANTAGES OF COMMUNITY NETWORKS

Because they provide means to connect the connected, they are tools for promoting digital inclusion.

Because they are community planned, implemented and managed, they allow for greater control and autonomy over telecommunication infrastructure.

As it involves people at grassroots, it allows for experimentation and for people to innovate and demonstrate their creativity.

It makes people to learn more about technology and to see it more as a social tool for problem solving than just mere ante fact.

It brings many more digital solutions such as eHealth, eLearning, ecommerce, etc to communities that are excluded.

Finally, it is more affordable.
United Kingdom’s Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) through their Digital Access Programme (DAP)- providing funding

Association for Progressive Communications (APC)- providing global coordination and general funds management

Meso organizations (six of them in Africa)- implementing the project at national levels

Micro organizations (seven in Nigeria)- working to enhance or establish community networks in their communities as learning tools

Advisory Committee (one in each country)- to support, advice and guide the implementation of the project
THE SIX CN PEERS IN AFRICA

BOSCO Uganda (Uganda)
Centre for Information Technology and Development (CITAD) (Nigeria)
Centre for Youth and Development (CYD) (Malawi)
Ensemble Pour la Différence (Democratic Republic of Congo)
Tunapanda Institute (Kenya)
Zenzeleni (South Africa)
THE OTHERS IN ASIA AND LATIN AMERICA

**Asia**

- **Alternative Solutions for Rural Communities (ASORCOM)** (Myanmar)
- **BAIF** in 2020 (Gram Marg Rural Broadband in 2019) (India)
- **Common Room Networks Foundation** (Indonesia)
- **Servelots** (India)

**Latin America**

- **AlterMundi** (Argentina): Represented
- **Colnodo** (Colombia)
- **Coolab** (Brazil): 
- **Instituto Bem Estar** (Brazil)
- **Telecomunicaciones Indígenas Comunitarias, A. C. (TIC AC)**

One more TBC.
DIMENSIONS OF THE PROJECT

Work Package one: enhancing the capacity of the meso organizations (which is CITAD) to provide training, mentoring and other support for the micro organizations.

Work Package 2: training, mentoring and support for seven micro organizations to aspire to build and or consolidate on their community network projects.

Work Package 3: work with various stakeholders to address legal, regulatory and policy issues that inhibit the flourishing of community networks in the country.
This project is actually two projects in one, with one supported by FCO (in five country) and another supported by SIDA (in another either countries)

The two are coordinated by Community Network (CN) Team of APC

Within this, there are Teams for each of the Work Packages

There is also a regional coordination team for each continent, the one to which we relate directly with, the African Coordination team is based in Nairobi, Kenya

In each country, there is CN Peer team made of three people from the meso organization who oversee different aspects of the project

Also at the National level, there will be an Advisory Committee made up of the peers, nominees of the micro organizations and representatives of different interest and professional stakeholders who have role to play in making the environment conducive for community networks
MAJOR ACTIVITIES OF THE PROJECT

Capacity building on designing, implementation and running of community networks
Mentoring through visits and experience sharing with other CN Peers
School of Community Network (annual, 2021 and 2022)
Training on regulatory, legal and policy matters and interfacing with regulators
Advocacy for improving regulatory and policy space for the community networks
Research and engagement at local level
WHAT ARE THE EXPECTATIONS FOR THE MICRO ORGANIZATIONS

All micro organizations will be expected to organize and initiate community network at their community level

All micro organizations will expected to nominate one person to serve in the Advisory Committee

All micro organizations will be required to nominate three members to be given training in three different aspects of community networks, namely technical, community engagement and finance/business

All micro organizations will have opportunity for their representatives to attend the School of Community Network that will run twice in the life of the Project

All micro organizations will have opportunity to attend the training sessions for civil society and regulatory agencies
WHAT WE EXPECT IN RETURN FROM THE MICRO ORGANIZATIONS

Commitment to engage with community network initiative at their community levels

Be involved with the advocacy to improve the national policy and regulatory space for the flourishing of community networks

Encourage experimentation, innovation and other relevant activities for digital inclusion in their communities

Provide step down training, especially on technical issues, to members of their communities/associations so as to expand the stock of technical resource for the sustainability of the project

Conceive, propose and implement various digital inclusion schemes

Encourage youth people to experiment with technology
THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

To guide and support the implementation of the project in each of the country, each of the meso organizations is required to constitute an Advisory Committee whose responsibilities will include:

- Provide general oversight in the implementing of the project
- Provide professional expert advice on various issues and engagements of the projects
- Serve to interface with government/regulatory agencies to secure more favourable policy environment on matters relating to the promotion of community networks in the country
- Take part in the annual School of Community network as part of the training and mentoring processes of the project that will benefit the target communities and organizations
- Take part in national and cross national CN Peer exchanges for sharing experience and learning
- Take part in the civil society/regulatory authorities/policy interface meetings to identify, and address legal, policy and regulatory matters that are barriers to the flourishing of community networks in the country.

In the discharge of its responsibilities, members of the Advisory Committee are to develop their guidelines and mode of operation

The meso organization will assist in facilitating the work of the Advisory Committee
WHAT ARE SOME OF THE THINGS THEY WILL DO?

In addition to providing support and advice, members of the Advisory Committee will have opportunity to engage in peer learning with Advisory Committee members in other countries. These exchanges could be online, one-one, or physical to extent that COVID 19 would allow people to travel.

Participate in the Annual School of Community Networks which will hold from next year annually.

Participate in the regulatory/civil society dialogue sessions.

If interested, can participant in the various training programmes that would be organized for the micro organizations.

Participate in the annual conference and seminars of the global LocNet movement.
CONCLUSION

What do we expect to see at the end of the project are:

- A more conducive regulatory and policy environment in the country for the flourishing of community networks
- We hope to see some or even all the micro organizations running and managing successful community networks
- We have to add to a technical and other capacity to support the flourishing of community networks across the county
- We hope to catalyze a national community networks moment that will vigorously champion the cause of connectivity to underserved and unserved communities in Nigeria
- Champion the cause for Nigeria to articulate and implement a National Digital Inclusion Agenda that will address various pockets of digital exclusion and marginalization in the country
- And, finally, we hope to see community networks contributing to addressing the digital divide in the country by providing connectivity to many unconnected communities in the country