



APT SYMPOSIUM ON DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION AND THE UNIVERSAL SERVICE FUND

13 – 15 October 2026, Islamabad, Pakistan

CONCEPT NOTE

1. Background

APT Ministerial Meeting 2025 adopted the Tokyo Statement on harnessing emerging technologies for sustainable, inclusive and equitable digital transformation in Asia-Pacific. Ministers commended the progress in developing broadband infrastructure and services which has contributed to bridge digital divides and promoting sustainable development in telecommunication/ICT.

The Asia-Pacific region is full of digital opportunities but also facing challenges like digital divides. Despite the strong growth in telecommunication/ICT, the region is still left behind in the digital transformation taking into account that:

- 48% of the Asia-Pacific population remains offline.
- While mobile broadband coverage has expanded widely, the “usage gap” — people covered by a signal but not using mobile internet — remains high.
- In many developing and least developed countries of the region, people struggle with high costs of telecommunication/ICT services, limited digital skills, lack of relevant content and services, and difficult terrain that makes infrastructure rollout expensive.
- Remote, island, and mountainous communities face special challenges such as high deployment costs, limited power supply, and sustainability issues. New technologies like Non-Terrestrial Networks (NTNs) including GEO, LEO satellites, HAPS— can help close these gaps but require supportive policy, regulatory, and industry frameworks.
- Other key enablers such as affordable access, sustainable power solutions, and gender inclusion are still uneven across the region.
- Expanding the role of Universal Service Funds (USF)/Universal Service Obligation (USFO)/Universal Service Provisioning/Rural Connectivity Fund/Telecom Development Fund to address new challenges that could raise concerns from contributing telecom companies and might require updates to national legislation or policies to remain effective.

Given these realities, the symposium on “Digital Transformation and the Universal Service Fund” will focus on the measures to bridge the digital divide. This fits the purposes envisioned by the Tokyo Statement and the APT Strategic Plan.

2. Objectives

The objective of the symposium is to provide APT members with a platform to discuss and explore new technologies, policies, and financing models that will ensure that digital

transformation becomes sustainable, inclusive and equitable for all in Asia-Pacific taking into account the roles of the Universal Service Fund (USF) in digital transformation. The symposium aims to encourage dialogue among high level policy makers, regulators and other stakeholders in the region on the following issues:

- a) *Highlight Connectivity and Inclusion Gaps*: Present evidence-based data and country case studies to illustrate the scale and nature of connectivity, usage, and digital inclusion gaps across Asia-Pacific.
- b) *Explore Emerging Technologies and Innovative Models*: Examine how solutions such as non-terrestrial networks (NTNs), renewable-powered infrastructure, and community networks can help connect remote and underserved areas, while enabling new digital and inclusive services.
- c) *Discuss Affordability and Sustainable Financing*: Review policies and models such as device subsidies, instalment-based subscription plans, and rationalized taxation frameworks that can make connectivity more affordable and financially sustainable.
- d) *Promote Digital Readiness and Inclusive Content Ecosystems*: Recognize that inclusion is not only a social goal but also an economic driver. Discuss strategies to improve digital skills, promote gender inclusion, and encourage local content and services that foster meaningful connectivity beyond network access.
- e) *Strengthen Policy and Regulatory Frameworks*: Facilitate peer learning and exchange of best practices among policy makers, regulators, operators, industry, and academia to create enabling environments for innovation. Explore how integrating new technologies and services into USF mandates can accelerate inclusion.
- f) *Foster Regional Collaboration and Partnerships*: Build stronger partnerships among APT member countries and establish linkages with regional and international organizations to promote coordinated regional efforts in bridging the digital divide.

3. Tentative Programme:

Policy makers, regulators, operators, and other stakeholders such as USF administrators from APT member states will engage in interactive discussions and share national success stories, challenges and best practices across the following thematic sessions:

- *Theme A: The Tokyo Statement 2025 and Digital Transformation*
Exploring the key points in the Tokyo Statement 2025 on the essential efforts for harnessing the transformative potential of ICTs to improve the economic prosperity across Asia-Pacific and inclusive digital transformation.
- *Theme B: Extending Infrastructure to Underserved Areas*
Exploring innovative connectivity solutions such as Non-Terrestrial Networks (NTNs), High-Altitude Platform Stations (HAPS), and community Wi-Fi networks to reach remote and underserved regions.
- *Theme C: Financing and Regulation for Affordable Access*
Discussing policy interventions and financial models including device subsidies, instalment-based payment plans, tax incentives, and public-private partnerships (PPPs) to promote affordable and sustainable access.
- *Theme D: Local Content and Digital Services Ecosystem*
Highlighting the role of localized digital services in sectors such as agriculture, health, and education, and promoting digital literacy, inclusion, and content creation in local languages.
- *Theme E: Technology Evolution and Future Readiness*
Evolving technologies such as 5G, AI-driven services, and next-generation satellite systems, with a focus on policy foresight and regulatory preparedness.

The tentative program with a detailed session plan is attached in Annex for your kind information.

4. Expected outcomes:

- Reaffirmation of Universal Services are foundational to inclusive digital transformation
- Policy and regulatory aspects of shifting the scopes of USF from access to meaningful digital transformation
- Sharing experiences and best practices in the region for pilot innovative models and scale successful approaches
- Enhanced greater regional cooperation for a roadmap and call to action.

5. Date and Venue:

13 – 15 October 2026, Islamabad, Pakistan

6. Participants:

The Symposium has been developed for the high-level executives and officials of the policy makers, telecom regulators, industry, regional and international organizations in Asia-Pacific who are involved in policy, regulation and management of digital transformation and USF. The symposium is open to all APT Members, Associate Members, Affiliate Members, as well as international/regional organizations.

It is expected that the Symposium will be attended by about 80 – 100 delegates.

7. Contact:

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Annex 1

Tentative Programme

Time	Tuesday, 13 October 2026
09:30 – 10:30	Opening • Welcome Address by APT Secretariat • Welcome Address by Host Organization • Inaugural Address by Dignitary • Presentation of Token of Appreciation (Group Photograph)
10:30 – 11:00	Coffee/Tea Break
11:00 – 12:00	Session 1: The Tokyo Statement 2025 and Digital Transformation <i>APT Ministerial Meeting 2025 adopted the Tokyo Statement on harnessing emerging technologies for sustainable, inclusive and equitable digital transformation in Asia-Pacific. Ministers commended the progress in developing broadband infrastructure and services which has contributed to bridge digital divides and promoting sustainable development in telecommunication/ICT. Ministers have identified that opportunities remain to further enhance connectivity, promote digital innovation, and harness the benefits of the digital economy.</i> <i>This session intends to explore the key political commitments of the Tokyo Statement and will address, in structured discussion, on essential policy and regulatory issues and a clear policy focused on digital transformation efforts. It will include the key issues such as:</i> – The Tokyo Statement 2025 – Keynote on “Digital transformation policy in a rapidly changing world – Global trends, opportunities, and policy challenges” – Examine how countries design and implement inclusive digital transformation policies – Highlight and illustrate the connectivity and inclusion gaps in Asia-Pacific region – What should be the top digital transformation policy priorities for the next 5 years? – Q&A
12:00 – 14:00	Lunch Break
14:00 – 15:15	Session 2: The Tokyo Statement 2025 and Digital Transformation (Continued) <i>Continue from previous session</i>
15:15 – 15:45	Coffee/Tea Break
15:45 – 17:00	Session 3: The Tokyo Statement 2025 and Digital Transformation (Continued) <i>Continue from previous session</i>

Time	Wednesday, 14 October 2026
09:30 – 10:45	Session 4: Extending Infrastructure to Underserved Areas <i>Extending ICT and telecommunication infrastructure to underserved areas is a critical step toward bridging the digital divide and fostering inclusive digital transformation. It presents a complex set of challenges. These include high capital and operational costs, low population density, difficult terrain, limited access to electricity, and weak commercial incentives for private operators. In addition, regulatory and policy frameworks are often not sufficiently adapted to support innovative deployment models or to reduce investment risks in these areas.</i> <i>Recent advances in technology offer new opportunities to accelerate connectivity in underserved areas. These include low-cost fiber and wireless solutions, expanded mobile broadband coverage, satellite connectivity, community networks, and renewable energy-powered telecom infrastructure. When combined with inclusive business models and community engagement, these solutions can significantly reduce deployment costs while increasing local ownership and resilience.</i> <i>This session provides a platform to examine policy options, regulatory tools, and practical experiences in extending ICT and telecommunication infrastructure to under-served areas. The topics for discussion will include:</i> – <i>Key issues to address for infrastructure gap</i> – <i>Policy and regulatory perspectives including the role of USF, spectrum management for rural connectivity, infrastructure sharing etc.</i> – <i>Technology and deployment models such as optical fiber, mobile broadband, satellite, high-altitude platform systems, community networks and small-scale operators</i> – <i>Industry views</i> – <i>Q&A</i>
10:45 – 11:15	Coffee/Tea Break
11:15 – 12:30	Session 5: Extending Infrastructure to Underserved Areas (Continued) <i>Continue from previous session</i>
12:30 – 14:00	Lunch Break
14:00 – 15:15	Session 6: Financing and Regulation for Affordable Access <i>Affordable access to information and communication technologies (ICTs) and telecommunication services is a cornerstone of inclusive digital transformation and sustainable development. While network coverage has expanded significantly in many countries, affordability remains a major barrier to meaningful connectivity—particularly for low-income households, rural communities, women, persons with disabilities, and small enterprises.</i> <i>Ensuring affordable ICT and telecommunication access requires a careful balance between sustainable investment and effective regulation. On the</i>

	<i>financing side, high capital costs, long payback periods, and demand uncertainty often discourage private investment in low-income or high-cost areas. Regulatory frameworks are equally critical in shaping affordability outcomes.</i> <i>This session provides an opportunity to explore how financing mechanisms and regulatory policies can be aligned to promote affordable, inclusive, and sustainable ICT and telecommunication access. By examining good practices, policy trade-offs, and lessons learned, it aims to support policymakers, regulators, and stakeholders in designing frameworks that expand access, enhance affordability, and ensure that digital transformation benefits all segments of society. The discussion topics will include:</i> <i>– Relationship between access, affordability and meaningful connectivity</i> <i>– Financial mechanisms for affordable access</i> <i>– Regulatory approaches to promote affordability</i> <i>– Case studies and practical experiences</i> <i>– Q&A</i>
15:15 – 15:45	Coffee/Tea Break
15:45 – 17:00	Session 7: Technology Evolution and Future Readiness <i>Rapid technological evolution is reshaping economies, societies, and governance systems at an unprecedented pace. Advances in digital technologies, such as broadband connectivity, cloud computing, artificial intelligence, data platforms, and next-generation networks, are transforming how people access services, participate in markets, and engage with institutions. Inclusive digital transformation requires anticipating technological change while addressing persistent structural gaps.</i> <i>Without deliberate policy action, rapid technology adoption risks widen digital divides. Future readiness therefore depends on aligning technology evolution with policies that promote universal access, affordability, digital skills, and trust.</i> <i>This session provides an opportunity to explore how technology evolution can be harnessed strategically to advance inclusive digital transformation. By examining emerging trends, policy implications, and preparedness strategies, it aims to support decision-makers and stakeholders in building digital ecosystems that are adaptive, inclusive, and capable of delivering long-term development impacts for all. The discussion topics will include:</i> <i>– Infrastructure and platforms for the future</i> <i>– Regulation and adaptive policy frameworks</i> <i>– Human capital and institutional readiness</i> <i>– Q&A</i>
Time	Thursday, 15 October 2026
09:30 – 10:45	Session 8: Local Content and Digital Services Ecosystem <i>The development of local content and a robust digital service ecosystem is essential for maximizing the benefits of ICT infrastructure and ensuring meaningful connectivity. While expanding networks to underserved areas is critical, true digital inclusion depends on the availability of relevant, culturally appropriate, and language-specific content that meets the needs of local communities. A thriving digital service ecosystem—comprising e-government</i>

	<i>services, e-commerce platforms, digital financial solutions, and educational resources—empowers individuals and businesses to leverage technology for socio-economic growth. By promoting local content creation and supporting innovative digital services, stakeholders can drive adoption, enhance user engagement, and stimulate local economies. This approach not only bridges the digital divide but also fosters sustainable development and digital sovereignty.</i> <i>This session provides a platform to explore how local content and digital services ecosystems can be strengthened to support inclusive digital transformation. By examining policy options, good practices, and emerging trends, it aims to inform strategies that empower local creators and service providers, stimulate innovation, and ensure that digital transformation delivers tangible benefits for all segments of society. The discussion topics will include:</i> <i>– Why does local content matter?</i> <i>– How to enable a balanced digital service ecosystem?</i> <i>– Policy, regulatory and financing perspectives to enable local contents and digital service ecosystems</i> <i>– How can stakeholders play their respective roles?</i> <i>– Q&A</i>
10:45 – 11:15	Coffee/Tea Break
11:15 – 12:15	Session 9: Local Content and Digital Services Ecosystem (Continued) <i>Continue from previous session</i>
12:15 – 12:30	Session 10: Wrap-up and Closing – Summary of the Symposium and the way forward – Closing
12:30 – 14:00	Lunch