2024 MEETING OF THE GROUP ON CAPACITY BUILDING INTIATIVES (GCBI)

GENEVA, SWITZERLAND

15 – 17 APRIL 2024

FINAL REPORT

Introduction

1. The Group on Capacity Building Initiatives (GCBI) was held from 15 to 17 April 2024, in Geneva, Switzerland.

2. The meeting was attended by Ms Anne Chantal Ngondji, Ms. Elisa Daigele Bizarria, Eng. Majid Al Madhloum, Dr Toni Janevski, Dr Lidia Stepinska-Ustasiak.

3. The meeting began with opening remarks provided by Mr Cosmas Zavazava, Director, BDT, ITU, who welcomed participants to the first face-to-face GCBI meeting since 2019, highlighting the significance of their presence in Geneva, especially for new members. He congratulated the current GCBI chair, Professor Mustapha Benjillali, and vice chair, Ms Tessie Leva, acknowledging their leadership roles. The Director emphasized the commitment of GCBI members to bridging the digital skills gap, underlining the importance of their efforts towards achieving digital inclusivity.

4. He outlined the progress made since the last meeting in November 2023, including the increase in individuals trained through the DTC initiative and the growth of the ITU Academy user base. Mr Zavazava mentioned the development of an ITU capacity development guideline by the Task Force harmonizing capacity development processes within ITU.

5. He encouraged open dialogue, constructive exchange, and collaborative efforts towards building a more inclusive digital world, highlighting the importance of the meeting's discussions. The Director expressed confidence in the collective wisdom and dedication of the attendees to develop innovative strategies and robust programs that will enhance global capacity development efforts.

6. Eng. Majid Al Madhloum, delivered remarks on behalf of the GCBI chair, not present at the meeting. He emphasized the importance of reflecting on established priorities, such as enhancing the effectiveness of ongoing capacity development initiatives and focusing on partnerships and resource mobilization, to guide the remaining three years of the present GCBI cycle.

7. He recalled the primary focus of the meeting to be on building upon the foundations laid during the last meeting by setting clear objectives, defining activities, establishing timelines, and discussing outreach strategies. Finally, he announced a dedicated session on the impact of AI on capacity development to explore the potential challenges and opportunities it presents.

Meeting Objectives and Expected Outcomes

8. Under this agenda item, the Chair outlined the meeting's objectives, expected outcomes, and revisited the action items generated from the previous meeting.

9. The group noted that its work should focus on:

   a. Alignment as the core of discussions, building a common understanding amongst members and with the CSD team as the basis for providing fruitful advice.

   b. Identify a few key strategic interventions that have the potential to have a big impact on the work of the BDT in the area of capacity development.

Overview of BDT CD work

10. Under this agenda item, the overview of BDT capacity development work was presented by ITU staff, highlighting selected projects, initiatives, and regional-level work including capacity development under technical assistance, covering topics such as Capacity Development, Cybersecurity, Innovation, AI for Good, and Projects.

11. In the presentations, capacity development emerged as a critical component of all the works being done across the thematic areas, with some, such as innovation, rolling out their work through capacity development mechanisms. The presentations also highlighted the overlap of capacity development across different areas with a substantial number of projects having capacity development as a core part of the project.

12. The GCBI encouraged the BDT departments to continue to work closely with each other to ensure that capacity development interventions are aligned and for departments to leverage each other's strengths.

13. GCBI members thanked BDT for sharing the work of the Bureau beyond capacity development. They emphasized the need to be informed of these various areas of work to enable them to advise from an informed perspective. They also indicated that the areas of cybersecurity, innovation and project management are present needs in most countries. They appreciated the information on capacity development work on AI and highlighted the need for ITU to focus more efforts on this topic.

14. The group also noted the development of an ITU capacity development manual by the intersectoral Task Force on Capacity Development. This manual was considered a key document in ensuring a harmonised approach to capacity development across the organization. The group also commended the planned review of the Digital Skills Toolkit as an important document which will assist ITU members with development and implementation of their skills policies

15. The group asked the presenters to share their expectations of the GCBI and the presented expressed:

    a. The need for the group to act as advocates of the work of BDT in capacity development and communicate in their respective fora.

    b. The potential to leverage their networks to attract additional funding to ongoing initiatives.

    c. The need for the group to advise and encourage the exchange of best practices, especially around the evaluation of impact and integration of lessons learned in future activities.

Ideation on needs assessment

16. Under this agenda item, GCBI members engaged in an ideation session on needs assessment, reflecting on the digital skills needs of their respective countries and regions. The session focused on prioritizing these needs and discussing best practices for assessing digital skills requirements. Through round-robin brainstorming, members generated lists of needs, engaged in critical discussions, and examples, with groups providing feedback on each other's lists to enrich the collective understanding.

17. The group noted several levels of digital skills, consistent with the existing differentiation between *basic, intermediate and advanced* skills.

18. Members listed some current priorities, namely: digital literacy, digital awareness, cybersecurity, data and data governance, and artificial intelligence. In addition, they noted the importance of related soft skills and long-term considerations such as critical thinking, ethics or sustainability – acknowledging that "digital" and "smart" must come together.

19. Members also discussed the applicability of such levels *within* a specific theme. Taking the example of Artificial Intelligence (AI), they noted the skills needed as follows:

    a. All citizens should have a basic understanding of AI and know some of its most common uses.

    b. Institutions and organizations such as regulators or operators should have intermediate skills related to the impact and leveraging of AI for their policy areas, projects or businesses.

    c. Specific actors such as vendors or academia should have advanced skills in AI related to programming, new uses and applications in various sectors.

20. Members stressed that such varying levels of skills should be addressed through a variety of interventions, including campaigns, courses, handbooks or guides.

21. The group advised that the BDT should continue to deliver training at different levels of digital skills (basic, intermediate, advanced) cutting across different themes, and prioritize digital literacy and awareness, cybersecurity, big data, governance, artificial intelligence, Internet of Things, future networks and services and associated soft skills.

Digital Skills Toolkit

22. Under this agenda item, the Digital Skills Toolkit was presented by ITU, followed by an ideation session where GCBI members utilized the 6-3-5 method to generate recommendations for updating the toolkit. This process involved members writing down recommendations, presenting them to the group, and collectively iterating on the ideas.

23. The group highlighted the importance of the toolkit, noting the practical challenges associated with conducting assessments and developing strategies at the country level. The group noted that the absence of guiding tools is a challenge for many countries and the ITU should consider developing more tools.

24. In discussing the Toolkit content, members advised that the toolkit should be shortened and its content streamlined to improve usability, focusing on answering "how to" questions. The toolkit should also have an interactive format and relevant use cases. The group proposed:

    a. Streamlining the structure of the toolkit to:

        i. Reduce its overall size and move the case studies to an Annex.

        ii. Present the information in a more systematic and actionable way, including explanatory visuals.

    b. Change to an interactive, searchable format.

    c. Include visuals to make the text more digestible.

    d. Re0Wrire Chapters 8,9,10,11 ensuring that the information captured is current and use recent examples.

    e. Improve sections on stakeholders, evaluating performance and prioritization of skills at the organizational or country level.

    f. Consider adding a section on self-assessment and evaluation approaches for digital skills

25. The members stressed the importance of ensuring that the toolkit is realistic and applicable, taking into consideration challenges on the ground to conduct assessments.

26. The group encouraged the BDT to consider developing a digital skills index or strengthening country-level measurement of digital skills in existing BDT indexes.

27. Finally, members encouraged the BDT to prepare for dissemination and training on the toolkit as an essential component of its success.

GCBI work plan

28. Under this agenda item, the GCBI engaged in a brainstorming session to develop their work plan for the next four years. They discussed and outlined the activities to be implemented, as well as possible associated tasks, objectives, Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), and results (OKRs). In two groups, the GCBI members discussed potential activities, identifying at least two objectives and actionable activities for each objective, followed by a report-back and discussion phase to consolidate their plans.

29. On direction 1: contributing to the enhancement of existing capacity development initiatives, the group came up with the following possible activities:

    a. Identification of possible enhancements to the existing catalogue, especially identifying gaps in attractive topics or the needs of key audiences.

    b. Gathering best practices and advising on avenues to measure success and impact of capacity development activities.

    c. Advising and reviewing the updating of the Digital Skills Toolkit

30. Direction 2: Scaling successful initiatives, programmes and partnerships through targeting and strengthening cross-sectoral collaborations and partnerships from various sectors and amplifying the impact of initiatives the GCBI proposed to:

    a. Accelerate advisory on measures for evaluating the success of capacity development activities

    b. Advise on new trends and needs, including innovations on capacity development

    c. Advise BDT on how to identify and establish partnerships through the following activities,

        i. defining the value proposition for BDT CD work and how this value proposition can be presented to attract more partners.

        ii. identify potential partners which BDT can approach

        iii. Communicate the BDT value proposition to partners in the GCBI members respective regions and facilitate conversations with BDT

        iv. Explore new partnership avenues which can include crowdsourcing of content (not training, but case studies)

        v. Identify measures which can ensure the sustainability and scalability of partnerships.

Outreach

31. Under this agenda item, the GCBI discussed outreach strategies, focusing on both partner and participant engagement. The session covered outreach models for different target audiences, including policymakers, ICT professionals, and citizens for participant outreach, and the private sector, government, NGOs, etc., for partner outreach. Members contributed their ideas on identifying potential partners, pitching value to them, enhancing existing partnerships, and supporting GCBI's outreach efforts. The discussion also encompassed participant outreach strategies, aiming to maximize engagement and participation in BDT capacity development activities across various communities.

32. The group reflected on the strengths of ITU as the UN agency for the Telecom/ICT sector, its global reach, trusted reputation, expertise in standards, AI, spectrum, etc., and its mission to care for and support all stakeholders.

33. Regarding partner engagement, members discussed the possibility of a campaign gathering a handful of key partners as a global partnership on *skilling for the SDGs*, an initiative that should be heavily promoted to in turn attract new partners.

34. Regarding participant engagement, members discussed:

    a. The need to focus on *community facilitators* – established networks or organizations more suited to reach their respective communities. Such an initiative could take the form of attracting "champions" or "pioneers" supporting to disseminate BDT capacity development resources and opportunities.

    b. The need to address current barriers preventing new communities from taking part in BDT capacity development activities, such as languages or disabilities. Members noted that such gaps can be addressed by targeted partnerships.

Resource Mobilization

35. Under this agenda item, the focus shifted to resource mobilization. GCBI members were asked to tackle questions on increasing the chances of positive responses from donors and the role of GCBI in supporting resource mobilization efforts. The process involved proposing solutions, identifying potential challenges, and collaboratively finding ways to mitigate these challenges.

36. The group identified key elements relevant to donors:

    a. Ensuring the visibility of successful existing partnerships (online and in BDT events) as a way to create healthy competition amongst donors and build trust in BDT work.

    b. Creating deep relationships with partners through regular updates on projects, expressing appreciation for contribution and impact reporting, which should align with the SDGs as well as include a "human" element and the indirect broader impact of the donor's contribution on the lives of people.

37. Members then defined potential avenues for the group to advise on this matter, including:

    a. Gather a list of big institutions and donors in their regions as potential partners for BDT capacity development work.

b. Making proposals for successful reporting and defining return on investment.

c. Reflecting on existing partnership benefits and possible enhancements, such as creating different levels of recognition based on the size of donor commitments.

Impact of AI on the future of CD

38. Under this agenda item, the discussion focused on the impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI) on the future of capacity development (CD), exploring the opportunities and threats posed by the adoption of AI. The session was structured to examine how AI influences skills and capacity development needs, as well as training delivery methods. In two groups, the GCBI members embarked on generating ideas regarding two pivotal issues. Group 1 delved into the capacity development and skills required to effectively engage with AI, contemplating the types of skills needed and how the ITU can position itself to meet these evolving demands. Group 2 examined AI's role in capacity development and skills, considering both the positive and negative impacts of AI on skills development and strategize on how ITU can adapt to these changes.

39. The group noted that AI is continuing to evolve impacting skills and being impacted by skills. Therefore, the BDT has to have measures in place to react quickly if it is to take the lead in the AI skills space.

40. The group noted that AI is indeed rendering some skills obsolete, but the risk of it completely replacing human capabilities has not arrived yet. The group noted that the skills needs which are required more and more in a world of AI are soft skills as AI is growing in capabilities of achieving some technical tasks.

41. The group noted that the worker who will be sought after in the future will be one who can manage and harness AI and associated applications and not a worker who can create the applications or do what the application can do. This requires a re-assessment of future skills needs.

42. In light of this, the group emphasised the need for BDT to start looking at soft skills that impact ICT use and enable professionals to harness ICT capabilities.

43. The group emphasised the need for the BDT to embark of AI awareness raising campaigns, noting that many people in the world use AI but they are not aware that they are using AI and therefore cannot appreciate the potential that AI holds

44. The group also noted that while AI brings with it a lot of positive capabilities, online safety is still a concern and therefore capacity development interventions on AI should be paired with cybersecurity measures.

Key outcomes of the meeting and next steps

45. The group noted that its work should focus on:

    a. Building a common understanding of ITU capacity development work amongst members as the basis for providing fruitful advice.

    b. Identify a few key strategic interventions that have the potential to have a big impact on the work of the BDT in the area of capacity development.

46. The overview of BDT capacity development work was presented by ITU staff, highlighting selected projects, initiatives, and regional-level work including capacity development under technical

assistance, covering topics such as Capacity Development, Cybersecurity, Innovation, AI for Good, and Projects

47. Different levels of digital skills (basic, intermediate, advanced) were recognized and prioritized, and are applicable across various themes like AI. It was highlighted that tailored interventions are needed. Current priorities include digital literacy, awareness, cybersecurity, Big Data, governance, artificial intelligence, Internet of Things, future networks and services, and associated soft skills like critical thinking, product and project management as well as ethics.

48. Initial Digital Skills Toolkit revisions were discussed, focusing on shortening and streamlining content and improving usability with an interactive format and relevant use cases. The importance of realistic toolkit applications was stressed, considering the practical challenges in conducting assessments on the ground. Preparations for toolkit dissemination and training were identified as crucial for its success.

49. When discussing avenues for engagement, the group stressed ITU's role as a pivotal UN agency for the Telecom/ICT sector with a global impact. Members outlined ideas to support the work of the BDT through the identification of a handful of global partners around a campaign focused on skilling for achieving the SDGs, which could in turn attract further interest. Regarding participant engagement, they discussed the potential of community facilitators in addressing barriers to taking part in BDT capacity development activities.

50. The group discussed enhancing donor engagement by increasing the visibility of successful partnerships, deepening relationships through regular impactful updates, and strategically advising on donor relations, including recognizing varying levels of donor commitments and defining return on investment.

51. The group emphasized the need for BDT to focus on building a strong understanding of AI, its opportunities and risks, noting that if there is an understanding of what AI is, there could be a better alignment of skills. Awareness of AI should focus on how to use AI to ensure an appreciation of the potential of these technologies.

52. The group defined activities under the two directions of its work, which can be divided between short- and medium-term priorities. Short-term or "quick wins" include: :

    a. Researching and providing a list of potential partners and/or donors from across regions

    b. Creating a value proposition for BDT capacity development and promoting BDT capacity development work, which should be augmented with continuous communication and alignment with SDGs.

    c. Promoting BDT capacity development work

53. Medium-term activities include:

    a. Advising and reviewing the updating of the Digital Skills Toolkit

    b. Advising on best practices for impact evaluation and showcasing of success stories.

54. The next steps proposed are to:

    a. Gather inputs from members who were not present at the meeting for the final report.

    b. Allocate roles and responsibilities between members on the defined activities, creating an action list of terms that the team could implement throughout the year.

    c. Undertake progress reviews and report on progress on a regular basis.

Next meeting of the GCBI

55. The next meeting of the GCBI is planned for the second quarter of 2025

ANNEX 1. List of GCBI members attending the meeting

Region	Name	Functional title	Affiliation	Country
AFR	Ms Anne Chantal Ngondji	Head of Research and Cooperation Division	Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Postes, des Télécommunications et des TIC (SUP'PTIC)	Cameroon
AMS	Ms. Elisa Daigele Bizarria	Specialist	ANATEL	Brazil
ARB	Eng. Majid Al Madhloum	Senior Manager, Digital Capabilities & Awareness	Telecommunications & Digital Government Regulatory Authority	UAE
EUR	Dr Toni Janevski	Full Professor	Faculty of Electrical Engineering and Information Technologies (FEEIT), Ss. Cyril and Methodius University	Republic of North Macedonia
	Dr Lidia Stepinska-Ustasiak	Area Leader, International collaboration and partnerships	Institute of Organisation and Management in Industry "Orgmasz"	Poland