

Executive Summary: Report on the Industry-Focused Stakeholders Engagement Session of the Universal Service Provision Fund (USPF) – 2025

Introduction

The Universal Service Provision Fund (USPF), in collaboration with the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and co-sponsored by the UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (UK FCDO), hosted the Industry-Focused Stakeholders' Engagement Session on March 13, 2025, at the Marriott Hotel Ikeja, Lagos. Themed **“Fostering Connectivity and Access in Unserved and Underserved Communities: Collaborating for Sustainable Growth,”** the event aimed to strengthen partnerships among telecom stakeholders to expand digital inclusion in Nigeria's underserved areas.

Over 120 participants, including policymakers, telecom operators, development partners, and community representatives, engaged in discussions on sustainable connectivity strategies. The session was structured into four segments: Preliminaries, Context-Setting Presentations, Panel Discussions, and Break-out Sessions.

Key Highlights

1. Opening Remarks and Keynote Addresses

- Dr. Bosun Tijani, HM FMCIDE, in his Keynote address emphasized the need for multi-stakeholder collaboration to bridge Nigeria's digital divide, citing initiatives like Project BRIDGE (90,000km fibre optic expansion) and 3MTT (3 Million Technical Talent program).
- Engr. Faruk Yusuf Yabo, PM, FMCIDE, delivered a goodwill message expressing confidence that the session will foster meaningful dialogue that will enhance connectivity in unserved and underserved areas.
- Dr. Aminu Maida, EVC-NCC, stressed strategic partnerships for sustainable connectivity.
- Mr. Ali Drissa Badiel, ITU Area representative for West Africa linked USPF's efforts to the UN's Global Digital Compact.
- Mr. Yomi Arowosafe, SUSPF, delivered opening remarks underscoring the urgent need for collaborative efforts to drive wide network connectivity coverage in underserved and unserved communities across Nigeria.

2. Presentations and Data Insights

- USPF's Achievements: Deployed 1,259km of fibre, 682 Base Transceiver Stations (BTS), and 2,733 computer labs, yet challenges like funding gaps and low stakeholder buy-in persist.
- GSMA Findings: Only 27% of Africa has mobile internet coverage (53% gap in Nigeria). Many USFs are susceptible to political interference resulting in underperformance. Best practices include independent USF governance, renewable energy incentives, and infrastructure sharing.
- Stakeholder Survey: Key hurdles include infrastructure deficits, regulatory bottlenecks, and community resistance.

3. Panel Discussion:

The PM, FMCIDE set the stage for the panel discussion by delivering a synopsis titled ‘*Exploring Sustainable Strategies for Expanding Connectivity through Stakeholder Collaboration in Nigeria's Telecommunications Sector*’. Critical Themes include:

- **Digital Literacy and Capacity Building:** Programs to leverage digital adoption in rural areas.
- **Policy and Regulatory Interventions:** Developing government policies that foster an enabling environment for digital expansion.
- **Infrastructure Development and Optimization:** The need for large-scale investments in connectivity solutions, and the importance of ensuring uptake of infrastructure deployed.
- **Strategic Partnerships:** The importance of collaboration between the government, telecom operators, equipment manufacturers, development agencies and advocacy groups.
- **Community Engagement:** The importance of developing targeted solutions adapted to meet community-specific needs, and the emphasis on community ownership of projects.
- **Sustainability:** Exploring renewable energy solutions and innovative business models to ensure long-term connectivity solutions.

4. Break-out Sessions: Actionable Strategies

Attendees were divided into three (3) groups, where actionable strategies were developed on:

- Funding Mechanisms
- Collaboration
- Capacity Building

5. Communique and Next Steps

The Communique for the event was collated and delivered by Mrs. Somto Nwigwe, USPF, as follows:

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 financial strategies to include alternative funding mechanisms, blended finance models and extended subsidies.
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.

Conclusion

The session reinforced that achieving universal connectivity requires sustained collaboration, 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.

The session ended with a vote of thanks by Mr. Cliff Eribo-Azibanato (USPF).

Prepared by: Universal Service Provision Fund (USPF)

Date: March 2025