

USF as a Financing Mechanism for Community Networks in Kenya

Session 2.3

Progress with Community Networks

Kenya leads the way in incorporating support for CNs from the USF:

- a. CNSP license developed in 2021
- b. Draft USF framework includes support to the establishment of 100 CNs.

For those 100 CNs to be sustainable and provide meaningful connectivity, we propose that CNs are supported in three ways:

- c. Infrastructure deployment;
- d. Capacity building activities; and
- e. Local content development.

These elements are supported by the CA Licensing and Spectrum Sharing Framework for Community Networks

Proposal

Building on the CN framework, establish an initiative with the principal objective of helping:

"to help catalyse initiatives from communities to develop locally-owned connectivity solutions."

Specific objectives of this initiative could include:

- Provision of meaningful connectivity in Kenyan communities;
- Building the technical and managerial capacity of women and men to plan, build, operate and manage their own telecommunication networks and local content according to their own needs;
- Promotion of local innovation at the community level;
- Promotion of gender equality and diversity through the financing of community projects (infrastructure, capacity building and/or content building) that target leadership and participation of women, different age groups, at the community level.

Operationalisation

Proposals could be submitted throughout the year and funding granted until the maximum number of projects, or the maximum amount of funding available in the Program for a given year is reached.

Categories of projects to be considered:

- a. Infrastructure
- b. Capacity building
- c. Local Content Development

Infrastructure

From the CN Framework:

The Authority expressed that it:

"will explore establishing a subsidy for start-up funds for community networks, under special projects, to help catalyse initiative from communities to develop locally-owned connectivity solutions".

Infrastructure

- Funding for infrastructure projects should be made available through a public call, open to holders of a CNSP license or those in the process of obtaining one.
- Infrastructure projects should provide broadband connectivity to citizens either by deploying new infrastructure in places where there was none or by extending and/or upgrading the existing infrastructure in places where a Community Network is already operating.

Infrastructure

Infrastructure projects could last up to 36 months, and divided in three phases, each lasting 12 months:

- Phase 1: Initial infrastructure build
- Phase 2: Networks operation and network expansions and upgrades
- Phase 3: Operational sustainability

After the Phase 1 is completed, CNSP licensees that have successfully complied with the terms of the project, should be allowed to receive funding for Phase 2. Similarly, CNSP licensees that have successfully complied with the terms of the project for Phase 2, should be allowed to receive funding for Phase 3.

Infrastructure

Among the eligible costs for infrastructure projects the following should be considered:

- Active and passive telecommunications infrastructure (equipment costs should not be charged to the end user). Passive infrastructure includes any equipment required to power and/or host the active elements of the infrastructure.
Applicability: all phases
- Personnel costs for the installation, operation and maintenance of the infrastructure, as well as for the management and reporting of the USF project.
Applicability: all phases
- Bandwidth costs.
Applicability: Phase 1 and Phase 2 only.
- Travel and transportation costs

Infrastructure

- An alternative to making bandwidth costs eligible, could be done via reimbursements or agreements with qualified wholesale providers that ease the conditions for community networks to upgrade or downgrade their wholesale connection, as well as reducing their backhaul costs as they establish their sustainability model.
- In the Argentinian Special Program, there is a clause stating that in the case of multiple options with similar conditions, the national fiber optic network, NOFBI in the Kenyan case, should be prioritized.

Infrastructure

- Based on interviews with community networks in Kenya, the budget for infrastructure projects comprising the three phases should range in between USD 50,000 - USD 300,000 per community network.
- These initial infrastructure "startup" grants might be supplemented in future by more substantial "scaling" grants open only to successful recipients of the "startup" grants.
- This would have the virtue of pre-screening candidates with an established track record of operating a community network and being compliant with both their CNSP license and USF grant conditions for one or more years.

Infrastructure

Proposals for infrastructure projects should contain:

- all necessary administrative documents required to justify that the applicant is compliant
- a technical proposal that describes the existing infrastructure and coverage in the area of intervention(if any) as well as the projected network design of the community network; and,
- a project plan with a timeline and a detailed budget, together with a list of materials.

Capacity Building

From the CN Framework:

The published framework suggests that *"the Authority may consider USF projects that contain a demand stimulation and specialised capacity building element."* and for that *"the Authority intends to build partnerships with organisations [...] committed to training, community ICT development and community networking."*

Capacity Building

APC is supporting TunapandaNet in training and mentoring seven community networks and creating a community of practice for CNs within Kenya.

This work directly contributes to the sustainability of the supported organisations. Details of TunapandaNet's work include:

- Selecting the seven local organisations in each based on robust digital inclusion criteria;
- Assessing the training needs of the local organisations and designing and delivering training workshops and a mentorship program that addresses their capacity gaps;
- Developing an initial cost analysis for the infrastructure that each local organisation requires, and facilitating resource mobilisation (i.e. identifying potential funders); and,
- Convening and facilitating online and offline (or in-person) interactions to strengthen the relationships among the local practitioners in Kenya.

Capacity Building

The capacity building focuses on the deployment and operations of network infrastructure, local content creation, sustainability, policy and regulation.

11 organisations are part of this:

- AHERI
- ALIN's Ng'arua Maarifa Center
- Dunia Moja
- Oasis Mathare
- Action pour le Progres Community Network
- Global Innovation Valley
- Ngikkeyokok
- SHOFCO
- Siaya Library Center
- Kijiji Yeetu
- Athi Community Network

Nairobi, Kilifi, Turkana, Siaya, Kisumu, Laikipia and Meru Counties

Peer to peer exchanges, virtual mentorship workshops with the aim of building communities of practice

Capacity Building

The model developed by TunapandaNet could be turned into an ongoing program supported by the USF. Among the eligible costs for such a mentorship initiative, the following should be considered:

- Personnel costs to coordinate and implement the training and mentoring program.
- Stipends, including communication and equipment allowances, for the mentees.
- Travel, accommodation, and related expenses for the physical gatherings required in the program.
- Consulting fees for professionals conducting the cost analysis.
- Training toolkit.

Any training programs for women should include a budget for children or family care expenses while women are receiving training otherwise they can seldom attend.

Development of Local Content and Services

From the CN Framework:

It goes on to propose: "the authority will examine ways of supporting bottom-up digital skills capacity building initiatives by groups and organisations working within communities, who are in a strategic position to design, roll out and implement programs that are context-appropriate. This approach also has the added benefit of encouraging communities to not only consume but create for the digital ecosystem, for instance, in addressing the gap in relevant content and local languages, as well as federating research and data collection on impacts of ICTs in communities."

Development of Local content and Services

USF support for local content development is essential to help ensure the sustainability of the local network and to maximise the impact of the community network.

Without appropriate local content and applications, there will be a lack of demand for the network services and fewer overall customers and usage which will inhibit the recovery of operating costs.

Support for local content development can occur at two levels:

- Projects benefiting one single community
- Project benefiting multiple communities

Development of Local Content and Services

Individual communities could benefit from direct assistance to the community for local content development projects that could include the following examples:

- Digitisation of local heritage information and cultural practises;
- Recording biodiversity;
- Monitoring environmental quality/pollution;
- Recording traditional agricultural techniques;
- Production of crop and livestock husbandry advice; and/or,
- Communicate with other community members in audio and video formats through local streaming platforms

Development of Local Content and Services

Multiple communities, particularly rural, could benefit from projects designed to solve problems common to all if larger amounts are made available to provide/develop local content and services that could include the following examples:

- Translation of existing services into local languages;
- Development of accessibility options for the disabled;
- Provision of electronic payments/banking services in areas outside GSM/Mobile coverage;
- Provision of various local govt services such as land registration and licensing; and/or;
- Provision of e-government, postal and financial services via physical intermediaries to provide electronic services to non-literate groups (e.g. like the eDosts in India or Infopreneurs in South Africa).

Evaluation of Projects

The evaluation and selection of the projects should be conducted by a committee of men and women of different backgrounds established by the USF board.

Beyond meeting the administrative and technical requirements, including the budgetary limitations, projects that foster women inclusion and engagement will be prioritised.

The evaluation committee can request additional information or documentation from the applicant, as well as suggest modifications to the project.

The total cost of the proposed program: Infrastructure Projects

- 10 Grants in 2022 (2022 - 2024)
- 20 Grants in 2023 (2023 - 2025) (Managing 30 projects this year)
- 30 Grants in 2024 (2024 - 2026) (Managing 60 projects this year)
- 40 Grants in 2025 (2025 - 2027) (Managing 100 projects this year)

With an average of 75K USD per project

The total cost of the proposed program: Capacity-Building Projects

APC is already committed to funding a training and mentoring project during 2022/2023.

Another cohort starting in 2023/2024

Another cohort starting in 2024/2025

Another cohort starting in 2025/2026

If the APC program is used as an example, then 600K will be required for training and mentoring at least 100 people from at least 35 communities.

The total cost of the proposed program: Local Content Development Projects

In the first category (individual CN support) 3 USD each:

- 5 Grants in 2022 - 15K
- 10 Grants in 2023 - 50K
- 20 Grants in 2024 - 60K
- 30 Grants in 2025 - 90K
- 40 Grants in 2026 – 120K

In the second category (multiple CN support) 30K USD each:

- 2 Grants in 2022 - 60K
- 5 Grants in 2024 - 150K
- 5 Grants in 2026 – 150K

Recommendations

- Awareness raising - community based projects, community media make them aware of this possibility so they, in turn make others aware, and even maybe apply too.
- Building capacity for the communities to apply for the license and the the USF (the application could a deliverable for those participating in the school)
- Consult with community networks representatives or invite them to the decision making structures of the fund.
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