

# “Universal Service Fund Modernization in a Post-COVID19 World”

## Capacity Building Workshop

22-23 June 2022

13:00 -15:00 hrs (UTC+7)

Virtual Mode via Zoom

### Concept Note

#### 1. Background

The Bangkok Declaration, commemorating the seventy-fifth anniversary of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), called for member states to work together to enhance regional connectivity and improve digital cooperation. This includes cooperation in “closing digital connectivity divide...and promoting inclusive digital economy and society,” through regional platforms such as the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway.

Digital connectivity is an essential resource for economic, social, and cultural development, but many communities in Central, South, and East Asia continue to contend with limited or unaffordable broadband internet access, particularly in rural and isolated locations. Many nations in these regions have adopted universal service funds (USF) to enhance digital connectivity for disadvantaged communities.

Many USF programs are adapting to address the needs created by an economy increasingly driven by internet-enabled mobile devices and applications. This includes updating transparency in management revenue and spending models, seeking new forms of partnership with the private sectors, and deploying USF in innovative ways to provide maximum benefit of connectivity for communities and in addressing the gaps in finances.

As noted by the UN Secretary General’s Roadmap for Digital Cooperation and UNESCAP AP-IS objectives, USF policies and programs must evolve to obtain appropriate resources, scope, and priorities, while complementing national broadband strategies in expanding connectivity in covering uneconomic areas. Such programs have the potential to achieve numerous sectoral development objectives for financial inclusion, literacy, and healthcare, among others.

#### 2. Objectives

- To enhance knowledge of Universal Service Fund programs
- To facilitate questions and follow-on consultations with States seeking to improve USF programming

#### 3. Venue and Date / Meeting Mode:

- Venue: Virtual meeting via Zoom
- Date: 22-23 June 2022 13:00-15:00 (Bangkok, UTC+7)

#### **4. Invited Participants**

- Members and associated members of the Asia Pacific Information Superhighway (AP-IS) initiative
- Partner organizations including UN agencies

#### **5. Organizers**

- Working Group 1 of AP-IS with the support of AP-IS Secretariat (IDS/ESCAP)

#### **Contact Info**

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