BACKGROUNDER

Know all you need to know about the 3rd edition of the ATU Africa Innovation Challenge (2023)

Theme: Innovating for Digital Inclusion: Solutions to Bridge the Digital Divide in Africa

Introduction

The ATU Africa Innovation Challenge 2023 is an ecosystem-based competition aimed at supporting innovators in Africa's telecommunications sector. This competition will be exclusively open to Universities and other Higher Learning Institutions across the continent. The theme for this edition is **"Innovating for Digital Inclusion: Solutions to Bridge the Digital Divide in Africa."** Through this challenge, the African Telecommunications Union (ATU) seeks to inspire and recognize ground-breaking solutions that address the digital divide, enabling equitable access to telecommunications/ICTs services and promoting inclusive development across Africa.

Background

Africa's telecommunications/ICTs landscape presents both challenges and opportunities for innovation. While significant progress has been made in expanding connectivity, a substantial digital divide still persists. Many communities, particularly in rural and underserved areas, are hindered from participation in the digital economy due to factors such as: underdeveloped infrastructure; lack of affordable internet access; limited digital skills training; inadequate mobile technology solutions; lack of localized content; ineffective policy and regulatory frameworks; limited adoption of satellite and alternative technologies, inadequate support for entrepreneurship and innovation, among others. The ATU recognizes that bridging this digital divide and doing away with factors that facilitate the divide, is crucial for Africa's socio-economic development, as it empowers people and communities.

Rationale

Universities and institutions of higher learning play a crucial role in facilitating and promoting transformative progress across multiple industries. With their wealth of expertise and abundant resources, these institutions have the potential to serve as a catalyst for driving innovation and addressing the ongoing digital divide, particularly in underserved communities. Leveraging this advantage, the ATU Africa Innovation Challenge 2023 assumes a collaborative approach that is designed to propel the telecommunications/ICTs sector forward, laying the foundation for a connected and empowered Africa and having at its centre, the African youth.

Objectives

Primary Objectives

● Cultivating a culture of innovation and research within institutions of higher learning in Africa, with a specific focus on the telecommunications/ICTs sector, to stimulate advancements and breakthroughs.

● Facilitating comprehensive digital inclusion across Africa by leveraging the expertise and resources of institutions of higher learning, effectively bridging the digital divide and empowering underserved communities.

● Nurturing collaborative ecosystems that unite universities, higher learning institutions, and industry stakeholders to propel the progress of the telecommunications/ICTs sector in Africa, encouraging knowledge exchange, research partnerships, and technological advancements.

Secondary Objectives

● To showcase and recognize outstanding solutions that contribute to bridging the digital divide in Africa.
● To provide a platform for networking, mentorship, and partnership opportunities for participants.
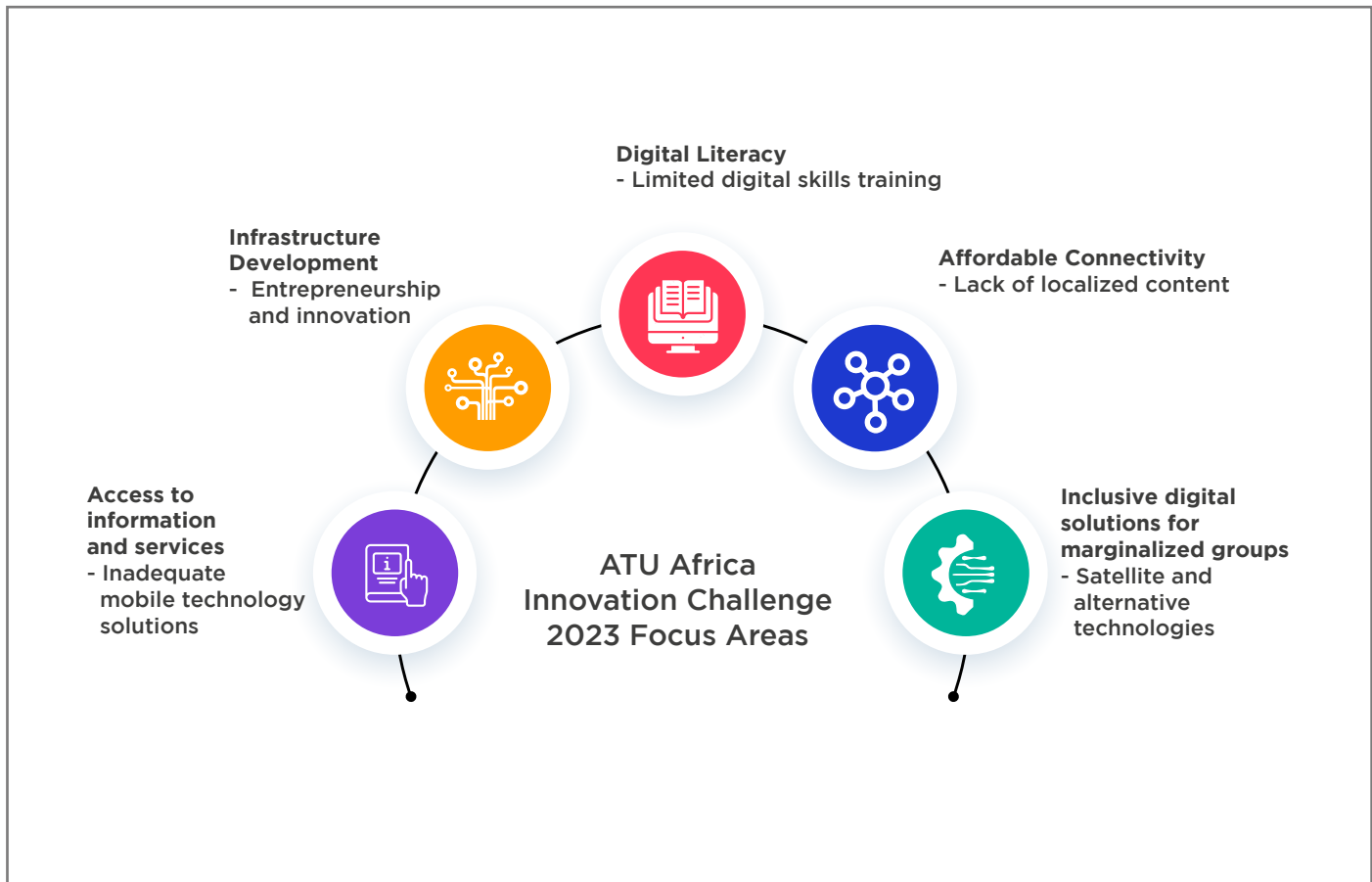● To facilitate the transfer of best practices among stakeholders.

Scope

The ATU Africa Innovation Challenge 2023 will invite participation from universities and institutions of higher learning ONLY within Member States of ATU.
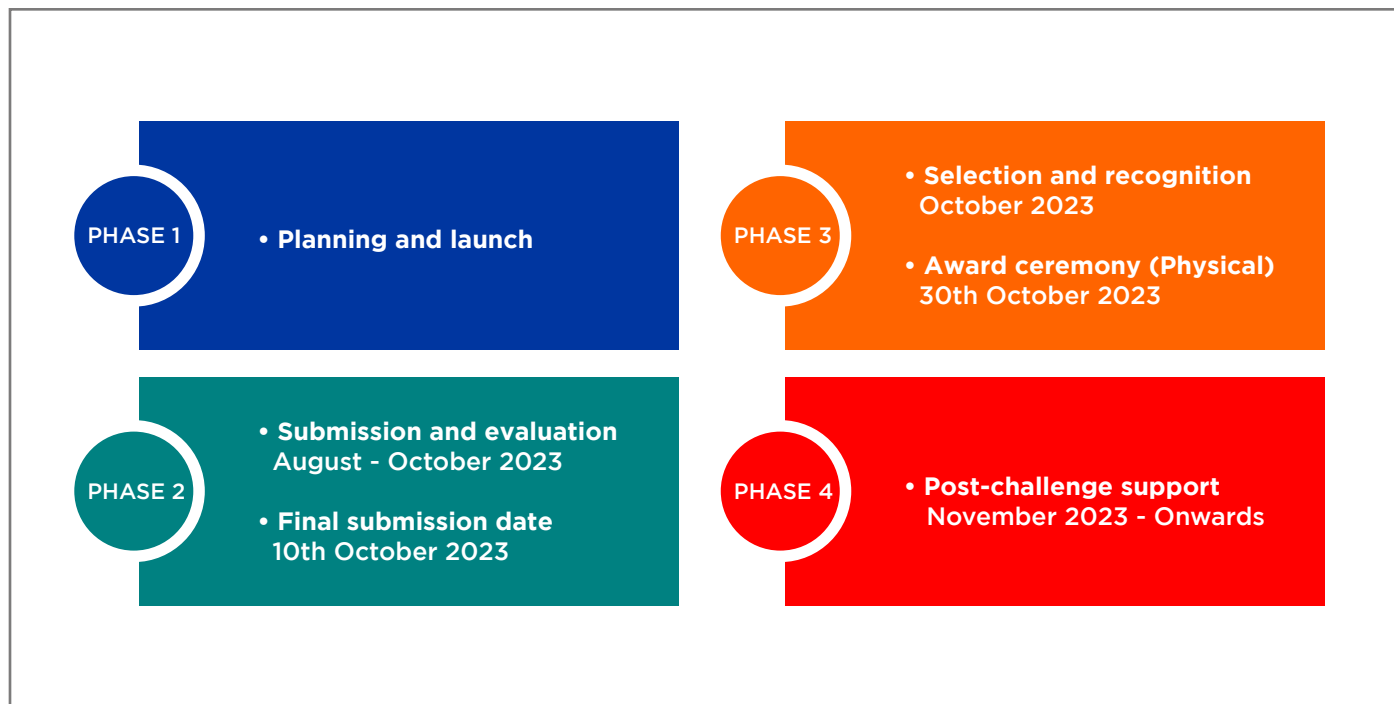
Theme

The focus areas for this competition will revolve around the theme "Innovating for Digital Inclusion: Solutions to Bridge the Digital Divide in Africa." Participating institutions are encouraged to propose solutions that address challenges such as affordable connectivity, infrastructure development, digital literacy, access to information and services, and inclusive digital solutions for marginalized groups.

Digital Literacy
- Limited digital skills training

Infrastructure Development
- Entrepreneurship and innovation

Affordable Connectivity
- Lack of localized content

Access to information and services
- Inadequate mobile technology solutions

Inclusive digital solutions for marginalized groups
- Satellite and alternative technologies

ATU Africa Innovation Challenge 2023 Focus Areas

Milestones of the competition

The ATU Africa Innovation Challenge 2023 consists of four distinct phases. The first phase; **planning and launch**, sets the groundwork for the challenge, defining its objectives and rules. In the second phase; **submission and evaluation**, innovators from across the continent are invited to submit their ground-breaking ideas. These ideas are then thoroughly evaluated based on their feasibility, impact, and alignment with the challenge's goals. The third phase, **selection and recognition**, involves identifying the most promising solutions and honouring the creators. The finalists receive recognition for their exceptional work and are given the opportunity to further develop their ideas. Finally, in the **post-challenge support** phase, selected participants receive support and resources to refine their innovations and bring them to fruition, driving positive change in Africa and beyond.

PHASE 1
• **Planning and launch**

PHASE 3
• **Selection and recognition**
October 2023

• **Award ceremony (Physical)**
30th October 2023

PHASE 2
• **Submission and evaluation**
August - October 2023

• **Final submission date**
10th October 2023

PHASE 4
• **Post-challenge support**
November 2023 - Onwards

Competition Format

i) Eligibility Criteria

The competition is open to all universities and higher learning institutions based in Africa and recognized or accredited by countries' ministries in charge of education. Participating universities or higher learning institutions MUST be from countries that are Member States of ATU and MUST be operating in Africa and each institution can only submit one (1) entry for the Challenge. The entry submitted for evaluation by the institution must fall under any of the topical issues provided, should be ongoing for at least 1 year and must be the participant's own work.

ii) Application Process

Interested participants must log in to the **ATU Africa Innovation Portal** and submit a concept note outlining their solution relating to "Innovating for Digital Inclusion: Solutions to Bridge the Digital Divide in Africa", along with a detailed implementation plan and in accordance with the submission form. Participants will also provide prototypes, demos, or proof-of-concepts to support their solutions as may be required by the submission parameters.

iii) Who Can Apply?

The ATU Africa Innovation Challenge 2022 is open to ALL universities and institutions of higher learning from **AFRICAN COUNTRIES** that are Member States of ATU and that have programmes that focus on closing the digital gap and empowering marginalized communities,

iv) Guiding Principle of all Applications

The university/institution of higher learning will be required to submit a unique and pioneering practice within their institution that addresses the pressing need to close the digital gap and empower marginalized communities. In addition, the submitted practice should demonstrate inclusivity, measurable impact and potential for scalability, ensuring sustainable access to digital resources and opportunities for underprivileged individuals. This can take the form of an initiative/programme supporting youth in technology within the confines of the Challenge theme, and can take the shape of any of the sub-thematic areas pictured below as will relate to the theme, **"Innovating for Digital Inclusion: Solutions to Bridge the Digital Divide in Africa".**

5G Innovation Labs

Rural Connectivity Solutions

Telecommunications Infrastructure Optimization

Telehealth Solutions

Smart Agriculture Initiatives

Research Partnerships

Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR) Applications

Digital Skills Training Programs

Innovative E-learning Platforms

Satellite Communication Solutions

Internet of Things (IoT) Integration

Cloud Computing Solutions

Enhancing Digital Literacy in Remote Areas

Network Resilience and Disaster Recovery Solutions

Mobile App Development

Mobile Data Optimization Strategies

Innovative Payment Systems

Localization of Telecommunications Services

Establishment of Mobile Tech Hubs

v.   Evaluation Methodology

Submissions will be evaluated based on the following criteria: innovation, feasibility, scalability, impact, and sustainability as shown in the table below. A panel of experts from industry, and the ATU, will assess the submissions. Shortlisted participants will be invited to present their solutions to the panel and respond to questions. The evaluation process will be objective, fair, and transparent, ensuring a level playing field for all participants.

Category	Final Selection Criteria	Maximum Number of Points
1	**Relevance** • Relevance to the theme, without which all scores are voided. • Relevance to the African set-up • Relevance to a specific economic and/or social problem • Potential of the proposed solution.	10
2	**Potency** • Economic and social potential. • Novelty. • Scalability. • Sustainability.	40
3	**Solution** • Clear problem solving • Readiness and usability. • Proposed solution offers continuous benefits for an identified target group of users.	40
	Excellence • Capacity to be an industry leader	10
Total		**100**

Prizes

The winning institutions of the ATU Africa Innovation Challenge 2023 will receive financial support, in-kind awards as well as value recognition for their work.

RANKING	CASH AWARD	ATU, ECOSYSTEM STAKEHOLDERS RECOGNITION AWARD	IN-KIND AWARD
Position 1	**USD 20,000** worth of direct injection into the programme as will be determined at the pitching stage	**2023 ATU Best** Ecosystem Practice in Africa addressing the digital gap and empowering marginalized communities **(Branded trophy and certificate)**	**I.**Attend a boot camp organized by ITU and ATU to scale up and amplify their practices; **II.**Have their practices recognized by ITU and ATU as an "Ecosystem stakeholders Best Practice" that can be scaled and amplified across Africa **III.**Showcase their best practices in a personalized virtual booth at select Global Innovation Forums organised by ATU, ITU and partners and connect to a community of like-minded stakeholders; **IV.**Knowledge transfer training by experts identified by ATU and partners **V.**Mentoring by industry experts and networking events with potential investors, partners, and stakeholders
Position 2	**USD 10,000** worth of direct injection into the programme as will be determined at the pitching stage	**1st Runners Up**, 2023 ATU Best Ecosystem Practice in Africa addressing the digital gap and empowering marginalized communities **(Branded trophy and certificate)**	
Position 3	**USD 5,000** worth of direct injection into the programme as will be determined at the pitching stage	**2nd Runners Up,** 2023 ATU Best Ecosystem Practice in Africa addressing the digital gap and empowering marginalized communities **(Branded trophy and certificate)**	
Position 4-10	Certificate		

Other benefits to all ten finalists include:

- Outstanding participants may have the opportunity to access incubation or acceleration programs tailored to their needs.
- Enhanced visibility and exposure, enabling them to connect with clients, collaborators, and market opportunities.
- Further collaborations and partnerships with industry stakeholders and government agencies may be explored beyond the competition.

Partnerships and Stakeholder Involvement

The ATU recognizes the importance of partnerships and stakeholder involvement in the success of the competition. Relevant stakeholders, including government agencies, industry associations, telecommunications/ICTs companies, investors, and academic institutions, will be actively engaged throughout the process. The ATU aims to establish long-term relationships and knowledge sharing among stakeholders, ensuring sustainable impact beyond the competition. Areas where partnership will be required to implement this Challenge include:

	Financial support for:
	Cash Awards
	Promotion (Advertisement) of the Challenge to reach audiences in all 51 Member States
	Venue rental and event management for the awards ceremony
	Travel of the finalists and technical team to the venue of the award ceremony
	Development and maintenance of the competition website or platform
	Administrative costs associated with organizing the competition
	Translation services to ensure materials are accessible in multiple languages
	Technical expertise for:
	Mentorship and capacity building
	Potential collaboration opportunities
	Assistance in evaluating and selecting competition participants
	Advisory services for participants to refine and improve their solutions
	Testing and validation of prototypes or pilot projects

Monitoring and Evaluation

The ATU Africa Innovation Challenge 2023 will implement a robust monitoring and evaluation framework to assess the competition's outcomes and impact. Key performance indicators (KPIs) will be established, including the number and diversity of applications received, the quality and scalability of winning solutions, the impact on bridging the digital divide, and the sustainability of implemented projects. Data collection, analysis, and reporting mechanisms will be employed to ensure transparency, accountability, and continuous improvement.

Conclusion

The ATU Africa Innovation Challenge 2023 is a transformative platform that aims to address the digital divide in Africa by promoting digital inclusion. Supporting innovators from universities and higher learning institutions is ATU's entry point to bridge the digital gap and ensure equitable access to telecommunications/ICTs services across the continent. The ATU remains committed to executing the competition with transparency, fairness, and the highest standards of professionalism, driving the growth of the telecommunications/ICTs sector and ensuring socio-economic development in Africa.