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**OPERATIONS AND TECHNOLOGY COMMITTEE (OTC)
24th, 28th AUGUST 2023 ARUSHA, TANZANIA**

DIGITALIZATION AND INNOVATION WORKING GROUP (DIG) REPORT

1. Subject Digitalization and Innovation Working Group (DIG) Report	References/Paragraphs PAPU Action Plan 2022-2025
2. Decision expected <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Adopt the Report;• Consider Recommendations of the Working Group.	

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Digitalization and Innovation Working Group (DIG) held its meeting virtually on 25th April 2023. During the Working Group's meeting, a number of issues on the agenda were discussed and deliberated on, as indicated below.

2.0 THE MAIN ISSUES TABLED AND DISCUSSED

The following salient issues were deliberated during the meeting:

i) Financial Services Activities

- Report on PAPU-IFAD Financial Services Webinar;
- Forthcoming events on Financial Services.

ii) Digitalization of Postal Services

- Review of Questionnaire on Digitalization of Postal Services;
- Study on improvement of digitalization of Postal Services in Africa;
- Integrated E-commerce Platform for Africa;
- Smart Post Office Project: Digitalization Experience Sharing and Benchmarking.

3.0 REPORT SUBMISSION

The detailed report for the Working Group meeting is annexed herewith.

4.0 DECISIONS EXPECTED

The report is submitted for the Committee to:

- Adopt the Report;
- Consider Recommendations of the Working Group.



DIGITALIZATION AND INNOVATION WORKING GROUP (DIG) REPORT

Virtual Meeting, 25th April 2023

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Digitalization and Innovation Working Group (DIG) meeting was held virtually on 25th April 2023 from 0900 hours to 1130 hours GMT.

2.0 REMARKS

2.1 Welcome Remarks by the Chairperson

The Chairperson, Mr. Abdaty Ka of Senegal, called the meeting to order and commenced the deliberations for the day at 09:08 GMT by delivering his welcome remarks to all participants in the meeting. He commended the participants for attending the meeting in large numbers.

The Chairperson pointed out that digitalization and innovation speak about modernization. He noted that how business is conducted is changing and leveraging ICT is a key driver to modernization and enhancement of quality-of-service delivery. He stressed that the digitalization of postal services required investment. Hence, he acknowledged and appreciated the implementation of the Study on Improvement of Digitalization of Postal Services funded by the Group La Poste France. The Chairman concluded by wishing everyone in the meeting fruitful deliberations.

2.2 Opening Remarks by the PAPU Secretary General

The Secretary General, Dr. Sifundo Chief Moyo, expressed gratitude to the Chairman, Mr. Abdaty KA, for his guidance and leading the work of the Digitalization and Innovation Working Group as well as participating in other meetings organized by the General Secretariat. He thanked participants for sparing time to attend the meeting.

The SG reiterated that the Working Group was created to drive the digitalization of postal services in Africa and track digitalization developments and innovation trends in the global postal sector. The advent of the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated that the Post to speedily digitize their operations, re-think their services and find new ways to do business to be resilient; and relevant hence the African Post should take heed and adapt to the global norm.

According to the Consolidated Action Plan for the Period 2022-2025, the Digitalization and Innovation Working Group is mandated to fulfill the following broad objectives:

- ✓ Development of a Model Digital Post Office;
- ✓ Improvement of Digital Infrastructure and modernization of operations;
- ✓ Enhancement of Digitalization of Postal Services;
- ✓ Development of Postal home-grown digital innovations;
- ✓ Ensure capacity building, benchmarking on best practices, and sharing of experiences.

In this regard, the PAPU Digitalization and Innovation Working Group is, therefore, the right platform for African Designated Operators to discuss and be guided on issues of common interest in this realm.

Lastly, the Secretary General pledged the unwavering support of the General Secretariat to the work of the Working Group and wished them fruitful deliberations.

3.0 CONFIRMATION OF BUREAU

3.1 Working Group Bureau

The Chairperson asked for volunteers to fill the position of the 2nd Vice Chair and Rapporteur. After the meeting, South Africa informed the General Secretariat of their desire to be the 2nd Vice Chair of the Working Group.

The Working Group Bureau is therefore set up as follows:

Chairperson:	Senegal
1 st Vice Chairperson:	Uganda
2 nd Vice Chairperson:	South Africa
Rapporteur:	Vacant
Secretariat:	PAPU General Secretariat

3.2 Participation

3.2.1 Member States

The meeting was attended by over 80 participants from the following PAPU Member States: Algeria, Angola, Benin, Burkina Faso, Chad, Congo Republic, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Morocco, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Tanzania, Tunisia, and Uganda.

3.2.2 PAPU General Secretariat

The PAPU Secretary General, Dr. Sifundo Chief Moyo, was in attendance leading the General Secretariat Team.

4.0 ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

The General Secretariat presented the draft agenda and proposed a change in the order of discussion for items under agenda item 5 by presenting item ii) before item i) The agenda was adopted after accepting the change in the order of presentation of the documents.

5.0 FINANCIAL SERVICES ACTIVITIES

A number of activities were undertaken in the implementation of the Digitalization and Innovation Working Group Action Plan. The General Secretariat reported on Financial Services Activities implemented since the 40th Administrative Council Session held in July 2022.

5.1 Report on PAPU-IFAD Financial Services Webinar

The Report of the Financial Services Webinar held in collaboration with the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), on 2nd December 2022 was tabled by the General Secretariat.

This Global Forum on Remittances, Investment, and Development (eGFRID) Webinar held virtually and titled, **'The Role of African Post Offices in the Rural Remittance Market: Towards Recovery and Resilience through Digital and Financial Inclusion'**, was held under the theme, ***"Leveraging African Postal networks in innovating rural access to remittances and financial services."***

The Webinar encompassed the sharing of insights, experiences, challenges, and lessons learned during the Covid-19 crisis and the recovery period by experts from both the public and private sectors.

Uganda Post provided an update on the project quoted by the Eurogiro presenter during the Webinar. The Post Bank project is funded by IFAD, with Eurogiro being an implementation partner. Uganda informed the meeting that the implementation of the project commenced in January 2023, and Uganda Post was serving the rural population with remittances being collected at Post offices across the country.

5.2 Forthcoming Events on Financial Services

The General Secretariat informed the meeting of the forthcoming Financial Services activities as follows:

- i) Global Forum on Remittances, Investment, and Development (GFRID) Summit 2023, to be held in Nairobi, Kenya, from 14th to 16th June 2023;
- ii) PAPU Digital Financial Services Workshop to be held from 13th to 14th September 2023.

5.3 Recommendations

The recommendations from the GFRID Webinar were as follows:

- i. Designated Operators should attend such fora to keep abreast with developments in the global market and benchmark on best practices;
- ii. Regulators and Governments should recognize the Post as a partner in enhancing financial inclusion through the provision of remittance and other financial services hence they should provide an enabling environment and appropriate regulations;
- iii. Digital transformation in the provision of financial services is the global norm, hence, Post Offices in Africa should not be left behind;
- iv. Development partners should collaborate with the Post to provide financial services in marginalized areas.

6.0 DIGITALIZATION OF POSTAL SERVICES

A number of digitalization activities were undertaken under the Digitalization and Innovation Working Group. The meeting also discussed some activities that need to be implemented as part of the Working Group Action Plan,

6.1 Study on Improvement of Digitalization of Postal Services in Africa

The General Secretariat provided an update on the Study on Improvement of the Digitalization of Postal Services in Africa, which the African Union Commission did in collaboration with UPU and PAPU. Le Groupe La Poste France funded the study.

The Study Report was validated by the Member States involved on 31st March 2023. Inputs made during the validation meeting will be incorporated into the final version of the report, which the African Union Commission will publish.

The meeting was informed that after the finalization of the report, Phase 2 – Implementation will commence, which will also be supported by the sponsors, and the criteria for selecting the participating countries will be determined. Phase 3 of the project will be the evaluation stage.

The report was adopted thereafter.

6.2 Review of Questionnaire on Digitalization of Postal Services

One of the activities to be undertaken by the Digitalization and Innovation (DIG) Working Group is to solicit information on the Status of the Implementation of Digitalization in the Member States by administering a questionnaire.

In this regard, the General Secretariat presented a drafted questionnaire to gather information on the status of implementation of digitalization by all member Designated Operators, for consideration by the Working Group. The questionnaire's objective was to gather information on the situation against the recommendations outlined in the AUC report on the study on Improvement of Digitalization of Postal Services, and other digitalization initiatives.

The questionnaire was reviewed and approved for circulation to Member States. The deadline for the return of completed questionnaires to the General Secretariat was set on 26th May 2023.

6.3 Integrated E-commerce Platform for Africa

The General Secretariat made a presentation on the implementation of an Integrated E-commerce Platform for Africa. Senegal informed the meeting that they were developing an integrated e-commerce platform and would update the working group on the progress.

6.3.1 Establishment of an Expert Team

An Expert team was established to develop an Integrated E-commerce Platform for Africa. The Team comprises representatives of Africa's five sub-regions as follows:

- East - Tanzania and Uganda;
- Central - Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC);
- North - Tunisia;
- South - Lesotho and Malawi;
- West - Nigeria and Senegal.

The Expert Team's mandate is to develop a framework for an e-commerce platform and report to the Working Group.

6.3.2 Working Group Meeting with Partners

The General Secretariat organized an online meeting of the Digitalization and Innovation Working Group on 27th July 2023. During the meeting, two presentations were made as follows:

- i) E-Commerce Platform - Ship2MyId;
- ii) Cyber Security – TAO Digital

The purpose of the meeting was for the partners to share insights into e-commerce platform development as well as cyber security with the Working Group members. This meeting, among others, set the right platform through the PAPU Digitalization and Innovation Working Group for Expert Team to gain some knowledge on how the e-commerce platform could best be developed.

The Expert Team members were requested to take notes during the presentations and were also free to contact the presenters for further guidance.

As a way forward, the Expert Team was implored to continue their work as mandated by the Working Group and report back as soon as possible.

6.4 Smart Post Office Project: Digitalization Experience Sharing and Benchmarking

Senegal and Tanzania presented on implementing the smart Post Office projects in their respective countries. The two countries were commended for their presentations and the digital innovations they implemented in their respective Designated Operators.

7.0 DATE AND VENUE OF NEXT MEETING

The General Secretariat informed the meeting that the date and venue of the next meeting of the Digitalization and Innovation Working Group (DIG) will be communicated once consultations were finalized.

The Chairperson of the Working Group is expected to present the Working Group's Report and its Recommendations to the Operations and Technology Committee meeting during the 41st Administrative Council Session.

8.0 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

No other business was discussed

9.0 CLOSING

In his closing remarks, the Secretary General, thanked participants for their attendance and active participation and reaffirmed the General Secretariat's support in the work of the Digitalization and Innovation Working Group. The Chairperson thanked everyone for their contributions during the meeting and closed the meeting at 11:40 hours (GMT).