# GIGA CONNECTIVITY FORUM2024

giga | unicef for every child | ITU

# Report

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# Content

# 01 | Foreword


**As the 2030 deadline for the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) approaches with many lagging targets, inclusive access to quality education remains an urgent need. The Giga initiative was recognized as a key commitment to meeting that need in the recently adopted Global Digital Compact, based on its mission to help connect schools to the internet and advance progress towards the SDGs.**

The first Giga Connectivity Forum (GCF) was designed to accelerate this mission.

In the following report on the GCF, held from July 8-10, we document the outputs from the sessions, workshops and panel discussions. As the report demonstrates, the GCF's premise of focused, in-person knowledge sharing yielded significant benefits for all who took part.

Our hope was to build a stronger sense of community around the challenging journey to school connectivity. Thanks to you, we have achieved that. The GCF owes its success to your enthusiasm and commitment to bringing online learning and economic development to your communities by connecting schools to the internet. Many of those who participated noted that it was their first experience of an event of this magnitude focused exclusively on school connectivity and its related issues.

Specifically, we thank you for all the great feedback you gave us during the deep-dive sessions on Giga's various tools for connectivity. Along with the actionable information country delegates took away from these sessions, the Giga team also gained valuable insights. We have presented a summary of your insights in this report. This feedback will serve as a call to action for us as we design and improve our tools to ensure they are as responsive and effective as possible.

This event also demonstrated that Giga is expanding its reach beyond connectivity by getting involved in partnerships to promote sustained investment, digital skills, affordable devices and child online security, electrification, data costs and more.

Giga has big plans to address many of the capacity development needs raised during the GCF. Our Connectivity Centre and Learning Hub are set to open in Geneva by the end of the year. Operated by ITU, this global innovation hub will offer training activities in all phases of the school connectivity process. Our ambition is to pilot and prototype collaborations in Geneva that can be scaled worldwide.

We've mapped more than 2.1 million schools in 141 countries — roughly 40 per cent of all the world's schools. We've provided 34 countries with advanced connectivity support, increasing access to connectivity for more than 14,500 schools and 7.79 million students.

Despite those gains, there is clearly a long way to go. Today millions of children are leaving school without digital skills, making it much more difficult to thrive and contribute to local and global economies.

With your commitment, we can make Giga the catalyst for connected communities, to not only give young people the opportunity to take part in today's digital revolution, but to serve as a spur to local economic development.

This is our common goal, and getting there has never been more urgent.

**Chris Fabian & Alex Wong, Giga Co-founders**

# 02| About the Forum

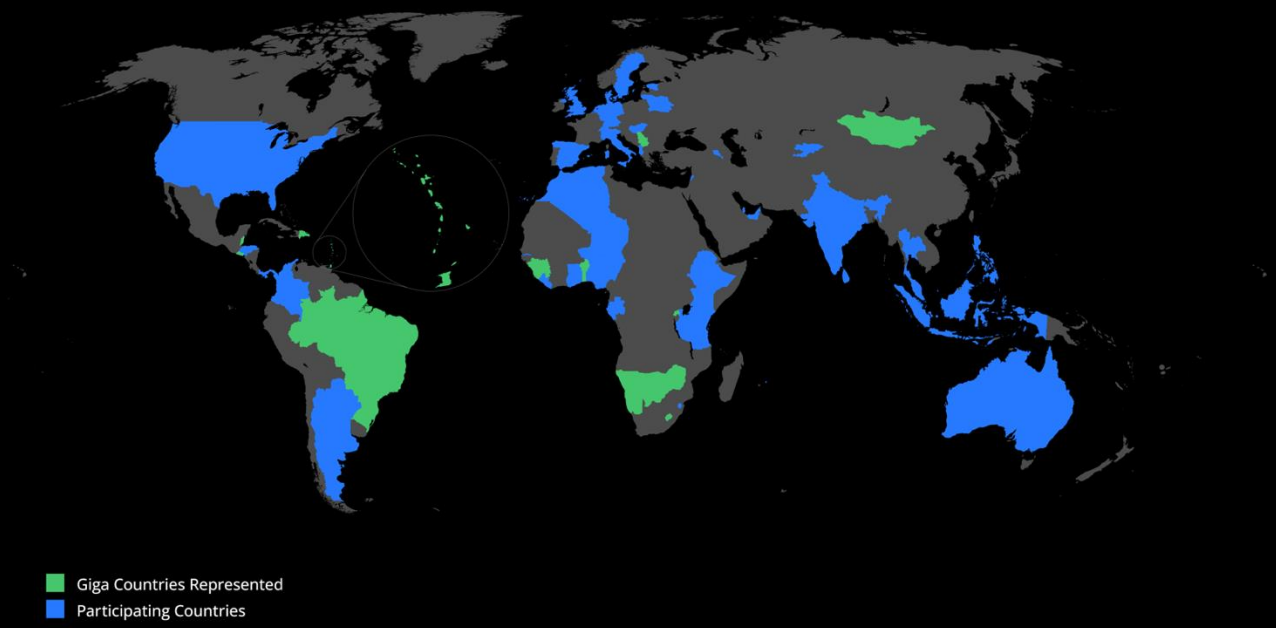

A joint initiative between ITU and UNICEF, Giga seeks to connect every school in the world to the internet by 2030.

The first-ever Giga Connectivity Forum, held in Geneva July 8-10, advanced that mission with hands-on workshops, knowledge sharing and networking.

The event brought together:

240 Participants from
67 Countries, including over
25 Giga-engaged countries

# 03| GCF in Numbers




**List of Giga Countries represented**

Antigua & Barbuda, Barbados, Belize, Benin, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Botswana, Brazil, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Grenada, Guinea, Honduras, Lesotho, Mongolia, Namibia, Rwanda, Sao Tome and Principe, Sierra Leone, Saint Lucia, Trinidad & Tobago, Zimbabwe, and the OECS.

**Participant Profile**

**80** Speakers and moderators

**18** Sessions, workshops, and panel discussions, along with social gatherings, receptions,

**3** Side events

**Over 240** Registered participants from over 25 Giga active member states, including government representatives and key high-level stakeholders

**7** Reporters from global newswires and Swiss media outlets joined the first morning of the Forum

| Category | Total | % |
|---|---|---|
| Men | 131 | 53% |
| Women | 117 | 47% |
| Swiss | 112 | 45% |
| Non-Swiss | 136 | 55% |
| Country delegates | 75 | 30% |
| UN agencies | 86 | 35% |
| International experts | 15 | 6% |
| Missions | 42 | 17% |
| Swiss Ecosystem | 29 | 12% |

*“Giga is about giving every person in the world, every child, a voice, a choice, and an opportunity. It's about connecting every school in the world to the Internet. This week in Geneva, we've brought together countries, ministries, and partners to exchange experiences and advance connectivity. It's a critical moment where we come together and try to find ways to double down and further connectivity.”*

*– Doreen Bogdan-Martin, ITU Secretary-General*

# 04| Event Objectives


## Through its programme of knowledge sharing, discussion and networking, the GCF's attendees achieved the following event objectives:

Learned how innovation and collaboration can help connect schools worldwide. From mapping school locations with our Giga Maps tool to developing sustainable business models, Giga's work was illustrated through practical lessons from countries, each with its own unique circumstances.

Connected with key players, stakeholders and UN system representatives involved in Giga.

Strengthened international cooperation and a broader community dedicated to school connectivity through knowledge sharing and networking.

Learned about future Giga in Geneva activities, including the Giga Connectivity Centre and Learning Hub, set to open in Geneva in the near future, as well as the Tech Centre in Barcelona, the R&D arm of Giga's connectivity tools.

# 05| Main Themes

**Connect a school, connect a community**
Connecting schools can be a lifeline for connecting entire communities. Getting the infrastructure in place and the schools connected can have a ripple effect, boosting business opportunities and jobs for communities as well as fostering digital skills in classrooms and beyond. The important correlation between connected schools and connectivity in the broader community stood out throughout discussions.

*"When we talk about connectivity and why it matters, we start always from the daunting side of the challenge. 2.6 billion people not connected in the world, forty to fifty per cent of schools not connected. It means every year we are leaving millions of children further and further behind their peers."*

*– Thomas Davin, Director of UNICEF Office of Innovation*

**Key support for African Union's Year of Education**
Giga's work in providing school connectivity aligns with the African Union's strategic focus for 2024 on education, providing a foundation for the continent's youthful population (70% under 30) by bridging educational gaps and fostering digital skills, laying the groundwork for an educational and AI-driven revolution.

**An all-hands-on-deck effort**
Connecting schools needs a multifaceted approach addressing affordability, sustainability and collaboration, bringing all stakeholders to the table — from governments and financial institutions to energy providers and ISPs. Here is where Giga's unique capacities come into play, leveraging UNICEF's strengths in education and procurement and ITU's expertise in ICT regulation and policy, along with vital contributions by partners in the public and private sector.

**Springboard for International Geneva**
The GCF welcomed representatives from across the Swiss ecosystem, from CERN to the Geneva Innovation Movement, the University of Lausanne and more, placing Giga firmly at the heart of this vibrant community. Participants had the opportunity to network with the International Geneva community during a reception at the Swiss residence, hosted by His Excellency Jürg Lauber, Permanent Representative of Switzerland to the United Nations and other Organizations in Geneva.

**Next steps on Giga's action areas**

The forum provided an opportunity to broaden understanding of Giga's growing roster of products and services, with rotating workshops to enable a more comprehensive knowledge of Giga's five main action areas: map, model, finance, contract and capacity development.

**Beyond connectivity**

Giga plays a key role in school connectivity, but it is the starting point of a process that extends to many issues beyond connection to the internet, such as sustained investment, digital skills, affordable devices and child online safety, electrification, content, data costs and more, all of which make up the broader school connectivity puzzle.

# 06| Key Learnings

## Key Learnings From Giga-Engaged Countries

### Twenty Giga-engaged countries presented snapshots of their journey to school connectivity, an inspiring gallery of shared experiences, challenges and priorities.

Each stage in that journey, whether a country is new to Giga or farther along, has common challenges. Giga's starting point in helping to address these challenges is the geolocation mapping of schools. Giga then assists by conducting a modeling analysis of current versus required infrastructure, policies, regulations and extends support in the financing and contracting to deliver sustainable, meaningful school connectivity. Once schools are online, Giga also facilitates the real-time monitoring of the internet connection to ensure quality of service. Action areas beyond connectivity were often emphasized in the different country presentations. Giga is seeking to address those areas through linkages with partners to promote online safety for children and schools, access to affordable devices, and Digital Public Infrastructure standards, in which education is part of a whole-of-society system of digital services.

**All these phases of the connectivity process emerged in the country presentations. What follows are the key observations:**

- Data—the more, the better. Many countries said they need to improve the collection and accuracy of their school location and infrastructure data. With better data, they can prepare stronger financial proposals for partners and donors and have more leverage to negotiate bulk service contracts with ISPs.

- A number of countries are looking to improve the percentage of schools monitored to ensure adherence of ISPs to standards and improve response time to outages. Discrepancies between reported and measured internet access underscores the challenges in data accuracy and reliability.

- Lack of electricity was cited as a hurdle to school connectivity, especially in rural and hard-to-reach areas. Various countries are exploring initiatives to increase electricity coverage, and to align electrification and connectivity deployment.

- Last-mile connectivity is a major issue, typically in rural, marginalized and remote areas. There is a need for significant investment to achieve high-quality connectivity in these places, along with financing to sustain connectivity (OPEX) beyond the initial connection.

- Procurement was a major theme. Presenters stressed the need to implement Service Level Agreements to decrease the price of school connectivity and ensure accountability and quality of service. Regional initiatives to bring down prices were also proposed.

- Many pointed to a lack of terminals in schools because of high costs, which limits the deployment of connectivity. One solution proposed was for countries to work together to assemble devices.

- The need for capacity building came across loud and clear. Many countries want to scale up digital literacy and certification training for teachers to increase the quality of student education. The shortage of digitally trained teachers also slows the deployment of connectivity.

- Countries are also looking to develop methodologies to assess students' digital competencies. Local customization of digital learning materials was also mentioned in this regard.

- The need for capacity building emerged again with respect to technical support resources for network maintenance. Countries are seeking regional and international support to co-develop and implement tech training for local technicians.

- Both governments and communities need to advocate for the internet in schools as a public good. Online access can turn a school into a hub for economic development during school closure, thereby addressing the digital divide.

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**Other issues that were identified**

- Implement child online protection for schools and young users.
- Encourage more competition among ISPs to improve service and lower costs.
- Explore public-private collaboration and other financing options to mobilize funds.
- Share best practices with other countries and organizations.
- School connectivity requires collaboration across government agencies.
- Develop a strategy for ethical, safe and responsible integration of AI in education.

# Key Learnings for Giga: Participant Feedback on Giga's Products

The first-ever Giga Connectivity Forum was also the first of its kind — the most comprehensive event on school connectivity ever held. At its heart was the Giga Product Showcase. Through three rounds of 50-minute breakout sessions, attendees experienced full-fledged seminars on Giga's core action areas: map, model, finance, contract and capacity development.
These sessions proved to be an important source of feedback for Giga itself. In the coming year, the ITU-UNICEF team will work towards incorporating the feedback received to improve the efficacy of its products and services. We plan to add new products and fine-tune those that already exist. In some cases, it is a question of learning how our products can work better together to create greater synergies.

Highlights of the feedback from attendees under each of Giga's five core action areas are included below:

## Map

Participants at the Giga Connectivity Forum highlighted several key challenges and issues that are impacting school mapping efforts. These challenges range from data collection and integration to technical implementation and infrastructure complexities. Notably, these included:

- Fragmented data ecosystems. Some countries noted that Internet Service Providers (ISPs) provide data from a wide set of software and tools, which makes drawing up a reliable single-source for a school's connectivity status technically challenging. The problem of data inputs from multiple sources and integration across systems also applies to school mapping. NGOs noted that they have valuable data to add to the map and that systems should be in place for them to do so.

- Integrate Giga's mapping efforts within existing systems. Participants expressed the need for a standardized approach to data entry that allows for progressive updates. The integration of mapping data within existing country information systems and/or national statistics systems would allow for more streamlined and regular updates, as well as better uptake and use of the data.

- High costs of primary data collection. Primary data collection for school location and infrastructure remains prohibitively expensive for some countries, limiting the benefits of complete mapping initiatives. Greater funding support is needed, as well as tools to streamline initial data collection.

- Device-agnostic approach to school connectivity monitoring. Participants want to work with ISPs but see the value of a third-party, device-agnostic approach to monitoring, such as Giga's Daily Check App. However, implementing solutions that do not rely on specific devices or proprietary technology is seen as crucial for achieving widespread and scalable connectivity monitoring.

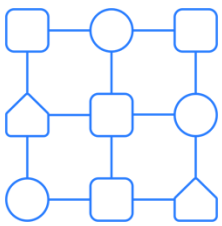
**Next Steps**

Towards addressing these challenges, Giga seeks to:

- Scale its product suite to more countries and accelerate its ongoing mapping of schools, including schools hosting refugees, to ensure they are identified and included in national connectivity plans.

- Continue designing work for greater customizability and localization in response to country-specific needs. This includes embedding new features in Giga Maps, configuring the Daily Check App to work across devices, and deploying Giga Sync, a data ingestion tool designed to keep school geolocation, connectivity and infrastructure data up-to-date.

- Work closely with governments to embed Giga's APIs within their existing information systems and national statistics systems where relevant (e.g., school mapping using machine learning). This integration will enable better data synchronization, and ultimately improve decision-making based on current data.



## Model

The breakout on modeling infrastructure and connectivity costs focused on Giga's work after school locations are mapped.  Giga conducts modeling analysis that comprises extensive

infrastructure mapping and connectivity infrastructure modeling. This involves overlaying information such as available electricity, mobile and fiber networks and other data to assess how close schools are to that infrastructure. The Giga team uses this information to assess estimated connectivity costs. That breakdown, together with a list of financing options, gives governments the necessary tools to design a school connectivity strategy based on local needs and circumstances.

**Key concerns raised during the session included the following:**

- Data collection. gathering and standardizing data can be a challenge for administrations, particularly in rural, remote, and un/underserved areas. That includes a common understanding of the need for and requirements of data, as well as to how to collect and to present it.

- Prioritizing infrastructure buildout. The challenge in determining where to start, based on the available data, policies and regulations or social programming of individual countries.

- Policy, regulatory and legislative concerns. Some countries will need to re-examine existing frameworks to allow for mapping infrastructure, visibility of schools and their data management practices in general.

- Government ministries and agencies working together is key. As was seen during the COVID-19 pandemic, cross-agency collaboration is critical to expedite and streamline governance, licensing and other activities to achieve joint objectives.

**Next Steps**

- Giga will refine its financial models to include not only capital and operating expenses but also broader national financial indicators. To improve data quality and streamline the process, Giga will work more closely with governments, operators, and internet service providers to promote standardized data collection methods.

- Giga is working with countries to improve their data collection, data accuracy and related skills development with the goal of strengthening their data management practices and data sharing.

- Giga will strengthen the integration of its models with other planning and infrastructure tools to ensure better mapping and modeling, and to facilitate holistic decision-making. The goal is to offer more robust and reliable insights into what Giga's government partners "see" — how they correlate where schools are, how schools could be connected and the financial viability and long-term sustainability of ICT projects.

## Finance

The long-term sustainability of any connectivity infrastructure project relies on engineering, policy and regulation, governance, economics and financing. Together, their goal is the sustainability of connectivity projects through partnerships and collaboration across a range of stakeholders (public, private, philanthropy and other expert stakeholders). A number of countries lack access to the capital needed to finance projects or need the know-how to work with funders to set-up technology enabling projects (e.g. accelerators) that can catalyze that investment and advance more sustainable public infrastructure projects. Giga helps partner countries assess all these factors.

**Key issues raised by participants**

- Incentivizing Companies. Governments have the challenge of figuring out how to work with companies to reassess their school connectivity business models as part of a multi-government agency process, incentivizing those companies that do not receive the same return on investment in school markets.

- Encouraging Government Agencies to Collaborate. Collecting data, revising school connectivity strategies, and assessing how to sustain and pay for network buildout is a multi-government agency responsibility and not a stand-alone task for an individual ministry, be it education, ICT or regulators. A collaborative approach spreads risk and responsibility, accelerates joint work and enables governments to look at financing infrastructure projects from a different perspective. This scenario would incorporate involvement from the Ministry of Energy/Electricity, Ministry of Finance and Tax Authorities, along with connectivity agencies, regulators and related ministries.

- Paying for the Infrastructure. Countries and partners participating in the discussion were extremely interested in the nexus between modeling, estimating costs and financing sustainable school networks. The discussion touched upon Giga's School Price Calculator, how to work with development financial institutions (DFIs) and international financial institutions (IFIs), along with other potential funds and innovative financing options.

**Next Steps**

In coordination with Giga's work in modeling:

- Giga will add enhancements to its cost modeling practices and cost calculator to make estimates more accurate, understandable and adaptable to local circumstances.

- Greater efforts will be made to identify capital sources for school connectivity to help decision makers advance their projects. Development of additional modes for deploying capital also are underway through a range of programmes and more information will be made available on upcoming accelerator programmes, start-up funding and connectivity credits.

- Giga will work with experts to identify ways to support specific fund vehicles to help support school connectivity.

- Giga will continue to work with DFIs and IFIs to encourage innovative financing mechanisms for school connectivity.

- Giga will explore ways to support funding programs like accelerators to fast-track technologies to support school connectivity.

- Giga will support studies focused on the connectivity gap, ways to bridge the gap, and pilot projects to support closing the gap.

- Giga's Barcelona Tech Centre and future centre in Geneva will formulate training programmes for government experts to work with financing entities, DFIs, IFIs, and other partners currently building connectivity out to schools through their projects and programmes.

## Contract

Participants highlighted five key challenges with the procurement of school connectivity solutions, which affect the quality of the connectivity delivered, as well as the rate at which new schools are being connected.

- Long Procurement Processes. Country representatives expressed frustration with the bureaucracy behind the procurement process, which slows down the pace at which authorities can connect new schools even when budgets are available.

- Lack of Standard Requirements. The technical solutions to connect schools are not standard and public servants in charge of procuring them lack a reference or standard to build the requirements on.

- Lack of Technical Know-How. Along these lines, it was reported that those in charge of procuring connectivity for schools are usually generalists, filling a centralized procurement function, and often lack experience in the technology and operational intricacies of school connectivity services.

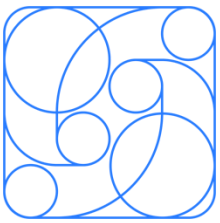
- Inadequate Competition. Another hurdle discussed was the lack of competition among internet providers in some countries. As a result, procurement systems can lack the required accountability, and budget envelopes are insufficient, leading to poor outcomes in contracting school connectivity.

- Heterogenous Cross-Border Regulations. When attempts are made to aggregate school connectivity demand at the subregional level, they run into differences in the regulations and industry dynamics of neighboring countries.

**Next steps**

Giga is stepping up its support for countries that need to procure connectivity solutions for schools, helping to alleviate some of the challenges highlighted during the breakout discussion. For countries doing the procurement in-house, Giga has created a School Connectivity Procurement Toolkit that provides advice, templates and guidance for the procurement process end-to-end.

UNICEF is building its capacity to procure school connectivity on behalf of countries, with the aim of aggregating demand and creating economies of scale, simplifying and accelerating the procurement of cost-effective and good quality school connectivity solutions.



## Capacity Development

In this session, participants highlighted numerous areas in which training is needed to help advance the deployment of school connectivity.  These include enhanced project management skills, particularly in monitoring, evaluation and partnerships. There was also an emphasis on the importance of in-depth knowledge of Giga's core activities and technical skills required for implementation. Other topics emerged beyond connectivity, such as online safety, digital skills, responsible AI and teacher training, indicating a broad demand for capacity development.

- The need for clear Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to ensure the success of training. Attendees suggested the use of pre- and post-training surveys to gauge the immediate effectiveness of the sessions, along with regular assessments to measure long-term impact.

- A preference for blended learning approaches. Participants were strongly in favor of varied training modes, combining instructor-led, self-paced and in-person sessions. Hands-on activities and the use of reusable case studies were seen as particularly effective, while the importance of localizing content to meet regional needs was also emphasized.

The session underscored the value of strong partnerships and collaboration within the Giga network. Participants saw opportunities for joint content development and even potential certification programs. Strengthening relationships with local institutions was identified as a key strategy for ensuring the sustainability and impact of the Giga Learning Hub's initiatives.

**Next Steps**

Moving forward, the insights gathered during this session will help refine the Giga Learning Hub's training programs, making them more regionally relevant and effective in building the capacity needed to accelerate global school connectivity.

# 07| Sustainable Business Models


## Roundtable Roundup

Investment in school connectivity requires innovation, large-scale funding or targeted joint funding of projects, and must include sustainability among its goals.  In theory, that means combining an innovative range of financial tools and investments from diverse funding sources. In practice, successful investment faces hurdles— financial risk, economic and political stability, government support and changes in practices, reliable demand and the supporting infrastructure available in partner countries.

The GCF held two roundtable discussions under the title of “Sustainable Models for School Connectivity.” The first offered an overview on the kinds of funding support that have been implemented thus far and the prospects for the future. The second session examined how Giga can support leveraging sustainable business models.

Key points made by the panelists included:

## First Roundtable

Panelists described the World Bank Group's newly announced Global Challenge Digitalization Program, which is looking to close the financing gap in digital infrastructure "at speed and scale." The World Bank will harness partnerships with IFC and others to address a growing digital divide at a time when 60% of future jobs will require digital skills.

Shared pain, shared gain. Panelists said if the numbers behind school connectivity projects show borderline potential for returns, they can still work if there is give and take among funders, using such tools as blended finance and longer grace periods. There is no one-sided answer. Ultimately, sustainable financing is about aligning incentives among all the parties.

Discussion of sustainable financing should not lose sight of the end user. Innovative financing is what gets done on the ground, not the financing in itself. As one panelist pointed out, the key factor is what you do differently on the ground to make your solutions more effective or more efficient.

Finally, discussion included ways to bring blended finance into the school connectivity financing picture, which brings a range of partners to the table, diversifies risk and strengthens sustainability.

## Second Roundtable

Examples were given of innovative financing models used by governments to fund sustainable school connectivity. Specifically, models where schools act as connectivity hubs, which local businesses can use to both promote economic development and pay for connectivity costs.

Discussion also looked at scaling "business models," such as the school as community hub, across countries and regions to ensure lasting connectivity and impactful investment in digital infrastructure.

Panelists recommended replicating innovative connectivity business/financing models by incorporating them into UN programmes and projects, and highlighted the need to include and support small- and medium-sized businesses as partners in the school connectivity development challenge.

# 08| Beyond Connectivity

**Skills, Devices and Security**

Giga is a key driver of school connectivity, but there are a host of requirements that need to be addressed once connectivity is achieved to create a safe and productive online experience at an affordable cost. Cognizant of this, Giga is looking at how to contribute to addressing the challenges in such areas as electrification, affordable devices and security, sustained investment in digital skills, content, data cost and more. The Connectivity Forum held special sessions on three of those issues: safe digital connectivity, device affordability and Digital Public Infrastructure.

**Safe Digital Connectivity**

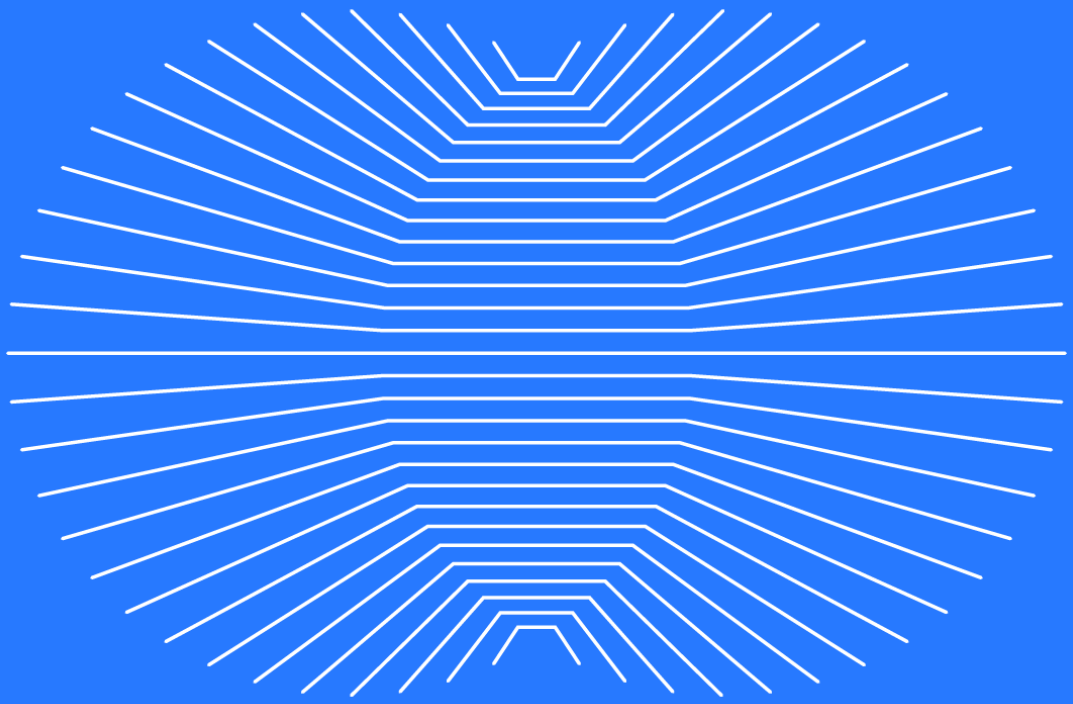
This session highlighted trends and successful strategies for keeping children safe in a universally connected world. Participants heard that children are creating solutions to address the violence that their peers are experiencing and emphasized that children must be included in formulating policy.

**Connectivity Adoption and Device Affordability**

Panelists took part in an interactive discussion on next steps for enhanced accessibility. These included the University of Pennsylvania's Professor Christopher S. Yoo, who offered a summary of the Broadband Commission's recommendations to get more affordable devices into the hands of end-users, which look at creative ways to facilitate payment, subsidies, lowering of VAT and harnessing of refurbished phones.

**Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI)**

A final special session on the power of soft infrastructure, in which education is part of whole-of-society system of digital services, delved into how DPI can contribute to digital learning. Participants wanted to know more on how DPI would actually unfold in their countries. They learned the process begins with mapping existing digital infrastructure and building blocks within each country, identifying components that can be customized, made open source and DPG (Digital Public Goods) compliant.



*“We've learned over the years that science is best done openly. It allows us to correct, improve, and apply knowledge in different ways, ultimately helping us to collaborate better.”*

– *Dr. Tim Smith, Coordinator, Open Quantum Institute, CERN*

# 09| Spotlight Talks

**The Web: Weaved from the Internet and Open Science**
The forum also featured a spotlight talk by Dr. Tim Smith, Head of International Relations for IT, CERN. He focused his talk on the mindsets that lead to the open source nature of the web and the open science platforms that CERN has created to accelerate collaboration on global challenges.

**Global Challenge Program on Digitalization**
Another spotlight talk was given by German Cufre, Global Head of TMT and Creative Industries, International Finance Corporation (IFC) and Isabel Neto, Practice Manager for Digital Development (East and Southern Africa), World Bank. They showcased the major joint initiative between the IFC and the World Bank to tackle connectivity bottlenecks, working with governments and the private sector.

**UNESCO-Giga Collaboration**
Erin Chemery, Senior Partnerships & Project Finance Officer, UNESCO, focused her spotlight talk on the ability of technology to accelerate progress on SDG4 (“to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”), but cautioned that we will not get there if we connect schools without investing in all components of digital transformation such as teacher training, capacity building, change management and sustainable financing.

# 10| Focus on Connectivity in Africa

Africa is a young country with huge youth potential – 70% of Africa's population is under 30 years old, projected to account for 42% of the world's youth by 2050.

Giga's work is a catalyst for maximizing this potential. In 2024, Giga has set the ambitious goal to support African countries' school connectivity targets, empowering teachers, students and communities to thrive in the digital age. This initiative aligns with the "Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA 16-25)" and the "African Union's Agenda 2063: the Africa We Want."

A Breakfast Roundtable was held with a focus on Connectivity in Africa. This discussion convened over 25 delegates from the continent as a part of Giga's alignment with the African Union's designated Year of Education, and the UN Office of the Special Advisor on Africa's focus on Digital Transformation.

Special thanks and recognition to: Doreen Bogdan-Martin, ITU, Secretary-General; Cosmas Luckyson Zavazava, Director, Telecommunication Development Bureau, ITU; H.E. Amb. Prof. Muhammadou M.O. Kah, Ambassador to Switzerland and Permanent Representative of the Republic of The Gambia to the United Nations at Geneva and Chair of the 28th session of the Commission on Science and Technology for Development; Chris Fabian, Giga Co-lead, Office of Innovation, UNICEF; Lacina Kone, Director General and Chief Executive Officer, Smart Africa; Mactar Seck, Chief of Section, Innovation and Technology, UNECA.

The highly productive discussion focused on the principal challenges related to connectivity for Africa: cost of data, market dynamics, high cost of infrastructure, investment costs and issues with foreign currency fluctuations.


*"Turning this demographic trend into a demographic dividend requires proactive and urgent measures to bridge educational attainment gaps. By providing high speed internet access to every school we aim to create the foundation for an educational revolution"*

*- Claver Gatete, Under-Secretary-General and Executive Secretary of the ECA (via video message)*

**Key takeaways from the Breakfast Roundtable: Focus on Connectivity in Africa:**

- Ensure that the deployment of meaningful connectivity incorporates an approach where energy and connectivity is done simultaneously, with consideration for the impact on the climate/environment.
- Embrace new and emerging technologies in connectivity solutions to connect more schools and communities faster, with the needs of youth at the centre.
- Ensure that the educational infrastructure and resources respond to the new digital reality when a school is connected.
- Rethink how partners are engaged and widen the range of possible partners that are considered for school connectivity implementation.
- Continue community building when deploying connectivity to schools. Communities for exchange can exist at different levels — regionally, nationally and across countries.
- Consider the complementary actions that are critical for meaningful connectivity such as access to devices, including assistive devices for persons with disabilities.
- Financing and sustained investment in connectivity are critical enablers.
- On the continent, there is an urgent need to move forward with the implementation of sustainable solutions for school connectivity at scale.

# Springboard for International Geneva

**The Connectivity Forum welcomed representatives from across the Swiss ecosystem, from CERN to the Geneva Chamber of Commerce, from the Geneva Innovation Movement, the University of Geneva, the University of Bern, GESDA to the representatives from the Swiss missions and the Canton of Geneva.**

Overall, the GCF gave participants a preview of what Giga will bring to Geneva, with its focus on innovative solutions and collaboration to tackle digital connectivity challenges worldwide and bridge the digital divide. Following the WEF in Davos, WSIS and the AI4Good, the GCF highlighted Geneva's pivotal role in global discussions about making technology work for everyone, underscoring the city's commitment to finding solutions to global challenges.

GCF delegates also had the opportunity to shape upcoming Giga in Geneva activities, in particular the Learning Hub curriculum, giving feedback on what their training needs are to ensure Giga's capacity development activities and delivery options achieve the maximum effectiveness on the ground.

*"Hosting the headquarters of Giga is significant for Switzerland because it's an example of how two UN agencies can bring their expertise together to create something new and exciting that benefits many people around the world, particularly children."*

*– H.E. Ambassador Jürg Lauber, Permanent Representative of Switzerland to the United Nations and other Organisations in Geneva*

# 11 | Global Reach

**Key messages from Giga and the GCF were amplified in global media, including Swissinfo, EFE Press Agency, Anadolu Agency and UN News:**

- **Swissinfo:** https://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/international-geneva/the-un-plans-to-connect-every-school-to-the-internet-by-2030/83325727
- **Geneva solutions**: https://genevasolutions.news/science-tech/how-the-un-is-connecting-the-world-s-classrooms
- **Infobae**: Honduras or El Salvador, examples for achieving school digital connectivity by 2030
- **Anadolu**: 1st Giga Connectivity Forum aims to bring all global schools online
- **Primicia Honduras**: Honduras, with the challenge of achieving school digital connectivity by 2030
- **UN News**: World News in Brief: Sand and dust storm scourge, Mali humanitarian update, moving education online | UN News
- **Fraternite Benin:** Forum Giga connectivité : le Bénin réitère son engagement pour (...) - Fraternité (fraternitebj.info)

# Stay in Touch

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## Resources

- Summary Video
- Opening Sessions  (recorded),Tue July 9th, Popov Room
- Event Photos
- Resources Material  Slides & Talks. Password: connecteveryschool
- Red Carpet Interviews

We'd love to stay in touch and let you know what's happening next for Giga.
So if you haven't done so already, please sign up to receive more news,
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