Press release


Pohnpei, Micronesia, 5 March 2024 - To support the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM)'s ongoing digital transformation journey, the United Nations in Micronesia yesterday engaged in a productive dialogue with the FSM Digital Transformation Committee. The meeting sought to integrate the UN’s collective strengths and resources into Micronesia's digital advancement efforts, catalyzing actions that accelerate the Pacific nations's development momentum.

As a Small Island Developing State (SIDS), the geographic characteristics of FSM with widely dispersed populations create fundamental challenges to securing affordable ICT connectivity in the country. Despite progress in strengthening digital infrastructure, significant gaps remain in the access to reliable, affordable, high-speed and high-capacity broadband Internet.
To tackle these challenges, the FSM Digital Transformation Committee was established under the chairmanship of Carl Apis, Secretary of the Department of Transportation, Communications and Infrastructure (TC&I), convening key figures including the Acting Secretary Leonito Bacalando Jr. of the Department of Justice, Secretary Marcus Samo of the Department of Health & Social Affairs, Executive Director Takuro Akinaga of Telecom Regulatory Authority (TRA), alongside national cabinet members and state representatives.

Echoing the government's efforts, the UN in Micronesia is implementing the "Joint Programme on Accelerating SDG Achievement through Digital Transformation to Strengthen Community Resilience in Micronesia" (Joint Programme). This initiative, led by ITU and managed by UNOPS, draws on the technical expertise of FAO, ILO, UNESCO, UNICEF, and UNODC. Together, the agencies are working to support digital transformation initiatives, solutions, and policy framework developments that align with FSM's developmental aspirations.

During the meeting, UNOPS Project Manager Rior Santos presented an overview of the UN's ongoing collaborative efforts through the Joint Programme. The discussion explored the draft Digital Transformation Strategy developed in partnership with ITU, the nomination of Tonowas as a pilot for the Smart Island initiative, and the launch of the Digital Readiness Assessment to evaluate FSM's preparedness for embracing digital transformation. These three proposed initiatives aim to establish a robust blueprint for ushering Micronesia into a digital era, with transformative benefits across health, education, agriculture, and digital finance sectors. The Joint Programme team expressed their hope for the FSM government to consider expedited endorsement and approval of these proposals.

Secretary Carlson Apis of TC&I has pledged commitment to collaborating with Chuuk state for the necessary endorsements for Tonowas to serve as the pilot Smart Island, “With the backing of Chuuk state, we will collaboratively endeavour to transform Tonowas into a model Smart Island. This initiative will create a replicable blueprint that can be extended to other islands, leveraging the support of diverse development partners.”
In his remarks, the UN Resident Coordinator in Micronesia Jaap van Hierden emphasized the synergy between the Joint Programme and FSM’s national agenda, “This partnership is crucial for accelerating the digital transformation agenda in the FSM. Let us take this opportunity to shape a future that ensures that no one is left behind and no island is left behind.”

The FSM Digital Transformation Committee expressed its excitement to work closely with the United Nations and leverage its collective expertise to advance the digital transformation agenda in FSM. Lieutenant Governor Francis Itimai of Yap welcomed the initiative, “This is a great initiative and example of inclusive collaborations. With private, public and development partners' expertise and collaborations, we can move digital transformation faster….and my sincere hope is that Yap state will also benefit from such initiatives.”

This meeting marks a constructive step forward in the collaboration between the United Nations and the Federated States of Micronesia, laying a foundation for future enhancements in the nation's digital capabilities. The outcomes and recommendations of this meeting will inform FSM's preparations for the forthcoming 4th International Conference on Small Island Developing States (SIDS4), with proposals to host interactive side events showcasing Micronesia's distinctive approach to digital transformation.

**ENDS**
Notes to the editors:

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About the Joint Programme
The Joint Programme on Accelerating SDG Achievement through Digital Transformation to Strengthen Community Resilience in Micronesia is a 3.8 million USD project funded by the UN Joint SDG Fund. Led by ITU and managed by UNOPS, the project leverages the technical expertise of FAO, ILO, UNESCO, UNICEF, and UNODC under the strategic guidance of the UN Resident Coordinator's Office in Micronesia. Together, the agencies support digital transformation initiatives, solutions, and policy framework developments to digitally empower Small Island Developing States (SIDS) across the Pacific Islands.