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Submissions from entities in the United Nations system and elsewhere on their efforts in 2011 to implement the outcome of the WSIS

Submission by

ESCAP

This submission was prepared as an input to the report of the UN Secretary-General on "Progress made in the implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society at the regional and international levels" (to the 15th session of the CSTD), in response to the request by the Economic and Social Council, in its resolution 2006/46, to the UN Secretary-General to inform the Commission on Science and Technology for Development on the implementation of the outcomes of the WSIS as part of his annual reporting to the Commission.

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Follow-up of the World Summit on the Information Society

By

Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

Executive summary

The digital economy in the Asia-Pacific region is an accelerator of the regional integration process underway. This is taking place in two ways. Firstly it is a growing contributor to the region's production, employment and trade. Secondly, the digital economy has emerged as source of dynamism and innovation that has enabled every other sector to increase productivity, change the way it interacts and does business across borders. This market-driven growth has made technology more affordable and available and has helped the region move closer to achieving the goals established by the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS).

Mobile phones are rapidly becoming ubiquitous across the region (from 6 to 61 mobile phone subscriptions per every 100 population on average, in less than a decade) empowering hitherto marginalized people. High-speed networks and local demand for services and content are fuelling further connectivity and integration among economies and peoples on a region-wide basis. Individuals and small and medium enterprises (SME) are gaining access to information systems that enable them to communicate and operate in ways comparable to those of large enterprises at very low costs – sometimes even at no cost.

However, although a digital way of life is emerging for many people across the Asia-Pacific region, disparities between and within countries continue. This is particularly so in the recent technologies, those technologies that are linked to the knowledge economy. Notably, access to broadband and high speed content rich information. Furthermore, digital divides continue to affect groups such as women, the poor and people who live in rural areas or with disabilities between and within countries in the region, preventing digital technologies from reaching their true transformational potential in connecting economies and empowering peoples.

In this context, the work of the ESCAP secretariat has consisted in assisting member States towards the regional implementation of the goals set by the WSIS. From the development of the Regional Action Plan towards the Information Society in Asia and the Pacific (ST/ESCAP/2415) presented at the Tunis phase of WSIS in 2005, until the most recent session of the ESCAP Committee on Information and Communications Technology (CICT) in 2010.

This document highlights recent regional actions and challenges related to the regional implementation of the WSIS Plan of Action. It also outlines future related activities coordinated by the ESCAP secretariat.

Analytical overview

While the Asia-Pacific is home to the most developed country in the world in terms of ICT infrastructure and human capacity - the Republic of Korea - according to the ICT Development Index (IDI) in 2011, the region is also home to the lowest ranking country, namely Papua New Guinea. Indeed, the capacity of individual and institutions to access and use ICT for their daily activities varies dramatically between and within countries.

Recent technologies such as broadband have failed to spread within the region, for example while in high-income countries of the region there are more than 25 subscribers to broadband Internet per every 100 persons, in the low income countries there are less than 1.[1] Large segments of the population are being left out of the Information Society, for example only 1 per every 100 persons of the 280 million people living in the Least Developed Countries in the region uses the Internet.[2] Only the mobile phone has been successful at reaching high levels of penetration in the least developed countries reaching close to 30 subscriptions per every 100 persons. It is easy to see that the levels of connectivity mentioned above remain a critical constraint to the achievement of the WSIS targets, as well as the transformation of the Asia-Pacific region to a knowledge based society.

In this context, ESCAP has been active in raising awareness on the importance of regional inter-governmental cooperation towards enhancing ICT connectivity in the region in the context of a much wider effort to economically integrate the Asia-pacific region including by enhancing trade and transport infrastructure as well as by developing people-to-people and cultural exchange. This cross-sectoral research conducted by the secretariat has been reflected in contributions to the ESCAP Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific 2011, and well as ongoing collaboration between ESCAP and the ASEAN Secretariat on ASEAN Connectivity.

Activities, programs and projects

ESCAP has also been working closely with Governments and partner organizations in raising awareness of ICT related issues, for instance by co-organizing the Asia-Pacific Regional Forum on Information, Communication and Technology (ICT) in Bangkok, Thailand, on May 2011 as a special event for the 67th Session of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) Commission. This forum was attended by more than one hundred and fifty participants and was co-organized by ESCAP, the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and the

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[1] ESCAP. Data from ESCAP Statistical Yearbook 2011. Fixed broadband Internet subscribers (per 100 population) p. 238
[2] ESCAP. Data from ESCAP Statistical Yearbook 2011. Internet users (per 100 population) p. 238, Population p. 147.

Ministry of Information and Communications Technology of Thailand (MICT).[3] Other innovative activities, programmes, and projects which have taken place across the region are outlined below.

ESCAP is action line facilitator for WSIS Action Line 11: International and regional cooperation. In line with this mandate and implementation of the outcomes of the WSIS, ESCAP has conducted the activities below:

From 2004 to 2011, periodic Regional Interagency Working Group on Information and Communication Technology (IWG) have been held to discuss the harmonization of programmes and initiatives related to the WSIS action lines, co-organized by ESCAP, the Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), the Asia-Pacific Telecommunity (APT), and with participation of more than ten United Nations Organizations, International/Regional and Inter-governmental Organizations. During the latest session held in December 2011, the participating organizations informed each other of their work plans and upcoming activities and discussed opportunities for coordination.

During 2010, ESCAP also organized the Expert Group Meeting on Emerging ICT Developments and Opportunities for Enhancing Cooperation in Achieving Regional Connectivity[4], which provided a preparatory forum for the second session of the inter-governmental Committee on Information and Communications Technology (CICT) of ESCAP.

The Second Session of the CICT, held in November 2010 highlighted the importance of information and communications technology (ICT) as a fundamental enabler in achieving the Millennium Development Goals and the targets of the World Summit on the Information Society,[5] and stressed the important role of broadband technologies in socio-economic development in the region. The Committee also expressed support for ESCAP secretariat activities in the implementation of the goals of the World Summit on the Information Society, and requested the secretariat to continue to facilitate regional cooperation in achieving the Summit's targets, particularly with regard to mobile applications and broadband development.

At these meetings, various innovative policies and initiatives were discussed, such as the importance of m-banking and the possibilities offered by high mobile phone penetration rates in facilitating international remittances among migrant workers, both of which were noted by the CICT. Additionally other challenges that members and associate members were facing were discussed such as the lack of laws governing telecommunications, limited human resources (capacity-building), and delivery of

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[3] Asia-Pacific Regional Forum on ICT Applications, 18-21 May 2011, Bangkok, Thailand.
http://www.unescap.org/idd/events/2011-Asia-Pacific-Forum-on-ICT-Applications/index.asp
[44] Expert Group Meeting on Emerging ICT Developments and Opportunities for Enhancing Cooperation in Achieving Regional Connectivity, 22-24 November 2010, Bangkok, Thailand.
http://www.unescap.org/idd/events/2010_EGM-ICT/index.asp
[5] See A/C.2/59/3, annex, and A/60/687.

services over Internet Protocol (IP), IP network infrastructure, cybersecurity, Internet governance, and localized content availability and creation.[6]

Regarding the information society indicators, ESCAP continues to be a member of the Partnership on Measuring ICT for Development, and has published its research on measuring the regional progress on the WSIS implementation, see the "Regional Progress and Strategies towards Building the Information Society in Asia and the Pacific" ST/ESCAP/2555.

In 2011, ESCAP also organized various meetings bringing together Governments and civil society to build awareness around topics related to the use of ICT, including space-based technology for inclusive and sustainable development. For instance, the Expert Group Meeting on Identifying Priority Cooperation Areas for the Regional Cooperative Mechanism on Disaster Monitoring and Early Warning, Particularly Drought (China, March 2011), the United Nations Conference on e-Government in Asia and the Pacific, (Republic of Korea, May 2011), the Asia-Pacific Regional Forum on ICT Applications (Thailand, May 2011), the Expert Group Meeting on Regional Knowledge and Cooperation for Comprehensive Multi-Hazard Risk Management in Asia and the Pacific, (Thailand, July 2011), the 4th Joint Project Team Meeting for Sentinel Asia STEP-2 (Malaysia, July 2011), the Training Workshop on Satellite Imageries for Disaster Risk Reduction and Development in Pacific Island Countries (Fiji, September 2011), the Consultative Meeting on Regional Cooperative Mechanisms on Space Applications towards an Effective Disaster Management and Sustainable Development, and the 15th Session of the Intergovernmental Consultative Committee on the Regional Space Applications Programme for Sustainable Development (Sri Lanka, October 2011).

Promoting the implementation of the WSIS in the region, in particular with regards to the WSIS action line "Capacity Building and Technical Cooperation", the Asian and Pacific Training Centre for Information and Communications Technology for Development (APCICT) of ESCAP has undertaken a series of initiatives and meetings. Such as the First National Training of Trainers Workshop, in partnership with with India's Department of Information Technology (DIT) and the Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration (India, Feb 2011), the Fourth Regional Training of Trainers Workshop (Republic of Korea, Feb 2011), the Second ICT Capacity Building Workshop and Awareness Lecture on ICT for Development in Myanmar (Myanmar, Mar 2011), the Collaborative e-Government training workshop for Moroccan government officials (Republic of Korea, Jun 2011), the launch of the Tajik version of the Academy of ICT Essentials for Government Leaders and Training of Trainers Workshop (Tajikistan, Sep 2011), and the Second Asia-Pacific Regional Forum on ICT Human Capacity Development: 'Where are we, Where are we going and What will it take to fill the gap?' (Republic of Korea, Oct 2011).

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[6] E/ESCAP/CICT(2)/5, Report of the Committee on Information and Communications Technology on its second session, Bangkok, 24-26 November 2010.

The APCICT also held the sixth session of the APCICT Governing Council attended by all 9 member countries, which commended the work of APCICT and expressed appreciation for the efforts and passion demonstrated by the Centre to carry out its mission. At the core of the activities of APCICT is the "Academy of ICT Essentials for Government Leaders" (Academy), which includes a comprehensive eight-module ICT for Development (ICTD) training curriculum. The Academy has successfully been implemented in 22 countries with strong local ownership by member States, and its being incorporated into long term national capacity building frameworks.[7]

In the area of ICT applications for disaster risk reduction and management, ESCAP, in cooperation with partners has implemented the Asia Pacific Gateway for Disaster Risk Reduction and Development (Gateway), an Internet portal which promotes mainstreaming DRR into development planning. The Gateway aggregates relevant regional DRR information, and provides a network for information sharing, building networks and promoting regional cooperation. The Gateway targets the information and networking needs of National Disaster Management Authorities/Organisations (NDMA/Os), line ministries and academics working in DRR in the region. It intends to enhance regional access to information on good practices, policy options, methods and tools, and programs on DRR, whilst serving as a regional hub that provides quick and easy access to networks and organizations doing work in disaster management. The Gateway identifies disaster management services available to governments in the region and facilitates value-added regional level analysis. This sharing of knowledge on policy development issues, programmes and emerging priorities helps member States achieve sustainable development, whilst building resilience by increasing the capacity of member States to formulate policies for increased disaster preparedness in all socio-economic development sectors. The Gateway also provides member States with a common platform for information sharing and establishing networks, which facilitates regional cooperation and collaboration for improved disaster management.

Future Actions

ESCAP members have expressed support for ESCAP Secretariat's activities in the implementation of the goals of the WSIS, and have requested that the Secretariat continues to facilitate regional cooperation in achieving the Summit's targets, particularly with regard to mobile applications and broadband development.[8] Additionally, the members have requested that ESCAP assists countries in the region in developing guidance on use of ICT for disaster risk reduction.

Accordingly, the ESCAP Secretariat firstly, will continue its work facilitating regional cooperation for the implementation of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) Plan of Action. This will be done, mainly through the ESCAP Committee on ICT

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[7] Forthcoming report of the sixth session of the APCICT Governing Council.
[8] E/ESCAP/CICT(2)/5, Report of the Committee on Information and Communications Technology on its second session, Bangkok, 24-26 November 2010.

and through its collaboration with the Partnership for Measuring ICT for development towards the development of international statistical standards for measuring ICT development. In the area of human capacity building on ICT, the APCICT plans include, among other components, (a) expanding APCICT's flagship ICT for development (ICTD) capacity building programme called the 'Academy of ICT Essentials for Government Leaders' (Academy), (b) further developing APCICT's activities for empowering new beneficiary groups such as youth, academic institutions and civil society organizations, (c) enhancing research efforts as well as knowledge sharing amongst partners; and (d) strengthening advisory services for ICT human capacity development in member States to institutionalize APCICT's ICTD training programmes.

Secondly, ESCAP will also strengthen its analytical work and awareness building activities among member States on the uses of ICT to enhance regional integration and economic growth. This work seeks to measure the impact of ICT on the economy and its contribution to increasing productivity, improving trade and transport procedures, creating employment, and attracting foreign investment, among others. Thirdly, ESCAP will continue to develop its work on ICT for Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR), by facilitating regional cooperation for the application of ICT for DRR, particularly through the expansion of the Asia-Pacific Gateway for Disaster Risk Reduction & Development, an Internet portal (www.drrgateway.net) which provides member States with a common platform for information sharing and which facilitates regional cooperation and collaboration for improved disaster risk reduction and management.

Public-private partnerships will continue to be pursued, recognizing that the private sector is a main driver of ICT adoption and diffusion, as well as cooperation with international organizations in areas of major concern for the region.

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