COMMISSION ON SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY FOR DEVELOPMENT (CTSD)

Sixteenth Session
Geneva, 3 to 7 June 2013

Submissions from entities in the United Nations system and elsewhere on their efforts in 2012 to implement the outcome of the WSIS

Submission by

United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

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 16th 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.

ESCAP input to the follow up report on the WSIS outcome

Part 1 Executive summary

There is growing awareness of the great potential of Information and Communications Technology in accelerating development in Asia and the Pacific. The region is at the heart of the mobile revolution, which has resulted in almost universal access to modern communications through the mobile phone. The region is also home to countries such as Japan and the Republic of Korea, whose ICT development index ranks consistently among the world's top 10. However, the region is also home to a number of least developed countries where ICT development is among the lowest in the world. Asia and the Pacific is therefore the region that has not only seen the emergence of new digital divide, particularly with regard to ICT infrastructure quality, access to Broadband Internet and related digital content, but where the divide is the starkest. Of particular concern is the very high price of Broadband Internet access in those least developed countries that can least afford it. This is due to wideranging and interrelated challenges, among which is a lack of competition at the national and regional levels, stemming in part from gaps in regional infrastructure, and still underdeveloped terrestrial fibre-optic networks. In this context, the secretariat of ESCAP has recently been mandated by its member states to carry-out a number of activities that will help establish an information base on the status of ICT infrastructure, policy obstacles and regulatory bottlenecks in bringing about a seamless regional information space.

Part 2: Analytical overview of trends and experiences, achievements and obstacles

The 3rd session of the ICT Committee of ESCAP, held in Bangkok on 20-22 November 2012 recognised "*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, and enhancing economic development and poverty reduction efforts across all sectors and economies in the Asian and Pacific region.*"

Inspired by the global commitment to build a people-centred, inclusive and sustainable information society, the potential of ICTs to provide new solutions to development challenges that address the need for economic growth, enhance competitiveness, eradicate poverty, and transform the region's societies to knowledge-based and more socially inclusive interactions, has moved up the agenda-setting processes of virtually all governments of the region, including Least Developed Countries. In particular, there is a growing recognition in Asia and the Pacific of the capacity of ICT to address various economic and social challenges, including the ageing population, youth unemployment, low economic growth and environmental degradation. Moreover, ICT is increasingly

being used in Disaster Risk Reduction and Disaster Risk management. This includes ICT in support of Early Warning Systems or emergency communications, among others.

Notwithstanding this potential a number of obstacles remain such as a) access to and affordability of ICT; b) lack of human capacity with regards to ICT at all levels c) insufficient integration of ICT in general development strategies d) lack of local relevant content, d) lagging infrastructure development

Part 3: Future actions and initiatives

The WSIS targets 1 to 6 as well as 8 and 10 largely relate to connectivity and access to ICT. In this respect and with particular regards to the issue of closing the connectivity gaps in the region, the Committee on ICT of ESCAP requested the secretariat to:
- pool expertise and collect best practices and strengthen regional policymaking processes in terms of improved connectivity of ICT infrastructure
- analyze gaps in backbone infrastructure networks, including regulatory and policy barriers and examine of the costs of laying terrestrial fibre-optic networks along other fixed infrastructure.
- In collaboration with the ITU, map the transnational ICT infrastructure in the Asian and Pacific region and identify the missing links, notably in the terrestrial infrastructure.

The ESCAP secretariat has also been requested to further develop its work on monitoring information and data gaps in the ESCAP region. More specifically, the Committee called the ESCAP secretariat to:

- pursue the facilitation and coordination of the regional review of progress in implementation of the targets set out in the outcome documents of the World Summit on the Information Society. This includes carrying-out a metadata survey in the region on the statistical indicators underpinning the WSIS targets, which have been developed by the Partnership on Measuring ICT for Development. The ECAP secretariat recently sent a questionnaire to all Member States to collect this information.

- Recognising the value of the Partnership on Measuring ICT for Development, in particular in setting statistical standards for ICT indicators that are timely, relevant and accurate, the Committee requested the secretariat to continue to promote the region's perspectives on issues coordinated under the Partnership and recommended that the secretariat step up its efforts within the Partnership, notably by contributing analytical work on defining indicators in emerging areas of interest to the region. The Committee also requested the secretariat to strengthen capacity-building on ICT for development measurement issues, including through the well recognized training programmes of the Asian and Pacific Training Centre for Information and Communication Technology for Development (APCICT).

With regards to target 9 on local content and use of all languages online, the Committee called on the secretariat to further expand its programmes to include new beneficiary groups, such as those living at the grass-roots level, women and children. In this context, it also recommended that APCICT develop a new training module under its Academy programme on ICT for Small and Medium Enterprises. Moreover, it recognized that access to e-content can be increased through a combination of increased network capacity, additional access points, increased ICT literacy and localization of content.