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**Submissions from entities in the United Nations system and elsewhere on  
their efforts in 2016 to implement the outcome of the WSIS**

**Submission by**

United Nations Economic Commission for Africa

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 20<sup>th</sup> 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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**ECONOMIC COMMISSION  
FOR AFRICA**

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**Implementing the WSIS outcomes in Africa -  
December 2016**

**1. Executive summary**

Based on the resolution 70/125 of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in extending the mandate of the WSIS process to 2025 and request for the continuation of the work of the UN agencies in supporting the implementation of the WSIS action lines, UNECA has continued coordinating implementation in Africa including its contribution to the reviews thereof through the regional reviews.

This is also reinforced at the regional level in that the ninth joint AUC-ECA annual meeting of the African Union Conference of Ministers of the Economy and Planning held in March 2016, adopted a resolution requesting ECA (in collaboration with other partners) to take all necessary steps to organize annually, an African regional review of progress made in the implementation of the WSIS outcomes in support of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the AU's Agenda 2063.

In this regard, Africa's ICT growth trends continue to show remarkable development with access and use of ICTs have increased on the continent representing the largest growth in the number of subscribers with an average growth rate of 11% in previous years although expected to decline to 6% between 2015 and 2020 which is still above the world average of 4%. Mobile-cellular subscriptions increased from 63% in 2013 to 76.2% in 2015. However, Africa remains the least connected of global regions, with a penetration rate well below the world average of 63%. Mobile broadband penetration continued to fill the gap in which active mobile-broadband subscription almost doubled from 10.9% in 2013 to 19% in 2015 whereas fixed-broadband penetration remains below 1%. Today, one in 5 people use internet in Africa compared to almost 2 in 5 people in Asia and Pacific<sup>1</sup>.

Furthermore, Internet traffic between African countries (and often within the same country) and the rest of the world is still mainly exchanged in Europe and North America which substantially reduces performance, consumes valuable international bandwidth, creating a barrier to growth, innovation and limiting operational efficiency. In this regard, there are a

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<sup>1</sup> International Telecommunications Union (2015). ICT facts and figures 2015. Geneva; ITU.

number initiatives to address Africa ICT infrastructure challenges including the African Internet Exchange System (AXIS) project which will support the establishment of national and regional Internet Exchange Points (IXPs) with the aim of achieving regional interconnection to make 80% regional and 20% international traffic by 2020. With regard to development of submarine cables it is expected that by end of 2016, there will be at least 60 submarine cable landing stations in the region and all of Africa's coastal countries will have access to at least one submarine cable, and most will have direct access to two. Thus it has enabled to connect 176 million more people to the internet. African countries have therefore made and continued to make progress toward the Geneva Action Lines and the Tunis Agenda and ICT has become an important contributor to gross domestic product and job creation. Governments played a key role in putting in place national ICT policies and made significant investment to implement policies and expand access to ICT infrastructure and services.

The work of the UNECA to support the WSIS objectives is carried out at a sub-programme level. In this context, ECA played a key role in the growth of the African Internet Governance space and also continued its work on undertaking policy research on ICTs, innovation and science & technology fields and producing evidence-based policy briefs to African policy- and decision-makers. In this regard, based on its recent work, ECA produced a Report on the Review of the Implementation and follow up of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) in Africa in 2016 and organized the Annual WSIS Regional Review Meeting for Africa November 2016. In terms of ICT policy development, ECA will continue to support number of African countries such as Guinea Bissau and South Sudan to develop their ICT policy and ICT Master Plan.

The following sections describe the work done by the various UNECA sub-programmes to support individual WSIS Action Lines and to promote the use of ICTs for achieving sustained growth and inclusive development in the context of the implementation of the SDGs 2030 and Agenda 2063.

## **2. Analytical overview**

This document focuses on the key activities in relation to ECA's direct involvement and participation with its partners and other stakeholders in selected follow-up activities and WSIS action lines at regional level.

### **2.1 Trends in the implementation of the WSIS outcomes**

The overall ECA's assessment of the WSIS implementation in Africa shows that over the last decade, African countries have made and continue to make progress toward fulfilling the Tunis Commitment. ICT penetration<sup>2</sup> has continued to grow with an increase in mobile-

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<sup>2</sup>ICT Facts and Figures 2016, ITU

cellular subscriptions from 63% in 2013 to 76.2% in 2015. However, Africa remains the least connected of global regions, with a penetration rate well below the world average of 63%. Among the obstacles to the development of mobile services include low disposable incomes, the high cost of expenditure related to mobile usage representing a significant part of the revenue; variable coverage of the mobile networks including 3G and 4G as well as a low technological culture level among the populations. In certain countries such as Zambia, Ethiopia or Namibia, households spend nearly 10% of their monthly income in telephony compared to 3% in developed countries<sup>3</sup>. In terms of the number of SIM cards in circulation, the accounts of the African market mobile are even higher. African users, which often have several SIM cards, reached 965 million by the end of 2015. This number will reach 1.3 billion in 2020.

Although the lowest compared to other regions, Africa's mobile broadband penetration has currently reached 17.4% with fixed broadband penetration being less than 1%. Active mobile-broadband subscriptions almost doubled from 10.9% in 2013 to 19% in 2015. Today, one in 5 people use internet in Africa compared to almost 2 in 5 people in Asia and Pacific<sup>4</sup>. Individuals using the internet increased from 16.7% in 2013 to 22.5% in 2015, while the percentage of households with internet access at home increased from 6.7% in 2013 to 13.6% in 2015 which is also a key indicator in terms of guaranteeing inclusive access.

## 2.2. Overview of ECA's key activities

### 2.2.1 Annual WSIS Regional Review Meeting for Africa

ECA undertook a comprehensive review of the implementation of the WSIS Outcomes in Africa during 2016 and organized the African Regional WSIS Follow-up and Annual Review Meeting which was held from 23 to 24 November 2016, at the United Nations Conference Centre in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Over 32 African countries, International Organisations and UN agencies attended the annual WSIS review and follow up meeting that discussed the *'ECA Report on the Review of the Implementation and follow up of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) Africa in 2016'* with a focus on some priority issues such as mainstreaming of WSIS action lines with the implementation of the SDGs 2030 and African Union Agenda 2063, the progresses made by countries in implementing WSIS action lines, and reviewing measurement of ICTs for development in the context of linking WSIS action lines with SDGs /Agenda 2063 goals and targets.

The annual review meeting provided an opportunity to the participants to see how effectively WSIS Action lines are implemented at the regional level and what are the main challenges and opportunities in the region as well as how to strengthen alignment between implementation of the WSIS Action Lines and SDGs as well as the African Union Agenda 2063 to ensure that ICTs play an enabling role in achieving the SDGs. It also provided

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid 2

<sup>4</sup> International Telecommunications Union (2015). ICT facts and figures 2015. Geneva; ITU.

structured opportunities to network, learn and participate in multi-stakeholder discussions and consultations on WSIS implementation. In addition the meeting was enriched by presentations from a number of African countries (Senegal, South Africa, DRC, Ghana, Kenya, Mali, Cote d'Ivoire) on the progress made in the implementation of WSIS Outcomes in their respective countries and a discussion on the indicator framework for ICT measurement in the context of the SDGs and the AU's Agenda 2063. Relevant international organizations (ITU, UNECA and UNESCO) have also shared experiences about their relevant scope of the work, activities in the implementation of WSIs action lines. Overall the continent has made significant progress in 2016 particularly in enhancing access to and use of ICTs while a lot remain to be done. However, critical issues facing Africa in the implementation of WSIS outcomes include the lack of access to affordable and reliable ICT technologies and services, specific challenges facing children, youth, and persons with disabilities, older persons, women and communities in remote and rural environments as well as the lack of content development.

The outcomes of this meeting will constitute input to the WSIS Forum (12-16 June 2017, Geneva, Switzerland) and its open consultation process, WSIS Stocktaking, WSIS Prizes, thereby bringing to forefront emerging trends, opportunities and challenges from the regional layer in a multi-stakeholder format.

### **2.2.2 Expert Group Meeting on Emerging Issues in ICT in Africa**

The Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), organized an expert group meeting on the emerging issues in ICT in Africa in relation to the implementation of the Agenda 2030 Sustainable Development Goals from 23 to 24 November 2016 back to back with the WSIS regional review meeting, at the United Nations Conference Centre in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The meeting brings together African policy makers from over 32 countries, ICT experts, and representatives of regional and international organizations, telecommunications operators, private sector, civil society, academic and research institutions.

The meeting discussed the report on Emerging issues in ICT in several special thematic areas pertinent to the continent's ICT development, thus, focusing on areas such as: the rise of the financial technology (fintech) industry in Africa and the increasing challenge of cyber-security; ICT infrastructures and Internet exchange points (IPXs), Internet Protocol version 6 (IPv6) transition, the IANA transition, and emerging Internet governance issues. The special session provided structured opportunities to network, learn and participate in multi-stakeholder discussions to identify the key challenges related to emerging issues in ICT in Africa. In this regard, the meeting provided Policy Recommendations focusing on the areas of policy environment, policy regulatory framework, infrastructure development as well as capacity development.

### **2.2.3 Senior Experts Dialogue on Science, Technology and Innovation**

In collaboration with AUC, NEPAD, South African Government, UN Habitat and SDPD, the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) organized the Senior Experts Dialogue on Science, Technology and Innovation (SED 2016) from 02 to 03 November 2016 in Pretoria, South Africa,. The meeting was attended by experts from 21 African countries, including representatives from universities, Member States and cities.

The theme of SED-2016; “Cities as innovation hubs for Africa's Transformation” has been a recurring sub-theme of past SEDs. Its choice is thus a response and a follow up to the outcomes of the previous SEDs. The theme responds to SDG 9 on "building resilient infrastructure, promoting inclusive and sustainable industrialization and fostering innovation", SDG 11 on making “cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable and SDG 17 (Global partnerships) Target 2 on technology. The theme also responds to the AU’s Agenda 2063 and STISA 2024. The meeting was divided into nine themes revolving around the central issue of “Cities as innovation hubs for Africa’s Transformation” and provided an opportunity to discuss and identify key elements and issues, based on local as well as international experience, that African governments, along with their international development partners, can take into account in formulating action plans to turn their cities from manufacturing and trade hubs into innovation hubs and centres. The meeting concluded with experts agreeing that African governments need to do more to support innovation.

### **3. Way forward**

African countries like most developing countries have been facing lack of access to affordable and reliable ICT technologies and services in which proactive effort through research and development may be necessary to introduce lower-cost connectivity options. To this effect, the investment needed should be sourced to address this challenge. The problem with this is also the fact that government is principally the main source of funding ICT infrastructure investments in Africa. To this end, and in order to bridge the digital divide and creating enabling environment, there is a need for greater and sustainable innovative funding mechanisms and PPP investment in ICT infrastructure and services, capacity building, and transfer of technology on mutually agreed terms in the next decade.

To ensure inclusive information society, particular attention need also be made to address the specific challenges facing children, youth, and persons with disabilities, older persons, women and communities in remote and rural environments.

There is a need for a robust actions to address content development particularly local content which is an important factor in accelerating ICT adoption and usage in the continent. The main challenge is therefore the need to promote greater participation and engagement of all stakeholders in all aspects of the WSIS action lines including those being addressed in internet governance fora.