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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

Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

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 20th 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.

DISCLAIMER: The views presented here are the contributors' and do not necessarily reflect the views and position of the United Nations or the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development.

2017 Annual Report of the Secretary-General to the Commission on Science and Technology Implementation and Follow-up of the World Summit on the Information Society

Contribution of ESCWA¹

I. INTRODUCTION

Many countries in the ESCWA (Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia) region are aware of the importance of moving towards an information society and the opportunities it offers through the diversification of economies, the enhancement of competitiveness and productivity, and the creation of new jobs opportunities. An increasing number of countries focus on achieving growth through the intelligent use of ICT (information and communication technology) and other technologies, the creation of research-based knowledge, and innovation.

For many international organizations working on achieving similar or complementary goals, the need for harmonized implementations of initiatives has led to creation of linkages such as the one found in the WSIS-SDG matrix². In the ESCWA region, linkages between the SDG community and the WSIS community are still weak. Even within the WSIS community itself, the linkages between technology sectors and the administrative development sector requires significant improvements. For the effective implementation of the SDGs, there has to be full ownership of the WSIS-SDG process by the aforementioned sectors. It is crucial for ESCWA member countries to realize information societies if they aspire to lay the foundations for sustainable economic development and achieve various internationally agreed development goals.

Having been at the heart of the WSIS community from its inception and being a strong supporter of what WSIS can do to achieve the SDGs in the region it serves, ESCWA has continued during the past year its efforts to narrow the digital divide and help build an inclusive, people-centred and development-oriented Information Society. The sections below highlight some of the initiatives carried out by ESCWA to achieve the development objectives of WSIS and the SDGs.

II. REGIONAL FOLLOW-UP OF THE WORLD SUMMIT ON THE INFORMATION SOCIETY

The information society, in which information is produced, exchanged and adapted, is the appropriate environment for achieving sustainable development and enhancing the well-being of citizens. For more than a decade, ESCWA has profiled the region's information society at the national and regional levels within the framework the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS). The 2003 Geneva Plan of Action, the 2005 Tunis Agenda and the WSIS+10 review defined the elements and action lines of the information society on which the *National and Regional Profiles of the Information Society in the Arab Region* were based. Produced at regular intervals by ESCWA, the purpose of the Profiles was to monitor and evaluate various aspects of the information society in ESCWA member countries and measure the progress towards building it. The series included seven issues which were produced during or immediately following 2003, 2005, 2007, 2009, 2011, 2013, and 2015.

¹ Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, currently serving 17 member countries, all situated in the Arab region www.escwa.un.org

² https://www.itu.int/net4/wsis/sdg/Content/wsis-sdg_matrix_document.pdf

The latest issue of the *Regional Profile of the Information Society in the Arab Region*³ was a special issue covering twelve years, extending from 2003 to 2015, and portraying the development and achievements of the region. Each chapter highlighted the progress of member states in one of the WSIS action lines and provided objective analyses and comparisons which are based on findings and statistics drawn from renowned sources. It also featured success stories from various countries. For each selected action line, the report discussed the strengths and weaknesses of the Arab region, and concluded with a set of actionable recommendations.

While it concluded that the Arab region still had a long way to go before realizing the information society, the analysis showed commendable improvements and major achievements. Positive progress was seen in the formulation and modernization of national ICT policies and strategies, the development of a modern ICT infrastructure and the creation of an enabling environment.

The Profiles are used as a reference by many regional policymakers, particularly for the development or update of national ICT policies and strategies. They are also used regularly by researchers who cite them in their articles, books and theses. The series has also paved the way for many upcoming ESCWA activities, including those that are related to the 2030 Agenda for Development.

III. ACTION LINES

C4: Capacity Building

In 2016, ESCWA completed the final evaluation exercise of a project entitled *Academy of ICT Essentials for Government Leaders in the ESCWA Region*⁴. It also organized training workshops that were aimed at sustaining the implementation process of the project. The project's evaluation exercise measured the overall achievements, results, main findings, challenges, best practices and lessons learnt, and reflected on outcomes and the way forward.

The implementation activities of the project continued during 2016. In coordination with ESCWA, a total of 11 capacity building workshops, which were based on the Academy's training modules, were held in Sudan. They targeted a wide public sector audience which included ministers, directors general, parliamentarians, police officers, and other government leaders and policymakers. These workshops were attended by 380 participants. In the same context, and as part of the project's sustainability efforts, ESCWA coordinated with the National Information Center (NIC) in Sudan to organize two training-of-trainers (TOTs) workshops, which were attended by 117 experts who received training on the four modules of the Academy.

C6: Enabling Environment

During November 2016, ESCWA held an expert group meeting (EGM) which was entitled *Mechanisms to Advance Innovation for Inclusive Sustainable Development in the Arab Region: Promoting Collaboration and Bridging Gaps*⁵. The main objective of the meeting was to identify and discuss the strategic options and mechanisms that are useful for bridging gaps in the innovation arena in the Arab region in order to advance innovation and achieve inclusive sustainable development. 70 experts representing government institutions,

³ <https://www.unescwa.org/publications/profile-information-society-arab-region-2015>

⁴ <http://www.escwa-aigle.org/>

⁵ <https://www.unescwa.org/events/mechanisms-innovation-sustainable-development-arab-region>

research centres, academia, the private sector, business support mechanisms, and international and regional organizations sat together to examine ways of supporting the Arab region's transition towards economies that cater for sustainable economic growth and improved employment. The meeting was also an opportunity to discuss an upcoming ESCWA publication entitled *Innovation Policy for Inclusive Sustainable Development in the Arab Region*⁶, which includes a framework for developing and enhancing innovation policies in Arab countries. Meeting sessions were thematic, focusing on groups of stakeholders that included academic institutions, which are key promoters of innovation and knowledge, and the private sector, which is a catalyst of innovation. There were specific sessions on the role of governments in building national innovation systems (NIS) and formulating national innovation policies. These sessions were complemented by presentations on experiences from member countries and case studies for harnessing innovation in national development agendas. The meeting also featured the participation of young entrepreneurs from the region who shared stories of their successes and challenges.

ESCWA also initiated a project entitled *National Technology Transfer Office (NTTO)* that aims at raising the effectiveness of technology transfer systems at the national level, strengthening links between research and academic institutions and the industrial sector, contributing to knowledge-sharing between developed countries and countries in the Arab region, and exchanging experiences and practices. During 2016, two studies⁷⁸ and two workshops were implemented in Mauritania and Sudan. These studies examined the overall environment for innovation and technology transfer and developed a vision that aims at creating a national system for technology transfer.

C7: ICT applications (E-Government)

During 2014, ESCWA, in cooperation with UAE-Prime Minister Office (PMO) launched an initiative that aimed at developing a *Government Electronic and Mobile Services (GEMS)* maturity index which can be applied globally, while taking into consideration regional specificity. The GEMS maturity index is an assessment tool that can be used by policymakers to measure the level of digitization and sophistication in the delivery of e-government and m-government services to the public. The tool goes further than earlier methods that had generally focused on high-level assessments. This index combines key performance indicators (KPIs) that measure service availability and sophistication, service usage, and public reach out. In addition to analyzing the services provided and their maturity, GEMS emphasizes the demand side of government services, i.e. the actual usage of services by individuals and their satisfaction with the services. During 2015 and 2016, ESCWA carried out pilot implementations of GEMS in 10 countries of the Arab region, namely Lebanon, Jordan, Palestine, Iraq, Bahrain, UAE, Oman, Sudan, Tunisia, and Morocco. The deployment of GEMS in these countries has encouraged policymakers in government entities to increase the supply of sophisticated and mature digital services. In turn, this will improve the delivery of e-government services.

In its continuing effort to promote regional integration in the Arab region, ESCWA proposed during the Government Summit (GS)-2014 in Dubai the creation of a council that brings together the directors or key players of e-government programs in the Arab region. The *Council of Directors of E-Government Programs in the Arab Region* aims chiefly at encouraging the exchange of knowledge and information on local, regional and global best

⁶ <https://www.unescwa.org/sites/www.unescwa.org/files/events/files/souheil-marine.pdf>

⁷ https://www.unescwa.org/sites/www.unescwa.org/files/page_attachments/mauritania-ntto-innovation-landscape-study-ar.pdf

⁸ https://www.unescwa.org/sites/www.unescwa.org/files/page_attachments/sudan-ntto-innovation-landscape-study-en.pdf

practices and new trends in e-government. The Council will strive to achieve the following objectives:

- Fostering dialogue between e-government practitioners in the Arab region by establishing a forum that aims at finding solutions for issues and problems that are related to e-government implementations;
- Avoiding duplication of effort and maximizing efficiency by facilitating the exchange of information on best practices and lessons learned from previous regional and global e-government implementations;
- Promoting regional integration by putting forward proposals and practical solutions that foster the adoption of e-government cooperation programs between Arab states;
- Optimizing the benefits of e-government implementations by setting regional and national priorities.

To elaborate this proposal, ESCWA held two consultative meetings with e-government program directors or key players from the Arab region. The first took place in Amman during December 2013, and the second in Dubai during February 2014. Another meeting took place during the *World Government Summit*⁹ which was held in Dubai during February 2016. This last meeting was dedicated to the discussion of the rules of procedure and proposed activities for cooperation for the years 2016-2017. Participants in the 2016 meeting reached a preliminary agreement on the structure, functions and activities of the Council. The Council is intended to be officially launched in 2017.

IV. MAIN THEMES

MT1: Internet Governance

The first mandate of the Arab IGF¹⁰ was established by ESCWA and the League of Arab States (LAS) in 2012 and extended to 2015. In 2016, the Arab Internet governance community called for its renewal. Four annual meetings of the Arab IGF were held during the first mandate, the last of which was in December 2015. The Fourth Annual Meeting of Arab IGF (AIGF-IV) resulted in the launching of the AIGF2020 initiative which aims at developing and extending the second mandate of the Arab IGF process until 2020.

The AIGF2020 initiative, announced by ESCWA and LAS on 18 December 2016 has the following main objectives:

- (1) Analyse the achievements of the first mandate of the Arab IGF process;
- (2) Assess the impact of AIGF on Internet governance policies in the Arab region;
- (3) Discuss challenges that faced the first mandate;
- (4) Enhance the second mandate of the Arab IGF and direct it towards the implementation of the SDGs, placing an emphasis on five main areas, namely objectives, structure and mechanisms, financing mechanisms, content and outputs, and communication, media and outreach.

⁹ <http://tcportal.escwa.org.lb/NewsDetail.aspx?Id=49>

¹⁰ <http://www.igfarab.org/En/index.jsp>

In 2016, ESCWA and LAS convened several meetings to facilitate the work of the members of the Technical Cooperation Working Group (TCWG) with regard to the implementation of the AIGF2020 initiative. TCWG designed, prepared, and propagated a comprehensive survey that was widely disseminated to stakeholders and kept open until 15 November 2016. The outcomes of the survey will be reflected in the final report of TCWG. It will result in a new charter which will be used for the next phase of AIGF culminating in 2020. It is worth noting that the implementation of the AIGF2020 initiative will assist the Arab IGF umbrella organizations, namely ESCWA and LAS, in producing a new technical cooperation framework for the Arab IGF process.

V. WAY FORWARD

It is important to note that many initiatives related to the implementation of WSIS in the Arab region were carried out in partnership with international and regional organizations. Collaborative efforts are coordinated primarily with the governments of ESCWA countries, non-governmental organizations, a host of stakeholders from the private sector, other United Nations Regional Commissions, UN specialized agencies and programmes and the League of Arab States.

In coordination with its aforementioned partners, ESCWA will continue its efforts to narrow the digital divide and to close the knowledge divide in the Arab region and to help build an inclusive, people-centred and development-oriented Information Society and to encourage member countries to move towards knowledge-based economies. This will be achieved with the conceptualization and implementation of programmes related to the development of enabling environments, the promotion of innovation policies, capacity building, Internet governance, smart society and smart government policies and guidelines, good governance, open government, as well as building the ICT sector. ESCWA will also work with member countries to strengthen the links between the information society and the SDGs in the Arab region. To achieve its objectives, ESCWA will assess and update existing plans of action, conduct analytical studies, convene meetings, provide advisory services and training workshops and act as a catalyst for change and innovation in policymaking.