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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

ITC

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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ITC's inputs towards the elaboration of the annual report of the Secretary-General to the Commission on Science and Technology for Development CSTD

Contributions from ITC's Division of Business and Institutional Support (DBIS) and the Division of Market Development (DMD).

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ITC contributes to transparency, democratization of access to information and capacity building by the intensive use of information and communication technologies. Generation of contents and applications for online tools, e-learning solutions and e-business related topics increase opportunities of economic and social development and reinforces the achievements of the information society.

Part one

Activities undertaken and progress

ITC produces a suite of market analysis tools: Trade Map, Market Access Map, Investment Map and Standards Map, that aim to improve the transparency of international trade and help exporters in developing and least developed countries identify export opportunities, assess market access requirements and monitor the performance of their countries vis-à-vis competitors. The tools have been free to developing countries and LDCs since 2008 and usage has grown 10 fold since then to 200,000 users in 224 countries and territories at the end of 2011. The tools contain trade statistics, customs tariffs, non tariff market access regulations, data on foreign direct investment as well as information on private voluntary sustainability standards. Integrated as a package, they provide a unique combination of data and easy to use software that companies, trade advisers and policy makers can use to turn statistics into actionable analysis of trade opportunities, competitive threats and market requirements.

From another angle, with a view to developing the capacity of trade service providers to support businesses and to strengthening the international competitiveness of enterprises, ITC is developing and delivering capacity building training material to clients and partners throughout the developing world and Least Developed Countries (LDCs) in particular. In order to extend its capacity building reach to a larger number of beneficiaries, e-learning has been identified as a suitable channel:

In order to provide beneficiaries with a consistent ITC approach to e-learning and reap economies of scale, ITC has developed its corporate e-learning strategy, served by acquiring a corporate-wide ITC e-learning solution. The Moodle Content Management System (CMS) has been chosen based on the fact that it is an open source that is used in several organisations as well as private companies for learning purposes.

This CMS allows ITC staff to create online content based -in a first stage- on existing materials, but also on synergies and complementarities among sections with capacity building programmes offered on-site up to date and that could be part of a full blended learning curriculum.

ITC has also developed a series of Enterprise Competitiveness Web marketing and E-commerce capacity building modules, which are supported by online diagnostic tools. The training package, which targets SMEs in developing countries, has been used in the framework of the ENACT training activities. ENACT is an ITC programme funded by CIDA in Canada targeting five Arab states. In Algeria, a series of awareness raising events took place in Algiers and Annaba, targeting women and young entrepreneurs. The second phase involved a rigorous selection process to hire two trainers. They were trained to deploy the ITC training on web marketing and e-commerce. The training of trainers took place in September 2011 in Sidi Abdellah Cyberparc. The national trainers then replicated the training a second time in Algiers, then in Annaba, Oran and the last session takes place at the end of December 2011 in Ghardaia. Trainees evaluate very positively the mix of a training package of international standards and the intervention of local trainers, who are very much aware of the local realities and problems.

At the same time, ITC has been implementing projects using mobile telecommunications, since 2006, for a range of business support and trade institution support objectives, from trade and market information collection and dissemination, to direct small business matching and inter-sectoral linkages. As a result, four mobile solutions have emerged, as part of a larger programme called "Trade at Hand". These solutions are called mPrices, mAlerts, mCollect and mMarketplace. One or more solutions have been or are currently being implemented in 9 LDCs. Implementations have required to adapt or customize these solutions to each context and were all opportunities to test and learn from new technologies as well as user behavior regarding innovative ICT tool adoption.

Part two

Trends and experiences

In an independent evaluation of ITC's market Analysis tools' effectiveness, completed in November 2011, it was found out that the tools improved developing country users' trade related decision making, the services they provide to others, and the design of trade policies. The evaluation also found that "Low-income countries are the largest users once one takes into account Internet access and the frequency of usage (average number of log-ins per users) is also high". Free access was also found to be critical to users in low income countries as "respondents often said that their institution would not pay for the data." The evaluation also found that 93% of users in Low Income Countries said "the ITC Market Analysis Tools make it easier to obtain trade-related data compared to other tools. This result is confirmed by qualitative interviews. Users frequently said that it is difficult to obtain their country data by themselves as ministries or customs authorities do not want to share the data within the country.

E-learning capabilities offered by ITC have been already tested. A pilot webinar was organized early December 2011 with 15 participants from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Montevideo-Uruguay, plus another ten Europe-based Uruguayan Trade attachés (Germany, Belgium, Netherlands, Czech Republic, Portugal, France, Sweden, UK, Switzerland and Russia). A blended approach was undertaken: live connection between trainers and trainees and a session of exercises to be done by participants on their own. This activity proved that it is feasible to conduct an event of this type online and that it is possible to save resources that otherwise would have been spent in travel expenses of participants.

In the framework of the ITC NTFII (an ITC project for Bangladesh), funded by the Dutch agency CBI, 40 beneficiary companies from the Bangladeshi IT & ITES industry receive training on web promotion with a strong emphasis on social media. Indeed, social media is playing a major role in today's society and especially in the business day-to-day activities. Beyond traditional marketing techniques such as the organization of events and business trips, the NTFII project heavily promotes the usage of social media, which have significantly reduced the cost of information sharing and online promotion. Sites such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn enable SMEs with few resources to reach out to a global audience. However, social media marketing requires a special approach and resources.

All four mobile solutions involve both mobile and web technologies and are implemented with a view to be fully owned and managed locally and integrated to business support practices. mPrices has allowed to share more than a million international market prices, by SMS, to small fruit and vegetable exporters from Burkina Faso, Mali and Senegal. mAlerts is a web-to-SMS solution which has allowed four trade support institutions from sub-saharan African countries to send 200 000 market alerts via SMS to more than 6000 SMEs. mCollect has enabled three price collection institutions from three LCDs to share expertise and experience and to collect rural market prices, by SMS, substantially accelerating data collection and dissemination through the replacement of paper and fax-based systems. mMarketplace has been or is being rolled-out in four LDCs: Liberia, the Maldives, Benin and Fiji. While this solution has raised very high enthusiasm and expectations it has started to show results through the effective business linkages among business which were generally completely out of the information society, except through simple phone communications.

Some of the challenges for continuing the implementation of mobile solutions are:

- The varying degree of capacities and "IT-literacy" of trade support institutions and governments with regards to using and managing simple innovative solutions
- Challenges to involve the private sector and establish successful local PPPs
- The limited duration of projects
- IT innovation is often perceived as a luxury when money is scarce and project momentum easily fades when confronted with economic instability.

Part three

Innovative programmes and projects / Future initiatives

ITC allocates considerable resources on building capacity in market analysis and research through training. The evaluation of ITC's market analysis tools also attributed the tools success in low income countries to ITC targeting its capacity building efforts in these countries. The Market Analysis and Research Section of ITC spent substantial resources on capacity building especially in Low-Income Countries.

From the analysis of usage, this targeting approach has been relatively successful as the average number of monthly logins is highest for users in low-income countries who are also those with the highest number of users per 100,000 internet users.

From the e-learning side, in order to start strengthening the skills of business communities around the world, new courses will be available online during 2012:

- Foreign Trade Representation
 - To enable Foreign Trade Representatives to better support their national business community with expert advice on market opportunities in their country.
- Information Management Learning System
 - To provide participants with basics principles of trade information management. It is targeted to managers and officers of business information services in trade promotion organizations, chambers of commerce.
- Market Analysis Tools
 - To introduce ITC's web-based market analysis tools, including Trade Map, Market Access Map, Standards Map and Investment Map,
- Export Potential Assessment.
 - To provide participants with a methodology for analyzing a country's export performance using trade statistics and a means by which products and export markets with the highest potential may be prioritized.
- Reducing cotton contamination and increasing quality
 - To create the skills to better understand issues on cotton contamination and to provide tips on how to increase quality and thus earnings.
- Web 2.0 and Social Media for Information Management
 - To explain the principles on web 2.0 and social media, social networking, blogging and micro blogging tools.

The following benefits will be achieved under the e-learning initiative:

- Standardization and consistency in the development of pedagogical online content
- Ability to provide blended learning to beneficiary countries as opposed to only onsite training courses
- Ability to track users and provide long term relationship with beneficiaries along with proper follow up to build capacity
- Reduction on operation costs through the reuse of online courses materials and their continuous improvement
- Training content available to a wider audience
- More flexibility for tailor made content to fit beneficiaries needs

In parallel, ENACT is supporting the creation of web-shops for 25 Tunisian handicraft artisans with the Tunisian Office National de l'Artisanat. Given the fact that access from potential clients to the internet is the basic requirement for a client to meet and purchase Tunisia's products. This initiative will enlarge the potential market for entrepreneurs and their opportunities to sell their products. This initiative includes coaching and technical support to entrepreneurs from the sector, facilitated as much as possible by local experts.