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**Submissions from entities in the United Nations system and elsewhere on their efforts in  
2013 to implement the outcome of the WSIS**

Submission by

**United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia**

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 17<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.

**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.

**ESCWA's Contribution to the  
2014 Annual Report of the Secretary-General to the Commission on Science and Technology on the  
Implementation of and Follow-up to the Outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society**

**I. INTRODUCTION**

The development of the information society in the ESCWA region encompasses many different facets and variables. Most member countries have taken significant steps towards bridging the digital divide and building an information society. Rates of ICT adoption are higher, while costs are lower and the spread and use of broadband are on the rise. The region's population has a wider array of ICT applications and e-services to choose from. The public and private sectors are working together to better integrate local communication networks regionally and globally.

This document is a non-exhaustive report that contains a summary of the status of implementation in the ESCWA region of a number of WSIS action lines. The initiatives described herein are ESCWA activities which are chiefly aimed at assisting member countries achieve the goals and objectives of the World Summit on the Information Society.

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

During 2013, ESCWA-ICTD<sup>1</sup> produced the latest edition of the *Regional Profile of the Information Society in the Arab Region* (RPIS)<sup>2</sup>. The 2013 edition<sup>3</sup> of RPIS is the sixth in a series that had been previously produced in 2003, 2005, 2007, 2009 and 2011. It examines the status of implementation of information societies in the Arab region, measures the progress made in building such societies and compares the performance of the region with that of other regions and the rest of the world. The publication uses WSIS action lines as a basis and contains related topics that are of special interest to the Arab region. The analysis and research undertaken to produce the 2013 RPIS have revealed that the Arab region has taken significant steps towards achieving WSIS goals and objectives.

The *Information Society Portal for the ESCWA Region* (ISPER)<sup>4</sup> provides a collaborative platform for knowledge management. The Website integrates accessible identity management through social media-based authentication, making it easier for participants in the region to collaborate. The system currently provides information on selected themes such as cyber legislation, information society measurement and Internet governance. It provides value to ESCWA member countries by promoting the findings and recommendations of work carried out by the Regional Commission and other information society stakeholders.

**III. ACTION LINES**

**C4: Capacity building**

The constitutions of all ESCWA member countries guarantee free public education and make it compulsory at the primary education level. Additionally, an emphasis on ICT capacity building is present in most national ICT policies.

One of the main mandates of ESCWA is to support and guide Arab countries in their move towards knowledge-based economies. Such a move cannot be achieved without capacity building. Decision makers and decision facilitators need to become familiar with ever-evolving concepts of e-government, e-governance, government information leadership, models of information sharing and interoperability. In this

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.escwa.un.org/divisions/main.asp?division=ictd>

<sup>2</sup> Previously, the Regional Profile of the Information Society in Western Asia

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.escwa.un.org/information/publications/edit/upload/E\\_ESCWA\\_ICTD\\_13\\_4\\_e.pdf](http://www.escwa.un.org/information/publications/edit/upload/E_ESCWA_ICTD_13_4_e.pdf) (tentative)

<sup>4</sup> <http://isper.escwa.un.org>

context, United Nations University<sup>5</sup> (UNU), ESCWA and the Office of the Minister of State for Administrative Reform<sup>6</sup> (OMSAR) of the Government of Lebanon jointly organized a training workshop which took place in Beirut during November 2013. Its main themes were e-governance policies, infrastructure and measurement. The five-day event was attended by 30 senior Lebanese civil servants who showed a keen interest in the subject matter.

In February 2013, ESCWA started implementing a project entitled *Academy of ICT Essentials for Government Leaders in the ESCWA Region (AIGLE)*<sup>7</sup>. The main objectives of the project are to create awareness and build the capacity of decision makers with regard to the utilization of ICT for sustainable development and to give them the skills that are necessary for the planning, managing and funding of development projects. The first activity of the project is an assessment of the ICT capacity-building needs of the Governments of the ESCWA region. The assessment will identify the main topics of training modules that will be created and implemented during the lifetime of the project.

ESCWA also created a study entitled *Impact of ICT on Arab Youth: Education, Employment and Social Change*<sup>8</sup>. This study examines the changes that have contributed to shifts in areas such as economics, social life and education. It identifies key pivot points and provides recommendations for maximizing the positive effects of ICT on the lives of Arab Youth. It also highlights the impact of ICT on the global competitive landscape and the attendant impact on the labor market for youth and shows that ICT has reduced the number of middle-class jobs, while creating more jobs at both the high-skill and low-skill edges of the spectrum. Its main recommendations focus on the positive impact of ICT on the educational systems of countries in the Arab Region.

## **C6: Enabling environment**

Cyber legislation is an essential element of an enabling environment for an effective information society. For the ESCWA region and as of the writing of this report, Yemen was the only country that had adopted a law on the right of access to information. The main objectives of this law are to facilitate access to information, expand freedom of expression and enhance transparency.

ESCWA has had a long history of helping member countries develop their national cyber legislation<sup>9</sup>. During 2013, ESCWA continued to provide related advisory services. The Ministry of ICT in Algeria, the Ministry of Communications in Iraq and the Prime Minister Office in Yemen have been beneficiaries of *advisory services* which focused on the enhancement of their national cyber laws.

ESCWA also developed a *cyber legislation policy note*<sup>10</sup> to aid the various stakeholders involved in the legislative processes of cyber space. The policy note highlights the importance of cyber legislation in building an effective knowledge society in the region. It aims at setting the legal frameworks that are necessary for cyber space and focuses on the major challenges and obstacles facing the region in the formulation and adoption of cyber legislation. The policy note also elaborates the efforts and research activities of the Regional Commission that are aimed at harmonizing cyber legislation and promoting regional integration. The policy note ends with a set of recommendations categorized according to the target audience or scope of work, including recommendations for: (1) the governments on the formulation of cyber legislation; (2) legislative procedures and processes; (3) the implementation of enacted laws; (4) the regional perspective for cyber legislation; and (5) education and capacity building.

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<sup>5</sup> <http://iist.unu.edu/capacity-building>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.omsar.gov.lb/Cultures/en-US/Pages/default.aspx>

<sup>7</sup> <http://css.escwa.org.lb/ictd/2094/12.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> [http://www.escwa.un.org/information/publications/edit/upload/E\\_ESCWA ICTD 13 TP-3 E.pdf](http://www.escwa.un.org/information/publications/edit/upload/E_ESCWA ICTD 13 TP-3 E.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> <http://isper.escwa.un.org/FocusAreas/CyberLegislation/tabid/157/language/en-US/Default.aspx>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.escwa.un.org/information/pubaction.asp?PubID=1394>

## **C7: ICT applications: benefits in all aspects of life**

During 2013, the process of improving e-government services continued in most countries of the ESCWA region. However, countries facing political instability suffered setbacks and, in some cases, some of their services failed and data collection for monitoring became more difficult.

ESCWA renewed its interest in e-governance and e-government applications with the *Regional Workshop on e-Government Best Practices*<sup>11</sup>. The workshop took place in Amman during December 2013 and was jointly organized by ESCWA, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) and the Jordanian Ministry of Information and Communication Technology (MoICT). It brought together directors of e-government programmes in the ESCWA region, project managers of e-government applications, experts from international and regional organizations and renowned relevant consulting firms. The main research material for the workshop was a 2013 ESCWA study entitled *E-Government Strategies in Arab Countries: Current Status and Development Prospects*<sup>12</sup>. Participants reviewed regional e-government achievements and areas for enhancement, identified areas for cooperation and deliberated on the establishment of a council of directors of Arab e-government programmes.

## **C8: Cultural diversity and identity, linguistic diversity and local content**

The Arabic language is ubiquitous in the ESCWA region. For the past few years, and in keeping with the spirit of the 8<sup>th</sup> WSIS action line, the Regional Commission has undertaken several initiatives aimed at enriching and enhancing the quality of online digital content in Arabic.

Digital Arabic content (DAC) carries numerous opportunities for businesses and investments in the ESCWA region and is only recently receiving growing attention from the private and public sectors. Realizing the importance of DAC, ESCWA developed during 2013 a study entitled *Business Models for Digital Arabic Content*<sup>13</sup>. The study identified five potential areas of development, namely education and learning, content aggregation and curation, public services, entertainment and gaming, and social media. It also focused on a number of business models suitable for the DAC industry including: (1) the advertising model, which is an extension of the conventional advertising model of the media industry; (2) the manufacturer model, which is also called the direct sales or direct model; (3) the subscription model, which offers paid premium content that is not accessible by other means; and (4) other models, such as brokerage, infomediary, merchant, affiliate, community, utility and venture capital fast-growth models.

The second phase of the project entitled *Promoting the Digital Arabic Content (DAC) Industry through Incubation*<sup>14</sup> was launched in 2012. The project is being implemented in partnership with several technology business incubators in the region. The related 2013 competition was launched in Palestine in collaboration with the Palestinian ICT Incubator (PICI), in Yemen in collaboration with the Science and Technology Centre of the University of Aden, and in Lebanon in collaboration with Berytech. Further competitions are planned for Egypt in collaboration with the Technology, Innovation and Entrepreneurship Centre and the UAE in collaboration with Abu Dhabi University. The competition will unlock the potential of entrepreneurs and university graduates who aspire to build novel DAC applications and products. The winners are granted an incubation period of 6 to 12 months with the partner, which will provide them with coaching, business advice, office facilities and guidance to establish a competitive start-up company.

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<sup>11</sup> <http://www.escwa.un.org/information/meetingdetails.asp?referenceNUM=3233e>

<sup>12</sup> <http://css.escwa.org.lb/ICTD/3233/StudyE-GovStrategies.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.escwa.un.org/information/pubaction.asp?PubID=1319>

<sup>14</sup> <http://isper.escwa.un.org/FocusAreas/DigitalArabicContent/tabid/260/language/en-US/Default.aspx>

## C11: International and regional cooperation

In collaboration with the Union of Arab Banks (UAB) and the Government of Tunisia, ESCWA organized the *Arab Forum on the ICT Sector*<sup>15</sup>, which took place in the city of Hammamet during May of 2013. Participants included experts and stakeholders from the public sector, the private sector, civil society and academia. The forum included discussions and deliberations on the strengthening of the financing and investment mechanisms, the promotion of business initiatives and the development of a competitive ICT sector in the Arab region.

The forum encompassed two consecutive events, namely the *Expert Group Meeting on Investment, Research, Development and Innovation in the ICT Sector*<sup>16</sup> and the *Conference on Investment and Finance of the ICT Sector in the Arab Region*<sup>17</sup>. The first part of the forum aimed at reaching a vision and setting recommendations for the development of a competitive ICT sector in the Arab region. The second part was a conference that aimed at promoting financing, investments and business entrepreneurs in the ICT sector. The main document discussed during the forum was a 2013 ESCWA study entitled *Competitiveness of the ICT Sector in the Arab Region: Innovation and Investment Imperatives*<sup>18</sup>. The forum concluded with a final statement entitled *Towards Strengthening Competitiveness in the ICT Sector through Investment and Innovation*. The statement stressed that governments had a role to play in the promotion of the ICT sector with the development of legal and organizational frameworks and legislations and the provision of a supporting infrastructure. It highlighted the need for universities and research centres to develop incentives for researchers and to focus on applied research and knowledge transfer in addition to theoretical research. It also invited the banking sector to increase its financing of and to promote better connections and cooperative mechanisms with the ICT sector.

During 2013, the ESCWA Technology Center<sup>19</sup> (ETC) in Amman prepared a study entitled *National STI SWOT Analysis Report for Arab Countries*<sup>20</sup>. The study was based on an ETC survey which was filled by 5 countries, namely Yemen, Qatar, Oman, Jordan, and Palestine and complemented with desk research which covered the remaining countries of the region. It listed the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges (SWOC) of each ESCWA member country and suggested and facilitated partnerships in science, technology and innovation (STI). The chief aim of suggested partnerships was to identify and promote regional complementarities. The study was the main material for discussion during a regional workshop that took place at end of April 2013 and which assembled representatives from the STI sectors of all 17 ESCWA countries.

## IV. MAIN THEMES

### MT1: Internet governance

The Arab Internet Governance Forum (AIGF) was established during 2012 under the joint umbrella of ESCWA and the League of Arab States (LAS). AIGF activities are coordinated by a central secretariat, which is hosted by the Egyptian National Telecommunication Regulatory Authority (NTRA), and are managed through the Arab Multistakeholder Advisory Group (AMAG), which is composed of 30 experts from various stakeholder groups in the Arab region. The forum's main activities during 2013 included three preparatory meetings as well as the *Second Annual Meeting of the Arab IGF (AIGF-II)*<sup>21</sup>.

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<sup>15</sup> <http://www.escwa.un.org/information/meetingdetails.asp?referenceNum=2118E>

<sup>16</sup> [http://css.escwa.org.lb/ICTD/2118/Agenda\\_EGM.pdf](http://css.escwa.org.lb/ICTD/2118/Agenda_EGM.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> <http://css.escwa.org.lb/ICTD/2118/Agendaconf.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> [http://www.escwa.un.org/information/publications/edit/upload/E\\_ESCWA\\_ICTD\\_13\\_4\\_E.pdf](http://www.escwa.un.org/information/publications/edit/upload/E_ESCWA_ICTD_13_4_E.pdf)

<sup>19</sup> <http://etc-un.org/pr/default.aspx>

<sup>20</sup> <http://etc-un.org/PR/Default.aspx?ln=1&pid=4850&pvr=0>

<sup>21</sup> [http://www.escwa.un.org/information/pressescwaprint.asp?id\\_code=582](http://www.escwa.un.org/information/pressescwaprint.asp?id_code=582)

The three preparatory meetings included one open consultation and two meetings of the Arab Multistakeholder Advisory Group (AMAG). They aimed at setting the program and focus areas of AIGF-II. They also included one coordination meeting which brought together the main partners of the process and resulted in a document entitled *Reference Framework for the Arab IGF Structure and Components: 2012-2015* which covers the functions and work mechanisms of AIGF components.

Under the slogan *Partners for Development*, the main AIGF activity for 2013 was the convening of AIGF-II in Algeria. The meeting took place during October 2013 under the high patronage of the President of the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria. Participants included 14 ministers from various Arab countries, with the total number of people in attendance surpassing 800, mainly from Arab and European countries. The main topics discussed during AIGF-II included Internet access and infrastructure, critical Internet resources, security and privacy, openness and content as well as Internet and youth. The meeting included 12 thematic workshops organized by various institutions covering the following: (1) ICANN's strategy to promote the DNS ecosystem in the Middle East and adjoining regions; (2) 4G networks in the Arab region; (3) Internet peering and exchange points in the Arab region; (4) child online protection in the Arab region; (5) Internet governance challenges and opportunities for law enforcement agencies; (6) information security and privacy; (7) human rights and Internet governance; (8) community networks for education, research and health sectors; (9) Living labs and Internet governance in the Arab world; (10) innovation for economic development; (11) innovation engines and mindsets; and (12) education, employability and entrepreneurship.

### **MT3: Measuring the Information Society**

In accordance with the goals of WSIS to more effectively measure the information society, ESCWA produced during 2013 an output, and carried out a related activity. The first was a publication entitled *Impact of Selected e-Services on Socioeconomic Development in the Arab Region*<sup>22</sup>. The study assesses the availability, maturity and status of selected e-services in the Arab region through available indicators and frameworks that aim to measure the impact of e-services on socioeconomic development. The study concludes with a recommended framework dedicated to the process by which e-services impact socioeconomic outcomes. It further suggests policy initiatives that exploit the transformation potential of ICT, as well as innovation in e-services, both made possible by technological advances and the increasing pervasiveness of ICT.

A related activity carried out during 2013 was an EGM entitled *The Role of ICT in Socio-Economic Development*<sup>23</sup>. Its main objective was to examine the role which ICT plays in selected, high-impact sectors, such as governance, economic competitiveness, social relationships and education. Participants identified actions needed to enhance the impact of ICT on socioeconomic development to catalyze positive change in the development challenges in the region.

## **V. SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **C1. Role of Public governance authorities in the promotion of ICTs for development**

Create, update and align strategies and companion action plans that are sector-specific, such as e-learning, e-education, e-health, e-government and e-commerce strategies.

### **C2. Information and communication infrastructure**

Give particular attention to the promotion of broadband services whether in their fixed or mobile variants. This requires a holistic approach as recommended by the Broadband Commission for Digital Development involving: (i) policy leadership for investment; (ii) open telecommunication markets; (iii)

<sup>22</sup> [http://www.escwa.un.org/information/publications/edit/upload/E\\_ESCWA ICTD 13 2 E.pdf](http://www.escwa.un.org/information/publications/edit/upload/E_ESCWA ICTD 13 2 E.pdf)

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.escwa.un.org/information/meetingdetails.asp?referenceNum=2094E>

development of government and other public electronic services; (iv) a universal service program; and (v) encourage efficient and innovative mobile broadband practices for new market entrants and consumers.

### **C3. Access to information and knowledge**

Adopt access policies and initiatives targeting the participation and inclusion of all citizens especially the disabled and the ones located in remote or marginalized areas.

### **C4. Capacity Building**

Encourage ICT professional training programs, in addition to the ICT academic qualification, to provide graduates with the necessary practical skills and expertise to fulfil market needs.

### **C5. Building confidence and security in the use of ICTs**

Share best practices from existing CERTs among ESCWA member countries for promoting the establishment of an incident management capability with national responsibilities, and support their activities by providing them with the latest technological solutions and standards in the field of security and protection of cyberspace. These centres should become the national points of reference in all matters related to technical issues related to the protection of ICTs, and should be designed to cooperate at the bilateral, regional and global levels.

### **C6. Enabling environment**

Pursue efforts for defining national ICT standards in line with the international ones to guarantee the production of infrastructures and software according to the international standards and to ensure interoperability between different ICT applications and e-government services at national, sub-regional and regional levels.

### **C7. ICT applications**

Mobilize the proper resources through concerted national efforts to implement e-government initiatives, based on re-invented and reengineering government procedures and processes, thus avoiding potential losses incurred from developing multiple systems to solve the same problems.

### **C8. Cultural diversity and identity, linguistic diversity and local content**

Enhance the enabling environment needed for a flourishing private sector by facilitating access to national and regional funds and making these funds available, providing facilities such as the simplification of processes to establish a business, and providing incentives such as tax exemptions for start-ups and SMEs in the field of DAC development.

### **C9. Media**

Call upon governments to amend the laws and legislations that govern the media sector and its professions in such a way to ensure that the press freedoms are well protected and the sector is governed in accordance to the international laws.

### **C11. International and regional cooperation**

Develop a coordinated approach on regional issues of common concern among member countries such as in the areas of international telecommunication, Internet governance, digital Arabic content and cyber safety.