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**Submissions from entities in the United Nations system and elsewhere on
their efforts in 2017 to implement the outcome of the WSIS**

Submission by

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 21st 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.

**2018 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

Innovation is acknowledged as one of the major drivers of productivity, inclusive economic growth, sustainable development, social well-being, and job creation. The implications of innovation are notable in improving human welfare, industrial efficiency, and environmental protection. To strengthen the enabling environment for innovation and boost its potential in social and economic development in the Arab region, Arab countries are encouraged to formulate and implement innovation policies that are aimed at inclusive sustainable development.

In 2017, efforts towards regional integration focused on linkages between the information society and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development. Focus was also directed towards analyzing the status of the digital economy in the Arab region and emphasizing the benefits of digital transformation for the economy of the Arab region and the attainment of the SDGs.

In the Arab region, the movement towards greater openness and the use of smart technologies for better government is becoming stronger and more prominent. The implementation of an open and smart approach in governments will lead to better government service delivery, citizen engagement, accountability, transparency, and responsiveness. In turn, these improvements will impact the wellbeing of citizens, and will promote better economic growth. Open government will encourage good governance in line with the recommendations of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, especially Goal 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions.

During 2017, much work aimed at the development of the Arab Internet governance Forum (AIGF) took place. ESCWA sponsored and nursed the process of drafting a new Charter for the AIGF and a second roadmap on Internet governance. Both, the new Charter and the Second Roadmap, were produced in a participatory manner by online working groups. These two instruments promote inclusiveness in the AIGF process and guide it towards regional cooperation in line with identified Internet governance priorities for the Arab region.

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

The first session of the Committee on Technology for Development was held during February 2017 in Dubai², gathering 20 government representatives from 12 ESCWA member states. Discussions included a variety of topics, namely technology and innovation for social and economic development, the global process on STI for development, international and regional processes of ICT for Development (ICT4D), the innovation landscape in the Arab region, the digital economy and smart societies. The meeting also featured a round table discussion on technology and the implementation of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda in the Arab states.

¹ Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, currently serving 18 member countries, all situated in the Arab region www.escwa.un.org

² <https://www.unescwa.org/events/committee-technology-development-1st-session>

The committee recognized the important role of science, technology and innovation (STI) and ICT in social and economic development in achieving the 2030 Development Agenda. It advised on strengthening cooperation between policymakers responsible for the digital economy and their counterparts in other sectors to take advantage of the possibilities offered by the digital economy, to increase employment, diversify the economy and absorb new types of digital functions. The committee also advised on the need to strengthen collaboration between government, academia and the private sector to promote and integrate innovation in national development agendas and called for better collaboration at the regional level to address regional challenges.

In May 2017, ESCWA launched a new process called *The Arab High-level Forum on WSIS and 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*³. Its first meeting took place in Beirut. It gathered 170 experts, participants and government officials who hailed from 17 countries. At the end of the event, the forum declared the *Beirut Consensus on Transformation and Digital Economy in the Arab Region – Towards the Achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. In the future, the forum will be held periodically and will serve as a regional platform for the exchange of experiences and lessons learned. It will also work towards strengthening partnerships in technology in order to promote complementary and balanced work and achieve optimal benefits.

III. ACTION LINES

C1: The role of governments and all stakeholders in the promotion of ICTs for development

Digital Economy is a concept characterizing a situation in which the pervasive use of information and communication technologies (ICT) in all social and economic endeavours leads to better opportunities, economic growth and improved public service delivery. The digital economy plays an important role in the advent of smart societies, empowering various actors, public authorities, governments, businesses, and citizens. It encourages youth and women to take optimal and informed decisions. The digital economy revolution is no less important than former industrial revolutions be they the advent of steam power, combustion engines or electricity.

In 2017, ESCWA produced a publication entitled *Perspectives of the Digital Economy in the Arab Region*. The main objective of this publication is to create awareness and help policymakers and other stakeholders in the Arab region in identifying priority areas for the transformation of traditional national economies into digital economies. It promotes the development of national digital agendas and addresses various socioeconomic problems and contributes to the fulfilment of the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

C2: Information and communication infrastructure: an essential foundation for an inclusive information society

During May 2017, ESCWA produced a study entitled *Next Generation Digital Infrastructure: Challenges and Opportunities for Development in the Arab Region*. This paper looks at the global landscape of the next generation digital infrastructure. It explores the main elements of the ecosystem, the various stakeholders, and the prevailing usage trends

³ <https://www.unescwa.org/events/arab-forum-information-society-sustainable-development>

accompanying the evolution in broadband technologies. It further explores the main drivers for the rollout of next generation networks and the emerging models for deployment.

In its second part, the paper takes a more focused look at the Arab region, exploring the context for next generation digital infrastructure rollout, the main deployment models and the regional landscape to date. Additionally, it attempts to define the prevailing regulatory and operational challenges, and the opportunities that lie ahead in addressing them through a roadmap of strategic tools and measures.

C4: Capacity Building

During 2017, ESCWA organized a Capacity Building Workshop on "Fostering Innovation in the Public Sector of Arab Countries"⁴. The objective of this workshop was to raise awareness among government decision-makers of the Arab region on innovative use of technologies in the public sector. It also aims at building better understanding among government officials about the various forms of innovation in public sector and its impact on social and economic development. These objectives were achieved through general discussions of concepts and challenges, approaches of public sector innovation, as well as tools and technologies. The value of public sector innovation was illustrated through examples from the international arena as well as regional and national case studies.

The workshop included several topics such as: (a) Understanding innovation in the public sector; (b) the linkage between public sector innovation and the SDGs; (c) tools and technologies that can be used to activate and sustain innovation in the public sector; and (d) policy for fostering innovation in public sectors.

C6: Enabling environment

During 2017, ESCWA produced a study entitled *Arab Horizon 2030: Digital Technologies for Development*. This document discusses digital technologies for development in the Arab region within the context of the UN Agenda for Sustainable Development and an outlook that culminates in the year 2030. The study addresses an array of issues related to digital technologies and lies at the intersection of various international development agendas. Most importantly, it focuses on how to improve the use and adoption of digital technologies for the benefit of development and fulfilment of the sustainable development goals. The following topics were the main targets of the study:

- Achieving SDG targets and goals by leveraging the power of ICT. This part of the study focuses on lessons learned locally, regionally and globally;
- Determining main SDG gaps in the Arab region and how they could be best filled using ICT;
- Projecting and determining a path for the Arab region to help it deliver on the promises of the SDGs by the year 2030.

ESCWA also produced a companion study entitled *WSIS-SDG Linkages on Employment, Industry & Economic Growth*. This study is an attempt to identify the links WSIS Agenda Action Lines have with two specific SDG's, namely 8 and 9, as related to economic growth and industrialization and as drivers for development and creators of job

⁴ <https://www.unescwa.org/events/fostering-public-sector-innovation-arab-region>

opportunities leading to full and productive employment and decent work for all in an ecosystem of a knowledge-based digital economy. It covers the following topics:

- Changes and transformations in employment models; their effect on individuals and societies; the future of employment with a focus on formal versus informal employment and the impact of the above on economic growth;
- The challenges of new employment models on the development of effective digital economies in the Arab region;
- Employment as it relates to the digital economy and the role of the digital economy in creating jobs;
- Role of governments in employment and the creation of job opportunities and economic growth in the Arab region;
- A short synopsis on the existence and implementation status of regional and national employment and economic growth strategies with a focus on initiatives sponsored by governments, NGOs and international organizations that aim at creating enabling environments to help meet present and future employment challenges;
- The role of ICT in creating industries, the role of ICT industries and the digital economy in creating job opportunities and economic growth;
- Recommendations on how to leverage the benefits of new employment models for the promotion of digital economies.

ESCWA published in 2017, a study on "Innovation Policy for Inclusive Sustainable Development in the Arab Region" which provides Arab countries with a comprehensive framework to formulate Innovation Policy that supports economic growth and contributes to the achievement of the 2030 Development Agenda. The proposed framework includes specific pillar for **consolidating the regulatory framework** to ensure suitable technology transfer and development through trade, foreign direct investment (FDI) and public procurement. Arab countries should strengthen their intellectual property frameworks and legislation, including patenting procedures. Fair and transparent competition is still absent in the vast majority of Arab countries and is a reflection of the rentier economic model, which is fundamentally harmful for innovators, particularly young entrepreneurs whose main assets are their energy and inventiveness. Fair competition laws are an essential complement to intellectual property frameworks because they contribute to the establishment of fair market behavior.

C7: ICT applications: benefits in all aspects of life

In the framework of the ESCWA regional initiative on "Institutional development for better service delivery towards the achievement of the sustainable development goals in Western Asia"⁵, ESCWA held in April 2017, its first EGM on "Open government: emerging technologies for greater government transparency and accountability"⁶. The meeting gathered 46 experts and high-level government officials from across the Arab region. The main objective of this meeting was to discuss open government, its potential role in enhancing

⁵ <https://www.unescwa.org/sub-site/open-government-arab-region>

⁶ <https://www.unescwa.org/events/open-government-emerging-technologies-arab-region>

government transparency, government accountability, and the improvement of citizen participation and engagement in government decision-making in the Arab region. The discussions were based on a draft study developed by ESCWA entitled “Open government policy framework for greater transparency and accountability in the public sector of Arab countries”. The meeting also discussed the status of open government in Arab countries based on the results of a survey on open government and a literature review. The main findings were presented and examined, including some suggestions on advancing and promoting open government in the region. During the meeting selected international, regional and national initiatives were showcased to stimulate the sharing of knowledge and lessons learned.

During 2017, ESCWA produced a study entitled *Smart Digital Transformation in Government*. The study focuses on smart applications and solutions that are implemented in developed and developing countries, with a special emphasis on smart government implementations. It took into consideration:

- Existing approaches, frameworks, policies and strategies;
- Best practices, success stories and known failures in the public and private sectors;
- The latest trends and technologies;
- Applicability to the countries of the Arab region.

The study explores and assesses the existence or lack thereof of smart applications in the Arab region, with a special emphasis on smart government implementations. It focuses on the following:

- Challenges and issues facing the region;
- Existing approaches, frameworks, policies and strategies;
- Best practices, success stories and known failures in the public and private sectors;
- Benchmarking of the region’s smart government applications.

IV. MAIN THEMES

MT1: Internet Governance

The ESCWA-LAS AIGF2020 initiative was launched in 2015, at the conclusion of the fourth Arab IGF meeting (Beirut, 2015), and started with the formation in 2016 of a Technical Cooperation Working Group (TCWG) from the various stakeholders in Internet governance, from 13 Arab countries. This initiative had many objectives, such as: (1) Analyse the achievements of the first round of the Arab IGF process (2012-2015); (2) Assess the impact of the Arab IGF on Internet governance policies in the Arab region; and (4) Propose enhancements for developing the second Arab roadmap on Internet governance as well as the second mandate of the Arab IGF, to be geared towards implementation of SDGs.

In 2017, the AIGF2020 initiative continued with the formation of a Roadmap Working Group (RMWG) that includes experts from various stakeholders who are collaborating on the review and update of the 2010 Roadmap and met in December 2017 in an [expert meeting "Second Arab Roadmap on Internet Governance – the Next Decade"](#)⁷, during which they finalized, adopted and launched the second version of the Roadmap⁸ that will guide the Arab IGF process in its next phase.

⁷ <https://www.unescwa.org/events/arab-internet-governance-roadmap-2-meeting>

⁸ <https://www.unescwa.org/sites/www.unescwa.org/files/events/files/armig2-draft.pdf>