

**UNITED NATIONS COMMISSION ON SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY
FOR DEVELOPMENT (CSTD)**

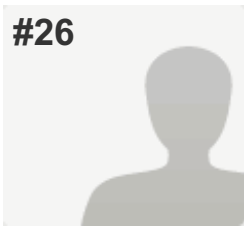
**Contribution to the CSTD ten-year review of the implementation of WSIS
outcomes**

Submitted by

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR WESTERN ASIA

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Q1: Salutation:

Mr.

Q2: First Name, Surname:

Haidar, Fraihat

Q3: Organisation:

Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

Q4: Country:

Lebanon

Q6: Which stakeholder category do you belong to?

Intergovernmental Organization

Q7: To what extent, in your experience, has the "people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society", envisaged in the opening paragraph of the WSIS Geneva Declaration of Principles, developed in the ten years since WSIS?

Since the question specifically mentions our experience, we will restrict the answer to the region that our organization serves which, to all intents and purposes, corresponds to a large part of the Arab-speaking world.

In broad terms, the development of a people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society is a more realistic prospect today than it was ten years ago. Most countries in the Arab region, the obvious exceptions being the countries that are currently experiencing severe political and social turmoil, are performing better today than they were at the time of the Declaration of Principles.

The Arab region has taken significant steps towards bridging the digital divide within the region and with countries of the developed world. ICT adoption and use rates have seen dramatic increases. The usage of fixed and wireless broadband technologies is on the rise and access costs are on the decline. Many countries in the region have adopted and implemented policies that are aimed at building the ICT sector. Building confidence and security in the use of ICT is another area of focus as it is seen by many as essential to encourage otherwise reluctant local populations to use online services.

Q8: How far do you consider the implementation of specific WSIS outcomes to have been achieved?

We believe that the Arab region made important progress in selected areas such as ICT infrastructure, role of government and stakeholder and local content development. However, in this region there is a need for serious efforts in the area of building trust and confidence in cyberspace, building ICT sector, development of ICT Applications and capacity building in ICT.

It should be noted that there is a gap in the development of Information Society in the region, and we can distinguish at least three maturity levels, the first which is the most advanced one include gulf countries, the second includes the medium level and includes countries like Jordan, Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco and Lebanon; and the third category includes countries under conflict and the least developed countries such as Syria, Palestine, Yemen and Sudan.

Worldwide, we think that developing countries made progress in connecting people, school, universities and other public institutions however the appropriate high quality services are still lacking in most of developing countries. Furthermore, although many efforts have been made in e-services and local content development, there is still gaps between developed and developing countries in this area. There is also a need to : (a) develop special programs for enhancing education and skills in ICT related topics at all levels, (b) consider emerging ICT trends of ICT, including mobile technologies, in the development of inclusive knowledge society, and (c) enhance legal and regulatory framework of information and knowledge society.

We also believe that there are others areas which requires serious efforts at global level such as the measurement of Information Society, research on the impact of ICT on social and economic development and the use of ICT for enhancing accountability and transparency of government service delivery.

Q9: How has the implementation of WSIS outcomes contributed towards the development of a "people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society"?

Government, NGO and private sector implemented a number of people centred services, initiatives and activities in many developing countries including the Arab region, however, we believe that such initiatives were limited to specific target group or geographic area, therefore, Information Society stakeholders should generalize the successful stories to target wider population.

Additionally, government together with private sector had also realized successful projects for the inclusion of disadvantage communities, such as people living in rural and remote areas, nevertheless, these projects were also limited either in terms of geographical coverage or in terms of implementation period. We think that mainstreaming such experiments by taking advantage of their lessons learned will contribute significantly to the development of Information Society.

In the last years there were serious efforts in developing citizen-centreic e-government services in developing countries, including Arab countries, yet this approach still requires enhancement and dissemination in the Arab region, and most probably in other developing countries.

It should be mentioned that there is a need to undertake research studies about the impact of ICT on social and economic development as there is not enough evidence and data on the role of ICT on development. At ESCWA, we made a number of studies on this topic during the last two years, and our studies focused on best practices and successful stories as well as on the use of ICT for development. We found that measuring the impact of ICT on development requires deep research and the definition of suitable indicators and indexes.

Q10: What are the challenges to the implementation of WSIS outcomes? What are the challenges that have inhibited the emergence of a "people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society"?

Challenges to the emergence of an information society in the Arab region persist but are not uniform, with some countries performing better than others. The main challenges that have inhibited the emergence of a people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented information society are listed below. It is important to note that this list is not exhaustive, but that it focuses on the challenges that are most common for the region.

- Low ICT readiness and utilization rates in the economically-disadvantaged member countries;
- Low broadband penetration levels associated with costs that are too high to be affordable by the less affluent population segments;
- Lack of confidence in the security of ICT applications, which discourages utilization of online services;
- Underdeveloped or incomplete legal and regulatory frameworks;
- Restricted access to information and electronic surveillance leading to a lack of online privacy;
- Limited production and availability of digital content in Arabic, which keeps a large portion of monolingual Arabic speakers from effectively utilizing or benefiting from online offerings;
- Poor, inaccurate and untimely ICT statistics and measurements which hinder the development of policies and strategies that are pertinent to the needs of the region.

Q11: How are these challenges being addressed? What approaches have proved to be effective in your experience?

We believe that collaboration between government, private sector and NGO is an important measure to face the challenges of the advancement of Information Society in the Arab region. There were a number of successful partnerships in the region that demonstrated their effectiveness. South-south collaboration and exchange of best practices and success stories, especially among developing countries would also boost the development of ICT initiatives in other countries.

Experiences show that the commitment of high level leaders is an important factor for the development of ICT and enhance its role in the society, especially when such commitment is translated by adopting policies and strategies for ICT for socioeconomic development, and by implementing initiatives and projects. The benefits of such policies grow when ICT policies are integrated in the national development policies.

The creation of specific fund for the developmental ICT projects, especially those targeting disadvantaged communities, is also an important factor for developing countries. Such fund could be established by government and supported by private sector, banks and financial institutions.

Finally, we believe that building capacity and enhancing skills at all levels and in many domains, especially in developing countries would certainly contribute to the progress of information society.

Q12: What do you consider the most important emerging trends in technology and other aspects of ICTs which have affected implementation of WSIS outcomes since the Summit? What has been their impact?

- Mobile technologies and WiFi technologies have highly affected the spread and the accessibility to ICT in all countries, especially developing countries.
- Smart phones facilitated the access and the exchange of information among people, they also boost the development of new type of applications and thus contributed to the development of m-services, including those based on geographic locations.
- Broadband technologies also facilitated the exchange of media content and data intensive applications.
- Social networking and social media also increased penetration rate to Internet and increased the traffic.
- Cloud computing affected the development of applications and their usage.

Q13: What should be the priorities for stakeholders seeking to achieve WSIS outcomes and progress towards the Information Society, taking into account emerging trends?

For Arab region stakeholders seeking to achieve WSIS outcomes and progress towards the information society, we listed ten main priorities below. For a more comprehensive look and a more detailed list, refer to the recommendations - by action line - of the latest edition of the "Regional Profile of the Information Society in the Arab Region" at:

http://www.escwa.un.org/information/publications/edit/upload/E_ESCWA_ICTD_13_6_E.pdf

1. 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.
2. Give particular attention to the promotion of broadband services whether in their fixed or mobile variants.
3. 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.
4. Encourage ICT professional training programs, in addition to the ICT academic qualification, to provide graduates with the necessary practical skills and expertise to fulfill market needs.
5. Share best practices from existing CERTs among ESCWA member countries and support their activities by providing them with the latest technological solutions and standards in the field of security and protection of cyberspace.
6. 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 all levels.
7. Mobilize the proper resources to implement e-government initiatives – as well as other e-services - based on the re-invention/re-engineering of government processes and procedures, while avoiding potential losses incurred from developing multiple systems to solve the same problems.
8. Facilitate the establishment of a national entrepreneurial and start-up support ecosystem including incubators, accelerators, mentorship, investments, and venture capital, focusing on DAC applications and emphasizing the recent technology trends such as mobile devices, tablet computers and cloud computing.
9. Call upon governments to amend the laws and legislation 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.
10. 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.

Q14: What role should information and communications play in the implementation of the post-2015 development agenda?

ICT should play an important role for the development of Post-2015 Development Agenda, in the Arab region, especially in the following areas:

- providing an advanced platform for accelerating the achievement of the three pillars of sustainable development: economic growth, social inclusion and environmental sustainability,
- supporting the creation of new job opportunities especially for women and youth,
- enhancing productivity, efficiency and transparency in public and private sector,
- supporting the education system and facilitating the access to school and university curriculum especially in remote areas and to areas under conflict,
- facilitating the access to healthcare information and system through the development of suitable applications and services,
- promoting innovation and entrepreneurship for the creation of start-ups and SMEs,
- supporting the management of natural resources especially (water, energy and transport),
- enhancing governance at national, regional and international level,
- improving access to information and knowledge for all.

Questionnaire for the CSTD's ten year review of WSIS implementation

Q15: Please add any other comments that you wish to make on the subject of the review that you believe would be helpful.

Respondent skipped this question

Q16: We would also welcome any documents, reports, etc. that you can forward which you think will provide useful evidence for the review. Please send these to cstd-wsis10@unctad.org. It would be helpful if you could list these in this box, together with any URL which enables access to them on the World Wide Web.

Regional Profile of the Information Society in the Arab Region - 2013
http://www.escwa.un.org/information/publications/edit/upload/E_ESCWA_ICTD_13_6_E.pdf