COMMISSION ON SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY FOR DEVELOPMENT (CSTD)

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Submissions from entities in the United Nations system, international organizations and other stakeholders on their efforts in 2023 to implement the outcomes of the WSIS

Submission by

World Food Programme

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 27th 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.

WSIS Report: Progress made in 2023 in the implementation of the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society at the regional and international levels

Part One: **An executive summary (half a page) of activities undertaken by all stakeholders, progress made, and any obstacles encountered.**

As the lead of the Emergency Telecommunications Cluster (ETC), the World Food Programme (WFP) coordinates and delivers services to humanitarians, affected populations, and governments to enable their vital access to information and communication in crises. In 2023, the ETC responded to humanitarian needs in Bangladesh, Nigeria, the Sahel, Sudan, Syria, Ukraine, Turkey, and Yemen.

In line with the ETC2025 Strategy, the ETC has stepped up its emergency preparedness efforts in recent years. It developed a return-on-investment model to enable national stakeholders to assess the benefits of investing in emergency telecommunications preparedness with empirical evidence, with the goal to encourage further investments in disaster-resilient telecommunications.

In addition, the ETC preparedness team has worked with governments in different parts of the world to strengthen their national and/or regional preparedness capacities. Key services provided by the ETC include needs assessments, improved coordination through the implementation of ICT working groups with clear Terms of Reference and work plans, the development of contingency plans and the execution of simulation exercises, as well as local capacity building, including adequate follow-up activities and promotion of South-South Cooperation.

Finally, the ETC also works to bridge the digital divide and address the information and technology gaps faced by communities by providing tailored ICT services within designated centers, giving people access to life-saving connectivity, information, digital literacy skills. The initiative also has a focus on digital learning with a view to building digital literacy in communities. With these skills, people can improve their livelihoods and build resilience to future shocks related to conflict, climate, and economy.

Part Two: **A brief (1–2 pages) analytical overview of trends and experiences in implementation at the national, regional and international levels and by all stakeholders, highlighting achievements and obstacles since WSIS and taking into account the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This could include information on the facilitation process of implementation, monitoring and cooperation among stakeholders.**

While connectivity should be considered a crucial form of assistance, on par with food, water, and shelter, at present it is not given this recognition in the broader humanitarian context, resulting in an *ad hoc* and unharmonized approach to providing connectivity to affected populations.

The ETC is looking address this gap and develop a framework, a global public good, that will empower the humanitarian community to provide "connectivity as aid", by establishing access to

information and communication services as a basic right in humanitarian settings, and providing guidance to the humanitarian community on how to design and deliver appropriate interventions, leveraging its diverse network of partners and experience providing communications services to affected populations, including migrants in transit and refugees.

Access to lifesaving information, remote education, and health, the ability to provide feedback about humanitarian assistance, are just some of the key elements that connectivity unblocks for those in need. It empowers populations and promotes accountability. Achieving universal connectivity is now included in the Roadmap for Digital Cooperation of the United Nations Secretary and is starting to be considered a new human right.

Part Three: **A brief description (1–2 pages) of:**
   (a) **Innovative policies, programmes and projects which have been undertaken by all stakeholders to implement the outcomes. Where specific targets or strategies have been set, progress in achieving those targets and strategies should be reported.**

ETC Return on Investment (ROI) model

The ETC's ROI model advocates for sustained investments in emergency telecommunications preparedness across three critical areas: infrastructure, capacity building, and stakeholder coordination. Its goal is to encourage various stakeholders involved in emergency telecommunications to adopt and utilize the model, providing tangible evidence of investment's value.

The model has been shared and presented to various stakeholders, including humanitarian organisations, government agencies and WFP country offices. The approach has been applied in two real-life country cases – Mozambique and Madagascar – demonstrating nearly a 3 USD saving for every 1 USD investment in emergency preparedness. The model is public and available for use by humanitarian partners and national governments.

This resource has been disseminated widely with governments, UN stakeholders and partners. In May 2023, the ETC presented the model at the ITU-D Study Group 3/1, which focuses on the use of telecommunications and ICTs for disaster risk reduction and management. The Study Group acknowledged the value of the ROI model and requested its inclusion in the main body of the report from this session. In addition, the Study Group expressed interest to feature this study in future 3/1 studies, which the ETC remains ready to do in close collaboration with 3/1 Chairs and the ITU Secretariat. The ETC also presented this resource in a session at the Model National Emergency Telecommunications Plan Situational Analysis Validation Workshop held in March 2023 by the ITU-Southern African Development States. The key findings have been shared in the final report for this engagement.

Other notable instances of knowledge-sharing include its presentation during a collaborative session among ETC partners (ITU, GSMA and UNICEF) at the Humanitarian Networks and Partnerships Weeks (HNPW) in Geneva in April 2023, the presentation of pilot country results at a South-South emergency telecommunications collaboration workshop for three Southern African

countries (Malawi, Madagascar and Mozambique) in Maputo in June 2023, and dedicated sessions for capacity development for WFP (as the lead agency for the ETC) and ETC partners across the year in 2023.

Emergency Telecommunications Preparedness Action Plan (ETPAP)

ETC investments have also led to the development of a national Emergency Telecommunications Preparedness Action Plan (ETPAP), aimed at comprehensively enhancing emergency telecommunications readiness in terms of capacity, infrastructure, and policy. The implementation of the ETPAP will reduce the potential response time for disasters. The draft ETPAP (reported in 2022 in this reporting series) is currently under review by the national stakeholders, as part of the National ICT Working Group in Mozambique.

Services for Communities

As part of ETC's commitment to actively advocate for and pursue accountability for affected populations, an inter-agency Common Feedback Mechanism was opened in Madagascar in December 2022 with the collaboration of the WFP Mozambique Country Office. Affected communities can call the toll-free hotline to seek assistance, request information and provide feedback on the humanitarian services available. The inter-agency CFM has received more than 90,000 calls and provided information about humanitarian assistance offered by the eight organizations using the mechanism, including NGOs, UN organizations and government agencies. The Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) is advocating for the inclusion of new organizations as partners of the feedback mechanism.

Connectivity as Aid

The ETC is committed to having connectivity recognized as a basic human right in humanitarian settings. In 2023, the ETC opened a community center in Diffa, Niger, that offers a free space for host communities and refugees to access internet and improve their digital skills. Considerations, such as data protection, cybersecurity, or implementing measures to try to reduce the gender gap, are always considered, to ensure the observation of the humanitarian principles of "do no harm." A second center in Dori, Burkina Faso, is targeted for completion before the end of the year.

> **(b) Future actions or initiatives to be taken, regionally and/or internationally, and by all stakeholders, to improve the facilitation and ensure full implementation in each of the action lines and themes, especially with regard to overcoming those obstacles identified in Part Two above. You are encouraged to indicate any new commitments made to further implement the outcomes.**

The ETC is actively collaborating with multiple country offices in Central America to facilitate the implementation and operation of the ROI model at the country-level, with respective country offices taking the lead in the application process. Additionally, the ETC is exploring ways to measure and leverage a social ROI, enhancing the understanding of the advantages that telecommunications preparedness offers communities during disasters. This comprehensive approach will empower better decision-making and enhance community resilience in crisis situations.

The aim of the ETC is to expand the scope of our projects to other use cases, such as areas with influx of migrants, and to define a standardized approach of service delivery in the case of a sudden onset emergencies. The ETC plans to consolidate the experience gathered through the different projects and deployments and define guidelines that can ease the process of identifying key steps and considerations when deploying this type of projects for other interested partners and humanitarian organizations.

The ETC will try to close the gap between user experience and service definition with the technology components of the solution, converting Connectivity as Aid as a true service. The ultimate goal of the ETC's work is to advocate for the official inclusion of access to connectivity as a human right, under international law.