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 2022 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 26th 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.

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

As a cluster 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. Serving three distinct 'clients' ETC continued to respond to humanitarian needs in five protracted crises (Bangladesh, Central African Republic, Syria, Yemen, Nigeria), with two new contexts Somalia and Ukraine. In Ukraine, ETC deployed cyber security solutions and VSATs to provide secure networks and backup connectivity to humanitarians. Further setting up interagency complaint and feedback mechanisms for humanitarians to have the collective response in Madagascar.

For affected population, ETC has deployed the Chatbot which aggregates key messages from different humanitarian actors under a single channel and delivers coordinated content to affected populations. Additionally setting up pilot project in Sahel region to enable access to telecommunication services, such as voice and data connectivity, along with kiosks to charge phones for migrants and internally displaced populations (IDPs). The interventions are both lifesaving and helps build community resilience in areas of protracted crises.

In the Pacific Islands, a region highly prone to natural disasters, ETC leads preparedness activities with governments and other stakeholders to ensure sustainable access to information and communications technologies in the event of a sudden onset disaster. Additionally supporting governments of Mongolia, Mozambique, Madagascar, Bhutan and Ghana to draw emergency telecommunications action plans to capacitate pre disaster preparedness actions.

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.

The prevalence of protracted crises around the world has led ETC to redesign its ICT support in humanitarian operations with a view of resilience building among communities. Through its response providing ICT services and support to communities, ETC is increasing the digital footprint of ICT in countries and locations that are often forgotten in the scope of the development agenda. The opportunity to implement ICT services from the onset of emergencies forms the foundations for WFP to reach out to these communities as part of their development agendas.

A major obstacle remains the lack of community-based business models for enhancing communities' ICT resilience, especially in protracted crises. Many populations in crisis are in flux or trapped in geographical pockets with very little or no public infrastructure. For example, migration routes from Colombia to Venezuela, refugees and migrants in central Sahel region, or internally displaced populations trapped in Central African Republic near the bordering area of DRC, have no network coverage. If coverage exists, the cost of using or sustaining these services is far too high, making them virtually inaccessible.

A related issue is the indifference of commercial mobile network operators towards communities in the time of sudden onset emergencies. During emergencies, commercial partners rarely reduce rates or schemes to allow access to ICT among affected populations. Lack of power and energy infrastructure, poverty, and issues with digital literacy further constrain communities' access to ICT.

Another obstacle is the lack of a universal agreement among Mobile Network operators to mutually recognize on the use of telecommunication as lifesaving aid. Such an agreement could lead to the development of a framework for free roaming and calls to reduce the burden of affordability for vulnerable people in need of life-saving information. Populations on the move, like refugees and migrants are not always able to access telecommunications services, either because of high costs or a lack of network coverage, or both. In some cases, like that of Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, they are not legally allowed to buy or use local sims.

Such regulatory frameworks deny the basic right to access to information among vulnerable populations and creates a power imbalance between communities. Further, the government has installed network jammers near border areas, so that communities cannot not access voice and data connectivity. Under humanitarian law, a normative framework acknowledges that access to ICT is life saving for populations and should thus be offered by governments and humanitarians as a form of aid.

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 Services for Communities

ETC Services for Communities enables populations affected by crises to access life-saving information and communicate with humanitarians and each other through technology. To achieve this goal, ETC Services for Communities provides two types of services: access to information and two-way communication between humanitarians and the affected population.

Earlier this year, ETC developed a chatbot in Ukraine that delivers useful information to populations affected by the emergency, focusing on internally displaced populations and vulnerable people within the country. ETC engaged with all the clusters and major humanitarian stakeholders in the emergency response to deliver a tool that any organization in Ukraine can use to disseminate their key messages and enhance their obligation towards accountability to affected population (AAP) activities. At this moment, the chatbot aggregates content from different humanitarian organizations and has a built-in referral mechanism so that people can be consulted on a range of topics, from cash programmes to health advice.

ETC is also implementing a two-way communication service in Madagascar, where consecutive cyclones have left local populations particularly vulnerable. A Common Feedback Mechanism, in the

form of a free hotline, will enable affected populations to get in contact with humanitarians via a common call centre. Populations will know exactly where to go to request information and open cases to provide their feedback. The aggregated data will then provide the humanitarian community with useful analysis about the current situation in the country.

ETC Return on Investment Model

Successful disaster management relies on resilient telecommunication infrastructure. ETC has developed a model for assessing the benefits of investment in emergency telecommunication preparedness, with the aim of generating empirical evidence and ultimately encouraging stakeholders to build disaster-resilient telecommunications. The return on investment (ROI) model is an evidence-based tool designed to be used by all humanitarian partners engaged in emergency telecommunications preparedness and to help decision-makers identify priority pre-emptive emergency telecommunications investments. The model uses quantitative analysis to detail the costs and benefits of preparedness investments, while qualitative analysis seeks to evaluate the non-quantifiable benefits stemming from preparedness investments.

The ROI model has been piloted in Mozambique, where two tropical cyclones caused devastating floods in 2019 and displaced over 140,000 people. The study indicated that the invested resources would yield a monetary return of almost three times the value of the original investments, proving the prudence and financial benefit of investments in emergency telecommunications preparedness in Mozambique.

Emergency Telecommunications Preparedness Action Plan

ETC investments have also led to a national emergency telecommunications preparedness action plan (ETPAP) aimed at comprehensively enhancing emergency telecommunications readiness in terms of capacity, infrastructure, and policy. The ETPAP is currently in the process of being adopted in Mozambique where a multisectoral national ICT working group has been convened, providing a forum for systematic and sustained engagements on preparedness amongst critical players in the emergency telecommunications sector, otherwise difficult to achieve. The implementation of the ETPAP aims to reduce the potential response time for disasters through better policies and quicker processes in emergency telecommunications preparedness.

(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 has defined its ETC Strategy 2025, which entails the establishment of a Strategic Advisory Group to increase service offering by forging new strategic partnerships with the private sector, government agencies, and NGOs, aimed at enhancing ETC's footprint in delivering services to humanitarians, populations and government at scale.

ETC's recently completed ROI study can be used by any stakeholder to quantify their investments against the benefits. It found that approximately one dollar invested in telecommunication preparedness can save up to three dollars in emergency response. This breakthrough is a convincing

document that can be used to advocate for investments in emergency telecommunications preparedness among stakeholders.

ETC is defining its localization strategy to lay the grounds for local business and communities to drive, shape and have a valuable share in local service provision and maintenance of telecommunications. This subject, however, goes beyond technology and needs support from advocacy from all stakeholders.

ETC's efforts to coordinate with the private sector on the subject of "no cost of call" in humanitarian crises continues to meet challenges from government regulators with opposing policies. This commitment therefore needs to be reinforced at the level of WSIS for government stakeholders, especially those with ongoing crises, to lift restrictions for populations to be connected, and define and agree on a framework that can respond to life-saving information needs of vulnerable people.