

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

**Twenty-second session
Geneva, 13 to 17 May 2019**

**Submissions from entities in the United Nations system and elsewhere on
their efforts in 2018 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 22nd 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.

<p>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.</p>

**2019 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

Part 1: Executive summary

Based on earlier efforts of ESCWA during the last couple of years, the Arab region in 2018 became committed to linking ICT/Digital Technologies Sector with the other socio-economic sectors at the national level. Many countries are linking WSIS process gradually with SDGs.

There is also a witnessed increasing awareness and interest in the notions of Digital Economy, promoted by ESCWA in the last 3 years, under the framework of ISDEHAR (Information Society and Digital Economy Hub in the Arab Region). In this context, ESCWA devised in 2018, a process that enriches and harmonizes the response of countries to global and regional trends. This commitment of Arab stakeholders has been manifested twice: first, in the outcome document of the 1st “Arab High-Level Forum (AHLF) on WSIS and 2020 Agendas”, in 2017; and second, in the outcome document of the 30th Ministerial Session of ESCWA, in 2018. Additionally, several countries are exploring how to boost their digital economy. ESCWA is shaping those trends and interests, by partnering with key stakeholders and by providing policy advisory, and advocacy, through actively engaging the countries in ESCWA platforms/fora at regional level, and through engaging them more at the global level.

Arab countries continue their efforts for harnessing ICT in government transformation, and they are moving towards openness. Many Arab countries launched open data initiatives², and few launched strategies and action plans for open government³. ESCWA is continuing its support to Arab countries through its regional project “Fostering open government in the Arab region”. Several regional and national activities were implemented by ESCWA open government⁴ and open data during 2018. Furthermore, ESCWA continues its support to member countries for advancing e-government program and its measurement. In 2018, ESCWA provided many capacity building programs and advisory services for enhancing e-government strategy and programmes in selected Arab countries. It also provides a platform for exchange of best practices and sharing knowledge and experience through its annual e-government council.

Part 2: Trends and experience in implementing WSIS

Technology and innovation are essential in the three pillars of sustainable development, social justice and regional integration, and they are crucial to achieve the 2030 development agenda and SDGs. The importance of digital technologies, frontier technologies and innovation in social and economic development is ever expanding throughout the Arab region. The fast development pace of technology and its wide cross-sectoral applications has also led to an avalanche of available technologies and data that threaten to overwhelm institutions, regulations, policies and people.

The importance of technology and innovation in the development of the Arab region, as well as the work ESCWA does in this field, was underscored in the selection of “Technology for Development” as the overall theme of the Thirtieth ESCWA Ministerial Session in 2018⁵.

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

² Such as Jordan, United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Tunisia, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Qatar and Morocco.

³ Such as Tunisia, Jordan and Morocco

⁴ <https://www.unescwa.org/sub-site/open-government-arab-region>

⁵ <https://www.unescwa.org/events/ministerial-session-30th>

Using its convening power in 2018, ESCWA served as a platform for the exchange of lessons learned for increased efficiency, awareness and capacity of member States on up-to-date themes in technology and innovation. The outcome resolution of the 30th Ministerial session “Beirut Consensus on Technology for Sustainable Development in the Arab Region”⁶ emphasized the role technology and innovation for sustainable decent employment and empowered youth.

Today, the Arab region is very committed to digital technologies and its links with other sectors. Arab countries are making serious efforts for harnessing digital technology in their policies for achieving the 2030 Development Agenda. An increased interest in digital economy was evident in 2018, at national and regional level; and there are serious efforts for formulating national and regional agenda for digital economy in the Arab region. Also, many Arab countries have started the formulation of strategies for smart cities, and ESCWA supporting its member states in this regard.

The notion of Multistakeholderism in internet public policy shaping (emanating from the modus-operandi of the global and the Arab Internet Governance Fora) that connects ICT/Digital Technologies with SDGs, is taking more shape in the region and clearly mentioned in many of the statements, seminars, and activities conducted by Arab countries, both at the national and regional levels.

Openness including open data continued their rise in 2018. Several Arab countries launched strategies or initiatives on open data to enhance transparency and accountability and encouraging the creation of new innovative services. Additionally, selected Arab countries⁷ have adopted “Access to Information Law” which will contribute to enhancing access to information, transparency and accountability. However, the implementation of these law is still limited⁸.

Due to the fast development pace of technology and its wide cross-sectoral applications, policymakers in the Arab region need to adopt the most appropriate policies to reap its advantage in achieving sustainable development, and to mitigate its negative deployment. Many Arab countries are reviewing their policy/strategy or legislation to adapt to the technological trends and fulfil the societal needs. Some Arab countries are reviewing their digital related strategies, and some are revising their legislations and regulation to ensure safer cyber-space. In fact, cybersecurity and cyber safety is still an important concern in the Arab region especially with the spread of emerging technologies such as AI and big data.

Many efforts have been made in the Arab region to enhance enabling environment especially for promoting innovation and entrepreneurship and to address the high un-employment rate in the region especially among youth and women. Also, initiatives launched in many Arab countries⁹ to promote innovation and entrepreneurship. ESCWA is implementing a number of activities related to this subject.

Part 3: Description of implemented and future activities

3.a- Main Implemented Activities

C1) The role of governments and all stakeholders: During 2018, ESCWA prepared the paper on “Arab Digital Agenda – ICT for Sustainable Development”. The Agenda provides a proposal for a set of targets and objectives in the area of ICT for sustainable development in the Arab region. The Arab Digital Agenda is intended to be a regional policy framework for promoting digital development and reducing the existing digital divide. It also gives a briefing

⁶ https://www.unescwa.org/sites/www.unescwa.org/files/resolutions_and_outcome_document_english_6_july.pdf

⁷ Namely: Tunisia, Morocco, Lebanon, Jordan, Yemen and Sudan

⁸ Tunisia is implementing is law and has dedicated institution to monitor the implementation.

⁹ Such as Lebanon, Jordan, Tunisia, Saudi Arabia, Oman and Morocco

on similar digital agendas in the world and their main focus areas and proposes an Agenda that is tailored to the needs and priorities of the Arab region.

Based on a request by the ministry of employment, vocational training and ICT in Mauritania, ESCWA provided a road map document to develop the national digital strategy in 2018. After conducting a field mission, meeting with several national stakeholders, and based on best regional and international practices, ESCWA developed this road map that could be implemented by the Ministry within 6 months. Additionally, based on a request from the Ministry of Industry, Investment, Trade and Digital Economy in Morocco, ESCWA suggested a roadmap for the preparation of the national strategy for Smart Cities in Morocco. Following an invitation from the Council of Arab Economic Unity, an organisation affiliated with the League of Arab States, ESCWA will participate remotely in the Arab Digital Economy Conference, 16-17 December 2018, in Abu Dhabi. The Conference showcased a common Arab vision for Digital Economy, with the support of the leaders of the UAE and under the patronage of H.H. Crown Prince of UAE.

C4) Capacity Building: Under the framework of the Academy of ICT for Government Leaders in the Arab Region (AIGLE), ESCWA continued in 2018 its support to Arab countries in the implementation of their national roll outs and organized capacity building workshops on the e-government module of the academy in Sudan and Morocco. These workshops have targeted high-level officials in West Darfur state in Sudan, and high-level officials from public entities in Morocco. In the same context, ESCWA have worked during 2018 to integrate the AIGLE online platform for training into the main ESCWA website.

C6) Enabling environment: In preparation for the Second Arab High-Level Forum on WSIS and 2030 Agenda and ECOSOC 2019, TDD started, in 2018, the preparations for a study on Fintech and Digital Financial Inclusion, which will be launched in 2019. The study entitled “Digital Financial Inclusion and Empowerment; Prospects for the Arab Region” is in partnership with ITU ARO, Union of Arab Banks, and Mohamed Bin-Rashid School of Government in UAE. It tackles the regulatory as well as the operational environment of Digital Financial Inclusion from both the perspective of the ICT sector as well as that of the Financial/Banking Sector, in addition to user’s perspective.

To promote innovation and entrepreneurship and enhance their enabling environment and the eco-system, ESCWA prepared a report titled “innovation and entrepreneurship: opportunities and challenges for youth and women”. The report stress on the urgent needs for establishing funds and supporting mechanism for entrepreneurs and to enhance the business environment for facilitating the creation of start-ups.

C7) ICT Applications: To increase awareness in the Arab region about the global technology trends and their potential implications on the region, ESCWA prepared “Technology Bulletin 2018”. The main areas addressed are: role of technology in employment, e-Accessibility, government transformation using digital technologies and Internet governance. This Bulletin will be published by the end of 2018 and disseminated through ESCWA website¹⁰ and social media channels.

ESCWA is implementing a regional project to foster open government in the Arab region, and during 2018, ESCWA published the main report of this project titled “Fostering Open Government in the Arab region”¹¹. This report presents the concept of open government (OG)

¹⁰ www.escwa.un.org

¹¹ <https://www.unescwa.org/publications/fostering-open-government-arab-region> And its summary report: <https://www.unescwa.org/publications/fostering-open-government-arab-region-2018>

and selected success stories from the world and from the Arab region, describe the readiness of the Arab countries in open government; and it proposes a framework for the adoption of open government which has four main steps. This framework is tailored to the needs of the Arab region.

The Arab e-Government Program Directors Council which brings together the directors of e-government programs in the Arab region held its annual meeting in Feb 2018, in partnership with Telecom Regulation Authority (TRA) in Dubai. The meeting was an interesting occasion to share local, regional and international best practices. In the area of e-Government, and in support of its member countries, ESCWA reviewed and enriched the draft Digital Transformation strategy based on the request of the Ministry of ICT in Jordan. This strategy will be launched in 2019.

3.b Main Future activities

C1) The role of governments and all stakeholders: ESCWA started, in 2018, the preparations for the Arab Digital Development Report (ADDR), which will assess the progress in certain policy areas of digital technologies in the Arab region and highlight existing gaps in the preparedness of countries to the future digital developments, through addressing an array of topics in digital transformation that support sustainable development in the Arab region. The preparation of this report would be based on National Reports prepared by focal points from each of the member countries participating in the process. National reports development process started by ESCWA and national counterparts in October 2018, as is expected to be included in the first trimester of 2019, a couple of months before the scheduled completion date of the ADDR before the second trimester of 2019. The ADDR is scheduled to be launched in parallel to the ECOSOC of July 2019, which will focus on Inclusiveness and Empowerment (same theme of ADDR).

On the other hand, based on a request from the Egyptian Ministry of Planning, Follow-Up and Administrative Reform, ESCWA started in Q3-2018, collaboration with multiple partners in Egypt, to explore launching an Arab Forum on Digital Economy to take place in the first trimester of 2019, under the preliminary title: Arab Digital Economy Forum: Towards a National Digital Agenda.

C5) Building Confidence: ESCWA launched the preparations for a study on “Cybersecurity in the Arab Region”. The study reviews the relationship between the economy and security in light of digital transformation and the motives for developing national strategies for cybersecurity. It addresses the tendencies of States to practice sovereignty on the resources of cyberspace, and to apply economies of cybersecurity in the context of national cybersecurity strategies (NCCSs). The study highlights the importance of integrating the economic and political dimensions in addressing cybersecurity, towards creating effective national public cybersecurity policies.

WSIS Themes

Internet Governance and Internet Governance Forum

The Arab Internet Governance Forum (Arab IGF) has commenced its second round in 2018, and it is expected to extend until 2025 in line with the term of the global IGF. This is after the completion of the ESCWA-LAS AIGF2020 Initiative that aimed to (a) analyse the achievements of the first round of the Arab IGF process (2012-2015) with regard to the targets of the 2010 ESCWA Regional Roadmap on Internet Governance; (b) assess the impact of the Arab IGF on Internet governance policies in the Arab region; (c) discuss challenges that faced the first Arab IGF mandate; and (d) make proposals for developing the second Arab roadmap on Internet governance and the second mandate of the Arab IGF geared towards implementing the SDGs. The two main outputs were the formulation of a new Charter for the

second phase of the Arab IGF, and the development of the Second Arab Internet Governance Roadmap for SDGs¹².

In preparation for the Fifth Arab Internet Governance Forum (Arab IGF) (2019), a set of meetings including Open Consultations and First Arab Multi-Stakeholder Program Advisory Committee Meeting were held in Beirut from 16 to 19 July 2018, within the partnership between ESCWA and the League of Arab States (LAS). The meetings resulted with the proposal of five themes for the programme of Forum: (1) meaningful access for inclusion and diversity, (2) cyber security, privacy, trust and peace, (3) digital transformation and Internet economy, (4) institutional empowerment and engagement in Internet public policy-making at global and regional levels, and (5) social and human impact.

Also, and as part of its efforts to support the implementation of the Second edition of the Arab Roadmap on Internet Governance, ESCWA convened an Arab Regional Dialogue and Experts Meeting on Internet Governance and Cybersecurity Nexus - Promoting Trust in Cyberspace. The event took place in the UN-House during 4-7 December 2018¹³ and sought to address the theme of cybersecurity and trust in line with Internet governance priority areas for the Arab region, as stipulated in the Second Arab Roadmap for Internet Governance. During the event, members of the Arab IGF Multistakeholder Programme Advisory Committee were able to hold their second meeting and work together on the preparations for the fifth Arab IGF. The meeting explored also opportunities for partnerships with all stakeholders towards strengthening collaboration on the Arab IGF process and for convening the Fifth Arab Internet Governance Forum (2019).

Furthermore, the ESCWA Arab IGF team has extended support to the Lebanese Ministry of Telecommunications on the establishment of the Lebanon IGF which was launched within the High-level Roundtable part of AHLF 2017. ESCWA provided substantive support to the Lebanon IGF and took part in its Multistakeholder Advisory Group which was in charge of the design of the agenda and the implementation of the program towards the convening of the First Lebanon IGF that was held at AUB, Beirut, 28-29 November 2018 under the main theme “Towards an inclusive Digital Tomorrow” and included four main plenary sessions and seven workshops.

¹² <https://www.unescwa.org/sites/www.unescwa.org/files/events/files/arab-roadmap-internet-governance-en.pdf>

¹³ <https://www.unescwa.org/ArabIGF-Internet-security-trust>