

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 the progress made in the implementation of the outcomes of the WSIS during the past 20 years

Submission by

World Food Programme

This submission was prepared as an input to the report of the CSTD secretariat that will inform the substantive discussion at the CSTD on the progress made in the implementation of the outcomes of the WSIS during the past 20 years during its 28th annual session in April 2025, in response to the request by the Economic and Social Council, in its resolution E/RES/2023/3, to the CSTD to conduct such substantive discussions and to report thereon, through the Economic and Social Council, to the General Assembly.

DISCLAIMER: The views presented here are the contributors' and do not necessarily reflect the views and position of the United Nations or the UN Trade and Development.

WSIS+20 Reporting Template

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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. The ETC also works with governments and communities in disaster-risk countries to improve communications preparedness and resilience measures ahead of emergencies.

Although WFP is not a direct facilitator of any WSIS Action Lines, it contributes to several areas through the activities detailed below, including Capacity Building, ICT Applications, Access to Information and Knowledge, and International and Regional Cooperation.

WFP has provided updates on these activities for the annual WSIS report, highlighting key operations such as:

- Ongoing ETC emergency telecommunications preparedness activities in Malawi (2023-present), Mozambique and Madagascar (2021-present), Zimbabwe (2024-present), and Rwanda (2024-present).
- Active regional ETC engagements in the Pacific (ETC preparedness cluster activated), Caribbean (2023-present), and Southern Africa (2024-present).
- Past operations in Nepal, Bhutan, Haiti, Dominica, and Mongolia.
- Ongoing Connectivity as Aid projects in the Sahel region, including Niger and Burkina Faso (2021-present)

Areas of contribution:

Challenges and opportunities over WSIS-related delivery areas:

- **Cascading complex disasters:** The complexity of multiple disasters occurring in close time ranges, or even sometimes simultaneously, has been testing national ICT preparedness and response in countries that possess high disaster risk profiles. Whilst having serious implications for the humanitarian sector, as seen in Madagascar when COVID and food shocks in June 2023. However, the role that ICTs can play in mitigating such cascading disasters and facilitate better emergency coordination cannot be underscored.
- **Climate change:** The frequency and severity of disasters is being augmented. Whilst this has resulted in increased vulnerability of ICT networks and infrastructure – including significant human and economic costs – it also presents opportunities for ICTs to be used to better forecast, prepare for, and manage emergency implications in times of a disaster. For example, whilst the

Dominican Republic was struck by Hurricane Fiona in September 2022, ICTs played a crucial role in disaster response. In particular, the ITU-ETC-GSMA Disaster Connectivity Map platform, which revealed connectivity blackspots and vulnerabilities post-disaster, influencing the prioritization of communications restoration in high-damage zones based on evidence.

- **Evolving humanitarian landscape:** Humanitarian emergencies are becoming increasingly complex and protracted. Limited financial streams are a consistent challenging in delivery. In this context, the ETC devised the first-of-its-kind return of investment model to calculate the effectiveness of preparedness investments over time in a national context. This kind of resource has been invaluable to drive investment decisions for developing countries.
- **Decentralization and localization:** Sustainability is a key question when it comes to UN engagements in the field. In this light, decentralizing delivery and localizing capacity development efforts are going a long way to promote national ownership and sustainable long-term engagement. In the ETC's preparedness workstream, a key effort has been to establish national emergency ICT preparedness coordination mechanisms in-country, under leadership of the national government with ETC/WFP advisory support in initial stages. In most countries, this mechanism has mobilized for several crucial emergency response efforts in-country, where greater cohesion and cross-sectoral coordination has been witnessed during the response. For example, in Madagascar during Cyclone Batsirai in February 2022, where this national coordination mechanism was mobilized with success.
- **Infrastructure Limitations:** The lack of telecommunications infrastructure in many regions where the ETC operates complicates efforts to establish reliable internet connectivity.
- **Digital Literacy Gaps:** Digital literacy gaps (particularly affecting women) hinders effective use of internet services, necessitating inclusive and accessible service design and targeted training initiatives.
- **Security Risks:** Implementing emergency telecommunications projects in some conflict-affected regions have faced challenges due to security risks and physical accessibility. Frequent violence and political instability at times has obstructed access to these areas, complicating logistics and delaying project deployment.

Recommendations:

- **Harnessing interagency mechanisms and capitalizing on existing efforts:** The International Telecommunication Union (ITU) is an ETC Partner. Realizing ITU is spearheading the National Emergency Telecoms Plans (NETP) initiatives in countries around the world, the ETC has positioned itself as an NETP implementation partner supporting the operationalization of NETP tenets in countries with active plans. These include the Dominican Republic and Madagascar, amongst others. In another compelling example, the ETC has collaborated with other UN partners to jointly deliver on thematic linked to national government capacitation, such as UNICEF on emergency preparedness and response in Mongolia through a desk-based simulation exercise.
- **Decentralization of project delivery to focus on the field:** The ETC is led by WFP, and capitalizing on WFP presence at regional- and country-levels has been imperative for field-focused delivery responding to national needs and priorities, plugging into WFP service and programme delivery. This has been the case for all Preparedness and S4C project countries and active regions. Harnessing the ETC's extensive Partner network, delivery of Preparedness

activities has also benefitted from Partner engagement – such as UNICEF and ITU – co-delivering in countries ranging from the Caribbean (regional preparedness capacitation for the Caribbean Islands) to Rwanda (operationalizing the National Emergency Telecoms Plan through training delivery).

- **Building intra-agency capacities through sharing of knowledge and good practices:** Noting that emergency preparedness in telecoms is an emerging area for many UN agencies, including ETC's partners in the UN sector, the ETC has co-designed or individually delivered capacitation services for the sector – seeking to build up UN personnel capacities in topics of importance, including free ITU-ETC training materials on the Tampere Convention for facilitating movement of telecoms equipment across borders, an ITU-UNICEF training-of-trainers and handbook on how to design and run desk-top simulation exercises, and a modular ETC government-focused emergency preparedness training.
- **Creating sub-regional communities of practice:** Understanding that countries are interested in learning from regional peers, the ETC has been placing efforts on building up regional-level communities of practice for regions such as Southern Africa, Western Africa, and Asia-Pacific, championed by WFP regional and country offices constituting those high-disaster risk regions.
- **National ownership and localization:** The ETC has placed national ownership and local capacity strengthening at the centre of its country delivery programmes in emergency telecoms preparedness and community services. National ICT working groups that the ETC is assisting in setting up at country-level are led by national government actors, so that there is a sustainability and investment of national efforts in championing the enterprise. In initial stages, ETC support is typically high, and then over time as capacity levels increase, the national actors take the lead role. For all capacity development programmes, efforts are made to ensure a diverse range of national actors are involved – from national to regional to municipal – ensuring a real dissemination of knowledge to all sectors of government.
- **Quantifying results and benefits for decision-making:** The ETC has developed and applied a rate of return-on-investment approach to quantify an investment-benefit ratio, and understand the spread of benefits across different investment categories. The approach has been run for three countries so far where ETC Preparedness projects have been implemented, demonstrating a unanimous return that is more than double the initial investment. These kinds of analyses have demonstrated to governments and the humanitarian sector alike that investing in emergency preparedness in telecoms is efficacious.
- **Monitoring and Evaluation:** ETC will conduct ongoing evaluations of connectivity as aid projects in the Sahel to identify lessons learned. This process will inform the development of a comprehensive package of guidelines, templates, and toolkits aimed at implementing similar projects. These resources will be crafted based on consultations with ETC partners and shared widely within the humanitarian community to promote best practices.
- **Joint Research Projects:** ETC plans to investigate critical issues such as the impact of communication technologies on affected populations, data privacy, and the digital divide in emergency contexts. This research will provide valuable insights to guide future initiatives.
- **Training Programs:** The development and delivery of training sessions and workshops for ETC personnel and collaborating partners will be prioritized. These programs will incorporate the

latest research findings and best practices in telecommunications and ethical technology use, ensuring that stakeholders are well-equipped to implement effective solutions.

- **Conferences and Workshops:** ETC will organize joint events to disseminate research findings, share experiences, and facilitate collaboration between researchers and practitioners. These gatherings will foster knowledge exchange and promote innovative approaches to connectivity challenges.
- **Technical Assistance:** The ETC will provide technical inputs and expertise to refine connectivity program cycles, ensuring they are ethical, efficient, and safe. This support will be informed by key academic findings and best practices, aligning initiatives with the latest research.
- **Advocacy Campaigns:** The ETC will launch campaigns aimed at promoting the adoption of ethical telecommunications practices in humanitarian responses. These campaigns will seek to raise awareness and drive change across the sector.

Publications and materials:

- ETC ROI methodology brief: <https://www.etcluster.org/document/return-investment-roi-model>
- ETC Country Prioritization Index overview: <https://www.etcluster.org/blog/etc-country-prioritization-methodology-published>
- ETC-ITU SIMEX Handbook: [Emergency telecommunications table-top simulation guide](#)
- ETC-REACH-GSMA The Connectivity, Needs and Usage Assessment Toolkit: https://www.gsma.com/solutions-and-impact/connectivity-for-good/mobile-for-development/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Overview_CoNUA2023_FINAL.pdf