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Report

Third session of the Committee on Technology for Development Online, 15-16 February 2021

Summary

The third session of the Committee on Technology for Development of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) was held online on 15 and 16 February 2021. Its agenda contained several items on the information society, technology and innovation.

Participants took note of the activities implemented by ESCWA pursuant to the recommendations issued by the Committee on Technology for Development at its second session, held in Beirut on 20 and 21 March 2019, and the activities implemented in line with the ESCWA programme of work and technical cooperation activities. The Committee also reviewed the activities of the ESCWA Technology Centre and the outcomes of the meetings of the directors of e-government programmes in Arab States. At the close of the session, the Committee held a panel discussion on regional priorities for the coming years in the area of technology for development.

The present report sets out the recommendations adopted by the Committee at its third session, and a summary of key points raised during the discussions.

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Introduction

1. The Committee on Technology for Development held its third session online on 15 and 16 February 2021, pursuant to ESCWA resolution [315 \(XXVIII\)](#) of 18 September 2014 on establishing an intergovernmental committee on technology for development at ESCWA, adopted by the Economic and Social Council in resolution [2014/35](#) of 17 November 2014, and in accordance with the recommendations made by the Committee on Technology for Development at its second session, held in Beirut on 20 and 21 March 2019.
2. The present report sets out the recommendations adopted by the Committee at its third session, and a summary of key points raised during the discussions.

I. Recommendations

3. At its third session, the Committee on Technology for Development made recommendations to members States and to the ESCWA secretariat.

A. Recommendations to member States

4. The Committee made the following recommendations to member States:

(a) Welcome the activities implemented pursuant to recommendations made by the Committee on Technology for Development at its second session and under the ESCWA programme of work on technology for development, and technical cooperation activities; and benefit from ESCWA services under the technical cooperation programme and from planned projects;

(b) Promote policies and strategies on adopting technology and innovation in various social and economic sectors, in contexts of recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and of rebuilding after conflicts;

(c) Continue developing digital and open government services, e-commerce, financial technology, e-accessibility and e-learning to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development;

(d) Develop and update national plans for digital development, including artificial intelligence and big data, and collaborate with ESCWA on digital development initiatives, digital cooperation and Internet governance;

(e) Determine national priorities in the application of green and new technologies to maximize their use and reduce their potential harm;

(f) Work with the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC)-ESCWA Centre of Entrepreneurship to support entrepreneurs, and to develop small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and promote their digital transformation and growth.

B. Recommendations to the secretariat

5. The Committee made the following recommendations to the secretariat:

(a) Continue supporting member States in harnessing science, technology and innovation to accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), and the [Beirut Consensus on Technology for Sustainable Development in the Arab Region](#);

(b) Support member States in developing and implementing policies and strategies to promote the information society, digital development and digital cooperation, e-government and open government policies,

e-commerce, financial technology, e-accessibility, e-learning, new technologies, innovation and entrepreneurship;

(c) Support member States in leveraging science, technology and innovation to respond quickly and resiliently to the repercussions of crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, conflicts and disasters;

(d) Continue providing technical support to member States and benefit from the Committee as a regional forum for transferring experiences among Arab countries in the fields of science, technology and innovation, in response to their needs and requests addressed to the ESCWA secretariat;

(e) Assist member States in developing national plans and strategies related to digital development, and in using artificial intelligence and local applications of big data to make evidence-based decisions;

(f) Provide support to SMEs, young people and women in the areas of innovation and entrepreneurship, and set guidelines for the localization and application of green and new technologies;

(g) Update continuously the Government Electronic and Mobile Services (GEMS) Maturity Index in line with technological developments, and promote its use as a tool to assess digital transformation at the national level.

II. Topics for discussion

A. Follow-up issues

1. *Implementation of activities under the ESCWA programme of work and of recommendations made by the Committee on Technology for Development at its second session*
(Agenda item 4)

6. With reference to document E/ESCWA/C.8/2021/3, the representative of the ESCWA secretariat gave summarized the implementation of activities under the ESCWA programme of work and of recommendations made by the Committee on Technology for Development at its second session. She said that the activities revolved around four main themes: innovation for development, emerging technologies, information society and Internet governance, and digital and open government. Since that session, ESCWA had issued 11 technical reports, and held eight expert group meetings and several workshops. ESCWA had also launched five application projects and had begun implementing them over a year ago, in addition to developing digital platforms. She noted that the activities carried out by ESCWA were aligned with the recommendations made by the Committee on Technology for Development at its second session.

7. In the ensuing discussion, representatives of member States focused on the importance of following up on ESCWA work and its support to countries in the field of open government, digital government and open data. They stressed the importance of e-learning and e-health services for Arab countries, especially to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic and its repercussions, the importance of entrepreneurship in general and societal entrepreneurship in particular, and the need to integrate technology and innovation in pivotal sectors to accelerate the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

2. *Technical cooperation activities*
(Agenda item 5)

8. With reference to document E/ESCWA/C.8/2021/4, the representative of the ESCWA secretariat gave an overview of the technical cooperation activities undertaken by ESCWA since April 2019, including advisory services, workshops and capacity-building activities at the national level. He said that ESCWA had provided a total of 27 advisory services to and organized 17 national workshops in 11 member States. He noted the main areas covered by technical cooperation activities, namely e-government, digital and smart

government, technology and innovation for sustainable development, and new technologies for development. He gave examples of technical cooperation activities related to preparing national policies and organizing workshops. He concluded by listing several technical areas that could be categorized into the following groups: digital transformation, digital and open government, new technologies, innovation and entrepreneurship.

9. In the ensuing discussion, representatives of member States focused on the need for technical cooperation in the areas of digital transformation, digital development, open data, artificial intelligence, and for measurement indicators for digital transformation, including the GEMS Maturity Index. They also discussed collaboration in the fields of entrepreneurship, digital identity and Internet governance.

3. Activities of the ESCWA Technology Centre (Agenda item 6)

10. With reference to document E/ESCWA/C.8/2021/5, the representative of the ESCWA secretariat gave an overview of the activities of the ESCWA Technology Centre in 2019 and 2020, noting the role of the Centre in assisting member States to prepare a road map in the fields of science, technology and innovation, and technology development and transfer for sustainable development; and in strengthening knowledge, capacity and regional cooperation in the field of technology, so as to implement the 2030 agenda for regional development. He reviewed the activities of the Centre aimed at empowering Arab young people and women through the development of skills and interactive tools in the fields of technology and entrepreneurship. He explained the Centre's role in developing a practical framework to build the capacity of micro, small and medium enterprises in the Arab region, to enable them to plan their business, manage their activities, expand their scope, and achieve financial sustainability; and in building the capacity of member States to design and implement programmes and services that meet the needs of male and female entrepreneurs.

11. In the ensuing discussion, some participants enquired about cooperation mechanisms between the ESCWA Technology Centre and member States. It was agreed to put forward practical proposals that would include regional activities for assessing and designing road maps for science, technology, innovation and entrepreneurship in the Arab region. They also emphasized the importance of collaboration in building electronic knowledge platforms, supporting and training Governments and societies, and ensuring the inclusion of young people and women.

4. Meetings of directors of e-government programmes in Arab States (Agenda item 7)

12. With reference to document E/ESCWA/C.8/2021/6, the representative of the ESCWA secretariat presented the results of the meetings of the directors of e-government programmes in Arab States since April 2019. He said that those meetings had been launched in 2013 as part of an ESCWA initiative to enhance coordination and dialogue between directors of e-government programmes on issues related to policies, action plans and initiatives. He presented the main objectives of those meetings and the participating parties from member States. He also gave an overview of previous meetings that took place between 2013 and 2019. He noted the two meetings that had taken place since April 2019, highlighting key topics discussed at each and the recommendations reached. He concluded by presenting proposals that would be discussed in future meetings in the fields of digital transformation, open data, and the GEMS Maturity Index.

13. In the ensuing discussion, representatives of member States focused on the need to clarify the fundamental concepts of e-government and smart and digital government at the national level so as to distinguish between them, and to include topics related to the legal framework of digital technology on the agendas of future meetings of directors of e-government programmes to exchange experiences between Arab countries.

B. Programmatic issues

Round-table discussion: Regional priorities for the coming years in the field of technology for development (Agenda item 8)

14. At the third session of the Committee on Technology for Development, a round-table discussion was held on regional priorities for the coming years in the field of technology for development. The representative of the ESCWA secretariat opened the discussion with a presentation on the discussion framework, with reference to document E/ESCWA/C.8/2021/CRP.1. He noted the major challenges facing the region in accelerating the achievement of the SDGs, particularly the challenges and opportunities resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. He also reviewed the strategic directions of ESCWA work on the information society, technology and innovation for development in the coming period.

15. The round-table discussion focused on key national and regional priorities in the field of technology for the coming years, and ways to further benefit from the features of the information society provided by technology, emerging technologies and innovation to achieve the SDGs.

16. Most participants focused on the importance of digital development as a comprehensive concept with multiple dimensions that fell under the following five thematic policy clusters: national plans within a framework of regional integration and global communication; infrastructure policies, legal environment, cybersecurity and related privacy and data protection issues; policies on the digital economy and its relationship to work and employment, electronic finance and payments, digital commerce, digital industries and export opportunities; policies on digital transformation and its relationship to e-government applications, e-learning and e-health, and the related digital inclusion of vulnerable or marginalized groups; and dimensions related to culture and media. Participants stressed the importance of following up on ESCWA work and supporting member States in those areas, especially towards the launch of the second cycle of the national digital development reviews, and of supporting countries in developing national plans for 2021, in addition to implementing the partnership between ESCWA and the League of Arab States to develop the unified Arab digital agenda and strategy on information and communications technologies, with the participation of member States and in collaboration with relevant United Nations entities. They commended the leadership of ESCWA in that regard, which was similar to the role of United Nations regional commissions in other regions: Africa, Asia and the Pacific, and Latin America, as well as that of the European Commission.

17. Participants also discussed major challenges at the national level, especially those related to building capacity to effect digital transformation. They stressed the importance of digital identity as an accelerator of transformation and an enabler of the digital economy, and the importance of the Arab High-level Forum on WSIS and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, whose third edition ESCWA would organize by the end of 2021 to exchange experiences on national plans and discuss the draft Arab digital agenda before the end of that year. They also commended the role of the Arab Internet Governance Forum, led by ESCWA and the League of Arab States, as a platform for dialogue between all stakeholders on public policy issues related to the management, development and use of the Internet. They requested that work continue on its development in view of the Secretary-General's Roadmap for Digital Cooperation and in conjunction with the Global Internet Governance Forum. Some also stressed the importance of data technology, artificial intelligence, innovation and entrepreneurship to support the third set of digital development policies, and the importance of continuing to measure indicators on the maturity of digital government services for digital transformation related to the fourth set of digital development policies. They also commended the ESCWA proposal to develop a measurement model to track overall progress in all aspects of digital development annually until 2030.

18. The ESCWA secretariat reaffirmed its support to Arab countries in the following core areas: the information society and Internet governance, digital and open government, innovation for development, and emerging technologies, stating that its work would focus on the following issues:

- (a) Digital technologies for development (the areas of information and communication technology for development, including the digital economy, digital transformation and related measurement tools);
- (b) Internet governance (digital collaboration areas);
- (c) E-government/open government (the areas of digital government and related measurement tools);
- (d) Facilitating the use of information and communications technology in the digital inclusion of marginalized groups, with a focus on persons with disabilities and women with disabilities;
- (e) Innovation for development (including in the areas of entrepreneurship);
- (f) Emerging technologies and data science (including big data).

**C. Date and venue of the fourth session of the Committee
on Technology for Development**
(Agenda item 9)

19. Participants agreed that the fourth meeting of the Committee on Technology for Development would be held at the United Nations House in Beirut in February 2023.

D. Other matters
(Agenda item 10)

20. No issues were discussed under this item.

**III. Adoption of the recommendations made by the Committee
on Technology for Development at its third session**

21. At its closing meeting, the Committee on Technology for Development adopted the recommendations set out in paragraphs 4 and 5 of the present report.

IV. Organization of work

A. Date and venue

22. The Committee on Technology for Development held its third meeting online on 15 and 16 February 2021. The Committee's work was divided over four meetings.

B. Opening

23. The representative of the Syrian Arab Republic, the country that chaired the second session of the Committee on Technology for Development, Mr. Ghassan Saba, Deputy Minister of Communications and Technology, delivered a welcoming statement in which he stressed the importance of the issues on the agenda of the third session of the Committee. He praised the Committee's sessions, which allowed for the exchange of experience and knowledge, and facilitated work and keeping pace with rapid technological developments. He also called on all member States to maintain constant and effective communication with the ESCWA secretariat, and to enhance collaboration with it to serve the region and its peoples.

24. The representative of the ESCWA secretariat, Mr. Haidar Fraihat, delivered the opening speech, stressing the importance of technology to achieve development, and the need for political will to use technology for development, especially in view of the challenges that the region was witnessing, including conflict that had eradicated development gains and caused large waves of displacement, unemployment

affecting the highest rates of young people and women worldwide, and water scarcity. He noted the significant role of technology in facing those challenges, implementing national development plans and achieving the SDGs, and called for building on the Beirut Consensus and following up on its implementation, noting the role of the Committee on Technology for Development as a regional forum for discussion and deliberation on successful experiences. He also stressed the importance of developing technological infrastructures capable of attracting private sector investments, mobilizing financing in the field of technology and innovation, improving relevant legislation, and developing local technological content. He also praised the Digital Transformation Fund launched by the Arab Development Summit in Beirut, stressing that the time had come to move from diagnosing challenges in the region to enacting solutions.

C. Participants

25. Representatives of 17 ESCWA member States participated in the session. The list of participants is set out in annex I to the present report.

D. Election of officers

26. Article 18 of the Rules of Procedure of ESCWA provides that member States shall assume the presidency of the subsidiary bodies of the Commission on a rotating basis, in Arabic alphabetical order, as established by the United Nations. The Sudan assumed the presidency of the third session of the Committee on Technology for Development. Participants elected the representatives of the Syrian Arab Republic and Iraq as vice-chairs, and the representative of Oman as rapporteur.

E. Provisional agenda

27. At its third session, the Committee on Technology for Development adopted the provisional agenda set out in document E/ESCWA/C.8/2021/L.1 and the organization of work contained in document E/ESCWA/C.8/2021/L.2.

F. Documents

28. Annex II to the present report contains the list of documents presented to the Committee on Technology for Development at its third session.

Annex I

List of participants

A. ESCWA member States

Algeria

Mr. Galizra Abdel Wahab
Branch Manager
Ministry of Mail, Transport and Telecommunication

Bahrain

Ms. Aycha Salman Bin Sanad
Acting Director of Communications Department
Head of Communication Policies
Ministry of Transport and Communications

Ms. Reem Ahmad Al Sisi Albuainain
Head of International Communication
Ministry of Transport and Communications

Mr. Zakariya Ahmad Al Khaja
Executive Vice President of Electronic
Transformation
Information and eGovernment Authority

Mr. Abdallah Habib
Director of Government Systems Development
Department
Information and eGovernment Authority

Mr. Ahmed Aseeri
Information and eGovernment Authority

Ms. Fatima Salem
Information and government Authority

Mr. Ahmad Alarabi
Information and eGovernment Authority

Ms. Fatme Barhoum
Information and government Authority

Ms. Fatima Ahmed Ibrahim
Information and government Authority

Ms. Dalal Jassem Mohamad
Information and eGovernment Authority

Ms. Anfal Althawadi
Information and eGovernment Authority

Mr. Ahmed Nabil Abdelnoor
Information and eGovernment Authority

Egypt

Ms. Nivine Tawfic
First Expert in International Relations
Ministry of Communications and Information
Technology

Ms. Samar Sobeih
Director of External Relations for Artificial
Intelligence

Mr. Ahmed Farag
First Expert in International Relations
Telecommunications Regulatory Authority

Ms. Sally Radwan
Consultant of the Minister in Artificial Intelligence
Affairs

Mr. Hisham Abu Al Yazeed
Director of Governmental Relations
Telecommunications Regulatory Authority

Ms. Houriya Hamed
Technical Expert
Ministry of Communication and Information
Technology

Mr. Moustapha Nameesh
Technical Expert

Ms. Rouweida Eskif
International Relations
Ministry of Communications and Information
Technology

Ms. Nagwa El Shennawi
Ministry of Communications and Information
technology

Ms. Lubna El Ansari
Ministry of Communications and Information
technology

Iraq

Mr. Ahmed Salim Hanoun
Media Authority and Communication

Mr. Maher AbdelHussein Al Anbari
Director-General of the National Centre
for Administrative Development and Information
Technology

Mr. Bassem Dari Mahmoud
Director-General of Sector Planning Department

Mr. Abbas AbdelKazim Mohamad
Director General of Information technology
Department
Central Bureau of Statistics

Mr. Auday Abed Oun Salim
Sectors Planning Department

Ms. Hanaa Mjbil Najm
Central Bureau of Statistics

Ms. Ahlam Fadel Ahmed
National Center for Administrative Development
Information Technology

Mr. Firas Adnan Hashem
National Center for Administrative Development
Information Technology

Mr. Nizar Hashem
National Center for Administrative Development
Information technology

Mr. Ihab Ihab AbdelRazzak
National Center for Administrative Development
Information Technology

Jordan

Ms. Samira Al Zoughbi
Acting Secretary-General
Ministry of Digital Economy and Entrepreneurship

Mr. Abdulqader Ali Albataniya
Director of Policies and Strategies
Ministry of Digital Economy and Entrepreneurship
Mr. Toufic Abou Bakr
Director of the Policies and Strategies Directorate
Ministry of Digital Economy and Entrepreneurship

Ms. Nada Khater
Head of department of the policies and strategies
for the Digital transformation

Ms. Sukaina Al-Domi
Researcher in the Artificial Intelligence
Department
Ministry of Digital Economy and Entrepreneurship

Ms. Lama Al-Arabiat
Acting Head of Artificial Intelligence Department
Ministry of Digital Economy and Entrepreneurship

Lebanon

Mr. Bassel Al Ayoubi
Director General
Ministry of Communication and Information

Mauritania

Mr. Mohamed lamine salih
Director-General

Mr. Hussein Babe
Director of Infrastructure for Old and New
Technology

Mr. Mohamed Boba
Director of Information Systems

Morocco

Mr. Mohamd Faysal Nebri
Head of Strategy, Development, Cooperation and
Communication department
Moroccan Digital Development Agency

Ms. Ghita Ben Othman
Head of Strategy and Vigilance Department
Moroccan Digital Development Agency

Mr. Yousef Rhallabi
Head of Development and Cooperation department
Moroccan Digital Development Agency

Oman

Mr. Khalil Al Maawali
Projects Executive
Ministry of Transport, Communication and
Information Technology

Ms. Maryam Bent Zouhair Allawati
Ministry of High Education and Scientific
Research and Innovation

State of Palestine

Mr. Ussama Al Sadawi
State Minister
Ministry of state for Entrepreneurship and
Empowerment

Ms. Mohamad Saleh
Ministry of State for Entrepreneurship and
Empowerment

Ms. Rania Jaber
Representative of the Ministry of Communication
and Information technology

Qatar

Ms. Mashael Al Hammadi
Acting Undersecretary for Information Technology
Ministry of Transport and Communication

Ms. AlJazi Assulaiti
Acting under Director eGovernment Gate
Ministry of Transport and Communication

Mr. Jassem Al Sayegh
Policies researcher
Ministry of Transport and Communication

Mr. Yousef Al Sahlawi
Planning researcher
Ministry of Transport and Communication

Saudi Arabia

Mr. Mohamed al-Qahtani
Communication Engineer

Mr. Akram Jadwa
Director General of International Cooperation
Ministry of Communication and Information
Technology

Mr. Saleh Balharith
International Cooperation Analyst

Somalia

Mr. Abdelrahman Moallem Ado
Director of the National Institute for Technology

Mr. Zakariya Ismail Sheikh
Head of egovernance

Sudan

Mr. Ibrahim Albakhit
Director General
National Information Centre

Ms. Alawiah Hamadabi
Director of the General Department for Planning
and International Relations

Mr. Aref Abdelkader
Director of Programming

Mr. Hamed Al Amin Ahmed
Consultant

Mr. Hedi EIDosougi
Consultant

Mr. Ali Mohamed Abbas
General Director
Office of the Central Statistic

Syrian Arab Republic

Mr. Mohamad Ali Mohamad
Director of Policies, Strategies and decision
support
Ministry of Communication and Information
Technology

Tunisia

Ms. Samia Al Charfi Kaddour
Director General for Scientific Research
Ministry of High Education and Scientific
Research

Yemen

Ms. Ruba Abdullah Abed Rabbou
Director General of the Secretariat-Minister Office
Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation

Mr. Mohamed Moussa Al Karfoushi
Undersecretary of the Ministry of Communication
and Information Technology

Mr. Tarek Abu Bakr Bakran
Director of the Yemeni Company for International
Communications Telyemen

Mr. Omar Hassan Al Akrabi
Director of Technology and Information Systems
Department
Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation

B. International and regional organizations

Ms. Ilham Mohamad Saleh
Gulf Statistical Center

Annex II

List of documents

Title	Item	Symbol
Information note		E/ESCWA/C.8/2021/INF.1
Provisional agenda and annotations	3	E/ESCWA/C.8/2021/L.1
Organization of work	3	E/ESCWA/C.8/2021/L.2
Implementation of activities under the ESCWA programme of work and of recommendations made by the Committee on Technology for Development at its second session	4	E/ESCWA/C.8/2021/3
Technical cooperation activities	5	E/ESCWA/C.8/2021/4
Activities of the ESCWA Technology Centre	6	E/ESCWA/C.8/2021/5
Meetings of directors of e-government programmes in Arab States	7	E/ESCWA/C.8/2021/6
Round-table discussion: Regional priorities for the coming years in the field of technology for development	8	E/ESCWA/C.8/2021/CRP.1