



Arab High-level Forum on WSIS and 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Beirut, 8-12 May 2017

المنتدى العربي رفيع المستوى للقمة العالمية لمجتمع المعلومات وأجندة 2030 للتنمية المستدامة
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Preliminary Information Note

1 Background

In 2015, the **United Nations General Assembly renewed the mandate of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) for 10 years, from 2015 to 2025**, during the ten-year review of WSIS high-level event,¹ and called for **close alignment of between the WSIS process and the Sustainable Development process**. In 2025, a review of the implementation of the WSIS outcomes will be an input into the review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In this context, the WSIS process convenes an annual global forum that serves as the platform for discussing the role of information and communications technology (ICT) as a means of implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and alleviation of poverty..

The United Nations General Assembly endorsed the convening of the WSIS in 2001, based on a proposal from the International Telecommunication Union (ITU). The WSIS has the objective of reducing and eventual elimination of the digital divide and was held in two phases, in 2003 in Geneva and in 2005 in Tunis. The WSIS outcomes included the Geneva Plan of Action that included 11 WSIS Action Lines² and the Tunis Commitment,³ aiming to build a people-centered, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society, focused on key subject areas: Internet governance and financial mechanisms, in addition to universal access to information and knowledge, democracy, sustainable development, freedom of expression and the free flow of information. In the 2015 ten-year review of the WSIS, the overarching message was that development is digitally based, and that the WSIS process has strong links with the Sustainable Development Agenda and goals; additionally, new topics were emphasized, including human rights, trust, security and Internet Governance.

The WSIS Process, which is led by the ITU, facilitates the development of the knowledge society and digital economy and supports the implementation of the SDGs, and has prepared in 2015 the **WSIS-SDGs Matrix**⁴ that links the WSIS 11 action lines with the SDGs. The linkages emphasize the crucial role of ICTs as catalysts for the achievement of all the 17 SDGs,⁵ and the analysis of the connections and relations between the action lines and the targets of SDGs strengthen the link between WSIS aim of harnessing ICTs to achieve the development goals.

The mandate of **United Nations Regional Commissions (UNRCs)**, including ESCWA, within the WSIS process received a similar extension in 2015 to that stipulated in the Tunis Agenda of 2005. ESCWA continue to play a leading role in the WSIS process, the preparatory activities of which has started since the inception of the WSIS and included, among others, regional preparatory meetings (2003, 2004, 2009), profiling of the information society in a series of biennial reports (from 2003 to 2015), a regional plan of action for building the information society (2004).⁶ In addition, activities in partnership with the League of Arab States included

¹ <http://workspace.unpan.org/sites/Internet/Documents/UNPAN95707.pdf>

² WSIS-03/GENEVA/DOC/5-E, Para.4, (12 December 2003), <http://www.itu.int/net/wsis/docs/geneva/official/poa.html>

³ WSIS-05/TUNIS/DOC/007-A, (15 November 2005), <https://www.itu.int/net/wsis/docs2/tunis/off/7.html>

⁴ <https://www.itu.int/net4/wsis/sdg/>, <https://www.itu.int/net4/wsis/forum/2016/Outcomes/#sdgs>

⁵ <http://www.itu.int/en/sustainable-world/Pages/default.aspx>

⁶ <http://isper.escwa.un.org/RegionalActionPlans/RegionalPlanofAction/RPoADocument/tabid/68/language/en-US/Default.aspx>

the initiative entitled "Arab dialogue on Internet governance"⁷ that resulted with a number of outcomes, including the launch in 2012 of the Arab IGF and its process (2012-2015).

Furthermore, an important ESCWA Development Account project resulted with the establishment of the "Academy of ICT Essentials for Government Leaders in the ESCWA Region (AIGLE)", and produced training modules in the area of ICT for Development, and an online platform for the Academy⁸. ESCWA activities also included initiatives for building capacities to promote technology for development, enhance ICT and Internet policies, reduce barriers to the adoption of ICT, and promote Internet penetration and the use of ICT applications to accelerate socio-economic development and the attainment of the SDGs.

With its continuous efforts to support member countries on leveraging opportunities of the digital economy and the information society, ESCWA has recently conceptualized a framework entitled "Information Society and Digital Economy Hub in the Arab Region" (ISDEHAR) that targets an increase in the readiness of the region to achieve the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development, and a sustainable and inclusive information society in the Arab region, as well as propose a comprehensive strategic framework to foster partnerships towards achieving the development goals.

Within its work programme, ESCWA has several activities related to the WSIS and SDGs for the new WSIS mandate (2015-2025). These include the **Arab High-level Forum on WSIS and 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**, scheduled to take place in Beirut, from 8 to 12 May 2017. It will include an experts meeting and a conference, as follows:

- 1) **Experts Meeting:** Shaping the Digital Future in the Arab Region (8-11 May).
- 2) **Conference:** Digital Technologies for SDGs (10-12 May), which includes and Arab WSIS Community Track on Partners for SDGs (11-12 May) and a Ministerial Track (12 May).

2 Objectives

The Arab Forum on WSIS and 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development will bring together various stakeholders in the information society, digital economy and Internet governance in the Arab region, to review, present, and discuss the digital footprint in the 2030 agenda for sustainable development. It will focus on how digital economies and smart societies can accelerate the implementation of WSIS action lines, themes and priority areas, as well as contribute to the achievement of the SDGs in the Arab Region.

3 Topics

The Forum will cover the WSIS themes and linkages with sustainable development and its three pillars, social, economic and environmental, as well as political. The topics would encompass those related to both the WSIS and SDGs processes, including, among others, cloud computing, Internet of things, digital economy, Arab top-level domain names, updated Arab ICT strategy, social inclusion, economic growth, peace, partnerships for sustainable development, and dialogue on the WSIS action lines and SDGs targets and the way forward.

During the **Experts Meeting**, four publications prepared by ESCWA will be reviewed, namely: *Arab digital agenda 2030*; *Arab Internet Governance Roadmap 2025*; *Smart transformation in Government and society in the Arab region*; and *Arab digital economy and smart society report*. The Meeting will introduce ESCWA's vision on how to support the region in their efforts to harness the Information Society and Digital Economy to achieve the goals of the 2030 Agenda, whether they are political, economic, social or environmental. It will introduce ESCWA's main pillars of work that include "Competitiveness," "Transformation" and

⁷ For more information, please check <https://www.unescwa.org/sub-site/arabDIG>

⁸ For more information, please check <http://www.escwa-aigle.org/>

"Governance," aiming at economic growth, social inclusion, stability and peace. It will produce suggestions for the improvement of the aforementioned publications.

The **Conference** will include main plenary sessions, that will cover (a) WSIS and Political Dimension of the 2030 Agenda; (b) WSIS and Economic Dimension of the 2030 Agenda; and (c) WSIS and Social Dimension of the 2030 Agenda. The Political dimension includes issues, such as Cyberwar Cyber peace, and Cyber Terrorism, National Sovereignty, Role of State and other actors; multilateralism versus multi-stakeholderism; in Internet Governance as well as role of ICT in good governance. The economic dimension includes issues of Digital Economy, Digital Industries, Competitiveness and Comparative Advantages of ICT Sectors in EMCs. Disruptive Technologies, Ecosystems and Platforms of eTrade and eCommerce. The social dimension includes issues such as Smart and Sustainable Communities, Smart Cities, Sustainable Consumption and eWaste Management, Digital Transformation, Smart Societies, Smart Governments, and Smart Sectors; with focus on education, health and social inclusion particularly for Women, youth as well as protection of children and empowerment of the elderly.

4 Outcomes

The expected outcomes of the Expert Meeting would include compiled recommendations for the improvement of the aforementioned publications, to enhance their final versions, while the overall outcome of the Forum would be a Declaration on the way forward in the linkage of the WSIS process and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

5 Organization

The *High-level Forum* is organized by the ICT Policies Section of the Technology for Development Division of ESCWA, in partnership with the Lebanese Ministry of Telecommunications and in collaboration with OGERO Telecom. The Forum will be held under the **patronage of the Lebanese Prime Minister HE Mr. Saad El-Hariri**. The event will be held at the UN-House in Beirut, from 8 to 12 May 2017.

6 Participants and Registration

Forum participants will include policy- and decision-makers who are directly involved in the process towards developing the information society, the development of a digital economy and the attainment of the SDGs in the Arab region. Experts in the field of ICTs and Internet policies, applications and services, and ICT for SDGs, as well as representatives of the public and private sectors, non-governmental organizations, and international and regional organizations will also attend. Invited participants should register for the Forum by Thursday 30 March 2017.

7 Languages

Arabic and English are the working languages of the Forum. There will be simultaneous translation between the two languages.

8 Additional information and correspondences

The event's web page below provides updated information on the Forum. For further inquiries, please do address your correspondences to Mr Ayman El-Sherbiny, Chief of ICT Policies Section, Technology for Development Division, ESCWA, to the email ESCWA-TDD@un.org.

English: <https://www.unescwa.org/events/arab-forum-information-society-sustainable-development>

Arabic: <https://www.unescwa.org/Zki>