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Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

REPORT

**REGIONAL STAKEHOLDERS' MEETING ON
KNOWLEDGE NETWORK STRATEGIES, MECHANISMS AND TOOLS
BEIRUT, 3-4 SEPTEMBER 2007**

Summary

The Regional Stakeholders' Meeting on Knowledge Network Strategies, Mechanisms and Tools for the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) region was held on 3 and 4 September 2007, at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Beirut. Participants reached a consensus on strategies, mechanisms and tools for transforming information and communications technologies (ICT) access points into knowledge hubs and building regional knowledge networks.

The meeting was organized by ESCWA as part of the project entitled Knowledge networks through ICT access points for disadvantaged communities, which is financed by the United Nations Development Account. It is being implemented by the United Nations regional commissions, led by ESCWA, over a period beginning in 2006 and lasting 36 months. Its main objective is to empower poor and disadvantaged communities and, in particular, women, by transforming local ICT access points into knowledge hubs and networking them at the national, regional and global levels. As part of the Project, a first regional stakeholders' meeting was planned by each of the five United Nations regional commissions in order to address the implementation of regional and global networks.

The Meeting involved 25 participants, including managers and coordinators of selected ICT access points and project coordinators from affiliated ministries and Government agencies, as well as non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen. The ICT access points were identified as being potential partners in the project and providing prime targets for transformation into knowledge hubs. Topics discussed included a review of the Knowledge Networks Project inside and outside the region and related experiences, the rate of progress of transforming ICT access points into knowledge hubs, and the design and implementation of a pilot regional knowledge network.

The agreed strategies, mechanisms and tools will be implemented or used in the course of the Project over the forthcoming two years.

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Introduction

1. The project entitled Knowledge Networks through ICT Access Points for Disadvantaged Communities is funded by the United Nations Development Account, and is being implemented by the United Nations regional commissions, led by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA). Its main objective is to empower poor and disadvantaged communities and, in particular, women, by transforming selected existing ICT access points into knowledge hubs and networking them at the national, regional and global levels. The objective will be accomplished by providing, developing, organizing, sharing and disseminating knowledge pertinent to those communities in key areas of sustainable development, including employment, education, gender and health.
2. So far, the most important activities undertaken by the Project have been studies reviewing and assessing ICT access points in the different regions, and a regional commissions meeting that resulted in the development of a detailed plan for transforming and networking those access points. The aforementioned studies were conducted by each United Nations regional commission and provided the basis for formulating the global review. As part of the second phase of the Project, a first regional stakeholders' meeting is planned in each of the five regions in order to ensure the establishment of regional and global knowledge networks.
3. The main objective of the Regional Stakeholders' Meeting on Knowledge Networks Strategies, Mechanisms and Tools was to develop consensus among stakeholders in the ESCWA region on the strategies, mechanisms and tools necessary for transforming ICT access points into knowledge hubs and building a regional knowledge network. The agreed strategies, mechanisms and tools will be implemented in the course of the Project over the forthcoming two years.
4. The Meeting involved 25 participants, comprising managers and coordinators from selected ICT access points and project coordinators from affiliated ministries and Government agencies, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen. The ICT access points were identified as being potential partners in the Project and prime targets for transformation into knowledge hubs.*
5. The Meeting revolved around the design and implementation of facilities, tools and administrative services. Topics included:
 - (a) Reviewing the Knowledge Networks project, with the focus on the roles of various partners and stakeholders;
 - (b) Evaluating experience of knowledge hubs and networks inside and outside the region, including those related to community development, based on telecentres and related facilities;
 - (c) Transforming ICT access centres into knowledge hubs: strategies, mechanisms and tools;
 - (d) Identifying the role and tasks of regional knowledge managers;
 - (e) Establishing regional knowledge hub networks: strategies, mechanisms and tools.

I. RECOMMENDATIONS

6. As a result of Meeting discussions, participants agreed on the following:
 - (a) To transform selected ICT access points into knowledge hubs and network them by developing, disseminating and exchanging knowledge in order to best serve disadvantaged communities in the ESCWA region;

* Knowledge hubs are ICT access points that provide, organize and disseminate knowledge directly related to social and economic development. They also supply and distribute knowledge on such topics of interest to the community as, inter alia, agriculture and fishing, provide value added services to the community beyond communications, and help people to find jobs, enhance employment skills and generally improve their quality of life.

(b) To define the mechanisms for the transformation of ICT access points into knowledge hubs, in accordance with the common concerns identified by the managers of the ICT access points in the five participating ESCWA member countries, which were outlined as:

- (i) Facilitating access to online e-government services;
- (ii) Organizing discussion forums on specific topics of concern to the five ESCWA member countries, namely, health, agriculture, tourism and education;
- (iii) Encouraging women to engage in the activities of the ICT access points by allocating them certain facilities, including morning courses, childcare and substantial discounts on the cost of courses, and addressing their general needs by, inter alia, organizing workshops on maternal health, childcare and employment opportunities;
- (iv) "Training the trainers" in the latest software in order to improve service to ICT access point users; and providing training for schoolteachers and public administrators in various ICT skills;
- (v) Providing training in entrepreneurship and setting up small businesses;
- (vi) Providing foreign language training courses through e-learning tools;
- (vii) Providing professional training courses in areas of interest to each community, including agriculture, maintenance, and secretarial and administrative assistance;
- (viii) Collaborating with selected schools in areas where ICT access points are located in order to initiate a pilot project for training managers, practically and theoretically, in using ICTs in education. ESCWA could help in implementing the project by providing training to the ICT access points;

(c) To define the role and tasks of the regional knowledge manager. They include defining the role of knowledge hubs, as well as devising the methodology for the transformation of selected centres from ICT access points to knowledge hubs; supervising and implementing that transformation; and developing plans for training ICT access point managers in knowledge management. On a broader note, the regional knowledge manager is also expected to devise a cohesive and unifying vision for the regional knowledge network, and outline how it will ultimately link to the global knowledge network;

(d) To request ESCWA to design a simple website to facilitate the exchange of information between the selected ICT access points during the process of their transformation into knowledge hubs, in order to promote transparency and enable those access points to benefit from each other's ideas and experiences. Initially, the website will function on a system of weekly updates on recent developments in participating access points;

(e) To convene regular meetings organized by ESCWA between the managers of all selected ICT access points in order to encourage the sharing of ideas and learning from each other's experiences;

(f) To link the ICT access points nationally in each of the selected ESCWA member countries in order to promote communication within them and facilitate communication between regional knowledge managers. It was agreed that the selected access points will choose a national coordinator who will liaise with the regional knowledge manager, follow up with ESCWA and define the mechanisms of cooperation;

(g) To create a regional portal for the selected ESCWA member countries in order to facilitate networking amongst ICT access points and knowledge hubs, a task that will be undertaken by Jordan through its Knowledge Stations project;

(h) To organize study tours between the selected ESCWA member countries as an integral part of the sharing of experiences during the transition period. Such tours will most likely be conducted in conjunction with the meetings to be held over the duration of the Project.

II. DISCUSSION TOPICS

7. The subjects addressed during the Meeting sessions are summarized in the sections that follow.

A. REVIEW OF THE KNOWLEDGE NETWORKS THROUGH ICT ACCESS POINTS FOR DISADVANTAGED COMMUNITIES PROJECT

8. The ESCWA ICT Policies Team Leader, Mr. Mansour Farah, presented an overview of Knowledge Networks through ICT Access Points for Disadvantaged Communities, a project funded by the United Nations Development Account, and jointly implemented by United Nations regional commissions, led by ESCWA, over a period starting in 2006 and lasting 36 months. Its main objective is to empower poor and disadvantaged communities by transforming selected ICT access points into knowledge hubs and networking them in order to enable the exchange of relevant knowledge and information. The presentation further elaborated on the project's activities, expected accomplishments and strategies at the community, national, regional and global levels. To date, project activities have included regional assessments and a global review, as well as the development of a detailed implementation plan. Sustainability issues were also addressed, along with tools for monitoring, evaluating and recording developments.

9. Mr. Nour Eldin Cheikh Obeid, ESCWA consultant, introduced his findings from the regional review that he had conducted in his presentation "Community telecentres in the ESCWA region: present and future". The presentation clarified the definition of telecentres and the role they play in capacity-building through training, bridging the digital divide, and building an information society in the ESCWA region. According to statistics from the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), the region remains in need of additional telecentres in order to bridge the digital divide, especially in the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen. The presentation gave an overview of community telecentres in the ESCWA region, their services, activities, types of Internet connection, funding and different managerial models. Future activities proposed for those telecentres include focusing on capacity-building and standardized training, networking, and addressing sustainability issues.

B. PRESENTATIONS ON COMMUNITY CENTRES FOR ICT ACCESS IN SELECTED ESCWA MEMBER COUNTRIES

10. The Ras el-Metn Women's Society gave a brief description of its work and the services it offers through the Ras el-Metn Internet Point of Presence (PiPOP) initiative, supported by the Professional Computer Association (PCA) of Lebanon. Established in 2005, PiPOP offers eight computers, a printer and a scanner. Some 60 users per month benefit from such services as printing, scanning, chatting and research. Other services include training in computer skills and school memberships, offered for a nominal fee, in order to conduct research at either the local PiPOP centre or the public library, the latter containing over 9,000 books in Arabic, English and French. PiPOP also offers health information to patients via its health centre, which provides services in such specialities as, inter alia, general medicine, paediatrics, gynaecology, cardiology, ear, nose and throat, and surgery. The Women's Society conducts regular medical seminars in order to raise awareness of medical issues, in addition to organizing cultural festivals and events.

11. The Lebanese Organization for Studies and Training (LOST), in its presentation entitled "PICTA" (Professional Computer Association ICT Academy) gave an overview of the three PiPOP branches in the Baalbeck region, namely, Baalbeck, Ein and Shmostar. The Baalbeck PiPOP was established in 2006, with the purpose of providing inexpensive training to the largest possible section of the community. It uses innovative self-teaching methods and provides the highest quality Internet access in the community, along with such services as printing, scanning, chatting and research assistance. It also ensures a calm and user-friendly environment which has attracted a large number of users, many of whom are women. The growing popularity of the Baalbeck PiPOP has led to the establishment of two other PiPOP centres in Ein and Shmostar. Those locations were chosen in order to cover the largest possible geographical area and thus

serve the largest possible number of communities. Recommendations for improving the centres include purchasing additional personal computers (PCs), upgrading equipment and providing a faster and more reliable Internet connection.

12. The telecentre in Zabadani, the Syrian Arab Republic, provided a brief description of its history and services. Established in 2004, it offers training courses in International Computer Driving Licenses (ICDL), languages, computer maintenance, specialized software and various other information technology (IT) skills. Recently, it has begun offering a secretarial skills course, and it also organizes a children's club. Services provided include Internet access, printing, photocopying and scanning. The telecentre has had a number of successful experiences, including providing services and training to the large Iraqi refugee community in the area. The main problems encountered are unreliable Internet connection and occasional electricity shortages.

13. The Zarka Knowledge Station in Jordan is an example of the Knowledge Stations Project implemented by the National Information Technology Centre (NITC) in Jordan, which establishes such stations in order to serve the needs of local communities and enable them to use ICTs for social and economic development. Established in 2001 in Zarka, the second-largest city after Amman in terms of population and economy, the Zarka Knowledge Station has opened its doors to all members of the community and has therefore helped them to improve their level of education. It offers courses and training to all segments of the community, including schools, businesses and Government agencies, mostly free of charge, but sometimes at a nominal fee. The station offers courses in various IT programmes and applications, including A+, Photoshop and Microsoft Office, and also in general computer maintenance. Community services include, inter alia, helping with online loan applications, raising awareness about online employment websites and services, and providing IT training for young offenders.

14. The Multipurpose Technology Community Centre (MTCC) in Taizz, Yemen, presented a brief overview of its history and services. Established in collaboration with the Attakaful Association, the Taizz MTCC was inaugurated in early 2007. It aims to eradicate computer illiteracy, offer community access to ICT facilities and provide training courses in such fields as business administration and computer maintenance. Its services include Internet access, printing, photocopying and assistance in research. As part of its implementation plan, the Centre has undertaken several promotional activities, including sending out letters of introduction to local businesses and producing a promotional brochure.

15. The IT Club of the Benevolent Association for Children in Al-Fustat, Egypt, summarized the IT Club's initiative in Egypt and explained its own role within it. Established in the year 2000, the IT Club provides services to orphans and orphaned families, and has so far contributed to the social and economic development of over 600 families. The IT Club is also associated with an orphanage and offers such services as Internet access and various training courses, as well as assistance with university application forms for high school students. Its overall aim is to promote social and economic development through ICT access.

C. REVIEW OF EXPERIENCES IN KNOWLEDGE HUBS AND NETWORKS INSIDE AND OUTSIDE THE REGION, INCLUDING COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT RELATED TO TELECENTRES

16. Mr. Samir Farjallah, ESCWA consultant, highlighted the benefits of community telecentres in his presentation "How to use ICTs and telecentres effectively for development", which focused on two main issues, namely, ICTs, telecentres and development, and an overview of telecentres in the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) region. The presentation outlined the emergence and evolution of telecentres and addressed the challenges facing development-oriented telecentres, which included making telecentre content relevant to community needs, implementing national policy, networking in order to develop and share resources, ensuring long-term sustainability and, most importantly, linking telecentres to development projects.

17. An overview of the Knowledge Stations Project in Jordan was given in the presentation "Impact of community centres on rural areas". The project was launched by NITC in 2001, one of 19 initiatives aiming to bridge the digital divide in Jordan between rural and urban areas, which has been growing since the 1990s. Knowledge stations are established according to the local needs of the community, surveyed through NGOs, youth clubs and urban social organizations, and developed in cooperation with host agencies that assist in

administrative and operational tasks. Special knowledge stations have also been set up for the visually and physically impaired, as well as for retired military personnel and youth offenders. The stations have received positive feedback from their communities, but an independent survey is being commissioned to confirm their responses. The study covered the issue of measuring impact and goal achievement, as well as any problems and suggestions for sustainability.

18. PCA gave a presentation entitled " The PiPOP initiative: communication at work" on the PiPOP initiative, established in order to provide inexpensive Internet access. The community-based project was developed in collaboration with several stakeholders and initially funded by PCA members. It aims to address the digital divide in Lebanon, create job opportunities, provide services and introduce a "community work" culture. The initiative is a collective concept involving PCA, universities, local communities, Government, NGOs and the private sector. Its efforts earned it a World Summit on the Information Society award. The PiPOP initiative aims to focus future efforts on improving content, specifically with regards to community and tourism, and increasing interaction between people.

D. GROUP DISCUSSIONS

19. Three discussion sessions were organized during the conference around the following topics:

- (a) Transforming ICT access points into knowledge hubs: strategies, mechanisms and tools;
- (b) Identifying the role and tasks of regional knowledge managers;
- (c) Achieving regional networking of knowledge hubs: strategies, mechanisms and tools.

20. General concerns and issues were raised during and after presentations and are outlined below.

1. *General concerns and issues*

21. Problems common to participating telecentres were the varying quality of Internet connection, particularly in Lebanon, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen, the need to encourage women's use of telecentres, and the lack of human capital and expertise available in the ICT field in the ESCWA region.

22. The issue of sustainability was also a major concern, especially the question of how to ensure financial sustainability: the main objective of telecentres is to serve poor and disadvantaged communities and, thus, they function on a non-profit basis. Participants therefore emphasized the importance for sustainability of having a clear financial plan before setting up a telecentre.

2. *Transformation of ICT access points into knowledge hubs*

23. The following set of questions was distributed to participants in order to facilitate the discussion and assist in designing the transformation strategy:

- (i) What is the name of the centre?
- (ii) Where is the centre located? Is it in a rural, urban or disadvantaged area?
- (iii) What are the main economic activities within the area? Are they agricultural, industrial, touristic, etc?
- (iv) What kind of information does the community need? Information on agriculture, culture, health, informatics, etc?
- (v) What programmes and services are offered at the centre? Internet, training courses, health services, social services, etc?
- (vi) Who are the main users of the telecentres? Youth, women, etc?

- (vii) Are any surveys being conducted on the type of user and the kind of courses that they need?
- (viii) What are the centre's strengths?
- (ix) What are the centre's weaknesses?
- (x) What can be done to improve the telecentres? (e.g. training the managers, upgraded materials, improved Internet connections, new services?)

24. Participants' answers are compiled in the table below:

	Lebanon		Syrian Arab Republic	Jordan	Yemen	Egypt
(i)	Lebanese Organization for Studies and Training (LOST)	Ras el-Metn PiPOP Professional Computer Association (PCA) of Lebanon	Zabadani Telecentre	Zarka Knowledge Station	Taizz Multipurpose Technology Community Centre (MTCC)	IT-Club of the Benevolent Association for Children
(ii)	Baalbeck, Shmostar and Ein	Ras el-Metn	Zabadani	Zarka	Originally Dabab, but relocated to Taizz	Cairo
(iii)	Tourism, trade and agriculture	Agriculture and tourism	Agriculture, tourism and trade	Industry and trade	Tourism and agriculture	Tourism
(iv)	Information on tourism, trade and agriculture; information relevant to university students	Information on tourism, handicrafts and health issues	Information on health awareness; language and computer courses	Information on culture, health, trade and commerce	Information on health	Information on culture, health and IT
(v)	Training in Internet, computer and language skills; children's club	Workshops on IT skills for the tourism sector; health services offered through an online clinic; library access	Internet and computer services: social trips and exchanges organized to promote integration in the community	Internet and computer training; social and community programmes; workshops on democracy; setting up small businesses; finding employment	Courses in computer and IT skills; diplomas in secretarial skills; Word, Excel, Access, Photoshop and Oracle	Training in Internet and computer skills, access to health information; eradicating IT illiteracy
(vi)	Men, women and youth	Men, women and doctors	Men, women and youth	Men, women and youth	Men, women and youth	Men, women and orphans

	Lebanon		Syrian Arab Republic	Jordan	Yemen	Egypt
(vii)	A website is being created to assess the needs of the Baalbeck community	Yes	-	-	-	Yes
(viii)	Training courses open to all segments of the community; a calm and user-friendly environment; being in a well-populated area; wireless Internet connection	The library, health clinic, Internet centre; organizing festivals and cultural events	Internet access; calm and user-friendly environment	Strong support from host agency; fast and reliable Internet connection	ICDL training; low fees	It is the only centre in the area offering such services; low-cost services
(ix)	Unreliable Internet connection	-	Unreliable Internet connection, electricity shortages	Competition from other knowledge centres	Weak Internet connection	-
(x)	Better Internet connection and configuration	More employees; a bigger generator to power all the hospital and computer equipment	Networking with other centres to exchange experiences	-	Better Internet connection; better-trained instructors	Better-trained instructors; networking with other IT clubs

25. During discussions on the first day, a number of needs emerged, including the following:

- (a) To provide information about health and medicine, agriculture, education and tourism;
- (b) To address such infrastructure problems as weak Internet connections and electrical shortages;
- (c) To focus on women and create the appropriate environment and incentives for them to use telecentres;
- (d) To collaborate with schools and enhance curriculums by including ICT learning tools;
- (e) To develop better facilities for university students, including enhancing research tools and publicizing employment opportunities;
- (f) To focus on human capital and, in particular, better training for instructors;
- (g) To achieve financial sustainability for telecentres, while maintaining a focus on promoting development;
- (h) To develop tools for online loan applications and other support for owners of small businesses.

26. Participants agreed to develop a portal that would connect the content and websites of the telecentres in the five participating ESCWA member countries. Several of the countries already have existing portals and websites that can be linked to or integrated into the new portal, which are set forth below:

(a) The portal of the Syrian Arab Republic, <http://www.reefnet.gov.sy>, includes 35-40 sites on rural Syrian communities and telecentres. It contains information on agriculture, tourism, health and Government procedures, as well as chat forums. While it currently has a centralized content-management system, the ultimate aim is for each community to manage its own website autonomously;

(b) The Jordanian portal, <http://www.ks.gov.jo>, covers cities and communities where knowledge stations currently exist. It includes general information and an online reporting system. Information is mainly static and updating is centralized;

(c) In Lebanon, Ras el-Metn PiPOP has a website, <http://ras-elmatnws.pipop.org/>, that is part of the PiPOP portal <http://www.pipop.org>. They also plan to form a network with the Ministry of Public Health and the Ministry of Culture. LOST is planning to develop a website for the Baalbeck region, but as yet does not have the funding;

(d) While IT clubs in Egypt do not have a dedicated website, information on their activities, as well as on health and tourism, is available on the Egyptian Government website, <http://www.egypt.gov.eg>;

(e) Yemen has a website for the Smart Community Project in Taizz, <http://www.escwa.org.lb/divisions/scp/taiz/index.asp>, which includes information on MTCC.

27. While participants emphasized the value of ICDL training and certification in enhancing employment opportunities, it was deemed costly for some people. It was therefore suggested that ESCWA should collaborate with telecentres in devising an alternative, less expensive course that would offer the skills and training that people in the region need. It was also argued that while the main role of telecentres is to provide training, they could also serve as testing centres if qualified to do so and deemed of interest to the community.

28. "Training the trainers" was also raised as an issue of concern to all the telecentres. It was agreed that there is a shortage of qualified instructors in several fields and that managers need to be trained in, inter alia, accounting, secretarial work and ICDL courses. They also require training in the administrative, operational and knowledge-management aspects of running a telecentre, a task which ESCWA is undertaking as part of the Project.

3. Identifying the role and tasks of a regional knowledge manager

29. Several ideas were put forward regarding the role that the knowledge manager should play in the Project. It was agreed that the regional knowledge manager will be the architect of the knowledge network, recommend knowledge-management strategies, create a unified vision of knowledge hubs throughout the region, and assist in the transformation of ICT access points into knowledge hubs. More specifically, he/she will be contracted by ESCWA and will perform a consultative role, consisting of the following:

(a) Defining the role and tasks of knowledge hubs, in collaboration with each ICT access point or telecentre;

(b) Devising the methodology for the transformation of each of the selected ICT access points into a knowledge hub;

(c) Supervising and implementing the transformation of selected ICT access points into knowledge hubs;

(d) Developing plans for training ICT access point managers in knowledge management;

(e) Creating a cohesive and unifying vision for the regional knowledge network, and suggesting how it will eventually link up to the global knowledge network;

(f) Establishing guidelines for the future development of the selected knowledge hubs.

4. Regional networking of knowledge hubs: strategies, mechanisms and tools

30. Several main needs were addressed in the discussion on regional networking, including to devise a means of ensuring financial sustainability, elaborate a mechanism to organize, disseminate and share information between hubs, and develop a sense of competition and offer incentives in order to enhance performance and encourage other knowledge hubs to join the network.

31. It was suggested that the network should comprise two distinct sections, namely, a “people” network that maintains communication between knowledge hub managers, and a portal to be developed by the Knowledge Stations Project in Jordan, given their successful experience of networking and centralizing knowledge stations.

32. At a national level, coordination between the knowledge hubs was deemed essential and national coordinators are therefore to be assigned in each of the participating ESCWA member countries. It was noted that Jordan and the Syrian Arab Republic already have a strong network in place that connects their telecentres and knowledge stations, whereas there is very little communication between IT clubs in Egypt. In Lebanon, LOST has developed a network between the three Baalbeck PiPOPs. Furthermore, all PiPOPs meet with PCA on a regular basis in order to consider the latest issues, concerns and developments.

33. It was suggested that ESCWA should develop a simple website as a communication tool for the parties involved, allowing them to exchange information and inform each other of the latest news and activities regarding the transformation of their ICT access points into knowledge hubs.

III. ORGANIZATION OF WORK

A. VENUE AND DATE

34. The Regional Stakeholders’ Meeting on Knowledge Network Strategies, Mechanisms and Tools for the ESCWA region was organized by ESCWA and held on 3 and 4 September 2007, at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Beirut.

B. OPENING

35. Mr. Yousef Nusseir, Chief of the ESCWA ICT Division, delivered the inaugural statement, in which he noted that the Meeting was held as part of the ESCWA project entitled Knowledge Networks through ICT Access Points for Disadvantaged Communities. The project was initiated last year, with the aim of enabling disadvantaged communities to achieve sustainable development through the transformation of community ICT access points into knowledge hubs: centres where communities can access and share information. Most Arab countries have implemented ICT projects as part of their development initiatives, mainly through community telecentres serving rural and disadvantaged areas. ESCWA aims to contribute to building information societies within those countries by focusing on ICT policies and strategies and translating them into projects that promote social and economic development at the global and regional levels. Moreover, ESCWA has conducted several studies on employment creation and poverty reduction, and executed two major projects, namely, MTCC and the Smart Community Project (SCP). Mr. Nusseir outlined the objective of the Meeting, namely, to develop consensus between stakeholders in the ESCWA region on strategies, mechanisms and tools to transform ICT access points into knowledge hubs and build a regional knowledge network. He concluded by emphasizing that the Meeting should be interactive, and that ESCWA expects the telecentre managers to determine the needs for transforming their telecentres into knowledge hubs and networking with each other.

C. PARTICIPANTS

36. The Meeting was attended by 25 participants from six ESCWA member countries, namely, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen. Participants included managers and coordinators of selected ICT access points and project coordinators from affiliated ministries, Government agencies and NGOs in the ESCWA region. The list of participants is contained in annex I of this *Report*.

D. AGENDA

37. The agenda of the Meeting is set forth below:

1. Opening address.
2. Knowledge networks through ICT access points for disadvantaged communities.
3. Community centres in the ESCWA region: present and future.
4. How to use ICT and telecentres effectively for development.
5. Professional Computer Association ICT Academy (PICTA).
6. Presentations on telecentres in ESCWA member countries (Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen).
7. Discussion: Transformation of ICT access points into knowledge hubs: strategies, mechanisms and tools.
8. Impact of community centres on rural areas.
9. Discussion: Identifying the role and tasks of regional knowledge managers.
10. The PiPOP Initiative: Community at Work.
11. Discussion: Regional networking of knowledge hubs: strategies, mechanisms and tools.
12. Consolidated of the implementation plan.
13. Recommendations and closing.

E. DOCUMENTS

38. A list of the documents submitted to the Meeting is contained in annex II of this *Report*, and available on the ESCWA website at: <http://www.escwa.org.lb/information/meetingdetails.asp?referenceNum=519E>.

Annex I*

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

A. PARTICIPATING COUNTRIES

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Annex II

LIST OF DOCUMENTS

Title	Symbol
Knowledge networks through ICT access points for disadvantaged communities	No symbol
Community centres in the ESCWA region: present and future	No symbol
How to use ICT and telecentres effectively for development	No symbol
Professional Computer Association ICT Academy	No symbol
The telecentre in Zabadani	No symbol
The Zarka Knowledge Station	No symbol
The MTCC in Taizz	No symbol
The IT Club of the Benevolent Association for Children	No symbol
Impact of community centres on rural areas	No symbol
Telecentres.org in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region	No symbol
The PiPOP Initiative: Community at Work	No symbol