



ESCWA

United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

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**WORKSHOP ON DELIVERY OF E-SERVICES IN CIVIL SOCIETY**

28-29 December 2009, Beirut, Lebanon

*Draft Information Note*

**Background**

The utilization of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) applications and e-services in the daily life of all citizens has shown promising results in recent years. Streaming ICTs in traditional services greatly improves efficiency, saves time and effort, speeds up processing, promotes better participation, enhances transparency, facilitates the spread of information and knowledge, and creates new economic opportunities.

Within this context, national and regional Information Society conferences have called for the need to utilize and implement ICT applications and provide quality e-services for all. Most prominently, the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) highlighted in its Geneva “Plan of Action”, the importance of ICT applications and dedicated action line “C7” for the subject. This action line stresses that ICT applications can support sustainable development, and bring benefits in all aspects of life, especially in the fields of public administration, commerce, education and training, health, employment, environment, agriculture and science.

Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) are a major player in building the Information Society; their diversity and, often, hands-on approach to various related issues, makes them key players in ensuring equitable and affordable access to ICTs and in particular to ICT applications and e-services. Moreover, a generally strong presence in rural areas, understanding of cultural diversity and the priorities of indigenous people, and small businesses, are other key elements that strengthens their role for the delivery of e-services to all citizens.

ICTs in general and web technologies in particular - such as interactive portals - promote information and knowledge collection and dissemination, provide partnerships and direct linking with other organizations, attract donors and funds, and extend the outreach and cyber presence of NGOs. In addition, e-services are positioned to create new economic opportunities at the grassroots level for organizations and citizens, and improve existing ones.

The significance of ICT applications and e-services has been recognised by most NGOs in the region. However, the level of awareness, adoption, use and delivery of e-services varies enormously from one member country to another and within the country itself. Even in a given country, efforts are not coordinated, experiences are not shared and e-services are not implemented based on the priorities of communities and societies. In all cases, the future of establishing the Information Society in the region depends on the development and delivery of e-services with an aim to building the capacity of millions of new ICT citizens who will sustain and drive innovation and participation across all sectors.

Realising the importance of ICT applications for building the information society in our region, the ICT Division at ESCWA organized during 2009, an Expert Group Meeting on ICT Applications and e-Service in the Public Sector. During this meeting, participants discussed the challenges facing the development, adoption and delivery of e-services in the public sector. This meeting provided the public sector with an opportunity to exchange ideas and discuss ways to overcome these challenges, however, the viewpoints of citizens and communities is still required. In addition, the ICT Division published a study on “Building Trust in e-Services” which highlights the important role of civil society in building the trust and confidence of citizens in the Information Society, and is also planning another study on the Impact of ICT on community development in the ESCWA region. In-line with the above, a workshop aiming at increasing the awareness, capacities, and capabilities of NGOs in the ESCWA region to develop and use e-commerce services, based on their priorities and development needs, will thus complement ICTD’s activities in this field.

## **Objectives**

The main objective of the workshop is to increase the awareness, capacities, and capabilities of selected NGOs in the ESCWA region to provide and use e-commerce services, based on the priorities and development needs of citizens and communities.

The workshop will also exploit the potential that portal technologies and e-commerce applications and services can have on the sustainability of NGOs. It will provide a platform for sharing experiences and best practices of selected case studies, as well as encouraging NGOs to join already existing web-based e-commerce applications and services dedicated to increasing their economic opportunities, the scope of their markets, and expanding their outreach.

Although the workshop, will be structured to provide a comprehensive hands-on approach on the topic, it will be complemented by a follow-up mechanism, using a web-based forum, to discuss and assess the progress achieved by NGOs with respect to promoting and using e-commerce services, creating new economic opportunities for their communities, and extending their outreach and community participation.

## **Topics**

The main topics of the workshop include:

- (1) An overview of the status of ICT applications and e-commerce in the ESCWA region;
- (2) Empowering NGOs targeting the development of rural communities, artisans and small businesses, by increasing their sustainability and extending their outreach through ICTs;
- (3) The development and use of web-based e-commerce applications and services according to NGOs priorities and development needs;
- (4) Latest trends, applications, best practices and experiences of international, regional as well as local NGOs will be explored and exploited.

## **Outcomes**

The workshop expected outcomes are:

- (1) Increased awareness and shared knowledge of best practices within the region for applying ICTs and delivering e-commerce services having a direct socio-economic impact;
- (2) A framework including a set of recommendations for enhancing the deployment of ICTs and e-commerce services for NGOs in the ESCWA region.

- (3) Promoting the development of e-content and building the capacities of NGOs in setting up their dedicated e-commerce portals or joining existing ones;
- (4) Expose NGOs to existing e-services they can exploit in order to increase their outreach.

## **Organization**

The workshop will be organized by the ICT Applications Section of the ICT Division at ESCWA. It will be held in mid December 2009 in Beirut, Lebanon.

## **Participation and Registration**

About 15 participants from ESCWA member countries will be invited to attend and participate actively in the workshop. Potential participants include regional and international NGOs that mainly target the development of rural communities, artisans and small businesses. Priority will be given to NGOs located in member countries enjoying medium to high ICT penetration rates, and are relatively advanced in the development and use of ICT e-services.

Participants are requested to register for the meeting by filling a downloadable registration form and returning it by email, to [escwa-ictd@un.org](mailto:escwa-ictd@un.org) and [zaatari@un.org](mailto:zaatari@un.org) before December 10<sup>th</sup>, 2009.

## **Language**

Arabic and English will be the official working languages of the workshop, noting that interpretation will not be provided.

## **Travel and Accommodation**

All participants are expected to inquire on their visa requirements to Lebanon and secure one ahead of their anticipated travel date. In this regard, ESCWA can provide assistance to Palestinian and Iraqi participants upon request.

## **Additional information**

Submissions, inquiries and requests for additional information should be addressed to:

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