Expert Group Meeting on the Role of ICT in Socio-Economic Development
Beirut, 9-10 April 2013

Preliminary Information Note

1. Background

In an increasingly connected world, ICTs are playing a major role in enabling change. Globalization has altered the landscape of trade, employment, communication and many other areas. Social change is no exception to this trend. This effect can be clearly seen in the recent turmoil in the Arab region, in which governments, economies and social mores have changed in ways which have drawn the attention of the world. Because ICT use correlates with many of these developments, and in some cases may cause such changes, understanding the role of ICT in socio-economic development in the Arab region is of great importance; in additional, sub-regional analysis will also be undertaken since the circumstances of individual countries throughout the region vary in key ways.

This meeting will examine the role which ICT are playing in selected, high-impact sectors, such as governance, economic competitiveness, social relationships, and education. Together with the beneficial impacts of these changes, increasing use of ICT comes with new risks. This meeting will also explore the positive and negative impacts of technology at the regional and sub-regional levels. While the role of ICT generally is the main focus of the meeting, appropriate examination will be made of the role of selected specific technologies and applications. For example, the socio-economic impact of e-services, the role of social media, the increasing relevance of mobile technologies, and other selected topics will be included.

The importance of these themes has been identified by member countries of the United Nations for many years. Rising to greater global prominence in the World Summit on the Information Society in 2003, and repeatedly emphasized by high level follow-up, the role of ICT in Socio-Economic Development has been increasingly acknowledged by a variety of stakeholders, including governments, the private sector and civil society. Most recently, the Rio +20 process agenda validated the important role of access to information in Principle 10. Building on this momentum, as member countries move forward in defining the international agenda for socio-economic development, understanding and applying the important role of ICT is of vital importance for the Arab region.

2. Objectives

The main objective of the meeting is to identify and examine the highest impact contributions of ICT to socio-economic development in the Arab Region. The meeting will focus on the required actions needed to enhance the impact of ICT on socio-economic development, in such a way to catalyze positive change in the development challenges in the region.

The meeting will also:

- Review emerging trends in ICT, particularly, in the Arab region. These include, but are not limited to: social media applications for promoting citizen engagement in governance, uses of ICT by marginalized communities and selected case studies from representative countries in the region;
- Present an upcoming ESCWA study on the “Impact of Selected e-Services on Socio-Economic Development”, with recommendations which focus on the application of the study’s findings and identifying areas for further research;
- Provide a platform for sharing experiences and best practices of the participants, as well as discussing further steps which ESCWA should take in promoting the uses of ICT in the recommended high-impact thematic areas.

3. **Topics**

Within the broader scope of the impact of ICT on socio-economic development, this meeting will examine a selection of specific topics. Associated benchmarking and measurement issues will be mainstreamed into the analytical approach of the EGM. The following are a list of the potential thematic subjects for the meeting:

1. The role of a human rights-based approach to freedom on information, affordable accessibility, and ICT infrastructure;
2. The impact of e-Services to enable socio-economic development and improving their delivery to citizens and customers, covering such areas as government, education, learning, and health;
3. Role of ICT, particularly social media, on selected aspects of social development, including: empowerment of youth, reduction of gender inequity and empowerment of marginalized groups;
4. Impact of ICT on sustainable development, including: entrepreneurship, start-ups and SMEs, digital Arabic content, effects on innovation, incubation models and emerging regional trends in software development particularly for mobile platforms.

4. **Outcomes**

The meeting’s expected outcomes are:

1. Strategic recommendations for the application of ICT for socio-economic growth in the region for the various stakeholders: government, private sector, NGOs and international organizations;
2. Raised awareness of the importance of ICT to governance;
3. Identification of high-impact areas for further development in the field of ICT in the region.

5. **Participation and Registration**

Participants in the meeting will include experts from leading international and regional organizations, professionals from government ministries and institutions, academia, NGOs, and experts from the private sector in the Arab region who have been involved in high-impact ICT applications and services.

Participants are requested to register for the meeting by filling out the registration form and returning it by email, to escwa-ictd@un.org and idlebi@un.org before 15 March 2013.

6. **Organization, venue and dates**

The meeting is organized by the ICT division at ESCWA and will be held during 9-10 April, 2013 at the UN House, Beirut, Lebanon.

It will include a number of presentations and case studies from thematic experts and selected Arab countries on the above topics as well as discussion sessions focusing on the role of ICT in the Arab region.

7. **Working language**

Arabic and English are the working languages of the Meeting. Simultaneous interpretation between both languages will not be provided.
8. 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.

ESCWA will cover the travel costs and daily subsistence allowance (DSA) of one participant from invited organizations; priority will be given to the Least Developed Countries (LDC) in the region.

9. Additional information

Inquiries and requests for additional information should be addressed to:

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