



ESCWA Weekly News

Issue 23/52

15 June 09

ESCWA Follows Up Building the Arab Information Society

ESCWA launched the Regional Arab Network of the Global Alliance for ICT and Development (RAN GAID) and its Steering Group in the Damascus-held conference on the "Follow-up to the Outcome of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS)". The Conference also called on all Information and Communication Technology (ICT) stakeholders in the Arab region to combine efforts and advance in the establishment of the Arab information society.

ICT officials and experts gathered in the ESCWA conference were asked to continue the implementation of WSIS outcomes by 2015, putting into operation all activities of the updated Regional Plan of Action and the General Arab ICT Strategy 2007-2012.

"Establishing the information society in our region requires the combination of efforts by the governments and the private sector, including regional training and research organizations," ESCWA Executive Secretary Bader Al Dafa said in the opening of the conference.

The conference was held in Damascus 16-18 June and was co-organized by many ICT sector stakeholders, including ESCWA, the Syrian Ministry of Communications and Technology, the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

Keynote speakers stressed on the importance of building and strengthening the information society in the Arab region in order to further push forward the development process. Syrian Minister of Communications and Technology, Imad Sabouni, said in the opening that the ESCWA meeting

represented an opportunity to review regional efforts to achieve the information society in the Arab region.

RAN GAID

With the launch of the RAN GAID, the meeting has created the third such global GAID networks, after the ones in Latin American and the Caribbean, and the African region. The newest regional network will have a nine-member steering group, chaired by ESCWA Executive Secretary Bader Al Dafa. The steering group will assume the task of coordinating the work and initiatives of the GAID RA Network and defining the medium and long-term priorities of the Network in consultation with all relevant stakeholders. Members will have to liaise with other regional networks of GAID to improve coordination of ICTD initiatives, cross fertilization of ideas and cooperation across regions, and promote awareness and advocacy campaigns on regional ICT for development initiatives at the global and regional levels, with the support of the GAID Secretariat and networks. The group will also develop and implement regional work programs along GAID's two focus areas, namely poverty reduction and education, among other issues.

IN THIS ISSUE:

- ESCWA Follows Up Building the Arab Information Society



برعاية معالي رئيس مجلس الوزراء المهندس محمد ناجي عطري
 المتابعة الإقليمية لقرارات القمة العالمية لمجتمع المعلومات دمشق 16-18 حزيران/يونيو 2009

Under the patronage of H.E. The Prime Minister
 Eng. Mohammad Najji Otari

Regional Follow-up to the Outcome of the World Summit on the Information Society
 Damascus, 16-18 June 2009





ICT Issues and Initiatives

Debates of the meeting focused on ICT infrastructures, and the use of ICT in development, with emphasis on the empowerment of marginalized groups such as youth, women and the disabled. The meeting reviewed developments in the implementation of the regional plan of action (RPoA) in the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), launched in Syria in 2004. The RPoA was also updated for better implementation throughout the region.

Al Dafa noted that ESCWA remains the voice of the region in the United Nations, as well as the regional arm of the world organization in the region. “The Commission represents a centre of expertise that supports governments in the building of the information society through legislation. It also encourages the use of tools that technology provides in governmental sectors and educational institutions,” he added. ESCWA strengthens the initiative to increase digital Arabic content, which accounts for only 0.2 per cent of the present content on the internet.

The meeting underscored regional efforts and programs to improve ICT access to these groups were underscored. Such programs include project on ICT for development in the Arab Region (ICTIDAR), implemented through the UN Development Program (UNDP). The project strives to spread knowledge as an empowering agent

within marginalized groups, and to facilitate access to knowledge through a simplified language in order for women and youth to know their rights and obligations and be able to claim them.

Regional ICT initiatives also include the “Academy of ICT Essentials for Government Leaders” programme, which stems from the Academy of the UN Asian and Pacific Training Centre for Information and Communication Technology for Development (APCICT), at the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP). Outlining the structure and work of the programme, APCICT Director Hyeun-Suk Rhee said the Academy is a comprehensive ICT for development training curriculum that aims to equip policymakers with the essential knowledge and skills to fully leverage opportunities presented by ICTs to achieve national development goals. The programme is extending to all regions of the world, and ESCWA may also adopt it in its member countries.

Hyeun added that following its initiation in 2007, the programme was developed over four phases: inception, content development, training of trainers, and national-level implementation. An inclusive and participatory approach was used throughout these four phases to ensure a high-quality programme that meets the growing and diverse demands of policymakers. It is currently being implemented and national training workshops have already been held in Afghanistan, Cook Islands, Indonesia, Mongolia, Philippines and Tonga. Similar arrangements are underway in Armenia, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, Kyrgyzstan, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Uzbekistan and Viet Nam. Further, and for best possible results, the programme content is customized to fit local needs, and is translated into the official languages of implementing countries. ■



The ESCWA conference concluded with an updated RPoA for the region. Conferencees issued recommendations entitled “The Damascus Statement” to all stakeholders, namely Arab governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the private sector and regional as well as international organizations. Recommendations underscored the urgent need for cooperation between all parties, for the implementation of local and regional ICT plans of action as well as intra-Arab projects and activities. Implementation of the WSIS outcomes was also highlighted, along with the development of the information society and the response to the technological needs of the region

Other partners in the meeting included the League of Arab States (LAS), the Arab ICT Organization (AICTO), the Arab Institute for Training and Research in Statistics (AITRS), the Global Alliance for ICT and Development (GAID), Cisco, the International Development Research Center (IDRC), Microsoft, the Syrian Computer Society (SCS), Syrian Telecom (STE), and the Talal Abu Ghazale Organization.

Address

P.O. Box 11-8575, Riad El-Solh, Beirut-Lebanon e-mail: webmaster-escwa@un.org
 Tel.: 961-1-981301; Fax: 961-1-981510 website: www.escwa.un.org