



UN Launches UNCTAD's Information Economy Report in Beirut



ESCWA held a press conference at the UN House in Beirut in cooperation with the UN Information Center (UNIC) in Beirut to launch the "Information Economy Report 2009" released by the UN Conference on trade and Development (UNCTAD).

Speakers at the conference were UNIC-Beirut Director Bahaa Elkoussy, ESCWA Information and Communication Technology Division (ICTD) Chief Youssef Nusseir, and ESCWA ICT Officer Rami Zaatari.

Elkoussy said that the importance and vitality of ICT in the past decades has emerged as an engine that speeds up the pace of economic and social development. This technology has opened new horizons and prospects in developed and developing countries alike. The rapid penetration of information and communication technology in various parts of the world, particularly in the mobile phone and Internet sectors, has exceeded the expectations of most experts.

Elkoussy added that the mobile communication sector is capable of confronting the current eco-

nomics crisis relatively well. However, the gap remains wide between the developed and developing worlds with respect to the availability of Internet service via broadband. "Despite the positive progress towards bridging this gap, there is still a long road to achieve equality among the various parts of the world on this matter," he said.

Nusseir, for his part, said that while the Information Economy Report 2009 discusses trends and future outlook, it focuses on the implications of the global economic crisis on ICT. The report looks at the progress that has been made and discusses different options for countries hoping to seize the opportunities created by new technologies.

Nusseir referred to the three chapters of the report. He said that in Chapter I, and in the context of analyzing ICTs for development, the report takes stock of recent trends with regard to extending connectivity worldwide. "Special attention is given to the challenge of providing broadband access to the Internet. Chapter II monitors development in enhancing the use of ICTs among enterprises and Chapter III looks at how international trade in ICT goods and in IT and ICT-enabled ser-

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Participatory Community Development



ESCWA convened an Expert Group Meeting on "Participatory Local Development", on 12-14 October 2009, in Manama, to enhance member countries' capacities in implementing the local community development approach, and consequently designing and implementing cross-cutting social development projects.

The meeting was held under the patronage of Bahraini Minister of Social Development Fatima Mohammed Al Belushi, and in close co-operation and coordina-

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VICES is evolving. As the report was prepared in the midst of the most turbulent economic times since the Great Depression, potential implications of the economic crisis are discussed in all chapters," he added.

According to Nusseir, the dynamism of the different ICTs varies a great deal. While fixed telephone subscriptions are now in slight decline, mobile and internet usage continues to expand rapidly in most countries and regions. At the same time, there is a wide gap between high-income and low-income countries in the area of broadband connectivity. At the end of 2008, the number of fixed telecommunications subscriptions in the world was around 1.2 billion and the number of mobile subscriptions reached 4 billion. There were an estimated 1.4 billion internet users around the world at the end of 2008 and an estimated 400 million fixed broadband subscribers.

"While ICT goods belonged to the most dynamic areas of world trade until 2000, they have subsequently expanded less rapidly than global trade as a whole. Between 1998 and 2007, the value of exports of ICT goods rose from \$813 billion to \$1.73 trillion, representing 13.2 per cent of all merchandise trade, while it used to constitute 17.7 per cent in 2000" Nusseir said.

The report acknowledged that there are concerns the current financial and economic crisis, the worst in 60 years, will negatively impact the positive trends in ICT diffusion and the investment needed in order to ensure universal access to ICTs. As of mid 2009, there was still great uncertainty about the degree to which it would affect



different countries and economic sectors. The crisis is expected to influence developed and developing countries and various regions within developing countries differently. Many governments, faced with the current economic crisis, have identified enhanced ICT use as a strategy to quicken recovery. Several developed countries have made ICTs an integral part of their economic stimulus packages, both by stimulating the demand for ICT goods and by continuing to enhance the supply side.

Finally, Zaatari gave a PowerPoint presentation in which he referred to the ongoing growth in the use of mobile phones and a decline in the use of fixed lines. He said that some ESCWA countries, including Qatar, Bahrain, UAE and Oman, have ranked among top countries in terms of mobile penetration. ■

Participatory Community Development (Cont.)



tion with the League of Arab States (LAS) and the Bahraini Ministry of Social Development.

The meeting worked on evaluating ESCWA approach on

participatory development, including the knowledge and skills acquired, and the operating and managing methods of the development process, in addition to the mechanisms adopted to

engage in this process. This was possible through the findings and results of the discussions held with participants vis-à-vis the meeting thematic areas, which encompassed: the Local Community Development (LCD) concept, its new streams and directions; Community-based projects and programmes based on ESCWA Manual streamlining the development process; a Manual directing the participatory research processes; and the individual and institutional capacity-building strategy devised by ESCWA in this realm.

Additionally, a number of national experiences including

the successes, challenges and lessons learned were presented, which exemplified even further the meeting outcomes and promoted experience-sharing among member countries. A final report reflecting the main discussions, conclusions and recommendations set forth by participants was issued upon the meeting completion.

Participants in the meeting included experts and specialists in the social development field, representing governments from the Arab region, civil society institutions, regional and international organizations, media practitioners, and academics. ■

Address

P.O. Box 11-8575, Riad El-Solh, Beirut-Lebanon
Tel.: 961-1-981301; Fax: 961-1-981510

e-mail: webmaster-escwa@un.org
website: www.escwa.un.org