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Technical cooperation activities for 2023-2024

Summary

The present document provides an overview of technical cooperation activities undertaken by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) in the field of technology for development under the Statistics, Information Society and Technology Cluster since the fourth session of the Committee on Technology for Development, held in Beirut on 14 and 15 November 2022, and up until the present time.

The document focuses on examples of activities that highlight the link between the three ESCWA functions, i.e. a research institution that prepares studies aimed at supporting public policy reforms, a house of expertise that provides technical guidance to policymakers, and a regional forum for consensus-building between member States on challenges they face and ways to overcome them. The document also contains proposals for technical cooperation activities that ESCWA could undertake in the field of technology for development in the next two years upon member States' request.

The Committee on Technology for Development is invited to take note of the implemented technical cooperation activities and the proposed areas of technical cooperation, and to comment thereon.

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Introduction

1.   The Regular Programme of Technical Cooperation is a fundamental tool in implementing the programme plan of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), as technical cooperation projects are designed to meet member States' needs upon their request. ESCWA technical cooperation is part of broader efforts aimed at achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

2.   ESCWA technical cooperation services typically fall into three categories: advisory services to support countries on policy issues; capacity-building workshops and study tours; and pilot field projects within ESCWA areas of expertise that can be developed into larger projects through extrabudgetary funding from donors. Technical advisory services complement other dimensions of support provided by the secretariat to member States, including generating knowledge on development challenges, building consensus to overcome those challenges and addressing them by providing direct support to member States.

3.   The work of the ESCWA secretariat in the area of technology for development and regional integration includes: digital transformation and digital development, emerging technologies (e.g. blockchain, Internet of Things (IoT), artificial intelligence (AI) and cloud computing), and digital inclusion. The present document sets out the technical cooperation activities undertaken by ESCWA since the fourth session of the Committee on Technology for Development, held in Beirut on 14 and 15 November 2022, to date, including advisory services and capacity-building workshops. It also provides proposals for future technical cooperation activities in the field of technology for development.

I. Overview

4.   The ESCWA secretariat has implemented a number of advisory services and workshops in the field of technology for development based on requests received from member States during the period from November 2022 to June 2024.

A. Advisory services

5.   Table 1 sets out the advisory services undertaken by the ESCWA secretariat in the field of technology for development by recipient country. These services include the following topics: proposing national plans for digital transformation and digital development, cybersecurity strategies, e-participation policies, interoperability and quality frameworks for digital services, and guides for the use of social media in government agencies. Some of these activities also covered policy proposals and regulatory frameworks for emerging technologies.

6.   Advisory services also touched on new topics such as digital inclusion policies and blockchain.

7.   Some of these plans, strategies and regulatory frameworks have been officially adopted by government agencies, such as the IoT regulatory framework in Libya, the digital transformation road map for original education in Mauritania, the AI strategy in Mauritania and the digital accessibility policy in the United Arab Emirates.

Table 1. Advisory services

Country	Submitted advisory reports	Official adoption date
Iraq	- National AI policy (2024) – under finalization - National cloud computing policy (2024) – under finalization	

Country	Submitted advisory reports	Official adoption date
Jordan	• The current reality of digital inclusion (2023) • National digital inclusion policy (2024) • National blockchain policy (2024)	(under adoption) Adopted by the Ministry and is under implementation (2024)
Libya	• National digital transformation strategy (2022) • Government services quality assessment framework (2023) • IoT regulatory framework (2023) • The current reality of digital development (2023) • National digital development agenda (2024) – under finalization • Analysis of the current reality of digital accessibility (2023) • National digital accessibility policy (2024)	Adopted and published (2023) Adopted and published (2023) (under adoption)
Mauritania	• A road map for digital transformation in original education (2023) • E-participation policy (2023) • AI strategy review (2024)	Adopted and published (2024) Adopted and published (2024) Adopted and published (2024)
Morocco	• Digital technology assessment framework (2023)	
State of Palestine	• The current reality of digital accessibility in Palestine (2022) • National digital accessibility policy in Palestine (2023) • The current reality of cybersecurity (2022) • National cybersecurity strategy (2023) • Palestine digital agenda 2030 (2022)	 (under adoption) (under adoption) Adopted by the Prime Ministry (2023)
Somalia	• Interoperability framework (2023) • Digital transformation strategy (2024) • Best practices in information and communications technology (ICT) price basket indices (2024) – under finalization	(under adoption)
Sudan	• ICT hackathon proposals (2023)	
Syrian Arab Republic	• National cloud computing policy (2022) • Analysis of national performance in the e-Government Development Index (2022) • Cybersecurity strategy review (2023) • Analysis of the current reality of using social media in government agencies (2023) • Guidelines of using social media in government agencies (2023) • E-participation policy (2023)	Adopted by the Prime Ministry (2023) Adopted by the Prime Ministry (2023) Circulated to government agencies (under adoption)

Country	Submitted advisory reports	Official adoption date
Tunisia	• The current reality of digital accessibility in Tunisia (2024) • National digital accessibility policy (2024)	(under adoption)
United Arab Emirates	• The current reality of digital accessibility in the United Arab Emirates (2022) • National digital accessibility policy (2023)	Adopted by the Prime Ministry (March 2024)
Yemen	• Digital transformation strategy (2024) – under preparation • Cybersecurity strategy (2024) – under preparation	

B. Workshops and capacity-building activities

8.   In the context of linking the provision of advisory services with national capacity-building, a number of national and regional workshops were held. Table 2 includes national workshops and capacity-building activities carried out since the fourth session of the Committee on Technology for Development, and the areas on which they focused. More than 1,000 participants or trainees have benefited from these workshops and activities. The workshops covered the following topics: digital transformation in higher and original education, digital development, e-accessibility, indicators of digital technology and innovation, e-registration of companies, the role of technology in recovery, cloud computing, digital divide policies, and digital transformation in railways. A regional workshop was also organized in cooperation with the League of Arab States on the inclusion of technology indicators in the reports of the voluntary national reviews.

Table 2. National and regional workshops

State	Quantity	Area
Iraq	1	• Workshop on digital technology policies (Baghdad and online, 1 December 2023)
Libya	5	• Consultative workshop on the data law (Tripoli and online, 21 November 2022) • Consultative workshop on cyber legislation (Tripoli and online, 29–30 November 2022) • Workshop on areas of technical cooperation in digital accessibility and digital development (Tripoli and online, 6 March 2024) • Workshop to launch the IoT regulatory framework and the digital service quality framework (Tripoli and online, 3 April 2024) • Consultative workshop on digital accessibility (Tripoli and online, 25 June 2024)
Mauritania	3	• Workshop on digital transformation in original education (Nouakchott, 24 January 2023) • Workshop on ICT indicators (Nouakchott, 19 September 2023) • Workshop to validate the road map for digital transformation in original education (Nouakchott and online, 23 January 2024)
Morocco	5	• Workshop on open data: policies and technologies (Agadir, Morocco, 18 October 2022) • Workshop on open data techniques (Agadir, Morocco, 19

State	Quantity	Area
		October 2022)
		• Workshop on digital transformation in education (Rabat, 15 June 2023)
		• Workshop on the Government Electronic and Mobile Services (GEMS) Maturity Index (online, 15 September 2023)
		• Workshop on digital accessibility: concepts and policies (Rabat, 18 July 2024)
Oman	1	• Workshop on ICT indicators (online, 23–24 November 2022)
State of Palestine	3	• Workshop on open data: policies and technologies (Ramallah, State of Palestine and online, 11–12 October 2022) • Workshop on innovation indicators (Ramallah, State of Palestine and online, 7 December 2022) • Workshop on digital development 2030 (Ramallah, State of Palestine and online, 21 March 2023)
Somalia	1	• Workshop on digital divide policies (online, 3 March 2023)
Sudan	3	• Workshop on the role of technology in recovery (Atbara, Blue Nile State and online, 14 December 2023) • Workshop on cloud computing (Atbara, Blue Nile State and online, 31 January 2024) • Workshop on digital transformation in railways (Atbara, Blue Nile State and online, 5 June 2024)
Syrian Arab Republic	4	• Workshop on e-registration of companies (LLC) (Geneva, Switzerland, 14–16 March 2023) • Workshop on e-registration of companies (JSC) (Geneva, Switzerland, 4–7 March 2024) • Workshop on transport performance indicators (Damascus, 20 March 2024) • Workshop on data quality in transport performance indicators (Damascus, 22 July 2024)
United Arab Emirates	2	• Workshop on digital accessibility (Dubai, 17 January 2023) • Round table on digital transformation (Dubai, 29 September 2023)
League of Arab States	1	• Workshop on technology in voluntary national review reports (Cairo, 2–3 October 2023)

II. Proposed areas of technical cooperation in the field of technology for development

9.   Since November 2022, the ESCWA secretariat has made concerted efforts to communicate with member States and organizations working in the fields of technology to publicize the technical support services provided by ESCWA. These efforts included participation in activities organized by government agencies or regional organizations on topics including digital transformation, AI and innovation.

10.   Based on discussions with member States and other organizations working in the fields of technology for development, the secretariat proposes the following themes for technical cooperation in the coming period:

(a)   Digital transformation and digital government;

•   Develop national strategies, policies and action plans, including digital accessibility and

financial inclusion policies.

- Enhance the ecosystem of digital government transformation, and develop the necessary legislative and regulatory frameworks.

- Adopt best practices for developing digital government services and digital platforms.

- Assess national readiness for a digital government.

- Enhance the government open data environment to ensure optimal use of technology in improving transparency, efficiency and participation.

- Integrate digital technology and innovation in national development strategies to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

- Monitor relevant international and regional indicators, and submit proposals to strengthen the performance of member States therein.

- Build national capacities in the areas of digital government and open data.

(b) Emerging technologies;

- Develop national strategies, policies and action plans on cloud computing, big data, AI and IoT.

- Assess national readiness to use emerging technologies such as AI, cloud computing, IoT and the transition to the metaverse.

- Build capacities in the development of national plans for emerging technologies.

- Monitor international and regional indicators related to emerging technologies, and submit proposals to strengthen the performance of member States therein.

(c) Innovation and entrepreneurship;

- Help strengthen and develop intermediate institutions, such as incubators and accelerators.

- Strengthen the innovation ecosystem and related legislative and regulatory frameworks.

- Link between supply and demand in the field of technology and innovation at the regional level.

- Strengthen technology and innovation transfer systems at the national and regional levels.

- Monitor international and regional indicators related to innovation, and submit proposals to strengthen the performance of member States therein.

III. Concluding proposals

11.   The ESCWA secretariat invites member States to take note of the implemented technical cooperation activities and the proposed areas of technical cooperation according to national needs, and to make proposals on technical cooperation priorities in line with emerging national priorities.