



Expert Group Meeting on National Digital Development Reports Dubai, 6-7 Feb 2019

اجتماع خبراء حول التقارير الوطنية للتنمية الرقمية

PELIMINARY INFORMATION NOTE

1 BACKGROUND

The Agenda for Sustainable Development was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 25 September 2015¹. All UN member countries reaffirmed their commitment to achieving its objectives and utilizing it to transform the world for the better by 2030. It includes 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs) and 169 targets to be attained by 2030, covering areas of critical importance for humanity and the planet. This Agenda: (i) strives to end poverty and hunger among human beings, letting them live in dignity and equality; (ii) aims at protecting the planet from further degradation and providing a healthy environment for present and future generations; (iii) attempts to develop a basis for building a prosperous socio-economic environment that allows technological progress for the benefit of human beings and nature; (iv) targets peaceful, just and inclusive societies that are essential to foster sustainable development; and (v) endeavours to build a lasting global partnership involving all stakeholders from all countries as an essential means to reach sustainable development, with focus on providing the poorest and most vulnerable people with their basic needs.

Also in 2015, the UN General Assembly renewed the mandate of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) until 2025², and called for its close alignment with the sustainable development processes^{3, 4} as the information and communications technologies (ICTs) are cross-cutting and constitute means of implementation of the SDGs and alleviation of poverty. The 2016 WSIS Forum focused on supporting the implementation of the SDGs through implementing its action lines. As one of the United Nations Regional Commissions, ESCWA, through its mandate and role within the WSIS process, received a similar extension, hence continues to play a leading role in the WSIS process and linkages with the SDGs processes.

In this context, ESCWA launched in 2017 the [Arab High-level Forum on WSIS and 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development \(Beirut, 8-12 May 2017\)](#) that focused on the linkages between the WSIS action lines and the 2030 Agenda and resulted in the [Beirut Consensus on "Transformation and Digital Economy in the Arab Region – Towards the Achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development"](#) (in Arabic). The Forum was planned to be held periodically and it serves as a regional platform for the exchange of experiences and lessons learned and for building partnerships in the area of technology for sustainable development.

In 2019, the Arab High-Level Forum on WSIS and 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development will be held in Beirut, in March 2019, and will bring together various stakeholders in the information society, digital economy and Internet governance in the Arab region, to review and discuss the linkages of the information society and sustainable development as well as the Internet governance issues and priorities for the Arab region with a particular focus on the theme of HLPF 2019, on empowerment and inclusiveness. It will focus on how digital economies and smart societies can accelerate the implementation of WSIS action lines, themes and priority areas, as well as contribute to the achievement of the SDGs in the Arab Region.

At the global level, the High-level Political Forum (HLPF) on Sustainable Development, is the UN central platform for follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the SDGs. It provides

¹ http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/1&Lang=E

² Outcome of the 2015 WSIS high-level meeting, para 77: <http://workspace.unpan.org/sites/Internet/Documents/UNPAN95707.pdf>

³ The alignment of WSIS and sustainable development entails that the review of its implementation in 2025 would feed into the process of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

⁴ [World Summit on the Information Society \(WSIS\) - Submission to the HLPF 2016](#)

for the full and effective participation of all States members of the UN and States members of specialised agencies. HLPF carries out regular voluntary reviews of the 2030 Agenda which includes developed and developing countries as well as relevant UN entities and other stakeholders. The reviews are state-led, involving ministerial and other relevant high-level participants, and provide a platform for partnerships, with participation of relevant stakeholders. The next meeting of HLPF will convene under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council in July 2019 and will comprise a three-day ministerial meeting⁵. The theme of the forum will be "*Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality*", focusing on goals 4, 8, 10, 13, 16 and 17.

At the regional level, following the ESCWA study on Arab Horizon 2030: Digital Technologies for Development⁶ (2017), and in line with promoting the linkages between ICTs and SDGs and bridging the gaps with the rest of the world, ESCWA decided in 2018 to assess the status of digital technologies in the Arab region and how they are harnessed for sustainable development through a series of reports named Arab Digital Development Reports (ADDRs), starting in 2019. The primary focus of these publications will be to provide a thorough review of digital technologies in the Arab region in its quest to close rapidly widening gaps before 2030; including extended up-to-date situational analysis and future perspectives of nearly all areas of the WSIS. The 2019 report will present the status and progress made in the main areas of digital technologies in the Arab region. The secondary focus of the publication will be a developmental lens that would largely be derived from the theme of the High Level Political Forum (HLPF) of the intended year of publishing, i.e. "*Empowerment and inclusiveness*" for 2019. The publication will be accompanied by and based on NDDRs.

Within the preparations for the 2019 ADDR and NDDRs, the Expert Group Meeting (EGM) will be held as part of the development process of National Digital Development Reports (NDDRs) and in collaboration with the member countries contributing to the ADDR. The national reports are being prepared by experts/national focal points nominated by participating countries and should cover the national policies, initiatives, plans and measurement methods in the areas of digital development. A Guiding Template was developed by ESCWA to facilitate the development of these national reports, providing linkages between WSIS action lines and the sustainable development goals (SDGs). This template also includes the UNDESA questionnaire needed to carry out the yearly e-government survey.

2 OBJECTIVES

The Meeting seeks to present and discuss the preliminary first drafts of National Digital Development Reports (NDDRs) prepared by national experts/focal points who will exchange viewpoints and work methodologies to collect needed data and information as per the guiding template. The resulting feedback should help all focal points enhance and finalise their reports shortly after the meeting, in proposition for presenting them in the upcoming AHLF in Beirut during 19-21 March 2019.

3 TOPICS AND OUTCOME

The topics would cover the main five parts of the guiding template for the NDDRs, which are considered as pillars of digital development: (1) Strategic frameworks – WSIS and SDGs; (2) State – Infrastructure, Governance, Legal Environment; (3) Economy – Production, Competitiveness of ICT Sector and Economic Growth; (4) Society – Transformation of Public Administration and Social Inclusion; (5) Culture and Media – Cultural identity, linguistic diversity, and Media.

The expected outcome of the meeting is the enhancement of national reports based on suggestions for more consistent and coordinated national reports. The reports would feed into the 2019 ADDR report and the preparations for the 2019 AHLF, planned for March 2019, which would in turn feed into

⁵ <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/index.php?menu=4444>

⁶ https://www.unescwa.org/sites/www.unescwa.org/files/page_attachments/arab-horizon-2030-digital-technologies-development-en.pdf

the Arab Forum on Sustainable Development (AFSD) and the Global WSIS forum planned for April 2019, and eventually the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development to be held in July 2019.

4 ORGANISATION

The meeting is jointly organised by ESCWA and the Mohammed Bin Rashid School of Government (MBRSG), on 6 and 7 February 2018, at the premises of MBRSG, Level 13 Convention Tower, Dubai World Trade Centre (DWTC), Sheikh Zayed Rd, Dubai, United Arab Emirates.

5 PARTICIPATION

Participants would mainly include experts in the area of digital development, national focal points from ESCWA member countries in charge of preparing the national digital development reports. Participants may also include policy- and decision-makers who are interested and involved in ICT-based sustainable development and its related thematic areas, as well as experts working on linkages between WSIS action lines and sustainable development in the Arab region.

6 LANGUAGES

Arabic and English are the working languages of the meeting, and participants are expected to know both languages as there is no plan to provide interpretation during this meeting.

7 ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AND CORRESPONDENCES

The following Web page provides additional information on the meeting, and correspondences can be directed to Mr. Ayman El-Sherbiny through the email: escwa-tdd@un.org

<https://www.unescwa.org/meeting-national-digital-development-reports>

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