UNITED NATIONS

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Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

REPORT

WORKSHOP ON THE MANAGEMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY OF KNOWLEDGE HUBS KHARTOUM, 11-14 JANUARY 2010

Summary

Within the framework of the project on Knowledge Networks through ICT Access Points for Disadvantaged Communities, the Information and Communication Technology Division (ICTD) at the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) organized the fourth workshop for the telecentres supported by the project. After Beirut in 2007 and 2008, and Amman in 2009, the Workshop on the Management and Sustainability of Knowledge Hubs was held in Khartoum from 11 to 14 January 2010, in partnership with the Gedaref Digital City Organization. The project is jointly implemented by all five United Nations regional commissions, with ESCWA playing the role of lead agency, in order to empower poor and disadvantaged communities by transforming selected existing information and communications technology (ICT) access points into knowledge hubs connected through a global knowledge network.

The main objectives of the workshop were: (a) to bring together telecentre managers from various parts of the ESCWA region in order to exchange experiences and consolidate relationships that will lead to the strengthening of knowledge networks; (b) to train telecentre managers on the establishment and management of small business ventures; (c) to review advancement with respect to transforming telecentres into knowledge hubs; and (d) to ensure sustainability of knowledge hubs and the regional network.

In total, 32 participants from Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Oman, the Sudan and the Syrian Arab Republic participated in the workshop. They attended a ten-hour course on the management of small projects, visited two telecentres in Khartoum and presented their status with respect to building knowledge hubs. The participants also discussed the sustainability of the knowledge networks project and selected the Salamieh Telecentre as the secretariat for the regional knowledge network.

CONTENTS

LIST OF ANNEXES

Introduction

1.   The Knowledge Networks through ICT Access Points for Disadvantaged Communities (KN4DC) is a project that was launched in late 2006 and is funded by the United Nations Development Account. The five United Nations regional commissions[1] partnered to implement this project at the global level with ESCWA being the lead party, while every commission was tasked with the implementation of the knowledge networks at the regional level. The main objective of the project is to empower disadvantaged communities by transforming selected information and communications technology (ICT) access points/telecentres into knowledge hubs that are networked at the regional and global levels. This objective will be reached by providing, developing, organizing, sharing and disseminating knowledge pertinent to targeted communities in such key areas of sustainable development as employment, education, gender and health.

2.   So far, ESCWA and the other regional commissions, namely ECE, ESCAP,[2] ECLAC and ECA have implemented the following project activities: (a) review and assessment of ICT access points in various regions of the globe; (b) development of a detailed implementation plan for the project; (c) organization of regional stakeholder meetings to discuss the various activities of the project; (d) preparation of regional and global strategies covering the access point-to-knowledge hubs transformation and the networking process; (e) preliminary design and implementation of a regional knowledge-based portal; (f) training of key telecentre staff on transforming access points into networked knowledge hubs; and (g) launching of a regional knowledge portal.

3.   Following the Workshop on Knowledge Sharing and Networking in the ESCWA Region held in Beirut in 2008 and the Telecentre Leaders' Forum in Amman in 2009, ESCWA organized and conducted the Workshop on the Management and Sustainability of Knowledge Hubs which took place in Khartoum from 11 to 14 January 2010. The workshop was organized in partnership with the Gedaref Digital City Organization (GDCO) and was hosted by the Sudan Academy of Sciences (SAS).

4.   The main goal of the workshop was to deliver to the telecentre managers a brief course on the establishment and management of small projects, as well as to discuss the future and sustainability of the project and decide on actions to be taken in that respect.

5.   Leaders of telecentres[3] involved in the KN4DC project as well as senior staff from other telecentres in the Sudan participated in the workshop, mainly managers and trainers of telecentres from Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Oman, the Sudan and the Syrian Arab Republic.

I. DISCUSSION TOPICS

A. PROJECT REVIEW AND WORKSHOP EXPECTATIONS

6.   Mr. Mansour Farah, Chief of the ICT Policies Section at the Information and Communication Technology Division (ICTD) in ESCWA and manager of the KN4DC project, gave a presentation that covered the KN4DC project. He explained and provided details on all activities organized under the project so far, including the plan of future activities within the framework of this project and its sustainability.

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[1] The five regional commissions of the United Nations are the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), and the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA).

[2] Since 2008, ESCAP is handling the ECE portion of this project with respect to the needy independent States common to both regions which are part of the project.

[3] In total, there were 24 telecentres represented in the workshop, divided as follows: one from Egypt, one from Oman, three from Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic each, and thirteen from the Sudan.

7.   Following the project review, Mr. Farah explained to the participants the workshop expectations, what it includes and what it excludes. He stressed the fact that this workshop aimed at enhancing the capacity of telecentre leaders in managing their respective telecentres/knowledge hubs as well as startups and small projects which will be valuable in ensuring the self-dependency and sustainability of telecentres/knowledge hubs, and thus the whole project.

8.   The presentation of Mr. Farah is referenced in annex II.

B. SMALL BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

9.   Mr. Mohamed El Gawi, assistant research professor at the Sudanese Ministry of Science and Technology and ESCWA consultant, delivered a ten-hour course on the management of small and startup projects. The course was divided into two main parts: management of small projects and management of knowledge hubs.

10.   The first part of the course covered the background and planning phases that precede a project, and the management of processes, time, cost, quality, human resources, communication, risk and procurement. The second part dealt with the management of knowledge hubs, including strategies and development of action plans for their operation. Mr. El Gawi concluded the course recommending a follow-up course for the participants of the workshop, namely on quality management. Mr. El Gawi's presentation is referenced in annex II.

11.   Mr. George Younes, ICT officer at ICTD in ESCWA, devised a practical activity for which workshop participants were divided into two groups, and each group had to come up with a business idea and plan for its implementation. A representative of each group had to defend the idea by presenting it to all attendees and reply to queries on the methodology used.

C. ROUND TABLE ON PARTNERSHIP AND SUSTAINABILITY

12.   The third day of the workshop was launched with a discussion led by Mr. Farah on the importance of partnership, be it with governmental or non-governmental organizations, for the sustainability of telecentres. In this round table, participants highlighted the different partnerships that their telecentres were subject to, and how those partnerships provided support in sustaining the telecentres. Common sources of partnerships were such public entities as governmental agencies and United Nations programmes – mostly the United Nations Development Programme – while other telecentres received the backing of such civil societies and unions as the union of disabled people in the Sudan.

13.   In addition to partnerships and the support of investors, community telecentres increase their sustainability by diversifying the courses and services offered, including professional and globally recognized certificates, organizing events and festivals, creating focus groups that discuss specific issues related to rural development, and making the telecentre an access point to browse the Internet.

14.   Many causes delay, or sometimes forbid, the telecentres from reaching sustainability. Defining marketing techniques to reach as many beneficiaries as possible, activating the community website to maximize Internet traffic and finding sponsors and investors can be such causes.

D. ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

15.   Mr. Marc Khayat, research assistant at ICTD in ESCWA, showcased a presentation on entrepreneurship and community development. The topics covered in his presentation were: (a) business incubation; (b) introduction to entrepreneurship; (c) essentials of web marketing; (d) Web2.0 marketing; (e) business planning; and (f) successful presentations.

16.   Regarding business incubation, Mr. Khayat informed the participants that there are several business incubators in every country, such as Berytech in Lebanon, that provide services and resources to accelerate the development of startups. The concept of marketing has changed a lot since the Internet boom in the mid 1990s: Web marketing does not simply rely on static websites and emails, but is also shared in social networks, wikis, blogs, and other tools which constitute parts of the next Internet generation, the Web2.0. He then presented the essentials of business planning and its four pillars: people, opportunity, context and deal. Finally, Mr. Khayat provided the participants with a quick guide on how to make a good presentation, which is based on personal skills and a good presentation layout.

17.   The presentation of Mr. Khayat is referenced in annex II.

E. ACTIVITIES LEADING TO THE TRANSFORMATION OF TELECENTRES INTO KNOWLEDGE HUBS

18.   In the afternoon session, eight telecentre managers and trainers gave presentations on the activities carried out at their telecentres which facilitate the transition from being ICT access points into knowledge hubs. The presentations of Khalil El Shataween from Jordan, Assmaa Osman from Egypt, Mahmoud Bwary from Lebanon, Kinda Khoury, Nabil Eid and Homam Saada from the Syrian Arab Republic, as well as Ahmed Eisa and Fadel Hamad from the Sudan, are referenced in annex II.

F. SELECTION OF A SECRETARIAT FOR KN4DC

19.   As mentioned above, one of the main objectives of the workshop was the selection of a secretariat for the KN4DC project which will ensure the sustainability of the project beyond its duration under the supervision of ESCWA. The secretariat will be tasked with planning activities for knowledge hubs under the umbrella of the project, increasing their number in the regional network, updating the regional knowledge portal and representing the regional network at the global network level. The secretariat shall become active once ESCWA will have finalized its activities in this project, which is planned for July 2010.

20.   In an open and transparent selection process, participants nominated two candidates: Mr. Nabil Eid from the Salamieh Telecentre in the Syrian Arab Republic and Mr. Ahmed Eisa from the Gedaref Digital City Organization in the Sudan. However, due to the overloaded schedule of Mr. Eisa, he declined acting as secretariat for the project in favour of his colleague Mr. Eid. The latter humbly accepted this new task and announced to present his plans for the coming period at a later stage.

21.   The need for a steering committee to oversee and direct the project at the regional level was briefly discussed. The committee will be formed of senior leaders and project managers for community development. Nominations for one committee member per country were requested from telecentres leaders for discussion in the next workshop. Mr. Eisa was proposed for the Sudan, and he accepted.

G. SITE VISITS TO TELECENTRES IN KHARTOUM

22.   The fourth day of the workshop comprised two site visits in Khartoum: the first one to the Sudanese National Society for the Deaf and the second one to the training locale of the union of retired police officers. During those visits, participants learned from the Sudanese experience on how deaf people contribute to the manufacturing of handicrafts and the use of computers, and how retired police officers are trained on the efficient use of computers.

H. WHAT'S NEXT?

23.   Mr. Farah informed the workshop participants that ESCWA intends to hold two additional workshops before the project end date. After Lebanon, Jordan and the Sudan, the next two workshops will take place in Egypt in February 2010 and in the Syrian Arab Republic in April 2010. The details of those meeting will be announced at a later stage.

24.   In general, all participants rated the workshop as good, having met new telecentre leaders from the Sudan and learned proper ways to manage small projects. Furthermore, they were satisfied with the transparent selection process that led to the appointment of Mr. Nabil Eid as the secretariat of the project, who promised to exert all efforts needed to ensure its sustainability.

II. ORGANIZATION OF WORK

A. VENUE AND DATE

25.   The Workshop on the Management and Sustainability of Knowledge Hubs was held at the Sudan Academy of Sciences (SAS) in Khartoum from 11 to 14 January 2010. It was organized by ESCWA in partnership with the Gedaref Digital City Organization (GDCO).

B. OPENING

26.   Mr. Ahmed Eisa, Chairman of GDCO, launched the workshop by acknowledging and appreciating the efforts invested by ESCWA in the workshop and in the success of the knowledge networks project. He briefed the participants on the activities of the GDCO, its eight ongoing projects and future activities for community development and how they are moving from community telecentres to knowledge hubs.

27.   Mr. Ahmad Adham, Director of SAS, informed participants about the history of the academy, its role as an institution for higher education and providing advisory services for the Government.

28.   Mr. Mansour Farah, Chief of ICT Policies Section at ICTD in ESCWA, introduced the knowledge networks project, its background, its current status within the ESCWA region, interaction with the other regional commissions and its sustainability. He then summarized the objectives of the workshop and thanked all partners for their efforts in supporting the event.

29.   Mr. Bashir Sahel Joumaa, Minister of Education of Gedaref, representative of the Gedaref Government and Head of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) National Committee welcomed all participants and praised the efforts deployed by all stakeholders in training and increasing the capacities and networking of telecentres. He valued the important tasks carried out by GDCO and SAS through their telecentres in building strategic partnerships in accordance with the Millennium Development Goals. He closed by affirming the commitment of the Gedaref Government and the UNESCO National Committee to the recommendations of the workshop and the support to GDCO.

C. PARTICIPANTS

30.   The workshop was attended by a total of 32 participants, mainly telecentre managers and trainers selected from six ESCWA member countries, namely Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Oman, the Sudan and Syrian Arab Republic. The list of participants is contained in annex I of this report.

D. AGENDA

31.   The agenda of the four-day workshop is set forth below:

1.   Opening.
2.   Project review and workshop expectations.
3.   Training on small business management.
4.   Round table on partnership and sustainability.
5.   Entrepreneurship and community development.

6. Activities leading to the transformation of telecentres into knowledge hubs.
7. Selection of a secretariat for KN4DC.
8. Site visits to Khartoum telecentres.

E. DOCUMENTS

32.   The list of documents, including presentations, submitted to the workshop is given in annex II of this report and is available on the ESCWA website at:
http://www.escwa.un.org/information/meetingdetails.asp?referenceNum=1217E.

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

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LIST OF DOCUMENTS

Telecentre presentations

Academy Al Tayb Ali Tah – The Sudan (Arabic)
http://css.escwa.org.lb/ICTD/1217/1.pdf

Computer Training Centre – Syrian Arab Republic (Arabic)
http://css.escwa.org.lb/ICTD/1217/2.pdf

Gedaref Digital City Organization – The Sudan (Arabic)
http://css.escwa.org.lb/ICTD/1217/4.pdf

Knowledge Stations Programme – Jordan (Arabic)
http://css.escwa.org.lb/ICTD/1217/6.pdf

Lebanese Organization for Studies and Training – Lebanon (Arabic)
http://css.escwa.org.lb/ICTD/1217/7.pdf

Salamieh Knowledge Centre – Syrian Arab Republic (Arabic)
http://css.escwa.org.lb/ICTD/1217/10.pdf

Zabadani Knowledge Centre – Syrian Arab Republic (Arabic)
http://css.escwa.org.lb/ICTD/1217/11.pdf

Sources

Entrepreneurship and Community Development
http://css.escwa.org.lb/ICTD/1217/3.pdf

Knowledge Networks Project – ESCWA
http://css.escwa.org.lb/ICTD/1217/5.pdf

Telecentre Management (Arabic)
http://css.escwa.org.lb/ICTD/1217/8.pdf

Telecentre Management
http://css.escwa.org.lb/ICTD/1217/9.pdf