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**Information and communication technologies
for development**

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**Economic and environmental questions:
Science and technology for development**

**Progress made in the implementation of and follow-up to the
outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society
at the regional and international levels**

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

This report highlights major activities by stakeholders to implement outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) in 2015. It takes account of the overall review of WSIS implementation conducted by the United Nations General Assembly in December 2015, 10 years after the second phase of the World Summit. It also draws attention to the review's call for stronger synergies between WSIS, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, also adopted in 2015.

The report was prepared at the request of the Economic and Social Council, in its resolution 2006/46, for the United Nations Secretary-General to inform the Commission on Science and Technology for Development each year on the implementation of WSIS outcomes. It draws on information provided by entities in the United Nations system and elsewhere.

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Introduction

1. This report, prepared at the request of the Economic and Social Council, in its resolution 2006/46, includes information provided by 32 United Nations entities and other international organizations and stakeholders¹ in response to a letter from the Secretary-General of UNCTAD inviting contributions on trends, achievements and obstacles in the implementation of WSIS outcomes. The report summarizes major activities of 2015, including the overall review of implementation of WSIS outcomes by the General Assembly, which concluded in December 2015.

I. Overall review: Implementation of the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society

2. The Tunis Agenda for the Information Society, paragraph 111, requested the General Assembly to perform an overall review of implementation of WSIS outcomes in 2015. The General Assembly decided, in its resolution 68/302, that its review would be concluded by a two-day high-level meeting, in accordance with General Assembly rules of procedure, with the participation of Member States and all relevant WSIS stakeholders.

3. The high-level meeting took place in New York, United States of America, on 15 and 16 December 2015. The outcome document of this meeting, General Assembly resolution 70/125, reaffirmed the WSIS vision of a people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented information society. It assessed progress to date, identified gaps and challenges, and made recommendations for the future. The document welcomed the rapid evolution and diffusion of information and communications technologies (ICTs), but expressed concern about continued digital divides within and between countries. It identified future opportunities and challenges, and provided agreed conclusions on ICT for development, bridging digital divides, the enabling environment, financial mechanisms, human rights, building confidence and security in ICTs, and Internet governance.

4. The high-level meeting was preceded by an intergovernmental preparatory process led by the Permanent Representatives of Latvia and the United Arab Emirates, acting as co-facilitators, with secretariat support from the Office of the President of the General Assembly and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs. ITU, UNESCO and UNCTAD contributed to the preparations throughout the process. Intergovernmental

¹ African Union Commission; Association for Progressive Communications; Council of Europe; Department of Economic and Social Affairs; Economic Commission for Africa (ECA); Economic Commission for Europe; Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC); Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP); Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA); End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes; Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO); International Chamber of Commerce-Business Action to Support the Information Society; International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions; International Labour Office (ILO); International Telecommunication Union (ITU); International Trade Centre; Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers, Internet Governance Forum; Internet Society; Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD); Telefónica; United Nations Children's Fund; United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD); United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO); United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP); United Nations Industrial Development Organization, Universal Postal Union, World Health Organization (WHO); World Intellectual Property Organization; World Meteorological Organization; World Trade Organization. For these contributions, see <http://unctad.org/en/Pages/CSTD/WSIS-UNSG-Report.aspx>. All websites cited in this report were accessed on 22 February 2016.

preparatory meetings were held in New York in July and October 2015. Informal consultations with all WSIS stakeholders were organized alongside these meetings.

5. A number of preparatory documents were submitted to the General Assembly to assist in its deliberations. In accordance with its role in assisting the Economic and Social Council as focal point in system-wide follow-up, review and assessment of progress made in implementing WSIS outcomes, and following substantive discussion at its eighteenth session in May, the Commission on Science and Technology for Development submitted a 10-year review of progress (E/2015/31-E/CN.16/2015/4) to the General Assembly, through the Economic and Social Council. It also submitted to the General Assembly a comprehensive analysis, *Implementing WSIS Outcomes: A Ten-year Review*,² which drew upon extensive published evidence as well as regional consultations and written contributions from all stakeholders.

6. Other reports submitted to the General Assembly included the following:

- (a) Final Statement of the conference, “Towards Knowledge Societies for Peace and Sustainable Development”, hosted by UNESCO in February 2013;³
- (b) WSIS+10 Statement on the Implementation of WSIS Outcomes;
- (c) Vision for WSIS Beyond 2015.

7. Following an extensive multi-stakeholder preparatory process, the latter two reports were adopted at the WSIS+10 high-level event held by ITU in June 2014.⁴ In addition, the Partnership on Measuring ICT for Development published the *Final WSIS Targets Review: Achievements, Challenges and the Way Forward* in June 2014.⁵

8. The General Assembly agreed to hold a further high-level meeting on the information society in 2025, with the participation of all stakeholders, which will take stock of progress in implementing WSIS outcomes, identify areas of continued focus, consider solutions to enduring and emerging challenges, and contribute to the General Assembly’s subsequent review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

II. Key trends

A. Digital opportunity and digital divide

9. General Assembly resolution 70/125 welcomed the evolution of connectivity, innovation and access to ICTs which has taken place since WSIS, including rapid growth in fixed and wireless broadband, mobile Internet, smartphones and tablets, cloud computing and big data. Despite these achievements, however, the resolution expressed concern about significant digital divides between and within countries, including the gender digital divide, and reiterated its commitment to address these through efforts to improve connectivity, affordability, content and capabilities.⁶

² UNCTAD and World Summit on the Information Society, 2015, available at http://unctad.org/en/PublicationsLibrary/dtlstict2015d3_en.pdf.

³ http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CI/CI/pdf/wsis/WSIS_10_Event/wsis10_final_statement_en.pdf.

⁴ <http://www.itu.int/net/wsis/implementation/2014/forum/dam/documents.html#high-level>.

⁵ http://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Documents/publications/wsisreview2014/WSIS2014_review.pdf.

⁶ Ibid.

10. According to the *Measuring the Information Society Report 2015* issued by ITU, the proportion of people covered by mobile networks worldwide now exceeds 95 per cent. Further, mobile cellular subscriptions have grown from 2.2 billion to 7.1 billion since 2005, and broadband mobile subscriptions, from 0.8 billion to 3.5 billion since 2010. However, developing countries, and particularly the least developed countries, where only 6.7 per cent of households have Internet access, still lag behind developed countries, where 81.3 per cent of households have access. There are substantial digital divides between urban and rural areas in many countries, with only 29 per cent of the world's rural population covered by a third-generation – 3G – network, compared with 89 per cent of its urban population.⁷

11. ITU data indicate that the proportion of women worldwide who are online is 40.8 per cent, compared with 45.9 per cent of men.⁸ This gap is significantly wider in developing countries and the least developed countries than in developed countries. The overall review, in General Assembly resolution 70/125, recognized the close association between the gender digital divide and other gender inequalities. It called for new emphasis on gender in the implementation of WSIS action lines, including measures to address women's participation in ICTs as content creators, employees, entrepreneurs, innovators and decision makers.

12. The ICT Development Index of ITU brings together indicators for ICT access, use and skills to compare performance between countries and over time. The *Measuring the Information Society Report 2015* also shows that all countries improved their Index performance between 2010 and 2015 but that disparities between countries remain substantial. Top performers in the Index are mostly developed countries with high income levels, competitive markets and skilled populations, while developing countries typically have lower Index levels, and the least developed countries may be falling behind. ITU concludes that targeted policy initiatives can improve Index performance, enabling the least developed countries and the least connected countries to reduce digital divides and enhance the contribution of ICTs to sustainable development.⁹

B. The evolving Internet

13. Rapid changes have continued in technology, services and governance of the Internet. Cloud computing continues to enable new services for businesses and individual users, while the Internet of Things and innovative applications and devices point towards the Internet's greater pervasiveness in economic and social activity in the future.

14. There has been extensive discussion concerning the future stewardship of the Internet Assigned Numbers Authority function following the announcement in 2014 by the Government of the United States that it intends to transfer this to an independent multi-stakeholder process.¹⁰ The Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers established a stewardship transition coordinating group of the Authority and has developed

⁷ ITU, 2015, *Measuring the Information Society Report 2015*, Geneva, available at <http://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Documents/publications/misr2015/MISR2015-w5.pdf>.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ See footnote 7.

¹⁰ National Telecommunications and Information Administration, United States Department of Commerce, 2014, NTIA announces intent to transition key Internet domain name functions, 14 March, available at <https://www.ntia.doc.gov/press-release/2014/ntia-announces-intent-transition-key-internet-domain-name-functions>.

proposals and accountability measures, which will be forwarded to the United States Administration in early 2016.¹¹

15. Other issues concerning Internet governance, such as cybersecurity, net neutrality, human rights, cultural diversity and the implications of emerging technologies and applications, were extensively discussed in forums during the year. These include the Internet Governance Forum,¹² the Geneva Internet Platform,¹³ a World Internet conference organized by the Government of China¹⁴ and the Global Commission on Internet Governance, which published studies on the dark web, cybersecurity and children's rights online.¹⁵ The Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers is reviewing experience of new generic top-level domains, more than 750 of which have been introduced since 2013, prior to a further application round.

16. UNESCO held a conference on the future of the Internet, "Connecting the Dots: Options for Future Action", in Paris in March 2015.¹⁶ It affirmed the Organization's Internet universality principles to promote a human-rights-based, open Internet that is accessible to all and is characterized by multi-stakeholder participation. A draft study considered at the conference¹⁷ was adopted at the General Conference of UNESCO in November, together with options for future action by UNESCO and its partners.¹⁸

C. The information society and the post-2015 development agenda

17. The United Nations adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in September, including 17 Sustainable Development Goals, which set a new framework for international action to enhance economic prosperity, social welfare and environmental sustainability (A/RES/70/1). The 2030 Agenda recognized that global interconnectedness and the spread of ICTs have great potential to accelerate human progress, bridge the digital divide and develop knowledge societies. Goal 9, which deals with infrastructure and innovation, includes a target to significantly increase access to ICTs and strive to provide universal and affordable access to the Internet in the least developed countries by 2020. Goal 17 includes the aim of enhancing the use of enabling technology, in particular ICTs. Other targets stress the role of ICTs in education and gender empowerment.

18. General Assembly resolution 70/125 called for close alignment between the WSIS process and the 2030 Agenda, highlighting ICTs' cross-cutting contribution to the Goals and poverty eradication. This relationship was extensively discussed during the year. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs organized expert group meetings on policy integration in government in pursuit of the Sustainable Development Goals¹⁹ and on advancing a sustainable information society for all in January and June 2015, respectively.²⁰ WSIS action line facilitators prepared a mapping exercise that identified synergies called the *WSIS-SDG Matrix: Linking WSIS Action Lines with Sustainable Development Goals*. It was presented at the WSIS Forum, endorsed by the United Nations Group on the

¹¹ <https://www.icann.org/stewardship>.

¹² http://www.intgovforum.org/cms/10th%20IGF%20Chairs%20Summary_Finalv2.pdf.

¹³ <http://giplatform.org/>.

¹⁴ <http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/cnleaders/2015WIC/>.

¹⁵ <https://www.ourinternet.org/>.

¹⁶ See <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/netconference2015>.

¹⁷ UNESCO, 2015, *Keystones to Foster Inclusive Knowledge Societies: Access to Information and Knowledge, Freedom of Expression, Privacy, and Ethics on a Global Internet*, Paris.

¹⁸ <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/internetstudy>.

¹⁹ <http://www.unpan.org/Events/Conferences/tabid/94/mctl/EventDetails/ModuleID/1532/ItemID/2720/Default.aspx>.

²⁰ <http://unpan3.un.org/ws10/egm>.

Information Society and forwarded to the General Assembly.²¹ The importance of big data for both the implementation and the measurement of the Sustainable Development Goals was further recognized, following publication in 2014 of the report, *A World That Counts*, by the Independent Expert Advisory Group on the Data Revolution for Sustainable Development.²²

19. In July, the third International Conference on Financing for Development agreed upon the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, including the establishment of a technology facilitation mechanism to build capabilities in technology, including ICTs, in developing countries. The mechanism was incorporated in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and launched at the United Nations summit for the adoption of the post-2015 development agenda in September. General Assembly resolution 70/125 encouraged a prominent profile for ICTs in this mechanism and consideration of its contribution to WSIS implementation.

20. The World Bank published the *World Development Report 2016: Digital Dividends* in January 2016.²³

III. Implementation and follow-up at the regional level

A. Africa

21. ECA published *WSIS+10 and Beyond: Outcomes and Perspectives for Africa*, which was followed by a review meeting in April.²⁴ The report discussed the continued rapid take-up of mobile access and usage in Africa, as well as improvements in harmonization of policy and legal environments for ICTs and the formulation and implementation of subregional e-strategies by the continent's regional economic commissions. However, ECA reiterated concerns that broadband deployment and Internet access remained inadequate, constraining development outcomes and necessitating renewed investment in infrastructure and public access facilities.

22. In January 2015, the African Union adopted the Common African Position on the post-2015 development agenda and Agenda 2063 for the structural transformation of Africa, which emphasize the importance of infrastructure development, including ICT, as a pivot for development.²⁵ The African Union adopted a declaration supporting the role of ICTs in sustainable development at its ICT Ministerial Conference in Ethiopia in September.²⁶ Together with ECA, it supported the fourth African Internet Governance Forum, which was held alongside the Ministerial Conference.²⁷ The Government of Tunisia hosted the ninth ICT 4 All Forum in November.²⁸

²¹ http://www.itu.int/net4/wsis/sdg/Content/wsis-sdg_matrix_document.pdf.

²² See <http://www.undatarevolution.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/A-World-That-Counts.pdf>.

²³ Available at http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2016/01/13/090224b08405ea05/2_0/Rendered/PDF/World0developm0000digital0dividends.pdf.

²⁴ http://www.uneca.org/sites/default/files/PublicationFiles/wsis10_and_beyond.pdf.

²⁵ http://www.uneca.org/sites/default/files/uploaded-documents/Macroeconomy/post2015/cap-post2015_en.pdf;
http://agenda2063.au.int/en/sites/default/files/agenda2063_popular_version_05092014_EN.pdf.

²⁶ http://www.au.int/en/sites/default/files/newsevents/workingdocuments/13016-wd-english-addis_ababa_declaration_of_au_ministers_in_charge_of_cict_sep.2015.pdf.

²⁷ <http://afigf.org/>.

²⁸ <http://www.ict4all.tn/en/>.

B. Asia and the Pacific

23. ESCAP continues to work with regional partners, including the Asian Development Bank and the Asia-Pacific Telecommunity, to stimulate regional infrastructure development and address intraregional digital divides. The Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway initiative aims to improve the connectivity of landlocked developing countries in the region through links to submarine cables and deployment of Internet exchange points.²⁹ In conjunction with the Internet Society and the Asian Development Bank, ESCAP in December published a report entitled *Unleashing the Potential of the Internet in Central Asia, South Asia, the Caucasus and Beyond*.³⁰

24. Increasingly, ICTs are being used in support of early warning systems for natural disasters reduction and emergency communications in the region. The Commission published a survey, *Enhancing E-resilience of ICT Infrastructure: Gaps and Opportunities in Disaster Management*.³¹ It also produced a working paper on intelligent transport systems in the region (see <http://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/ITS.pdf>).

C. Western Asia

25. ESCWA prepared its biennial *Regional Profile of the Information Society in the Arab Region*, which assessed Information Society development and identified post-2015 priorities. The *Profile* draws on the Information Society Portal for the ESCWA Region, which gathers and analyses data on regional trends in order to provide information and resources to policymakers and other stakeholders (<http://isper.escwa.un.org/>). Particular concerns include the low availability of broadband connectivity, digital divides between countries and between urban and rural areas, and the need to stimulate developmental uses of ICTs.

26. The Commission focused on regional priorities concerned with cybersafety and cybercrime, developing ICT awareness among government leaders, and the use of space and satellite technologies. It continued work to promote Arabic content and online services, organizing a forum on Arab content in an era of major digital transformations in partnership with ITU, the League of Arab States and the Government of the United Arab Emirates. It also published the study, *Improving the Quality of Digital Arabic Content* (<http://isper.escwa.un.org/>).

27. The fourth Arab Internet Governance Forum was held in Lebanon in September, under the theme “Internet economy for sustainable development”.³²

D. Europe

28. The Economic Commission for Europe plays a central role in ICT-enabled trade facilitation. In 2015, the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business managed by the Commission updated the United Nations rules for Electronic Data Interchange for Administration, Commerce and Transport and the United Nations Code for Trade and Transport Locations, which facilitate information exchange in transport,

²⁹ <http://www.unescap.org/our-work/ict-disaster-risk-reduction/asia-pacific-information-superhighway>.

³⁰ <http://www.unescap.org/resources/unleashing-potential-internet-central-asia-south-asia-caucasus-and-beyond>.

³¹ <http://www.unescap.org/resources/enhancing-e-resilience-ict-infrastructure-gaps-and-opportunities-disaster-management>.

³² <http://igfarab.org/En/index.jsp>.

customs, government and business contexts.³³ The Commission promotes single-window data-sharing initiatives to reduce trade costs and works with ESCAP to promote paperless trade. It supports the development of intelligent transport systems to improve efficiency in transport and freight networks and is working with European partners to develop a shared environmental information system.

29. The annual European Dialogue on Internet Governance was held in Bulgaria in June.³⁴ The Global Internet Policy Observatory is being set up by the European Commission.³⁵

30. The Council of Europe held a conference on freedom of expression in October³⁶ and published the book *Journalism at Risk: Threats, Challenges and Perspectives*. At its December meeting, the Council's Steering Committee on Media and Information Society finalized recommendations of the Council of Ministers on Internet freedom, the safety of journalists and a new strategy on Internet governance for 2016–2019.³⁷ Other work during the year focused on youth participation, the processing of personal data and freedom of assembly and association on the Internet.

E. Latin America and the Caribbean

31. ECLAC implements WSIS outcomes through its regional action plans, whose contribution towards regional and international cooperation was recognized with a WSIS Prize in 2015. The fifth Ministerial Conference on the Information Society in the region, held in Mexico in August, considered a report entitled *The New Digital Revolution: From the Consumer Internet to the Industrial Internet*,³⁸ reviewed implementation of the Plan of Action for the Information and Knowledge Society in Latin America and the Caribbean, and issued the Mexico Declaration. The Declaration approved the Digital Agenda for Latin America and the Caribbean, which included policy commitments relating to access and infrastructure, the digital economy, e-government, sustainable development and inclusion, and governance.

32. The Observatory for the Information Society in Latin America and the Caribbean³⁹ gathers regional data and maintains an online statistical information system on ICT, while its Regional Broadband Observatory⁴⁰ monitors indicators on broadband diffusion, access, tariffs and service speeds. The Commission published a report on the state of broadband in Latin America and the Caribbean, comparing countries within the region and addressing policy challenges.

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