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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

Executive summary

This report has been prepared in response to the request by the Economic and Social Council to the United Nations Secretary-General, in its resolution 2006/46, to inform the Commission on Science and Technology for Development (CSTD) on the implementation of the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) as part of his annual reporting to the Commission. The report has been prepared by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) secretariat based on information provided by entities in the United Nations system and elsewhere on their efforts during 2013, with a view to sharing effective practices and lessons learned.

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[**] E/2014/1/Rev.1.

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Introduction

1.   In 2013, the global information and communications technology (ICT) revolution continued to expand across all regions. As technology and markets continue to evolve at an extraordinarily rapid pace, Governments, businesses, international organizations and citizens are challenged to keep pace and adapt to ever-shifting opportunities and uncertainties.

2.   This report includes information provided by 26 United Nations and other international organizations and stakeholders[1] concerning trends, achievements and obstacles in the implementation of WSIS outcomes during 2013.[2]

I.   Current trends

A.   Development status of information and communications technologies

3.   ICT demand and supply have continued to grow. Globally, the number of mobile cellular subscriptions now surpasses 6.8 billion.[3] Many rural and remote regions of developing countries, though, have yet to be covered by mobile networks, and many citizens cannot afford mobile phones. Internet access and use also continues to expand, with more than 2.7 billion Internet users worldwide.[4] An increasing proportion of users have access to high-end broadband networks and services, but access is not ubiquitous or affordable in large portions of the developing world.

4.   The United Nations and international agencies have begun a 10-year review of WSIS outcomes (WSIS+10) to be completed by the General Assembly in 2015, alongside the review of the Millennium Development Goals. During 2013, the first WSIS+10 review event was organized by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). The International Telecommunication Union (ITU) hosted the WSIS Forum, which launched an open consultation on the issues and goals for the review.

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[1]   Africa ICT Alliance, Association for Progressive Communications, Council of Europe, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Economic Commission for Africa, Economic Commission for Europe, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and the Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, International Chamber of Commerce–Business Action to Support the Information Society, Internet Governance Forum, Internet Society, International Trade Centre, International Telecommunication Union, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, Telefónica, UNCTAD, United Nations Environment Programme, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, United Nations Industrial Development Organization, World Health Organization, World Intellectual Property Organization, World Meteorological Organization and World Trade Organization.

[2]   Full submissions from these organizations are available at http://unctad.org/cstd.

[3]   http://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Pages/publications/mis2013.aspx.

[4]   Ibid.

B.   Wireless technologies and trends

5.   Many recent developments in the ICT sector have involved wireless technologies. Wireless broadband services have become one of the fastest growing trends, with mobile broadband subscriptions growing at some 30 per cent per year,[5] allowing users to access content from an increasing variety of "smart" devices.

6.   Under ITU guidance, Governments and regulators are transforming their spectrum management policies, for example by shifting from analogue to digital broadcasting standards. This releases large ranges of spectrum for use. The newly available spectrum promises to create opportunities for innovative and lower cost networks, which could prove beneficial in reaching underserved populations and offering more affordable services.

7.   These developments are contributing to the ongoing convergence of technologies, media and applications, as voice, data transmission, broadcasting and traditional media become increasingly integrated and interchangeable.

C.   Government policy initiatives

8.   An increasing number of countries are recognizing the importance of ICTs by adopting or preparing national ICT policies and/or broadband plans and strategies aimed at bringing together the range of stakeholders on the supply and demand sides of the ICT ecosystem, to create coherent and effective paths to ICT development.

9.   Such strategies emphasize the role of ICTs in education and, by extension, the importance of increasing awareness and building human capacity in the use of ICTs in all spheres. Introducing computers, Internet access and technical training into school curricula has become a priority focus. More recently, new "digital literacy" strategies aim at taking ICT-oriented public education beyond the classroom, to society as a whole, to ensure that current and future generations are best prepared to reap the benefits of the information society.

II.   Implementation and follow-up at the regional level

A.   Africa

10.   The sizeable gaps in Internet access in African countries have begun to shrink with significant growth in this sector, and new policies and initiatives are showing promise. According to a recent report,[6] as of 2013, Africa has an overall estimated 63 per cent mobile penetration and a 16 per cent Internet access rate. Mobile broadband penetration has increased from 2 per cent in 2010, to 11 per cent in 2013. The Internet represents 1.1 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) in Africa and could rise from $18 billion today, to $300 billion in 2025.[7] Despite these gains, sub-Saharan Africa still has the lowest Internet penetration rate.

11.   The Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) continues to support its member States in the implementation of the Tunis Agenda for the Information Society, working

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[5]   http://www.broadbandcommission.org/documents/bb-annualreport2013.pdf.

[6]   http://www.mckinsey.com/insights/high_tech_telecoms_internet/lions_go
_digital_the_internets_transformative_potential_in_africa.

[7]   Ibid.

closely with the African Union Commission and Africa's regional economic communities on the development of an African convention on cybersecurity, harmonization of cyberlegislation and e-government indicators.[8]

12.   The Africa ICT Alliance, a private sector-led cooperation among African ICT organizations, launched operations in 2013, conducting activities in support of implementing WSIS action lines.[9]

B.   Asia and the Pacific

13.   The steady progress in ICT development has been uneven in many parts of the Asia–Pacific region. The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) carried out a regional review of the WSIS outcomes in Asia and the Pacific in 2013,[10] identifying areas of progress and continuing challenges.

14.   Although mobile telephony is available to a substantial majority of the region's population and public institutions are increasingly connected to the web, the more economically advanced countries of ESCAP (e.g. Australia, Japan, New Zealand, the Republic of Korea, Singapore) have progressed even faster than the less connected ones, thereby increasing the digital divide. For example, while only 7 per cent of people in the Asia–Pacific region have fixed broadband access, the Republic of Korea is at 37.56 per cent fixed broadband penetration, compared to Myanmar with only 0.01 per cent.

15.   ESCAP is promoting a number of initiatives aimed at closing the digital divide, including development of the concept of an Asia–Pacific information superhighway: a continent-wide meshed network of terrestrial optical fibre. In 2013, ESCAP and ITU produced a set of terrestrial transmission infrastructure maps[11] to allow the identification of missing links and bottlenecks in cross-border fibre optical networks.

C.   Western Asia

16.   The Western Asia region has taken significant steps towards bridging the digital divide and building an information society. Lower costs are enabling higher rates of ICT adoption. The public and private sectors are working together to integrate local communications networks regionally and globally.

17.   The latest edition of the *Regional Profile of the Information Society in the Arab Region*,[12] produced by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) in 2013, confirms that the Arab region has taken significant steps towards achieving WSIS objectives.

18.   The information society portal for the ESCWA region[13] provides a platform for knowledge management, further supporting collaboration and dissemination of information on key ICT policy themes.

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[8]   http://au.int/en/cyberlegislation.

[9]   http://aficta.org/index.php/home/visionmission.

[10]   Following resolution 69/10 of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, entitled "Promoting regional information and communications technology connectivity and building knowledge-networked societies in Asia and the Pacific".

[11]   http://www.unescap.org/idd/maps/asia-pacific-superhighway/.

[12]   http://www.escwa.un.org/information/pubaction.asp?PubID=1492.

[13]   http://isper.escwa.org.lb.

D. Latin America and the Caribbean

19.   In Latin America and the Caribbean, ICTs are having a positive impact on economic growth, technological investment, production and business/consumer behaviour in some countries, while in others progress has been slower.[14] There is asymmetrical development of critical infrastructure reflected in mobile broadband penetration: the most advanced countries have 15 times more development than the ones lagging the furthest behind. It has been estimated that ICTs represent on average 3.2 per cent of GDP in four countries in the region (Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Mexico).[15]

20.   The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) oversees the region's implementation of WSIS activities. The Fourth Ministerial Conference on the Information Society in Latin America and the Caribbean approved the Montevideo Declaration – whereby the region's countries reaffirmed their commitment to achieving the targets in the Plan of Action for the Information and Knowledge Society in Latin America and the Caribbean (eLAC 2015)[16] – and the 2013–2015 workplan for the implementation of the Plan of Action.[17]

21.   ECLAC is also the technical secretariat of the Regional Dialogue on Broadband, which expanded in 2013 to 11 members.[18] During 2013 ECLAC deepened its work in the measurement of digital economy and its benefits for equality, and in the promotion of ICT use to overcome the gender divide.

E. Europe

22.   While there has been considerable progress in improving the infrastructure and technological capacity of ICTs in many of Europe's emerging economies, the Internet in many of these economies is not robust and is subject to potential disruptions, largely due to the small number of providers.[19]

23.   In implementing the outcomes of WSIS, the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) of the United Nations has concentrated on finding solutions that use ICT tools to facilitate development goals, while dedicating special attention to sustainability-related concerns. ECE has undertaken initiatives through its various subprogrammes to address most of the WSIS action lines by promoting partnerships among public and private stakeholders in the region.

24.   The Council of Europe works with its 47 member States, the private sector, civil society and other actors to shape ICT policies for the region, through conventions in fields such as cybercrime, data protection and the protection of children and through the European Dialogue on Internet Governance.[20] At the 2013 global Internet Governance Forum (IGF),

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[14] http://www.cepal.org/cgi-bin/getProd.asp?xml=/publicaciones/xml/5/49395/P49395.xml&xsl=/publicaciones/ficha.xsl&base=/publicaciones/top_publicaciones.xsl.

[15] Ibid.

[16] http://www.eclac.cl/cgi-bin/getprod.asp?xml=/elac2015/noticias/paginas/0/44210/P44210.xml&xsl=/elac2015/tpl-i/p18f.xsl&base=/elac2015/tpl-i/top-bottom.xslt.

[17] http://www.eclac.cl/socinfo/noticias/documentosdetrabajo/8/49568/eLAC-Plan_of_work_2013-2015.pdf.

[18] http://www.eclac.org/cgi-bin/getprod.asp?xml=/prensa/noticias/comunicados/6/51136/P51136.xml&xsl=/prensa/tpl-i/p6f.xsl&base=/socinfo/tpl-i/top-bottom.xsl.

[19] See the ECE contribution to this report.

[20] http://hub.coe.int/en/a-free-and-safe-internet.

the Council presented its draft Guide on Human Rights for the Internet Users[21] for comment, with the intention of adopting it during 2014.

III. Implementation and follow-up at the international level

A. General Assembly

25.   The General Assembly adopted resolution 68/198 in December 2013, which recognized that ICTs have the potential to provide new solutions to development challenges. The General Assembly decided to finalize the modalities for its overall review of the implementation of WSIS outcomes no later than the end of March 2014 and invited the President of the Assembly to appoint two co-facilitators to convene open consultations for that purpose (A/RES/68/198, para. 22).

26.   In response to General Assembly resolution 67/195, the Working Group on Enhanced Cooperation (WGEC) on public policy issues relating to the Internet was established by the Chair of the CSTD. It held its first meetings in May and November 2013. The WGEC consists of 22 Member States and representatives from the private sector, civil society, technical and academic communities, and intergovernmental and international organizations.

B. Economic and Social Council

27.   In July 2013, the Economic and Social Council adopted resolution 2013/9, which noted the ongoing implementation of WSIS outcomes, emphasizing the multi-stakeholder approach and contributions of numerous agencies at the international and regional levels, while reiterating the importance of maintaining this process.

28.   The Council recognized and reaffirmed the importance of implementing the WSIS outcomes on Internet governance and enhanced cooperation, including the role of the WGEC and the IGF. It urged all stakeholders to continue to focus on and prioritize the goals of WSIS, including review and improvement of measurement of and indicators for ICT development. Finally, it noted that a substantive session on WSIS+10 would be organized by the CSTD, as mandated by paragraph 47 of Economic and Social Council resolution 2013/9.

C. United Nations Group on the Information Society

29.   In May 2013, the 30 members of the United Nations Group on the Information Society (UNGIS) issued a joint statement on the post-2015 development agenda,[22] which noted the dramatic changes in the ICT landscape since the Millennium Summit and the WSIS. These include factors that make ICTs more directly relevant to achieving the Millennium Development Goals, such as helping to accelerate sustainable development, ensuring rights-based development, creating jobs, improving education, empowering women and other key benefits.

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[21] http://www.coe.int/t/informationsociety/Rights%20of%20Internet%20Users/Draft%
20Council%20of%20Europe%20Guide%20on%20Human%20Rights%20for%20Internet%20Users.
pdf.

[22] http://www.ungis.org/Portals/0/documents/JointInitiatives/UNGIS.Joint.Statement.pdf.

30.   UNGIS emphasized that the role of ICTs for development should be fully recognized in the post-2015 development agenda, which should reflect lessons learned on the potential of ICTs to achieve the Goals. In this regard, there should be linkages between the post-2015 development agenda and the WSIS+10 review processes to ensure coordination and coherence.

31.   In response to the UNGIS joint statement,[23] the Secretary-General's Special Adviser on Post-2015 Development Planning noted that this input reinforced the Secretary-General's report to Member States on the Millennium Development Goals and post-2015 goals,[24] which underscored the centrality of incorporating science and technology, including ICTs, into the post-2015 development agenda.

D.   Facilitation and coordination of multi-stakeholder implementation of the Geneva Plan of Action

32.   ITU hosted the annual WSIS Forum in May 2013, together with UNESCO, UNCTAD and the United Nations Development Programme. This event included the launch of the WSIS+10 High-Level Event: Open Consultation Process[25] and the annual meeting of the WSIS action-line facilitators.

33.   The WSIS Forum 2013 Outcome Document focused on the ongoing development of WSIS+10 plans. A WSIS+10 Visioning Track was formed, whereby participants were encouraged to consider key themes for the upcoming WSIS+10 review.

E.   Civil society, business and multi-stakeholder partnerships

34.   During 2013, the Association for Progressive Communications focused efforts on affordable Internet access, ICT use for environmental sustainability, use of emerging technologies for social change, building the "information commons", defending human rights in the Internet sphere, securing gender equality and women's rights, and improving Internet governance.

35.   In 2013, the World Wide Web Foundation established the Alliance for Affordable Internet[26] to advance affordable access to mobile and fixed Internet connectivity in developing countries. In December, the Alliance released its first Affordability Report.[27]

36.   The Internet Society (ISOC),[28] which is also the organizational home to the Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF), has expanded its collaboration with many intergovernmental organizations to promote the expansion of an open Internet globally.[29] This included participation in 2013 in the Internet Technical Advisory Committee of the Committee on Digital Economy of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

37.   End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and the Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes (ECPAT) International leads the Dynamic Coalition on Child Online

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[23] http://www.ungis.org/Portals/0/documents/JointInitiatives/ AminaMohammend_HC_re_UNGIS_Joint_Statement.pdf.

[24] http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/pdf/A%20Life%20of%20Dignity%20for%20All.pdf.

[25] http://www.itu.int/wsis/review/mpp/.

[26] https://a4ai.org/.

[27] http://a4ai.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Affordability-Report-2013-FINAL.pdf.

[28] www.internetsociety.org.

[29] http://www.internetsociety.org/who-we-are/our-community-and-partners.

Safety. In 2013, ECPAT organized stakeholder workshops on child online protection at the IGF[30] and published youth-led field level studies, conducted in Africa[31] and Latin America,[32] on vulnerabilities arising from ICT use by children.

38. Business Action to Support the Information Society, an initiative of the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC), works with businesses to support WSIS outcomes.[33] ICC also manages the Commission on the Digital Economy, which develops policy and practical tools in collaboration with international organizations. ICC participated in the 2013 IGF and contributed statements emphasizing the need to develop favourable policy environments to allow businesses and individuals to capitalize on the benefits of the Internet.[34]

F. Facilitation and implementation of WSIS action lines and themes

1. Implementation of action lines

a) The role of public governance authorities and all stakeholders in the promotion of ICTs for development (C1)

39. The eLAC process overseen by ECLAC is a multi-stakeholder platform for high-level dialogue and regional cooperation on ICT policies. The Montevideo Declaration reinforced the commitments of the Latin American and the Caribbean countries to meet the objectives set out in the Plan of Action for the Information and Knowledge Society in Latin America and the Caribbean.[35]

40. The Africa ICT Alliance held its first summit in Nigeria in June 2013 to address the theme of fulfilling the promise of the digital age in Africa.[36]

b) Information and communication infrastructure (C2)

41. ITU organized the eighth facilitation meeting of action line C2 at the WSIS Forum, with the theme titled "Broadband backbone connectivity: Economic, regulatory policy and technical aspects".[37] ITU also organized the Connect Asia–Pacific Summit,[38] jointly with the Government of Thailand, in November 2013 and hosted six regional development forums.[39]

42. An important focus of ITU connectivity initiatives has been on schools, under the framework of its Connect a School, Connect a Community programme.[40]

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30 http://www.intgovforum.org/cms/dynamiccoalitions/79-child-online-safety.