



UNITED NATIONS SPECIAL PROGRAMME
FOR THE ECONOMIES OF CENTRAL ASIA (SPECA)

Eighth Session of the SPECA Working Group
on Knowledge-based Development

(Almaty, Kazakhstan, 22 September 2016)

REPORT

The eighth session of the SPECA Working Group on Knowledge-based Development (WG on KBD) was jointly organized by ESCAP and UNECE at the invitation of the Government of Kazakhstan in Almaty on 22 September 2016. In conjunction with the session, ESCAP and UNECE organized a regional workshop on “Resilient ICT Connectivity for the Knowledge Economy, SDGs and the WSIS Goals” in Almaty on 20-22 September 2016. The events were hosted by Centre for Emergency Situations and Disaster Risk Reduction (CESDRR).

Delegations from Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan participated in the session along with representatives of the ESCAP and UNECE secretariats. Representatives of other UN agencies and programmes, international and regional organizations, as well as representatives of the private sector and the academic community also participated in the regional workshop and the eighth session of the WG on KBD. The List of participants of the eighth session of the SPECA WG on KBD and the regional workshop is attached (Annex I).

Opening of the session

Mr. Dzhergalbek Ukashev, Deputy Director of the CESDRR, welcomed the participants to the session. Mr. Ukashev thanked the ESCAP and UNECE secretariats for organizing the session, as well as the experts participating in the regional workshop on “Resilient ICT Connectivity for the Knowledge Economy, SDGs and the SWIS Goals”. He highlighted the importance of this theme for the SPECA countries, expressed his wishes that further efforts be accorded to Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) and ICT within the region and called for further collaboration among the stakeholders.

Mr. Arslan Dandybayev, Head of the Representative Office of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Almaty, Kazakhstan, welcomed participants to the eighth session and expressed his appreciation for the productive discussions between delegates and experts during the regional workshop on “Resilient ICT Connectivity for the

Knowledge Economy, SDGs and the WSIS Goals”, and his thanks to the CESDRR, ESCAP and UNECE secretariats for their efforts in organizing the events.

Ms. Tiziana Bonapace, Head of the ESCAP Subregional Office for North and Central Asia, welcomed participants to the eighth session and expressed her gratitude to the Government of Kazakhstan and the CESDRR for hosting the SPECA events. She also thanked UNECE for their excellent collaboration in co-organizing these events. Ms. Bonapace drew delegates’ attention to the eleventh session of the SPECA Governing Council (GC) and 2016 SPECA Economic Forum in Ganja in November 2016, which will provide a good opportunity for further discussion of SPECA priorities. Ms. Bonapace noted that the results of the deliberations made during the SPECA WG on KBD session and the preceding regional workshop will feed into the SPECA GC session, as well as serve as a basis for discussion at the inaugural session of the ESCAP Committee on Information and Communications Technology, Science, Technology and Innovation to be held on 5-7 October 2016 in Bangkok. Ms. Bonapace also noted the importance of the themes discussed during the regional workshop, in particular the cross-border nature of DRR and ICT connectivity, which require close regional cooperation. Ms. Bonapace highlighted ESCAP’s Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway (AP-IS) initiative as a way forward to increase resilience and ICT connectivity in the region.

Mr. Christopher Athey, UNECE Secretary to the WG on KBD and Economic Affairs Officer, UNECE Economic Cooperation and Trade Division, welcomed the eighth session and expressed his gratitude to the Government of Kazakhstan and the CESDRR for their hospitality in hosting the eighth session of the SPECA WG on KBD and the regional workshop on “Resilient ICT Connectivity for the Knowledge Economy, SDGs and the WSIS Goals”. Mr. Athey highlighted the continued usefulness of the WG for promoting knowledge-based development in SPECA countries, and thanked ESCAP for taking the lead in organizing the regional workshop alongside this year’s session of the WG on KBD.

Election of officers and adoption of the agenda

The WG elected Mr. Dzhergalbek Ukashev, Deputy Director of the CESDRR, as Chairperson of the eighth session of the WG on KBD.

The SPECA WG on KBD adopted the agenda for its eighth session.

Outcomes of the regional workshop on “Resilient ICT Connectivity for the Knowledge Economy, SDGs and the WSIS Goals”

Ms. Atsuko Okuda, Chief of the ICT and Development Section of the ICT and Disaster Risk Reduction Division (IDD), ESCAP, provided a summary of the main outcomes of the regional workshop.

An expert from the Russian Federation reiterated his proposed new paradigm of dealing with Emergency Situations (ES) using existing ICT devices, which could significantly decrease material losses and casualties from ES.

A summary of the main outcomes of the regional workshop is included in Annex II.

Review of the activities of the SPECA WG on KBD since its last session

Mr. Athey and Ms. Okuda reported on activities carried out since the seventh session of the SPECA WG on KBD in Dushanbe on 17 June 2015, and described the activities planned for the second half of 2016 and 2017. The Progress report on the activities of the WG on KBD since the seventh session can be found in Annex III.

Delegates expressed their satisfaction with implementation of the Programme of Work for 2016-2017, and their interest in the activities planned for the second half of 2016 and 2017.

Delegates indicated their continued satisfaction with the activities of the WG on KBD and emphasised its importance for future policy development. Delegates requested the two United Nations Commissions present a draft of the updated Terms of Reference of the SPECA WG on KBD for discussion and adoption at its next session.

Review of the Programme of Work of the SPECA WG on KBD for 2016-2017

Mr. Athey and Ms. Okuda presented the Programme of Work of the WG on KBD for 2016-2017.

Delegates expressed their continued interest in the UNECE Innovation Performance Reviews. They encouraged the implementation of such reviews in other SPECA countries, including second round reviews on Innovation for Sustainable Development, as appropriate and subject to availability of extrabudgetary resources.

Delegates noted that, without ICT connectivity, it is hard to achieve results in any field of development, and highlighted ICT connectivity as particularly important for DRR. As a way forward to enhance resilience and connectivity, the delegates expressed strong support for the continuous work of ESCAP on the AP-IS initiative to bridge the digital divide in the region.

A delegate from Kyrgyzstan suggested greater continuity of participation of delegates in the WG on KBD, and that consideration be given to the creation of subgroups on thematic areas of work of the WG on KBD for specific implementation activities. A delegate from Kazakhstan supported the suggestion on greater continuity and participation of delegates in the WG on KBD.

The WG agreed that the details of the envisaged activities in the Programme of Work for 2016-2017 could be further elaborated in consultation with the host countries of these future activities.

Date and venue of the next session of the SPECA WG on KBD

The WG agreed to hold its next session in 2017 and that the exact date and venue of the ninth session of the WG would be decided through consultations with the SPECA countries.

Other business

Delegates and other attendees thanked the Government of Kazakhstan and the CESDRR for their hospitality, and the ESCAP and UNECE secretariats for the excellent organization of the SPECA WG on KBD events in Almaty.

The delegation of Azerbaijan highlighted the importance of the work of the SPECA WG on KBD and the issues discussed during the regional workshop in relation to ICT connectivity, resilience and disaster risk reduction. They encouraged the further development of policy initiatives to improve broadband connectivity, particularly through Trans-Eurasian Information Super Highway (TASIM) and ESCAP's AP-IS initiative.

The delegation of Kazakhstan provided a brief overview of the current situation, as well as recent and planned policy initiatives in the areas of ICT and telecommunications in the country. They highlighted the strategic importance of ICT to all countries, with policy challenges transcending national boundaries. Technological change has the potential to accelerate realisation of the SDGs, with ICT as one of the foundations for knowledge-based development.

The delegation of Kyrgyzstan highlighted the importance of resilient information management systems, and early warning systems in the event of natural disasters. They briefly presented some key recent policy initiatives implemented in Kyrgyzstan in this regard, including an initiative supported by international donors to improve the management of information and crisis situations.

Adoption of decisions

The proposed draft decisions were adopted by the delegations of SPECA countries. The Decisions of the eighth session of the SPECA Working Group on Knowledge-based Development are attached to this report (Annex IV).

Closing of the session

Mr. Athey and Mr. Pomoshchnikov, Head of the Joint ESCAP/UNECE SPECA Office in Almaty and Senior Economic Affairs Officer of the ESCAP Subregional Office for North and Central Asia, expressed sincere gratitude, on behalf

of the ESCAP and UNECE secretariats, to the Government of Kazakhstan and particularly to the CESDRR for the excellent organization and hospitality extended to the participants of the regional workshop and the annual session of the SPECA WG on KBD. They also expressed their appreciation to all delegates from SPECA countries for their active participation and cooperation in these events.

Mr. Ukashev, Chairperson of the eighth session of the SPECA Working Group on Knowledge-based Development, thanked the ESCAP and UNECE secretariats for their support to the organization of these important events. He expressed his gratitude to all delegates and experts for their active participation in the work of the 2016 session of the SPECA Working Group on Knowledge-based Development and the regional workshop on “Resilient ICT Connectivity for the Knowledge Economy, SDGs and the WSIS Goals” and closed the session.

Regional workshop
“Resilient ICT Connectivity for the Knowledge Economy, SDGs and
the WSIS Goals”
and
Eighth session of the SPECA WG on KBD
(Almaty, Kazakhstan, 20-22 September 2016)

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

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