UNITED NATIONS ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

Nineteenth Meeting of the Regional Interagency Working Group on Information and Communications Technology

15 December 2015
United Nations Conference Centre, Bangkok

Summary Meeting Report

Prepared by the Secretariat

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* This document has been issued without formal editing

I.   PROCEEDINGS

Summary of Presentations

1.   The representative of APT provided an overview of their upcoming work programmes and strategic priorities, including a particular focus on tangible outcomes. These focus areas include policy and regulation, ICT development, disaster management, cybersecurity, radio communication, standardization, capacity building, regional cooperation for ICT development and other events. Under the theme of ICT for development, APT will focus on the promotion of sustainable investment in the ICT sector, the adoption of ICTs within governments to transform and increase efficiency, the sharing of research information, development of applications and services and to encourage development of content in local languages, providing incentives to businesses to develop applications, promotion of ICT entrepreneurship and SMEs, promotion of Public Private Partnership (PPP) and to devise general guidelines/best practices for building and maintenance of reliable and robust Telecommunication/ICT facilities.

2.   The representative of ITU noted the increasing relevance of ICT for the international development agenda, as reflected by the SDG and WSIS processes. In the Asia-Pacific region, ITU is focusing on five main initiatives. These include special consideration for LDCs, SIDSs, Pacific Island Countries, and Landlocked Developing Countries, emergency communications, harnessing the benefits of new technologies, development and adoption of broadband, and policy and regulation. In particular, the presentation noted the areas of synchronicity between the WSIS and SDG frameworks and highlighted the need for continued investment in these processes. A summary of potential areas of cooperation and planned events was also provided.

3.   The representative of ESCAP provided an overview of the substantive and programmatic components of the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway initiative, which addresses the causes of digital divides, develops the Internet ecosystem, supports the implementation of the SDGs and stimulates the digital economy. This initiative is a pillar in ESCAP's regional connectivity initiatives (together with trade, transport and energy), which aims to facilitate movement of people, goods, money, information and knowledge for sustainable socioeconomic development in the region. Ongoing efforts have focused on an analysis on critical ICT infrastructure, including cross-sectoral synergies for e-resilience, policy analysis, options and recommendations for promoting innovation, digital inclusion and a seamless regional information space that deepens regional connectivity. Further work will include building up further in-depth analytical studies, especially on feasibility, demand forecasts and network resilience. In support of these activities, the ESCAP member countries have requested the creation of a Working Group on the AP-IS. The next meeting of this body will be convened in first half of 2016, with recommendations conveyed to the Committee on ICT & STI in second-half of 2016.

4.   The representative of UNCDF presented material on their projects and activities pertinent to ICT for Development, with a particular focus on mobile money applications and their potential positive impact on financial inclusion issues. The opportunity for positive impact on Pacific Island countries was particularly noted.

5.   The representative of UNPOG emphasized the role of e-government in the Asia Pacific region, and its role in supporting the three dimensions of Sustainable Development. In order to fulfil this role, UNPOG is focusing on policy coherence, ICT strategies at national level and institutional frameworks and leadership for e-Government development. As a cross-cutting issue, it was noted that gender empowerment is an important priority in the region and should be mainstreamed into programmatic approaches to e-Government. In addition, UNPOG will also focus on innovative aspects of e-Government, including service delivery at all levels, environmental protection, disaster risk management and economic development with particular focus on countries with vulnerabilities such as Small Island and Developing States in the Pacific.

Proposed Areas for Collaboration

The participants had thorough discussions and proposed ideas for collaboration, which are outlined below:

6.   The representative from APT outlined priority areas in their work plan, which provided opportunities for synergies with other Working Group members. Notable themes include providing support to assist Members in setting up Computer Emergency Response Teams and Computer Security Incident Response Teams (CERT/CSIRT) activities and CERT/CSIRTs, as well as to encourage the development of more ICT experts on disaster management/communications and on cybersecurity. In addition, the promotion of affordable national broadband access and improve international broadband connectivity is a matter of general interest, together with the creation of an environment that fosters the development of next generation networks, IPv6 enabled infrastructure, smart devices, applications and services.

7.   The representative from the ITU Regional office noted the opportunity for continuing cooperation on the broadband transmission network map which was the result of previous collaboration between ESCAP and ITU, together with Emergency/Disaster Communications, digital inclusion e.g. ICT accessibility for Persons with Disabilities. Further, specific events such as Girls in ICT Day had been the subject of previous cooperation and should continue. Other thematic working areas such as cybersecurity, digital economy / society, e-Education, e/m-Health and e-Agriculture were noted. Finally, upcoming events such as ITU Telecom World 2016 and WTIS 2016, offer the chance for expanded collaboration between Interagency Working Group members.

8.   The representative of ESCAP noted the crosscutting nature of the Asia Pacific Information Superhighway, and the importance of a multi-stakeholder approach. In this regard, the Working group on the AP-IS was emphasized as a very useful forum for the promotion of many shared priority areas, particular given the strong support from member countries for this mandate.

9.   The representative form UNPOG noted the previous success in the joint ESCAP-UNPOG/DPADM Capacity Development Project Strengthening gender equality policies and programmes in A-P, and the opportunity to proceed with additional phases of this project.

Conclusions and Recommendations

10.   The importance of ICT for Development, as identified in the Sustainable Development Goals, was viewed as an important extension to the WSIS process and a matter of increasing relevance for the future development agenda. Following on the decision by the General Assembly to support the continued activities of the WSIS action lines, participants recognized the importance of an integrated approach which supports the cross-cutting role of ICT as well as subject-specific themes, such as the impact of the digital divide.

11.   In follow-up to the 18th session of the Regional Interagency Working Group participants reiterated the broad consensus of the need to establish the working group as part of the Regional Coordination Mechanism, which will provide the appropriate level of coordination and support. This was acknowledged to better facilitate fostering the treatment, at the regional level, of emerging global trends/issues and providing directions for their consideration at the national level as well as promoting the strategic coordination of the regional and sub-regional directions and efforts of the members. Further, this approach will help ensure thematic and policy coherence across the region and across agencies in supporting the alignment of operational work with analytical and normative work, thereby ensuring a coherent UN regional development agenda. It was also noted that the organizations which make up the IAWG engage in a number of regional/sub-regional initiatives in specific areas, particularly those of a trans-boundary nature, that require coordinated effort by multiple agencies. Finally, this mechanism was determined to serve a valuable anchoring network of UN system's analytical, policy and advisory expertise in the region in sustaining the related knowledge base in support of UNCTs and member States. In this spirit, the participants reviewed and discussed the Terms of Reference of the proposed structure.

12.   The purpose of the working group shall be to promote coordinated and joint action to exchange information on information and communications technology programmes and activities undertaken and planned by members for follow-up action by the Group, identify ways and means to promote synergy and complementarity of action and avoid duplication of efforts in order to make the best use of available resources and liaise as necessary with other relevant thematic groups, taking into account their recommendations in implementing mandates relating to the objective of the Thematic Working Group on ICT. The group will carry out the aforementioned coordination efforts and implementation of joint activities within a targeted and time-bound framework and support the preparation, implementation and follow-up of the international and regional agreements on ICTs.

13.   The working group decided that Director of the ICT and Disaster Risk Reduction Division of ESCAP, the Secretary-General of the Asia-Pacific Telecommunity (APT), and Head of the Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) will co-chair the TWGICT. The secretariat support for the TWGICT will be provided by ESCAP. The three co-chairs of the IWG will jointly develop a Terms of Reference for the new thematic working group under the existing Regional Coordination Mechanism. Once the draft Terms of Reference has been incepted, the chairs will circulate the draft to all participants for a two week period to facilitate feedback and any further changes. At the conclusion of this period, ESCAP will make the proposal to its Executive Secretary, as the chair of the RCM, for consideration at the next feasible session of the RCM retreat for discussion and consideration.

II. PROCEEDINGS

A. Organization of the Meeting

The Nineteenth Meeting of the Regional Interagency Working Group on Information and Communications Technology (ICT) was held at the United Nations Conference Centre, Bangkok, Thailand, on 15 December 2015. The meeting was jointly organized by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and the Asia Pacific Telecommunity (APT). The programme of the meeting is attached as Annex 1.

B. Attendance

The meeting was attended by twenty representatives from seven United Nations agencies and regional institutions working in ICT. The complete list of the participants is included in Annex 2 of this report.

C. Opening of the meeting

The meeting was opened with speeches from Ms. Shamika Sirimanne, Director, Information and Communications Technology and Disaster Risk Reduction Division, ESCAP, Mr. Ioane Koroivuki, Regional Director, International Telecommunication Union Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (ITU/ROAP) and Mr. Jongbong Park, Asia Pacific Telecommunity (APT) on behalf of the Secretary General of APT. They all reiterated the importance of inter-agency coordination, the significance of ICT as a means of implementation for sustainable development and the need to reflect this at higher levels and within existing regional coordination mechanisms and development partnership frameworks.

D. Updates by agencies and coordination of areas of common interest

The session covered presentations made by agencies on their areas of work, including potential areas of common interest. Presentations were made by ITU, APT, ESCAP, UNPOG, and Internet Society. This was followed by a presentation made by the ESCAP secretariat on its Regional Coordination Mechanism (RCM) as an existing development cooperation mechanism that the IWG could potentially be integrated into. The main points from the discussion which followed, regarding the possibility of integrating the work of the IWG into the framework of the Regional Coordination Mechanism (RCM) have been summarized in section I.

List of Annex Documents

1.   Annex 1:   Programme of the 19th IWG on ICT
2.   Annex 2:   List of Participants
3.   Annex 3:   Terms of Reference of the IWG

Nineteenth Meeting of the Regional Interagency Working Group on Information and Communication Technologies

15 December 2015
United Nations Conference Centre, Bangkok
Meeting Room F

PROGRAMME

13:00-13:30	Opening remarks

- Ms. Shamika Sirimanne, Director, Information and Communications Technology and Disaster Risk Reduction Division (IDD), ESCAP;
- Mr. Ioane Koroivuki, Regional Director, International Telecommunication Union Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (ITU/ROAP); and
- Ms. Areewan Haorangsi, Secretary-General, Asia Pacific Telecommunity (APT).

13:30-15:00	Updates by agencies and coordination of areas of common interest.

- APT
- ITU
- ESCAP
- UNPOG
- Internet Society
- Others (10 minutes per agency)

15:00-15:45	Discussion on the ToR of the ICT Thematic Working Group of the Regional Coordination Mechanism

- Overview by ESCAP secretariat (10 minutes)
- Discussion

15:45-16:15	Other matters

16:15-16:30	Closing remarks by IDD/ESCAP, ITU/ROAP and APT.

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Nineteenth Meeting of the Regional Interagency Working Group (IWG) on Information and Communication Technology (ICT)

15 December 2015
UNCC Bangkok
Thailand

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

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