
Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
Committee on Information and Communications Technology

Second session

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Item 5 of the provisional agenda

Broadband development in Asia and the Pacific

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Information note by the secretariat

I. Background

1. Ten years ago, the most typical network experience was limited to dialling up to the Internet to see if there were any messages and then “surfing” around a few familiar websites. The advent of broadband networking changed this scenario dramatically: it sped up Internet access and brought about plenty of innovative new applications and services.

2. Broadband is a general-purpose technology that significantly affects how people live and work. It is a key driver of economic growth and national competitiveness and can contribute to social and cultural development. Countries, communities, corporations and individuals that lack easy access to broadband may miss significant economic and social opportunities. For instance, broadband-enabled cities attract more service firms and, thus, create more employment opportunities than their narrowband counterparts. Communities also benefit from faster Internet access: their residents have enhanced virtual opportunities to communicate with each other and to access public services and information.

3. The benefits of broadband are not limited to the economic sector. For instance, a study conducted by Climate Risk for the Australian telecommunications operator, Telstra, shows how broadband creates opportunities for low-carbon development. The report identifies seven opportunities for carbon reduction or abatement, all of which are based on the use of broadband networks.

4. The need for broadband is also particularly urgent given the emergence of cloud computing and what it can offer to developing countries. An expanding array of services and applications is offered on the Internet and it has been gaining momentum and broad acceptance among the widespread broadband networks that support cloud computing and the associated increase in cost efficiency.

5. According to the latest ESCAP figures, 42 per cent of broadband Internet subscribers were located in Asia and the Pacific in 2009. The most

significant growth has been witnessed in Central Asia and in landlocked developing countries, as detailed in document E/ESCAP/CICT(2)/2. Asia and the Pacific has been recognized to be leading the world when it comes to the development of broadband Internet. In fact, after the mobile market, broadband has been the fastest growing telecommunications market segment in Asia. The dynamic expansion of broadband, however, has largely remained limited to the developed economies, with narrowband dial-up access continuing to be the norm in most of the poorer developing countries of the region. A new digital divide has been emerging to distinguish the mostly high-income countries that are broadband leaders from the mostly middle- and low-income countries that are broadband challenged.

II. Focus of the panel

6. The objective of this panel discussion is to review and discuss recent developments in broadband in Asia and the Pacific to promote sustainable and inclusive socio-economic development with a view to achieving internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals and the goals established in the outcome documents of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS). It is expected that the panellists will share with the Committee their views on the current state of affairs, gaps and challenges, practical ways to adopt and expand broadband networks and applications in individual member States that can promote inclusive socio-economic development.

7. For example, what would be the emerging role of the private sector and how can more private sector resources be brought in for the expansion of broadband networks in developing countries? How can better cooperation be developed among all stakeholders, including end-users, government and the private sector, in developing policies and initiatives? What are the policy and regulatory requirements and considerations that have proven to be effective in promoting broadband uptake and pragmatic applications? What would be a good cooperation mechanism to ensure the sustainable involvement of all interested parties?

III. Format

8. The format of the panel is as follows:

- An introductory presentation will be made by the ESCAP secretariat (5 minutes).
 - The discussion will be moderated by a distinguished panellist.
 - Panellists will each have 10-15 minutes to make comments or presentations about the topic, to share their views and experience, and to make recommendations and suggestions on the topic.
 - The floor will be open for questions and answers addressed to the panellists.
 - The moderator, assisted by the secretariat, will briefly summarize the session.
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