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Bangkok

**DRAFT REPORT OF THE SUB-REGIONAL WORKSHOP ON
STRENGTHENING ICT POLICIES AND APPLICATIONS
TO ACHIEVE MDGs AND WSIS GOALS
IN SOUTH ASIA AND CENTRAL ASIA**

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. The sub-regional workshop on Strengthening ICT Policies and Applications to Achieve MDGs and WSIS Goals in South Asia and Central Asia, organized by the Information and Communications Technology and Disaster Risk Reduction Division (IDD) of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) took from 21 to 22 October 2009 in Bangkok.
2. ESCAP organized the workshop to review the current status of ICT access among the countries, identify opportunities and challenges posed by emerging technologies at the national level and develop a framework for regional cooperation by providing a platform to discuss main issues concerning, policies, technologies and business models.
3. The workshop comprised of four sessions:
 - Session 1: Opening
 - Session 2: Regional overview: ICT access and identifying gaps
 - Session 3: Challenges and opportunities at the national level
 - Session 4: How to address the challenges: technological and policy issues
 - Session 5: The way forward
4. The main objective of the workshop was to raise awareness among ICT policy and decision makers on policy analysis and recommendations so that they can take advantage of emerging ICT solutions and develop a concerted strategy for possible regional cooperation as well as create synergies and harmonized approaches with international and regional organizations to achieve Millennium Development and the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) Goals.
5. The full contents of the presentations during the meeting, as well as other relevant documents can be found on the ESCAP website:
http://www.unescap.org/idd/events/2009_sRW-MDG-WSIS-SEAsia%20and%20Pacific/index.asp.

6. Hon. David Butcher an economist, former Minister of Energy and Commerce of New Zealand and now Manager of David Butcher and Associates Ltd, facilitated the meeting. He has extensive experience in telecommunications sector regulatory reforms in New Zealand and has also worked on telecommunications regulatory reform in the Asia-Pacific Region, Central Asia and Mongolia.

II. PROCEEDINGS

A. Session 1: Opening

7. Mr. Zengpei Xuan, Director of the Information and Communications Technology and Disaster Risk Reduction Division (IDD), welcomed participants and opened the workshop.
8. Mr. Xuan stressed that member countries of ESCAP had been making efforts to achieve MDGs and WSIS goals and that ICT had been playing a very important role in the process. This meeting, he highlighted, was to review the progress made to achieve those two goals using ICT as a tool.
9. He mentioned that a similar workshop organized for Southeast Asia and the Pacific from 19 to 20 October 2009 had been very successful and useful in terms of its in-depth discussions focused on country experiences and common obstacles they faced as well as on possible solutions for regional cooperation. Mr. Xuan hoped that during this meeting the participants could share their personal as well as professional insights into the issues and that the shared knowledge and insights would become valuable outcomes of the meeting and a stepping stone for the future activities.
10. Finally Mr. Xuan stressed that participants should actively raise questions to the knowledgeable consultants who participated in this workshop to learn from their experience and insights.
11. Mr. Timothy Loh of IDD explained the objectives and expected outcomes of this workshop. Mr. Loh noted that this meeting would be a platform to propose holistic solutions in terms of technology, regulatory and socio-economic point of views based on gap analysis of the current status of ICT access in the region to achieve MDGs and WSIS goals.
12. Furthermore, he reminded the participants that the workshop aimed to assist Least Developed Countries (LDC), Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDC) and Small Islands

Developing States (SIDS) with the implementation of the WSIS Plan of Action and Tunis Agenda in the area of ICT access and to the under-served people in Asia and the Pacific with information applications for development.

13. He pointed out that these expectations could be reached through discussions on available technologies for deployment in different terrains and conditions and different levels of technological readiness as well as through policy discussions, while investigating potential technical cooperation opportunities and exploring frameworks for cooperation at the regional level.

B. Session 2: Regional overview: ICT access and identifying gaps

14. Ms. Atsuko Okuda of IDD gave a statistical overview on the current trends in ICT access expansion and identified characteristics of growth patterns among LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS.

15. In her presentation, Ms. Okuda noted that while the growth in fixed telephone subscribers had been generally declining among advanced countries, there had been significant expansion of mobile subscribers among LDCs recording over 100 per cent growth rate between 2003 and 2008. Average growth of mobile subscription among ESCAP member countries showed only 26.4 per cent whereas the average of LDC marked 88.5 per cent along with the 68.1 per cent of LLDC. Meanwhile, there exists generally very slow growth in SIDS.

16. Ms. Okuda went through a list of tables that compared the growth rate of Internet subscribers across the region. In her presentation, she noted that the lowest Internet subscriber number had been found in South and South-West Asia with 8.6 per 100 population with the highest average CAGR of 27.8 per cent. On the contrary, the highest number 44.2, had been found in the Pacific (including Australia and New Zealand), even though a negative growth rate (0.4 per cent).

17. Ms. Okuda highlighted ESCAP's work in the area of ICT access through the implementation of General Assembly resolution 60/252 on WSIS and Economic and Social Council resolution 2005/40 on the establishment of the Asian and Pacific Training Center for Information and Communication Technology for Development (APCICT). By the end of 2009, IDD would have published research and technical papers relevant to the WSIS such as green and cool ICT, the 1997 financial crisis and responses of the Republic of Korea and regional connectivity in Central Asia.

18. Mr. Patrick Remus, a consultant of IDD, in his address focused extensively on how ICT

access demands could drive network development. He presented his view on the current trends in Asia and the Pacific while citing examples of the increasing phone based services in new ICT serviced areas. He cited examples of a barber in Bangladesh who used a mobile phone in an innovative way and mobile-money which could be sent via mobile phones. He stressed that these could provide a great opportunity and help improve livelihood in the rural areas.

19. Mr. Remus stressed that although it would be expensive and difficult to roll out a network, he explained that the expansion in rural area would be possible and it required the PTB approach which he referred to as Power, Tower and Backhaul. He called on member countries to examine the “Indian experience” and proffered solutions such as infrastructure sharing and outsourcing of its IT services as a way of leveraging available facilities and ultimately maximizing productivity.
20. He argued that adopting the right technology would depend on a number of factors and regulatory policies. He, however, acknowledged that although in most countries of ESCAP the infrastructure is already in place, it can be expanded, upgraded or replaced. Mr. Remus stated that many mobile network companies were emerging with operational models to educate the local residence on the use of ICT and provided information on how regulators could play a vital role in encouraging e-services as part of ICT roll-out.
21. Mr. Remus shared his personal experience in Maldives on how WiMAX technology could deliver broadband services to the underserved region with primary focus on community. He emphasized that WiMAX operators faced challenges regardless of the operator’s size or segment focus. An issue concerning licensing was highlighted explaining how competition could drive development. While narrating the role of government, Mr. Remus suggested that mechanisms on strengthening and encouraging ICT access development with favorable policies and regulations could make this synergy a win-win situation. He recommended legislative tools such as universal access approach and community service obligations as a driving force to ICT implementation.
22. In response to the presentations, Mr. Aidraliev, Head of E-Government Department of Prime Minister Office in Kyrgyzstan emphasized that there was a need to work with various stakeholders so that they knew how to manage resources and government to enhance its services. Regarding broadband access, he called for access to financial resources and technology by state authorities, and asked a question on tariff rates and access to ICT infrastructure.
23. In reaction to these questions, Mr. Remus explained dynamic development of

technologies and methods to reduce cost to manage mobile networks, such as outsourcing management of networks.

24. Professor Kan from the School of Economics and Management of Beijing University shared his analysis of the current state of technology stressing that 3G was not good enough because of its insufficient bandwidth and his view that universal obligation funds might not produce as much benefit as expected.

C. Session 3: Challenges and opportunities at the national level

25. Mr. Shahabuddin, from the Bangladesh Telecommunications Company, presented the overview of the National ICT Policy of his country which aimed to achieve a transparency, accountability, responsiveness and higher efficiency in the delivery of government services to citizens. He continued by sharing with the participants the major ICT initiatives currently rolled out by the administration including the InfoBahan project inaugurated to construct an Internet Protocol/ MultiProtocol Label Switching (IP/MPLS) backbone network for Internet services, a project to introduce latest network technologies, a project to replace digital telephone network with the next generation network (NGN), and a project to introduce WiMAX services.

26. In addition to this, Mr. Shahabuddin identified gaps of ICT access expansion in Bangladesh as follows:

- Subsidized operation in rural areas
- Lack of capital investment
- Lack of manpower familiar with latest technologies
- Limited availability of uninterrupted commercial power
- Unexpected delay in project implementation
- Absence of Universal Service Obligation (USO) fund.
- Failure to keep pace with technology changes.

He noted that while there was great progress in the ICT sector in the country, there was a need for a holistic approach towards achieving the above mentioned goals.

27. Mr. Suberi, Chief Planning Officer of Policy and Planning Division at Ministry of Information and Communications in Bhutan, shed light on issues such as technological and infrastructural problems, policy issues regarding data privacy and cyber-security and the composition of national telecommunications networks among others in Bhutan.

28. Mr. Suberi drew on the Bhutan Information and Communications Technology Policy and Strategies (BIPS) which covered five strategic themes, namely policy, infrastructure, human capacity, content and application, and enterprise. He mentioned that Bhutan faced persistent challenges such as extending connectivity to rural areas, harsh topography, scattered settlements, and high cost of providing ICT infrastructure. More specifically, he stated the following as bottlenecks in expanding ICT access:

- Affordability of ICT services, due to high cost of developing infrastructure and small domestic markets
- Low utilization of ICT services due to lack of local content and low computer literacy
- Competition becomes challenging since the new entrants had to compete for limited pool of customers

29. He concluded his presentation with enthusiasm by recognizing ICT as an indispensable medium to help achieve the nation's overall goal, "Gross National Happiness", narrating strong commitment of the government to developing this sector. With specific reference to the WSIS targets, he referred to ongoing efforts to achieve these targets through the Five Year Plan (2008-2013).

30. Mr. Urazymbetov of the Agency for Information and Communication of Kazakhstan presented the country report. In the presentation, he shared the activities of the agency in 2008 and its goals for 2009-2010.

31. In his speech, Mr. Urazymbetov drew attention of the participants to the government's main focus on e-government and development of ICT by means of public and private sector interaction. He noted that main telecommunication indicators (telephone density, mobile subscribers, number of Internet users and the level of digital telecommunication network development) had increased every year.

32. He continued that in rural areas 7,008 rural settlements had been provided with telephone connections by government, although there were systemic problems of rural communication, such as imperfection of infrastructure, low level of digitalization and limited

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