Report to the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia on Impact of ICT on Arab Youth: Employment, Education and Social Change

Contents

1 Executive Summary

At the 2015 session, held from 21 November 2015 to 24 November 2015, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) considered "Impact of ICT on Arab Youth: Employment, Education and Social Change" as the topic for the 2015 session.

The Member States of ESCWA recognized the relationship between Information Communication Technology (ICT) and youth education and employment. As a commission we identified that there is a separation between two sub-groups on the issue of ICT. The first sub-group is one that must develop the basic infrastructure necessary to create ICT initiatives. The second sub-group consists of States that have the developed ICT infrastructure and are looking to further ICT initiatives.

The second chapter of this report submits for consideration Resolution II/1 pertaining to the development of ICT infrastructure. This resolution deals with the creation of telecommunication networks, the use of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) to expand internet access and possible education and incentive programs. The resolution also asked the Economic and Social Council to set the agenda for ESCWA in the future to include ICT. This resolution was adopted by consensus.

The third chapter of this report details the discussions from the commission on ICT development. The deliberations detail the discussion of splitting into the two sub-groups. It also details the discussion surrounding Resolution II/1, and the discussion of other possible solutions and programs related to ICT.

2 Matters Calling for Action

2.1 ESCWA II/1

Reaffirming the important role that Information Communications Technology (ICT) can play in the lives of Arab Youth,

Guided by the work done by the United Nations ICT Task Force with the Asia-Pacific Development Information Program,

Cognizant of the great potential for ICT as a means towards eradicating poverty, improving quality of life and developing sustainably in least developed countries (LDCs), especially countries in Western Asia,

Recognizing the need for internet infrastructure in LDCs,

Noting the importance of incentive programs in encouraging foreign investment in ICT programs,

Emphasizing every Member States' national sovereignty,

1. *Encourages* Member States to work towards providing government officials and youth with technological literacy programs, coordinating with Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) when necessary, possibly including but not limited to:

    (a) UandI;

    (b) Community Education Computer Society;

    (c) Academy for Educational Development;

2. *Invites* Member States to further develop telecommunications infrastructure, and if necessary cooperating with NGOs and other relevant organizations such as but not limited to:

    (a) Facebook Internet.org Project;

    (b) Google's Project Loon;

    (c) The Malala Fund;

    (d) One Laptop per Child;

    (e) The Arab Information and Communication Technologies Organization;

3. *Calls upon* Member States to consider implementing comprehensive incentive programs for companies in the technological sector in order to attract foreign and domestic investment, recommending in particular:

    (a) Consideration of the benefits of offering companies tax incentives for hiring people in technology-related positions and for companies building infrastructure conducive to creating ICT industries within Member States;

    (b) Implementation of a subsidiary program for build out projects;

4. *Requests* that the Economic and Social Council puts ICT development on the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) agenda on a biennial basis:

    (a) Recommends this discussion revolve around ICT growth initatives adopted in Member States and the impact these policies have on the respective Member States' technology sector and economy;

    (b) Further recommends that the Economic and Social Council asks ESCWA to discuss policies in which Member States share policies regarding technology development to achieve more efficient and rapid regional growth in ICT.

3 Consideration of the Impact of ICT on Arab Youth: Employment, Education and Social Change

Many of the Member States in the West Asia region have greater than 50 percent of their total population under the age of 30. As a result, the impact of Information Communications Technology (ICT) on youth in employment, education and social change are of great concern to the Member States in the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia. Member States within the aforementioned Commission recognized divisions in technological infrastructure, as some States have more developed telecommunication systems that allow for ICT expansion, whereas other States are still in need of further developments before delving into ICT growth. In Member States' deliberations of this topic, Member States of the group in need of further developments focused on the following issue areas: infrastructure development, Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) internet access, incentive programs, youth training and education, sharing information and international cooperation in development of ICT structures and national and governmental training regarding use of ICT technologies.

In order to take advantage of the technological advancements in the realm of ICT, Member States recognized that it is crucial that States without proper internet and telecommunications infrastructure work towards the creation of such necessities. Many Member States believe that this can be accomplished through collaborative actions between States along with NGOs and outside funding. Because many of our Member States face the need to further education, many believe that working with these types of organisations would bridge the gap between developed States and States still developing ICT infrastructure. The main reasoning for this is that an increase in telecommunications infrastructure will similarly bolster the economy, and thus provide a suitable investment opportunity for corporations and other States in the region. Member States hope that infrastructure is built quickly in order to make the most out of the current rapid technology advances.

To help facilitate the development of new as well as existing infrastructure, Member States believe that NGOs can assist in development, specifically in the realm of providing internet access. Examples that Member States hope to call upon include the Facebook Internet.org project, Google's Project Loon, the Malala Fund, One Laptop per Child, and the Arab Information and Communication Tecnologies Organization. It is the hope of Member States that these NGOs, as properly funded through the Economic and Social Council budget, State budgets and foreign investment groups, will collaborate with State governments to optimize efficient development.

These organizations have a mission to ensure information to every youth through collaboration with governments and providing basic access through low-cost yet mobile machines. In addition, the ESCWA highlighted the role The United Nations Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development (IANYD) could play as a support mechanism to successfully promote youth development and education in relation to ICT. Certain States have used school broadband networks initiatives, such as Eduwabe, from 2003 to the present to create a national virtual learning platform. This has been successfully implemented in over 1,300 schools and therefore this commission would recommend the promotion of such online education programs for all States in the region.

To encourage foreign investment, many Member States recommended that States consider implementing comprehensive incentive programs for companies in the realm of technological advancements. Member States recommend that such programs consider the benefits of offering companies tax incentives for hiring for technology-related positions, building infrastructure conducive to creating ICT industries within Member States and subsidies for buildout.

To make sure development happens efficiently and with purpose, Member States recognized that it is necessary that measures are taken in order to train and develop the youth, as well as the governments in technological literacy. Member States recognized that this will require multiple programs, and therefore suggest that governments collaborate with NGO's such as UandI, Community Education Computer Society, Academy for Educational Development to train officials and to commission programs that allow for youth training. Member States recognized that such necessary training is primarily vocational, but also may include learning the basics of technology development in the States that have very little exposure.

One problem recognized by some Member States in the context of ICT development is that even after ICT services are expanded, said policies may not be utilized to their full potential. Member States expressed concern that after ICT policies are enacted, there may be lack of education about how to use new technologies. Member States considered how this might cause ICT programs to be less effective in obtaining their longer-term goals of economic development and strengthening infrastructure. Member States discussed how educational campaigns can

106 address this problem, and expressed the hope that NGOs and other relevant organizations will help Member States
107 to address this issue.

108 For those ESCWA States with established ICT infrastructures, discussion was broken into three
109 categories: (1) ICT and Education, (2) ICT and Employment, and (3) Security and Confidentiality.

110 1. There were a number of important issues that the Economic and Social Council should consider
111 related to education:

112 This body recommended a public-private cooperation through seminars on technological literacy.
113 Such seminars have been implemented with governmental support, strengthening the capabilities of citizens while
114 also developing the region as a market for these firms.

115 In order to incentivize students to pursue an ICT education in secondary and postsecondary edu-
116 cation, the body encourages the establishment of a scholarship program, entitled Synergy Education. Through the
117 design of this program, scholarships will help enhance skills, leadership and productivity as it relates to ICT edu-
118 cation. The scholarship program is a simple tool to develop highly skilled youth to fill the market demand for ICT
119 jobs. Having youth in ICT jobs will help increase productivity, communication and teamwork as well as decrease the
120 youth unemployment rate within ESCWA Member States. The scholarship program is structured to create leaders
121 who develop extraordinary results in their communities, future workplaces and personal lives.

122 2. There are also many connections between ICT and business development in Western Asia:

123 This Commission emphasizes the improvement of existing forms of ICT infrastructure, which would
124 allow educated youth to compete in the global job market much more successfully. In order to realize these benefits,
125 ESCWA Member States believe that ICT can be used to encourage foreign investment in the region. The body
126 discussed using different forms of tax breaks to encourage investment in areas lacking in ICT access, and the potential
127 of capital gains tax and labor law alterations to incentivise private investors to enter into specific regions was
128 emphasized.

129 In addition to encouraging foreign investment, Member States also analyzed the opportunity for local
130 development and economic growth related to ICT. One way to encourage such growth is the implementation of ac-
131 celerator programs, especially those with an emphasis on mentorship between professionals and young entrepreneurs.
132 Certain Member States have implemented successful government sponsored accelerator programs that have resulted
133 in small business sector growth. Furthermore, the body discussed the establishment of State sponsored ICT devel-
134 opment funds in order to establish technology parks, develop infrastructure to support ICT and increase access to
135 ICT resources for small and medium sized businesses.

136 The commission recommended the creation of State sponsored ICT development funds. In order
137 to finance these programs, the commission further recommended the following sources: The Asian International
138 Investment Bank, Licensing fees for large businesses, a portion of returns from ICT fund investments.

139 To further encourage ICT development among ESCWA Member States, the body encourages the
140 Economic and Social Council to set the topic of ICT development on the ESCWA agenda on a biennial basis for
141 the purpose of Member States discussing their progress towards this goal. This would involve the discussion of ICT
142 growth initiatives adopted within Member States and the impact these policies have on the respective Member State's
143 ICT environment. Sharing policy approaches between Member States will enable more efficient growth in ICT.

144 3. Finally, the Economic and Social Council should strongly consider the security issues related to
145 ICT development:

146 As the region continues to develop our ICT infrastructure, the issue of cyber security naturally arose.
147 Many Member States face the issue of hostile non-state actors (NSA) such as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant
148 using the ICT infrastructure to negatively influence the citizens of Member States and destabilize the region.

149 One of the solutions ESCWA discussed was the restriction of public access to the sites, videos, social
150 media accounts and other propaganda used by NSAs deemed threatening to Member States. Although most Member
151 States agreed that this was a viable solution, several States disagreed and felt that these are domestic issues and not
152 ones that should be addressed by the Economic and Social Council.

Passed by consensus, with 0 abstentions