UNITED NATIONS
ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

in cooperation with

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Regional Workshop for Knowledge hubs and Networks –Next Step

10-11 December 2009
Bangkok, Thailand

SUMMARY REPORT

I. Organization of the workshop[1]

1. The Regional Workshop for Knowledge hubs and Networks - Next Step was organized by the United Nations Economic Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) in cooperation with United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) at the United Nations Conference Centre, Bangkok, Thailand from 10 to 11 December 2009.

2. The Workshop was an activity of the United Nations Development Account project entitled "Knowledge networks through ICT access points for disadvantaged communities", which is implemented jointly by the five United Nations Regional Commissions. The project aims to empower the poor and disadvantaged communities, women in particular, through transforming selected existing ICT access points into knowledge hubs of global knowledge network to provide, develop, organize, share and disseminate information, knowledge and services pertinent to them.

3. The main objective of the Workshop was to review the outcome of the previous activities and design the future strategy for sustainable knowledge-hubs and knowledge networks for Asia and the Pacific, and some Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries. More specifically the meeting attempted to assess the (i) tangible benefits to rural communities through knowledge sharing and networking; (ii) progress of the transformation from community access points to knowledge hubs and new services offered; (iii) role of regional networks in value added services to communities; (iv) involvement of the poor and disadvantaged groups (including women) in accessing benefits from knowledge hubs/ networks; (v) effective resource mobilization for sustainable knowledge hubs/networks; (vi) role of public-private partnership and the community in sustainability of knowledge hubs/ networks; (vii) challenges in the process of establishing knowledge hubs/ networks.

4. Mr Xuan Zengpei, Director, Information and Communications Technology and Disaster Risk Reduction Division (IDD), ESCAP delivered the opening statement to the Workshop. Following his address, welcome address was delivered by Ms. Michiko Enomoto, Economic Affairs Officer, Economic Cooperation and Integration Division, UNECE, highlighting the role and challenges of community ICT access points and regional knowledge networks. Following two speeches, Mr Ram Tiwaree, Information

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[1] This report has been issued without formal editing.

Technology Officer, IDD, ESCAP made a presentation entitled "Background information and objectives of the workshop".

5. The Workshop was attended by 32 representatives of various ICT access point stakeholders, such as managers of various national ICT access points and networks, and government officers responsible for ICT access point issues from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, China, Georgia, India, Indonesia, Iran (Islamic Republic of) Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Maldives, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Tajikistan and Thailand. In addition, six representatives from UNDP, ITU, PIFS, SOPAC and International Development Research Centre (IDRC) participated in the Workshop. The programme and list of participants are attached as annexes 1 and 2, respectively.

6. The first session of the workshop, "Roles and Functions of Knowledge-hubs and Networks" was chaired and moderated by Ms. Michiko Enomoto, Economic Affairs Officer, United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE). Mr. Manohar Bhattarai, Vice Chairman, High Level Commission for Information Technology, Nepal and Mr. Wu Guoxiang, Chief, Space Applications Section, IDD, ESCAP chaired and moderated second and the third session of the first day respectively. Day two of the Workshop (group discussion and agreeing on workshop conclusions and recommendations) was chaired by Mr. Guennadi Fedorov, a resource person of ESCAP. All together seven papers including two posters were presented during the Workshop. The list of oral presentations is provided in annex 3.

7. Participants had the opportunity to discuss and share their experiences during the group discussion sessions held on the day two. Three groups were formed. First group was moderated by Ms. Maria Teresa Magadia Camba, Director for Field Operations, Commission on Information & Communications Technology, National Computer Center, Philippines, and second and third groups were moderated by Mr. Basheerhamad Shadrach, Senior Program Officer – Asia, International Development Research Center (IDRC), India and Ms. Dil Piyaratna, Programme Head, Information and Communication Technology Agency of Sri Lanka (ICTA), Sri Lanka.

8. The group discussions covered a number of issues that aimed to strengthen the role of regional telecentre networks, namely, Asia-Pacific Telecentre Network (APTN) and Eurasian Telecentre Network (*the name of this network has been considered for change so that he gives proper meaning in Russian language*). Topics include enabling policies for telecentres and national/regional networks; requirements of training and capacity building; strengthening regional cooperation and partnership; sustainability of telecentres and networks, among others.

9. The following conclusions and recommendations have been drawn as the major outcome of the above discussions. Presentations made by each moderator are attached as annex 4.

II. Conclusions and Recommendations[2]

10. The Workshop participants regarded existing ICT access points/telecentres and networks are playing essential roles as knowledge hubs to empower the poor and disadvantaged as these access points and networks provide knowledge or services to the needs of communities they serve. They recognized that these access points or centres and networks were the direct means to reach marginalized and poor communities due to their proximity

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[2] In this document, the terminologies 'ICT access points' and 'telecentres' are used interchangeably.

to the people and the areas that they serve. The Participants were of the view that easy access to these access points/centres and affordable services, programmes specifically tailored to the poor and marginalized groups make them more effective and sustainable.

11. The participants recommended that the national and regional networks should replicate specialized projects for visually impaired and distance learning programmes for poor and remote communities across all knowledge hubs.

12. The participants recognized that ICT access points/networks have given opportunities for women to become entrepreneurs as well as catalysts for development and also the leadership role in the local community. In many countries in the region, women's associations had been using these ICT access points/networks as meeting places, training centres and tools to reach other women towards raising awareness in large spectrum of issues, such as, health, education, social issues, disaster preparedness, economic activities, among others.

13. The participants supported the idea of establishing a telecentrepedia and proposed that Asia Pacific Telecentre Network (APTN) and Eurasian Telecentre Network may collaborate with the "telecenter.org" foundation and others to define its content.

14. The participants supported the '100 ideas for sustainable telecentres' and proposed creation of "telecentre magazine" to be released by March 2010 in Manila, Philippines. It was also decided to request each Telecentre Network to contribute ideas for the book. A strong link with telecentre magazine was considered desirable for telecentre operators and users.

15. The participants generally agreed to produce 'Asia Pacific Telecentre Review' (APTR) and proposed a committee of experts to be appointed to formulate the plan of action. It has been agreed that the target audience of the APTR should be the policy makers and telecentre operators should use the publication to lobby funding agencies to attract investments for national level network development and management.

16. The participants supported the idea of publishing a 'telecentre best practices book'. They requested ESCAP and other international organizations to assist developing a 'telecentre primer' to promote best practices and lessons learned. Asia-Pacific Training Centre for ICT for Development (APCICT) of the ESCAP was requested to take the lead in this task.

17. The participants were of the view that capacity building for telecentre operators and users should be need based. They emphasized of the need to use already available resources like, the telecentre academy, and material developed in countries like the Philippines. Participants also recognized the importance of on-line and off-line means of training and emphasized the need to localize training materials to suit country specific conditions and environment. Participants felt that better recognition should be given to e-training conducted by telecentre networks.

18. The participants recommended that governments to create an enabling policy environment in order to sustain knowledge hub and networks. Enabling policy environment should include policy reforms and development of frameworks to assist smooth functioning of ICT access points and networks. Governments should also address the concerns related to gender, person with disability, children, climate change and disaster mitigation in developing the policy framework. Governments may encourage public-private partnerships and recognize the role of civil society in formulating policies and legislations for sustainable networks. Providing tax incentives in creation of

community ICT access points could be considered. Governments can also play a key role in monitoring and evaluating the existing ICT access point programmes. Government support in research and development of ICT access points and networks would be appreciated.

19. The participants agreed on the value of creating a critical mass of ICT access points and networks to create more impact to the society. The need to increase numbers of users and create more content has also been addressed. However, the number of ICT access points and contents should be based on community needs (demand driven), targeting multiple sectors. Participants addressed the need to localize contents based on the need and encouraged use of more visuals than text subject to the community which they are servicing.

20. The participants agreed the need to secure adequate funds for management and maintenance of ICT access point networks. It was emphasized that start up funds are vital in creating knowledge hubs, local and regional networks needs funds and other resources to launch innovative projects. Maintaining close links with international donors and establishing multi-country partnerships for information exchange were two other tasks identified for regional networks.

21. The participants felt that it is important to maintain close ties and cooperation among national regional and global networks for knowledge sharing.

22. The participants took note of the rapid penetration of mobile telephones in their local communities. However, they agreed that mobile phones and the work of individual ICT access point are different. Mobile phones are considered as complementary means for information and communication and not the threat to the ICT access points or the telecentres.

23. The participants requested ESCAP and UNECE for further support for the regional networks of ICT access points, such as, funding and other resources; establish an organizational structure for the regional networks; advice for the operations of ICT access points; organization of regional networking and events; and general advocacy on ICT access points for governments.

24. The participants made the following recommendations for APTN and Eurasian Telecentre Network. Both networks should
   • work towards knowledge sharing and fusion of both successful and unsuccessful practices. Take a proactive approach to telecentre development;