

Progress towards Information Society in Asia and the Pacific Region

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[The views expressed in this paper are of the author and do not reflect the opinions of
ESCAP, ITU, APT or other organizations referred]

Information & Communication Technologies

- UN has since long recognized ICT as a Tool for Development.
- UN has encouraged development of strategic partnerships amongst donors, private sector, civil society, working groups and task forces to enhance collaboration throughout the UN system as well as other international and regional organizations; ICT Interagency Working Group (ESCAP, ITU, APT and others) is one such example.
- In 2000, Economic and Social Council adopted a Ministerial Declaration on the role of ICTs in the context of knowledge based economy. The UNMDGs adopted in 2000 underscored the urgency of ensuring that the benefits of new technologies, especially ICTs, are made available to all.
- To achieve this goal World Summit on Information Society was planned in two phases aimed at developing the political will and establish the foundation for an information society for all.
- WSIS Geneva, December 2003, endorsed the Principles and Action Lines and set certain goals. WSIS Tunis November 2005 – commitments were made for implementation of Action Plan.

Information & Communication Technologies

- ICTs comprise a complex and diverse set of equipment, applications and services used to produce, process, distribute, transact, and transform information, all based on electronics;
- Act as Drivers for diverse industries comprising telecommunications (fixed, mobile and Internet), TV and Radio broadcasting, computer H/w and S/w, IT and ITeS, electronic media, entertainment, etc.;
- Powerful instruments for advancing economic and social development through creation of new online and offline social and economic activities, education and training, health-care and several other services;
- Innovation and convergence are leading to the creation of **Information or Knowledge societies** with resulting changes in social interaction, economic and business practices, education, health, leisure and entertainment.

Digital Divide

- “Digital divide” refers to the differences in resources and capabilities to access and effectively utilize ICTs for development that exist within and between countries, regions, sectors and socio-economic groups.
- It is manifested by
 - Low levels of access to ICTs,
 - Inadequate network infrastructure keeping ICTs out of reach for the large rural population,
 - Content in local language, affordability, etc.
- Poverty, general illiteracy, lack of computer literacy and language barriers are among the other factors impeding access to ICT infrastructure, especially in the developing countries.
- The Gender dimension of the ‘Digital Divide’ is also a serious issue. Priority areas for intervention from the gender perspective have included sensitization of policy makers for greater awareness of this aspect in the development of national level ICT policies and “e-strategies” aimed at achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

Digital Divide

- Perhaps, the best description of digital divide is that given by the then UN Secretary General at the WSIS in Geneva:

“The so-called digital divide is actually several gaps in one. There is a technological divide - great gaps in infrastructure. There is a content divide. A lot of web-based information is simply not relevant to the real needs of people. And nearly 70 per cent of the world’s websites are in English, at times crowding out local voices and views. There is a gender divide with women and girls enjoying less access to information technology than men and boys. This can be true of rich and poor countries alike”.

Kofi Annan, United Nations Secretary-General, Statement to the World Summit on the Information Society, Geneva, 10 December 2003

WSIS

GENEVA, December 2003: Major Outcomes

- Declaration of Principles: Benefits of Information Society to be extended to countries and regions with special attention to LDCs, LLDCs, SIDCs and those vulnerable to threats to development, such as Natural disasters;
- Agreement on Eleven Action lines for implementation by adopting multi-stakeholder approach;
- Common vision and agenda aimed at mainstreaming ICTs for development to achieve UNMDGs;
- WSIS goals relating to connectivity, school curricula, media coverage, content and access ICTs for over 50% of world population connecting all communities by 2015;
- UN Secretary General to look into unresolved issues: Internet Governance and Financing.

ESCAP's major Contribution: Tokyo WSIS Preparatory Meet and Declaration, and Roadmap towards Information Society in ASP region;

TUNIS, November 2005

Concretization and commitment to the Plan of Action, Internet Governance

ESCAP's major contribution: ASP Regional Action Plan and Tehran Declaration

WSIS Action lines Progress Review

- Agencies designated for WSIS Follow-up: Action lines - wise
- Partnership mechanism set up for Measuring ICT for Development
- Review of the progress by relevant ICT indicators as per the Regional Action Plan for each Action line
- ITU ICT Development Index



designated for WSIS Follow-up

of public governance authorities and all
in the promotion of ICTs for development

acilitators: ECOSOC/ *UN Regional Commissions* /ITU/

on and communication infrastructure

acilitators: **ITU**/[APC]

o information and knowledge

acilitators: ITU/**UNESCO**/[FAO/UNIDO]

building

acilitators: **UNDP**/UNESCO/ITU/UNCTAD/[UN DESA]

confidence and security in the use of ICTs

acilitators: **ITU**

environment

acilitators: ITU/**UNDP**/*UN Regional Commissions*/
[UN DESA/UNIDO/APC]