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REPORT

EXPERT GROUP MEETING ON REGIONAL NETWORKING AND PARTNERSHIP FOR THE INFORMATION SOCIETY DEVELOPMENT BEIRUT, 5-6 SEPTEMBER 2007

Summary

The World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) recognized the significant role of partnerships in building a people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented information society, and the WSIS 2005 Tunis Agenda for the Information Society promoted the establishment of multi-stakeholder partnerships for the realization of the Summit goal. Additionally, the Regional Plan of Action (RPoA) for Building the Information Society, initiated by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), highlighted the importance of partnerships and included programmes and projects that are open to the involvement of all stakeholders in their implementation. RPoA was formulated within the context of the ESCWA preparatory activities for the two phases of WSIS, namely, Geneva 2003 and Tunis 2005.

The Expert Group Meeting on Regional Networking and Partnership for the Information Society Development was organized by ESCWA and held on 5 and 6 September 2007 in Beirut. The main objective of the Meeting was to initiate networks and partnerships within the ESCWA/Arab region for and with institutions and organizations sharing similar or complementary goals, and to monitor their development among the various stakeholders. Those networks and partnerships, in turn, are expected to incubate projects that are of direct benefit to the development of the region and support the augmentation of the targeted inclusive information society.

Twenty-nine participants from eight ESCWA member countries attended the Meeting. They included representatives and experts from the public and academic sectors, the business community, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and international institutions. The Meeting sessions included reviewing the ESCWA RPoA for Building the Information Society, addressing the progress made in the region towards the development of the information society, reviewing case studies of networks within and outside the ESCWA region, and examining the networks and partnerships needed to progress towards the implementation of RPoA as well as the tools to support those networks and partnerships. The main outcome of the Meeting was the initiation of communication channels for the creation of partnerships and tangible projects that will lead to the development of the information society.

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Introduction

1. Partnerships play an important role in the successful implementation of many projects, including those that contribute towards the development of knowledge-based economies. Stressing that fact, the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) recognized the significant role of partnerships in achieving its main goal of building a people-centred, development-oriented and inclusive information society.
2. The WSIS 2005 Tunis Agenda for the Information Society¹, hereafter referred to as the Tunis Agenda, underlined the importance of establishing multi-stakeholder partnerships, particularly for infrastructure projects, educational programmes and information and communications technology (ICT) training, as well as for research and development. Additionally, the Regional Plan of Action (RPoA) for Building the Information Society highlighted the importance of partnerships, and included programmes and projects that are open to the involvement of various stakeholders in their implementation. RPoA was formulated within the context of the preparatory activities of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) for the two phases of WSIS, namely, Geneva 2003 and Tunis 2005. In addition to meetings and workshops, activities included two major regional preparatory conferences for WSIS, which were held in Beirut and Damascus in February 2003 and November 2004, respectively.
3. The Second Regional Preparatory Conference for WSIS (Damascus, 2004) paid special attention to the role of partnerships. That became evident in the "Damascus Call – Towards Partnership for Building the Arab Information Society", which was launched as a result of the Conference, which falls within the scope of work of the ICT Division of ESCWA that calls for the activation of partnerships to implement ICT projects to achieve socio-economic development, with emphasis on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).
4. The Expert Group Meeting on Regional Networking and Partnership for the Information Society Development was held at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Beirut on 5 and 6 September 2007, and was organized by ESCWA. The main objective of the Meeting was to initiate networks and partnerships within the ESCWA/Arab region, involving institutions and organizations sharing similar or complementary goals, and to monitor their development. Networks and partnerships are, in turn, expected to incubate projects that are of direct benefit to the development of the region and that help achieve the main goal of the Summit, namely, to develop the inclusive information society. Twenty-nine participants from eight ESCWA member countries attended the Meeting. They included representatives and experts from the public and academic sectors, the business community, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and international institutions.
5. The 10 sessions of presentations and discussions included reviewing the ESCWA RPoA for Building the Information Society, addressing the progress made in the region towards the development of the information society, reviewing case studies of networks within and outside the ESCWA region, and examining the networks and partnerships needed to progress towards the implementation of RPoA, as well as the tools to support those networks and partnerships. The main outcome of the Meeting was the initiation of communication channels for the creation of partnerships and tangible projects that will lead to the development of the information society.

¹ The Tunis Agenda for the Information Society stated: "We encourage strengthened and continuing cooperation between and among stakeholders to ensure effective implementation of the Geneva and Tunis outcomes, for instance through the promotion of national, regional and international multi-stakeholder partnerships including Public Private Partnerships (PPPs)" (November 2005, WSIS-05/TUNIS/DOC/6(Rev.1)-E, para. 98).

I. RECOMMENDATIONS

6. As a result of the discussions held during the Meeting and summarized in the closing session, the participants agreed on the following:

(a) To revive and support efforts on the implementation of the RPoA for Building the Information Society through partnerships;

(b) To have the information on RPoA programmes and projects updated by the coordinating agencies and to promote the introduction of new projects and programmes by interested parties, including the e-government initiative for Arab countries and an education initiative based on the Jordan Education Initiative;

(c) To develop the Information Society Portal for the ESCWA Region (ISPER) as a tool or mechanism for the promotion of the formation and management of partnerships and the implementation of RPoA projects;

(d) To make RPoA programmes and projects available to the public through ISPER so that those under implementation can be updated and followed up online;

(e) To identify national bodies that work on ICT-based development projects in partnership with various stakeholders, including in particular the participation of youth and women, and that could play an advisory role to their Governments on project partnerships;

(f) To utilize appropriate and successful mechanisms and tools for the efficient implementation of RPoA projects, including the following:

(i) Use of ISPER for the promotion and preparation of partnerships, implementation of projects and finding of partners to collaborate at both the national and regional levels;

(ii) Organization of workshops, conferences and awareness-raising events in the region regarding ongoing and successful partnerships;

(iii) Incorporation of the cultural dimension within the working methods for partnership-building, and management of the cultural consensus and dialogue among partners;

(iv) Consolidation of partners and assignment of funding resources to projects that meet the development needs of the region;

(g) To seek financing for projects from the region's funding establishments by submitting well-prepared concept papers and project documents, preferably containing regional components and specific development objectives;

(h) To set clear and realistic objectives for projects, and specify activities and beneficiaries, as well as the capabilities required of partners and project ownership that ensure follow-up and continuity;

(i) To build mutual trust and credibility among partners and set clear project concepts and goals, structures and roles, management and leadership, and efficiency criteria and methods, while documenting and monitoring project progress according to set evaluation criteria;

(j) To conduct feasibility studies on projects that are candidates for partnerships, show justifications for participation and create incentives, while convincing potential partners for project implementation;

(k) To promote partnerships for existing or replicated projects that proved to be successful initiatives in the region, in order to build on positive partnership experiences in Arab countries;

(l) To promote partnerships for complex projects that involve a variety of risks, and to ensure, for those projects, the existence of political will, proper packaging and contextualization of ideas and the mutual interest of the partners.

II. DISCUSSION TOPICS

7. The subjects addressed during the Meeting sessions are summarized in the following sections.²

A. ESCWA PARTNERSHIP INITIATIVES

8. In the first session, ESCWA partnership initiatives were addressed by two presentations: "Regional Plan of Action (RPoA) for Building the Information Society and Partnership in Implementation" and "Information Society Portal for the ESCWA Region".

9. RPoA is a dynamic plan that aims at building a sustainable and inclusive information society in the region, in line with the WSIS Geneva Plan of Action and the Tunis Agenda, proposing a strategic framework for the region, fostering partnerships and their implementation, and fulfilling MDGs. It was prepared in 2004-2005 within the framework of the ESCWA preparatory activities for WSIS and is the result of collaborative efforts going back to the Arab Strategy for Communications and Information adopted by the Arab Summit in 2001, the Cairo Declaration resulting from the Pan-Arab Regional Conference on WSIS in 2003 and the ESCWA Tentative Plan of Action for Western Asia: Building the Regional Information Society of November 2003. RPoA was then enhanced in accordance with the Geneva Plan of Action for the first WSIS phase in 2003, taking into account the updates on the Arab Strategy for Communication and Information and feedback received from the ESCWA Second Regional Preparatory Conference for WSIS through an online forum. Those efforts resulted in the ESCWA Regional Plan of Action for Building the Information Society³ of January 2005.

10. As an evolving plan, RPoA can include additional programmes and projects and assimilate the future needs of Arab countries, along with a mechanism to periodically introduce regional strategic actions, report on the progress of work and adjust the plan as needed. Considerations to be taken into account include partnerships, decentralization, result-based management, national priorities, leading responsibility, implementation upon maturity of projects, monitoring and reporting on progress and evaluation. The RPoA strategic framework aims at streamlining regional activities and promoting the development of national capacity to develop the information society, and is based on the 11 WSIS action lines adopted in the Geneva Plan of Action and the specificities of the region. When launched, RPoA included 38 projects grouped under 10 specified programmes.

11. Each programme is managed by a coordinating agency guiding project leaders. The implementation of each project could start upon its maturity and after the realization of basic requirements. The project implementation phases within RPoA include: partnering with agencies and producing a project document; the preparation of, and agreement on a memorandum of understanding between partners; and the start of the implementation and reporting process by the leading agency. The process of programme and project implementation involves specifying the roles of the different stakeholders and forming a steering committee and secretariat among the strategic partners, with national coordination at all levels of implementation. The project phases include monitoring, evaluation and analysis, available and administered through an online tool, ISPER, which includes an online partnership space that presents the mechanism within which projects and programmes are updated.

² All presentations held during the meeting are available in English and Arabic at: http://www.escwa.org.lb/divisions/ictd/events/531E_documents.asp.

³ Regional Plan of Action for Building the Information Society (E/ESCWA/ICTD/2004/4) is available at: <http://www.escwa.org.lb/information/publications/edit/upload/ictd04-4.pdf>.

12. ISPER⁴ was presented as an online tool to facilitate collaboration among stakeholders in the region, create a community of practice and coordinate the efforts made towards meeting the region's needs and accomplishing its development targets. The portal includes updated information on RPoA accessible to everyone and fosters partnerships among stakeholders for project implementation. The portal also includes an online database of indicators that can be tracked and used by decision makers in the region to access country-specific information that is segmented into different thematic areas, and to produce reports in HTML, Microsoft Office Word or PDF formats. The portal provides real-time discussion forums and access to a document library, is enabled in Arabic and includes all publications available in Arabic or in English

B. PARTNERSHIP PARADIGMS

13. The second session addressed the subject of partnership paradigms through three presentations on multi-stakeholder partnerships, the partnership for WSIS between the global communications solutions provider Alcatel-Lucent and ESCWA, and the role of partnership in community development. The presentations are summarized below.

14. The presentation entitled "Multi-stakeholder partnerships for the region" elaborated on the concept and definition of a multi-stakeholder partnership that brings together stakeholders from different sectors to work on achieving common goals or jointly implementing projects. The different and complementary roles of partners from the public and private sectors, NGOs and international and regional organizations were described and the importance of partnerships for the realization of and follow-up on internationally agreed goals was outlined. The general aspects of partnerships in the ESCWA region were highlighted, together with the major challenges encountered in fostering regional partnerships towards building the information society, essentially including fund-raising and implementation mechanisms.

15. The presentation entitled "Alcatel-Lucent and ESCWA Partnership during the WSIS Process: Realizations and Future Perspectives" stressed the commitment of Alcatel-Lucent to bridge the digital divide and collaborate with international organizations working towards the realization of WSIS recommendations. It outlined the main milestones of the Alcatel-Lucent/ESCWA partnership that started in 2004 and its major achievements, including the publication of the study "Broadband for Development in the ESCWA Region", issued in February 2007.⁵ The study highlights the importance of broadband, whether for the new services it provides or for the dramatic changes it introduces into the telecommunications landscape, and includes recommendations that can be adapted to the specific conditions of the countries in the region. The Alcatel-Lucent Cairo Content Development Centre was also presented. It was established in 2005 to incubate local value added service projects, and to provide a technical platform to develop such services at the top level of mobile infrastructure together with technical and marketing support to selected partners. The Content Development Centre has successfully hosted five projects and the services developed are now offered through local and regional networks. All partners are maintaining full ownership of their projects and resulting benefits.

16. The third presentation, "Role of Partnership in Community Development", introduced Jordanian activities that target bridging the digital divide, which is hindering socio-economic development in remote and rural areas across nine provinces in Jordan. The establishment of the Jordanian Knowledge Stations was mandated, and a Royal Commission was entrusted with managing those stations and setting up their strategies. The Royal Commission was formed with experienced partners from the private and public sectors, as well as international and regional organizations. The establishment of the Knowledge Stations was enabled by partnerships between civil society institutions and the project management, with the local communities receiving direct benefits from their operation. In five separate phases, 144 Knowledge Stations were established and operationalized, providing computer and software services to more than 120,000 citizens. Connecting the stations was possible through the National Information Technology Centre.

⁴ Available at: <http://isper.escwa.org.lb/isper/>.

⁵ The study can be downloaded from both the Alcatel-Lucent and ESCWA websites: <http://www.alcatel-lucent.com/digitalbridge> and http://www.escwa.org.lb/divisions/lib/uploads/ESCWA_ALCATEL_2007.pdf.

C. PARTNERSHIPS – THE NGO POINT OF VIEW

17. The third session addressed the NGO point of view of partnerships through three presentations, which were given by the Professional Computer Association of Lebanon (PCA), the Arab Business Forum for ICT (ABFICT) and the Association of the Lebanese Software Industry (ALSI). The presentations are summarized below.

18. The PCA presented "A Critical View of Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs)", starting with the main concerns of the private sector, PCA objectives and means of work. The presentation reviewed the status of the ICT sector and financing mechanisms in Lebanon, which are more often than not restrained by an inadequate legal governing framework, lengthy administrative processes and limited support for export and marketing activities. The presentation stressed a number of problems encountered, namely: the difficulty to communicate and create awareness; continuously changing teams; the lack of a national ICT vision and budget; limited grants and loans; and the need for computing building blocks and sufficient bandwidth.

19. Established in 2002 as a result of PPP, ABFICT initiates and promotes regional ICT projects for the business sector and seeks the support of Governments and regulators for their implementation. The efforts of ABFICT were illustrated in a case study on the establishment of the Pan-Arab Fiber Optic Network (PAFON) that connects Arab countries and allows for an integrated use of the Internet bandwidth. The presentation outlined the current situation of fibre-optic transmission, which is done through submarine cables and terrestrial connections with a very high cost for bandwidth, the Arab region being one of the most underserved areas of the world. It also listed five reasons that make PAFON necessary for the Arab region, namely: time zone bandwidth compensation and cost saving through the distribution of peak times over the day since the Arab region spreads over four time zones; bandwidth backup, operation and support in the case of emergencies so that operations can be restored through PAFON; real and automatic peering between Arab countries that saves bandwidth costs; a true development project that includes six least developed countries, including countries in conflict; and the formation of an effective and powerful critical mass through economies of scale, consequently lowering service prices.

20. The ALSI presentation overviewed the framework of the successful collaboration with the Euro-Lebanese Centre for Industrial Modernization (ELCIM) on the Lebanon SoftShore project. That project aims at the promotion of Lebanese software exports, joint project implementation, provision of specialized cluster services and organization of technical and management training. The project should furthermore facilitate cooperation between member countries, companies and universities; promote software quality and innovation; increase the international competitiveness of the Lebanese software industry; and generate economies of scale and synergy effects through cooperation.

D. GOVERNMENT CASE STUDIES

21. The fourth session addressed Government case studies of partnerships in Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Yemen. Five presentations are summarized below.

22. The first presentation gave an overview of the situation of ICT in Iraq from 1974 to 2000, specifically in the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research under the Iraqi Commission for Computers and Informatics (ICCI), which follows up on all information technology (IT) projects and networking between Iraqi universities and research centres. The challenges facing the process of infrastructure building for those networks were highlighted, together with the actual need for partnership with the private sector and the building of capacities in applied programmes related to the effective use of the networks.

23. The second presentation was on ICT in education projects for Iraq and covered the partnership between United Nations entities on projects at the pragmatic and operational levels. ESCWA is operating two ICT projects in Iraq in partnership with other United Nations bodies. The Iraqi Networking Academies, a \$5 million project, is being implemented by ESCWA in partnership with the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, Cisco Systems Inc., Iraqi universities, the Lebanese American University and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

ICT in Education for Iraq, a \$4 million project, is also being implemented in partnership with UNESCO, the Ministry of Education and various NGOs. The main obstacles facing those projects are the current security situation and the language barrier.

24. The third presentation illustrated the experience of Jordan as a case study of a public-private partnership model for effective and advanced ICT deployment, in which the commitment of Jordan to incorporating ICT into the daily lives of all its citizens was illustrated. As part of the country's aspiration for a knowledge-based economy and society, efforts are underway to broaden access to ICT for communities, businesses and individuals. Recognizing the importance of partnerships to achieve national goals, Jordan has taken great strides towards developing a model and the mechanisms necessary to enhance PPPs within the country. An example is the Jordan Education Initiative that became a globally recognized example of PPP for its impact on socio-economic development. Other examples include the One Laptop per Child Initiative and IT incubators. Those initiatives signify that Jordan heavily relies on PPPs in making decisions and drafting policies and strategies for the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of projects.

25. Case studies of public-private partnerships in the Lebanese Government were addressed in the fourth presentation, defining those partnerships as contractual agreements formed between public bodies and the private sector to allow for greater private-sector participation in the delivery of public-sector projects. Those partnerships combine the resources of the public and private sectors and represent a new paradigm for economic development in the twenty-first century. With the global phenomena of economic and political reform, PPPs are becoming crucial mechanisms for development, and the roles of the partners in the knowledge society are changing. Governments are becoming facilitators, while the private sector is no longer solely profit-oriented, but is increasingly assuming social responsibilities.

26. The fifth presentation covered the Yemeni national information network project that targets the development of the information society in Yemen and creates partnerships between government institutions, the private sector, Arab and regional networks and civil society organizations. The network is expected to improve the efficiency of the Government's administration and e-services and make information available at the national level to decision makers.

E. REGIONAL PARTNERSHIP INITIATIVES

27. The fifth session addressed regional partnership initiatives through two presentations, namely, "Memory of the Arab World" and "Impact of Regional Networks on the Development of E-government in the Arab World". These presentations are summarized below.

28. In March 2007, a four-year regional project, "Memory of the Arab World", was initiated to develop a portal in Arabic and English. The objectives of the project include the promotion of cooperation and partnerships among Arab countries for the documentation and dissemination of their rich collective heritage; strengthening of the Arabic e-content on the Internet; networking among experts on the heritage of the region; and the identification of best practices for the utilization of IT in safeguarding the Arab heritage. The partners are representatives from all Arab countries, including government institutions, NGOs, specialized and academic institutions, and international and regional organizations. The project master plan is underway, and a coordination unit was established at the Center for Documentation of Cultural and Natural Heritage (CULTNAT), which acts as project coordinator. The first phase of the portal is planned to be launched by the end of 2009, and the project will also produce CD-ROMs, books and other publications.

29. The presentation "Impact of Regional Networks on the Development of E-government in the Arab World" covered the regional working group on e-government and administrative simplification as part of the initiative for good governance for development in the Arab world. It highlighted the lessons learned from the network and collaboration created among the Dubai School of Government, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and OECD member countries, the private sector and Governments in the Arab region. The complexity in the development of successful e-government initiatives can be considerably reduced through collaboration among the various stakeholders of a regional network despite their diverse objectives and work culture and other barriers. However, a strong credible leadership,

clear shared objectives and a proper partnership structure are prerequisites for achieving a successful regional collaboration that can drive e-government development.

F. EXPERIENCES OF INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

30. The sixth session addressed the experiences of international organizations through three presentations given by the Center for Environment and Development for the Arab Region and Europe (CEDARE), Cisco Systems Inc. and Microsoft. These presentations are summarized below.

31. The first presentation entitled "Arabic E-learning Programme for Integrated Coastal Zone Management: Success Stories in Partnership" discussed the success story of a partnership between Arab Mediterranean countries and the European Union. It highlighted the results of the partnership between CEDARE and the Short- and Medium-term Priority Environmental Action Programme (SMAP) of the European Commission to implement the first Arabic e-learning course for integrated coastal management, ArabMedOpen. That course targets decision makers at the local, national, regional and international levels, policy advisers and managers, staff and experts from international organizations and institutions, academic researchers, students and members of the general public interested in coastal management in the Arab Mediterranean countries. The results of the 2005 and 2006 runs were reviewed and information about the third, 2007 run, was provided. The 2007 run includes a new module for sustainable coastal tourism offered in partnership with the EUCC Coastal Union⁶ in the Netherlands and the EUCC Mediterranean Centre in Spain⁷.

32. The presentation by Cisco Systems Inc., "Partnership for Lebanon", elaborated on the formation of a partnership of five companies to help Lebanon after the July 2006 war. The companies are Cisco Systems Inc., Intel Corporation, Microsoft Corporation, Ghafari Inc. and the Occidental Petroleum Corporation. The partnership initiative spans 14 projects in the areas of relief and response, ICT infrastructure, education and workforce training, job creation and private sector revival, connected communities and government.

33. The presentation "Partnership for Development" highlighted the importance of intellectual property and ICT enablement with Microsoft as a partner to meet development needs in both education and business. The programme enables developers in the region to design specific solutions that meet local needs.

G. GROUP DISCUSSIONS

34. Group discussions took place during the sessions in the form of panel discussions on: (a) challenges for partnerships in the ESCWA region; and (b) approaches, mechanisms and tools for effective partnerships in the ESCWA region.

35. The discussions focused on identifying and prioritizing the challenges facing the successful establishment, management and maintenance of partnerships, and are summarized as follows:

(a) Political unrest and instability in the region and lack of security in some member countries represent the most pressing challenges to establishing successful partnerships;

(b) On the sectoral level, the willingness of the private sector to partner with the public sector is dampened by a weak or absent enabling environment, uncertainty concerning legislation, a low return on investment, the poor sustainability record of business models and restrictive regulatory structures;

(c) There is an inherent weakness in the process of initiating partnerships, which was characterized by the participants as "improper packaging of ideas" by the public and the private sectors. On the one hand, the public sector, by not sufficiently addressing private-sector needs, fails to attract the private sector; and on the other hand, the private sector fails to provide feasible and viable propositions;

⁶ Formerly known as European Union for Coastal Conservation.

⁷ See <http://www.eucc.nl/en/> and <http://www.eucc.nl/medcentre/index.html>, respectively.

(d) Other challenges include harbouring unrealistic expectations, the absence of teamwork culture, the changing interests of partners and lack of financing;

(e) It was concluded that a partnership is a “means to an end” but is not an “end”. In that context, a partnership may only be useful under a certain scenario, particularly when a project is complex and involves a variety of risks. In other situations when the project is simple, one single player can take the lead without a direct need for a partnership.

36. Furthermore, the creation of a partnership generally depends on security and political will, and the diverse interests of the various partners can be a challenge. The sustainability of partnerships is also related to the changing interests of partners over time. Occasionally, the weak points in PPPs lie with the packaging of ideas and with the business sector that is not able to describe its viability as a tool for development. Renewing trust and credibility among partners can be a good step to revive partnerships.

37. Discussions also addressed funding mechanisms. The situation of project financing in the region was found satisfactory since both funding bodies and resources are sufficiently available. However, submitted project documents need to have clear and specific objectives that meet the development needs of the region. Funding institutions that provide grants and loans are mostly limited and can only partially contribute to the financing of projects.

38. The role of ESCWA as catalyst and facilitator was emphasized, and ESCWA proposed projects with regional components and a partnership with the leading agency for each. Projects with regional scope have a higher opportunity for funding than those with only a national perspective. As an example, EUMEDIS, the successful Development Information Society in the Mediterranean Region, includes more than one institution and covers more than one country.

39. The RPoA for Building the Information Society includes a list of projects, and interested parties can either choose to work on one of those projects or add new ones. Once project partners and leaderships are specified, funding can be sought and the portal can be used as a means to announce status and requirements for each project. ISPER was also addressed and considered an important tool to facilitate the formation of partnerships within the RPoA framework. The portal can specify the financing sources for each project and include a resource framework similar to that of the project, in order to provide clear information to stakeholders or potential partners who express interest in the project.

40. The choice of mechanisms and funding were considered to be less significant than the choice of a project that meets the needs of beneficiaries or the targeted community. The mechanism of a partnership depends on the type of association. The establishment of a board of directors is a common practice. Funding can be sought through loans repayable from project operations either through advertisements or production revenues that guarantee project sustainability.

III. ORGANIZATION OF WORK

A. VENUE AND DATES

41. The meeting was held at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Beirut on 5 and 6 September 2007.

B. OPENING

42. Mr. Yousef Nusseir, Chief of the ESCWA Information and Communication Technology Division (ICTD), delivered the opening speech of the meeting starting by highlighting the special attention that ESCWA directs to the field of ICT. The ICTD work programme aims at improving the enabling environment that supports the development of the information society in the region through assisting member countries in the formulation and implementation of their national policies and strategies for the development of the information society. It also encourages progress towards a knowledge-based economy and partnerships with collaborative efforts between the public and private sectors and civil society, enabling the implementation of projects that target sustainable development and the realization of MDGs.

43. The important role of partnerships in project implementation was emphasized in the Tunis Agenda, which shows the significance of having multiple stakeholders as partners in ICT infrastructure projects, training and academic programmes, and research and development. Formulated within the context of ESCWA preparatory activities for WSIS, the RPoA for Building the Information Society also stressed the importance of partnerships in building an inclusive information society.

44. The main objective of the Meeting was to initiate networks among institutions that have complementary goals within the ESCWA region and the rest of the Arab world. Those networks should facilitate and promote the efforts made towards the achievement of WSIS goals. The meeting discussed the results of the WSIS phases and the progress made towards the realization of its targets. It also reviewed the RPoA for Building the Information Society in the region and the partnerships created for its implementation. Broadly speaking, it aimed at raising awareness of the significant role of partnerships for ICT projects and for various social development projects, and identifying institutions and mechanisms to finance projects to reduce the digital divide.

45. The efforts of ESCWA in the field of ICT focus on socio-economic development and the strengthening of the Arabic content on the Internet, which currently stands at a modest 1 per cent of the total content. ESCWA encourages the establishment of networks and partnerships towards the achievement of the desired results and envisages that the dialogue between experts and representatives will help establish a joint Arab framework for the information society.

C. PARTICIPANTS

46. The Meeting was attended by 29 participants from eight ESCWA member countries, namely, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, the Syrian Arab Republic, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen. The participants included representatives and experts from the public sector, the academic sector, the business community, NGOs and international organizations. The list of participants is contained in annex I of this *Report*.

D. AGENDA

47. Presentations and discussions were held during nine sessions and covered a number of themes. The agenda of the Meeting is summarized and set forth below:

1. Opening.
2. ESCWA partnership initiatives.
3. Partnership paradigms.
4. Partnerships – the NGO point of view .
5. Challenges for partnerships in the ESCWA region.
6. Government case studies.
7. Regional partnership initiatives.
8. Experiences of international organizations.
9. Approaches, mechanisms and tools for effective partnerships in the ESCWA region.
10. Recommendations and closing.

E. DOCUMENTS

48. A list of the documents submitted to the Meeting is contained in annex II of this *Report*, and available on the ESCWA website: <http://www.escwa.org.lb/information/meetingdetails.asp?referenceNum=531E>.

Annex I

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS*

A. PARTICIPATING COUNTRIES

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Annex II

LIST OF DOCUMENTS

Symbol	Title
E/ESCWA/ICTD/2004/4	Regional Plan of Action (RPoA) for Building the Information Society and Partnership in Implementation
No symbol	Information Society Portal for the ESCWA Region
No symbol	Multi-Stakeholder Partnership for the Region
No symbol	Alcatel-Lucent and ESCWA Partnership during the WSIS Process: Realizations and Future Perspectives
No symbol	Role of Partnership in Community Development
No symbol	Critical View of Public -Private Partnerships
No symbol	Pan-Arab Fibre Optics Network: Case Study of Arab Public -Private Partnerships
No symbol	Lebanon SoftShore: a Successful Collaboration between ALSI and ELCIM
No symbol	Situation of ICT in Iraq (in Arabic)
No symbol	ESCWA ICT in Education Projects for Iraq
No symbol	Public-Private Partnership Model for Effective and Advanced ICT Deployment – The Case of Jordan
No symbol	Public-Private Partnerships in the Lebanese Government
No symbol	Yemeni National Information Network Project and its Role in Developing the Information Society (in Arabic)
No symbol	Memory of the Arab World – a Cooperation Framework
No symbol	Impact of Regional Networks on E-government Development in the Arab World (in Arabic)
No symbol	Arabic E-learning Programme for Integrated Coastal Zone Management: Success Stories in Partnership
No symbol	Partnership for Lebanon
No symbol	Partnership for Development
