United Nations E/ESCAP/CICT(2)/5

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
7 January 2011

Original: English

Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
Committee on Information and Communications Technology

Second session
Bangkok, 24-26 November 2010

Report of the Committee on Information and Communications Technology on its second session

Contents

I. Matters calling for action by the Commission or brought to its attention

1. The Committee highlighted the importance of information and communications technology (ICT) as a fundamental enabler in achieving the Millennium Development Goals and the targets of the World Summit on the Information Society[1] as well as implementing the Hyogo Framework for Action,[2] and enhancing economic development and poverty reduction efforts across all sectors and economies of Asia and the Pacific.

2. The Committee stressed the important role of broadband technologies in socio-economic development in the region, while acknowledging the need to bridge the emerging digital divide in broadband access.

3. In recalling the recommendations made during its first session,[3] the Committee expressed support for the secretariat's activities in the implementation of the goals of the World Summit on the Information Society, and requested the secretariat to continue to facilitate regional cooperation in achieving the Summit's targets, particularly with regard to mobile applications and broadband development, and taking into account the need to reduce costs and prices and increase the quality of access.

4. The Committee requested the secretariat to continue to undertake policy analysis and research in the areas of ICT policies and regulations, inter alia, focusing on the problems of landlocked and Pacific island countries, taking into consideration the ongoing Asia-Pacific Telecommunity (APT) Telecom Policy and Regulatory Forum outputs and proceedings to the suggested activities.

5. The Committee noted that ICT initiatives should not only strengthen regional economic connectivity, but also bring far-flung and hitherto geographically isolated Pacific islands economies into the dynamism found in the rest of Asia, taking into account that Pacific connectivity was essential to better connect Asia and the Pacific in the true spirit of the Commission's mandate to foster regional cooperation. In that regard, the Committee requested the secretariat to work in close partnership with the Secretariat of the Pacific Community, the Pacific Islands Telecommunications Association and the International Telecommunication Union in ICT for development and disaster risk reduction.

6. The Committee highlighted the importance of regional cooperation for expanding broadband connectivity in Asia and the Pacific and underlined the need to address availability, affordability, reliability and redundancy issues in the future. In that regard, the Committee took note of a number of proposals for developing broadband networks at the regional and national levels, including possible broadband development together with the construction of highways and railways and deploying mesh technology. It also noted other modalities in expanding broadband networks cost-effectively, such as the deployment of optical fibre wire along the electric power transmission lines.

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[1] See A/C.2/59/3, annex, and A/60/687.

[2] Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015: Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters (A/CONF.206/6 and Corr.1, chap. I, resolution 2).

[3] See E/ESCAP/CICT/6, Chap. I.

7. The Committee noted the importance of m-banking and the possibilities offered by high mobile phone penetration rates in facilitating international remittances among migrant workers and requested that the secretariat study the issue further, within the overall framework of a road map for a conducive ICT environment in the region, while taking into consideration specific conditions of each country and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. In that regard, the Committee also took note of the need for the sharing of knowledge, expertise and best practices and cooperation among ESCAP member States.

8. The Committee agreed that cybersecurity threats continued to be a concern in view of the increasingly wider use of ICT tools, especially the Internet, broadband deployment and mobile communications for commercial transactions, e-government and other applications, and called for more regional cooperation to deal with those issues.

9. The Committee noted with concern that members and associate members were facing various challenges regarding ICT for development and disaster risk reduction, such as the lack of laws governing telecommunications, limited human resources (capacity-building), delivery of services over Internet Protocol (IP), IP network infrastructure, cybersecurity, Internet governance, and localized content availability and creation. In that regard, the Committee emphasized the long-term need for human resources development efforts through enhanced regional cooperation.

10. The Committee reviewed the progress and achievements of the Asian and Pacific Training Centre for Information and Communication Technology for Development (APCICT) during the period 2008-2010, which were aimed at human and institutional capacity-building among ESCAP members and associate members in use of ICTs for their socio-economic development. The Committee expressed support for the implementation of the Centre's capacity-building initiatives under its four programmatic pillars, namely serving as a multilateral cooperation mechanism, training and workshops, research and knowledge sharing, and advisory services. The Committee noted that the Centre's flagship programme, entitled the "Academy of ICT Essentials for Government Leaders", had been developed through an inclusive and participatory process and had been rolled out in 17 countries in close partnership with national and subregional partners.

11. Taking into account that countries in the region were facing different types of disasters, the Committee requested the secretariat to assist in developing guidance on use of information and communications technology for disaster reduction, specifically on early warning of disasters.

12. The Committee recommended that the members and associate members of the Commission strengthen cooperation in the development and application of ICT, including space-based techniques and applications, to reach the goals of the World Summit on the Information Society and the Millennium Development Goals, and to deal with the socio-economic and technological challenges confronting the region.

13. The Committee expressed strong support for the launch and further development of the Asia-Pacific Gateway for Disaster Risk Reduction and Development, and commended the partnership of the secretariat with Microsoft, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Asian

Disaster Preparedness Center (ADPC) and the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR), among others.

14. The Committee welcomed the launch in Nanjing, China, in September 2010 of the Regional Cooperative Mechanism on Disaster Monitoring and Early Warning, Particularly Drought (the Mechanism) within the framework of the Regional Space Application Programme for Sustainable Development (RESAP), and expressed the hope that the Mechanism would be further developed to cover other major hazards to which the region was prone.

15. The Committee expressed appreciation for the continued support of member States, including Bangladesh, China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Pakistan, the Republic of Korea, the Russian Federation, Sri Lanka and Thailand, of regional cooperation in ICT applications for disaster risk reduction (DRR) as well as substantive technical support for relevant regional cooperative mechanisms. The Committee highly commended China for providing continued support to the Mechanism, Japan for continued support, and enhanced support when needed, for Sentinel Asia, and the Russian Federation for making the services of its positioning and navigation system, the Global Orbital Navigation Satellite System (GLONASS), available to ESCAP members and providing technical assistance in strengthening the capacity of central Asian countries to use ICT effectively to forecast extreme weather events.

16. The Committee welcomed with appreciation the offer of Sri Lanka to host the third session of the Committee in Colombo in the first part of November 2012. The Committee also welcomed the plans of Japan, Mongolia and Thailand to organize international meetings on ICT for development or on DRR in cooperation with the secretariat.

17. The Committee requested APCICT to continue its collaboration with member States for implementing its programmes in the region, mainstreaming the Academy into national human resources development training curricula and promoting its new initiative for strengthening ICT for development (ICTD) education in institutions of higher learning. Requests were also put forth for the Centre to assist with the development of regional e-competency standards as well as ICTD training content for community groups.

II. Proceedings

A. Mobile applications in Asia and the Pacific

18. The Committee expressed appreciation for the information note entitled “Mobile applications in Asia and the Pacific” (E/ESCAP/CICT(2)/INF/4) and the valuable discussion by a panel of experts and senior officials from members and associate members of the Commission. The panel, consisting of Professor Kaili Kan, of the Beijing University of Posts and Telecommunications, Mr. Iwan Krisnadi, Commissioner, Indonesia Telecommunication Regulatory Authority and Mr. Sameer Sharma, Senior Advisor from the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), discussed trends and developments in mobile access and applications in Asia and the Pacific and their impacts on the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and the targets of the World Summit on the Information Society as well as the Hyogo

Framework for Action for inclusive and sustainable socio-economic development.

19. The Committee noted that emerging mobile applications, such as mobile banking, payment and remittances, as well as mobile health-care applications for public health awareness, patient monitoring and health data collection had the potential to empower the poor and accelerate inclusive development. In addition, mobile applications capabilities to enhance public service delivery in the education and employment sector were noted.

20. The Committee took note of the profound impacts of electronic commerce (e-commerce) in rural areas, while citing as an example a village in China where e-commerce was instrumental in commercializing products manufactured locally, increasing income, raising salaries, generating employment and strengthening the social fabric of the inhabitants. It also noted the formidable growth of mobile telephone subscriptions in developing countries such as Indonesia, where the number of subscribers had surpassed 160 million. It further noted Indonesia's plan to use Universal Service Obligation (USO) funds to extend ICT infrastructure to rural areas.

21. The Committee noted that, to achieve the targets of the World Summit on the Information Society, it was important to develop both mobile applications and broadband fibre optic infrastructure. The alignment of priorities with the Geneva Plan of Action of the World Summit on the Information Society,[4] which set forth action lines for building an inclusive information society, was also recognized.

22. The Committee noted various ITU initiatives and its recent launch of a Summit stocktaking database and Summit Lab, a collaborative space initiative aimed at sharing research, as well as ongoing programmes, case studies and new applications, such as mobile health projects to be implemented in Nepal in 2011. It took note of the need to focus on e-strategies including e-government, e-health, e-education as well as the extension of incentives, such as tax and tariff reductions, to encourage private investment and revenue sharing that would drive competition and potentially generate more mobile content.

23. The Committee was of the view that mobile applications should be adapted for conditions of countries in Asia and the Pacific in which a large number of users were rural illiterate poor and only had access to basic mobile phones. It noted further that there was a need to consider local requirements, such as language, and also to factor in usability, such as graphics and symbols, in content development to cater to the poor and other vulnerable groups, such as the disabled.

24. The Committee noted that some countries in the region were in the process of implementing mobile government (m-government), mobile payment (m-payment) and mobile money (m-money) solutions at the national level. It also noted initiatives to establish electronic payment gateways capable of handling mobile payments as well as the development of supportive national policies and guidelines with the private sector, including leading financial institutions involved in the deployment of mobile banking solutions.

[4] A/C.2/59/3, annex.

25. The Committee was of the view that safety and security linked to mobile applications needed to be addressed. It highlighted the importance of strengthening cybersecurity measures as well as establishing policies and legislation to protect consumers, especially the poor, from possible exploitation. Regulations would need to be set in collaboration with policymakers from a variety of sectors, including finance and health, to address issues relating, for example, to transfers of funds for illegal purposes.

B. Broadband development in Asia and the Pacific

26. The Committee had before it the information note entitled "Broadband development in Asia and the Pacific" (E/ESCAP/CICT(2)/INF/5), which provided background information on broadband development in the region as well as emerging challenges and opportunities in developing broadband networks for inclusive and sustainable socio-economic development. The Committee expressed appreciation for the timeliness and relevance of the discussions by the following panellists: Mr. Yeong-ro Lee, Research Fellow, National Information Society Agency (NIA) of the Republic of Korea, Mr. Prasert Aphiphunya, Deputy Secretary-General, National Telecommunications Commission (NTC) of Thailand, Mr. Rohan Samarajiva, Chair and CEO of LIRNEasia and Mr. Siaosi Ofaki Sovaleni, ICT Outreach Coordinator, Secretariat of the Pacific Community.

27. The Committee noted that Asian backhaul prices were much higher than in other areas of the world, such as North America and Europe, and that more conduits were needed for both submarine and terrestrial connectivity. More conduits would also create redundancy for increased protection against disasters, which had caused a number of disruptions to Internet connectivity over the last decade.

28. The Committee took note of the latest developments on policy and regulation regarding broadband development in the Republic of Korea, particularly its broadband plan to cover 99 per cent of the rural areas of the country by 2014 and an initiative to provide free broadband Internet access to all schools in the country as well as government initiatives to support the livelihood of local communities in a sustainable manner.

29. The Committee noted the importance attached to the ICT needs of Pacific island developing States, while acknowledging the concerted efforts made by Pacific member countries in developing the Framework for Action on ICT for Development in the Pacific, which had been endorsed by Pacific ICT ministers in June 2010. It was noted that a number of Pacific member States did not have ICT policies or legislation and needed assistance from international organizations. The Committee was informed of the need for the various international and regional organizations to harmonize their approaches in support of the implementation of the Framework for Action. The Committee welcomed the discussions between the ESCAP secretariat and the Secretariat of the Pacific Community and the Pacific Islands Telecommunications Association over the Pacific use of Asian satellite resources to promote Pacific connectivity.

30. The Committee took note of various initiatives on broadband development in Thailand, including the Telecom Business Master Plan, a project to be implemented in 2011, which aims to create an environment for free and fair market competition and encourage telecom operators to expand

backbone networks for redundancy. The Committee also noted a capacity-development project that Thailand carried out in cooperation with Japan with a view to bridging the digital divide between urban and rural areas.

31. The Committee recommended that closer attention be paid to matching supply and demand in developing and providing broadband networks. In particular, the Committee highlighted the need to create demand for broadband network expansion through the development of local content and applications, and increasing the affordability and reliability of services. It noted the importance of enabling policies, regulations and public-private partnership frameworks that would enable the private sector to drive broadband growth. Some of the other options the Committee considered included infrastructure-sharing among operators and conducive regulations and legislation which would promote fair competition and access to broadband networks as well as reduce the large fixed investment costs of broadband development. Economic measures to extend broadband connectivity were noted to be fixed WiFi and a fixed version of Worldwide Interoperability for Microwave Access (WIMAX), although the Committee recognized the need for the market to determine technological standards. The Committee acknowledged that future trends in broadband deployment would be led by wireless broadband technologies.

32. The Committee highlighted the need for further capacity development in ICT, including ICT literacy enhancement at the community level and through schools. It also expressed appreciation for the role played by APCICT in ICT capacity-building for government officials and young people.

33. The secretariat, in collaboration with the relevant organizations of the United Nations system, regional agencies and stakeholders, was requested to assist member States in compiling guidelines in infrastructure development, deployment of broadband networks and facilitating the shift from e-government to m-government.

C. Regional capacity-building and overview of information and communications technology for development

34. The Committee had before it a document entitled “Report of the Asian and Pacific Training Centre for Information and Communication Technology for Development on its activities during the period 2008-2010” (E/ESCAP/CICT(2)/1).

35. The Committee noted that, with the support of member States, the Academy of APCICT had become localized and customized, enabling it to cater to local entities, and had been institutionalized into national capacity-building frameworks in many countries. It also noted that the Centre had been producing and disseminating a number of research products on ICTD capacity development, and fostering knowledge sharing through both online and offline channels for the exchange of best practices across member States.

36. The Committee commended the activities of APCICT and the contributions of its Director and staff, and recalled that the Commission in its resolution 66/14 had decided that the Centre should continue to operate beyond 2011 as a subsidiary body of the Commission, based on the statute of the Centre. It expressed its strong support for the ICTD capacity development programmes of the Centre, which were better enabling

national Governments to deliver ICTD programmes, and providing a channel for information sharing. Some members mentioned the follow-up activities of the Academy programme undertaken by them, such as organizing additional Academy workshops and translating the Academy curriculum into local languages. All of that was being done in view of the existing need for ICTD capacity development in the region.

37. The Committee had before it the document entitled "Review of the progress made in implementing the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society in Asia and the Pacific" (E/ESCAP/CICT(2)/2) and expressed appreciation for the useful information contained in the document.

38. The Committee noted ongoing and planned national and regional ICT connectivity initiatives among ESCAP members and associate members. It discussed Mongolia's plans for the national fibre optic network to reach all provinces and sub-provinces within two years and its Programme on Broadband Development and other projects, including e-learning and telemedicine. The Committee was informed of the efforts of the Russian Federation to expand ICT coverage and promote broadband Internet for socio-economic development despite the country's vast geographical coverage and Bangladesh's efforts to create digital data networks through the extension of terrestrial fibre optic cables, an action that expanded connectivity to most cities, helped boost the country's teledensity from 0.4 per cent in 1997 to about 30 per cent in 2010 and provided commensurate increases in employment and business opportunities, in particular among women, in the implementation of Millennium Development Goals. The Committee took note of other initiatives being implemented by Bangladesh, such as the development of the High-Tec Park and Software Park, to promote the ICT industry.

39. The Committee also recognized various initiatives of ESCAP members and associate members in implementing ICT application development, citing as examples the move by the Russian Federation to provide equal access to all citizens to ICT services by 2020, and the implementation of major e-government initiatives in Nepal for which it sought support from the secretariat.

40. The Committee expressed appreciation for the information provided by the Russian Federation on the country's positioning and navigation system, GLONASS, and the related services that could be made available to ESCAP members and associate members.

41. The representative of the World Bank updated the Committee on its initiatives, such as the Pacific Regional Regulatory Resource Centre to be established in Suva and an initiative to lay down submarine cables in the Pacific, and explored opportunities for collaboration with ESCAP and other international entities in providing support to Pacific member countries for the development of the telecommunications sector. The Committee also took note of the invitation of the World Bank to jointly identify possible gaps and opportunities to develop cable connectivity in other subregions.

42. The representative of the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO) informed the Committee of a report it had compiled on the integration of ICT into schools in South-East Asia, particularly relevant to the World Summit on the Information Society targets 2 and 7.

43. The Committee noted comments made by the representative of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) on the important role that aviation played in response to, and recovery during, natural disasters and crisis situations, including the importance of aeronautical fixed and mobile communication for the restoration of airport operations and air traffic control management. The representative highlighted further that ICAO contracting States in the Asia-Pacific region would be providing data in order to prepare a catalogue of resources and services available, which would facilitate coordination in the provision of facilities and services. In addition, States were also encouraged to develop global navigation satellite system-based procedures as part of disaster preparedness programmes and ICAO offered to support joint efforts for ICT restoration in DRR.

D. Information and communications technology for disaster risk reduction

44. The Committee had before it three documents entitled "Role of information and communications technology in the implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action" (E/ESCAP/CICT(2)/3), "Collaborative efforts to improve regional disaster communication capabilities" (E/ESCAP/CICT(2)/4), "Asia-Pacific Gateway on Disaster Risk Reduction and Development: Phase 1" (E/ESCAP/CICT(2)/INF/7).

45. The Committee expressed its continued support for the efforts of the secretariat on ICT, including space applications, for DRR, requesting that priority be given to assisting members and associate members in the implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action by using proper ICT tools.

46. The Committee welcomed the launch of the Asia-Pacific Gateway on Disaster Risk Reduction and Development for the sharing of valuable experiences and knowledge in disaster management, and encouraged members and associate members to provide available information resources to support its operationalization process.

47. The Committee recognized the critical importance of communications capacity in ensuring the timeliness and efficiency of response actions to major disasters, and encouraged the secretariat to work closely with the Regional Interagency Working Group on ICT, the Committee on Disaster Risk Reduction and the private sector to develop a more comprehensive analysis of the region's cooperative disaster communication capacities, including those for air traffic control and reporting.

48. The Committee shared information from member States in the successful use of information, communications and space technology tools for disaster management, and on recent developments in the establishment of a relevant national institution arrangement for their operational utilization.

49. The delegation of Pakistan expressed appreciation for efforts made by the ESCAP secretariat after the recent catastrophic floods in the country, and the visit of the Executive Secretary of ESCAP to Islamabad that strengthened the cooperative efforts taken by United Nations agencies and the Government. The delegation was of the view that space applications had greatly aided response efforts, which had saved lives through efficient rescue, evacuation, relief and rehabilitation actions. In that context, the

Committee expressed appreciation for the offer of the delegation of Pakistan to share its relevant experiences on space applications for enhanced early warning and flood response.

50. The Committee expressed appreciation for the efforts of Japan for the Sentinel Asia initiative, with the ESCAP secretariat as a partner, to promote space applications for disaster management, and its offer to share the Integrated Flood Analysis System (IFAS) software system and satellite-based rainfall data to improve the quality of early warning flood systems.

51. The Committee expressed appreciation for the offer of the delegation of the Russian Federation to share its experiences in using satellite imageries, mobile phones and other emergency communication equipment to support drought and forest fire disaster response.

E. Regional cooperation on information and communications technology for development and disaster risk reduction

52. The Committee had before it the document entitled "Background information on the VIP Forum on Information and Communications Technology for Development and Disaster Risk Reduction" (E/ESCAP/CICT(2)/INF/6).

53. The Committee benefited from a discussion among VIP panellists that consisted of H.E. Mr. Meas Po, Under-Secretary of State, Ministry of Posts and Telecommunication of Cambodia, Mr. S. R. Rao, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Communications and Information Technology, Department of Information Technology, India, Mr. Tomohiro Ishibashi, Director, Weathernews Inc. Global Center, Chiba, Japan and Mr. Ivan Fong, President, Pacific Islands Telecommunications Association (PITA). The Committee expressed appreciation for the relevant discussions.

54. The Committee took note of the efforts of Cambodia to promote the policy and regulatory work related to ICT and telecommunication development, including challenges the country faced in human resources development, IP convergence, security matters, Internet governance, network readiness and content, lack of financial and human resources on the government side and the need for more laws to promote ICT as a truly driving force.

55. The Committee noted a new management style for data collection in weather forecasting by Weathernews Inc. For example, in Japan, through a network of 220,000 reporters, the service obtained local cloud reports, which reported a high 90 per cent level of accuracy in forecasting local severe storms. Since its inception in 1986, the service had expanded at a rapid pace and had opened 35 offices in 16 countries.

56. The Committee called for enhanced attention to cloud sourcing and cloud computing, green ICT, more regional and subregional initiatives as well as a multidisciplinary approach to DRR, and a common platform for collecting data, and predicting and managing disasters.

57. The Committee noted the importance of realizing the different perspectives involved when reviewing disaster data, and was briefed on the challenges that the Pacific States encountered in accessing information and cybersecurity. It was pointed out that many Pacific countries simply lacked a separate set of ICTs for disaster prevention with the public sector under-

resourced, and that foreign regulations often served as barriers for the private sector to implement new initiatives. PITA informed the Committee that a new disaster communication system had been initiated about two weeks before. It explained that the system was based on a common emergency disaster response as a result of a partnership involving PITA, the Secretariat of the Pacific Community and South Pacific University.

58. The Committee expressed its continued support to the secretariat for its efforts on applying ICT, including space applications for DRR, and further emphasized the need to prioritize the implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action.

59. The Committee noted a participatory approach to providing more accurate storm forecasting using a mobile phone network. The Committee recommended that that approach be promoted in a public-private partnership.

60. The Committee noted that ICT for development should be embraced from national to community levels, ensuring secure connectivity among relevant stakeholders in promoting long-term sustainability.

61. The delegation of China highlighted the importance of regional cooperation and urgency in promoting cooperative work in ICT for DRR in Asia and the Pacific, the fastest growing region economically in the world but also the most disaster prone. The delegation expressed the desire to work collaboratively with the secretariat of ESCAP and other members to support the Mechanism recently launched in China.

62. The delegation of Indonesia asked for assistance in operationalizing the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Humanitarian Assistance Centre. The delegation also sought training and resources support in building information management capacity and technical assistance to harness cloud computing technology for developing countries of the region in order to reduce costs and promote green ICT.

63. The delegation of Thailand informed the Committee that its Ministry of Information and Communication Technology would organize an international seminar on ICT for DRR, and invited the secretariat to cooperate in the endeavour and member countries to actively participate in it. The delegation explained that, during the seminar, technical experts, academia and related United Nations agencies as well as other members of the private and public sectors would discuss lessons learned from disasters and share experiences.

64. The delegation of Nepal informed the Committee that the South Asia Subregional Economic Cooperation (SASEC) had an ICT component which could be a good model for regional cooperation and offered to provide further details in that regard. The delegation suggested that ESCAP should use more participatory methods in promoting regional cooperation.

F. Consideration of future programme focus

65. The Committee had before it an information document entitled “Future programme focus” (E/ESCAP/CICT(2)/INF/8). The Committee members expressed support for the draft strategic framework for the biennium 2012-2013, which provided the main orientation of the work of the secretariat. The deliberations and recommendations made by the

Committee under the previous items of the agenda would serve as the basis for the preparation of the draft programme of work pertaining to ICT and DRR.

66. One delegation noted the importance of the proposal for promoting an Asia-Pacific collaborative platform for disaster emergency communications capacities and pointed to the need for further detailed consideration of the proposal by the secretariat, including the connection with the work of the Committee on Disaster Risk Reduction.

G. Consideration of draft resolutions for submission to the Commission at its sixty-seventh session

67. No draft resolutions were submitted.

H. Dates, venue and provisional agenda of the third session of the Committee

68. The delegation of Sri Lanka offered to host the third session of the Committee, tentatively, in the first part of November 2012, with the exact date to be decided in consultation with the host country.

I. Other matters

69. No other matters were raised.

J. Adoption of the report

70. The Committee adopted the present report on 26 November 2010.

III. Organization of the meeting

A. Opening, duration and organization of the session

71. The Committee on Information and Communications Technology held its second session in Bangkok from 24 to 26 November 2010. It was declared open by Mr. Gongsak Yodmani, Adviser to the Minister of Science and Technology of Thailand, on behalf of the minister.

72. In his welcome address, he recalled the devastating effect of natural disasters across the region and urged ICT policy- and decision makers to redress their priorities and take advantage of the rich resources in information and communication technologies as a tool to promote inclusive and sustainable socio-economic development. While alluding to the panel discussions, Mr. Yodmani expressed his view that dialogue of that nature was the right platform to discuss the regional agenda regarding ICT for development, especially in the area of broadband development and mobile applications, explaining that ICT initiatives would further strengthen regional economic connectivity.

73. He commended the recent launch of the regional cooperative mechanism on the use of space-based information products and services for drought disaster monitoring and early warning, stating that the mechanism would be further developed to cover other major hazards to which the region was prone. He explained that lessons learned from recent disaster events indicated the importance of disaster communication capacity and

expressed support for the outcome of the 14th meeting of the Regional Inter-agency Working Group on ICT, in which ESCAP, ITU and APT as co-conveners agreed on joint actions towards a regional platform for disaster communication capacity.

74. In his closing remarks, he commended the partnership between ESCAP, Microsoft, ISDR and ADPC on the development of the Asia-Pacific Gateway for Disaster Risk Reduction and Development, which was aimed at mainstreaming disaster risk reduction into development planning. He called for active participation and cooperation in actions to be undertaken at the national level by member countries, and for work to be undertaken by the secretariat.

75. The Executive Secretary of ESCAP, in her opening statement, highlighted the ample evidence showing how ICT had accelerated economic progress, improved corporate performance and augmented foreign exchange earnings. She noted that, halfway through the implementation of the Geneva Plan of Action of the World Summit on the Information Society (2005-2015), the Asia-Pacific region had made remarkable progress towards achieving the targets. That included the use of mobile phones—connecting half of the region's population—ICT applications and capacity development. However, despite all the impressive technological advances and the commitment of key players in the region, there was still a wide disparity in access to ICTs between developed and developing ESCAP members and associate members, and between different communities. Further action would be required to address four major components—ICT for Pacific connectivity, ICT for economic and social connectivity, ICT for disaster risk reduction and capacity-building and training in ICT for development. The secretariat would leverage the vast resources and capacities of space technologies to promote Pacific connectivity in cooperation with partner organizations, notably the Secretariat of the Pacific Community and PITA, to formulate concrete action plans. She informed the Committee that a project was being planned on the use of ICT for enhanced social connectivity focusing, in particular, on socially disadvantaged groups, such as the disabled, the elderly, women and children.

B. Attendance

76. Representatives of the following members and associate members of ESCAP attended the meeting: Armenia; Australia; Bangladesh; Bhutan; Cambodia; China; India; Indonesia; Iran (Islamic Republic of); Japan; Kazakhstan; Lao People's Democratic Republic; Mongolia; Nepal; Pakistan; Papua New Guinea; Republic of Korea; Russian Federation; Sri Lanka; Tajikistan; and Thailand. The session was also attended by representatives of the following States: Czech Republic and South Africa.

77. Representatives of the following offices of the United Nations bodies, specialized agencies and related organizations attended: UNDP; Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR); Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO); ICAO; ITU; World Bank; International Finance Corporation (IFC); World Health Organization (WHO); and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

78. The following intergovernmental organizations were represented: APT; SEAMEO; Secretariat of the Pacific Community; and PITA.

79. Other entities represented included: Beijing University of Posts and Telecommunications (BUPT); Chulalongkorn University; International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC); InternetSpeech, Inc.; LIRNEasia; NIA; Microsoft Operations Pte. Ltd.; Thaicom Public Company Limited; and Weathernews Inc.

C. Election of officers

80. Mr. Lalith Chandrakumar Weeratunga (Sri Lanka) was elected Chair. H.E. Mr. Meas Po (Cambodia), Mr. S. R. Rao (India) and Mr. Henao Iduhu (Papua New Guinea) were elected Vice-Chairs and Mr. Manohar Bhattarai (Nepal) was elected Rapporteur.

D. Agenda

81. The Committee adopted the following agenda:

1. Opening of the session.
2. Election of officers.
3. Adoption of the agenda.
4. Mobile applications in Asia and the Pacific.
5. Broadband development in Asia and the Pacific.
6. Regional capacity-building and overview of information and communications technology for development.
7. Information and communications technology for disaster risk reduction.
8. Regional cooperation on the information and communications technology for development and disaster risk reduction.
9. Consideration of future programme focus.
10. Consideration of draft resolutions for submission to the Commission at its sixty-seventh session.
11. Dates, venue and provisional agenda of the third session of the Committee.
12. Other matters.
13. Adoption of the report.

Annex

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