UN Regional Commissions Submission on WSIS+20 Review (Paper 2 of 2)[1]: Observations on the WSIS+20 Elements Paper

This document presents observations and proposed additions to the WSIS+20 Elements Paper, complementing the companion paper: *'UN Regional Commissions Submission on WSIS+20 Review (Paper 1 of 2): Roles and Mandates.'*

Introduction

The UN Regional Commissions welcome the comprehensive approach reflected in the WSIS+20 Elements Paper and share the following observations and recommendations to strengthen the alignment with evolving digital realities and ensure multifaceted measurable progress.

Bridging Digital Divides

Observations:

Current focus on connectivity underrepresents MSME participation, particularly in the Global South, where substantial barriers to adopting digital technologies persist. These disparities constrain productivity and competitiveness and perpetuate structural economic gaps between and within countries.

Recommendations:

- Encourage commitments to close structural economic and affordability gaps, with measurable targets.
- Call for tailored support to enable MSMEs to adopt digital technologies.

Digital Economy

Observations:

Technology adoption remains heterogeneous across firms and sectors. MSMEs face challenges accessing and deploying digital and emerging technologies, limiting innovation, market access, and participation in global value chains.

Recommendations:

- Promote inclusion of MSMEs and startups through policies supporting the digitalization of productive sectors via tools such as digital extension services, innovation hubs, and sector-specific digital strategies.
- Encourage enabling ecosystems through regional cooperation.

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[1] For complementary UNRECs Roles and Mandates, please refer to the companion document: *'UN Regional Commissions Submission on WSIS+20 Review (Paper 1 of 2): Roles and Mandates.'*

Internet Governance

Observations:

Requires reaffirmation of inclusive and multistakeholder principles.

Recommendations:
- Reaffirm WSIS processes on Internet governance as defined in the relevant sections and paragraphs in Tunis Agenda.
- Encourage capacity development for participation in global IG processes.
- Reinforce the role of UNRECs as key custodians of regional IGFs.

Enabling Environment and Policy Coherence

Observations:

Institutional fragmentation and lack of coordination between digital strategies and broader development plans, along with outdated regulatory frameworks, hinder progress.

Recommendations:
- Call for coherent, risk-based regulatory frameworks.
- Strengthen national digital governance through clear institutional coordination, integration with development strategies (education, industry, innovation), and modernization of legal frameworks.
- Encourage regional harmonization by supporting intergovernmental and multistakeholder dialogues and integrating WSIS and GDC objectives into regional digital agendas.

Ethical Dimensions of the Information Society

Observations:

The regional specific ethical dimensions need to be emphasized in the outcome document.

Recommendations:
- Reaffirm regional specific ethical dimensions.

Artificial Intelligence
Observations:

The paper lacks a balanced emphasis on both the opportunities and risks of AI, including its role in enhancing productivity and innovation in developing countries.

Recommendations:
- Call for governance frameworks that uphold ethical principles, that maximize the opportunities and mitigate the associated risks of AI.
- Recognize AI's transformative potential for productivity, competitiveness, and sustainable development.
- UNRECs are requested to support their countries in setting AI governance modalities specific to their regions.

- Promote national AI strategies oriented toward development, especially in key sectors (health, education, production), while addressing risks such as social impact, capacity gaps, and equitable access.

Capacity-Building

Observations:

Capacity-building is often narrowly interpreted as training.

Recommendations:
- Encourage systemic approaches encompassing institutional readiness and legal frameworks.
- Call for resourced partnerships that leverage regional expertise to scale up knowledge production, building consensus, technical assistance and capacity-building through the UNRECs.

Measurement and Indicators

Observations:

There is a need for indicators on AI adoption and a clear approach to operationalizing new metrics.

Recommendations:
- Reinforce the role of UNRECs in data collection, indicators monitoring for WSIS, GDC, and STI, and support national statistical systems in ICT, digital, and AI statistics in line with global standards.
- Encourage the creation of dedicated mechanisms for monitoring and reporting progress on regional digital strategies, including those specific to AI.
- Build on UNRECs existing mechanisms and models to further comparable measurement, monitoring, evaluating and reporting on digital development progress at large.
- Expand ICT indicators to cover AI adoption by individuals and businesses, with additional frameworks on AI, gender, and MSMEs.

Follow-up and Review

Observations:

Regional mechanisms are underrepresented. There is a risk of duplication, fragmentation, and overlapping mandates between WSIS and GDC processes, particularly impacting countries with uncoordinated reporting and fragmented support.

Recommendations:
- Reaffirm a strengthened role of WSIS Forum as the global platform for follow-up on WSIS progress.
- Reaffirm the mandate of UN Regional Commissions to serve as regional mechanisms for WSIS follow-up and GDC implementation.
- Call for continued structured regional reviews on the implementation of WSIS beyond 2025 under UNREC auspices.
- Recommend a shared roadmap for coherence and coordination between WSIS+20 and GDC, including alignment of action lines and implementation timelines.