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Executive Summary of Background Paper

On

Digital Content

The paper provides an *integrated assessment of the current situation* of Arabic Digital Content and proposes a set of goals, targets and actions to bridge the noticed gap with global and international benchmarks. The digital content changes observed in the last 5 years; in terms of their nature, growth and sources requires a fundamental change of the ICT industry components in terms of policies, network architecture/technology and business models. Currently there are no agreed upon international indicators for digital content; however there are over thirty indicators have been reported reflecting the complexity of the issues involved.

The paper supports that the *digital content divide* is the largest digital divide for the Arab region. The paper also reports about the relationship between digital content and internet adoption in the short run. This gives a priority for digital content as the highest element for socioeconomic development of the region. This priority is coupled with the intermingled Broadband and Digital Content due to the changing nature of the content (IP video will ultimately be 90% of total IP traffic; Cisco/VNI study). The different types of digital content; as governmental, commercial and social/personal will require special measures with the role of governmental/public sector data highly regarded as per OECD policy guidelines for digital content. Also, the paper supports the need to look at the Arab region as a contiguous market, in order to provide the necessary critical mass needed to support the mechanisms for digital content development.

The *affordability* of the content is closely coupled with the affordability of the cost of broadband. Comparing the prices of broadband connectivity for the Arab region to OECD has been highlighted. The current average of $168 PPP of connecting at 1 Mb/s in the Arab region for low broadband is (256K) is strikingly high, compared to the average prices reported for OECD of $4.17 (ranges from $ 0.35 for Japan to $23.50 for Mexico). The target of Broadband Commission of a target ceiling of 5% of broadband price of income by 2015 requires a reduction of prices over 1000% for 10 countries (having 62% of the region population) and 7 countries (having 34% of the region population) by an average of 500% reduction and only the gulf countries with the exception of Saudi Arabia (having less than 4% of the population) are currently meeting the target.

The formation of a *Pan Arab Digital Content Foundation* dealing with the regional policies, regulations and other coordinating mechanisms on both content development and necessary mechanisms for infrastructure support is strongly recommended. Issues to be dealt with starts from Arabic Search Engine, Arabic Internet and Business Directories, to Regional mechanism for internet traffic exchange, to translation and digitization/digitalization of content. Finally, importance of human capacity development and strong utilization of remote learning should be given the priority both as a tool to build needed capacities and as a digital content in itself needed for higher internet penetration, a major component for socio-economic development of the region.