ITU Inter-Regional Week on "Emerging Technologies for Development"
for the Arab and African Regions

13-18 December 2020

Concept Note

RATIONALE AND BACKGROUND:

The seventh World Telecommunication Development Conference (WTDC-17) of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) was held from 9 to 20 October 2017 in Buenos Aires, Argentina. During this WTDC-17, the Arab states adopted a set of regional initiatives some of which are pertaining to emerging technologies. Within the framework of the implementation of the regional initiatives, the ITU Arab Regional Office organizes annually a week on Emerging Technologies (ET). The last Emerging Technologies week was held in Abu Dhabi, UAE from 26-29 August 2019 (more information can be found here). Based on its success, this year version, the Emerging Technologies for Development Week will be organized in the Arab and African regions from 22-27 November 2020.

As we embark on the decade for action to meet the 2030 Sustainable Agenda targets, it is evident that emerging technologies will play a key role in implementing the SDGs. It is important to recall that the UN General Assembly adopted resolution A/Res/70/1 titled "Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" adopted on the 25th of September 2015, mentioned "The spread of information and communications technology and global interconnectedness has great potential to accelerate human progress, to bridge the digital divide and to develop knowledge societies, as does scientific and technological innovation across areas as diverse as medicine and energy". Moreover, specific targets relevant to information and communication technologies were outlined in SDGs 4, 5, 9 and 17. In addition to target relevant to technologies were highlighted in SDGs 1, 2, 7, and 14. It is important also to note that ICTs have a great impact on SDGs 3, 8, 10 and 11.

Since, 2015 when the SDGs were adopted ICTs evolved quite a bit giving birth to emerging technologies such as 5G, artificial intelligence, blockchain, cloud computing, internet of things, big data, low orbiting satellites and many more. Each of these technologies have had profound impacts on societies across the world in different sectors. Ultimately, accelerating countries strides to achieving the SDGs. Furthermore, it is evident that the global effects of Covid-19 on societies has shed light on the importance of connectedness and also the vitality of these emerging technologies to provide unprecedented insights, develop and manage knowledge, raise awareness, facilitate collaboration among stakeholders across the

world and empower policy makers to make well informed decisions. It is noteworthy, that it is evident that countries who had invested in their ICTs in the past years were able to better manage the COVID-19 crisis not only from a health perspective but were able to sustain economies and societies to the best degree possible. On the contrary, countries with least connectivity are finding it more difficult to handle the crisis. That said, and as the world tries to evolve into a new normal it is quite clear that policy makers and stakeholders globally and especially in developing countries, will have to make it a priority to provide meaningful connectivity to all citizens, and to invest heavily in emerging technologies in a needed effort to digitize their economies and digitally transform societies. Ultimately leading to taking bigger and more impactful strides to achieving the SDGs.

OBJECTIVE OF THE WEEK

The overall objective of the Week is to promote the wide scale deployment of emerging technologies including, Artificial Intelligence, IoT, Big Data, low orbiting satellites, and 5G to ultimately contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Moreover, through the sharing of experiences and solutions and by engaging a diverse range of international, regional and national stakeholders, this week will build partnerships and foster reflection. It is expected that this week could serve to enlarge the number of aware, engaged and concerned stakeholders, thereby catalyzing and expanding the impact of ongoing regional initiatives that promote emerging technologies for development.

This Week is planned to take place annually with a new theme each year focusing on specific emerging technologies and targeting a few number of SDGs. This year the focus will be on SDG 3 on Health and Well Being, SDG 8 on Decent Work and Economic Growth and SDG 9 on Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure. The rational being is that due to the COVID-19 crisis a global recession has occurred that will have a devastating impact on the global economy at large and developing countries in specific. In spite of that and as economies are planning for the future and the new normal investments will be made in emerging technologies. This Week will be an excellent opportunity to shed light on the different country experiences relevant to utilizing emerging technologies to combat the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 with the vision to achieving the SDGs on the long run.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

- Target needed areas for utilizing emerging technologies to meet national and regional developmental priorities in the Arab and African regions.
- Raising awareness among key stakeholders in the Arab and African regions on the measures that need to be taken to utilize emerging technologies for development.
- Enhance regional coordination between all stakeholders
- Sharing experiences and best practices relating to AI, IoT, Smart Cities and Big Data between countries of the Arab and African countries   as well as industry.
- Promoting open innovation and empowering innovators to develop AI, IoT, Smart Cities and Big Data applications and services
- Validation of ITU deliverables related to emerging technologies (standardization, developmental and econometrics).

FORMAT OF THE WEEK

Adopting a multi-stakeholder approach, the Week will bring together Governments, other UN and intergovernmental bodies, industry, civil society, academia, the private sector and citizens in advancing emerging technologies for development. ITU therefore is inviting stakeholders across the Arab and Africa regions to organize at least one activity during this Week (preferably virtual activities), to shed light on their key activities in this domain, whether at the national or regional level. Stakeholders are free to design the nature, scope and location of activities and associate them to the Week overall objective, as long they reflect the theme of Emerging Technologies for Development. Some ideas could organizing webinars, podcasts, announcing studies, partnerships, projects or initiatives, organizing national and regional challenges or competitions, organizing capacity building programmes, etc…

ITU will promote all activities on the webpage will be established for the ET Week with hyperlinks to the websites of the organizers of these activities along with promoting their logos. ITU will also be promoting the Week throughout the media including social media. We invite you to promote your activity on social media using the following Hashtag: #ITUET4DWeek and to reference this hashtag in your media releases.

PARTNERS and Expected Participants

Key Organizers:

This ET week is organized by ITU. Moreover, partners to the Week from all stakeholders are welcome to join by organizing an activity during the Week.

With the participation of:

- ITU Membership from Arab and African regions
- Regional organizations such as the African Union, African Union Commission (AUC), ATU, League of Arab States and AICTO
- ITU-D Study Groups
- ITU-T SG20
- ITU-T SG20 Arab and African Regional Groups
- ITU-R
- United for Smart and Sustainable Cities initiative (U4SSC)
- Private sector companies relevant to emerging technologies including ITU sector members
- Academic institutions including ITU academia members
- Interested UN organizations including UN Country Teams in the Arab and African regions
- Other interested regional and international organizations