



**Director, Telecommunication Development Bureau**

**REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT FORUM FOR THE ARB  
SUMMARY OF DISCUSSIONS**

**Summary:**

The document contains summary of the discussions of the Regional Development Forum that took place in Khartoum, Republic of Sudan, on 29 January 2017.

**Expected results:**

N/A

**References:**

N/A

**Background**

The ITU Regional Development Forum for the for the Arab region (RDF-ARB) was organized by the Telecommunication Development Bureau (BDT) of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) in Khartoum, Republic of Sudan on January 29, 2017 at the kind invitation of the National Telecommunications Corporation. The Forum was held on the eve of the Regional Preparatory Meeting for WTDC-17 for the Arab Region (RPM-ARB). The RDF-ARB's main objective was to discuss the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and their desired impact on developing countries in the Arab region particularly on the areas of infrastructure, education, health and employment, and to define respective areas of ICT development beyond 2017 in the context of contributing to the implementation of the SDGs. The outcome is being submitted as an information document to the RPM-ARB. Two hundred and eleven (211) participants representing 20 Member States and 14 sector members and 3 Academia members, 6 UN and specialized agencies and other guests attended RDF-ARB. The list of participants can be found [here](#). This report provides an overview of the issues discussed, as well as the issues identified during the course of the Forum. The agenda and this report can be found on the [RDF website](#).

**Opening Ceremony**

The opening remarks were provided by the following high-level speakers: Dr Yahia Abdalla, Director General of National Telecommunication Corporation of Sudan, and Mr Brahima Sanou, Director, Telecommunication Development Bureau, International Telecommunication Union. The Opening Ceremony was followed by keynote speeches provided by Ms Martha Rudeas, UN Resident and

Humanitarian Coordinator, UNDP Resident Representative in Sudan, and Dr Wisal Hussein Abdallah on behalf of Dr Lamia Abdelghaffar, Secretary General of Sudan National Population Council.

Dr Yahia Abdalla welcomed all participants on behalf of the Government and underlined its commitment towards the implementation of information and communication technologies (ICTs) and support to ITU. He noted that we should assume the responsibility to harness the potential of ICTs in all areas of life for the socio-economic growth to achieve the SDGs. He underlined that ICTs are perceived as the main pillar of the knowledge-based economy and the integration of ICTs contribute to the development of critical infrastructure, education, healthcare, human resources and other vital sectors and development of public services such as e-government and e-commerce which are current priorities of the Arab region. He highlighted the importance of regional coordination to address issues related to ICTs and to fulfill Resolution 31 of WTDC-10. He added that the Regional Development Forums represent an ideal platform for high level dialogue on ICTs and drew attention to the fact that the RDF attracted stakeholders from different sectors, e.g. health, education, finance, as well as a range of international organizations, the business community, academia and other stakeholders both inside and outside of the Arab region.

Mr Brahim Sanou welcomed all participants and said we are experiencing a wake-up call, and becoming even more conscious that ICTs are the foundation upon which economic and social development can grow. He stated that, as we embark on the implementation of the SDGs, policy makers, regulators, private sector, development partners and all stakeholders within the ICT ecosystem need more than ever to establish an inclusive, multi-stakeholder and collaborative dialogue to achieve socio-economic development, and improve the lives of people. The RDF is a perfect platform for such dialogue to share experiences and insights on the role that ICTs play in achieving the SDGs, focusing especially on infrastructure development, health, education and employment and economic growth, given the importance of establishing a structured dialogue with other sectors of life. In this context, he mentioned several BDT initiatives and events held in 2016 that illustrated the importance of continuous cross-sectoral collaboration: the Global Symposium for Regulators (GSR) that reached out to the financial sector through a Global Dialogue on Digital Financial Inclusion, and was organized with the support of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation; the inter-ministerial round table held by ITU and the World Health Organization (WHO), that discussed the use of ICTs to improve universal health coverage; the e-Agriculture Strategy Guide developed by ITU and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) to help Member States to adopt a strategic approach in making the best use of ICT developments in agriculture; and the 2016 Policy Forum held by ITU and UNESCO which brought together ministers of education and ministers of ICTs for the first time to explore the role that policies and cross-sectoral collaboration can play in fostering innovation and how the use of mobile technology can improve the quality, equity and accessibility of inclusive education. Mr Sanou added that the dialogue on education will continue this year with an event organized by ITU and UNESCO, in partnership with the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), in Paris in March 2017. He invited all Ministers of ICTs in the Arab Region to attend this event, especially given the importance of education and the role of ICTs in making education available to all. He spoke about WTDC-17, which will take place in Buenos Aires, Argentina, from 9 to 20 October 2017 under the theme ICT ④SDGs, and invited all stakeholders to contribute to its preparatory process. He also said that 2017 will mark the 25th anniversary of the establishment of the ITU Development Sector. The anniversary is an opportunity not only to celebrate but also to reflect on the future of ITU-D. Year-long celebrations are planned which will culminate at WTDC-17. Above all, ICTs are about people, and we should ensure that ICTs work for all people, the BDT Director concluded.

Ms Martha Rudeas commended ITU for putting ICTs at the center of SDGs. All 193 UN Member States are committed to achieve the 17 SDGs by 2030. Sudan has enormous potential to achieve its development potential and increase the pace of its development through ICTs. This is because ICTs change the way companies do business, increase GDP, innovation, health delivery, education and agricultural efficiency, promote tourism and minimize the effects of floods and droughts. In addition to ICTs providing underlying support across each and every sector, big data has enormous potential in Sudan and other countries to inform progress and monitor implementation of the SDGs.

Dr Wisal Hussein Abdallah welcomed all participants on behalf of the Secretary General of Sudan National Population Council and reiterated the commitment of Sudan to the work on ICTs for development both within the framework of the MDGs and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. She drew attention to the country monitoring reports for MDG implementation as well as the voluntary self-assessment report on SDGs carried out in 2015. While drawing attention to the ongoing work at the national level related to the implementation of MDGs and SDGs, Dr Abdallah underlined the importance of the three pillars of sustainable development (social, economic and environmental) that can only be addressed through partnership building, which is a natural fourth pillar of sustainable development. She informed participants about some projects of NPC and used this opportunity to recognize key stakeholders for great cooperation during this time.

**The following are highlights of each of the sessions: The presentations of all speakers can be found on the [RPM-ARB website](#).**

#### **Session 1: ICT 4 Infrastructure Development**

The ITU Regional Office for the Arab region (ITU RO-Arab), presented an overview of the session, and shared the main trends on ICT infrastructure for development.

The speakers provided their knowledge and experiences on the main subjects of the session. Their presentations focused on ICT technologies, its evolution and development in the region, the role of infrastructure sharing and universal access and service in development, cyber security to protect a range of vital infrastructure including electricity and transportation, and the Internet of Things (IoT) for sustainable cities. In addition, the session provided statistical data on ICT trends and development and its impact on GDP globally and highlighted that the development of ICT infrastructure related policies remains an important priority, in particular in rural areas where most people in developing countries live. The session also recalled the significant impact of the results of the 2005 World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), held in Tunis, on the global agenda for ICTs, in particular on infrastructure development and to strengthen the enabling environment for a sustainable ICT ecosystem.

At the end of the session, the participants emphasized the importance of cyber security awareness, national policies, training, in particular on IoT and smart city infrastructure and that ICT legal and regulatory frameworks have to be continuously reviewed in the region for better development.

Key recommendations agreed by the participants were as follows:

1. Existing ICT infrastructure is important to achieve the SDGs.
2. There is a need to share different models for implementing Universal Service in the Arab region and to measure the impact of Universal Service implementation to achieve the SDGs.
3. There is a need to share and develop infrastructure sharing policies, legislation, rules and regulations to serve the development and promotion of the Internet of Things (IoT).
4. Cyber security awareness and the update of related national policies is of great importance.

5. There is a need for national policies on the use of ICT for development.
6. There is a need for training, in particular on IoT and smart city infrastructure.
7. ICT legal and regulatory frameworks should be continuously reviewed in light of new ICT developments.

## **Session 2: ICT and Health**

This session highlighted the expanding role of ICTs to support national health-care services. This is especially so at a time when all health systems face serious economic challenges and greater demands to provide more and better health care, especially to those most in need. In recent years, the health sector in the Arab region started utilizing ICTs to manage and provide efficient and affordable health services to the public. While more efforts are needed to create enabling environments for e-Health, a number of success stories have started to emerge from the Arab region, which were shared with RDF-ARB.

As an introduction, the ITU RO-Arab, presented an overview on e-Health while highlighting the impact that it has on different sectors of society. Furthermore, a description of the roles of different stakeholders in the e-Health ecosystem was also presented. Finally, a quick background on all relevant international agreements was highlighted as important references for all relevant stakeholders to pursue.

This session focused specifically on the following:

- Creating enabling environments for e-Health in the Arab region
- m-Health projects in the Arab region
- The roles of the public vs private sectors in e-Health
- Collaboration between ICT and health companies

Key recommendations echoed by the participants were as follows:

1. A call upon all governments in the Arab region to adopt national strategies related to e-Health formulated through a multi-stakeholder approach in line with the ITU-WHO guidelines issued in 2013.
2. Acknowledging the good achievements of the ITU-WHO “Be Healthy Be Mobile” global initiative, particularly with the launch of two projects in Egypt and Tunisia, and a further call upon countries in the Arab region to join this global initiative.
3. A call upon stakeholders to conduct studies and share their studies and best practices related to e-Health.

## **Session 3: ICT and Education**

This session highlighted the relevant SDG education targets and further elaborated on the important role of ICTs to achieve those targets by 2030. This would entail creating enabling environments for smart learning to thrive with a focus on improving technological infrastructure for schools and other educational facilities, developing interactive educational e-content, and building the capacities of teachers and other personnel in the education sector.

As an introduction, the ITU RO-Arab, presented an overview of the notion of smart learning, relevant international agreements, the importance of ICT skills for youth employment, and regional challenges pertaining to education, and finally raised questions about the role of ICTs in education for the speakers to elaborate on.

This session focused specifically on:

- Creating enabling environments for smart learning in the Arab region.
- Local initiatives to promote the use of ICTs in education in the Arab region.
- Collaboration between the ICT and education sectors as well as models for public private partnerships.

The participants agreed on the following key recommendations:

1. Acknowledging the good work done so far regionally through the ITU Arab Regional Initiative on Smart Learning and further calling upon all stakeholders to join and contribute to the activities of the initiative.
2. Calling upon countries of the region to conduct policy reviews and formulate national strategies on smart learning through a multi-stakeholder approach as a first step towards creating enabling environments to promote smart learning in the countries of the Arab region.
3. Exploring new technologies and their use in education to bridge the digital divide between developing and developed countries.
4. Invite ALECSO and the ITU RO-Arab to conduct train-the-trainer programs on mobile applications development in the Arab region.
5. Calling upon countries of the region to encourage young people to use the ALECSO platform for mobile applications as a strategic Arab resource that aims at empowering Arab youth on leadership and innovation in this promising area.

#### **Session 4: ICT for Employment and Economic Growth**

Unemployment is one of the world's key development challenges. Youth unemployment rates in the Arab region are among the highest in the world. This session was devoted to discuss the opportunities offered by ICTs to cope with the challenge of employment.

Most jobs and businesses now require ICT skills, and ICTs themselves are transforming the way that business is being done everywhere. New opportunities exist for young people in areas such as offshore services, including information technology outsourcing (ITO) and business process outsourcing (BPO), as well as crowdsourcing and microwork (task-oriented work opportunities for data entry, coding, tagging and other text-based tasks).

As an introduction, the ITU RO-Arab presented the digital opportunities for youth employment and the challenges the Arab region is facing, highlighting some important factors, such as skills and innovation in determining the degree of the impact of ICT access and use. The presentation also informed participants on the ITU activities and assistance provided in this area, namely the establishment of the Arab Incubators and Technoparks Network (ARTECNET), and on ITU related publications.

The key issues which were highlighted by the panelists include:

- How the use of ICTs help institutions become innovative by building capabilities and transforming the culture of their organization.
- The lack of suitable finance models, including the need to finance SMEs, is hindering growth in the region.
- Incubation is a MUST issue.
- Some case studies and ongoing projects showing how ICTs can help in creating new jobs in traditional employment sectors.

The participants identified the following key recommendations:

1. Calling upon all concerned stakeholders to consider ICT capacity building as a priority in their national youth employment and entrepreneurship strategies.
2. Inviting all stakeholders in the Arab region to further support and provide incentives to ICT related entrepreneurship and startups.

In the wrap up session, the chairman highlighted the key areas of discussion noted above. The participants agreed on the following general recommendations:

1. Promote and formulate partnerships with all stakeholders, including the private sector and civil society, in activities leading toward the implementation of the SDGs.
2. Develop a code of conduct to guide communication and sharing of information.
3. Invite relevant stakeholders from outside the ICT sector to participate in future RDFs to share their experiences.

In closing, the Chairman thanked the BDT Director and RO-Arab, and indicated that through effective implementation mechanisms, such as the ITU-D Regional Initiatives, growth of the ICT sector may be ensured, while advancing implementation of WSIS, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals.

Dr Yahia Abdalla, Chairman  
Khartoum, Republic of Sudan  
29 January 2017

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