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Briefing about Lebanon's ICT Indicators

Executive summary

Based on the Resolution No. 72/2005 dated 1/10/2005 issued by the President of the Council of Ministers, the Ministerial Committee for Information and Communication Technology was established. In 2010, an ICT unit at the Presidency of the Council of Ministers (PCM) was formed with aim to coordinate the implementation of the national ICT strategy. As part of this broad mandate, the National ICT coordinator took an individual initiative to liaise between the various ministries to collect Lebanon Core ICT Indicators for the year 2011.

The ICT unit developed the framework for ICT indicators with the Central Administration for Statistics (CAS). The framework consists of the minimum set of statistics that Lebanon has to keep in order to measure the digital economy. The framework is based on the recommendations of the "Partnership for Measuring ICT indicators for Development". The goal of the framework is to measure the policy effect of the e-strategy on the ICT sector and the economy at large. Per such few indicators were added to the minimum set recommended by the "Partnership for measuring ICT indicators for Development". The additional ICT indicators address ICT investments throughout the economy, the size of the ICT sector, e-government, and R&D.

Once the framework has been established, and the methodology of the "Partnership on Measuring ICT indicators" was adopted and the ICT unit started working in parallel with the public institutions on the one hand, and a statistics company on the other hand to perform the household and the business surveys. The reason behind commissioning the statistics company to conduct these surveys is due to CAS's inability to deliver the household and business indicators in due time.

The ICT unit collected the ICT indicators from: the Telecommunication Regulatory Authority (TRA), the Office of the Minister of State for Administrative Reform (OMSAR), the National Council for Scientific Research, and the Center for Educational Research and Development.

The ICT unit's ultimate goal is to have a single administration that collects these indicators based on international standards and methodologies, and the most suited administration for doing so periodically is CAS. Given the proper recruitment for additional specialized and budget, CAS would be able to collect these indicators on yearly basis.

Introduction and Methodology

In April 2011, the National ICT Strategy Coordination Unit at the Presidency of the Council of Ministers (PCM) developed, along with the Central Administration for Statistics (CAS), the framework of ICT indicators. The framework was approved by the various Lebanese private and public stakeholders at a workshop held at the PCM on April 14, 2011.

Dr. Huub Meijers, an expert on the digital economy from Maastricht University visited Lebanon and met with the various Lebanese stakeholders to validate the framework and assess the availability of data needed for the indicators. Once the framework was approved, and in order to quickly populate the first set of ICT indicators and draw from it lessons learned, the PCM commissioned a private company to conduct two surveys in order to populate the ICT indicators on household and business use. Concurrently, the Centre for Educational Research and Development was commissioned to conduct a survey on the use of both public and private schools. Finally various Lebanese institutions were asked to provide administrative data. These include the Ministry of Finance, National Accounts, Ministry of Education and Higher Education (Center for Educational Research and Development), Telecommunication Regulatory Authority, Office of the Minister of State for Administrative Reforms, and National Council for Scientific Research.

The framework contains the minimum number of indicators needed to measure the Lebanese digital economy and to measure the policy effect of the strategy on the ICT sector and the economy at large. It is recommended that the ICT indicators be populated once a year, and that the results are disseminated to stakeholders and to International Organizations.

The National ICT Strategy Coordination Unit has commissioned Infopro (Statistics Company) to conduct two surveys in order to populate the ICT indicators for the households and individual use, and the ICT indicators for the business sector. The surveys were launched in July 2011 according to the methodology of the: “Partnership on Measuring ICT for Development”. In particular for the household questionnaire, Infopro used the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) Manual, and for the business survey the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) Manual.

The National ICT Strategy Coordination Office has also commissioned the Center for Education and Research Development (CERD) to conduct one survey to populate the ICT indicators for the education sector.

Quality reports are available at: www.ict.pcm.gov.lb

The final product was released to the public in May 2012.

Recommendations

The result of the experience of the working group during 9 months was a series of recommendations for measuring the Lebanese digital economy going forward.

- 1- Restructure the National Accounts. The current structure of the National Account doesn't give visibility over key promising sectors such as ICT, media, advertising, and other digital economy sectors and industries. The first recommendation is to review the structure of the National Accounts to give visibility on the ICT sector.

- 2- Use the ISIC classification in the National Accounts and in the Ministry of Finance (MoF). This classification should be promoted and used by all concerned stakeholders both in the private and public sectors.
- 3- Appoint the CAS as the organization in charge of coordinating all actions and creating a comprehensive publication on the Digital Economy in Lebanon.
- 4- Measure ICT indicators in both public and private institutions. For example the indicator for the penetration of computers in schools should include both private and public schools. Surveys needed should be designed accordingly.
- 5- Use international standards and methodologies when identifying sets and collecting data in order to compare and contrast Lebanon's results with other countries. Specifically, the recommendation is to use the "Partnership on Measuring ICT for Development" standards and set of indicators. For questionnaires, the methodology, and the quality checking and reporting, the recommendation is to use UNCTAD.
- 6- Insure that all information is disseminated on a yearly basis to all relevant (international) bodies (ITU, World Bank, World Economic Forum, WITSA, UN, Conference Board, GGDC, The Economist Intelligence Unit, ESCWA, etc.).
- 7- Establish a high quality on-line, real-time, National Business Register.

Lessons Learned

From our experience, the lessons learned about the optimal model to gather statistics is the incorporation of the task of measuring the digital economy within the mandate of the National Statistical Office. In some cases, special laws need to be passed to allow the National Statistical Office to have access to data on ICT spending and investing. The National Statistical Office is free to outsource the needed surveys and market studies or perform them internally. In any case a national coordinator is needed because ICT indicators are spread across several ministries, institutions, and regulatory authorities.

The ITU should provide training session for the IT units at ministries and institutions in order to make the staff more familiar with ITU methodologies and show them best practices from all over the world. Technical assistance should be provided on a country per-need basis.