



UNITED NATIONS SPECIAL PROGRAMME
FOR THE ECONOMIES OF CENTRAL ASIA (SPECA)

Seventh Session of the SPECA Project Working Group
on Knowledge-based Development

(Dushanbe, Tajikistan, 17 June 2015)

REPORT

The seventh session of the SPECA Project Working Group on Knowledge-based Development (PWG on KBD) was jointly organized by UNECE and ESCAP at the invitation of the Government of Tajikistan in Dushanbe on 17 June 2015. In conjunction with the session, UNECE and ESCAP organized an International Conference on Practical Steps Towards a Knowledge-based Economy in collaboration with the Ministry of Industry and New Technologies of Tajikistan in Dushanbe on 16-17 June 2015.

Delegations from Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan participated in the session along with representatives of the UNECE and ESCAP secretariats. Representatives from other United Nations member States, international and regional organizations, as well as the business and academic community also participated in the International Conference and the seventh session of the PWG on KBD. The List of participants of the seventh session of the SPECA PWG on KBD and the International Conference is attached (Annex I).

Opening of the session

Mr. Akram Ruzizoda, Deputy Minister of Industry and New Technologies of Tajikistan, welcomed the participants to the session. Mr. Ruzizoda thanked UNECE and ESCAP for organizing the session, as well as the experts presenting during the International Conference "Practical steps towards a knowledge-based economy". He highlighted the importance of this theme for SPECA countries, with Tajikistan looking to promote new technologies and ideas for application in the domestic economy.

Ms. Tiziana Bonapace, Head of the ESCAP Subregional Office for North and Central Asia, welcomed participants to the seventh session and expressed her gratitude to the Government of Tajikistan for hosting the SPECA events. She also thanked UNECE for taking the lead in organizing the seventh session and International conference. Ms. Bonapace briefed delegates on economic

developments and policy opportunities in the SPECA region as well as ongoing discussions of options to strengthen the United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia. The tenth session of the SPECA Governing Council and 2015 SPECA Economic Forum in Dushanbe in November 2015 will provide a good opportunity to discuss this issue further.

Mr. Christopher Athey, UNECE Secretary to the PWG on KBD and Economic Affairs Officer in the UNECE Economic Cooperation and Trade Division, welcomed the seventh session and expressed his gratitude to the Government of Tajikistan for their hospitality in hosting the seventh session of the SPECA PWG on KBD and the International Conference on “Practical steps towards a knowledge-based economy”. Mr. Athey also briefed delegates on the emerging results of a questionnaire to SPECA countries on measures to strengthen the Programme.

Election of officers and adoption of the agenda

The PWG elected Mr. Akram Ruzizoda, Deputy Minister of Industry and New Technologies of Tajikistan, as Chairperson of the seventh session of the PWG on KBD.

The PWG on KBD adopted the agenda for its seventh session.

Outcomes of the International Conference on “Practical steps towards a knowledge-based economy”

Mr. Athey provided a summary of Session I of the International Conference, i.e. the presentation and discussion of the main conclusions and policy recommendations of the UNECE Innovation Performance Review of Tajikistan.

Mr. Rémi Lang, ESCAP Secretary to the SPECA PWG on KBD and Economic Affairs Officer in the ESCAP Information and Communications Technologies (ICT) and Disaster Risk Reduction Division, provided a summary of Session II of the International Conference on “Improving broadband connectivity in Central Asia”.

A summary of the main outcomes of the International Conference is included in Annex II.

Review of the activities of the SPECA PWG on KBD since its last session

Mr. Athey and Mr. Lang reported on activities carried out since the sixth session of the SPECA PWG on KBD in Ashgabat on 11 June 2014, and described the activities planned for the second half of 2015. The Progress report on the activities of the PWG on KBD since the sixth session can be found in Annex III.

Delegates expressed their satisfaction with implementation of the Programme of Work for 2014-2015, and their interest in the activities planned for the second half of 2015.

Review of the Programme of Work of the SPECA PWG on KBD for 2016-2017

Mr. Athey and Mr. Lang presented the Programme of Work of the PWG on KBD for 2016-2017.

Delegates welcomed the UNECE Innovation Performance Review of Tajikistan as an important policy advisory service, and encouraged the implementation of such reviews in other SPECA countries.

Delegates welcomed the important work of ESCAP and Internet Society on broadband and Internet connectivity in Central Asia. The results of the study on “unleashing the benefits of broadband for Central Asia” should be fed into the deliberations of the Working group on the Asia-Pacific information superhighway.

The PWG agreed that the details of the envisaged activities in the Programme of Work for 2016-2017 as adopted (Annex IV) could be further elaborated in consultation with the host countries of these future activities.

Date and venue of the next session of the SPECA PWG on KBD

The PWG agreed to hold its next session in 2016 and that the exact date and venue of the eighth session of the PWG would be decided through consultations with the SPECA countries.

Other business

The delegation of Azerbaijan thanked the Government of Tajikistan for its warm hospitality and the UNECE and ESCAP secretariats for the excellent organization of the SPECA events in Dushanbe. They highlighted the importance of the work of the SPECA PWG on KBD and of ESCAP in relation to Internet connectivity. They also highlighted the relevance of public-private partnership models to the development of ICT infrastructure, and the importance of engaging with international financial institutions to help secure the necessary finance.

The delegation of Kyrgyzstan expressed their gratitude for an interesting and informative conference, and requested the UNECE secretariat to carry out an Innovation Performance Review of Kyrgyzstan, subject to availability of UNECE extrabudgetary funding.

The delegation of Turkmenistan also expressed their thanks to the host country and all organizers of the SPECA events in Dushanbe, and provided a briefing on recent developments on innovation policy in Turkmenistan.

Adoption of decisions

The proposed draft decisions were adopted by the delegations of SPECA countries. The Decisions of the seventh session of the SPECA Project Working Group on Knowledge-based Development are attached to this report (Annex V).

Closing of the session

His Excellency Mr. Shavkat Bobozoda, Minister of Industry and New Technologies of Tajikistan, thanked the UNECE and ESCAP secretariats for their support to the organization of these important events. He expressed his gratitude to all delegates and experts for their active participation in the work of the 2015 session of the SPECA Project Working Group on Knowledge-based Development and the International Conference on Practical steps towards a knowledge-based economy.

Mr. Ralph Heinrich, Chief of the Innovative Policies Development Section of the UNECE and Ms. Tiziana Bonapace, Head of the ESCAP Subregional Office for North and Central Asia, expressed sincere gratitude, on behalf of the UNECE and ESCAP secretariats, to the Government of Tajikistan for the excellent organization and hospitality extended to the participants of the International Conference and the seventh session of the SPECA PWG on KBD. They also expressed their appreciation to all delegates from SPECA countries for their active participation and cooperation in these events.

Ms. Bonapace emphasized the importance of bringing the outcomes of these SPECA events to the attention of the high-level SPECA meetings in Dushanbe in November 2015.

Mr. Akram Ruzizoda, Chairperson of the seventh session of the SPECA Project Working Group on Knowledge-based Development, expressed his thanks to all participants and closed the session.

**International Conference
“Practical steps towards a knowledge-based economy”
and
Seventh session of the SPECA PWG on KBD**

(Dushanbe, Tajikistan, 16-17 June 2015)

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ANNEX II

SUMMARY

International Conference on Practical Steps Towards a Knowledge-based Economy

(Dushanbe, Tajikistan, 16 June 2015)

Session I: Innovation Performance Review of Tajikistan

1. Innovation policy in Tajikistan should focus on relaxing interrelated constraints linked to a lack of skills, knowledge, resources, incentives and opportunities for innovative businesses. For maximum impact, policy should also focus on issues that are critical for the functioning of the national innovation system and which would produce visible results quickly without requiring substantial financial and human resources. Policy should also be guided by addressing system failures, as many current policy issues result from deficient interactions within the national innovation system, rather than from missing components.

2. Specific policy priorities could be to:

- Increase investment in education and vocational and on-the-job training, and in R&D to improve absorptive and adaptive capacities, oriented at international quality standards. This requires finance from international donors because the resource requirements will be significant given the young and growing population.
- Facilitate access to foreign knowledge and innovative products, services and solutions proven in foreign markets. This is cheaper, faster and less risky than developing completely new products and services at home. Conduits of foreign knowledge are the import of machinery, foreign direct investment, the acquisition of foreign knowledge via licensing agreements, and learning via the international mobility of workers, business people, researchers and teachers. Investments in skills and domestic R&D are also necessary to successfully absorb and adapt foreign knowledge and innovations.
- Mobilize remittances for domestic investment and attract foreign investment, with due regard to increasing access to financial services, including by developing new means of payments. This will not only relax domestic financing constraints, but also bring in new knowledge. It is particularly important to facilitate knowledge spillovers from foreign firms to the domestic economy.
- Improve the general business environment. Regulatory reforms, such as reducing the number of permits required to open a business, can be undertaken at low cost to the budget. They can be done relatively quickly as good practices are readily available. And they are essential for improving

incentives and opportunities for innovation-based investments. Energy and transportation infrastructure also needs to be upgraded. This will require significant investments, including by multilateral financial institutions.

- Rationalize and coordinate existing innovation policies to reduce waste and improve effectiveness (in terms of budgetary resources and policy implementation capacity).
- Facilitate quality improvements and innovations in business processes and management. These may be achieved with relatively little expense relatively quickly, and bring significant benefits by improving the prospects of businesses to penetrate international markets, including by finding niches in global value chains.
- Focus policy support on existing industries, particularly on tradable goods and labour-intensive industries, to support productivity improvements which can then form the basis for additional investment and economic diversification into related activities.

Session II: Improving Broadband Connectivity in Central Asia

3. The experts took note of the preliminary findings of the ESCAP-ISOC study on “unleashing the benefits of broadband for Central Asia”. The experts noted the important positive impact ICT, and broadband in particular could have on socio-economic progress. They also noted that Central Asia could derive benefits of its geostrategic location, and act as a landlinking hub for Eurasia.

4. The experts observed that access to and affordability of broadband varies greatly across Central Asian countries. While mobile and mobile broadband penetration have progressed, the experts observed that further broadband progression is hampered by high prices at the consumer level in a number of countries of the region, with a risk of widening the digital divide.

5. In line with the study, the experts emphasized that low international bandwidth and weak international infrastructure contribute to very high prices for international transit in some of the countries of the region, which in turns contribute to unaffordable and low quality broadband services for final consumers. The experts called for the study to look into greater depth at other major determinants of the broadband price throughout the broadband value chain different tiers, in order to better understand the factors ultimately affecting broadband prices at the national level.

6. Experts concurred with the study’s premises that access to key infrastructure, including to international gateways and legacy fiber optic transmission networks needs to be improved and made more open, to bring about price drops in broadband services. In this respect, policy and regulatory framework will need to be reformed to stimulate competition. The experts requested the final version of the study to issue in-depth recommendations in this regard

7. The experts also concurred with the study's analysis that traffic management needs to be improved in the region to address tromboning and inefficient IP transit patterns at the regional level. They agreed with the study's preliminary findings that more Internet Exchange Points (IXPs) should be created in the region. They requested the study to issue recommendations in this regard. In particular, the final version of the study should examine how regional internet traffic could be improved through regional IXPs.

8. The experts took note of the major role the ESCAP Asia Pacific information superhighway could play in all of the above points. They endorsed its objective of creating a resilient and seamless meshed network of transmission infrastructure throughout the continent. In that respect, the experts recommended to revise ESCAP's Asian Highway and Trans-Asian Railway agreements so that fiber optic cables be more systematically deployed when these infrastructures are built or maintained. They also expressed their interest in the World Bank's CARFON initiative to create a subregional fibre network using the rights of ways of electric transmission lines.

9. The experts were informed of the recent creation by ESCAP's member States of the open-working group on the Asia-Pacific information superhighway, and of the organization of its first session, in early September, in Incheon, Republic of Korea. They recommended that Central Asian countries take an active part in this working group.

10. The experts called on the final results of the study prepared by ISOC and ESCAP to be fed into the deliberations of the working group on the Asia-Pacific information superhighway. In this regard, he experts agreed to support its finalization by providing information through the questionnaires shared by ESCAP and ISOC.

PROGRESS REPORT ON THE ACTIVITIES OF THE PWG ON KBD

This report contains activities organized by the UNECE and ESCAP secretariats either within the framework of the SPECA Project Working Group on Knowledge-based Development (PWG on KBD), or addressing topics within its thematic areas that were held since the sixth session of the SPECA PWG on KBD in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan, 11 June 2014.

The Programme of Work of the PWG for 2014-2015 was adopted at the fifth session of the PWG on KBD, held in Baku on 4 December 2013. The UNECE and ESCAP secretariats have carried out the following capacity-building activities for SPECA countries since the sixth session:

Implementation of the UNECE project “Innovation Performance Reviews”

- Within the framework of this project, *Innovation Performance Reviews of Kazakhstan and other CIS countries* have been completed. Reports are available in English and Russian. *The Follow-up Workshop to the Innovation Performance Review of Kazakhstan “Strategy for International Cooperation in Science, Technology and Innovations and International Technology Transfer: Policies and Practices”* was organized in Astana, Kazakhstan, on 29 October 2014.
- Within the framework of the preparation of *the Innovation Performance Review of Tajikistan*, the UNECE preparatory mission on Innovation Performance Review of Tajikistan and the Fact-finding mission on Innovation Performance Review of Tajikistan with participation of the International Team of Experts were held in November 2014 and March 2015. Ongoing preparation of the Innovation Performance Review of Tajikistan will be discussed during the *International Conference “Practical steps towards a knowledge-based economy”* in Dushanbe on 16-17 June 2015.

Implementation of the ESCAP project “Expanding connectivity of North and Central Asia with the Asia-Pacific region through the development of ICT infrastructure and networks”

- The outcomes of the ESCAP High-level Regional Roundtable on Telecommunications Connectivity in Central Asia in Almaty, Kazakhstan, 3 June 2014 provided the basis for the Almaty Declaration on Strengthening Central Asia Connectivity through Enhanced Telecommunications Infrastructure, which was presented at the 4th session of the ESCAP Committee on ICT held in Bangkok, Thailand, 14 - 16 October 2014.

- Under this project, ESCAP has established a partnership with the Internet Society to carry out *a joint study on Unleashing the Potential of the Internet in Central Asia and Beyond*. Early results of this study will be discussed in Dushanbe on 17 June 2015.
- ESCAP also carried out an *In-Depth Study on the Broadband Infrastructure in Afghanistan*, April 2015, focusing on an assessment of current fibre optic infrastructure and an analysis of broadband trends.

Institutional capacity-building for regional cooperation on disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation

- ESCAP provided sustained technical support to Kyrgyzstan, which hosted a series of regional ministerial conference on disaster risk reduction, to prepare a framework for regional cooperation on disaster risk reduction and the accompanying short-term plan of action. The draft was presented to and endorsed by a pre-conference ministerial meeting at the World Conference on DRR in Sendai, Japan, in March 2015, with the presence of ESCAP Executive Secretary.
- ESCAP supported the Ministry of Emergency Situations of the Kyrgyz Republic in *establishing national geoportal for disaster risk management (Geo-DRM)* in 2014 to address disaster by using integrated geospatial data. In addition, in May 2015 ESCAP dispatched an expert to provide technical advisory services and training in operating Geo-DRM. This should contribute to addressing disaster monitoring and management by using integrated geospatial data and socio-economic data in Kyrgyzstan.

Activities within the framework of the ESCAP - APCICT

- The National Training of Trainers Workshop on the “Primer Series on ICTD for Youth” was organized in Baku, Azerbaijan, 20 - 22 February 2015.
- Localization for APCICT Primer Series issue 1 “An Introduction to ICT for Development” in Azeri was completed, and the localization efforts for Primer Series issue 2 “Project Management and ICTD” are ongoing.
- Localizations of additional Academy Modules in Turkmen were completed, including modules 1, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10.

Representatives of the SPECA countries participated in the following events:

- Sixth session of the UNECE Team of Specialists on Public-Private Partnerships, Geneva, Switzerland, 23 - 24 June 2014.
- Seventh session of the UNECE Team of Specialists on Innovation and Competitiveness Policies, Geneva, Switzerland, 16 - 17 October 2014.

- UNECE International Conference on Public-Private Partnerships in the Water and Sanitation Sector, Geneva, Switzerland, 21 - 22 October 2014.
- “PPP Days 2015”, London, United Kingdom, 16 - 17 June 2015.
- ESCAP Regional Workshop on Social Media for Development, Incheon, Republic of Korea, 30 June - 2 July 2014.
- ESCAP Regional Training Workshop on the Use of Space Technology for Drought Monitoring and Early Warning, Beijing, China, 28 - 30 October 2014.
- ESCAP Regional Dialogue on ICTD Capacity-building for Sustainable Development and Annual Partners Meetings for the Academy and Primer Programmes, Incheon, Republic of Korea, 25 - 28 November 2014.
- ESCAP Workshop on Promoting ICT for Inclusive and Disaster Resilient Development, Ulan Bator, Mongolia, 14 - 15 May 2015.

PROGRAMME OF WORK OF THE SPECA PWG ON KBD FOR 2016-2017

The activities to be carried out by the Project Working Group on Knowledge-based Development (PWG on KBD) are demand-driven, focused on a limited number of priority topics and matched with available resources.

ACTIVITIES ENVISAGED FOR 2016-2017

1. Capacity-building in policy options and practical instruments to promote knowledge-based development

Objectives:

To strengthen the national capacity of the SPECA countries to advance knowledge-based development by developing relevant substantive skills, increasing the organizational capacity of the institutions involved, promoting regional cooperation and fostering investment in modern infrastructure.

Rationale:

The project is in line with the objectives of the PWG on KBD as specified in its Terms of Reference. Implementation is subject to the availability of UNECE extrabudgetary funds.

Proposed activities:

- (i) Organization of a regional/subregional capacity-building event on knowledge-based development, possibly in conjunction with annual session of the PWG on KBD (tentatively envisaged for 2016);
- (ii) Participation of experts from SPECA countries in UNECE policy-oriented meetings and capacity-building events on promoting knowledge-based development for policymakers and practitioners; and
- (iii) Policy advisory services and other events promoting knowledge-based development at the request of Governments of SPECA countries.

2. Implementation of the UNECE project on innovation performance reviews of selected countries

Objectives:

To increase the role of innovation in promoting further economic development of the SPECA countries.

Rationale:

The project is in line with the objectives of the PWG on KBD as specified in its Terms of Reference. Implementation is subject to the availability of UNECE extrabudgetary funds.

Proposed activities:

Undertaking Innovation Performance Reviews and supporting implementation of policy recommendations in selected countries of the SPECA region (envisaged for 2016 and 2017).

3. Implementation of ESCAP activities in support to the Asia-Pacific information superhighway initiative

Objectives:

To strengthen the capacity of SPECA countries to contribute to regional discussions in the Working Group on the Asia-Pacific information superhighway.

Rationale:

The project is in line with the objectives of the PWG on KBD as specified in its Terms of Reference. Implementation is subject to the availability of ESCAP extrabudgetary funds.

Proposed activities:

- (i) Participation of experts from SPECA countries in a regional capacity-building event on the Asia-Pacific information superhighway's principle and norms, in parallel to one of the sessions of the Working Group on the Asia-Pacific information superhighway;
- (ii) Development of a repository of cross-border infrastructure projects susceptible to host fiber optic cables co-deployment; and
- (iii) Preparation of a policy tool-kit on good practices in terms of co-deployment of fiber optic cables along other utilities infrastructure.

4. Enhancing national capacities to use ICT for socio-economic development

Objectives:

To enhance the capacities of policymakers, government officials and other relevant stakeholders to promote, adopt and utilize ICT for achieving national sustainable development goals.

Rationale:

The project is in line with the objectives of the PWG on KBD as specified in its Terms of Reference. The activities will be funded through the extrabudgetary resources of APCICT and co-funding mobilized through national and subregional partners.

Proposed activities:

- (i) Conduct capacity-building workshops on APCICT's flagship ICT for development programmes;
- (ii) Development of localized versions of the APCICT training modules, targeted at SPECA countries;
- (iii) Conduct subregional training-of-trainers workshops. These workshops aim to strengthen the pool of national resource persons capable of delivering the various training modules;
- (iv) Provide advisory services to SPECA countries in areas related to ICT for socio-economic development, subject to funding and resource availability; and
- (v) Conduct capacity-building workshops on the application of ICT tools for renewable energy resource assessments at the national level in SPECA countries, subject to funding and resource availability (APCTT).

5. Capacity development on the utilization of ICT for disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation

Objectives:

Develop knowledge-based tools for disaster risk management, and build resilience into development policy and planning of SPECA countries.

Rationale:

The project contributes to the objectives of the PWG on KBD as specified in the Terms of Reference, in particular to objective of knowledge-based disaster risk reduction and management. Implementation will be financed from the ESCAP extrabudgetary funds.

Proposed activities:

- (i) Assist SPECA countries to access cooperation mechanisms such as RESAP and RIMES;
- (ii) Conduct activities on measuring resilience; and
- (iii) ESCAP provides continued support on DRR and climate change adaptation in the context of the Ministerial Regional Conference on disaster risk reduction.

SUMMARY TABLE

Area of Activity	Lead Executive Agency	Timeframe
Ongoing and planned projects/activities with funding secured or expected. These activities would be implemented in mutually reinforcing way. Additional support from interested partners would expand the scope and the number of beneficiaries of these projects/activities.		
Capacity-building in policy options and practical instruments to promote knowledge-based development	UNECE	2016-2017
Implementation of the UNECE project on innovation performance reviews of selected countries	UNECE	2016-2017
Implementation of ESCAP activities in support to the Asia-Pacific information superhighway initiative	ESCAP	2016-2017
Enhancing national capacities to use ICT for socio-economic development	ESCAP	2016-2017
Capacity development on the utilization of ICT for disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation	ESCAP	2016-2017

ANNEX V

**DECISIONS
OF THE SEVENTH SESSION OF THE SPECA PWG ON KBD**

1. The Project Working Group on Knowledge-based Development (PWG on KBD) noted with satisfaction the outcomes of the International Conference “Practical steps towards a knowledge-based economy”.
2. The PWG noted the usefulness of the policy recommendations of the Innovation Performance Review of Tajikistan. The PWG welcomed the lively discussion which took place during Session I of the International Conference, to be included as a summary in Annex II of the Report of this session. The PWG requested the main points of this important discussion be reflected in the content and policy recommendations of the final version of the Innovation Performance Review of Tajikistan. The PWG appreciated the value of the work of the UNECE secretariat in carrying out Innovation Performance Reviews in Kazakhstan and Tajikistan and asked them to consider the possibility of continuing this activity in other SPECA countries.
3. The PWG noted the crucial need to improve broadband connectivity in the SPECA region, as discussed during session II of the International Conference. The PWG took stock of the work being carried out in this regards by ESCAP in cooperation with the World Bank and Internet Society, including the ESCAP Asia-Pacific information superhighway initiative. The PWG welcomed ESCAP resolution 71/10 on “Strengthening regional information and communications technology connectivity through the Asia-Pacific information superhighway”. The PWG stressed the importance of contributing actively to the first meeting of the Working Group on the Asia-Pacific information superhighway on 1-2 September 2015 in the Republic of Korea. The discussions held during this session will be included as a summary in Annex II of the report of the current session.
4. The PWG noted the briefing provided by the secretariat on the strengthening of SPECA, a theme which will be discussed further at the tenth session of the SPECA Governing Council. The UNECE and ESCAP secretariats welcomed the strong participation and fruitful discussion during the current PWG events in Dushanbe.
5. The PWG took note of the review of the activities of the SPECA PWG on KBD since its last session. Delegates noted with satisfaction the activities carried out within the framework of the PWG.
6. The PWG took note of the presentations on the Programme of Work of the SPECA PWG on KBD for 2016-2017 by the UNECE and ESCAP secretariats. The

PWG emphasized the relevance of the proposed activities to the knowledge-based development of the SPECA countries.

7. The PWG on KBD adopted its Programme of Work for 2016-2017.

8. The PWG underlined the importance of partnerships with all stakeholders at the national and international levels. In this regard, the Group recommended that national representatives actively involve relevant stakeholders in the PWG activities.

9. The PWG agreed to hold its eighth session in 2016 and that the exact date and venue will be decided through consultations with the SPECA countries.

10. The PWG expressed its sincere gratitude to the Government of Tajikistan for the excellent organization of the meetings and the hospitality offered to participants.

11. The PWG expressed its appreciation to the secretariats of UNECE and ESCAP for their efforts in organizing these events, and their active work to support the activities of the PWG on KBD.
