



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

Eighth Session of the SPECA Working Group
on Knowledge-based Development

(Almaty, Kazakhstan, 22 September 2016)

REPORT

The eighth session of the SPECA Working Group on Knowledge-based Development (WG on KBD) was jointly organized by ESCAP and UNECE at the invitation of the Government of Kazakhstan in Almaty on 22 September 2016. In conjunction with the session, ESCAP and UNECE organized a regional workshop on “Resilient ICT Connectivity for the Knowledge Economy, SDGs and the WSIS Goals” in Almaty on 20-22 September 2016. The events were hosted by Centre for Emergency Situations and Disaster Risk Reduction (CESDRR).

Delegations from Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan participated in the session along with representatives of the ESCAP and UNECE secretariats. Representatives of other UN agencies and programmes, international and regional organizations, as well as representatives of the private sector and the academic community also participated in the regional workshop and the eighth session of the WG on KBD. The List of participants of the eighth session of the SPECA WG on KBD and the regional workshop is attached (Annex I).

Opening of the session

Mr. Dzhergalbek Ukashev, Deputy Director of the CESDRR, welcomed the participants to the session. Mr. Ukashev thanked the ESCAP and UNECE secretariats for organizing the session, as well as the experts participating in the regional workshop on “Resilient ICT Connectivity for the Knowledge Economy, SDGs and the SWIS Goals”. He highlighted the importance of this theme for the SPECA countries, expressed his wishes that further efforts be accorded to Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) and ICT within the region and called for further collaboration among the stakeholders.

Mr. Arslan Dandybayev, Head of the Representative Office of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Almaty, Kazakhstan, welcomed participants to the eighth session and expressed his appreciation for the productive discussions between delegates and experts during the regional workshop on “Resilient ICT Connectivity for the

Knowledge Economy, SDGs and the WSIS Goals”, and his thanks to the CESDRR, ESCAP and UNECE secretariats for their efforts in organizing the events.

Ms. Tiziana Bonapace, Head of the ESCAP Subregional Office for North and Central Asia, welcomed participants to the eighth session and expressed her gratitude to the Government of Kazakhstan and the CESDRR for hosting the SPECA events. She also thanked UNECE for their excellent collaboration in co-organizing these events. Ms. Bonapace drew delegates’ attention to the eleventh session of the SPECA Governing Council (GC) and 2016 SPECA Economic Forum in Ganja in November 2016, which will provide a good opportunity for further discussion of SPECA priorities. Ms. Bonapace noted that the results of the deliberations made during the SPECA WG on KBD session and the preceding regional workshop will feed into the SPECA GC session, as well as serve as a basis for discussion at the inaugural session of the ESCAP Committee on Information and Communications Technology, Science, Technology and Innovation to be held on 5-7 October 2016 in Bangkok. Ms. Bonapace also noted the importance of the themes discussed during the regional workshop, in particular the cross-border nature of DRR and ICT connectivity, which require close regional cooperation. Ms. Bonapace highlighted ESCAP’s Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway (AP-IS) initiative as a way forward to increase resilience and ICT connectivity in the region.

Mr. Christopher Athey, UNECE Secretary to the WG on KBD and Economic Affairs Officer, UNECE Economic Cooperation and Trade Division, welcomed the eighth session and expressed his gratitude to the Government of Kazakhstan and the CESDRR for their hospitality in hosting the eighth session of the SPECA WG on KBD and the regional workshop on “Resilient ICT Connectivity for the Knowledge Economy, SDGs and the WSIS Goals”. Mr. Athey highlighted the continued usefulness of the WG for promoting knowledge-based development in SPECA countries, and thanked ESCAP for taking the lead in organizing the regional workshop alongside this year’s session of the WG on KBD.

Election of officers and adoption of the agenda

The WG elected Mr. Dzhergalbek Ukashev, Deputy Director of the CESDRR, as Chairperson of the eighth session of the WG on KBD.

The SPECA WG on KBD adopted the agenda for its eighth session.

Outcomes of the regional workshop on “Resilient ICT Connectivity for the Knowledge Economy, SDGs and the WSIS Goals”

Ms. Atsuko Okuda, Chief of the ICT and Development Section of the ICT and Disaster Risk Reduction Division (IDD), ESCAP, provided a summary of the main outcomes of the regional workshop.

An expert from the Russian Federation reiterated his proposed new paradigm of dealing with Emergency Situations (ES) using existing ICT devices, which could significantly decrease material losses and casualties from ES.

A summary of the main outcomes of the regional workshop is included in Annex II.

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

Mr. Athey and Ms. Okuda reported on activities carried out since the seventh session of the SPECA WG on KBD in Dushanbe on 17 June 2015, and described the activities planned for the second half of 2016 and 2017. The Progress report on the activities of the WG on KBD since the seventh session can be found in Annex III.

Delegates expressed their satisfaction with implementation of the Programme of Work for 2016-2017, and their interest in the activities planned for the second half of 2016 and 2017.

Delegates indicated their continued satisfaction with the activities of the WG on KBD and emphasised its importance for future policy development. Delegates requested the two United Nations Commissions present a draft of the updated Terms of Reference of the SPECA WG on KBD for discussion and adoption at its next session.

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

Mr. Athey and Ms. Okuda presented the Programme of Work of the WG on KBD for 2016-2017.

Delegates expressed their continued interest in the UNECE Innovation Performance Reviews. They encouraged the implementation of such reviews in other SPECA countries, including second round reviews on Innovation for Sustainable Development, as appropriate and subject to availability of extrabudgetary resources.

Delegates noted that, without ICT connectivity, it is hard to achieve results in any field of development, and highlighted ICT connectivity as particularly important for DRR. As a way forward to enhance resilience and connectivity, the delegates expressed strong support for the continuous work of ESCAP on the AP-IS initiative to bridge the digital divide in the region.

A delegate from Kyrgyzstan suggested greater continuity of participation of delegates in the WG on KBD, and that consideration be given to the creation of subgroups on thematic areas of work of the WG on KBD for specific implementation activities. A delegate from Kazakhstan supported the suggestion on greater continuity and participation of delegates in the WG on KBD.

The WG agreed that the details of the envisaged activities in the Programme of Work for 2016-2017 could be further elaborated in consultation with the host countries of these future activities.

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

The WG agreed to hold its next session in 2017 and that the exact date and venue of the ninth session of the WG would be decided through consultations with the SPECA countries.

Other business

Delegates and other attendees thanked the Government of Kazakhstan and the CESDRR for their hospitality, and the ESCAP and UNECE secretariats for the excellent organization of the SPECA WG on KBD events in Almaty.

The delegation of Azerbaijan highlighted the importance of the work of the SPECA WG on KBD and the issues discussed during the regional workshop in relation to ICT connectivity, resilience and disaster risk reduction. They encouraged the further development of policy initiatives to improve broadband connectivity, particularly through Trans-Eurasian Information Super Highway (TASIM) and ESCAP's AP-IS initiative.

The delegation of Kazakhstan provided a brief overview of the current situation, as well as recent and planned policy initiatives in the areas of ICT and telecommunications in the country. They highlighted the strategic importance of ICT to all countries, with policy challenges transcending national boundaries. Technological change has the potential to accelerate realisation of the SDGs, with ICT as one of the foundations for knowledge-based development.

The delegation of Kyrgyzstan highlighted the importance of resilient information management systems, and early warning systems in the event of natural disasters. They briefly presented some key recent policy initiatives implemented in Kyrgyzstan in this regard, including an initiative supported by international donors to improve the management of information and crisis situations.

Adoption of decisions

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

Closing of the session

Mr. Athey and Mr. Pomoshchnikov, Head of the Joint ESCAP/UNECE SPECA Office in Almaty and Senior Economic Affairs Officer of the ESCAP Subregional Office for North and Central Asia, expressed sincere gratitude, on behalf

of the ESCAP and UNECE secretariats, to the Government of Kazakhstan and particularly to the CESDRR for the excellent organization and hospitality extended to the participants of the regional workshop and the annual session of the SPECA WG on KBD. They also expressed their appreciation to all delegates from SPECA countries for their active participation and cooperation in these events.

Mr. Ukashev, Chairperson of the eighth session of the SPECA Working Group on Knowledge-based Development, thanked the ESCAP and UNECE 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 2016 session of the SPECA Working Group on Knowledge-based Development and the regional workshop on “Resilient ICT Connectivity for the Knowledge Economy, SDGs and the WSIS Goals” and closed the session.

Regional workshop
“Resilient ICT Connectivity for the Knowledge Economy, SDGs and
the WSIS Goals”
and
Eighth session of the SPECA WG on KBD
(Almaty, Kazakhstan, 20-22 September 2016)

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

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Regional Workshop on Resilient ICT Connectivity for the Knowledge Economy, SDGs and the WSIS Goals

(Almaty, Kazakhstan, 20-22 September 2016)

SUMMARY

The Regional Workshop was held from 20 to 22 September 2016 in Almaty, Kazakhstan. Attended by more than 50 participants, including representatives of governments, international and regional organizations, non-governmental organizations and academia, the meeting discussed the emerging topic of resilient Information and Communications Technology (ICT) connectivity as a basis for the knowledge economy and knowledge-based development among the SPECA countries.

The meeting specifically addressed the broadband gaps which exist between SPECA countries and the rest of the ESCAP countries as well as among the SPECA countries. Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan were cited as leading the SPECA region, while Afghanistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan demonstrated slow growth. The meeting participants noted that the development of reliable, affordable and resilient broadband networks was a prerequisite for knowledge based development and knowledge economy.

The meeting also examined the natural hazards which impact on knowledge-based development and knowledge economy. The ESCAP study identified that the SPECA countries face risks associated with earthquake, floods and extreme weathers and the seismic risks are concentrated around populated areas. While disaster risk reduction (DRR) should be mainstreamed in all sectors, the meeting participants were informed that ICT as a sector was particularly important, as it is a critical infrastructure itself and is an enabler which support other socioeconomic development in society. In this context, the workshop examined various aspects of ICT for DRR, such as Internet of Things (IoT) for detecting hazards and personalizing responses and risk governance, while providing opportunities to member countries to share experience in promoting ICT for DRR and disaster response.

The meeting then discussed a larger context of connecting ICT and resilience with SDGs and WSIS goals and reviewed concrete examples of how ICT and DRR initiatives have been instrumental. In addition to UNECE and UNIC presentations, the participants also learned how Pakistan succeeded in introducing mobile payments and expanding ICT access, thus creating a virtuous cycle. The presentation by ITU focused on global WSIS processes and introduced WSIS prize winners who demonstrated applications, tools and initiatives which promoted innovative use of ICT in various socioeconomic sectors. The demonstration of these initiatives prompted active discussions among participants.

ICT capacity development was introduced by the Asia-Pacific Training Centre for Information and Communication Technology for Development (APCICT) of ESCAP, followed by the Center's recent initiative of promoting e-commerce among women

entrepreneurs across the region. The translation of the materials into Russian generated interests among the participants.

The meeting concluded with the session on the way forward, which included the overview on the upcoming session of the Committee on Information and Communications Technology, Science, Technology and Innovation, scheduled from 5 to 7 October 2016 in Bangkok. This inaugural session of the Committee will table the agenda items which were debated during this Regional Workshop, namely the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway (AP-IS) Master Plan and Regional Cooperation Framework Document, e-resilience and WSIS regional review.

The meeting participants agreed that the Regional Workshop was helpful in presenting emerging development challenges and opportunities for the SPECA region, identifying elements of ICT and DRR for future policy and programmes, building consensus on the need for enhanced and expanded regional cooperation and partnerships on regional platforms of ESCAP and UNECE, including sharing of knowledge, good practices and lessons learned. It was also agreed that the deliberations should be shared by SPECA country representatives at the upcoming Committee meeting.

PROGRESS REPORT ON THE ACTIVITIES OF THE WG ON KBD

The eighth session of the SPECA Working Group on Knowledge-based Development (formerly the Project Working Group on Knowledge-based Development, PWG on KBD), jointly organized by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and hosted by the Center for Emergency Situations and Disaster Risk Reduction (CESDRR), was held in Almaty, Kazakhstan, on 22 September 2016. In conjunction with the session, ESCAP organized a Regional Workshop on Resilient Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Connectivity for the Knowledge Economy, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) Goals from 20 to 22 September 2016.

The Regional Workshop addressed the emerging issues of resilient ICT connectivity as a basis for the knowledge economy and knowledge-based development among the SPECA countries. The meeting will specifically address how to enhance e-resilience in network design, make more efficient use of ICT for emergency communication and reduce the impact of disasters on businesses and governments, within the context of achieving internationally agreed goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the WSIS. The results of the Regional Workshop served as a basis for discussion of the eighth session of the SPECA Working Group.

This progress report contains activities carried out/to be carried out by the UNECE and ESCAP secretariats within the framework of the SPECA Working Group on knowledge-based development that were held since the seventh session of the SPECA WG on KBD in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, on 17 June 2015. These activities are in line with the Programme of Work of the WG for 2016-2017, which was adopted at the seventh session. UNECE and ESCAP secretariats carried out the following capacity-building activities for the SPECA countries:

Implementation of the UNECE project “Innovation Performance Reviews”

- The **Innovation Performance Review of Tajikistan** was completed in 2015. It has been published as an official United Nations publication in English and Russian.
- An international conference was organized in November 2015 in Minsk, Belarus, to learn from the experience with the first five reviews, including those of Kazakhstan and Tajikistan, to discuss the scope for methodological improvements, to prepare for the second round of reviews, and to adapt the reviews to generate insights and recommendations on innovation for sustainable development.
- At the 2015 SPECA Economic Forum in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, in November 2015, a session was organized on innovation, in which findings and recommendations from the Innovation Performance Review of Tajikistan were presented.

Implementation of UNECE capacity-building activities on policy options and practical instruments to promote knowledge-based development

- International UNECE Public-private Partnership (PPP) Forum on Implementing the United Nations 2030 Agenda through effective, people-first Public-private Partnerships, 29 March - 1 April 2016 in Geneva, Switzerland. One of the “people-first” PPP projects identified was the Pamir Private Power Project in Tajikistan.
- Meeting of the Business Advisory Board (BAB), held in Geneva, 31 March 2016, provided the occasion for Kazakhstan to present a number of PPP projects in the health sector, for feedback from the BAB.

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

- The Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway (AP-IS) Master Plan and Regional Cooperation Framework Document were presented at the Regional Workshop on Resilient ICT Connectivity for the Knowledge Economy, SDGs and the WSIS Goals on 22 September 2016 in Almaty, Kazakhstan.
- The AP-IS Master Plan and Regional Cooperation Framework Document will also be presented and discussed during a meeting scheduled back-to-back with the first session of the ESCAP Committee on Information and Communications Technology, Science, Technology and Innovation in Bangkok, Thailand, on 3 and 4 October 2016.
- In 2015, in collaboration with ADB and ISOC, ESCAP finalized a report, titled “Unleashing the Potential of the Internet in Central Asia, South Asia, the Caucasus and Beyond”, which assessed the status of Internet connectivity and identified key elements to transition from a basic Internet economy to a thriving digital economy and society.

Activities within the framework of UN-APCICT/ESCAP

- Organized a Roundtable on Academy of ICT Essentials for Government Leaders Programme (the Academy) during the Global Conference on Professional Civil Service for the Successful Implementation of Institutional Reforms, Astana, Kazakhstan, 25 May 2016.
- Developed a knowledge product on “Social Media for Disaster Risk Management” for government officials to supplement the Academy module ICT and Disaster Risk Management, and shared with Academy partner institutes in the region.
- Supported civil service training programmes and initiatives through localization and utilization of the Academy Programme in Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

- Supported the localization and utilization of the Primer Series on ICTD for Youth (Primer Series) among institutions of higher learning in Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan.
- Provided advisory services for curriculum development and institutionalization of the Primer Series programme in Kazakhstan.
- Collaborated with Public Fund Civil Internet Policy Initiative to enhance awareness of issues relevant to women's economic empowerment and introduce the Women and ICT Frontier Initiative programme (WIFI) during the Media Engagement Workshop, Dushanbe, Tajikistan, 11 August 2016.

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

- ESCAP provided a government official of the Ministry of Emergency Situations of Kyrgyzstan with a study opportunity, a nine-month post graduate course on remote sensing and geographic information systems, which was conducted at the Centre for Space Science, Technology and Education for Asia and the Pacific (CSSTEAP) in Dehradun, India, from 1 July 2015 to 31 March 2016. The course provided in-depth understanding and capacity-building on the use of remote sensing and geographic information systems in diverse, sustainable development sectors such as disaster management, resource management and urban planning.
- Although Kyrgyzstan is a pilot for the Regional Cooperative Mechanism for Drought Monitoring and Early Warning, work has not begun in the country yet. ESCAP is consulting with the Russian Federation and other donors on funding the implementation in Central Asian countries. Experts from Kyrgyzstan benefited from a nine-month master's degree in India, establishing a good technical basis for future activities in the country.
- ESCAP organized the Expert Group Meeting on Capacity Development for Disaster Information Management in North and Central Asia, in Almaty, Kazakhstan, on 26 and 27 February 2014. Experts from Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and other countries expressed support for the Asian and Pacific Centre for the Development of Disaster Information Management (APDIM) to provide capacity development activities on disaster information management. Pursuant to Commission resolution 71/11 on the establishment of APDIM, it was proposed to initiate activities of the Centre during 2016-2017 with the financial support from the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran, to support the most vulnerable countries in Asia and the Pacific in disaster risk management.
- ESCAP is also assisting the Government of Afghanistan with the disaster management system to be aligned with the Sendai Framework on Disaster Risk Reduction (SFDRR), in particular capacity-building training to be incorporated as a strategic component of the disaster risk management system.

Representatives of the SPECA countries participated in the following events:

- Seventh session of the UNECE Team of Specialists on Public-Private Partnerships, London, United Kingdom, 18 June 2015
- High-level International Conference on Unlocking the Economic Potential for Sustainable Development, Geneva, Switzerland, 2 September 2015
- Ninth session of the UNECE Committee on Innovation, Competitiveness and Public-Private Partnerships, Geneva, Switzerland, 3 and 4 September 2015
- Eighth session of the UNECE Team of Specialists on Innovation and Competitiveness Policies, Geneva, Switzerland, 16 and 17 December 2015
- Tenth session of the UNECE Committee on Innovation, Competitiveness and Public-Private Partnerships, 23 and 24 May 2016
- International UNECE PPP Forum Implementing the United Nations 2030 Agenda through effective, people-first Public-Private Partnerships, Geneva, Switzerland, 30 March and 1 April 2016
- Expert Group Meeting on Engaged Learning in ICTD Education for Asia-Pacific Universities, Incheon, Republic of Korea, 18 and 19 August 2015
- Regional Dialogue on ICTD Capacity Building for Sustainable Development and Annual Partners Meetings for the Academy and Primer Programmes, Incheon, Republic of Korea, 1 to 4 December 2015
- Consultative Meeting on Women and ICT Frontier Initiative (WIFI), Incheon, Republic of Korea, 14 and 15 April 2016
- Regional Forum on ICT Human Capacity Development and Launch of the Women and ICT Frontier Initiative (WIFI), Incheon, Republic of Korea, 9 and 10 June 2016
- Second session of the ESCAP Working Group on the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway, Guangzhou, China, 29 and 30 August 2016
- ESCAP Workshop on Knowledge and Policy Gaps in Disaster Risk Reduction and Development Planning, Bangkok, Thailand, 8 and 9 March 2016
- ESCAP Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway (AP-IS) Private Sector Consultative Meeting, Bangkok, Thailand, 1 April 2016

ANNEX IV

DECISIONS OF THE EIGHTH SESSION OF THE SPECA WG ON KBD

1. The SPECA Working Group on Knowledge-based Development (TWG on KBD) noted with satisfaction the outcomes of the regional workshop on “Resilient ICT Connectivity for the Knowledge Economy, SDGs and the WSIS Goals” and the importance of this subject for the knowledge-based development and resilience of the SPECA region.
 2. The WG welcomed the lively discussions of the Regional Workshop, which reiterated the importance and timeliness of activities carried out within the framework of the main thematic areas of the SPECA WG on KBD in achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) Goals. Participants requested that a summary of the main outcomes of the regional workshop be included in Annex II of the Report of this session.
 3. The WG took note of the review of the activities of the SPECA WG on KBD since its last session in 2015. Delegates noted with satisfaction the activities carried out within the framework of the WG.
 4. The WG requested that the two United Nations Commissions present a draft of the updated Terms of Reference of the SPECA WG on KBD for discussion and adoption at its next session.
 5. The WG took note of the presentations on the Programme of Work of the SPECA WG on KBD for 2016-2017 by the ESCAP and UNECE secretariats. The WG emphasized the relevance of the Programme of Work of the SPECA WG on KBD for 2016-2017 to the knowledge-based development of the SPECA countries.
 6. The WG 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 WG activities.
 7. The WG agreed to hold its ninth session in 2017. The exact date and venue will be decided through consultations with the SPECA countries.
 8. The WG expressed its sincere gratitude to the Government of Kazakhstan and the Center for Emergency Situations and Disaster Risk Reduction (CESDRR) for the excellent organization of the meetings and the hospitality offered to participants.
 9. The WG expressed its appreciation to the secretariats of ESCAP and UNECE for their efforts in organizing these events, and their active work to support the activities of the SPECA Working Group on Knowledge-based Development.
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