



ESCWA

United Nations
Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

Regional Plan of Action (RPOA) for Building the Information Society

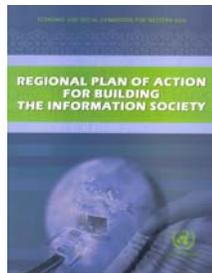
Background



ESCWA took a leading role in the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) processes. ESCWA preparation for WSIS started with the organization of the "Western Asia Preparatory Conference for WSIS" early in 2003 for the Geneva phase. In late 2004, ESCWA organized the "Second Regional Preparatory Conference for WSIS - Partnership for Building the Arab Information Society" for the Tunis phase, which resulted in the production of the "Regional Plan of Action for Building the Information Society".

The Regional Plan of Action (RPOA) defined:

- ▶ The components and programmes needed for the creation of a sustainable information society in the region;
- ▶ Projects aimed at fulfilling the objectives of the WSIS;
- ▶ Partnerships and funding mechanisms aimed at producing the desired impetus towards the realization of the information society in Western Asia.



The original RPOA comprised 38 projects distributed on 10 programmes.

In order to propel the WSIS momentum forward and to accelerate the implementation of the Geneva Plan of Action, the Tunis Agenda and the RPOA, ESCWA held in mid 2009 (16-18 June 2009), a conference entitled "Regional Follow-up to the Outcome of the World Summit on the Information Society". Its main objectives included:

- ▶ Identifying new projects for inclusion in the RPOA and in other plans of action, including the updated Arab Information and Telecommunication Technologies (ICT) Strategy;
- ▶ Updating the RPOA and making recommendations for the enhancement of ICT strategies and plans of action, in light of accumulated experiences.

Updating the RPOA: Obstacles and Recommendations

Economic/Financial Sustainability:

Obstacles: Lead organizations often had difficulty retaining the support and funding of partners.

Recommendations: To encourage the creation of more private-public partnerships for ICT projects.

ICT Infrastructure and Applications:

Obstacles: The lack of national backbones in many ESCWA member countries (EMCs), the insufficient development and utilization of e-applications and the high pricing of broadband access all hindered the progression of infrastructure and e-services projects.

Recommendations: To take advantage of broadband wireless access and technologies in tailoring the development of applications to local needs in the region; applications such as mobile-banking have much richer capabilities than those foreseen only few years ago.

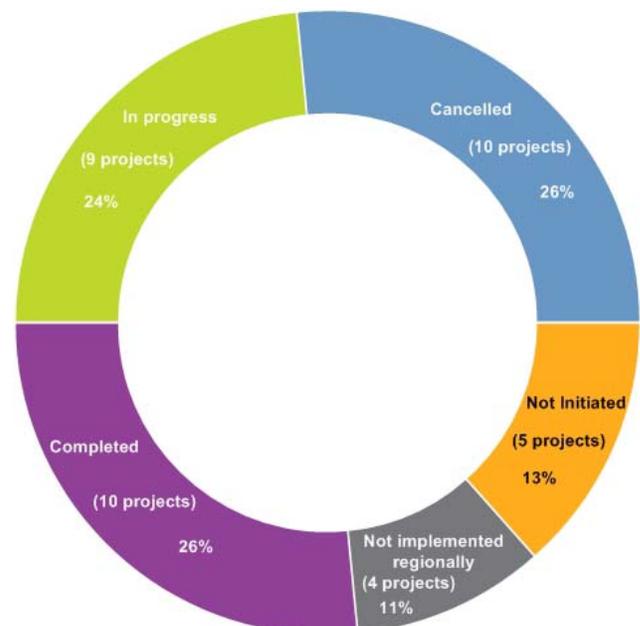
Data Gathering:

Obstacles: The difficulty in reaching a regional consensus on issues/data, such as the core ICT indicators, and the lack of dedicated ICT surveys in EMCs made it difficult to provide sound and accurate data on the progress of projects, although EMCs have benefited lately from the best practices and capacity-building efforts in the region.

Recommendations: To work on Arabizing ICT indicators, definitions and statistical documents in order to promote the adoption of indicators across EMCs, as most surveys in the region are carried out in Arabic.

Status of RPOA Projects

As a result of a review of RPOA projects, the following chart summarized the extent of implementation of these projects:



Revised RPOA:

| Programme | Project title | Status |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|
| 1. ICT for Economic Development | CyberPort for trade and transport | Not imp. regionally |
| | Connecting Arab ATM networks | Cancelled |
| | CyberHaven for regional tourism development | In progress |
| | ICT Hub for SMEs | In progress |
| | Electronics disassembly, refurbishment, and recycling centres | New |
| | ESCWA excellence award for best achievement in building the information society | New |
| | A classification framework for economic industries and activities cross relevant entities | New |
| | Strengthening the ICT capacity of government leaders in the ESCWA region | New |
| 2. Developing e-government services | Enhancing government decision support capabilities in the socio-economic fields | Not imp. regionally |
| | Regional e-government portal | Completed |
| 3. Empowering Arab NGO's in the information society | Arab NGO's information network | Cancelled |
| | Arab civil society academy for capacity-building | Cancelled |
| 4. Developing communications infrastructure | Enhanced broadband access through pilot national applications | Completed |
| | Towards an integrated regional telecommunications network | In progress |
| 5. Developing the ICT sector | Legislation model for an ICT enabling environment | Not initiated |
| | Establishment of ICT incubators | Not initiated |
| | Partnership space for incubating telecommunication projects | Completed |
| | Harmonization of Cyber legislation | New |
| 6. Women's empowerment in the information society | Women's empowerment through ICT | Cancelled |
| | Promoting the rights of women and children through the use of ICT | Completed |
| | Enhancing Arab women's role in development and decision-making through the use of ICT | Cancelled |
| | Gender evaluation methodology for ICT initiatives (GEM) | Cancelled |
| | Women in Technology | New |
| 7. Information society measurements | Core ICT indicators | Completed |
| | ICT indicators database | Completed |
| | Capacity-building for information society measurement | In progress |
| | Unification of Information Society Measurements | New |
| 8. Promoting digital Arabic content | Establishing a digital Arabic library | Not initiated |
| | Connecting Arab documentation centres | Not initiated |
| | Developing an Arabic search engine | Not imp. regionally |
| | Arabic domain name system (ADNS) | Completed |
| | Arab region network for document cataloguing and processing | Cancelled |
| | Arabized ICT e-glossary | In progress |
| | Memory of the Arab World | In progress |
| | Establishment of a Domain Name Registry for the ".arab" and ".عربي" gTLDs | New |
| | Promotion of the Arabic Domain Name System (ADNS) - Phase II | New |
| | Promotion of the Digital Arabic Content (DAC) Industry through Incubation - Phase II | New |
| Linguistic and Technical Standards for Digital Arabic Content | New | |
| 9. ICT in educational and scientific research | Regional Hub for capacity-building in open source software for education and research | Cancelled |
| | IT teacher training framework | In progress |
| | Regional scheme for deployment of technical computing software | In progress |
| | Lifelong learning for regional socio-economic development | Completed |
| | Iraq networking academies | Completed |
| | Learning object repository in Arabic (LORA) | Cancelled |
| | Enhancing Distance Learning and Educational Content in Arab Universities | New |
| 10. Increasing community access with emphasis on the marginalized and disabled | PC for Every Home | Not imp. regionally |
| | Information technology clubs | Not imp. regionally |
| | Empowerment of the visually disabled through ICT | Cancelled |
| | Market information systems for agriculture and fishing businesses | Completed |
| | Empowerment through community access | In progress |
| | Implementing an e-safety agenda in the region | New |
| | ICT for Development - Persons With Disabilities | New |
| | Knowledge Networks through ICT Access Points for Disadvantaged Communities | New |

Projects in GRAY are those that have been completed/terminated.

Projects in BLACK are those that are still in progress.

Projects in RED are new projects introduced in June 2009.