United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
Division for Social Policy and Development

Expert Group Meeting

"E-Participation: Empowering People through Information Communication Technologies (ICTs)"

Aide-Mémoire

24-25 July 2013

ITU Headquarters
Geneva

I. Purpose of the meeting

The Division for Social Policy and Development (DSPD) of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), in collaboration with the Division for Public Administration and Development Management (DPADM) and the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), is organizing an Expert Group Meeting on **"E-Participation: Empowering People through Information Communication Technologies (ICTs)"** from 24 to 25 July at ITU Headquarters in Geneva, as part of the preparations for the 52th session of the Commission for Social Development (CSocD) that will take place in February 2014 and to promote the 2013 theme of the Economic and Social Council Annual Ministerial Review on "Science, technology and innovation -- as well as culture -- for sustainable development".

The meeting is convened in the context of draft Resolution 1 in the Report of the Commission for Social Development (E/2012/26) in which the Economic and Social Council decided that the priority theme for the 2013-2014 review and policy cycle should be "Promoting empowerment of people in achieving poverty eradication, social integration and full employment and decent work for all".

The outcomes of the meeting will provide important inputs to the work of the Commission, in particular demonstrating the impact of ICTs and e-Participation on people's empowerment and how they can be used as a means to implement the Post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals.

II. Background: Justification and basic concepts

KEY ISSUES

- As the Internet becomes a significant force in human lives, access to the Internet by people at all levels of society and in all countries is a significant issue.
- Obtaining access means ensuring that the Internet is available to all, is transparent and neutral, based on innovative approaches to Internet governance with effective participation of all stakeholders;
- Enabling people to make effective use of the Internet implies both technology and the creation of local level initiatives and training;
- Local initiatives to use the Internet for economic development are a new means of addressing issues of poverty.

There is growing global consensus that the Internet and its related technologies are providing a new framework for economic, political and social development. The World Summit for Social Development (WSSD, Copenhagen, 1995) recognized that the new information technologies and new approaches to access to and use of technologies by people living in poverty can help in fulfilling social development goals; and therefore recognize the need to facilitate access to such technologies. WSSD emphasized that promoting access for all to education, information, technology and know-how is an essential means for enhancing communication and participation in civil, political, economic, social and cultural life, and for ensuring respect for civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights.

In 2000, the Economic and Social Council adopted a Ministerial Communiqué on the role of information technology in the context of a knowledge-based economy. Later that year, the Millennium Declaration underscored the urgency of ensuring that the benefits of new technologies, especially ICT, be available to all. In 2001, the Council considered the role of ICT for development in the context of partnerships with relevant stakeholders, including the private sector. In June 2002, the General Assembly will hold a two-day meeting devoted to ICT for development (17 and 18 June).

The World Summit on the Information Society, Geneva 2003 – Tunis 2005, the Copenhagen Declaration and Tunis Commitment all recognized that ICTs is a key to eradicate poverty and unemployment and the importance of building a people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society, where everyone can create, access, utilize and share information and knowledge, enabling individuals, communities and peoples to achieve their full potential in promoting their sustainable development and improving their quality of life, premised on the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and respecting fully and upholding the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

In spite of these convincing arguments, the concept of "ICTs for development" has not been effectively deployed. Following the World Summit on the Information Society, significant policy commitments were made in the Millennium Declaration (2000), adopted at the Millennium Summit in September 2000, which ensured that the benefits of new technologies, especially information and communication technologies, in conformity with recommendations contained in the ECOSOC 2000 Ministerial Declaration, are available to all. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) forged "ICTs" as a major vehicle in advancing development under MDGs Goal 8 (target 8F).

The 2005 World Summit recognized that science and technology, including information and communication technology, are vital for the achievement of the development goals and that international support can help developing countries to benefit from technological advancements and enhance their productive capacity.

The 2010 Summit on the Millennium Development Goals highlighted the importance of strengthening public-private partnerships in order to close the large gaps that remain in access to and affordability of information and communications technology across countries and income groups, including by upgrading the quality and quantity of existing telecommunication infrastructure, particularly in the least developed countries, to support more modern information and communications technology applications and greatly increase connectivity, access and investment in innovation and development and the effective use of innovative information and communications technology applications and e-governance tools.

During the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, Rio+20, Governments recognized that ICTs are facilitating the flow of information between governments and the public. In this regard, it is essential to work towards improved access to information and communications technology, especially broadband networks and services, and bridge the digital divide, recognizing the contribution of international cooperation in this regard.

The United Nations System Task Team on the Post 2015 UN development agenda in its 2013 report entitled "A renewed global partnership for development" recognized that access to

science, technology and innovation underpins progress in all development dimensions; from economic growth to environmental protection. There is a need to rethink how best to diffuse existing technologies as well as promote access to new technologies for all. Whether embodied as products or processes, or in the form of knowledge transfers, such exchange holds the key for a sustainable and prosperous future for all.

Today, according to the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), there are more than 2 billion Internet users worldwide at the end of 2013; mobile broadband reached more than 1 billion subscriptions, while the use of fixed broadband is estimated at 590 million subscriptions. The goal of creating an "information society for all" remains elusive, with many individuals and social groups remaining invisible, voiceless, and excluded from decision-making processes that affect their lives. While there is a rapid development and growth of the ICTs, collective efforts need to be harnessed effectively to bridge the ongoing digital divide and ensure that everyone around the world can exploit its benefits.

It is therefore critical to move develop concrete and practical strategies to promote ICTs for economic, social and environmental development: The three pillars of sustainable development. Such strategies need to be based on realistic and updated information on what types of policies, strategies and good practices exist across regions, as well as systemic analysis on what has worked/not worked and why it has worked/not worked.

There are various types of national policies that are favourable to promote an information society for all citizens. Some policies target specific social groups, such as youth, older persons, persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, women, people living in poverty, and migrant workers. Others are more general, but aim to ensure universal coverage; for example, online education and e-health for all. It is important to examine how these various types of polices are inter-linked and create a better synergy among them in order to consolidate national efforts and resources.

Affordable and accessible ICTs empower people to learn, create and share knowledge. It is a key tool for development aimed at enabling full and active participation of every member of the society in all aspects of life, including, civic, social, economic, and political activities, as well as participation in decision-making processes. With the use of social media, people are becoming more familiar with global issues and educating themselves. These tools allow people to connect, keep up with the current events and find opportunities to raise their voices and share their ideas. The meeting will address the question of how the role of ICTs can be enhanced to help countries meet human needs and bring in the benefits of the knowledge economy.

During the expert group meeting (EGM) on "Promoting People's Empowerment in Achieving Poverty Eradication, Social Integration and Decent Work for All" which took place in New York from 10 to 12 November 2012, the experts suggested to explore two new areas namely, governance and ICTs, which reflect the needs of a contemporary society.

The meeting highlighted governance and ICTs as an important factor of participation and recommended to:

- Consider the implications of empowerment for the design of post-2015 goals and objectives in the context of sustainable development to ensure that people can better contribute to decision-making using e-Governance and ICTs as tools and delivering a government that is more pro-active and responsive to its citizens;

- Begin an examination of the relationship between access to e-Governance, ICTs and empowerment, including the role of mediation, investment and infrastructure to achieve social development goals;

- Consider the role of empowerment at the international level, including in policy formulation and in ensuring accountability of international programmes as well as the role of civil society organizations, e-Governance and ICTs;

Promoting participation of the citizen is the cornerstone of socially inclusive governance. The goal of e-Governance initiatives should be to improve the citizen's access to information and public services; and promote participation in public decision-making which impacts the well being of society, in general, and the individual, in particular.

e-Participation is possible only if political, economic, technological and social barriers are removed and access to opportunities from ICT is equitably distributed. Therefore, in order to bridge the digital divide, the reach of ICT to facilitate greater participation by citizens to influence the democratic decision-making process must be considered just as important as the nature of the participatory process itself.

The EGM concluded that access to e-Governance and ICT tools can empower people improve transparency and accountability and, enable full and active participation of every member of the society in all aspects of life, including, civic, social, economic, and political activities, as well as participation in decision-making processes.

This meeting will build upon the above recommendations and move further study the relationship between empowerment and e-Participation.

III.	**Objectives and Methodology**

Given that the mandate of CSocD is the follow-up to the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development and the 24th special session of the General Assembly, and taking into account its choice for the priority theme of its 2013-14 cycle, this expert group meeting should provide an overview of how e-Participation can be used as a tool for the empowerment, social inclusion and "organic" participation.

The overall objective of the meeting is to review and consider new opportunities offered by ICTs for all people and some social groups, their use as means for the empowerment and promotion of e-governance and e-participation.

The specific meeting objectives are to:

1) Review challenges and opportunities offered by ICTs, exchange ideas and share experience on existing policies, strategies and practices aimed at promoting e-Participation;

2) Provide an evidence-based set of recommendations to strengthen stakeholders' capacities and promote e-participation and ICTs as means for social inclusion and the empowerment of social groups.

IV.   Organizational and administrative matters

The number of experts will be approximately 8-10, who will be identified and invited by the Division for Social Policy and Development. In addition, the following will participate:

1. Staff members of United Nations Secretariat (UNDESA/DSPD/DPADM) as an organizer to provide substantive and administrative support;
2. Representatives of the civil society organizations invited by DSPD;
3. One consultant/facilitator to be selected by the United Nations;

In an opening plenary, participant's presentations will create a conceptual framework for the discussion. The plenary will be followed by short presentations and in-depth discussions on specific issues. At the conclusion of the meeting, participants will outline the major conclusions and recommendations of the meeting. A final report will be produced after the meeting.

V.   Venue

The meeting will take place in conference room K at the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) in Geneva, Switzerland from 24 to 25 July 2013.

VI.   Language

The working language of the meeting will be English. Documentation for the meeting will be provided in English. No interpretation will be provided.

VII.   Documentation

The documentation of the meeting will be comprised of relevant publications, documents, and materials related to empowerment and ICTs, 5 – 10 page papers from the expert participants, and relevant United Nations documents, that will be made available on the web site to be created for the meeting.

Expert participants will be invited to provide their contributions in advance (to be submitted by **15 July 2013**), and to make brief presentations in the plenary.

VIII.   Passports and Visas

Participants will be expected to make necessary arrangements with regard to passports, visa and health certificates for travel. An information note will be sent out to participants to assist them with travel arrangements.

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