Open Forum Documentation

Open Forum Title: Creating an Enabling Environment for Inclusive Economy Using ICTs

Hashtags: #ICTs4SDGs, #Inclusive Economy, #Digital Divide, #ICTs Capacity Building, #Connectivity, #ICT polices

Date: Thursday December 8, 2016

Time: 10:45 - 11:45

Open Forum Organizer: Ms. Nirvana Farrag, Director General, International Cooperation Department, the Egyptian Cabinet Information and Decision Center, IDSC

Moderator: Ms. Nesreen El-Molla, Head of Monitoring and Evaluation Division, WFP, Egypt Country Office

List of Speakers and their Institutional Affiliations:

- Ms. Nirvana Farrag, Director General, International Cooperation Department, the Egyptian Cabinet Information and Decision Center, IDSC

- Dr. Abeer Shakweer, Advisor to the Egyptian Minister of Communications and Information Technology

- Dr. Wael Abd Elaal, Chairman of the Egyptian Telemedicine Foundation

- Ms. Mary Uduma, Chair of Nigeria Internet Governance Forum

- Mr. Jimson Olufuye, Chair of AfICTA

- Mr. Moctar Yedaly, Head of Division, Infrastructure and Energy Department, African Union Commission

- Ms. Nesreen El-Molla, Head of Monitoring and Evaluation Division , WFP , Egypt Country Office

Forum Description and Key Issues Raised:

The aim of this forum is to highlight the importance of encouraging the development of multi-stakeholder collaboration at the national, regional and international levels to discuss the diffusion of (ICTs) which are considered as cross-cutting enablers of development and are therefore critical to the achievement of the sustainable development goals (SDGs). The forum discusses the challenges that face the expansion and diffusion of ICTs and building Information Societies at different levels particularly for developing countries. This includes connectivity challenges, building information and communication network infrastructure and applications, making use of innovative technologies for the well-being communities and people. The forum also includes the presentation of significant case studies from international organizations and private sector in bridging the digital divide, alleviating digital poverty and building ICT capacities for dealing all developmental challenges. Finally, the forum provides a set of policy recommendations to support and encourage both governments and stakeholders to address inclusivity and sustainability of ICT impact on all societal levels. The following are the main themes tackled in the forum:

ICT As An Accelerator for Achieving the SDGs

Information and communication technologies have been increasingly bolstering global development efforts. Recognizing the economic and developmental challenges facing nations, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) strive for a world that is just, equitable and inclusive, and committed to work together to promote sustained and inclusive economic growth. The SDGs recognize these challenges, notably in Goal 8 ("Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all") and Goal 10 ("Reduce inequality within and among countries"). Sustainable Development Goal 8 (SDG 8) recognizes the crucial role that economic growth has played in reducing poverty in recent decades. Economies will need to be transformed if they are to ensure sustained improvements in living standards for all the world's citizens. ICTs are considered today as a driver of economic growth and a catalyst for economic development that can be smartly utilized to address the economic challenges of any nation. The forum discusses the need for leveraging existing and widely deployed technologies, and also the necessity for new innovative services and improved reach of technological solutions.

Bridging the Digital Divide

While the positive aspects of ICTs on economic growth are real, but the benefits are not shared equally among people worldwide. In being disconnected from the internet, more than half the world's population are excluded from its benefits. The forum discusses the prospects of bridging the "Digital Divide" to bring ICTs benefits and shared economic prosperity to both advanced and emerging countries. The forum further highlights the necessary policies and programs needed to achieve greater ICT-driven inclusive growth, and to enhance the income effects of ICTs on lower-income and marginalized populations.

ICTs Human Capacity Building for Development

The global quest for ICT for development is enormous to both developed and developing countries. This is because ICT skills are critical to the success of enhancing national development in a globalized era. Although lack of infrastructure and access to ICT devices are major challenges, human capacities and digital literacy is also a challenge that needs to be addressed. In this regard, governments are focused on creating opportunities for citizenship participation in ICT training, knowledge and skills acquisition, and general application and usage of ICT tools to solve problems, promote their wellbeing and enhance national growth.

ICT for Better Governance

It is necessary to address the role of ICTs in the governmental operating system to ensure effective transformation of the public sector and to ensure better delivery of services. This transformation represents not just technological change but also change in the operating culture of the government to ensure adequate public sector reform. Such change should include the usage of ICTs in the central government, ministries, executive agencies, governorates, cities and villages, all units dealing with citizens.

Presentations and Speeches:

The forum opened with a speech delivered by Ms. Nirvana Farrag, Director General, International Cooperation Department-the Egyptian Cabinet Information and Decision Center, IDSC where she Introduced the rationale of the forum and highlighted several issues related to different aspects of enabling ICT in achieving inclusive growth and its impact on sustainable development from a multi-stakeholders perspective. Ms. Farrag discussed the role of ICTs as Catalyst for Economic Development. She also highlighted the importance of bridging "the Digital Divide" to achieve Socio-Economic Benefits in Developing Countries. Ms. Farrag's speech stressed upon the importance of Sustainable Inclusivity and including all segments of societies in sustainable development and the role of internet as a critical enabler for sustainable development. Finally, she presented the role of IDSC in supporting the Government of Egypt through creating several ICT creative and smart solutions.

Following the opening speech, the forum moderator introduced the speakers and opened the floor for Dr. Wael Abd Elaal, Chairman of the Egyptian Telemedicine Foundation to present the experience of Telemedicine Foundation in using ICTs in delivering healthcare services in Egypt. Dr. Abd Elaal delivered a presentation where discussed how ICTs and technologies can play a role in the health sector especially in helping physicians working in remote areas. Following Dr. Abd Elaal's presentation, Ms. Mary Uduma, Chair of Nigeria Internet Governance Forum delivered a speech where she explored the basic needs in Africa, especially in Nigeria, including education, food, and the environmental challenges and the possibilities of making use of ICTs in solving such problems. She also highlighted the problems of excluding sectors including the youth, women, the physically challenged and the rural communities. Dr. Uduma stated that governments need to think out of the box and to

benefit from the young people and their talents in ICTs. She highlighted that ICTs are cross-cutting and affects education, food, health and environment as well as other fields and sectors. Dr. Uduma stressed the need to reach more for communities and for people to know their needs, to know their requirements, instead of adopting the top to bottom approach which most of the time does not fulfill the needs of the people. Dr. Abeer Shakweer, Advisor to the Egyptian Minister of Communications and Information Technology gave a presentation where she discussed the strategy of the Egyptian Ministry of Communications and Information Technology to support social responsibility. Dr. Shakweer highlighted the efforts of the ministry in providing 15,000 opportunities for youth in slum and rural areas in addition to equipping schools with the required ICTs and technologies and training teachers on using the Internet and ICTs to improve the quality of education in those areas. Mr. Jimson Olufuye, Chair of AfICTA delivered a speech where he highlighted the importance of strategy and partnership among different stakeholders where he discussed the case of Nigeria in dealing with several ICT-realted projects. Mr. Olufuye also discussed the importance to promote and advocate that ICT should be used for transparency and accountability. Ms. Nesreen El-Molla, Head of Monitoring and Evaluation Division , WFP , Egypt Country Office discussed the role of the United Nations World Food Program in supporting the government of Egypt in using ICTs for inclusive economies and sustainable development particularly SDG2 which is related to fighting hunger. She provided several examples and pilot activities the WFP implements using ICTs and technologies to empower the government of Egypt. Mr. Moctar Yedaly, Head of Division, Infrastructure and Energy Department, African Union Commission highlighted that we need to understand that the only opportunity offered to Africa in the 21st century, is to use ICT for the socioeconomic development and to use it to catch up in many developmental fields. He provided an example of the field of education where it is crucial to utilize ICTs to develop education instead of gathering efforts to build new schools and institutions.

Discussions and Suggestions:

A comment from the audience highlighted the ICT revolution that transferred Nigeria from the bottom to the very top level in Africa, economic-wise. The speaker stated that Nigeria is one of the top economies in Africa now stressing that this primarily came from private funding and private investment due to the beneficial government liberalization policies.

A question was addressed to Dr. Abeer concerning the social responsibility projects introduced by the Ministry. The question was whether the ministry found any resistance from people working in this field when they started implementing the projects. Dr. Shakweer answered that they indeed found a lot of resistance in the beginning and this was what they were expecting. The reason is that the mindset of people is not used to working together. She mentioned that the approach they followed was starting to work with those who are willing to work and then others joined when they witnessed the achievements and success and impact. She emphasizes that we should focus on finding solutions to overcome the resistance to achieve success.

Conclusive Remarks and Recommendations:

Tackling the questions related to the digital divide and the digital poverty, one of the key messages raised was the necessity to work using a bottom-up approach to make sure that the needs and the requirements of all communities are covered.

Important policies that the government should work on in order to enhance the use of ICT in inclusive economies and that have been very good example of the government policy on social responsibility in the sector of ICT.

The importance of partnerships and how we can work together in order to enhance our cooperation.

The need to focus on engagement and accessibility of all partners. We need to use ICT more for transparency and accountability. We need to focus on outcome and impact monitoring rather than output monitoring in order to achieve our SDGs. We needs also to make sure that ICD is used as good and solid way to better monitor the services and the assistance provided by governments and international organizations. And also we had best practices that we have been discussing like the telemedicine pilot which cost-efficient pilot and above all to end this forum, it is important to have the political will so that all those initiatives can come to reality in life. Thank you very much for your participation in this forum.

Photos:

Quotes about the Forum:

The forum hosted by Egypt was a very interesting session and Egypt was the only country in Africa to host a forum and it gave insight on projects Egypt has been working on like projects that has created jobs, impacting life, also projects in the medical area and the social area and I think this is a good example for the rest of Africa. So I congratulate Egypt for this great effort.

Dr. Jimson Olufuye
Chair, AfICTA

Mrs. Mary Uduma
Chairperson of the Nigeria Internet Governance Forum

I participated in the open forum that Egypt organized and it was very well organized in terms of quality and the presentations were very good and especially in the health care issues and the corporate social responsibility, those are two main issues that I would like to introduce in my country.

Mr. Moctar Yedaly
Head Information Society Division at the African Union Commission

I was delighted and glad to be in the forum organized by Egypt. The theme that has been addressed was critical and wonderful.