

**Regional Preparatory Meeting
for WTDC-17 for Asia and the Pacific (RPM-ASP)**



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**INFORMATION DOCUMENT FROM ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR ASIA
AND THE PACIFIC (ESCAP)**

ASIA PACIFIC INFORMATION SUPERHIGHWAY

I have the honour to transmit herewith the attached document from ESCAP for your information.

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Information Paper Asia Pacific Information Superhighway

1. Background

Millions of people in Asia and the Pacific are shut out from transformative digital opportunities due to a lack of broadband connectivity. In particular, countries with special needs (Least developed countries, landlocked least developed countries and small island developing states) continues to experience the largest gap on broadband digital divide¹.

The increasing broadband digital divide in Asia-Pacific, if not addressed, could have significant negative consequences on their sustainable development efforts. In particular, the abilities of Asia-Pacific countries to effectively achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) goals.

Based on ESCAP analyses, the main causes originate from lack of: investment in resilient ICT infrastructure, effective Internet traffic and network management, conducive and enabling regulations for investment, and capacity and awareness among policy makers and regulators among others². Recognizing these connectivity deficits, the ESCAP member countries recently endorsed the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway (AP-IS) Master Plan³ and the Regional Cooperation Framework Document⁴ outline the principles, deliverables, timeline and financing mechanisms towards narrowing the digital divide and accelerating the achievement of the SDGs.

2. AP-IS Framework

The AP-IS concept was defined to identify cross-border fibre-optic network gaps, opportunities and the need for regional cooperation on improving digital inclusion around four areas (pillars):

- 1) Connectivity:
 - Physical network design, development, management at regional level;
 - Intergovernmental negotiation;
 - Improving regulations based on open access
- 2) Traffic/network management
 - Ensuing efficient and effective Internet traffic and network management at

¹ In 2015, 20 Asia-Pacific countries were found to have less than 2% fixed broadband penetration. These countries consist mostly of LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS. For further details, see ESCAP (2016), 'State of ICT in Asia and the Pacific – uncovering the widening digital divide', accessed via: <http://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/State%20of%20ICT%20in%20Asia%20and%20the%20Pacific%202016.pdf>

² For further details on ESCAP studies, please visit <http://www.unescap.org/our-work/ict-disaster-risk-reduction/asia-pacific-information-superhighway/publications>

³ http://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/pre-ods/CICTSTI1_2E_rev1.pdf

⁴ http://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/pre-ods/CICTSTI1_3E_rev1.pdf

regional, sub-regional and national levels

- 3) E-resilience
 - Resilient ICT networks;
 - Support to disaster management systems;
 - Ensuring last-mile disaster communication
- 4) Broadband for all
 - Bridging digital divides
 - Promoting affordable access to underserved areas
 - Policy and technical support to governments

The AP-IS Master Plan endorsed by ESCAP member countries in October 2016 included three key areas and seven strategic initiatives for the achievement of medium-term objectives for implementation as follows:

Three key areas:

- 1) Seamless, affordable and reliable regional broadband connectivity, with well-balanced sea- and land-based connectivity and Internet traffic exchange management;
- 2) The promotion of e-resilience
- 3) The promotion of inclusive broadband access in underserved areas and narrowing the digital divide

AP-IS seven initiatives⁵:

- 1) Identification, coordination, deployment, expansion and integration of the regional backbone networks at the cross-border intra- and interregional levels, in collaboration with member countries and sub-regional organizations
- 2) Establish a sufficient number of Internet exchange points at the national and sub-regional levels and set out common principles on Internet traffic exchange to prevent Internet tromboning, decrease transit costs and improve service quality
- 3) Regional social and economic studies
- 4) Enhancing ICT infrastructure resilience in the AP region
- 5) Policy and regulations for leveraging existing infrastructure, technology and inclusive broadband initiatives
- 6) Capacity-building
- 7) AP-IS project funding mechanism based on public-private partnerships

3. Potential activities for ITU/ESCAP collaboration

As outlined by the AP-IS Master Plan, specific areas of focus with parties responsible have been identified through regional consultations⁶ in the past 12 months. The activities listed below are areas identified in the AP-IS Master Plan for potential collaboration with ITU.

⁵ http://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/pre-ods/CICTSTI1_2E_rev1.pdf

⁶ <http://www.unescap.org/events/second-session-working-group-asia-pacific-information-superhighway> and <http://www.unescap.org/events/committee-information-and-communications-technology-science-technology-and-innovation-first>

Some activities are proposed new areas of focus for collaboration between ITU and ESCAP. In addition, the World Summit on Information Society (WSIS) is an activity outside the AP-IS Master Plan, but identified as a potential effective regional partnership for ESCAP/ITU collaboration.

Areas of focus	Description	Party responsible
Update Asia-Pacific information superhighway transmission maps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maximize cross-sectoral synergy or utilize existing roads and railroad infrastructure Update the Asia-Pacific information superhighway transmission map 	ESCAP, International Telecommunication Union and member countries [As reflected in the AP-IS Master Plan]
Financial inclusion for empowerment of women entrepreneurs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In collaboration with United Nations Economic Commission for Asia and the Pacific, evaluate challenges, best practices, and lessons learnt on the use of ICT to improve financial inclusion in Pacific island countries. 	[Proposed activity for ITU]
Terrestrial fibre links to international connectivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explore ways to strengthen e-resilience in fibre link to Europe Explore the provision of additional bandwidth for landlocked Central Asian countries 	[Proposed activity for ITU]
Institutional and individual capacity-building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Capacity-building, sharing of good practices and lessons learned at the regional level pertaining to network traffic management and monitoring, deployment of terrestrial/submarine fibre 	ESCAP, all member countries, research institutes, the private sector and United Nations agencies & International Telecommunication Union [As reflected in the AP-IS Master Plan]
Formulation of an Asia-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explore and formulate a 	ESCAP, United Nations

<p>Pacific information superhighway funding platform</p>	<p>mechanism to fund the Asia-Pacific information superhighway project in partnership with the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and other financial institutes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore public funding arrangements and public-private partnerships and special purpose vehicles for the promotion of infrastructure development • Explore government funding options on Internet exchange point construction and operations • Collect information on ICT project funding mechanisms in the Asia-Pacific region 	<p>agencies, subregional organizations, the private sector, financial institutions and member countries</p> <p>[Proposed activity for ITU]</p>
<p>Regional review of the World Summit on Information Society (WSIS) in Asia and the Pacific</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In collaboration with United Nations Economic Commission for Asia and the Pacific, conduct annual regional review on the progress of implementation of the WSIS action lines in Asia and the Pacific. 	<p>[Proposed activity for ITU]</p>

4. References to ESCAP Resolution, Sustainable Development Goals, and WSIS Action Line Goals

ESCAP Resolution

ESCAP Resolution 72/10, ‘Regional review of the implementation of the World Summit on the Information Society action lines (E/ESCAP/RES/72/10)’

Sustainable Development Goals

The identified activities for joint ESCAP/ITU collaboration above contribute directly to the achievement of the following UN SDGs: 5(target 5.b); 9 (targets 9.a, 9.b, 9.c) & 17 (targets 17.6)

WSIS Action Line Goals

The identified activities for joint ESCAP/ITU collaboration above contributes directly to the implementation of the WSIS Action Line C4 (Information and communication infrastructure); C5 (Building Confidence and security in the use of ICTs); C6 (Enabling environment); and C11 (International and regional cooperation).