ITU Regional Development Forum for Arab Region (RDF-ARB)
Accelerate the digital development in Arab Region

Organized by the International Telecommunication Union with the support of the

Bahraini Ministry of Transportation and Telecommunications

6-7 November 2023 - Kingdom of Bahrain

CONTRIBUTION FORM

Please note that submitted information will be presented during the RDF-ARB P2C Roundtables and it will also be reflected on the pledging platform of the Partner 2 Connect Digital Coalition.

Once completed send to ITU-RO-ArabStates@itu.int

ORGANIZATION: Members of ITU Generation Connect Arab Region

FOCAL POINT: Members of Generation Connect Arab Region: Ali AlToblani, Ahmad Alkhaldi, Batool Alsalieby, Melissa El Feghali, Omar Ramzi, Yomna Sherif, and Zied Baccouch.

TITLE: Digital Transformation in the Arab Region, Strategies, Challenges and Youth Empowerment

DESCRIPTION OF ACTION:

Digital development in the Arab Region: Trends, opportunities & challenges. Digital development in the Arab region is marked by compelling trends, offering both opportunities and challenges. The proliferation of mobile technology, increased internet connectivity, and the rise of digital platforms provide immense potential for economic growth and societal transformation.

Arab youth, known for their digital fluency and innovative mindset, are at the helm of this evolution. They're leading in areas like e-commerce, online education, and fintech startups, aiding economic diversification and job creation. However, significant challenges, including the digital divide, unequal access to education, and cybersecurity threats, remain. Investing in the digital literacy of the youth, democratizing quality education for everyone through available access to training and curricula, and nurturing an ecosystem that bolsters innovation and entrepreneurship can guarantee their pivotal role in the digital era. Enthusiastic young professionals in the region are making strides and fostering vibrant developer communities, that emphasize the latest digital tools, promoting collaboration and skill enhancement. Some have even collaborated with international institutions, ensuring students

receive top-notch education and exposure to advanced technologies. Yet, challenges like uneven technical infrastructure in educational establishments present hurdles. To truly harness the digital promise of the Arab region, comprehensive investments in both infrastructure and quality education are crucial, aiming for a future that's inclusive and forward-thinking. To foster sustainability, it is essential to prioritize renewable energy sources to power digital infrastructure and reduce carbon emissions. Investing in solar and wind energy solutions can not only provide reliable and clean power but also create job opportunities for the youth.

Multistakeholder cooperation and digital development. In the Arab region, the rapidly evolving digital landscape offers unprecedented opportunities for growth, innovation, and bridging societal divides. At the heart of this transformation should be robust multistakeholder cooperation – involving governments, businesses, civil society, academia, and most crucially, the youth. The young demographic, representing a significant portion of the region's population, is inherently digital-savvy and poised to be the primary beneficiaries and drivers of digital advancements. Engaging them is not just a matter of inclusivity but a strategic imperative. By leveraging their insights, energy, and native digital proficiency, youth can craft policies and frameworks that are both forward-looking and rooted in the unique socio-cultural nuances of the Arab world. In turn, encouraging active youth participation ensures that digital development remains relevant, sustainable, and resonates with the aspirations of future generations.

Innovation and entrepreneurship for digital development. Innovation and entrepreneurship are catalysts for digital development, holding immense promise for the Arab youth to drive the region into a new era of technological growth. As the Arab world delves deeper into the digital age, young individuals are taking the lead, generating innovative ideas, and establishing start-ups that redefine industries. Their intrinsic understanding of local needs offers tailored solutions to the region's unique challenges. Government initiatives, educational support, and private sector involvement play crucial roles in fuelling this progress led by youth. These combined forces can foster a conducive ecosystem for the entrepreneurial spirit, providing resources, training, and investment opportunities. With the right infrastructure and backing, Arab youth have the potential to become digital innovation trailblazers, ensuring the region's prominent position in the global digital arena. To maximize this potential, expert research funding is crucial. It facilitates product development, business opportunities, and drives progress. By offering research avenues to the youth, we empower them to bring their groundbreaking ideas to fruition. Strengthening partnerships among academia and industries and prioritizing cross-sector collaboration can further amplify this growth, boosting support for startups and widening access to international markets. Additionally, ensuring robust copyright protection is imperative to safeguard innovators' intellectual property, allowing them to thrive without concerns of idea theft.

Developing digital infrastructure for smart sustainable cities and communities. Developing digital infrastructure for smart, sustainable cities and communities is an imperative in our increasingly urbanized world, with Arab youth poised to be instrumental in this transformation. As cities in the Arab region grapple with rapid urbanization, they face both challenges and opportunities. Leveraging digital technologies can enhance efficiency, reduce resource consumption, and improve the quality of life for urban residents. Arab youth, as digital natives, can play a pivotal role in envisioning and implementing these smart city solutions. By actively participating in the development and deployment of innovative technologies, they can drive economic growth, environmental sustainability, and social inclusivity. Empowering Arab youth through education and providing

opportunities for them to engage in the planning and implementation of smart city projects is crucial for building the digital infrastructure required to create sustainable and interconnected urban spaces. With their creativity and energy, Arab youth can be the driving force behind the development of smart cities that serve as models for the rest of the world.

Enhancing confidence, security, and privacy in the use of telecommunications/Information and communication technologies in the era of new and emerging digital technologies. In the era of rapidly advancing digital technologies, establishing confidence, security, and privacy in telecommunications and ICT across the Arab region is crucial. As we become deeply integrated into the digital world, protecting sensitive and personal information is paramount for individuals, businesses, and governments. This not only involves securing financial transactions but also entails the safeguarding of personal data. Governments in the Arab region have the responsibility to create robust regulatory frameworks that can protect against cyber threats and ensure that businesses and organizations maintain high security standards. Furthermore, there's an imperative to educate users, especially the Arab youth, about best practices for online security. As digital natives, they are at the forefront of technological advancements and can play a pivotal role in fostering a culture of security and privacy. By ensuring that Arab youth are well-equipped with knowledge and tools, they can act as ambassadors for safe digital practices, creating ripple effects throughout their communities. Moreover, their involvement in creating and developing security solutions ensures that the region remains resilient to cyber threats in the ever-evolving digital landscape. Strengthening cybersecurity infrastructure and fostering partnerships with international stakeholders can further elevate the region's ability to safeguard its digital assets and maintain public trust.

Sustainable digital economy through digital transformation. Embracing a sustainable digital economy through digital transformation is paramount for the Arab region's progress. As technological advancements continue to reshape global economies, the Arab region stands to gain significantly from a holistic digital transformation. This involves not only adopting new technologies but also fostering a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship. The youth, representing a vast and tech-savvy demographic, are at the forefront of this change. Their fresh perspectives, combined with their digital acumen, make them pivotal agents in driving sustainable economic growth. By aligning digital strategies with sustainability goals, the Arab region can achieve a balance between economic prosperity and environmental responsibility. Government initiatives, private sector investments, and educational reforms can collectively accelerate this digital transformation. Offering support to startups, promoting research and development, and creating a conducive ecosystem for digital innovations are all critical steps towards realizing a sustainable digital economy. Moreover, integrating digital technologies in sectors like agriculture, healthcare, and education can optimize resource usage, enhance productivity, and improve overall quality of life. The Arab youth, with their dynamism and tech expertise, can lead these initiatives, ensuring the region's transition to a sustainable digital economy that is both inclusive and future ready.

COUNTRIES in FOCUS:

The countries that are the primary focus of the discussion encompass the entire Arab region, representing a diverse and interconnected collective of nations with shared cultural, historical, and linguistic ties.

YEARS of IMPLEMENTATION: [Tick the relevant boxes or delete the irrelevant items]

      ☒ 2023

      ☒ 2024

      ☒ 2025

RELEVANT ITU REGIONAL INITIATIVE: [Tick the relevant boxes or delete the irrelevant items]

☒ ARB1: Sustainable digital economy through digital transformation.

☒ ARB2: Enhancing confidence, security and privacy in the use of telecommunication/Information and communication technologies in the era of new and emerging digital technologies.

☒ ARB3: Developing digital infrastructure for smart sustainable cities and communities.

☒ ARB4: Building capacities and encouraging digital innovation, entrepreneurship, and future foresight.

☐ ARB5: Developing means of digital regulation.

Please find more information on the ITU Regional Initiatives 2023-2025, as defined by WTDC-22,

https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Pages/regional-iniaves-2023-2025.aspx

RELATED ITU-D PRIORITIES AS DEFINED BY THE ITU WORLD TELECOMMUNICATION DEVELOPMENT CONFERENCE 2022

☐   Affordable connectivity

☒   Digital Transformation

☒ Enabling policy and regulatory environment

☐   Resource mobilizing and international cooperation

☒   Inclusive and secure telecommunications/ ICTs for sustainable development

Please find more information on the ITU-D Priories, as defined by WTDC-22, here

RELATED ITU PRIORITIES AS DEFINED BY ITU PLENIPOTENTIARY CONFERENCE 2022

☐   Spectrum use for space and terrestrial services.

☐   International telecommunication numbering resources.

☒   Inclusive and secure telecommunication/ICT infrastructure and services.

☐   Digital applications.

☒ Enabling environment.

Please find more information on the ITU Priories, as defined by PP-22, here