2023-2033
الأجندة الرقمية العربية
Arab Digital Agenda

Programme for Enhancing Digital Cooperation and Development for Arab Countries

Arab Digital Agenda 2023-2033
Digest

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VISION
ESCWA, an innovative catalyst for a stable, just and flourishing Arab region.

MISSION
Committed to the 2030 Agenda, ESCWA's passionate team produces innovative knowledge, fosters regional consensus and delivers transformational policy advice. Together, we work for a sustainable future for all.
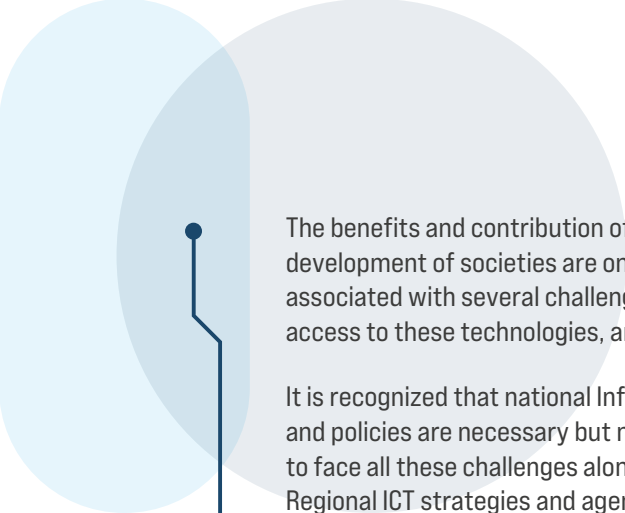
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The benefits and contribution of digital technologies and digital transformation[1] to the development of societies are one of the main marks of our era. Nevertheless, they are associated with several challenges, such as the need for inclusion so all people can have access to these technologies, and the need to cope with the risks that come with them.

It is recognized that national Information and Communication Technology (ICT) strategies and policies are necessary but not sufficient on their own, as no country would be able to face all these challenges alone. Therefore, the need to develop regional frameworks. Regional ICT strategies and agendas offering frameworks for collaboration and coordination between stakeholders have been created in the European Union, Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa, and Southeast Asia and the Pacific. These regional strategies take into consideration the specificities, needs and capabilities of each region, and aim at harmonizing and coordinating efforts to create a momentum that would allow the achievement of certain goals.

The Arab region has been without regional digital strategy since 2012, and there has been a dire need for a compass to better harmonize and coordinate digital development efforts. The Arab Digital Agenda (ADA)[2] is a strategic framework of action for the period 2023-2033 and a regional plan for Arab countries to coordinate their actions to maximize the benefits of digital development towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. The ADA vision aims at considerably improving the level of digital development and digital cooperation in the Arab region, as well as expanding access and use in various sectors to support social and economic development. This would also enable the Arab region to achieve the position it deserves at the global level, and to have an active and influential role in international policymaking processes related to digital development and digital cooperation.

This vision has been translated in the ADA through 35 goals distributed over 5 main clusters that follow the conceptual model developed by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) to establish linkages between the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) action lines and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), covering 10 thematic policy pillars. The diagram below depicts the clusters and pillars.

The ADA goals tackle key priority areas that have been identified based on an analysis of the current situation at the national and regional levels in the Arab countries. Each goal has one or more quantified targets that need to be met in the short, mid, or long term, and which are

described using a set of indicators. A set of recommended actions is associated to each goal as the proposed means to achieve this goal, with a total of 114 actions.

The ADA includes a rich chapter on deployment mechanisms which represents a unique feature of the ADA process. This includes specific sections on implementation support, and on monitoring follow-up and on steering and sustainability, with a wealth of modalities unprecedented in the Arab history. Deployment of the Arab Digital Agenda immediately started to bolster its means of implementation, follow up and review as well as steering and sustainability, representing a fully integrated ecosystem.

Cluster 1: Strategies Frameworks and Processes

Impactful planning frameworks and integrative processes

Pillar One: National Digital Strategies (Sectoral and Thematic)

Pillar Two: Regional and International Processes

Cluster 2: Digital Infrastructure, Regulatory and Legal Environment

Robust digital infrastructure and world-class services that are safe and secure

Pillar Three: Regulatory Environment and Digital Infrastructure

Pillar Four: Legal Environment and Trust

Cluster 3: ICT Sector and Transition to Digital Economy

Lucrative and innovative ICT sector inducing a multi-dimensional transition to digital economy

Pillar Five: Lucrative and Innovative ICT Sector

Pillar Six: Multi-Dimensional Transition to Digital Economy

Cluster 4: Digital Government Transformation

Government sectors that are digitally enabled and socially inclusive

Pillar Seven: Inclusive Access to Information and Knowledge

Pillar Eight: Digitally Enabled Government Sectors

Cluster 5: Culture and Media

Digital technologies for a thriving culture and responsible media

Pillar Nine: Cultural Identity and Linguistic Diversity

Pillar Ten: Flourishing and Responsible Digital Media

Developing the Agenda

A participatory and collaborative approach was adopted for the research and development leading to the conceiving of the ADA. Under the leadership of ESCWA and the League of Arab States (LAS), the ADA was co-produced by a number of experts from Arab Member States, key international and regional organizations as well as various stakeholders active in the field of digital development. The Agenda was adopted at three levels: the Arab Telecommunications and Information Council of Ministers on 23 January 2023, the Economic and Social Council of the League of Arab States on 9 February 2023 and the Arab League Summit on 19 May 2023. This partnership proved to be successful and will continue and expand during the development phase to enhance the momentum needed for the success of the Agenda. Several strategic partners from various international, regional, and Arab organizations played a pivotal role in the development work.

The collaboration work involved the creation of two mechanisms to complement the processes of LAS; namely, the Core Research and Technical Cooperation Mechanism (CRTCM), a team of experts and researchers from participating international, Arab and regional organizations and from Arab states, assigned mainly the task of developing the full content of the Agenda; and the Joint Technical Committee (JTC) acting as a liaison between the Arab Working Group on the Arab ICT Strategy and the General Secretariat of the LAS and the Executive Secretariat of ESCWA. The CRCTM and the JTC held six meetings, the most relevant being as follows:

1. The first ESCWA-LAS joint workshop to develop the ADA/ICT Strategy (ADAICTS) was conducted in March 2021. The workshop represents a pivotal step in a series of collaborative efforts to craft a unified ADAICTS that aims at leveraging ICT for development and supporting the achievement of the 2030 Agenda. This endeavor builds on ESCWA extensive experience in digital development and follows a participatory approach, incorporating insights from United Nations

agencies, regional organizations, and Arab countries to ensure the strategy meets the Arab Region unique needs and priorities.

2. The CRTCM and the JTC held a series of meetings which played pivotal roles in the development and implementation of the ADA. Throughout these meetings, these bodies focused on refining draft versions of the Arab ICT strategy, identifying goals, indicators of achievement, and strategic initiatives. Their collaborative efforts emphasize the production, development, and seamless implementation of the ADA, leveraging a participatory approach that incorporates insights from experts across the Arab Region. This work underscores the commitment to advancing digital cooperation and development, aligning closely with national digital development priorities and the broader objectives of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

3. The Arab Digital Agenda and the Arab Global Forum for Digital Cooperation and Development event represents a significant milestone in regional digital collaboration. This consultative conference held from 25 to 27 October 2022, aimed at shaping the future digital landscape of the Arab Region. The conference gathered experts and stakeholders who contributed towards the development and update of the ADA. The event underscored the importance of collective effort in enhancing government digital transformation and highlighted key tracks for digital development, setting a

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foundation for the ADA to be a cornerstone project in advancing digital cooperation across the Arab States for the upcoming decade and beyond. The pre-final version of the ADA was produced during this meeting and was presented to the meeting of the Arab Telecommunications and Information Council of Ministers in its 26th regular session of January 2023.

Deployment mechanisms

The Agenda is designed to be activated through the development and deployment of several components which constitute an ecosystem for its implementation support. This ecosystem aims at boosting collaboration between various stakeholders to achieve the goals and targets specified within the Agenda. Furthermore, it offers capabilities for monitoring and analysing progress, which will be used later for the upgrade of the Agenda. The main tools of the ecosystem include the following mechanisms and processes:

1. The Measurement and Monitoring Model (MMM)

A major instrument used in developing and implementing the ADA. This model is designed to assess the status of digital development in Arab States, pinpoint strengths, and weaknesses, and underscore critical gaps and priorities. The Model hinges on a curated selection of international and Arab indicators. These indicators play a crucial role in tracking progress throughout the Agenda life cycle and serve as foundation for regular updates. The MMM provides a detailed definition for each indicator completed with metadata, and highlights interconnections with SDG indicators and various other international benchmarks.

2. The Collaboration and Partnership Framework (CPF)

A collaboration platform that manages the relationship between three entities: the ADA goals, targets and partners who cooperate in achieving these goals, and the projects supporting the implementation of the proposed actions to reach the targets. It contains an information system aimed at providing information about the maximum possible number of national and regional projects which support the ADA.

3. The Digital Development Process

The Process includes the National Digital Development Reviews (NDDRs) and the Arab Digital Development Report (ADDR). This process defines the ESCWA digital development conceptual model and the related upgrade. The national and regional reports constitute the baseline for the periodical update of the ADA.

The full-fledged ADA and related associated knowledge material and toolkits will be soon available on a dedicated portal on the ESCWA official website: ada.unescwa.org.

Future evolution

The ADA will be periodically revised during its lifetime to assess progress and eventually adjust the targets and actions. Current work in progress aims at evaluating the expansion of the ADA scope to include other developmental sectors that can significantly impact the achievement of the 2030 Agenda and the related goals.

Endnotes

1   The terms "digital technology" and "information and communication technology" are used interchangeably in the present document.

2   Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) and the League of Arab States, Arab Digital Agenda 2023-2033, 2024.