



Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

REPORT

WORKSHOP ON THE ENHANCEMENT OF THE NETWORKING CAPACITIES OF KNOWLEDGE HUBS CAIRO, 16-18 FEBRUARY 2010

Summary

As part of the project on Knowledge Networks through ICT Access Points for Disadvantaged Communities, the Information and Communication Technology Division (ICTD) at the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) organized the fifth workshop for the telecentres leaders that are supported by this project. This workshop was entitled Workshop on the Enhancement of the Networking Capacities of Knowledge Hubs and was held in Cairo from 16 to 18 February 2010, in partnership with the Charitable Society for Child Care. This project for building knowledge networks is jointly implemented by all five United Nations regional commissions, with ESCWA acting as the lead agency, and aims at empowering poor and disadvantaged communities by transforming selected existing information and communications technology (ICT) access points into knowledge hubs which are connected through regional and global knowledge networks.

The main objectives of the workshop were to increase initiatives by telecentre managers aimed at the enhancement of networking capacities and the improvement of knowledge hub services by:

- (a) pinpointing, discussing and working out problems that are related to the implementation of the Knowledge Network Portal, which is the main tool that is used for networking by telecentre managers;
- (b) proposing new activities aimed at the transformation of telecentres into knowledge hubs; and
- (c) developing the business writing skills of knowledge hub managers, thus empowering them to prepare proposals aimed at securing funding from local and international donors and increasing the chances of sustainability of telecentres.

In total, 14 participants from Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen participated in the workshop. They attended a one-day training course on how to write good business proposals, networked with peers on implementing the knowledge hubs/network and visited the locale of the Charitable Society for Child Care, an exemplary knowledge hub in Egypt which focuses its services on disadvantaged children.

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Introduction

1. The Knowledge Networks through ICT Access Points for Disadvantaged Communities (KN4DC) is a project that was launched in late 2006 and is funded by the United Nations Development Account. The five United Nations regional commissions¹ partnered to implement this project at the global level with ESCWA being the lead party, while every commission was tasked with the implementation of the knowledge networks at the regional level. The main objective of the project is to empower disadvantaged communities by transforming selected information and communications technology (ICT) access points/telecentres into knowledge hubs that are networked at the regional and global levels. This objective is reached by providing, developing, organizing, sharing and disseminating knowledge pertinent to targeted communities in such key areas of sustainable development as employment, education, gender and health.

2. All regional commissions have nearly completed the implementation of project activities and are currently in the final implementation phase. The following activities have been completed or nearly completed: (a) review and assessment of ICT access points in various regions of the globe; (b) development of a detailed implementation plan for the project; (c) organization of regional stakeholder meetings to discuss the various activities of the project; (d) preparation of regional and global strategies covering the “access point to knowledge hub” transformation and the networking process; (e) preliminary design and implementation of a regional knowledge-based portal; (f) training of key telecentre staff on transforming access points into networked knowledge hubs; and (g) launching of a regional knowledge portal.

3. After hosting the fourth workshop for the KN4DC project in Khartoum, the Sudan, in January 2010, ESCWA organized and conducted a fifth workshop, namely the Workshop on the Enhancement of the Networking Capacities of Knowledge Hubs, which took place in Cairo from 16 to 18 February 2010. The workshop was organized in partnership with the Charitable Society for Child Care and was hosted at the Amarante Pyramids Hotel in Giza, Greater Cairo, Egypt.

4. Major objectives of the workshop were: (a) to deliver a quick course on writing good business and project proposals; (b) to review recent activities of knowledge hubs; and (c) to discuss ways to reach self-sustainability.

I. DISCUSSION TOPICS

A. ENHANCEMENT OF THE NETWORKING CAPACITIES OF KNOWLEDGE HUBS

5. Mr. Noureldine Cheikh Obeid, knowledge manager for the KN4DC project in the ESCWA region, gave a presentation on how to increase the networking capacities of knowledge hubs, whether at the national, regional or even global level. Networking can be done with such peers as other telecentres that have a similar economic and social environment or with the local community through websites and local events. If applicable, networking can also be done with the management of national telecentres. For instance, the ReefNet Syrian Community Portal in the Syrian Arab Republic and the Knowledge Stations programme in Jordan provide support for the telecentres in those countries. In addition to that, networks can be established between telecentres and local authorities, which will assist in transforming the telecentre from an access point to a knowledge hub. Going from national to international cooperation, linkage between telecentres across borders and regions can be very beneficial for all stakeholders, especially when it comes to exchange of knowledge, ideas and practices.

¹ The five regional commissions of the United Nations are the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), and the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA). It should be noted that, since 2008, ESCAP is handling the ECE portion of the project with respect to the independent States common to both regions which are part of the project.

6. Mr. Cheikh Obeid instructed telecentre leaders not to provide solely such ICT courses as the international computer driving license (ICDL) or other classical computer training programmes, but also to invest time in developing such customized courses as web marketing.

7. Before closing the session, Mr. Cheikh Obeid asked all participants to start practicing their networking capacities by gathering information about the local community, try to operate in partnership with local authorities and coordinate with other telecentres within the country or the region.

8. The presentation delivered by Mr. Cheikh Obeid is referenced in annex II.

B. KNOWLEDGE NETWORKS AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN PUBLIC POLICIES

9. Mr. Nabil Eid, who was elected as secretariat for the KN4DC project during the Khartoum workshop in January 2010, gave a presentation entitled Knowledge Networks and Community Development in Public Policies. During his presentation, he argued that countries in the ESCWA region should formulate and implement policies and plans that create an enabling environment for knowledge hubs in the service of disadvantaged communities. These policies are implemented in one of three categories: knowledge management; access to information and knowledge; and knowledge application and promotion of e-services.

10. He provided examples of such successful projects in developing countries which enhance knowledge networks and community development as www.drishtee.com and www.mssrf.org in India, www.busyinternet.com in Ghana and www.fishinglanka.com in Sri Lanka.

11. The presentation made by Mr. Eid is referenced in annex II.

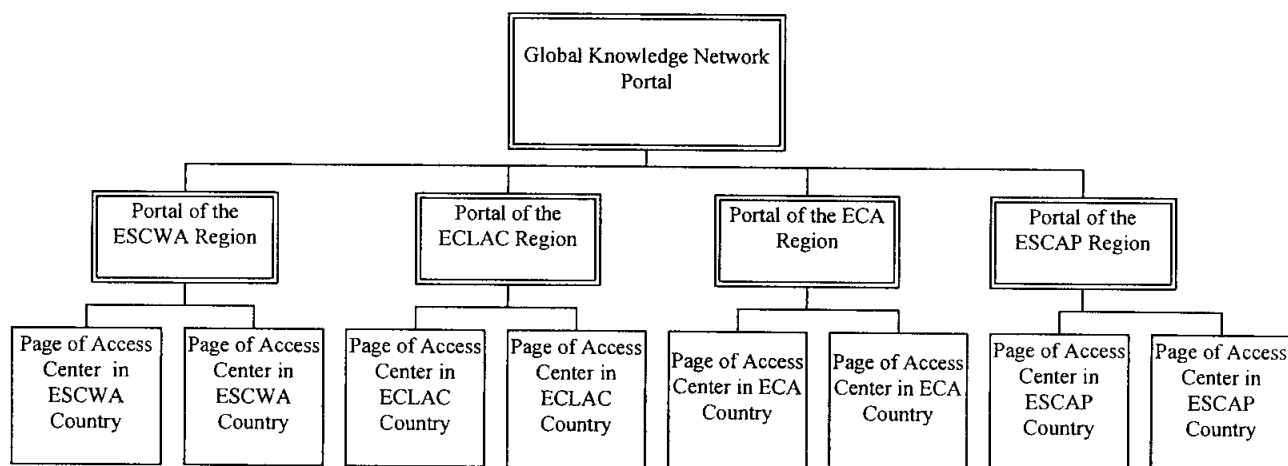
C. THE KNOWLEDGE NETWORK PORTAL: IMPROVEMENTS AND THE WAY FORWARD

12. A timeslot was allocated to discuss the problems that telecentre leaders are currently facing with the web portal of the KN4DC, available at www.knowledgenets.net. These challenges are summarized as follows:

- (a) The integration of pictures in the web pages consumes a lot of time;
- (b) The Internet connection on the web server is slow, which affects uploading or downloading images and files to the portal;
- (c) The import of text directly from Microsoft Word does not work well;
- (d) The displayed text sometimes mixes lines together in a way that renders the text unreadable;
- (e) Such addition of modules as syndication is not allowed;
- (f) The current development of the template is very rigid: the left and right panels do not grow with the text;
- (g) The design of the portal is not appealing to users;
- (h) A surfing map which would enable users to locate and access telecentres visually is not available.

13. Since the required adjustments to fix the problems mentioned above have to be comprehensive, it would not be effective to overhaul the current portal. Therefore, ESCWA staff members Georges Younes and Marc Khayat suggested the development of a new portal that matches the specifications and functionalities of such social networks and community websites as Facebook (www.facebook.com), telecentre.org (www.telecentre.org) and ning (www.ning.com).

14. This portal will have the following layers:



15. The portal that will be hosted on ESCWA servers will host the global and regional knowledge networks and a forum for discussions. As for the websites of knowledge hubs, they will be hosted on the project portal in the event that those knowledge hubs do not have other websites. If they do, then only a link will be posted on the project portal that directs visitors to the actual page of the knowledge hub.

16. All participants agreed that, since local sites may be present outside the portal, norms and standards should be set in order to define acceptable and unacceptable content.

D. SUSTAINABILITY OF KNOWLEDGE HUBS AND KNOWLEDGE NETWORKS

17. The afternoon of the first day of the workshop was dedicated to telecentre leaders who presented their thoughts for achieving sustainability at their sites. Their presentations included a list of activities and events, potential obstacles and importance of ICT in the sustainability of knowledge hubs.

18. The 11 presentations delivered by participating knowledge hub leaders are listed in annex II.

E. WRITING A BUSINESS PROPOSAL

19. The second day of the workshop was dedicated to conducting a course on writing business proposals. For that purpose, ESCWA had contracted a consultant, Mr. Sayed Kishta, to organize and give this six-hour short course.

20. During the course, Mr. Kishta thoroughly explained each of the following building blocks of any good project or business proposal: goal, activities, structure, implementation plan, budget, evaluation and follow-up, sustainability and annexes.

21. His course included interactive sessions, tests, collaborative work and case studies and was well received by all participants. The presentation used by Mr. Kishta is referenced in annex II.

22. Following this quick course, participants expressed their thoughts about the subject of the next course which will take place during the Damascus workshop in April. Topics varied between “basic writing skills”, “web marketing”, “article writing skills”, “news writing skills” and “how to collect, analyse and report news”.

F. SITE VISIT TO THE CHARITABLE SOCIETY FOR CHILD CARE

23. On the third day of the workshop, a visit to the Charitable Society for Child Care was organized in order to benefit from the experience of this association as a successful knowledge hub in the Giza area which provides services to disadvantaged children. Different sections of this site were visited, namely the library, residence, workshops, sport area and IT club.

24. This association makes available a number of comic and educational books for children at the library for a nominal fee. Many children of the local community benefit from this service. The association also provides shelter for orphans and abandoned kids, with enough rooms available to host 20 guests. As for the workshops, handcraft and tailoring are common at the centre, where young people, some of which are with disabilities, create and sell a variety of items in an effort to make the site self-sustainable. The IT club is yet another service available at this centre that allows young people to connect to the Internet and get in touch with other communities using social networks as well as to carry out searches on various topics.

25. As a humane gesture and a token of appreciation for the efforts that the leaders of this association are pulling in order to help needy children, the participating KN4DC telecentre leaders gathered about US\$330 and presented them as a donation to this association on behalf of the KN4DC project.

G. RECOMMENDATIONS AND CLOSING

26. The closing session was held at the locale of the association following the tour on the various services offered at the site. In addition to the workshop participants, the following persons from the Charitable Society for Child Care were present at the closing session:

- Mr. Mohamad Fahmy, Chairman of the Board of Directors;
- Ms. Gazbiya Saad Khalifa, Vice-chairman;
- Mr. Saber Abdel Monem, Secretary-General;
- Ms. Fatma Ossman, Director of the Association;
- Ms. Iman Ragab, member of the Board of Directors and journalist.

27. Mr. Mohamad Fahmy welcomed all guests to Egypt and expressed his hope that the Charitable Society of Child Care was helpful in the organization of the workshop and that the event reached all its expected goals and more.

28. On behalf of the KN4DC project, Mr. Mansour Farah thanked the association for all efforts carried out during the past month, especially by Ms. Assmaa Ossman, and expressed his hope that participants benefited from the quick training on how to write business proposals. He also advised all participants that a homework was set and had to be submitted during the next and final workshop in April in Damascus, namely that every telecentre leader would have to write a business proposal for a project relevant to his or her own community. The exercise would allow them to practice this task which is crucial during the fund-raising process.

29. As a follow-up to the closing statement of Mr. Farah, Mr. Cheikh Obeid submitted a document to telecentre leaders which contains the next steps to be undertaken by them during the coming period. These steps include networking with local and regional telecentres and interacting with the local and global communities. The distributed document is referenced in annex II.

30. Ms. Iman Ragab added to the closing session a summary of her fund-raising tasks in this association. During her long career in journalism, Ms. Ragab has built a comprehensive network of potential donors to whom she submits projects and business ideas of this association in order to receive the necessary funding.

31. Ms. Fatma Ossman presented the history of this association, which was established in 1966 in Fostat, then moved to Giza. When the association started its operations in 1979, very limited funding was available and the initial service offered was the care of orphans. With the increase of donors and donations, the activities expanded to include a children's club, a medical centre, a general library, an IT club and a training centre.

32. Cairo Radio was present during the closing session and made an interview with Mr. Farah and Mr. Fahmy to publicize this workshop as well as the tasks done by the knowledge networks project.

33. The closing session was concluded with the distribution of certificates of attendance to all participants. In their evaluation of the workshop, participants expressed a very high degree of satisfaction in all areas, namely, organization, discussions, interactive sessions, course content and delivery method.

II. ORGANIZATION OF WORK

A. VENUE AND DATE

34. The Workshop on the Enhancement of the Networking Capacities of Knowledge Hubs was held at the Amarante Pyramids Hotel in Cairo from 16 to 18 February 2010, and was organized by ESCWA in partnership with the Charitable Society for Child Care.

B. OPENING

35. Mr. Saber Abdel Monem, Secretary-General of the Charitable Society for Child Care, opened the workshop by welcoming all participants to Egypt and to the workshop venue. The society that Mr. Saber represents is one of 26,000 civil societies in Egypt, but has a leading position vis-à-vis other societies due to the high number and diversity of activities organized there and how those activities and events are inter-related. He continued by saying that what gives an organization edge over others is its networking capacity and this is how ESCWA, through its knowledge networks project, is taking an active role in upgrading those networking capacities for telecentre leaders. He concluded his speech by wishing everybody the best of success in the workshop.

36. Mr. Mansour Farah, Chief of ICT Policies Section at the Information and Communication Technology Division (ICTD) in ESCWA and manager of the KN4DC project, thanked the management of the Charitable Society for Child Care in general and Ms. Assmaa Osman in particular for their valuable contribution to organizing the workshop. As communicated to all participants earlier, Mr. Farah reminded all participants about the goal of this workshop and its expectations.

C. PARTICIPANTS

37. The workshop was attended by a total of 14 participants, mainly telecentre managers and trainers selected from six ESCWA member countries, namely Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen. The list of participants is contained in annex I of this report.

D. AGENDA

38. The agenda of the three-day workshop is set forth below:

1. Opening.
2. Workshop expectations.
3. Enhancement of the networking capacities of knowledge hubs.
4. Knowledge networks and community development in public policies.
5. The Knowledge Network Portal: improvements and the way forward.
6. Sustainability of knowledge hubs and knowledge networks.
7. Course on writing a business proposal.
8. Site visits to telecentres.
9. Recommendations and closing.

E. DOCUMENTS

39. The list of the documents, including presentations, submitted to the workshop is given in annex II of this report, and available on the ESCWA website at:
<http://www.escwa.un.org/information/meetingdetails.asp?referenceNum=1229E>.

Annex I*

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* Issued as submitted.

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Annex II

LIST OF DOCUMENTS

Title
<i>Telecentre presentations on sustainability</i>
Lebanese Organization for Studies and Training – Lebanon (Arabic) http://css.escwa.org.lb/ICTD/1229/LOST.pdf
Salamieh Knowledge Centre – Syrian Arab Republic (Arabic) http://css.escwa.org.lb/ICTD/1229/Salamieh.pdf
Gedaref Digital City Organization – The Sudan (Arabic) http://css.escwa.org.lb/ICTD/1229/GDCO.pdf
Knowledge Stations Programme in Salhia – Jordan (Arabic) http://css.escwa.org.lb/ICTD/1229/Salhia.pdf
General Union of Gedaref Farms – The Sudan (Arabic) http://css.escwa.org.lb/ICTD/1229/Gedaref_Farmers.pdf
Computer Training Centre – Syrian Arab Republic (Arabic) http://css.escwa.org.lb/ICTD/1229/CTC.pdf
Charitable Society for Child Care – Egypt (Arabic) http://css.escwa.org.lb/ICTD/1229/Childcare.pdf
Zabadani Telecentre – Syrian Arab Republic (Arabic) http://css.escwa.org.lb/ICTD/1229/Zabadani.pdf
Knowledge Stations Programme in Ma'an – Jordan (Arabic) http://css.escwa.org.lb/ICTD/1229/Maan.pdf
Knowledge Stations Programme in Hasa – Jordan (Arabic) http://css.escwa.org.lb/ICTD/1229/Hasa.pdf
Multipurpose Technology Community Center – Yemen (Arabic) http://css.escwa.org.lb/ICTD/1229/Attakaful.pdf
<i>Sources</i>
Enhancement of the Networking Capacities of the Knowledge Hubs http://css.escwa.org.lb/ICTD/1229/NetworkingCapacities.pdf
Next Steps (Arabic) http://css.escwa.org.lb/ICTD/1229/Cheikh_Obeid-Next_steps.pdf
Knowledge Networks and Community Development in Public Policies http://css.escwa.org.lb/ICTD/1229/Knowledge.pdf
Writing Business Proposals (Arabic) http://css.escwa.org.lb/ICTD/1229/writing.pdf
