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WTIS 2014: Indicators symposium recognizes progress in ICT development

The 12th World Telecommunication/ICT Indicators Symposium (WTIS), organized by ITU and hosted by the Government of Georgia, took place in Tbilisi, Georgia, 24–26 November 2014 to debate hot topics related to international information and communication technology (ICT) statistics and information society measurement. The three-day Symposium, the main global forum to discuss ICT statistics, was attended by 250 participants from 79 Member States and 15 other public and private organizations.

The Symposium was opened by Irakli Garibashvili, the Prime Minister of Georgia, in the presence of Giorgi Kvirikashvili, the Minister of Economy and Sustainable Development and Vice-Prime Minister of Georgia, and Dimitry Kumsishvili, First Deputy Minister of Economy and Sustainable Development, and Chair of WTIS 2014. In his opening remarks, Mr Garibashvili highlighted the vital importance of telecommunications as a priority sector for Georgia's development, and described the liberalization of its market, the move to digital broadcasting, and the introduction of e-government services.

ITU was represented by the Secretary-General Elect, Houlin Zhao (now ITU Secretary-General), who highlighted the important role of WTIS at the dawn of the post 2015-development period, when ICTs are expected to play a critical role for the sustainable development of countries. He further emphasized the importance of ITU's work in monitoring the information society. Brahima Sanou, Director of the ITU Telecommunication Development Bureau, described the framework for ITU's work on ICT statistics emanating from the ITU Plenipotentiary Conference 2014 and sixth World Telecommunication Development Conference.

WTIS began with a ministerial round table in which participants discussed the upcoming post-2015 development agenda and future ICT4D policies. The keynote speaker, Professor Richard Heeks of the United Kingdom's University of Manchester, highlighted the mismatch between new development priorities and current ICT4D priorities and emphasized the importance of "development through ICTs", where economic, social and political life is digitally mediated. The experiences of Jordan, Namibia and Egypt were also presented, and panellists emphasized how data can form a sound basis for economic and social policy and decision-making. Calls were made for the Partnership on Measuring ICT for Development, ITU and National Statistical Offices (NSOs) to contribute actively to data collection.

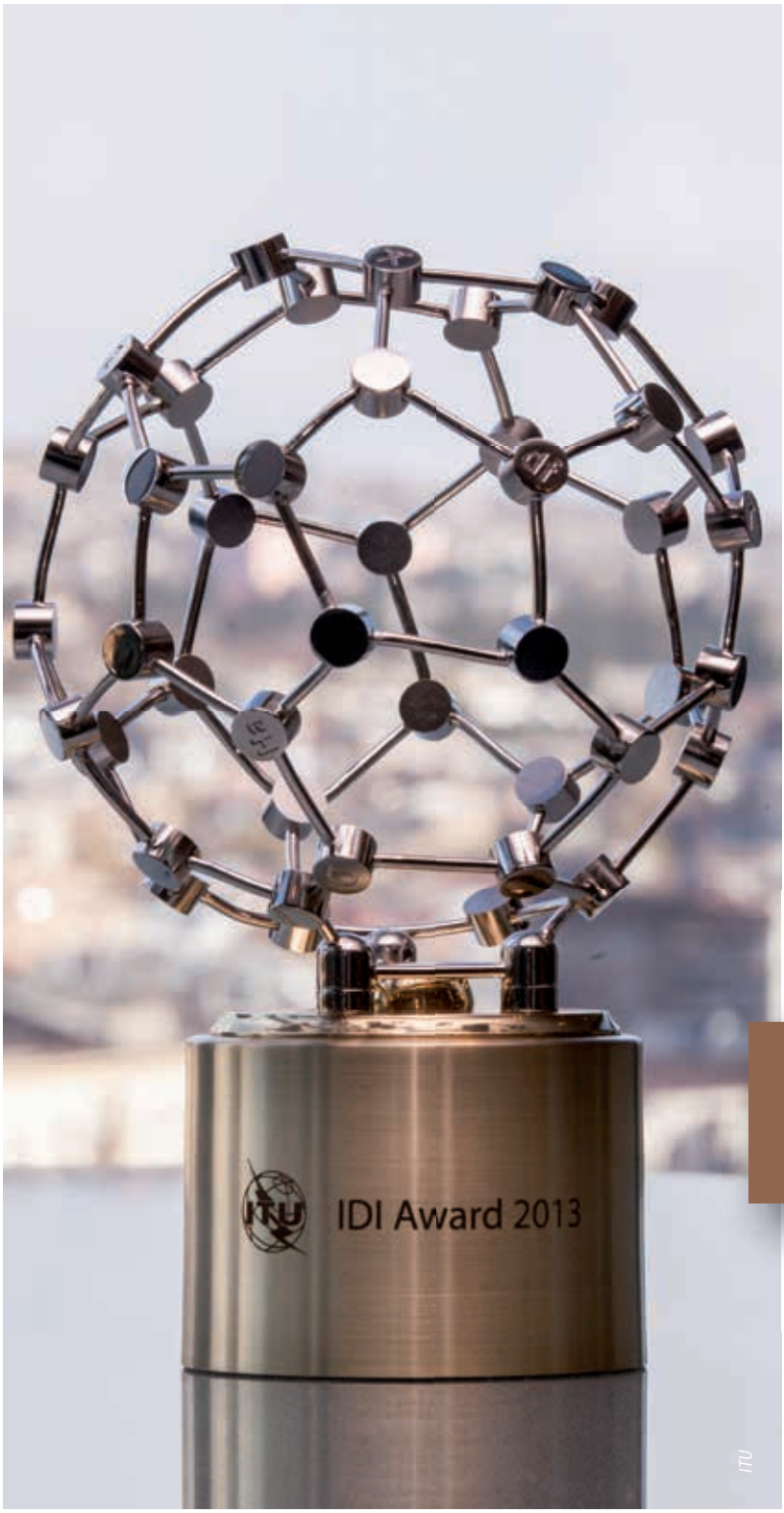
Discussions took place on "big data", which offers huge possibilities for complementing existing and producing new ICT indicators, including from: mobile devices, mobile apps, mobile payment platforms, content delivery networks, social media, instant messaging, and other Internet sources. Despite challenges with regard to data quality, methodologies and privacy, mobile and Internet data are already being used to produce real-time information, including for tracking and monitoring the impact of earthquakes and epidemics. However, analysis of big data suggests that the geographical distribution of Internet content may not match the distribution of Internet users, and highlights the uneven geography of knowledge production.

Another session focused on measuring competition, regulation and affordability of ICT services. Experts also discussed data quality, open data policies, and the progress of the work carried out by the Partnership on Measuring ICT for Development. Participants debated current and future work on telecommunication/ICT indicators and ICT household indicators, and received reports from the Expert Group on Telecommunication/ICT Indicators (EGTI) and the Expert Group on ICT Household Indicators (EGH) on their work over the past year. Hong Kong (China) and Spain presented their experiences with household surveys, while the experiences of Japan and Moldova were presented with regard to implementing open data policies.

With a view to improving international comparability, it was agreed that a revision of the indicator on International Internet bandwidth was necessary, and participants discussed the difference between the indicators on mobile phone owners, mobile phone users and mobile-cellular subscriptions. ITU will collaborate with GSMA Intelligence to improve global data on mobile phone uptake and usage.

A special session on the international coordination of ICT measurement was held at the occasion of the 10th Anniversary of the Partnership on Measuring ICT for Development.

ITU's flagship statistics publication, "Measuring the Information Society Report 2014", was launched at WTIS. The ICT Development Index (IDI) country rankings were announced at an award ceremony, and discussed during a separate panel. Denmark ranked first in ITU's IDI, a composite measurement that ranks 166 countries according to their level of ICT access, use and skills (see separate article about the report and ICT Development Index). An "Information society measurement award" and trophy were awarded to those countries that had hosted world telecommunication/ICT indicators events; Egypt (WTIM 2009), Mauritius (WTIM 2011), Thailand (WTIM 2012) and Mexico (WTIS 2013), as well as Georgia. The Government of Japan offered to host WTIS 2015.



For further information, including the agenda, the presentation slides, webcast archives, documents and the list of participants, please see: www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Pages/events/wtis2014/default.aspx.

Listen to the views of some of the speakers:

- Dr Azzam Sleit, Minister of Information and Communications Technology, Jordan
- Stanley Simataa, Deputy Minister of Information and Communication Technology, Namibia
- Nagwa Ebrahim Elshenawy, Under-Secretary for Information and Strategic Planning, Ministry of Communications and Information Technology, Egypt
- Kiyoshi Mori, Director General for International Affairs, Global ICT Strategy Bureau, Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, Japan.

WTIS 2015 will take place in Japan within the week of 30 November to 4 December 2015.