WSIS Forum 2011

MEASURING THE ICT SECTOR FOR POLICY ANALYSIS
17 May 2011, 14:45-18:00 hours
Room IX, ILO Headquarters, Geneva

<u>Summary for final report</u>

The session was chaired by UNESCO Institute for Statistics and started with an overview by ITU of recent activities of the *Partnership.* Special attention was given to emerging measurement issues, particularly related to the rapidly growing mobile access to the Internet. This presentation was followed by a progress report on e-government indicators presented by UNECA.

The session then turned to its main theme, the measurement of the ICT sector and its importance for policy analysis. UNCTAD pointed to the internationally agreed definition of the ICT sector and the latest classification that can be used to measure the sector. Although a number of developed economies collect data on the ICT sector, it was noted that only few developing countries do. The OECD highlighted the evolution of the ICT sector definition and presented new data on the ICT sector in OECD countries. Special emphasis was given to the importance of having accurate data to measure the ICT sector's impact on productivity, competitiveness and economic growth.

Orbicom (the Network of UNESCO Chairs in Communication) then presented the results of its research and training programme related to "Statistical Compilation of the ICT Sector and Policy Analysis", involving researchers and statistical offices in Brazil, Cameroon, Egypt, India and Malaysia. The main results of the country studies were presented by researchers from each of the countries, who provided an overview of the magnitude and composition of the respective ICT sectors. While some countries had substantial ICT manufacturing (e.g. Malaysia), others had developed mainly their ICT services (e.g. India). Generally, countries without ICT manufacturing showed ICT trade deficits. In view of the significant variation in size and composition, relevant policy responses needed to be country- as well as industry-specific.

Despite differences, the research also pointed to a number of similarities. For example, ICT sector employees tended to have an above-average level of education and to be younger than employees in other sectors. Furthermore, jobs in the ICT sector were generally perceived as desirable because of upward mobility, job security and the availability of training opportunities. Finally, data suggested that the ICT sector had a relatively high degree of R&D expenditure.

In the lively discussion that followed, several measurement challenges were recognized, including disparities in the gender distribution of employment. There was a lower percentage of women employed in the ICT sector and often women receive lower wages, particularly in the informal sector. Another challenge was related to the need to obtain information from multiple sources within a country. The studies are based on data from various sources, including national accounts, trade statistics and survey data. In this context, the researchers mentioned the importance of transparency and the need for governments to make national data available for research purposes. While data to analyze the ICT sector may be available, they are often "hidden" in surveys and national accounts and scattered across different line ministries, the NSO, the central bank and other institutions. It therefore requires a fair amount of effort to find and analyze the data.

Addressing these and other challenges required collaboration between the different stakeholders. It was recommended that other countries explore the possibility of carrying out similar studies. The role of the Partnership in promoting the availability of data on the ICT sector, especially in developing countries, was stressed.