COMMISSION ON SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY FOR DEVELOPMENT (CSTD)

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Submissions from entities in the United Nations system, international organizations and other stakeholders on their efforts in 2021 to implement the outcomes of the WSIS

Submission by

United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs

This submission was prepared as an input to the report of the UN Secretary-General on "Progress made in the implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society at the regional and international levels" (to the 25th session of the CSTD), in response to the request by the Economic and Social Council, in its resolution 2006/46, to the UN Secretary-General to inform the Commission on Science and Technology for Development on the implementation of the outcomes of the WSIS as part of his annual reporting to the Commission.

Report on the Implementation of the Outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS)

(January – December 2021)
United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA)

The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) through the Division for Public Administration and Development Management (DPADM) serves as facilitator for the implementation of and follow-up to the action lines:
- C1 - The role of public governance authorities and all stakeholders in the promotion of ICTs for development
- C7 - ICT Applications: E-government
- C11 - International and regional cooperation

I - Summary

As the leading facilitator for Action Lines C1, C7eGov, and C11, as a member of the United Nations Group on the Information Society (UNGIS), and the institutional manager of the IGF Secretariat[1], UNDESA continued its efforts to promote policy dialogue and advocacy among United Nations bodies, governmental and non-governmental stakeholders and partners for the implementation of the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS). UNDESA has ensured a comprehensive exchange of views, information and experiences among WSIS stakeholders; and has provided advisory services and technical assistance to developing countries.

II. Analytical overview of trends and experiences

Global e-government development

The next edition of the UN E-Government Survey will be launched in the year 2022 -- with eight remaining years for UN Member States to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and three years from 2025 during which the General Assembly will review the 20th year implementation of the Action Lines of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS+20), including the action line on e-government.

It will also be the 12th edition of the biennial major publication of UN DESA, having witnessed how digitalization has emerged as a global megatrend, and how e-government

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[1] http://www.intgovforum.org/

has emerged from a technocratic role -- that was practiced through siloed approach, and in a handful of high-income countries, to an essential role at the centre of government's modus operandi, increasingly through a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach. During the past months of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is evident that digital government now plays a central role in ensuring business continuity of government across sectors, and ensuring multilevel governance across regional and local jurisdictions, as well as ensuring information and service provision to all segments of the society, including businesses and the most vulnerable groups. But leaving on one behind in the post-COVID-19 age of digitalization must include urgent actions to close a persistent digital divide that is fast becoming the new face of inequality. Based on the 2020 UN e-Government Survey, the average E-Government Development Index for more than 50% of the countries in the world remain well below the global average and half of the world population is off-line or have issues on connectivity and accessibility. This gap points to persistent challenges that continue to undermine the efforts for development of the countries in special groups and in particular the Least Developed States.

Local e-government development
E-government development is a rising priority in political agendas, but attention has been focused primarily on digital government transformation at the national level. Local e-government merits attention as well because city and municipal administrations have more direct interaction with residents and are responsible for addressing concerns affecting people's daily lives. As part of the 2020 United Nations E-Government Survey, levels of e-government development were assessed for 100 cities—a marked increase from the 40 cities evaluated as part of the pilot study first conducted in 2018. For the 2022 edition, UN DESA will examine the most populous city from each of the 193 UN Member States.

Internet governance
The sixteenth annual meeting of the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) was hosted by the Government of Poland in Katowice from 6-10 December under the overarching theme: Internet United.. Two main focus areas and four emerging and cross-cutting areas were selected after community input: (i) Economic and social inclusion and human rights (ii) Universal access and meaningful connectivity. IGF 2021 Emerging and cross-cutting issue areas were (i) Emerging regulation: market structure, content, data and consumer/users rights regulation (ii)Environmental sustainability and climate change (iii) Inclusive Internet governance ecosystems and digital cooperation and (iv) Trust, security, stability.

Science, Technology and Innovation for the Sustainable Development Goals
Pursuant to General Assembly resolution 70/1, on 4 and 5 May 2021, the President of the Economic and Social Council, Munir Akram, convened the sixth annual STI Forum[2]. As a component of the Technology Facilitation Mechanism (TFM), the Forum is a venue to discuss cooperation in science, technology and innovation (STI) around thematic areas pertaining to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), bringing together all relevant stakeholders to actively contribute in their areas of expertise. The Forum explored lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic for a better science-policy-society interface, a resilient, sustainable and inclusive recovery, and rapid solutions for global challenges. This included reflections on the response of the scientific community to the

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[2] https://sdgs.un.org/tfm/sti-forum

pandemic, its impact on open science, building trust in science, support for the socio-economic recovery, including the role of creative economy sector, advancement of gender equality, as well as lessons-learned on how to better harness science and technology to resolve global challenges[3].

The 2021 High-level political forum on sustainable development (HLPF) underlined the following related to ICT:

It was emphasized that inequalities in pandemic response and recovery have been exacerbated by the digital divide and unequal access to technology. Technology, in particular digital technology, and closing the digital divide, including the gender digital divide, are essential for recovering from the pandemic and achieving the 2030 Agenda. This means providing the entire world with high-quality, reliable, and affordable Internet access, as well as promoting digital literacy and skills. There is a necessity of closing the gender digital divide, the true severity of which is likely underestimated. It was noted that gender digital inequality is also driven by online gender-based violence and abuse requiring the security of women online to be a priority and it was warned that STI policy is often gender blind and thus governments may unwittingly increase or widen the gender gap. It was further observed that women were unrepresented within the STI community prior to the pandemic, a situation which was further exacerbated by COVID-19 because of the burden of additional unpaid care work traditionally placed on women.

Effective implementation of the SDGs requires good data and statistics and there is an urgent need to assist developing countries in building digital data infrastructure and capacity development.

It was stressed that digital development could act as a great equalizer in bridging these divides. As such, policy efforts must integrate digital development that allow for meaningful access to digital resources for all, and specifically for marginalized groups. Importance of information technology was recognized as an important element for sustainable agriculture.

Among the concerns shared across regions were among others inadequate connectivity, infrastructure and digital skills. It was stressed that national STI4SDG roadmaps could be useful, strategic tools for ensuring policy coherence, linking public and private actions, and optimizing investments. It was recommended by the STI Forum that the Technology Facilitation Mechanism should further promote international cooperation on policy, plans and capacity-building, including the Partnership in Action on STI4SDG roadmaps.

Also during the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) 2021, UNDESA co-organized a thematic session on the theme 'Mobilizing science, technology and innovation and strengthening the science-policy-society interface', on 9 July 2021.

The Ministerial declaration of the high-level segment of the 2021 session of the Economic and Social Council and the high-level political forum on sustainable development also underlines importance of ICT and digitalization. It recognizes need for appropriate

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[3] https://sdgs.un.org/sites/default/files/2021-06/2021-STI-Forum-summary-advance_1.pdf

information technology to increase the resilience, productivity and incomes and to enhance sustainable agriculture and food security. It also underlines that COVID-19 has shown that digital technologies are a vital component of resilient financial and public services, including health-care services and education, but also demonstrated the persistent digital divide undermining access to affordable, safe and secure information and communications technologies. It has been recognized that digital inclusion, when implemented in a sustainable and secure manner, as an integral part of social and economic inclusion helps to ensure that digital transformation does not widen inequality within and between countries or the gender digital divide. The importance of ICT has also been recognized in reducing hazard exposure and vulnerability to disasters. The importance of strengthening meaningful digital accessibility and affordability of digital skills and media and information literacy and providing training to support data processing, transmission and storage has been stressed, and it was underlined that the same human rights that people have offline must be protected online.

The declaration also committed to significantly increase access to information and communications technology and to strive to provide universal and affordable access to the Internet in least developed countries. It also committed to promote expanding digital and mobile banking services. It was underlined that inclusive and equitable delivery and access to public services, including health care, education and social services, including through digital cooperation, is key to building greater public confidence and trust in government. It was stressed that children and youth need to be free from all forms of violence, neglect, bullying, abuse and exploitation, both in person and in digital contexts. The declaration also committed to promote inclusive digital economy and connectivity and build resilience across sectors as well as to enhance and promote digital capacity-building, infrastructure, connectivity and technical assistance initiatives and innovation and technologies towards advancing the Goals and targets, with a special focus on developing countries. It also recognized that in the context of emerging technologies and their applications such as artificial intelligence, big data and blockchain will undoubtedly transform production and business there is a need to take actions to bridge the digital gap to ensure that this transformation will reduce inequalities among countries. It is also acknowledged that any consideration of tax measures in response to the digital economy should include a careful analysis of its implications for developing countries, taking into account their inputs, with a special focus on their unique needs and capacities. It also calls upon the United Nations, and all other relevant international organizations, to support countries, particularly developing countries, in building policy and administrative capacity for the effective and efficient taxation of the digital economy.

SDGs and ICT indicators

During 2021, UN DESA served in the steering committee of the Partnership on Measuring ICT for Development. The Partnership is an international, multi-stakeholder initiative that was launched in 2004 to improve the availability and quality of ICT data and indicators, particularly in developing countries. Partnership's WSIS 2021 session[4] was a follow-up to the Partnership session organized during the WSIS Forum 2020 on the call to address data availability of the ICT indicators necessary for policy making. With the pandemic, national

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[4] https://www.itu.int/net4/wsis/forum/2021/Agenda/Session/407

statistical offices have been tasked with producing accurate, high quality statistics faster, more frequently and with a reduced burden on respondents. Yet they are expected to achieve this within the same or even a smaller budget. The session seeked answers to the questions how statistical offices can collect data in innovative ways? Are there new tools out there that we can use? Can they use big data sources to complement official statistics and better meet their objectives for providing timely and accurate evidence for policy-making? In particular,the session included presentations on the use of mobile phone data to calculate the two SDG indicators; i) 9.c.1 – Percentage of population covered by mobile network: 2G, 3G and 4G and above (administrative data) and ii) 17.8.1 – Percentage of population using the Internet (household survey data). The session also showcased the importance of using new data sources/big data to complement or supplement existing data particularly in measuring digital economy.

Other relevant activities

The World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) Forum 2021 partnered with the Global Coalition on Aging, in collaboration with ITU, WHO and DESA, on the first-ever WSIS Forum Healthy Ageing Innovation Prize, which was awarded to the most innovative technology that enables healthier and more active ageing and was presented at the Forum's 2021 Special Track on ICTs and Older Persons.

The 59th session of the Commission for Social Development (CSocD59), which took place from 8 to 17 February 2021, address the priority theme of "Socially just transition towards sustainable development: the role of digital technologies on social development and well-being of all". UNDESA organised a high-level panel discussion on the priority theme, a multi-stakeholder forum on the priority theme, and two side events on the theme of Digital Technologies, Families and the Impact on COVID-19 | Family (un.org), co-organized with the Major Group for Children and Youth a side event on "Youth driving a new social contract: reshaping the digital divide and co- designing connected futures", and co-organized a side event on Innovating Public Governance and Leveraging Digital Technologies for Social Inclusion of Vulnerable Groups.

UN/DESA Policy Brief #92: Leveraging digital technologies for social inclusion, 17 February 2021; Leveraging digital technologies for social inclusion (un.org); and Policy Brief on Digitally enabled new forms of work and policy implications for labour regulation frameworks and social protection systems (to be released in September 2021)

III. Future actions

In 2022, UN DESA will publish the United Nations E-Government Survey 2022, with newly updated Local Online Service Index (LOSI) covering the most populous city from each 193 UN Member State. The new edition will also delve deep into key questions such as: (i) how to shape the Future of Digital Government in 2030 and beyond, and how to promote digital commons as a global public good, including internet connectivity and affordability for all peoples; (ii) how the new trends on frontier technologies will impact and drive the future of digital government for achieving the sustainable development; (iii) how public institutions, at all level, together with other stakeholders, can devise resilient strategies for achieving the SDGs.

Digital government is not an end; it is a means to improving public service delivery, increasing people's engagement, enhancing transparency, accountability and inclusion, and ultimately making life better for all. E-government has an increasingly important role to play in supporting countries as they endeavour to activate the Decade of Action and accelerate the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

UN DESA will continue to support governments in their journey in e-government development, continue to facilitate international and regional collaboration and promote ICTs. The way forward is a new "digital normal" in responding to global challenges and pursuing sustainable development.

2022 Internet Governance Forum is expected to take place in Ababa, Ethiopia during the fourth quarter of 2021. UN DESA, as institutional home to the IGF, will continue to support the Secretary-General to convene the annual IGF meetings as mandated by the General Assembly, and to support the IGF itself, as the key platform for dialogue on Internet governance.

The theme of the World Telecommunication and Information Society Day (WTISD) in 2022 is "Digital technologies for older persons and healthy ageing." The Day will be commemorated on 17 May 2022.