# INTERSESSIONAL PANEL OF THE UNITED NATIONS COMMISSION ON SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY FOR DEVELOPMENT (CSTD)

**Lisbon, Portugal**
**6-7 November 2023**

Contribution by United Kingdom

to the CSTD 2023-2024 priority theme on "Data for Development"

**PRIORITY THEME 1:** Data for Development

# United Nations Commission on Science and Technology for Development (CSTD)

Dear CSTD Member,

The 26th CSTD annual session selected "Data for Development", as one of the priority themes for its 27th session (2023-24 period).

Data, including for scientific and research purposes, are becoming a key strategic resource for sustainable development. If well managed, data can help overcome major global development challenges, such as poverty, food security, climate change, disaster risk management, and pandemics. If badly handled, they can generate unequal development outcomes. General Assembly's resolution 77/150 of 14 December 2022 noted that the Commission on Science and Technology for Development could explore the connection between data and sustainable development, including data governance, while taking into account the multiple dimensions of data. The development implications of data, including data quality, data capabilities, and responsible data handling should also feature prominently in discussions about the Global Digital Compact and in the Summit of the Future, adding to the relevance of the CSTD's perspectives on this issue as the UN focal point for STI for development.

Under this theme, the Commission will consider issues such as major contributions and risks of data in relation to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development; how to ensure that developing countries benefit from the data revolution while considering risks; national and international policies and support measures that can help address the challenges of the developing countries in the area of data relevant for sustainable development, while taking into account the multiple dimensions of data.

The CSTD secretariat is in the process of drafting an issues paper on the theme to be presented at the CSTD inter-sessional panel meeting to be held in the second half of October 2023 in Portugal. In this context, we would like to solicit inputs from the CSTD member States on this theme. We would be grateful if you could kindly answer the following questions based on your experience in your country or region.

1. What are the major contributions and risks of data in relation to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development?
2. How can developing countries benefit from the data revolution while considering risks?
3. What national and international policies and support measures can help address the challenges of the developing countries in the area of data relevant for sustainable development, including scientific and research purposes, data quality, data capabilities and data governance, while taking into account the multiple dimensions of data?
4. In your country's view, what role could CSTD play in respect of data for development, including in the context of the Global Digital Compact?

Please indicate contact person(s) responsible for projects/policies and international collaboration in this context in case we need clarification on the inputs.

Please send your responses and any further inputs on the theme to the CSTD secretariat (stdev@unctad.org) by **15 August 2023**. We look forward to receiving your valuable inputs.

Sincere regards,

CSTD secretariat

Responses:

1. What are the major contributions and risks of data in relation to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development?

Advise to refer strongly to the SDG progress report: [The-Sustainable-Development-Goals-Report-2023.pdf (un.org)](https://un.org)

- The latest global-level data and assessments from custodian agencies[1] paint a concerning picture: of the approximately 140 targets that can be evaluated, half of them show moderate or severe deviations from the desired trajectory. Furthermore, more than 30 per cent of these targets have experienced no progress or, even worse, regression below the 2015 baseline.
- Despite the challenges in securing timely data across all 169 targets, considerable progress has been achieved in the availability of internationally comparable data: the number of indicators included in the global SDG database has increased from 115 in 2016 to 225 in 2023. The number of data records in the database has increased from 330, 000 in 2016 to 2.7 million as of May 2023. In just seven years, the global SDG database has expanded significantly.
- While these achievements are worthy of celebration, we cannot ignore the persistent gaps that still challenge our data landscape. Geographic coverage, timeliness, and disaggregation remain areas of concern. For several crosscutting goals such as climate action (Goal 13), gender equality (Goal 5), and peace, justice, and strong institutions (Goal 16), less than half of the 193 countries or areas have internationally comparable data since 2015. This stark reality serves as a reminder that we must prioritize gathering essential information on these critical issues that profoundly impact our future and our planet.
- Furthermore, a significant challenge lies in the timeliness of data, with less than 30 per cent of the latest available data from 2022 and 2023, while over half of the latest data comes from 2020 and 2021. As we embark on delivering a rescue plan for people and planet at the SDG Summit, accelerated action for data is imperative.
- Despite all efforts, challenges remain in the coordination capacity of NSOs within the National Statistical System. A survey conducted in 2021 on the implementation of the Cape Town Global Action Plan for Sustainable Development Data showed that around 53 per cent of the NSOs expressed dissatisfaction with their coordination role. Particularly, in low- and lower-middle income countries, as many as 74 per cent of NSOs felt a need for improvement. Inadequate institutional mechanisms, ineffective communication channels for information sharing, and lack of incentives were identified as the top three challenges impeding better coordination.
- The unprecedented data demand driven by the 2030 Agenda has acted as a catalyst for data innovation… Engaging respondents as cocreators, empowering them to contribute to the data collection process, has further enhanced the quality and relevance of the obtained information. Meanwhile, nontraditional data sources such as administrative records, satellite imagery, and citizen-generated data have emerged as valuable sources in bridging data gaps. Another important aspect of innovation focuses on the integration of multiple data sources.

2. How can developing countries benefit from the data revolution while considering risks?
- Integration of data and statistical systems with national planning and financing ministries.
- "An effective regulatory framework is needed to align private sector governance models with sustainable development objectives. A fresh push is needed to reap the data dividend, and the monitoring, follow-up and review of the Goals must be taken to the next level, including by strengthening civic space and public engagement in policy- and decision-making. »
- « Take action to reap the data dividend, with a focus on the most vulnerable groups, by working towards securing data for at least 90 per cent of the Sustainable Development Goals targets in each country by 2027, increasing domestic financing for data and statistics by 50 per cent from current levels by 2030, embracing new data sources and innovative approaches, and adopting data governance and protection policies »

- Recognizing the diverse national capacities in data and statistics, countries agree on the importance of adopting a "whole-of-society" approach to meet the monitoring needs of the ambitious 2030 Agenda.

3. What national and international policies and support measures can help address the challenges of the developing countries in the area of data relevant for sustainable development, including scientific and research purposes, data quality, data capabilities and data governance, while taking into account the multiple dimensions of data?

SDG progress report:

- Within governments, the alignment of the global SDG indicator framework with national policy priorities has fostered collaborative efforts between national statistical offices and line ministries.
- The public sector has been the main partner of national statistical offices, with 80 per cent of NSOs having institutional arrangements with other government entities. Collaboration with international organizations is also common, with 66 per cent of countries reporting such partnerships. Additionally, academia, the private sector, and civil society organizations have emerged as important partners for NSOs. However, 13 per cent of countries indicated a lack of arrangements with other stakeholders. Moving forward, it is crucial to make efforts in building partnerships with a wide range of stakeholders to further strengthen data monitoring efforts for the SDGs.
- The increased openness, accessibility, and effective use of data have played a crucial role in achieving better data impact…. One key step in adding value to existing data collection is the dissemination of microdata, which allows researchers to conduct more in-depth analysis, promotes transparency and accountability, and fosters collaboration. Only less than half of the low- and lower-middle income countries disseminate survey microdata data through national repositories.
- The need for data capacity building has never been so urgent, as countries face multiple crises on health, food, energy and climate, and need better data to support policymaking. It is also paramount to ensure effective monitoring and reporting on the progress towards achieving the SDGs.
- In response to the funding gap in data, the recently launched Hangzhou declaration "Accelerating progress in the implementation of the Cape Town Global Action Plan for Sustainable Development Data", called for "an urgent and sustained increase in the level and scale of investments in data and statistics from domestic and international actors, from the public, private and philanthropic sectors, to strengthen statistical capacity in low-income countries and fragile states, close data gaps for vulnerable groups and enhance country resilience in the current context of economic crisis, conflict, climate change and increased food insecurity."

4. In your country's view, what role could CSTD play in respect of data for development, including in the context of the Global Digital Compact?
- Recognise, and advocate for, the multiplier benefits, and transformational opportunities of the data dividend which is enabled by digital and tech transformation, and the role of the national statistical system in coordinating and regulating access – linking with national planning priorities. Unlocking the Data Dividend for the SDGs (data4sdgs.org)
- Coalesce and advocate for the need for coordinated investment in the strengthening of national data systems, (Investment Case: Multiplying Progress Through Data Ecosystems (data4sdgs.org))
- Work within national data partnerships -   bringing together public and private stakeholders to drive timely, ethical and efficient data use. The partnerships will build a common approach, catalyze new investments in capacities and infrastructure, and overcome fragmentation.

- Sustainable investment - directing a greater proportion of data investment in to sustainable solutions for national data ecosystems rather than single use surveys.
- "Close the loop"/ leave a real-time data legacy - Ensure the value and impact of data investments are directly benefitting citizens and national priorities.
- Improve coordination, advocate for the need to commit to harmonised indicators and sources: **Building a unified sustainable development goal database: Why does sustainable development goal data selection matter? –** *Sustainable Development (2022)*