

**United Nations Commission on Science and Technology for Development (CSTD)
Twenty-seventh Annual Session**

**High-level panel on
“Data for Development”**

**16 April 2024,
Tuesday, 10.00-13.00 (Geneva time)
Geneva**

Concept note

Background

As economies and societies become increasingly interwoven with digital technologies, data emerge not only as an economic asset but as a catalyst for transformative change. Data enable breakthrough innovations and novel forms of value creation, influencing and reshaping various aspects of our lives and work.

One of the most significant potentials of data lies in its ability to harmonize economic priorities with sustainability demands. When managed wisely, data can become a powerful tool in addressing global challenges, ranging from poverty eradication to climate change mitigation. Crucially, data can enable evidence-informed policymaking, offering a holistic perspective on the complex interplay among various Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This facilitates the formulation of integrated interventions that simultaneously address multiple SDGs, ensuring no goal is compromised.

The progress in data and AI stands as a cornerstone for the advancement of scientific research, arguably being its most significant contribution. The advent of data-driven innovations has the potential to significantly reinvigorate scientific advancement, laying the groundwork for pioneering discoveries in various critical fields.

While data-driven insights harbor the potential to spur innovations and foster sustainable development, the pathway is riddled with both unparalleled prospects and formidable challenges. If mishandled, data can accentuate the disparities in developmental outcomes, magnifying the digital divide and potentially morphing it into a broader developmental chasm. If left unregulated, data can inadvertently lead to market monopolies, spawn discriminatory practices, and even pose fundamental threats to human rights.

Global data governance is essential to address data-related risks and effectively combat global challenges like climate change and pandemics. The governance of data and data-enabled technologies should be consistent with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The pursuit of economic development, driven by data-enabled technologies, must not come at the expense of ethical considerations. At the same time, data governance should find a balance between risk avoidance and the promotion of innovation.

Objective

The high-level panel will discuss the current state of data-enabled technologies and their future outlook in the context of data-driven development. It will explore the roles of both international and national stakeholders in designing governance frameworks that aim to maximize the positive impact of data on sustainable development, while simultaneously minimizing associated risks and challenges

Guiding questions for discussion

- What should be done now to unleash the full potential of data and data-enabled technologies for societal benefit? Which policies are required to mitigate and resolve the risks and threats associated with data and data-enabled technologies?
- How can data and data-driven innovations affect development potential and the achievement of the SDGs?
- What measures are necessary to ensure the inclusivity and representation of marginalized groups in data collection and analysis processes, to prevent biases and ensure equitable outcomes in the pursuit of the SDGs?
- How can international standards and best practices for data governance be developed to facilitate cross-border collaboration on global challenges?

Format of the high-level panel

The panel will begin with the introduction of the Report of the Secretary-General by the CSTD secretariat. This will be followed by presentations from panelists (maximum 15 minutes each). After presentations, an interactive discussion between panelists and the participants will commence. Interventions from participants in the meeting room will have a duration of maximum 3 minutes each.

Supporting documents

- Report of the Secretary-General: Data for Development (E/CN.16/2024/2), available at https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/ecn162024d2_en.pdf
- Issues Paper on Data for Development, available at https://unctad.org/system/files/information-document/CSTD2023-2024_Issues01_data_en.pdf
- Other documents available on the website of the CSTD: <https://unctad.org/meeting/commission-science-and-technology-development-twenty-seventh-session>