Chair's Summary

1st Meeting of the UN CSTD Working Group on Data Governance

1-2 May 2025, Geneva and Online, Switzerland

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6 May 2025

The first session opened on the morning of 1 May 2025 with Mr. Peter Major, the Working Group Chair, welcoming 165 participants and formally announcing Colombia's accession to the Working Group. The Chair outlined how he had been nominated following CSTD Bureau consultations and explained that two Vice-Chairs would serve: Ambassador Kah of the Gambia for state actors, whose appointment had been confirmed by silence procedure, and a Vice-Chair for non-state actors to be elected by the Working Group non-state members.

The Chair introduced the suggested Terms of Reference (ToR) drafted by the CSTD Bureau, acknowledging that they required adjustment to align precisely with paragraph 48 of the Global Digital Compact (GDC), and circulated a provisional agenda of the meeting. Representatives from OECD, FAO and Germany sought clarity on how the agenda would address procedural aspects of the Working Group report, while the U.S. delegation proposed introducing a separate agenda item to discuss the ToR and argued against an interim report in favor of a single output. The Chair agreed to revisit the agenda to accommodate these proposals.

When the discussion turned to the ToR, the United States stressed that data governance should be managed at the national level, consistent with state sovereignty, and that the US sees the group's primary purpose as facilitating information-sharing and capacity-building, rather than formulating universal principles or frameworks, given the diverse approaches already existing among member states. The US also stated that reaffirmations of the 2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were not acceptable for inclusion in this group's work. They advocated instead for a practical approach focusing on interoperability and mutual understanding of different national and regional data governance regimes.

Delegations from Canada, Switzerland, Indonesia, Brazil, Ecuador, Austria and others expressed their support for maintaining the GDC's language on SDGs, equity, inclusivity and sustainability and geographic balance. Anita Gurumurthy and the Gambia highlighted the need for explicit references to data stewardship, sovereignty and power-asymmetry remedies. Germany and the Chair proposed using targeted questionnaires and small intersessional drafting groups to gather broader input without permanently dividing the plenary.

Anthony Wong provided a legal framing for the ToR, emphasizing that paragraph 48 of the Global Digital Compact constitutes a non-negotiable charter from the General Assembly that the Working Group must not amend. He underscored equity and interoperability as essential principles, urged the Group to build on existing foundations (especially given the complexities of data governance and data as inputs to AI) rather than restart discussions from scratch. He also stressed that the terms and concepts in paragraph 48 are elaborated in the GDC's Objective 4 section ("Advance responsible, equitable and interoperable data governance approaches") and that the entire text of Objective 4 should therefore be considered.

In the afternoon of 1 May, after agreeing that the ToR would remain closely anchored to paragraph 48 of the Global Digital Compact, participants turned to how the Working Group's report should be structured and what it should contain. Alejandro Saucedo laid out six indispensable technical foundations: shared taxonomy, interoperable access control, provenance tracking, comprehensive documentation, clear usability standards and explicit human oversight. He argued that without these bedrock elements any governance recommendations would lack coherence. Building on that, Linnet Taylor proposed a dedicated "Public Interest Data" chapter to interrogate ownership, value chains and who benefits from data, while Reyna Jenkyns urged systematic treatment of established frameworks (FAIR, TRUST, CARE, Open Science), multiple dimensions of interoperability (from machine-actionable formats and persistent

identifiers to ontologies, schema alignment and open licenses) and Indigenous data perspectives, especially for AI training or digital twin applications where provenance is critical.

Austria recommended beginning with a comprehensive mapping chapter surveying UN, regional and sectoral data governance initiatives to reveal convergences, divergences and gaps,particularly around benefit-sharing, cross-border flows and infrastructure needs. Nick Ashton-Hart took this further by suggesting an online repository, organized around the ToR's four thematic areas, into which members and observers could upload relevant instruments and studies. Automated text-analysis tools could then detect recurring principles and issues, thus providing an evidence-based springboard for subsequent sessions. Claire Melamed envisioned a three-layered structure: an outer layer articulating overarching objectives (development, human rights protection, innovation, inclusive growth), a middle layer detailing data-specific outcomes (interoperability, trusted flows, equitable benefit-sharing, privacy safeguards) and an inner layer prescribing implementation mechanisms (roadmaps, capacity-building arrangements, participatory models and adaptive standards processes). Carl Gahnberg called for an initial gap analysis to identify the report's topics and cautioned against moving too quickly into substantive detail.

Several members fleshed out thematic chapter proposals. Gambia called for an introductory chapter situating the Group's mandate within broader UN digital policy, followed by sections on public-interest data, data sovereignty and self-determination, ethics and rights-based approaches, capacity building and infrastructure disparities, financing mechanisms, and multistakeholder cooperation modes. Tanzania urged a "Data Economy" chapter to demonstrate concretely how data drives social and economic value, alongside technical and physical infrastructure considerations, including digital public infrastructure. Linda Bonyo proposed cataloguing State obligations in a standalone chapter, detailing national institutions, legal frameworks, budget allocations and annual progress reports to foster an accountability mechanism aligned with the GDC.

Some other members called for flexible, modular outputs. Renata Ávila recommended issuing a series of thematic briefs and structured consultations rather than a single monolithic volume to allow iterative refinement and broader stakeholder engagement. Enrique Mesones argued for anchoring the year-long work plan on three pillars, leveraging existing resources, focusing on development priorities and producing actionable guidance while avoiding duplication. At the same time, Ashutosh Chadha cautioned against reinventing the wheel, urging the Secretariat to compile and synthesize the vast corpus of global data governance work before drafting new text. The OHCHR stressed that a foundational chapter must place human rights on equal footing with development and innovation, and the International Data Spaces Association (observer) proposed a chapter on "Data Spaces" to showcase how collaborative digital environments governed by common rules can operationalize governance in practice.

In concluding the first day of the meeting, the Chair summarised the day's outcomes. There was broad agreement that stock taking is essential and that existing frameworks, principles and studies should underpin future work. Members and observers willing to volunteer for the stock taking exercise should inform the Secretariat or declare their interest at the next session. The Chair noted consensus that provisions directly mirroring paragraph 48 of the GDC should remain intact in the ToR, while procedural elements (meeting modalities, drafting methods, progress report formats) lie within the group's discretion. He encouraged written submissions on proposed themes, work models and timelines, and reminded delegates that the group's ability to meet in person is constrained by funding

On the morning of 2 May, the Secretariat announced the election result for the Vice-Chair from the non-governmental stakeholders. Out of 27 non-state members of the Working Group, 23 votes were cast, and Claire Melamed was declared the winner.

Members then continued the discussion on the ToR. Brazil, USA, Germany and Ashutosh Chadha debated replacement rules for non-state participants, agreeing that substitutes must come from the same

stakeholder group and serve until the 81ˢᵗ General Assembly session. Discussions on the introductory "Mandate" section coalesced around a streamlined reference to UNGA resolution 79/1 and GDC paragraph 48.

Attention then turned to outputs. Gambia presented two options: a concise, development-centered formulation listing capacity building, stewardship, data commons and rights-based concerns, and a longer text closely mirroring GDC paragraph 48 with indicative themes such as interoperability and benefit-sharing. Members remained undecided on whether to enumerate interim deliverables (e.g., policy briefs, mapping exercises) or to leave non-mandatory outputs flexible within the work plan. Austria, Switzerland, and many other members pushed for a clause allowing divergent views to be recorded if consensus proved elusive, while the United States maintained that all published outputs, even summaries of dissent, must themselves be adopted by consensus.

As the meeting drew to a close, dates for the next session were tentatively set for 3–4 July 2025 to align with other Geneva events, though some participants noted potential conflicts. The Working Group Chair underscored that funding and room availability would constrain in-person gatherings and reminded members to submit written comments on themes, modalities and timelines. He confirmed that a draft work plan and consolidated ToR, reflecting the day's rich deliberations on mandate, membership rules, working methods, outputs and substantive priorities, would be circulated for further refinement before reconvening.