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

High-level Panel 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 level"

31 March 2022, 14:30 – 16:30 (Geneva time)
Geneva and Online

Concept Note

Background

In accordance with the mandate received from the General Assembly and the ECOSOC, the twenty-fifth session of the United Nations Commission on Science and Technology for Development (CSTD), will undertake its annual system-wide review of progress made in the implementation of the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society at the regional and international level. For this purpose a High-level Panel will be held in the afternoon of 31 March 2022. The Panel will focus on opportunities and challenges posed by information and communications technologies (ICTs) for achieving the WSIS vision of a people-centered, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society in the dual context of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown the crucial role of digital technologies in mitigating the impact and enabling life continuity through online transactions, remote work and education, and the use of big data and artificial intelligence for public health interventions. Next to the demonstrated prominence of enabling affordable connectivity, the increased use of data has shown the associated importance of an emphasis on data management and an enhancement of cybersecurity. Furthermore, the rapid evolution of ICTs has underlined the necessity of digital cooperation allowing to address the new cross-border and governance challenges. Digital innovations are transforming lives and offering new opportunities to reinforce and invigorate efforts to achieve the SDGs. The climate crisis has been growing alongside the pandemic emphasizing the fundamental nexus between digitalization and the environment. Despite the conversion of data corporations towards renewable energy sources, the proliferation of devices, artificial intelligence, and frontiers technologies such as autonomous vehicles and cryptocurrencies will drastically increase energy consumption. Other challenges have also emerged including widespread misinformation and disinformation, and barriers to achieving the technological potential.

Objectives

The COVID-19 pandemic will likely have profound long-term economic and social consequences, including the acceleration of the changes caused by digitalization. The CSTD assessment should help draw the pertinent lessons so that WSIS stakeholders can optimize opportunities, mitigate risks and enable societies to rebuild better as the crisis recedes. The Panel

will provide an opportunity to identify critical emerging and future challenges as well as relevant strategies to address them at the regional, and international levels. The outcome of the session will be fed into the High-level Political Forum on sustainable development under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council.

Guiding questions for discussion

The following questions will guide the discussion:

- What lessons have we learned about policies and practices that can help countries to leverage digital technologies in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic?
- What are the emerging and future challenges that will affect the development potential of ICTs, including as a consequence of COVID-19?
- What good practices can help address the risks associated with digital technologies?
- What can countries and the international community do to reduce inequalities in access to digital resources, for example with regard to the ability to use data for development?
- What can the CSTD do to enhance digital cooperation and digital governance?

Format of the High-Level Roundtable

After a brief introduction of the Report of the Secretary-General, panelists will make their presentations (5-7 minutes). This will be followed by an interactive discussion among the participants (in person and virtual) and high-level panelists.

Supporting document

- A/77/62-E/2022/8 "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"

- E/RES/2021/28 "Assessment of the progress made in the implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society"

- Documents available on the website of the CSTD:
  https://unctad.org/meeting/commission-science-and-technology-development-twenty-fifth-session