Global Leaders Forum
Charting a New Development Course in a Changing World

60th Anniversary of UN Trade and Development (UNCTAD)
High-level session

Palais des Nations, Geneva, Switzerland

13 June 2024

CONCEPT NOTE
Shaping a digital future for people and the planet

The second half of UN Trade and Development's (UNCTAD) history has witnessed sweeping economic and social changes driven by the digital technological revolution. Yet, with the emergence of new, powerful forms of digital technologies around data, block chains and artificial intelligence, it is clear that the world remains far from the end of this long wave of technological, economic, cultural, environmental and political transformation.

As firms and consumers find new ways to use digital technologies and to combine them with other innovations in trade, ecommerce, logistics, bioscience, materials or renewable energies, there are formidable opportunities for increased productivity and to find solutions to long-term development challenges, enhance existing and build entire new industries and create millions of jobs. Opportunities for innovative entrepreneurship may become more widely available. In response, Government processes will need to adapt.

On the other hand, digital and data divides remain wide. Many other industries and jobs will disappear or change profoundly, drastically affecting the competitiveness of economies and the livelihoods of people. The nature of the digital economy may result in extreme market concentration and stifled competition. Inequality within and among countries may reach levels not seen for centuries. Populations facing change and uncertainty may become more receptive to populist messages, which new digital media can contribute to spread globally.

Whether the outcome of this intrinsically uncertain process will be dominated by the opportunities or the threats of the digital revolution will depend on the policy decisions taken at the national and the international levels. This in turn depends on the ability of existing institutions to understand what is at stake, to learn and adapt and to devise and implement credible responses in terms of industrial, trade, social, financial and environmental measures.

This session will provide an opportunity for thought leaders and political decision makers to share insights about the key actions needed at the international level to set a course for the digital revolution that works for all people and for the planet. This may include questions such as:

- What institutional and political changes do we need to regulate digitalization in ways that avoid economic, social and environmental harm?
- How can developing countries' perspectives and concerns be fully reflected in global digital policy-making?
- How to avoid extreme market and income concentration due to digitalization?
- How to maximize investment in digital innovation that delivers desirable social and economic outcomes?
- What are the opportunities for Governments and the private sector?
- How can UNCTAD help find answers to these questions?

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