

**COMMISSION ON SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY FOR DEVELOPMENT  
(CSTD)**

**Twenty-fifth session**

**Geneva, 28 March to 1 April 2022**

**Submissions from entities in the United Nations system, international  
organizations and other stakeholders on their efforts in 2021 to  
implement the outcomes of the WSIS**

**Submission by**

Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Technology

This submission was prepared as an input to the report of the UN Secretary-General 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 levels" (to the 25<sup>th</sup> session of the CSTD), in response to the request by the Economic and Social Council, in its resolution 2006/46, to the UN Secretary-General to inform the Commission on Science and Technology for Development on the implementation of the outcomes of the WSIS as part of his annual reporting to the Commission.

**DISCLAIMER:** The views presented here are the contributors' and do not necessarily reflect the views and position of the United Nations or the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development.

# **Implementation of Outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society**

## **Response by the Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Technology**

**October 2021**

### **Part One**

The Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Technology (hereinafter referred to as "the Office") was established in 2021, following the Secretary-General's appointment of his inaugural Envoy on Technology. Since its creation, the Office has prioritised the implementation of the Secretary-General's *Roadmap for Digital Cooperation* (hereinafter "Roadmap") which contributes to the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS). Significant progress has been made in developing workplans and advancing concrete actions in the areas of universal connectivity, digital capacity-building, digital inclusion, and other thematic priorities outlined in the Roadmap, through the Office's coordination and support to eight thematic Roundtables comprising over 100 Member States, United Nations entities, and private sector and civil society actors, as well as initiation and implementation of various activities with partners. The Office has also commenced work on the digital-related elements in the Secretary-General's Common Agenda, which was launched in September 2021, in particular the proposal for a Global Digital Compact.

### **Part Two**

The Office plays an informal coordinating role as part of the United Nations Secretariat to support greater coherence and collaboration within the United Nations system on digital issues, as well as greater visibility of these. It participates in key United Nations interagency processes on digital issues and technology, such as the Interagency Task Team within the Technology Facilitation Mechanism mandated by the 2030 Agenda, interagency meetings supporting WSIS such as UNGIS, the United Nations ICT Steering Committee, and relevant work of the Chief Executives Board.

The Office also plays a leadership role in several United Nations interagency process. For instance, the Office is coordinating system-wide efforts on key digital aspects in the Secretary-General's Common Agenda, serving on the interim Advisory Board for the GIGA initiative, as well as coordinating a United Nations systemwide interagency working group on the issue of freedom of expression and social media. The Office is also partnering with various United Nations lead agencies to launch several technology-related initiatives, including on artificial intelligence for road safety, online child protection, and space-based connectivity.

The Office has served as a key advocate and focal point for digital cooperation and other technology-related activities at the United Nations. It worked closely with the Office of the President of the General Assembly to prepare for the High-Level Thematic Debate on Digital Cooperation and Connectivity held on 27 March 2021, and has organised various events throughout the year, including a high-level event at the STI Forum, an event on satellite-based connectivity at ITU's Emerging Technology Week, sessions on multistakeholder engagement and digital inclusion at the annual RightsCon, as well as upcoming events at the Internet

Governance Forum in December 2021. Moreover, the Office has spoken at over 50 external events organised by partners. At this year's High-Level Week of the 76th General Assembly, the Office co-organised or spoke at over ten separate events, including representing the Secretary-General on several occasions.

The Office has made significant progress in promoting the use of open-source technologies and digital public goods within and outside of the United Nations system in collaboration with our partners, an issue that has been increasingly recognized by the Member States as a priority, including in a new resolution adopted by ECOSOC this year. The Office works closely with the [Digital Public Goods Alliance \(DPGA\)](#)<sup>1</sup>, including in ensuring that the Alliance's flagship five-year strategy is aligned with United Nations priorities in accelerating the attainment of the SDGs through digital public goods. A series of high-level convenings have been held in 2021, including two events co-organized by the Office with partners such as the DPGA, the Office of Information and Communications Technology (OICT), UNICEF, and UNDP during the UNGA High-Level Week, on promoting digital public goods and digital public infrastructure through technical assistance and capacity building in low- and middle-income countries. Within the United Nations system, the Office is actively collaborating with OICT to build the UN's internal capacity to develop and use open-source technologies.

The Roadmap recognises the importance of the United Nations in-country presence, particularly the role of the United Nations Resident Coordinators and Country Teams. The Office has sought to work closely with the United Nations Development System entities to follow-up on this. In particular, an interagency Roadmap Response Team, established in October 2020, and coordinated by the United Nations Development Coordination Office with standing members from the Office, ITU, UNDP, and UNICEF and engagement of other UN agencies, has supported Resident Coordinators' Offices in promoting digital cooperation and enhancing support to their Programme Countries on digital issues. Support is being provided, for example, to the preparations to the Common Country Assessment in Ghana, which will feature a specific analysis of Ghana's digital transformation process, to the establishment of a taskforce to lead digital transformation and accompany the Common Country Assessment in Mongolia, as well as to the UN Digital Task Force in Brussels.

To ensure that Member States and all stakeholders are kept informed of its activities and engage openly and inclusively, the Office launched a dynamic website in all six official UN languages ([www.un.org/techenvoy](http://www.un.org/techenvoy)) and maintains active social media accounts, all of which are regularly updated with information on key events and activities, including action plans for several of the Roadmap's Recommendation areas.

### **Part Three**

In line with the Roadmap, where the Secretary-General outlined his intention to map the technology and digital parts and functions throughout the United Nations system, so as to

---

<sup>1</sup> The Digital Public Goods Alliance is a multi-stakeholder initiative established by the Governments of Norway and Sierra Leone, UNICEF, and the technology think tank iSPRIT in direct response to the United Nations Secretary-General's call to promote digital public goods.

assess where there is room for consolidation and strengthening, the Office will be undertaking a mapping of initiatives, mechanisms, programmes, and major conferences on digital technologies, to promote inclusive digital transformations for the SDG, working with UN-DESA, building on the existing interagency methodology that has been used by the Inter-Agency Task Team/Technology Facilitation Mechanism.

Examples of contributions of the Office to WSIS implementation in specific action lines follow.

#### *WSIS Action Line C2. Information and communication infrastructure*

Implementation of Roadmap recommendations on global connectivity has focused on ensuring a “people-centred” approach in leaving no one behind. This entails prioritizing aspects such as affordability and socio-economic aspects of accessibility, in addition to broader issues of broadband infrastructure and coverage.

Within the multi-stakeholder consultation process coordinated by the ITU and UNICEF, and supported by the Office, ITU’s Data and Analytics Division has led a multi-stakeholder working group to develop a baseline framework for universal, affordable, and meaningful digital connectivity. In direct response to the Roadmap’s call for developing such a baseline, this framework includes: i) the proposed enablers of connectivity, ii) the expected outcomes for each enabler for the basic connectivity stage and the meaningful connectivity stage, and iii) the possible indicators to measure those outcomes. This supports a detailed and outcome-oriented analysis of where we stand today (‘baseline’) and the setting of targets of where we ought to be by 2030.

As of March 2021, “GIGA”<sup>2</sup>, the UNICEF-ITU initiative to connect all schools around the world to the Internet, has mapped over 800,000 schools globally, and 19 countries have formally joined the initiative. Almost 3,000 schools have been connected as part of pilot projects in Brazil, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Sierra Leone, and the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States. GIGA is now also looking at developing and launching a global financing instrument for school connectivity, and country-level capital markets products that explore and prototype innovative financing modalities. This is also part of the broader call in the Roadmap for affordability and the urgent need for financing of connectivity needs, in order to meet the ITU’s estimated price tag of 428 billion United States dollars to connect the remaining 3 billion people aged ten years and above to broadband Internet by 2030. The economic value generated by the digital economy will contribute better to Leaving No One Behind.

Leading UN humanitarian actors, including the inter-agency Emergency Telecommunications Cluster led by the World Food Programme (WFP), ITU and UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), as well as the GSM Association from the private sector, are setting up a working group to map existing initiatives and develop Terms of References. The group will identify potential for greater coordination and scalability in the area of emergency

---

<sup>2</sup> <https://gigaconnect.org/>

telecommunication, responding to the Roadmap's call to ensure connectivity in times of crisis and humanitarian operations.

*WSIS Action Line C3. Access to information and knowledge*

Narrowing the digital divides remains at the heart of Roadmap implementation, underpinning efforts at promoting digital inclusion and strengthening global digital capacity-building. To address the fact that digital divides reflect and amplify existing social, cultural and economic inequalities, the Roadmap calls for a definition and framework to better measure digital inclusion, so as to establish a measurable and evidence-based foundation for further work.

Efforts to draw up a common understanding of digital inclusion and a specific assessment framework are underway through ongoing multi-stakeholder consultations under the leadership of UN Women and the Governments of Canada and Mexico, coordinated by the Office. This work aims to eventually develop scorecards focused on the social dimensions of access as a tool for governments and other actors to assess their ongoing progress in promoting digital inclusion and identify gaps and areas for further support.

This effort is undertaken in collaboration with key actors working on inclusion issues, including leveraging on existing digital inclusion indices, such as the UN Capital Development Fund's Inclusive Digital Economy Scorecards and the World Benchmarking Alliance's Digital Inclusion Benchmark for companies, which was released in December 2020.

A digital inclusion "network of networks" is being conceptualized through the multistakeholder Roundtable process, which will bring together different digital inclusion actors working with different vulnerable or traditionally marginalized groups. The "network of networks" will serve as a platform for profound and dynamic collaboration for a more inclusive world and thereby help share best practices and information, create synergies between existing initiatives and alliances (such as the Generation Equality Action Coalition on Technology and Innovation and ongoing efforts by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees).

*WSIS Action Line C4. Capacity building*

UNDP and ITU are conducting a mapping exercise of existing digital capacity building efforts engaging a broad range of cross-sector stakeholders to better understand the landscape of available existing initiatives. Building on this, they will then publish a point-in-time snapshot of the digital capacity development supplier landscape, both inside and outside the UN system. This mapping will contain additional information on different categories and topics within digital capacity building globally, presented in a user-friendly public resource.

The Office, together with UNDP and ITU has launched an online platform ([www.digital-capacitybuilding.org](http://www.digital-capacitybuilding.org)) which will provide consolidated information on global digital capacity-building, including the ITU-UNDP Joint Facility, which was launched in August 2021. Working with UNDP and ITU, the Office will also shortly launch a MultiStakeholder Network on Capacity-building.

### *WSIS Action Line C5. Building confidence and security in the use of ICTs*

The Office continues to explore with Member States and through its coordination of a thematic multistakeholder Roundtable the Secretary-General's proposal for a broad and overarching global statement that would highlight the need for safe and trustworthy deployment of digital technologies with a view to realizing the 2030 Agenda.

### *WSIS Action Line C7. ICT Applications: E-environment*

The Roadmap calls attention to the significant impacts of advancing technologies on the environment, particularly in terms of “ground-breaking opportunities to monitor and protect the environment, as well as overall planetary health.” In response to this, a Coalition for Digital Environment Sustainability (CODES) has been initiated by the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), UNDP, the International Science Council, the German Environment Agency, the Kenyan Ministry of Environment and Forestry, and Future Earth and Sustainability in the Digital Age, as a global multi-stakeholder process which will convene a series of events to firmly anchor environmental sustainability needs within the Digital Cooperation Roadmap and catalyze a digital planet for sustainability. The initiative was launched on 31 March 2021, and is developing its objectives and plan of activities, including working with the Internet Governance Forum Policy Network on Environment and Digitalisation. The Office was actively engaged in the preparations for CODES' Global Conference “A Digital Planet for Sustainability – Working towards an Action Plan on Digital Environmental Sustainability” and is supporting implementation of the Action Plan and upcoming publication of a major report.

### *WSIS Action Line C10. Ethical dimensions of the Information Society*

The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) is coordinating United Nations entities in the development of system-wide guidance on human rights due diligence and impact assessments in the use of new technologies. Within the United Nations, working groups have been set up to discuss and coordinate approaches on issues such as hate speech, disinformation, data protection and privacy and freedom of expression and social media. An [online resource hub](#) on human rights and digital technologies has been launched that centralizes authoritative guidance from the United Nations human rights mechanisms on how human rights standards apply in the digital space.

The Office is a key participant in interagency work on countering disinformation and promoting greater data transparency. It led the organization of a side event on transparency and disinformation, together with the Department of Global Communications, UN Global Pulse, UNDP, UNESCO, and WHO during the United Nations General Assembly High-Level Week to present the results of these interagency efforts. The Office's website hosts outputs of the interagency work, which include a selection of data from online platforms to enable better understanding of disinformation online and efforts to counter it, as well as United Nations systemwide considerations for online communications companies on the issues of countering disinformation and enhancing transparency.

The Office works closely with OHCHR to strengthen civil society participation and engagement with the United Nations, particularly online and through the use of technology and

has actively promoted civil society engagement and feedback in UN processes on digital issues, including organizing regular consultations and providing direct guidance to civil society actors.

*WSIS Action Line C11. International and regional cooperation*

The Internet Governance Forum (IGF) Secretariat and Multistakeholder Advisory Group (MAG) have already made considerable efforts to implement the Roadmap's recommendations. Moreover, the IGF 2021 main focus areas and emerging and cross-cutting issue areas are directly related to the Roadmap. The Office continues to consult and work closely with all stakeholders in taking the Recommendations forward.

The Office also continues to regularly engage with the IGF MAG to share information and promote engagement, including for instance, on a nearly biweekly basis, providing updates to the MAG Working Group on IGF Strategy and Strengthening. These updates have covered Roadmap implementation and the Office's activities. The Office is also contributing to a mapping exercise that aims to support linkages between Roadmap implementation and the IGF.