COMMISSION ON SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY FOR DEVELOPMENT (CSTD)

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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

United Nations Development Programme

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 25th 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.

UNDP INPUTS TO UNCTAD ANNUAL REPORTING TO THE SG ON ICT FOR DEVELOPMENT
[WSIS OUTCOMES IMPLEMENTATION]
October 2021

Part One*: Summary of activities undertaken by stakeholders, progress made, and any obstacles encountered.*

In 2021, UNDP enhanced the multi-pronged support it has been providing countries since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic in early 2020. Efforts included leveraging digital technologies to respond to immediate needs, particularly as lockdowns and social-distancing measures explored by governments to stop the spread of the virus entailed disruptions to socio-economic activities and supply chains. Among others, UNDP helped governments and partners gather data and information on evolving priorities and where needs are deepening, mobilize resources (including financial) to support efforts on the ground, and get services (including vital information and medical supplies) where needed most.

UNDP also continued to enhance investment in its own digital capacity, as it continued to serve as the UN system's technical lead in its response to the socio-economic impact of the pandemic (an impact that underlined the fundamental role of broadband connectivity and increased digital capacities in responding to crises). It built on the earlier Rapid Response Facility (RRF) to establish the Rapid Financing Facility (RFF), which quickly provided funds to support cascading needs across countries (both integral to UNDP goal to deploy $500 million to help countries quickly respond and to begin to recover). Digital development emerged as a priority for focused support, as a pillar of work in and of itself as well as a component (discreet or significant) of other priorities such as enhancing inclusive and responsive governance, continuing health crisis support, enabling social protection, and advancing green economy.

The need to build the resilience of our economies, societies and communities became more urgent in 2021, as the global community tries to chart recovery pathways out of the pandemic, takes stock of the climate emergency as COP26 nears, accelerates progress towards 2030, and deal with concurrent crises (new, emerging or resurging) that complicate efforts. The obstacles and challenges posed by instability (such as in Myanmar and Afghanistan) underlined the need to anchor digital-enabled responses, and digital development overall, in local and special (often highly sensitive) contexts. UNDP sees the need to ensure digitalization efforts move forward in a way that not only introduces digital tools and ICT-enabled processes and services in projects, but propels action on the unprecedented development setbacks brought on by interlocking challenges.

Part Two: *A brief analytical overview of trends and experiences in implementation at the national, regional and international levels and by all stakeholders, highlighting achievements and obstacles.*

The lessons of 2020 and 2021 underlined what digital inequality really means in the day-to-day life of individuals and communities at risk of being left behind, and the prospects for sustainable development at a time of profound regress on many development gains of the past decades. As socio-economic and personal activities shifted online particularly during lockdowns, and as information and services were increasingly being deployed using digital mechanisms, the differentiated impact of the pandemic and its interplay with digital inequality became very clear.

In 2021, UNDP saw the demand for digital tools, approaches and solutions continue to rise --- across all regions. This trend needs closer inspection, as it unfolds differently across and within countries. The [150 million](#) expected to be added to the world's extreme poor this year, due to the impact of the pandemic, are also in advanced economies and among the persistently poor in developing countries. Anchoring digital solutions in local contexts, therefore, becomes even more crucial.

The increased demand needs to be met or matched by commensurate investments. Efforts that introduce digital tools help, but countries increasingly require support in building local digital ecosystems that could propel and sustain progress (including financing mechanisms aligned with their priorities and diminished resources).

The requests for support in 2021 also showed a shift from stand-alone digital solutions towards more strategic, holistic approaches that involve a wider scope and require policy support. This translated into increased requests for more general support for countries' digital transformation strategies.

UNDP continues to underline the importance of the "fundamentals" in digital development and transformation --- from infrastructure to enabling environment, skills and capacities (areas covered by the WSIS Action Lines)--- and one of the concerning trends that rose during the pandemic is the level of support some governments needed to establish these fundamentals quickly in order to leverage digital technologies for crisis response. The need for greater cooperation and coordination is acute, and the UN Secretary's General Digital Cooperation initiative had been instrumental in moving forward critical action points, such as the digital help desk and digital capacity building (in which UNDP had the privilege to be part of efforts).

The ready platform or mechanism provided by the WSIS Forum and the UN Group on the Information Society (UNGIS) continues to help quickly convene experts and stakeholders around priorities, as well as to identify and channel potential ICT solutions where needed. UNDP continued its engagement in and support for the WSIS processes, including in the organization of the 2021 WSIS Forum.

Part Three: A brief description of:
(a) Innovative policies, programmes and projects which have been undertaken by all stakeholders to implement the outcomes. Where specific targets or strategies have been set, progress in achieving those targets and strategies should be reported.
(b) Future actions or initiatives to be taken, regionally and/or internationally, and by all stakeholders, to improve the facilitation and ensure full implementation in each of the action lines and themes, especially with regard to overcoming those obstacles identified in Part Two above. You are encouraged to indicate any new commitments made to further implement the outcomes.

Many of the nearly 250 digital solutions launched in over 80 countries in the previous year continue to help countries to address pressing needs. The 60 UNDP Accelerator Labs serving 78 countries also continue to quickly help develop and scale-up innovative solutions. In 2021, new initiatives the take forward specific WSIS Actions Lines include (not an exhaustive list):

- Supporting countries to develop health management information systems (e-health)
- Developing and implementing digital readiness assessment in countries, to help understand better the digital opportunities that could help countries meet development goals (enabling environment)
- Launching the Digital X Scale Accelerator to support proven, ambitious digital solutions with the potential for great impact in new countries, territories, or user groups (capacity building)
- With the European Union, developing and launching 'iVerify', a fact-checking and response mechanism to help countries address disinformation that could destabilize democratic processes (media and access to information)
- Supporting micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) leverage ICTs for continued operations during the pandemic, developing a tool for developing digital transformation of MSMEs and currently implemented in nine countries in Latin America (capacity building)
- Developing a framework for building resilient, inclusive and sustainable cities that leverage smart city approaches, in collaboration with UN-Habitat and other

partners, helping cities as epicenters of the pandemic and leveraging rapid urbanization for sustainable development (capacity building)
- Launching the $100 million Rapid Financing Facility (RFF) to help UNDP Country Offices leverage partnerships and support national response and recovery efforts (international and regional cooperation)
- Launching with ITU the digital capacity building pillar of the UNSG's Digital Cooperation Roadmap, which involves a multi-stakeholder network and a joint UNDP-ITU facility (capacity building)

In all these efforts, UNDP leveraged and leaned on good practices and lessons learned from around the world, which underlines the continuing importance of multi-stakeholder collaboration and cooperation mechanism enabled and provided by WSIS.