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Submissions from entities in the United Nations system, international organizations and other stakeholders on their efforts in 2020 to implement the outcomes of the WSIS

Submission by

United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs

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 24th 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.

UNITED NATIONS   NATIONS UNIES

Report on the Implementation of the Outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS)

(January – December 2020)
United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA)

The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) through the Division for Public Administration and Development Management (DPADM) serves as facilitator for the implementation of and follow-up to the action lines:
- C1 - The role of public governance authorities and all stakeholders in the promotion of ICTs for development
- C7 - ICT Applications: E-government
- C11 - International and regional cooperation

I - Summary

As the leading facilitator for Action Lines C1, C7eGov, and C11, as a member of the United Nations Group on the Information Society (UNGIS), and the institutional manager of the IGF Secretariat[1], UNDESA continued its efforts to promote policy dialogue and advocacy among United Nations bodies, governmental and non-governmental stakeholders and partners for the implementation of the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS). UNDESA has ensured a comprehensive exchange of views, information and experiences among WSIS stakeholders; and has provided advisory services and technical assistance to developing countries.

II. Analytical overview of trends and experiences

Global e-government development
The United Nations E-Government Survey 2020, launched in July, assesses the digital government development of the 193 United Nations Member States in identifying their strengths, challenges and opportunities, as well as informing policies and strategies.

According to the Survey, e-government development continues to advance, with the global average E-Government Development Index (EGDI) value increasing from 0.55 in 2018 to 0.60 in 2020 and with 57 countries having very-high EGDI in comparison with 40 countries in 2018. A total of 69 countries have high EGDI, and 59 countries have middle EGDI. Only 8 countries have low EGDI compared to 16 countries in this category in 2018.

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[1] http://www.intgovforum.org/

It is worthy to notice that Africa and Oceania made notable progress, having increased their EGDI values by 14 %. Progress is evident even in countries in special situations and among those with limited resources. The number of least developed countries (LDCs), landlocked developing countries (LLDCs) and small island developing States (SIDS) with high and very high EGDI values (above 0.50) has increased by 29 per cent since the last edition of the Survey.

Close to 80 per cent of Member States offer specific digital services for youth, women, older people, persons with disabilities, migrants and/or those in poverty, contributing to efforts aimed at leaving no one behind. Similarly, in line with the SDG 16 principles of greater transparency and accountability, more Governments are using online platforms for public procurement and for the recruitment of civil servants. Since 2018, there has been a 30 per cent increase in the number of countries publishing government vacancies online, with 80 per cent of Member States now offering this feature.

But despite some development gains and investments in technology in several groups of countries, digital divide continues to persist. According to the Survey, the world is clearly divided in two main groups, with 126 countries (65%) in the high and very high EGDI and the other 46% of countries lacking behind. Nonetheless, the average EGDI for more than 50% of the countries in the world remains well below the global average. If we look at the African region - for example - only 4 countries out of 54, score higher than the world average. This gap points to persistent challenges that continue to undermine the efforts for development of the countries in special groups and in particular the LDCs.

Local e-government development
E-government development is a rising priority in political agendas, but attention has been focused primarily on digital government transformation at the national level. Local e-government merits attention as well because city and municipal administrations have more direct interaction with residents and are responsible for addressing concerns affecting people's daily lives. As part of the 2020 United Nations E-Government Survey, levels of e-government development were assessed for 100 cities—a marked increase from the 40 cities evaluated as part of the pilot study first conducted in 2018.

The findings of the 2020 Local Online Service Index (LOSI) reinforced those of the 2018 survey in affirming that levels of local e-government development are not necessarily consistent with national e-government development levels—which provides justification for the need to conduct separate assessments at the national and local levels. The 2020 LOSI average is 0.43, which implies that most city portals are still offering very basic features (such as information provision but little or no services provision). However, nearly all city portals are accessible from mobile devices, confirming the awareness of local governments of the importance of mobile technologies in multichannel service delivery.

Impact of COVID-19 on e-government
During the COVID-19 crisis, ICT has played a vital role in promoting the health and safety of people and in keeping economies and societies working. Digital government technologies, through information sharing and online services provision, have kept Governments and people connected during the outbreak. Digital technologies have also enabled Governments to make rapid policy decisions based on real-time data and analytics, to enhance the

capacities of local authorities for better coordination, and to deploy evidence-based services to those who need them most. A review of the national portals of the 193 United Nations Member States indicates that Governments have exhibited high levels of transparency when reporting and sharing crisis-related information. Some Governments have demonstrated great agility in developing dedicated COVID-19 portals and government-supported apps to provide continually updated information and resources.

Compendium on Digital Government Initiatives in Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic
A number of Governments must be highly commended for rapidly developing and deploying innovative online services designed to contribute to the fight against COVID-19. In a quick call for inputs by UN DESA, government officials around the world shared nearly 500 COVID-19 related applications in less than two weeks at the peak of pandemic in April/May. As a result, UN DESA developed and launched the Compendium[2] on Digital Government Initiatives in Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic. The publication aims to capture emerging trends in digital responses of UN Member States against the COVID-19 pandemic, and provide a preliminary analysis of their main features. These cases are shared for exchange of information so that Member States can learn from each other and possibly create new partnerships. The compendium lists selected initiatives according to major categories of action areas of: 1. Information sharing, 2. E-participation, 3. E-health, 4. E-business, 5. Contact tracing, 6. Social distancing and virus tracking, 7. Working and learning from home 8. Digital policy 9. Partnerships.

Internet governance
The fifteenth annual meeting of the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) was hosted online by the United Nations under the overarching theme: Internet for human resilience and solidarity. The programme developed around the four main thematic tracks: (1) Data; (2) Environment; (3) Inclusion; (4) Trust. The theme of "digital cooperation" and the UN Secretary-General's Roadmap for digital cooperation was also featured prominently. With a record participation of over 6,100 participants from 173 countries - more than half attending for the first time, the IGF has once again proven its role as a unique global platform to discuss challenges around building a people-centered Internet and unleashing the power of digital technologies as a true equalizer and enabler. As well as Ministers, former Heads of State, parliamentarians, the 2020 IGF benefited from the personal participation of executives of major Internet-related businesses and technical organizations.

IGF 2020 has been held in the year of a global pandemic, where the need for physical distancing to contain the spread of COVID-19 as much as possible, large portions of the world have turned to the Internet for work, for social and cultural activities, for collecting and sharing data about the virus, and for education.

One clear message emerging from the 2020 IGF is that the global community can no longer separate the development tracks of digitalization and sustainable development. More than ever, there is a need of cross-fertilization of digital transformation and action for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGsS). Digital transformation is emerging as an integral part of the Decade of Action for the SDGs.

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[2] https://bit.ly/EGOV_COVID19_COMP

Not only has the pandemic exposed new and underlying digital divides, but also highlighted how inequalities offline mirror inequalities online. In response, participants at the IGF stressed that Internet policy challenges could not be resolved through mere digital solutions. Strengthened cooperation among policymakers and technical and business communities as well as civil society groups must be established across silos, as well as across borders, sectors, disciplines and generations.

Keeping the Internet safe while keeping it open and free is another primary challenge of bridging the digital divides. In this regard, participants cautioned that the complex nature of the Internet should not be underestimated, as its safe function calls for localized and contextualized approaches, engaging local communities for effective deployment of digital tools and providing local-language content. Fighting mis- and dis-information is increasingly a critical function of the Internet platforms.

This year has also witnessed continued initiatives for further strengthening the impact of the IGF, building upon last year's priority themes of (1) data; (2) inclusion; and (3) trust, with a new track on the environment. Amid climate change, environmental instability, and the challenges in meeting the 2030 Agenda targets, IGF participants called for the deployment of digital technologies to serve the planet's wellbeing and tackle these global emergencies. Likewise, the 2019 engagement of parliamentarians from around the world was reinforced through a dedicated track. Concrete cooperation efforts between parliaments and dynamic coalitions were forged at this Parliamentary Roundtable and will continue during the inter-sessional period. One other distinct improvement was the first ever Youth Summit, and youth were featured in the High-level Leaders' Track as well as in dedicated youth flash sessions.

Technology facilitation
In July 2020, UN DESA launched the Online Technology Platform – 2030 Connect in the context of the Technology Facilitation Mechanism and COVID-19. 2030 Connect is a dynamic new tool for entrepreneurs, innovators, students and leaders from around the world seeking to exchange ideas and technology, build networks, and work to advance the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

SDGs and ICT indicators
UN DESA launched "The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2020[3]" in July 2020, which reviews progress of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development amid the COVID-19 crisis. The report uses the latest available data and estimates to track progress towards the SDGs before the pandemic started, but it also looks at some of the devastating initial impacts of COVID-19 on specific Goals and targets.

The virtual UN World Data Forum took place over three days, with over 10,000 data producers and users from over 180 countries gathering to support the "ongoing evidence-based response to the COVID-19 pandemic" from 19-21 October 2020. At the end of the Forum, the High-level Group launched the global data community's response[4] to COVID-19, titled, 'Data for a changing world.' The Data community's response to Covid-19 is an acknowledgement that during the pandemic the demand for data and statistics are greater

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[3] https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2020/
[4] https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/hlg/Global-data-communitys-response-to-COVID-19/

than ever and a critical part of building back a more equitable, sustainable and resilient future; but they are in short supply in many parts of the World. The response appeals to the whole data community to come together to support the response to the Covid-19 pandemic and accelerate action on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It resolves to ensure data to leave no one behind, trust and privacy in data and increase investments in data to respond more effectively to the Covid-19 pandemic, future disasters and renew the call made in the Dubai Declaration[5] for an innovative funding mechanism to help implement the Cape Town Global Action Plan[6] (CTGAP).

During 2020, UN DESA served in the steering committee of the Partnership on Measuring ICT for Development. The Partnership presented its report "Information and communication technology statistics (E/CN.3/2020/23[7])" at the 51st Session of the Statistical Commission. The Report introduced new indicators which reflect the latest developments in ICT adoption and use by households and individuals, and recent progress on big data's use to measure ICT availability and use in sectors relevant to the SDGs that are not currently covered in the global SDG indicators framework. The new statistics also include "E-participation" indicators that are part of the United Nations E-Government Survey.

UNDESA together with ITU and other members of the UN Global Working Group on Big Data for official statistics have developed methods and guidance to use mobile positioning data for the estimation of indicators on Tourism, Migration, Population, Transportation and Displacement, including for the estimation of indicators for SDG targets 8.9 (on sustainable tourism) and 10.7 (on facilitating orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people).

UN DESA organized the event "Digital Inclusion of Older Persons: Harnessing digital technologies to promote the inclusion and well-being of older persons" during the World Summit on the Information Society Forum in 2020 which, for the first time, has dedicated a special track to older persons and ICTs. The event explored access and inclusion of older persons in technology, discussed the digital divide in this group identifying their main vulnerabilities, reasons and the impact that such divide has on older persons' participation in society, and provided some examples of successful efforts to promote access and inclusion of older persons.

In support of the Commission for Social Development, UN DESA organized an Expert Group Meeting on "Socially just transition towards sustainable development: the role of digital technologies on social development and well-being of all" in collaboration with UNCTAD and ITU. Academic researchers, government officials, civil society representatives and other experts/practitioners participated in the meeting. The meeting recognized that the digital divide is recognized should be seen as one of the inter-linked and mutually reinforcing many dimensions of socio-economic inequality., all of which are inter-linked and mutually reinforcing, therefore both should be addressed simultaneously. Tackling the digital divide is complex and requires a multi-dimensional strategy that focuses not only on improving physical access and the affordability, but also investing in digital skills, promoting better

[5] https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/hlg/dubai-declaration/
[6] https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/hlg/Cape-Town-Global-Action-Plan/
[7] https://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/51st-session/documents/2020-23-ICT-EE.pdf

internet usage, building awareness of benefits, while regulating negative uses. While digital technologies can help advance social progress, they can also pose threats to personal privacy dignity and freedom, therefore a people-centred approach to digital transformation is critical. This will require strengthening and enhance the Internet Governance Forum (IGF), establish trust and accountability mechanisms at the international level, and continue to mobilize efforts to promote universal access and digital inclusion of disadvantaged groups and persons in vulnerable situations in line with the UN SG's Roadmap on Digital Cooperation.

UN DESA is also planning to hold a Multi-stakeholder Dialogue on Sport and Technologies, with a focus on digital technologies, on 7-8 December 2020.

III. Future actions

UN DESA will continue to support governments in their journey in e-government development, continue to facilitate international and regional collaboration and promote ICTs. The way forward is a new "digital normal" in responding to global challenges and pursuing sustainable development.

The 5th annual Multi-stakeholder Forum on Science, Technology and Innovation for the Sustainable Development Goals (STI Forum) which was supposed to be held at UN Headquarters in New York, from 12 to 13 May 2020, has been deferred to 2021. As in previous years, the theme of the 2020 STI forum was supposed to be on 'Using science, technology and innovation for accelerating action and transformative pathways', aligning with the theme of the High-level Political Forum (HLPF).

Related to the Internet Governance Forum, UN DESA, as institutional home, will continue to support the Secretary-General to convene the annual IGF meetings as mandated by the General Assembly, and to support the IGF itself, as the key platform for dialogue on Internet governance. Looking ahead, DESA is already working with the future hosts of the IGF, with Poland in 2021, Ethiopia in 2022, Japan in 2023 and the Russian Federation in 2025. The 2021 IGF is scheduled to take place on 6-10 December 2020 in Katowice, Poland.

In 2021, UN DESA will continue to work on the upcoming United Nations E-Government Survey 2022, with improved methodology. The assessment of local e-government development will continue with the improved methodology of Local Online Service Index (LOSI) covering many more municipalities worldwide. Digital government is not an end; it is a means to improving public service delivery, increasing people's engagement, enhancing transparency, accountability and inclusion, and ultimately making life better for all. E-government has an increasingly important role to play in supporting countries as they endeavour to activate the Decade of Action and accelerate the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.