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 2020 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 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.

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UNDP INPUTS TO UNCTAD ANNUAL REPORTING TO THE SG ON ICT FOR DEVELOPMENT
[WSIS OUTCOMES IMPLEMENTATION]
December 2020

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

Helping countries respond to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic became the primary focus of the United Nations system in 2020. UNDP itself quickly pulled together an array of support for its programme countries, which leaned on the strategic use of information and communications technologies (ICTs) to, among others, help control the spread of the virus, help governments to function during the pandemic and, in coordination with other UN agencies and partners, help provide critical health and other services quickly and where needed most (more details in Part Three).

UNDP, already investing in its own digital capacity, stepped up 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 21st century economies and societies *worldwide*. From the impact assessments and response plans developed by countries with support from the UN system, the acceleration of digitalization was clear across sectors. As socio-economic and personal activities shifted online particularly during lockdowns, digital tools and approaches were being explored and embraced wherever they are available. This brought to the fore, as never before, the gaps in terms of connectivity and use of digital tools and technologies within and between countries, and what this digital divide really means in terms of day-to-day life of individuals and communities at risk of being left behind and prospects for human development overall.

Obstacles to universal access to ICTs and to the benefits they enable are now better understood in development terms. 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, but propels action on the unprecedented development setbacks brought on by "a crisis unlike any" in the United Nations' 75-year history.[1]

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

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[1] https://www.un.org/en/un-coronavirus-communications-team/above-all-human-crisis-calls-solidarity

achievements and obstacles since WSIS and taking into account the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This could include information on the facilitation process of implementation, monitoring and cooperation among stakeholders.

The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated the importance of the "fundamentals" in digital transformation --- from infrastructure to enabling environment, skills and capacities (areas covered by the WSIS Action Lines)--- and one of the concerning trends that rose in this period is the level of support some governments needed to establish these fundamentals quickly in order to leverage digital technologies for crisis response and for getting their countries back on track towards SDG achievement by 2030. This underlined the importance of cooperation and coordination in addressing serious global challenges that have differentiated impact on countries and communities.

In its technical lead role for the UN system's response to the socio-economic impact of COVID-19, UNDP had been particularly mindful of the need to engage stakeholders at all levels (global to local) – both in assessing impact and in developing response plans. Because digitalization emerged as an area of focus across countries, the engagement of the ICT community was crucial. The ready platform or mechanism provided by the WSIS Forum and the UN Group on the Information Society (UNGIS) helped to 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 2020 WSIS Forum online, and in framing global thinking on the role of ICTs in charting a sustainable development roadmap for a world hit hard by the pandemic.[2]

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.

UNDP relied on connectivity and digital technologies to rapidly mount a strong defence against the pandemic and its impact [3] establishing digital transformation as one of the

[2] https://unctad.org/topic/ecommerce-and-digital-economy/ungis-dialogue
[3] https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/coronavirus.html

four pillars of its overall support ("[Beyond Recovery: Towards 2030](#)"). Over 80 of our Country Offices launched nearly 250 [digital solutions](#) to help countries to address pressing needs. Our 60 [UNDP Accelerator Labs](#) serving 78 countries quickly developed and scaled-up innovative solutions. Utilizing the power of digital disruption, they included the use of [crowdsourcing in Ecuador](#) to connect the most vulnerable people with food, goods and service providers -- to helping [local governments in Nepal to monitor quarantine data](#)[4].

UNDP is committed to open-source solutions. In the Asia-Pacific region, we curated open source [digital solutions](#)[5] for disease monitoring; prevention and containment; as well as diagnosis and recovery. We launched an [open-source hardware challenge to tackle COVID-19,](#) which generated 350+ submissions of which many came from developing countries. In collaboration with partners, we shipped 'response toolkits' to a number of UNDP Accelerator Labs to catalyse innovation efforts and have subsequently seen makerthons in [Kenya](#), [South Africa](#), and [Tanzania](#). We note that the [UNDP COVID-19 Open-Source Digital Toolkit](#) saved [one country millions of dollars and significant time](#) by allowing them to build on an existing and proven solution in their COVID-19 response.

In Africa, together with the European Investment Bank and Bearing Point, we identified the [most effective digital solutions to fight COVID-19 in the region](#).[6] With the United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF), we strengthened digital payment ecosystems and used mobile technologies to sustain the [flow of remittances](#) on which many communities and families rely.[7] In Uganda, we worked with the leading private e-commerce platform to [support over 2,000 local vendors](#) so they could continue their business during lockdown. UNDP also established a [Rapid Response Facility](#)[8] to assist vulnerable countries on a range of innovative solutions.

We helped countries make effective use of [technology and digital disruption](#) to find rapid, much-needed solutions. That included the establishment of [a facility to deploy $500 million](#) to support innovative solutions around the world.

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[4] [https://www.np.undp.org/content/nepal/en/home/blog/2020/Accelerating-for-a-NOVEL-cause.html](#)
[5] [https://sgtechcentre.undp.org/content/sgtechcentre/en/home/digital-tools-for-covid-19.html](#)
[6] [https://www.eib.org/en/publications/african-digital-best-practice-to-tackle-covid-19](#)
[7][https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/presscenter/pressreleases/2020/UNCDF_UNDP_to_improve_remittances_and_counter_impacts_COVID19.html](#)
[8] [https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/news-centre/news/2020/COVID-19_30_million_Rapid_Response_Facility_launched_for_vulnerable_countries.html#:~:text=%E2%80%9CAs%20part%20of%20the%20UN,effects%20of%20COVID%2D19%E2%80%9D.](#)

In 2020, UNDP developed guidelines for its Country Offices on data, privacy and human rights, and launched a global programme addressing information pollution and countering disinformation. UNDP joined various efforts, such those in the Broadband Commission, in developing studies on countering digital misinformation In October 2020, together with UNESCO, UNDP held a global consultation on impacts of and responses to information pollution, "Forging a path to a better information ecosystem". In parallel UNDP launched a disinformation mapping programme to understand trends and patterns of disinformation across 8 country contexts and organised a series of internal and external virtual events bringing together expertise from within the organisation and from partners. UNDP is developing an elections disinformation monitoring platform which will be piloted in Zambia in 2021.

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.