INTERSESSIONAL PANEL OF THE UNITED NATIONS COMMISSION ON SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY FOR DEVELOPMENT (CSTD)

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Contribution by ESCAP

to the CSTD 2023-2024 priority theme on "Data for Development"

PRIORITY THEME 1: Data for Development

United Nations Commission on Science and Technology for Development (CSTD)

To whom it may concern

The 26th CSTD annual session selected "Data for Development", as one of the priority themes for its 27th session (2023-24 period).

Data, including for scientific and research purposes, are becoming a key strategic resource for sustainable development. If well managed, data can help overcome major global development challenges, such as poverty, food security, climate change, disaster risk management, and pandemics. If badly handled, they can generate unequal development outcomes. General Assembly's resolution 77/150 of 14 December 2022 noted that the Commission on Science and Technology for Development could explore the connection between data and sustainable development, including data governance, while taking into account the multiple dimensions of data. The development implications of data, including data quality, data capabilities, and responsible data handling should also feature prominently in discussions about the Global Digital Compact and in the Summit of the Future, adding to the relevance of the CSTD's perspectives on this issue as the UN focal point for STI for development.

Under this theme, the Commission will consider issues such as major contributions and risks of data in relation to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development; how to ensure that developing countries benefit from the data revolution while considering risks; national and international policies and support measures that can help address the challenges of the developing countries in the area of data relevant for sustainable development, while taking into account the multiple dimensions of data.

The CSTD secretariat is in the process of drafting an issues paper on the theme to be presented at the CSTD inter-sessional panel meeting to be held in the second half of October 2023 in Portugal. In this context, we would like to solicit inputs from international organizations, UN entities and agencies, and regional commissions on this theme. We would be grateful if you could kindly answer the following questions based on your organization's work at the global, regional, and/or national levels:

1. What are the major contributions and risks of data in relation to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development?

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development greatly benefits from the data revolution.

High quality, timely, relevant, granular data is essential to both measure and to achieve the SDGs and to ensure no one is left behind. At the midpoint towards the 2030 target year, regions should have made 50% of the progress needed to achieve the goals, yet in Asia and the Pacific (in common with other regions), overall progress is slow and has reached only 14.4%[1]. At the current pace, the Asia-Pacific region will miss 90% of the 118 measurable SDG targets by 2030 unless efforts are multiplied. Although data availability for the SDGs has doubled since 2017, data remain insufficient for 51 out of 169 targets. To bridge the data gap, poor and rich countries alike will need to do more.

The extensive and intensive generation of data through digital technology and applications can be harnessed to monitor and manage digital transformations, a crucial aspect of an inclusive digital society. This data can provide governments with a deeper understanding of the digital divide and the process of digital transformation.

Major contributions and risks of data in relation to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development:

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[1] https://www.unescap.org/kp/2023/asia-and-pacific-sdg-progress-report-2023

Contributions: ESCAP is working with 16 countries to implement the National SDG Tracker[2] which is a tool for countries to track progress on the SDGs. It allows countries to add their data, enter national target values, and visualize progress in a few simple steps. ESCAP is also working with a number of countries to strengthen their civil registration and vital statistics systems which underpin many government services including digital services.

The ESCAP secretariat has promoted the importance of regional cooperation on digital data for an inclusive digital society through the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway (APIS) platform. A Working Group on digital data was established under the APIS platform of which is led by the governments of Kazakhstan and the Republic of Korea as Co-Chairs, and Armenia, the Philippines and Sri Lanka as Vice-Chairs. Through Working Group 3, different stakeholders including governments, private sectors, academia, international organisations, among others discusses various aspects of digital including safe and secure data creation, collection, integration, and management. Digital data enhances the effectiveness of evidence-based policy making with more targeted policy interventions for an affordable and universal Internet connectivity. The rapid development of digital technologies relies on the availability of integrated digital data. Data-platform-integrated activities, such as data analytics, need integrated digital data for value creation across all segments of society, resulting in innovative and sustainable data-based solutions. The Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway Working Group 3 discusses the challenges of management of vast amounts of data. Additionally, issues surrounding data privacy, protection, and cybersecurity pose significant risks.

Risks: The ESCAP Committee on Statistics decided to 'feature data governance in its future work, with an emphasis on sharing country experiences and facilitating the provision of technical assistance' during its 8th session. Furthermore, during its 7th session, the ESCAP Committee on Statistics decided to 'feature big data for official statistics in its future work, with an emphasis on sharing country research, experiences and good practices and facilitating capacity development'. In service of these decisions, a compendium of country governance practices is being prepared for review, presentation and discussion to member States later in 2023.

2. How can developing countries benefit from the data revolution while considering risks?

Strong data governance frameworks are essential as countries seek to modernize and to use new data sources and new data methodologies and techniques. The Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics remain the cornerstone for National Statistical Offices helping to ensure that trust is maintained and built across the data ecosystem. New data sources and new techniques can help to augment traditional data sources but can seldom replace them completely.

Developing countries can benefit from the data revolution by leveraging new digital technologies and digital data across all sectors.

- Promote capacity for digital skills and digital financial services, particularly for women entrepreneurship and empowerment, and for vulnerable groups in countries with special needs.
- Strengthen ICT applications for disaster risk monitoring, management, and recovery from disasters.
- Promote policies and digital platforms for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), particularly in countries with special needs.
- Strengthen the systems and framework for data privacy and protection, including the capacity on cybersecurity.
- Leverage new digital technologies the application of frontier technologies, such as artificial intelligence, robotics, and biotechnology.
- Coordinate actions to identify and remove barriers to digital transformation and create enabling environments for innovation using regulatory sandboxes can be beneficial.

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[2] https://data.unescap.org/stories/national-sdg-tracker

3. What national and international policies and support measures can help address the challenges of the developing countries in the area of data relevant for sustainable development, including scientific and research purposes, data quality, data capabilities and data governance, while taking into account the multiple dimensions of data?

The Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics are key to ensuring quality is build into national statistical systems throughout the value chain from the inputs to process and finally to the data outputs. These are supplemented by other frameworks include the National Quality Assurance Framework, the Generic Statistical Business Process Model and the IMF's data dissemination standards.

There are several national and international policies and support measures that can help developing countries overcome challenges in data relevant for sustainable development.

These include:

i. strengthening regulatory policies to promote digital innovative businesses through public-private partnerships (PPPs),
ii. establishing national and regional intelligent data resource management centres to maximize data use and innovation,
iii. promoting systems for easy sharing of digital and statistical data among public sector organizations.

It is also important to ensure everyone has access to digital identities and digital data. Institutional capacity to collect, research, and publish granular data related to digital transformation should be strengthened.

At the regional level, initiatives like the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway" promotes regional cooperation on safe and secure 'digital data' for an inclusive digital society. At the global level, the "World Summit on the Information Society Action Lines", and the United Nations Secretary-General's Policy Brief on Global Digital Compact, are working toward increasing digital inclusion, avoiding Internet fragmentation, strengthening data protection, and building digital capacity.

4. What could be the role of the CSTD as part of the overall work on the UN in the field of digital data?

The CSTD could contribute to the abovementioned initiatives by providing expertise in science and technology, helping to shape policies and strategies, and promoting cooperation among countries. It could also play a role in supporting the development and implementation of regulatory policies for promoting digital innovative businesses in the framework of public-private partnerships (PPPs), and in promoting capacity for digital skills and digital financial services.

Furthermore, the CSTD could assist in strengthening ICT applications for disaster risk monitoring, management, and recovery from disasters, and in promoting policies and digital platforms for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), particularly in countries with special needs.

In the context of data management, the CSTD could help governments strengthen their data systems and indicators to respond to digital transformation as an essential component of an inclusive digital society. This could involve strengthening the capacity of literacy and skills of government officials for a deeper analysis and understanding of the digital divide and digital transformation process.

Overall, the UNCSTD could play a crucial role in helping to shape a digital future that leads to fair and positive outcomes for an inclusive digital society that shares digital dividends equitably.

Please indicate contact person(s) responsible for projects/policies and international collaboration in this context in case we need clarification on the inputs.

Please send your responses and any further inputs on the theme to the CSTD secretariat (stdev@unctad.org) by **15 August 2023**. We look forward to receiving your valuable inputs.

Sincere regards,

CSTD secretariat