

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

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Contribution by WFP

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

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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?
2. How can developing countries benefit from the data revolution while considering risks?
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?
4. What could be the role of the CSTD as part of the overall work on the UN in the field of digital data?

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

WFP Inputs

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

Data has an important role to play in the achievement of the SDGs. Governments, humanitarian and development actors, private sector entities, civil society and academia can all use data to promote greater accountability, effectiveness and efficiency, and agility in their activities.

WFP's new Information and Technology (I&T) Strategy 2023-2026 recognizes data as a "mission-critical asset" for the organization, and the humanitarian and development community at large. Gathering data that helps WFP better understand and target the people it serves is crucial for meeting their needs in the most appropriate and effective way. The ability to access disaggregated data based on sex, age and disability status ensures that the most vulnerable groups are assisted.

Beyond improving targeting and monitoring capabilities, data fundamentally transforms how organizations make strategic and operational decisions. Real-time insights into food security, climate data, population movements, etc. lead to better-informed, evidence-based decisions, and better designed projects and services that meet the needs of the people they aim to serve. In this regard, WFP is a contributor to the development of digital public goods (DPGs), particularly open data on food security and climate risk monitoring.

For instance, WFP's HungerMap Live is a hunger monitoring system that pulls together publicly accessible data from various sources—such as food security information, weather, population size, conflict, hazards, nutrition and macro-economic data—to predict and monitor the food security situation in close to real time.

PRISM, another WFP initiative, enables governments in low- and middle-income countries to access climate hazard data through an open-source software solution, which is open for collaboration and can be used by anyone, and which highlights the risks and impacts of droughts, floods, and tropical storms. The project began in Indonesia as a pilot programme aimed at providing the President's office and Food Security Agency with the latest available information on droughts across the country. It quickly scaled to a regional initiative in Asia and then to a WFP global project managed in HQ. PRISM was included in the [Digital Public Goods Alliance registry](#) in 2021, recognizing its contribution as open-source software to achieve the SDGs, with a focus on climate risk reduction.

Data has the power to improve how governments, supported by organizations like WFP, prepare for and respond to emergencies – for example, using the WFP-developed Machine Learning tool known as DEEP (Digital Engine for Emergency Photoanalysis) to automate the process of analysing high-resolution drone images of the impacted areas, cutting assessment time from weeks to hours. WFP works to build national and regional governments' capacity to prepare for and respond to emergencies, thereby strengthening their resilience to future shocks and stresses.

When it comes to government efforts to achieving the SDGs, data will be essential to allowing governments to understand citizens' needs, behavioural patterns, channels and means to effectively communicate with their citizens ('know them better, to serve them better'). This knowledge will allow governments to better design, plan, and allocate resources towards citizen services, as well as to monitor such services, establish continuous improvement processes and enhance transparency towards its constituents. WFP is using this philosophy in its approach to digital assistance to governments, supporting the modernization of national social protection systems and other digital transformation projects. In doing so, WFP encourages and supports governments to utilize DPGs where appropriate.

While technology suffers from the risk of obsolescence, the value of data increases over time: the more it is collected over time, the more statistical patterns and trends become visible and reliable.

Contributions of data to the achievement of the SDGs:

- Time efficiencies
- Cost/resources efficiencies
- Better resource allocation
- Accountability and transparency
- Facilitating partnerships

- Improved monitoring and evaluation capabilities
- More sustainable development
- More accessible development
- Better decision making

Risks

- Data inaccuracies that can lead to uninformed decision making
- Data security, privacy and protection
- Unlawful use of data that could affect human rights (such as right to privacy)
- Commodification of data
- Limited digital and data literacy

Data protection is a critical issue for the humanitarian sector. Processing personal data has legal, ethical, operational, and reputational implications and must be considered within the broader framework of data protection, privacy, and human rights.

Despite established principles, norms, and standards for personal data protection, practices vary within and across humanitarian response contexts. Ensuring we minimize the risks while maximizing the benefits of personal data management in humanitarian settings requires a continued and evolving strategy that is operationalized with collective action that extends across and beyond humanitarian organizations.

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

In addition to the risks listed above, additional challenges for developing countries could include:

- Developing countries can be left out of the “data revolution” and face even more challenges compared to other countries.
- Lower income countries are at a competitive disadvantage when it comes to harnessing the economic benefits of data platform businesses due to the lack of digital connectivity and modern infrastructure for exchanging, storing, and processing data. The result is a skewed global data system that needs to be improved by giving marginalized people representation in, and access to, data.
- It is also likely that there will be some data inequality when generally available data misrepresents certain populations, vulnerable people and regional developments (data not being as accurate or available).

If these risks can be adequately mitigated, developing countries stand to benefit from the data revolution at a bigger scale since there is more room for development and improvement of the current technological landscape. In addition to the benefits listed above, and the opportunity to use data to improve resilience, preparedness, financial inclusion, gender equality, etc., better data will also enhance governments’ abilities to set priorities and target resources more efficiently. As mentioned above, developing countries could leverage the data revolution to strengthen their national social protection systems, and use the data they collect to better allocate resources and deliver services, thereby accelerating progress towards the SDGs.

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?

To reap the full benefits of data and create opportunities for all, renewed efforts are required to improve data governance domestically, as well as through closer international cooperation. At the multilateral level, WFP explores ways to ensure the best utilization of data and data protection across

International Organizations. An example is hosting the "Workshop on Data Protection in IOs" with the EU Data Protection Supervisor at WFP HQ in May 2022, with more than 180 participants from UN and other international organizations, and signing a Data Protection Framework with ICRC.

At the current rate of advancements in the realm of data, artificial intelligence (AI), etc. investments in digital and data literacy are becoming indispensable, across the board. Governments, international organizations and NGOs, private sector companies and academia, need to invest in helping citizens and staff develop and maintain the skills they need to keep up with an increasingly digitized world.

Improved data literacy will also contribute to better data privacy and a more ethical use of data, as people will have a better understanding of what data is being collected and how it is being used, and can consent to their data being used in such a way or not.

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

With UNCTAD's focus on increasing access to digital technologies and promoting entrepreneurship and innovation, the CSTD could play an important role in advocating for greater accessibility of data. While the democratization of data is critical to the effective use of analytics and AI, UN Agencies, Funds and Programmes (AFPs) must work to make data more accessible, to help ensure that use cases are built on robust, well-managed data with APIs designed to carry the right data (quantity) at the right time (quality).