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**Contribution by United Kingdom
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“Data Governance for Development: From Asymmetry to Equitable Stewardship”**

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1. Can you share challenges that your country faces in building and leveraging data capacities, including issues related to infrastructure, ownership and stewardship, free and trusted cross-border flows, and benefit-sharing?

The UK has a mature and growing data ecosystem, underpinned by strong digital infrastructure, a significant data driven economy, and a policy framework that seeks to maximise the value of data while maintaining public trust. The UK's Industrial Strategy aims to treat data as an economic asset and build a data economy in which people, businesses and organisations trust the data ecosystem, have the skills to use data effectively, and can access data when they need it.

Despite these strengths, the UK continues to face challenges in building and leveraging data capacities through free and trusted cross-border data flows. A key challenge is the increasing fragmentation of global data governance frameworks. Different jurisdictions have adopted varying approaches to privacy, cybersecurity, data localisation, government access to data, and transfer mechanisms. While these approaches often pursue legitimate public policy objectives, regulatory divergence can increase compliance costs and complexity for organisations operating internationally, particularly SMEs, potentially reducing opportunities for innovation, trade and participation in global digital markets.

Maintaining public trust in international data transfers is another challenge. Citizens and businesses expect strong safeguards when personal data is transferred overseas, requiring policymakers to balance the benefits of data mobility with high standards of privacy, security and data protection. Effective legal frameworks, regulatory oversight and international cooperation are therefore essential.

The UK also faces challenges related to interoperability between data governance regimes. Differences in legal frameworks, governance approaches, and technical standards can impede collaboration in research, health, artificial intelligence and other data intensive sectors. Addressing these challenges requires sustained international cooperation to reduce fragmentation, improve interoperability, build trust, and ensure that the benefits of the global data economy are shared widely.

2. How are inequalities embedded in the processes through which data is generated, collected and used in your country? In particular, how do biases in data collection and use, such as gender data gap, affect policymaking, service delivery and development outcomes?

While the UK recognises that data gaps and biases can arise in practice, the UK's legal framework is one designed to promote equality and protect rights.

The UK's legal framework includes the Equality Act 2010, which prohibits discrimination on protected grounds, and the Public Sector Equality Duty, which requires public authorities to consider the impact of their decisions on equality of opportunity and outcomes. Personal data processing is governed by the UK GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018, which provide safeguards relating to fairness, transparency, accountability and the protection of individual rights.

The UK nevertheless recognises that biases and data gaps can arise in practice and may affect policymaking, service delivery and development outcomes. Data may underrepresent certain groups, fail to capture relevant characteristics, or reflect historical societal inequalities. For example, emerging data driven technologies, including AI systems, can risk perpetuating existing biases if training data is not sufficiently representative.

To address these challenges, the UK promotes evidence-based policymaking, equality impact assessment, transparency, and robust data governance practices. The UK continually seeks to improve the quality, coverage and inclusiveness of data collection, while ensuring that the use of data supports fairness, protects individual rights, and enables better outcomes for all members of society.

3. Has your country implemented national strategies, regulatory frameworks or policy instruments to promote equitable and interoperable data governance? What are the lessons learned?

The UK has implemented a range of strategies, regulatory frameworks and policy instruments to promote equitable, trusted and interoperable data governance.

The UK's Data Use and Access Act provides the overarching framework for building a modern data economy by improving access to and sharing of data, strengthening public trust, enhancing data skills, and promoting interoperability across sectors. The strategy recognises that data governance should enable innovation and economic growth while safeguarding privacy, security and competition.

The UK's Industrial Strategy identifies data as a key enabler of growth across the economy. It seeks to improve access to high-quality data, strengthen data sharing infrastructure, and support data driven innovation across priority sectors. Internal UK policy work has highlighted the importance of facilitating access to data, improving its use across the economy, and supporting reciprocal cross-border data flows to maximise economic benefits.

These strategies are underpinned by the UK GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018, which provide a rights-based framework for personal data governance. The UK's approach seeks to enable the responsible use of data while maintaining high standards of privacy, transparency and accountability. Recent reforms have aimed to make data protection rules clearer and more flexible for organisations while maintaining strong safeguards for individuals.

A key lesson learned is that effective data governance requires balancing innovation, economic growth and international interoperability with public trust, privacy and security. The UK has found that trusted governance frameworks are essential for enabling data sharing, supporting cross-border collaboration, and realising the economic and societal benefits of data.

4. Can you share your country's experience in reducing asymmetries and promoting more equitable data stewardship in development sectors such as public services, education, health and agriculture? (Please provide examples, lessons learned and remaining challenges where possible)

The UK has supported a range of initiatives aimed at reducing data asymmetries and strengthening equitable data stewardship across developing countries, particularly in health, population, education, humanitarian response and sustainable development planning.

A central lesson from the UK's development portfolio is that data inequalities are often rooted in governance, incentives and representation, rather than simply technical capacity. Through support for the Inclusive Data Charter (IDC), of which the UK is a co-founding member, the UK has helped improve the visibility of populations that are frequently underrepresented in official statistics, including women and girls, persons with disabilities and other marginalised groups. The IDC has demonstrated that data disaggregation and inclusive data practices can support more equitable policymaking and service delivery, while highlighting that making previously invisible groups visible can be politically sensitive and requires strong national ownership and safeguards.

The UK has also supported efforts to strengthen the role of civil society and communities in data governance. Through initiatives on Citizen Generated Data (CGD) and the Data Advocacy Programme, the UK has helped improve recognition of community and civil society generated data within official decision-making processes. These initiatives have reduced information asymmetries between governments and citizens, strengthened accountability, and promoted more inclusive participation in decisions about how data is collected, used and governed.

The UK's 'Data for Development – Unleashing the Data Dividend' is a £15.6 million portfolio that has supported countries to strengthen national data systems and improve the use of data for development outcomes. Examples include support for the use of modelled population data, geospatial information and mobile phone data to improve health planning, education service delivery, disaster preparedness, humanitarian response and population statistics. Across these programmes, evidence suggests that the greatest impact is achieved when data initiatives are co-developed with national institutions and directly linked to policy and operational decisions.

The UK has additionally supported initiatives to strengthen national statistical systems and long-term stewardship of data. Through partnerships with organisations such as PARIS21, UNFPA, the Global Financing Facility and the UN's Power of Data initiative, support has focused on strengthening national statistical strategies, improving census and population data, enhancing routine health information systems, and building institutional capacity for evidence-based decision-making. These programmes have reinforced the importance of country ownership, sustainable financing, and integrating innovative data sources into official systems rather than creating parallel structures.

Several cross-cutting lessons emerge from these experiences. First, reducing data asymmetries requires investment in institutions, governance and capacity, alongside investments in data and technology. Second, data is most impactful when linked directly to decision-making processes and public service delivery. Third, trust, transparency and participation are essential for ensuring that data systems serve

all populations equitably. Finally, alternative and innovative data sources can complement official statistics, but only where appropriate governance, privacy safeguards and stewardship arrangements are in place.

Across these initiatives, the UK has found that effective data governance depends on inclusive partnerships, strong national leadership, trusted stewardship arrangements, shared standards, sustainable financing and meaningful participation by both data producers and data users. Durable improvements occur when governance arrangements are designed to strengthen entire data ecosystems rather than individual datasets or technologies in isolation.

Many countries continue to face underinvestment in data systems, capacity constraints, fragmented data ecosystems, limited interoperability, and restrictions on data sharing. The UK's experience suggests that addressing these challenges requires sustained support for country-led data systems, stronger partnerships across governments and society, and governance frameworks that ensure data is used responsibly, inclusively and for public benefit.

5. What mechanisms or institutional arrangements are in place in your country to foster collaboration around data governance for development among different stakeholders (e.g. university-industry, private-public, or multi-stakeholder initiatives)?

The UK supports a range of institutional arrangements and multi-stakeholder partnerships that foster collaboration on data governance for development, recognising that effective data systems require coordination across governments, international organisations, civil society, academia and the private sector.

One example is the UK's participation in a Canada-led humanitarian donor working group on humanitarian data. Through this collaboration, the UK works with like-minded donors to develop common principles for the responsible use of data in humanitarian contexts, including data minimisation, data protection and minimum standards for data governance. The initiative reflects a shared recognition that many data governance challenges can be addressed more effectively through collective action than through individual donor approaches.

The UK is also a longstanding funder and partner of the Digital Impact Alliance (DIAL) through the Digital Impact Programme. DIAL is a multi-stakeholder alliance bringing together governments, donors, foundations and technical partners to advance inclusive, responsible and sustainable digital and data governance. DIAL itself participates in the UN CSTD Multi-Stakeholder Working Group on Data Governance at All Levels, contributing directly to international discussions on data governance.

Through DIAL, the UK supports several collaborative initiatives. These include GovStack, which promotes interoperable and standards-based digital public infrastructure; the Digital Impact Exchange, which improves visibility and trust in digital solutions through partnerships with organisations such as Africa CDC and UNICC; and the Africa Data Leadership Initiative, which supports peer learning and has

informed national data governance strategies in countries including Ethiopia. DIAL has also contributed to the development of international frameworks, including the UNDP Digital Public Infrastructure governance framework and the UN Digital Public Infrastructure Safeguards.

A key lesson from these experiences is that multi-stakeholder platforms can play an important role in building consensus, sharing expertise and promoting interoperability. However, sustaining shared digital public goods and collaborative governance mechanisms over the long term remains a challenge, requiring continued investment, strong institutional ownership and clear incentives for participation.

6. What major bilateral, regional, or international partnership has your country engaged in to foster equitable and interoperable data governance? (Please describe the benefits of participating in these partnerships, as well as any challenges related to coordination, capacity, trust, interoperability or benefit-sharing)

The UK actively participates in a range of bilateral and multilateral partnerships to promote trusted, interoperable and rights-based data governance.

At the multilateral level, the UK is an active participant in the OECD Working Party on Data Governance and Privacy (DGP). The UK supports OECD work on privacy, cross-border data flows, interoperability and the implementation of Data Free Flow with Trust (DFFT). The OECD provides an important forum for developing evidence-based policy approaches and internationally recognised principles that help reduce fragmentation between data governance regimes. The UK also played an active role in the development of the OECD Trusted Government Access Principles, which aim to build trust in cross-border data flows by promoting transparency, necessity and proportionality in government access to data.

The UK also engages actively in the Council of Europe Convention 108 framework, the only international legally binding treaty on data protection open to countries worldwide. Through participation in Convention 108 and discussions on Convention 108+, the UK contributes to the development of common approaches to privacy, data protection and transborder data flows, helping to promote interoperability across jurisdictions.

The UK is also the first country to have been granted Associate status in the Global Cross-Border Privacy Rules (CBPR) Forum. The Forum promotes trusted cross-border data flows through a government backed privacy certification system and seeks to improve interoperability between different privacy and data protection frameworks. The UK has actively supported efforts to strengthen interoperability between CBPR and GDPR-style approaches.

Alongside these multilateral initiatives, the UK pursues bilateral adequacy partnerships and other transfer mechanisms to facilitate trusted international data transfers while maintaining high standards of data protection. The UK's adequacy framework provides a streamlined mechanism for cross-border transfers where appropriate protections are in place, helping to support trade, innovation, research collaboration and public services.

A key benefit of these partnerships is that they help reduce regulatory fragmentation, improve interoperability, support trusted data sharing and promote international cooperation. However, challenges remain. Differing legal frameworks, privacy traditions and regulatory approaches can make coordination difficult and can slow progress towards mutual recognition and interoperability. Capacity constraints across jurisdictions and the growing use of data localisation measures can also create barriers to trusted cross-border data flows. The UK's experience is that sustained international dialogue, trust-building and practical cooperation are essential to overcoming these challenges and ensuring that the benefits of the digital economy are widely shared.

7. How can international cooperation strengthen equitable and interoperable data governance to ensure that data contributes to shared prosperity and sustainable development? In what ways can the UN CSTD contribute to this effort?

International cooperation is essential to strengthening equitable and interoperable data governance and ensuring that data contributes to shared prosperity and sustainable development. In an increasingly interconnected digital economy, data generates the greatest value when it can be accessed, shared and used responsibly across sectors and borders. Trusted cross-border data flows support international trade, scientific research, public service delivery, innovation, and joint efforts to address global challenges such as climate change, public health, and disaster response. At the same time, strong governance frameworks are needed to protect privacy, maintain security, and build trust.

A key priority for international cooperation is improving interoperability between data governance frameworks. While countries may pursue different legal and regulatory approaches, common principles, shared standards, and interoperable mechanisms can reduce fragmentation and enable organisations to operate across jurisdictions more efficiently. The UK has seen the value of this approach through its engagement in the OECD, the Council of Europe Convention 108 framework, the Global CBPR Forum and bilateral adequacy arrangements, all of which seek to facilitate trusted data flows while maintaining high standards of protection.

Shared systems and common governance approaches can also help ensure that the benefits of data are more widely distributed. International cooperation can support capacity building, knowledge sharing, regulatory cooperation, and the development of practical tools that enable countries with different levels of digital maturity to participate in and benefit from the global data economy.

The UN CSTD is well placed to contribute to this effort by providing an inclusive multilateral forum for dialogue, sharing best practice, identifying common challenges, and building consensus on approaches to responsible data governance. The CSTD can help bridge perspectives across different regions and levels of development, promote capacity-building and technical cooperation, and support greater convergence around high level principles that enable trusted, interoperable and inclusive data governance.