Introduction of the Report of the Secretary-General on Data for Development

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Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today, I have the privilege of presenting the findings of the United Nations report on Data for Development, a comprehensive analysis that sheds light on the essential role of data in driving forward the United Nations Sustainable Development Agenda. The report has been prepared by the secretariat based on information provided by 30 member-states and international organizations.

In this introduction, I will focus on three key aspects of the role of data in sustainable development. These are:

- Promises of data for sustainable development,
- Navigating the complexities of the data-driven world, and
- Global data governance.

Promises of data for economic development and policymaking

Ladies and gentlemen,

From one perspective, data are considered an economic resource in the value chain. By processing data, we can create strategic assets that fuel innovation and form the foundation of business models based on data analysis. These innovations have the potential to increase productivity and bring about significant changes, resulting in new markets and new value sources.

From another perspective, data serve as a crucial decision-making tool, aiding in achieving economic, social and environmental objectives and advancing Sustainable Development Goals. Quick access to reliable data can determine the success or failure of policy interventions. For instance, in managing a pandemic, real-time data about infection rates, vaccine efficacy, and public health measures across borders can significantly influence the strategies adopted by different nations. Reliable data are needed to understand where to allocate scarce resources, when to enforce actions, and how to respond to rapidly evolving scenarios at the global scale.

Furthermore, one of the most significant benefits that data-enabled technologies offer is the enhancement of scientific research, which can lead to significant economic and social advantages. Through supporting faster analysis of data, lowering operational costs, and encouraging new hypotheses, data-driven innovations do not merely accelerate scientific

research but also open up new areas of knowledge. This has the potential to speed up progress in various fields and spur further innovation.

Navigating the complexities of the data-driven world

Distinguished delegates,

Benefiting from data is far from straightforward and demands the satisfaction of numerous prerequisites across various domains.

First and foremost, we must prioritize the quality of our data. Without high-quality data—data that are accurate, complete, timely, relevant, and consistent—any insights derived or decisions made could be erroneous, or at their worst, harmful.

Equally critical is the interoperability of data across diverse technological systems. In our interconnected world, it is essential that different data systems, applications, and devices can exchange and utilize data seamlessly.

However, access to high-quality, interoperable data on a robust infrastructure is not the end of the story. Countries must also cultivate the necessary skills and capabilities to distill insights from data. This involves significant investments in data literacy, analytical skills, and technical know-how within our workforces. It is only with these skills that we can transform raw data into actionable insights and informed decisions.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is crucial to acknowledge that the benefits of the data economy are not automatic or evenly distributed. The disparities in access to, and control of, data resources often exacerbate existing inequalities, disproportionately impacting lower-income nations and hindering equitable participation in the global data economy. This divide not only challenges the fairness of the data economy but also raises critical questions about the concentration of power, accountability, and the protection of human rights in a data-driven world.

In light of these challenges, there is a pressing need for international cooperation on data governance. Such collaboration is vital to ensure that the benefits of the data economy are accessible to all, safeguarding against practices that deepen disparities and prioritizing measures that foster inclusivity and equity.

Global data governance

Distinguished delegates,

Now let me turn to the importance of data governance. The report argues strongly in favour of a balanced approach to effective global data governance, aimed at preventing the fragmentation of data frameworks. Importantly, the report does not call for a single, unified global data governance regime—an idea that may appear impractical. Instead, the report proposes a more achievable goal—to advance a global multilateral, multistakeholder and multidisciplinary dialogue on data governance.

The complexity and unpredictability of technological advancements underscore the need for our regulatory frameworks to be flexible. Effective data governance necessitates the involvement of diverse stakeholders, including civil society, businesses, academia, NGOs,

technical communities, and notably, the youth. This ensures that data governance frameworks accommodate a wide range of perspectives and address the needs of future generations.

Data governance must navigate a careful path, minimizing risks while simultaneously encouraging innovation. This demands a nuanced, flexible, and inclusive regulatory approach. The principles guiding global data governance should align with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, ensuring that our efforts in this domain support and uphold fundamental human rights and freedoms.

Closing

Distinguished delegates,

As highlighted in the Secretary-General's report on Data for Development, it is imperative for governments and all relevant stakeholders to take actions that enhance data literacy, and bolster domestic capabilities in data analysis and management. The development of robust frameworks for cross-border data sharing and global data governance is crucial to address global challenges effectively, including climate change and pandemics. Such efforts should strive to create a global landscape where the exchange of data benefits all parties involved, significantly contributing to the Sustainable Development Goals.

To conclude my statement, I wish to emphasize the collective responsibility we hold in shaping a future where data serve as a cornerstone for innovation, equity, and sustainable development. It is only through shared commitment and action that we can harness the potential of data for the betterment of humanity and our planet.

Thank you for your attention.

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