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**Submissions from entities in the United Nations system, international
organizations and other stakeholders on their efforts in 2023 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 27th 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 the CSTD Report on WSIS Implementation October 2023

Part One: *Brief/Executive summary of activities undertaken, progress made, and any obstacles encountered.*

Recent breakthroughs in digital technology have unleashed unprecedented opportunities, and with them new avenues for digital innovation in our race against time to fulfil the promise of the 2030 Agenda. As 2.6 billion people globally still remain offline, UNDP and development partners are driving new efforts to ensure that everyone can benefit from the ongoing digital transformation including through universal and meaningful connectivity.

Additionally, while there is great potential in harnessing technology to enable sustainable development, they are not without risks. Global cooperation is needed to address challenges from cyberthreats to AI governance, from misinformation to deepening digital divides & biases. We also must empower individuals and communities with digital skills, especially in developing countries. Digital technologies must be developed and deployed in a safe, responsible, and equitable manner.

With digitalization reshaping our globe, UNDP is harnessing its potential as an empowering force for people and planet. After an initial focus in the COVID-19 pandemic on helping countries quickly set up digital solutions to adapt to the 'lockdown' world, we moved to help countries accelerate digital transformation more generally. Since the onset of the pandemic, 82 countries have adopted over 580 digital solutions for e-commerce and e-governance, increasing access to basic services, especially for those left behind. Over sixteen countries have worked directly with UNDP to develop 'whole-of-society' digital transformation strategies, and/or solutions to both speed recovery from COVID-19 and accelerate the SDGs. Mauritania has set up a national digital agency; Grenada and Dominica adopted new national digital strategies. Tajikistan has transitioned 74 civil registration offices to digitized services towards improving vital birth, death and other record-keeping for more than 450,000 citizens. In Lao PDR, the Ministry of Technology and Communications, with support from UNDP, launched the [Gov-X application](#), a free mobile app that aims to improve the delivery and accessibility of government services to citizens, businesses, and government officials. And Malawi, with support from UNDP, sets a benchmark with 10.5M citizens now holding National IDs - the foundation block for Digital Public Infrastructure.

Recognizing that technology poses risks alongside its benefits, UNDP has forged partnerships with the Office of the UN Secretary-General's Tech Envoy, the International Telecommunication Union, the Digital Public Goods Alliance and others to shape forward-looking global norms around preventing potential harms. UNDP places human rights and inclusion at the heart of our own digital work through the six guiding principles in our [digital strategy](#).

Part Two: *A brief analytical overview of trends and experiences in implementation, highlighting achievements and obstacles since WSIS and taking into account the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (could include information on the facilitation process of implementation, monitoring and cooperation among stakeholders).*

The global context and role of the Internet and digital technologies in our lives have changed dramatically since WSIS, and a number of trends and obstacles stand out in 2023. In particular, the COVID-19 pandemic showed the cost of weak digital infrastructure and capacities (steep challenges to business continuity and service delivery during crisis, among others). Additionally, it is increasingly clear

that digital transformation can have both beneficial and detrimental outcomes, which are often driven by countries' policies, laws, and regulations — in other words, governance. Below are some themes and trends that played out in many areas of UNDP's work, and which need to be more closely analyzed for their impact on SDG acceleration and achievement:

- **Significant digital divides persist** – Many types of digital divides persist today, and we must work diligently on digital inclusion in all forms. One particularly persistent challenge is that populations living in Least Developed Countries (LDCs) are among the most digitally excluded in the world: only 36 percent of the LDC population uses the Internet, compared to the global average of 66 percent. A mere 8 percent of LDC households have a computer, and 58 percent of the population own a mobile phone. The average price of a smartphone accounts for 53 percent of the monthly income in LDCs. To meet all connectivity related WSIS Action Lines and Targets will require very strategic interventions particularly in such countries and regions where digital exclusion remains significant. The data divide is also spurring, and it's even more evident with the rise of the Generative AI tools like ChatGPT and others in 2023. Data is skewed in favor of the Global North, which limits the use of those advanced tools in the Global South and exacerbates biases due to a lack of representation (text data, images, audio, languages, etc.)
- **Digital capacity of governments is critical, and uneven** – Policymakers at all levels need a comprehensive understanding of digital technologies & ICTs in order to make decisions that maximize their benefits in public services, and to evaluate costs and risks accurately. Not everyone is equally able to take advantage of the opportunities presented by digital, particularly as the rapid pace of change places further demands on resource-constrained governments and societies. UNDP has extensive experience in working with governments across all geographies and levels, providing neutral, expert, and independent support on diverse aspects of their digital transformation, from strategy to technology procurement, as well as convening across public and private sectors and capacity building. For example, UNDP has supported the development of critical digital public infrastructures like digital payments in a range of countries, and continues to support countries assess their digital readiness. This includes direct support to countries and Ministries, as well as overarching knowledge exchange support such as the publication of resources like a [Digital Public Infrastructure Playbook](#) published with and under India's presidency of the G20 in 2023, and supporting initiatives such as the [Future of Government Awards](#) which recognizes leaders who are transforming people's lives by applying digital solutions and leveraging technology to reform the public sector for those it serves.
- **Growing appreciation for Digital Public Infrastructure.** Our understanding of "ICT infrastructure" has evolved since WSIS, bringing about more sophisticated instruments and means for establishing and measuring connectivity, as well as a proliferation of both public and privately owned systems which provide critical digital services. Additionally, in the last several years, a new appreciation has emerged for Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) as critical enabler of digital transformation which can turbocharge progress to deliver on the SDGs. DPI -- a secure and interoperable network of digital payments, ID, and data exchange systems -- is essential for countries to improve their economies and digital service delivery for people. DPI is the foundation on which citizen services are built. There are both technical and non-technical layers of DPI which must be established. UNDP is working directly with individual countries directly on DPI implementation projects, and through convenings such as the G20 to expand understanding and frameworks for DPI. In 2023, UNDP accelerated its work with partners and stakeholders to mobilize funding and commitments to implement in countries around the world in support of sustainable development.

- **AI governance & readiness is the new frontier.** At the 2023 UN General Assembly and in the Security Council, world leaders at the highest levels discussed the importance of inclusive global governance for Artificial Intelligence (AI), which presents powerful opportunities for humanity. Similarly, this year’s Internet Governance Forum (IGF) featured a special focus on the issue of AI as companies, think tanks, governments and individuals around the world are grappling with the rapid pace of innovation in the field of AI, and its potential impacts on society – both positive and negative. This is the new frontier of technology, and we need new instruments, policies and frameworks to manage its impact. For its part, UNDP engages in the [UN Inter-Agency Working Group on Artificial Intelligence](#), which has developed [recommendations on AI Ethical Standards](#), and [UNDP’s AI Readiness Assessment](#) (AIRA) is a comprehensive set of tools that allow governments to get an overview of the AI landscape and assess their level of AI readiness across various sectors.
- **The need for global cooperation on digital matters is expanding.** The type and scope of “regional and international cooperation” needed to address digital issues is much broader today than as described in the Geneva Plan of Action. Of course, continued cooperation is needed to accelerate ICT project implementations and expand meaningful connectivity, but global cooperation is also now urgently needed to address many facets of internet governance, and set guardrails to minimize unintended consequences of rapidly changing digital technologies on society. These expanded set of challenges require international cooperation. UNDP continues working with stakeholders and partners to support knowledge sharing on issues related to rights and governance in the digital age and is engaging closely in the UN’s Global Digital Compact consultation process.

Part Three: A brief description of (a) Innovative policies, programmes and projects which have been undertaken 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 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.

Examples of innovative policies, programmes and projects related to WSIS action lines & themes which were launched or enhanced in 2023:

Information and communication infrastructure (C2) and Enabling Environment (C6): In September 2023, UNDP together with ITU launched the [High Impact Initiative on Digital Public Infrastructure](#), as part of a suite of initiatives supported by the UN Deputy Secretary-General to help accelerate SDG progress worldwide. It will carry through the next several years, engaging governments and other stakeholders around 5 key pillars, on topics ranging from establishing [DPI Safeguard principles](#) to strengthening local digital ecosystems. Additionally, [“50-in-5” is a new global campaign](#) launching in November 2023 (by UNDP, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Digital Public Goods Alliance and Co-Develop), aimed at accelerating DPI adoption by bringing countries together to help radically shorten implementation journeys by sharing learnings, best practices, and technologies that can ultimately reduce costs and maximize impact. The goal of 50-in-5 is for 50 countries to have designed, implemented, and scaled at least one component of their digital public infrastructure in a safe, inclusive and interoperable manner in five years--by the end of 2028.

Capacity-building (C4): UNDP has supported digital capacity building efforts in at least 45 countries throughout 2023 on an ongoing basis. UNDP has facilitated learning exchanges between civil servants and leadership in governments, such as between Uganda, Rwanda, Ghana learning from Estonia, India

and Bangladesh. UNDP has provided Digital transformation advisory to policy makers to assess, formulate, action plan and implement national strategies in Uganda, Moldova, Cuba, Rwanda to name a few. Among the newest initiatives, UNDP and the UN Office for South-South Cooperation, with the support of the German Agency for International Cooperation, have established the [Data to Policy Network](#). The Virtual Network is a space for policymakers to connect and learn from one another about how best to integrate new data sources into their decision-making. Members will be encouraged to share challenges, success stories, and lessons learnt. In addition to peer-to-peer learning, the network will regularly host certified training sessions, organize broader thematic webinars, and share up-to-date research, policy papers, and [other knowledge products](#).

Ethical dimensions of the information society (C10): UNDP enhanced efforts in this area by launching a tool to counter misinformation particularly during elections ([iVerify](#), an open source misinformation detection tool), and an initiative on [information integrity](#) as part of the UNDP Strategic Plan (which includes an information pollution mapping programme). UNDP also continues to serve as a knowledge partner to governments and partners on issues ranging from [digital rights in Europe & Central Asia](#), lessons learned on [digital governance](#), [digital standards](#) for implementing ICT enabled development programming, and frameworks for [digital safeguards](#) for Digital Public Infrastructure.

International and regional cooperation (C11): UNDP currently serves as co-chair of the UN Group on Information Society (UNGIS) and continues to take part in global partnerships to tackle global challenges leveraging ICTs, such as the *Broadband Commission*, the *Edison Alliance* on Digital Inclusion, and the Digital Public Goods Alliance among others. In 2023, UNDP served as the official knowledge partner on Digital Public Infrastructure for India's presidency of the G20, culminating in the production of two key knowledge products which aided in reaching a [groundbreaking consensus among the Digital Ministers of 20 nations on DPI as an accelerator of the Sustainable Development Goals](#). At the regional level, UNDP is engaged in many initiatives to accelerate cooperation and knowledge sharing around ICTs and digital solutions in the Arab Region, Asia, Latin America and Africa through hubs like UNDP's [Centre for Technology, Innovation and Sustainable Development](#) based in Singapore, and our [network of Accelerator Labs](#). And with growing emphasis on global cooperation on internet governance and digital issues, UNDP continues to support Member States in the Global Digital Compact process.

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