

# **COMMISSION ON SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY FOR DEVELOPMENT (CSTD)**

**Twenty-eighth session  
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## **Submissions from entities in the United Nations system, international organizations and other stakeholders on the progress made in the implementation of the outcomes of the WSIS during the past 20 years**

### **Submission by**

United Nations Development Programme

This submission was prepared as an input to the report of the CSTD secretariat that will inform the substantive discussion at the CSTD on the progress made in the implementation of the outcomes of the WSIS during the past 20 years during its 28<sup>th</sup> annual session in April 2025, in response to the request by the Economic and Social Council, in its resolution E/RES/2023/3, to the CSTD to conduct such substantive discussions and to report thereon, through the Economic and Social Council, to the General Assembly.

<p><b>DISCLAIMER:</b> The views presented here are the contributors' and do not necessarily reflect the views and position of the United Nations or the UN Trade and Development.</p>
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# United Nations Commission on Science and Technology for Development

## Twenty years in the implementation of outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS)

### WSIS+20 Reporting Template

**Name of organization:** United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

**Name/role of respondent:** UNDP Chief Digital Office

**Date of response:** November 2024

- **What is your organisation's formal role and responsibilities concerning WSIS implementation?**

- a. **Mandates of your organization relevant to the WSIS implementation**

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is the UN's development agency, dedicated to supporting countries in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through country programmes tailored to national priorities. At the core of UNDP's mandate are poverty eradication and reducing inequality, complemented by focus areas such as governance, resilience, environmental sustainability, energy, and gender equality. This broad mandate enables UNDP to serve as an integrator within the UN System, particularly in the digital development sector. UNDP's growing work on digital is guided by our comprehensive Digital Strategy, which sets a long-term vision to create a world in which digital is an empowering force for people and planet. UNDP's unique positioning allows it to maintain strong relationships with central government institutions, leverage its thematic expertise across all SDGs, work across sectors, and foster connections that support a holistic approach to digital transformation across societies. All of these are inextricably linked to the WSIS Action lines, where our broad programmes, work and mandates allow us to contribute to the implementation of the WSIS outcome.

UNDP has an extensive global presence, with country offices in over 170 countries and territories. Through its digital initiatives in more than 120 countries, UNDP brings deep expertise in supporting governments at all levels. It provides policy expertise and technical support on various aspects of digital transformation — from strategy development to capacity building to technology procurement — while fostering collaboration between stakeholders across public and private sectors and civil society. With strong connections to local innovation ecosystems through its Accelerator Lab Network, now active in 90 locations across 114 countries, UNDP is uniquely positioned to develop solutions that are rooted in local ecosystems and which can be scaled and adapted to fit multiple contexts.

b. Brief History of your organization's contribution to the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS)

UNDP has longstanding experience supporting countries on a range of digital programmes globally over the past two decades. For example, UNDP supported the Aspire to Innovate (a2i) programme, Bangladesh's flagship e-government programme since 2007. a2i has [improved access to public services through](#) a national network of over 8,000 digital centres, which delivers over 300 public services digitally. In Indonesia, UNDP supported the Ministry of Health to launch [SMILE](#) (Sistem Monitoring Imunisasi Logistik secara Elektronik), an innovative technological solution that aims to strengthen the immunization supply chain system and ensures that safe and effective vaccines are available to all children. The solution enables real-time visibility of vaccine cold chain logistics by digitizing stock supplies and storage temperature across vaccine cold chain points. Since its launch in 2018, SMILE has been [implemented](#) in more than 50 regions in Indonesia.

In 2019, UNDP adopted its first Digital Strategy and established the Chief Digital Office to spearhead efforts to strengthen and accelerate the organization's support for countries to leverage digital technology for sustainable development. In response to the surge in demand for digital support during the COVID-19 pandemic and the evolution of the development landscape, UNDP's 2022-2025 Strategic Plan identified digitalization as one of three key enablers to accelerate progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In line with the Strategic Plan, UNDP adopted its second and even more ambitious Digital Strategy in February 2022, to strengthen our digital programmes by creating a more strategic and coherent approach to supporting countries, with a bold vision to help 'create a world in which digital is an empowering force for people and planet'. This vision of UNDP is closely aligned with the WSIS outcomes that articulated a future where digital technologies would empower individuals, foster inclusion and spur global development through digital cooperation.

Since WSIS's inception, UNDP has been an active contributor to the WSIS mechanism and processes. As mentioned above, our Digital Strategy guides us in our efforts to support countries to build inclusive, ethical, and sustainable digital societies, as well as boosting the digital capacity of vulnerable and marginalized groups. In this regard, UNDP plays an important role in advancing WSIS objectives as a co-facilitator for WSIS Action Lines C4 (Capacity Building), C6 (Enabling Environment), and C11 (International and Regional Cooperation). This includes leading efforts to build digital capacities within governments, developing local digital ecosystems, creating conducive environments for ICT development, and fostering regional and international partnerships. UNDP's work goes beyond just the above-mentioned 3 action lines where we serve as co-facilitator but also to the other WSIS areas as well. Through its various workstreams and thematic projects, UNDP also directly and indirectly contributes to the WSIS outcomes and targets around WSIS Action Lines C2 (Information and communication infrastructure), C3 (Access to information and knowledge), C7 (ICT applications: benefits in all aspects of life, specifically disaster recovery, e-applications, e-agriculture, e-business and e-commerce, e-environment, e-government, e-health, sustainable production and consumption, civic participation and transparency), and C10 (Ethical dimensions of the information society). UNDP also actively supports

digital inclusion initiatives and coordinates projects to close the digital divide, leveraging its extensive network and partnerships to facilitate WSIS's vision across regions, especially in least developed countries (LDCs).

UNDP is also the co-organizer of the annual WSIS Forum together with ITU, UNESCO and UNCTAD. UNDP is also an active member of the UN Group on the Information Society (UNGIS), serving as one of the co-chairs and in its term as UNGIS Chair from 2023-2024, UNGIS coordinated and provided inputs to the Global Digital Compact (GDC) discussions. The WSIS process has, and must continue to play, an important role to play in delivering on the GDC, as recognized by Member States in the GDC itself. In this regard, together with close UN partners like ITU, UNESCO and UNCTAD; UNDP convened and participated in multiple meetings to discuss the alignment of WSIS with the GDC processes and objectives and to underscore the important role that existing mechanisms like WSIS can play in GDC implementation as well as the WSIS+20 review that is scheduled for 2025.

#### **c. Implementation processes and initiatives within your organization and/or in partnership with other organisations**

UNDP is an active contributor to the WSIS Process across all of its elements like the WSIS Action Lines, United Nations Group on Information Society (UNGIS), WSIS Forum, IGF, etc.

Guided by its corporate Digital Strategy, UNDP supports the implementation of WSIS outcomes through its innovative policies, programmes and projects, working with more than 120 countries on digital-related issues. During the last decade, UNDP's digital programmatic activities have shifted from individual country office projects to strategic and integrated digital programming offers across themes like capacity building, digital public infrastructure (DPI), inclusive digital transformation and digital/AI strategy development, AI ecosystems and capacities, data governance, information integrity, etc. (more information about these initiatives and programmes is presented in the next section). This is reflected in the UNDP Digital Strategy's programmatic objectives, which not only aim to accelerate the integration of digital as an enabler into UNDP's thematic offers but also support the development of inclusive digital ecosystems. Embedding digital in UNDP's programming has been supported by the further rollout of 'Digital by Default', an approach in which digital outputs become a standard consideration for programme planning, design and monitoring processes. UNDP was the first UN agency to systematically embed digital in this way. As a result, in 2023, over 70% of UNDP projects included digital components. Moreover, as of today, almost all of UNDP's Country Programme Documents feature some level of digital considerations.

UNDP also collaborates with other UN entities on initiatives related to WSIS. These includes the SDG Digital initiative with ITU on advocating for the use of digital technologies for accelerating the progress towards SGDs, the development of the Universal DPI Safeguards Framework with the Office of UN SG's Envoy on Technology, our joint ITU-UNDP Cyber Development and Capacity-Building to Build Safe, Inclusive and Resilient Digital Ecosystems, our High Impact Initiative on DPI with ITU, as well as

collaboration with UNESCO on AI assessments and around UNESCO's Global Forum on AI and Digital Transformation in the Public Sector. We also co-lead, with the ITU, the Technical Support Group for the Digital track of the Joint SDG Fund.

UNDP remains actively engaged in global partnerships around using digital and ICT to address global challenges, including the Broadband Commission, the Edison Alliance on Digital Inclusion, the Digital Public Goods Alliance, the Coalition for Digital Environmental Sustainability (CODES), and "50 in 5" global campaign on Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) adoption with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Digital Public Goods Alliance and Co-Develop.

In 2023, UNDP also served as the official knowledge partner on DPI for India's G20 Presidency, 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](#). In 2024, UNDP has been partnering with the Italy's G7 Presidency and other partners from the public and private sector on co-designing the 'AI Hub for Sustainable Development' to drive inclusive and sustainable AI-enabled growth in Africa. This Hub was officially launched at the 2024 UN General Assembly. Additionally, UNDP in collaboration with the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) announced a [global platform to harness the power of responsible AI for sustainable development](#). At the inaugural Hamburg Sustainability Conference in October 2024, the [AI for SDGs Compendium](#), a global registry of AI initiatives for sustainable development, was launched along with the announcement of the intention to work towards a Hamburg Declaration on Responsible AI for the SDGs in June 2025.

UNDP has also developed strategic partnerships with the private sector to implement programmes that contribute to the WSIS action lines, like the collaboration with major private sector players such as Google on capacity-building in the African region, with e& on digital transformation in the Arab States region, and with Intel on AI capacity-building. UNDP has also actively mobilized private sector engagement through global convenings such as the aforementioned SDG Digital high-level event.

- **What have been your organization's main contributions to the direct implementation of the WSIS outcomes and related areas of digital development since the Summit, particularly since 2015?**

**a. WSIS Action Lines (as lead, co-facilitator or supporting participant)**

**The role of public governance authorities and all stakeholders in the promotion of ICTs for development (C1):** Through its Chief Digital Office and its Bureau for Policy and Programme Support, UNDP enhanced support to governments in developing national digital and data strategies, including advisory guidance on data management and capacity-building support for government officials, and other stakeholders, addressing risks arising from cybersecurity, human rights, and ethics.

**Information and communication infrastructure (C2) and Enabling Environment (C6):** UNDP is dedicated to helping countries worldwide to benefit from the digital revolution by strengthening local ecosystems and fostering an enabling environment through multistakeholder partnerships.

***Inclusive Digital Transformation.*** UNDP has developed an Inclusive Whole-of-Society Digital Transformation Framework that lays the foundations for our organization's work around supporting local digital ecosystems and inclusive digital transformation. UNDP has supported over 60 countries on national-level digital transformation. This includes supporting nearly 50 countries to conduct UNDP's Digital Readiness Assessment (DRA) to facilitate the developing national-level, inclusive digital transformation strategies. The DRA offers scoring and data points across 5 pillars of intervention of the Inclusive Whole-of-Society Digital Transformation Framework: connectivity, regulation, digital government, economy, and people. These assessments have laid the foundation for large-scale investments in digital transformation in many countries. For example, in Mauritania, the DRA has led to the creation of its first government agency for digital transformation. In Moldova, the DRA shaped the country's digital transformation agenda and became the basis for their 2030 Digital Strategy. In Antigua and Barbuda, the government publicly committed to digitalizing all public services by 2030, following the DRA. In Suriname, the Cook Islands and Niue, the DRA informed the development of national digital strategies.

The DRA is complemented by the Digital Development Compass, an online tool created by UNDP in partnership with GitHub, which provides an analysis of a country's digital maturity based on indicators from 180+ public data sources. By using the Digital Development Compass, users can interact with the publicly available data to examine the digital state of a country, whilst accessing comparison insights and recommendations. The Digital Development Compass won Bronze for the 'Responsible Tech' category in the Anthem Awards, a prestigious award that honors people, companies and organizations that are dedicated to making positive social impact.

***Artificial intelligence.*** In collaboration with Italy's G7 Presidency, UNDP co-designed the AI Hub for Sustainable Development to [drive sustainable AI-based growth in Africa](#), engaging over 500 local stakeholders and leaders in this co-design process. Launched at the 2024 UN General Assembly, the Hub centers on inclusive and representative datasets, globally accessible and affordable green computing infrastructure, local AI talent development, and enabling environments for responsible AI adoption. Complementing G7 initiatives, the AI Hub serves as a multistakeholder platform to steer private sector collective action across the African continent, ensuring the AI revolution benefits all. Current pilots of the Hub include a [Startup Acceleration Pilot](#), with 350+ applications from African startups across 9 countries, and the [Local Language Partnerships Accelerator](#), engaging 80+ language innovators across 30+ countries to advance the digitation of low-resource language data for greater AI inclusion. The Hub is a key milestone in UNDP's overall AI commitment, aimed at bending the arc of AI's global development towards inclusive green growth and sustainable development.

Additionally, UNDP in collaboration with the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) announced a [global platform to harness the power of responsible AI for sustainable development](#). At the inaugural Hamburg Sustainability Conference in October 2024, they presented the launch of the [AI for SDGs Compendium](#), a global registry of AI initiatives for sustainable development, and the intention to work towards a Hamburg Declaration on Responsible AI for the SDGs in June 2025.

To build an enabling environment for AI, UNDP has been conducting AI Landscape Assessments (AILA), a comprehensive analysis of national AI ecosystems, examining adoption rates, policy and regulatory frameworks, and ethical approaches. Since its launch in 2023, through AILA, UNDP provided governments from 7 countries with actionable insights and recommendations to inform their AI strategies and identify areas for targeted intervention (Sri Lanka, Colombia, Bhutan, Rwanda, Montenegro, Ecuador, Vietnam) with additional AILAs getting underway in 2024 or early 2025 in Mongolia, Uzbekistan, Malawi and Cote d'Ivoire. UNDP's AILA insights provide countries with a strong evidence base around which to develop their national AI agendas and governance frameworks. In Sri Lanka, the country's first national AI strategy was developed based on insights from the AILA.

**Digital public infrastructure.** UNDP has been a global leader in promoting digital public infrastructure and digital public goods (DPGs) as key catalysts to accelerate inclusive digital transformation. UNDP became co-host of the Digital Public Goods Alliance (DPGA) in 2021, and has since been working with global and local partners in the discovery and implementation of digital public goods (DPGs) as a basis for inclusive DPI. UNDP has been leading global advocacy on DPI, including as the official knowledge partner for the Digital Economy Working Group of the G20 Indian Presidency in 2023. In 2024, UNDP was one of the co-organizers of the inaugural Global DPI Summit.

UNDP has been proactively supporting over 25 countries in the implementation of DPI and DPGs, addressing global challenges such as information pollution, social protection, access to justice and climate resilience. Examples include piloting digital legal ID in Mauritania, advising on DPI strategy in Malawi, replicating open-source police records management system in the Caribbeans and scaling a court case management system in Palestine.

UNDP also co-leads the High-Impact Initiative on DPI implementation that was launched at the SDG Summit in 2023. One of the five pillars is the DPI Safeguards Initiative undertaken with the Office of the SG's Envoy on Technology. As a part of that initiative, the [Universal DPI Safeguards Framework](#) was developed. This set of actionable guidelines for building safe and inclusive DPI for public interest was released in September 2024 following a comprehensive multistakeholder process.

Launched in 2023, the 50-in-5 initiative that UNDP and its partners (the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Digital Public Goods Alliance, Co-Develop) lead seeks to help 50 countries design, launch, and scale components of their digital public infrastructure by 2028. On the sidelines of the Summit of the Future in September 2024, the 50-in-5 initiative welcomed numerous new countries, including

Brazil, Cambodia, France, Nigeria, Ukraine, and Uruguay, bringing the total to now 22 committed to accelerating DPI adoption in a safe, inclusive and interoperable way.

In advancing the digitalization of governance, UNDP has pioneered a Model Governance Framework for Digital Legal ID. This framework is designed to guide the development and implementation of digital ID systems that prioritize safety, privacy and inclusivity, ensuring equitable access to services for all.

**Open-source.** UNDP also supports and catalyses open-source digital ecosystems in countries through the Open-Source Ecosystem Enabler (OSEE) initiative, that is jointly led by UNDP and the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) with support from the European Union.

**Capacity-building (C4):** UNDP has continuously supported digital capacity-building efforts in at least 70 countries to ensure that governments are prepared for future challenges and opportunities, like AI. UNDP has offered digital transformation advisory to policymakers in countries such as Uganda, Moldova, Grenada, Rwanda and Cote d'Ivoire, to name a few, supporting them in assessing, formulating, planning, and implementing national strategies. UNDP has delivered virtual and in-person learning sessions for policymakers 50+ policymakers trained from 7 countries (Uganda, Kenya, The Gambia, South Sudan, DRC, Türkiye, Kosovo) on data governance.

In 2022, UNDP launched the [Data to Policy Navigator](#), a tool designed in partnership with GIZ (on behalf of BMZ) to support policymakers in integrating new data sources into their decision-making and policy-development processes. As of Q4 of 2024, it has more than 23,000 active users across governments, the private sector, academia and NGOs. In 2023, UNDP also launched the Data to Policy Network, a global network of 100+ policymakers from 20+ countries to facilitate knowledge-sharing and scaling of best practices. Based on the [Data to Policy Navigator](#), UNDP developed the Data to Policy training that has already been delivered in different formats to 250+ policymakers from 4 countries across 3 regions since beginning of 2024.

Recognizing the growing need for capacity building, especially around AI and cyber, UNDP has partnered with ITU on global capacity-building to ensure that global efforts then translate to effective, impactful online and in-person trainings for policy-makers, governments officials, members of the business community, and other partners from all over the world.

UNDP, ITU and the UN Innovation Network (UNIN) have also partnered to establish a UN-wide community dedicated to the topic of digital transformation – [the UN Digital Community](#). Supported by the Executive Office of the Secretary-General, the community aims to create a space where colleagues interested in digital from across the UN system can embrace best practices, exchange on their experiences and challenges, and help embed a digital mindset as an integral part of the UN culture. Since its launch in May 2024, the community has attracted over 2,200 members from more than 60 UN entities and has held 6 knowledge sharing and networking events reaching an average of 350 participants per event.



**ICT applications: benefits in all aspects of life (C7):** UNDP, alongside its close partner, the ITU, has been championing the idea of leveraging digital technologies for sustainable development and acceleration of SDGs through the [SDG Digital initiative](#) that was launched in 2023 on the occasion of the UN SDG Summit. For [2 consecutive years](#), SDG Digital has been a flagship UN platform to showcase the impactful scalable digital solutions that can advance our progress towards the SDGs and explore trends, risks, and opportunities presented by digital and emerging technologies.

UNDP, through the UNDP-ITU Joint Facility, also leads the Technical Support Group for the digital track of the [Joint SDG Fund](#). By supporting [inclusive and effective digital solutions across various sectors](#), the Fund aims to promote transparent public services, resilient food systems with increased access to markets, greener practices, resilient socioeconomic growth as well as gender equality. To-date, the Fund, supported by the Technical Support Group, has designed and approved 22 joint programmes on digital to be led by RCs and implemented by 24 UN entities, with a third of the portfolio comprised of LDCs or LLDCs. The investment is primarily focused in Africa (9 countries), followed by Latin America and the Caribbean (7 countries), Asia and the Pacific (3 countries) and Europe and Central Asia (3 countries). The total budget amounts to \$66.5 million, with \$40.3 million supported by the Fund and \$26.1 million in co-funding.

Through its rich thematic programming on various levels of interventions, UNDP actively explores ways to increase or scale its impact by embedding digital and ICT applications and leverages data for data-driven decision when designing and implementing its programmes. To consolidate best practices, UNDP launched the [Digital Guides](#), offering practical insights on integrating digital technology into its programmatic initiatives, while highlighting the opportunities and risks associated with these technologies. Developing Digital Guides that are harmonized with the UNDP programmatic offers was one of the commitments of the current UNDP Digital Strategy.

Given its broad mandate, UNDP has actively supported its partner governments in leveraging digital and ICT solutions across multiple sectors – from e-government, civic participation and transparency to e-agriculture, e-business and e-commerce, to e-environment, sustainable production and consumption and e-health. Selected examples of such UNDP programmes and the impact they made are presented below:

***E-business and e-commerce.*** In Cambodia, a [strategic partnership between UNDP and the government](#) led to several programs to create an enabling environment for micro, small & medium enterprises (MSMEs) to be more digitally capable and resilient. As a result of those programs, more than 500,000 MSMEs and 2,500 young entrepreneurs harnessed digital solutions for their businesses in 2021. In Uganda, UNDP collaborated with the e-commerce firm Jumia to improve income-earning opportunities by enabling informal market vendors to sell their goods online. More than 4,000 vendors have registered on the Jumia e-commerce platform, more than 60% of whom are women, young people, and people with disabilities. This new model has also created jobs for more than 900 young people, from market agents to customer

care providers and delivery riders. In India, [UNDP supported about 5,000 women artisans/micro-entrepreneurs](#) with digital financial skills in India and onboarded them on digital trading platforms to secure their businesses during the pandemic. In Turkey, for instance, [the 14 women's cooperatives](#) that received support in digitalization during the first year of a joint programme organized by Visa, UNDP and Habitat Association achieved the following results: 86% reported increased sales, 93% forged new partnerships. Within a year, 76% of participating cooperatives were engaged in e-commerce and 71% had diversified sales channels.

**E-health.** UNDP with Indian Ministry of Health developed [CoWIN](#) (Covid Vaccine Intelligence Network), which is India's digital public good supporting largest COVID-19 vaccination drive in the world – enabling registrations, tracking and delivering more than 2 billion COVID-19 vaccinations for more than 1 billion people across more than 470,000 centers. This digital public good would not have worked without rigorous training to frontline health workers – UNDP had trained more than 1 million Health Care workers on CoWIN platform to make the world's largest vaccine drive happen. Along with digital expertise, UNDP has supported the government with strategies on vaccine equity – reaching out to prison inmates, transgender etc.

Leveraging its long-standing experience in digital health, UNDP launched the Digital Health for Development Hub in July 2023. This initiative is designed to provide technical and advisory support to Country Offices, enhance capacity-building, manage knowledge effectively and facilitate collaboration between countries of the Global South. The Hub supports the Global Initiative on Digital Health, launched in February 2024 and coordinated by the World Health Organization (WHO).

**E-government, civic participation and transparency.** The [UNDP's digital ID project](#) in Vanuatu, supported more than 230,000 citizens (77% population) with unique national ID cards. Over 72% of such digital ID owners have started using it for voter identification purposes. The government is further using such digital ID to plan and target health policies to communities in need, better allocation of public benefits, disaster relief, education and urban planning. In Bhutan, UNDP with the National Council of Bhutan [launched the Ten-Drel platform](#), a space for public discourse, debate, and discussion. The goal is to meaningfully engage citizens including youth in policy and law-making, to increase trust between citizens and the government, and to place citizens' voices at the centre of public decision- and policy-making.

**E-agriculture.** UNDP Accelerator Labs facilitated the digital public good [DiCRA](#) (Data in climate resilient agriculture) in India where [100+ young data scientists](#) and 10 partner organizations have come together to co-create a geospatial open AI digital public good to detect vulnerable farms and optimize climate adaptation investments across more than 50 million hectares of land and natural resources in India.

**E-environment, sustainable production and consumption.** UNDP developed an open-source software National Carbon Registry as a Digital Public Good. Countries can utilize the code and develop a national registry that provides a transparent and efficient platform for stakeholders to monitor how carbon credits are issued and traded.

**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, eMonitor, a social media monitoring and analysis system that includes a set of digital tools with advanced AI capabilities), and an initiative on [information integrity](#) as part of the UNDP Strategic Plan.

In 2022, UNDP's Global Policy Centre for Governance released a series of publications about information integrity, one of which – The Strategic Guidance on Information Integrity – provides a conceptual framework for information integrity as well as a practical guidance for programme design. Two subsequent publications from the Centre include a 2023 guidance on evaluating the impact of iVerify - UNDP iVerify: A Monitoring and Evaluation Framework and the 2024 publication “Defending Information Integrity: Actions for Election Stakeholders providing recommendations to mitigate impacts of tech-facilitated information pollution”.

**International and regional cooperation (C11):** As noted above, UNDP plays an active and leading role in global partnerships around using digital and ICT to address global challenges, including the Broadband Commission, the Edison Alliance on Digital Inclusion, the Digital Public Goods Alliance, and the Coalition for Digital Environmental Sustainability (CODES). At the regional level, UNDP is advancing cooperation and knowledge sharing on ICTs and digital solutions across the Arab Region, Asia, Latin America, and Africa through hubs like the UNDP [Centre for Technology, Innovation and Sustainable Development](#) based in Singapore, and the UNDP [network of Accelerator Labs](#).

#### **b. [WSIS-related projects](#)**

UNDP has been an engaged WSIS community member and a co-chair of the UN Group on the Information Society (UNGIS). In our term as UNGIS Chair from 2023-2024, UNGIS coordinated and provided inputs to the GDC discussions. The WSIS process plays a critical role in delivering on the GDC's outcomes and UNDP stands ready to support the implementation of the GDC anchoring our efforts into existing mechanisms like WSIS and its various elements and processes. Together with partners, UNDP convened multiple meetings to discuss the alignment of WSIS with the GDC processes and objectives as well as the WSIS+20 review that is scheduled for 2025. UNDP has been also an active contributor to the key WSIS-related platforms like the WSIS Forum and Internet Governance Forum (IGF) participating in the design and discussions around digital cooperation. UNDP shares information about the WSIS Prizes and encourages some of their solutions and projects to apply.

#### **c. [Indicators used to measure the impact of ICT in the achievement of the SDGs in your organization's area of work](#)**

UNDP's Integrated Results and Resources Framework, which is the organization's annual reporting framework for its Strategic Plan, includes several key indicators as digital is considered one of the key enablers to achieve the Strategic Plan. This includes the indicators such as the 'Percentage of new country programme documents that incorporate Digital-by-Default', 'Number of data sources and data

modules mapped to the Data Catalogue’, ‘Number of country-level digital assessments and surveys conducted’ and ‘Number of personnel trained in digital and data literacy’.

Additionally, UNDP has also published several knowledge products which aim to quantify the impact of ICT on sustainable development. Below are some examples:

***SDG Digital Acceleration Agenda.*** This [SDG Digital Acceleration Agenda](#) shaped by ITU and UNDP, in collaboration with IDB and BCG, highlights the wide-ranging importance of digital technologies and data for attaining the SDGs, from digital skills to governance and regulations, financing, infrastructure, safety and security, content, applications and services. With a range of real-world examples, the research showed how game-changing digital solutions can accelerate progress across at least 70% of the 169 SDG targets in areas ranging from climate action to education to hunger and poverty.

***Return-on-Investment in National Digital Transformation: Exploring the Development Impact of Digital.*** In this [policy brief](#), colleagues from UNDP highlighted the importance of broadening the measurement of digital transformation to ‘return-on-investment in digital transformation’ (RoI-DT) that aims to position digital approaches as key to achieving development outcomes. This includes the role of digital in reducing poverty, improving equality, protecting the planet, etc.

***The Human and Economic Impact of Digital Public Infrastructure.*** In 2023, UNDP conducted [a study](#) that sought to estimate the economic and human impact of the implementation of DPI across the finance, justice, and climate sectors in 70 low- and middle-income countries. The analysis quantifies the added impact that could come from the implementation of DPI within these three sectors, examines the current use of uniform solutions and standards, and discusses the outcomes they can materialize for people and the planet.

d. What assessment has your organization made of its engagement in WSIS-related work and digital development in its areas of responsibility?

UNDP assesses its engagement in WSIS-related work and digital development through a range of corporate reporting processes, which tracks advancements toward the UNDP Digital Strategy as well as to the WSIS outcomes. These evaluations highlight UNDP’s achievements in expanding digital inclusion, strengthening digital ecosystems, and building digital capacity across regions, etc.

- What does your organization see as the main achievements, problems and emerging issues arising from WSIS and from digital development in its areas of responsibility since the Summit, particularly since 2015?

a. What have been the main achievements of WSIS and digital development?

UNDP views the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) as a cornerstone in advancing global digital development and fostering a people-centered, inclusive digital society. Since the first WSIS meeting in Geneva in 2003, world leaders and stakeholders from various sectors have committed to building a development-oriented digital society where digital technologies empower individuals, enhance inclusion, and spur global growth. The vision established during the Geneva and Tunis summits laid the groundwork for inclusive digital advancement, setting a collaborative path toward harnessing technology to address global challenges and engage all actors in this pursuit.

Over the past two decades, WSIS has remained instrumental in driving global digital cooperation and providing a comprehensive framework for leveraging ICTs for sustainable development and social inclusion. The multistakeholder model of WSIS has been particularly impactful, with mechanisms like the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) supporting the growth of Internet Exchange Points, especially in the Global South, and fostering a global knowledge-sharing community. In a rapidly evolving digital policy landscape, WSIS continues to play a vital, complementary role alongside multilateral forums such as the G7 and G20, and particularly as a key driver of digital cooperation within the UN ecosystem. As recognized in the recently adopted Global Digital Compact, an annex to the Part for the Future and one of the key outcome documents of the Summit of the Future, WSIS will play a critical role in fulfilling the vision outlined by UN member states for a brighter digital future, solidifying WSIS's legacy in shaping digital development for the next generation.

#### **b. What problems, obstacles and constraints have been encountered?**

**Significant digital divides persist, with digital inclusion becoming critical** – many types of digital divides persist today – from access to infrastructure, internet, devices and tools to disparities based on digital skills, affordability, usage, ownership. With the rapid developments of AI, this technology risks further widening global inequalities and deepening the digital divide. This signals that we need to double down on digital inclusion of all forms, ensuring that the Global South remains central to these efforts. As governments and partners (including UN agencies supporting development efforts) increasingly use digital technologies in projects and programmes on the ground, the benefits could be dampened by risks of leaving the unconnected further excluded and behind. UNDP therefore sees digital exclusion as an obstacle and, along with the broader WSIS community, calls for greater cooperation and sustained investments not only to close the connectivity gaps (as a development outcome in and of itself) but to support ICT-enabled efforts that advance countries' SDG priorities and reach the most in need. These efforts must also be matched by an urgent scale up in support to digital skills and capacity building.

**A need for having a compelling narrative about digital transformation as a sense of excitement about digital technologies meets a dose of skepticism** – digital transformation is increasingly recognized as a critical driver of human development. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the adoption and integration of digital solutions worldwide, prompting many countries to explore their potential for national and local development, and UNDP has witnessed a surge in demand for our digital programming support. However, digital transformation is a complex and often costly endeavor, requiring substantial investment in skills, culture, and technology. These efforts can take years to yield tangible returns, and

the outcomes are not always positive. Digital technologies can amplify risks such as misinformation, cyber threats, technology-facilitated violence, and environmental impact. Moreover, the results of digital investments - whether beneficial or detrimental - can be challenging to directly measure or attribute, underscoring the need for thoughtful, inclusive, and resilient approaches to digital development. As a result, UNDP notes the growing realization that digital technologies are not a panacea in themselves but must be thoughtfully and intentionally harnessed. Given often limited resources and capacity, government counterparts often need a compelling argument, some evidence – whether anecdotal or quantitative – that their investments into digital will bring benefits to society while minimizing the risks.

**Limited funding constrains ambitions, with a growing need to seek new financing approaches** – the world faces numerous competing priorities, with an estimated annual funding gap of USD 3.7 to 4.2 trillion needed to achieve the SDGs by 2030. Addressing this challenge requires innovative financing mechanisms and better utilization of existing resources. Prioritizing foundational enablers of digital transformation is critical. Achieving this demands collaboration and alignment among funders and financiers to pool resources and focus on the most impactful areas, as well as recognizing that we need to focus on proven implementors – organizations with a track record of delivery, particularly in-country and directly to governments, communities and societies. Mobilizing private capital for development must become a priority to ensure sustainable and scalable financing solutions. Additionally, public-private partnerships are important for driving substantial digital development investments.

**Avoiding duplication of efforts and a need to scale proven solutions and processes** – with growing global cooperation around digital and ICTs, it is important to build on existing mechanisms like the WSIS and leverage proven solutions and processes, with context-specific customization where needed. UNDP is dedicated to fostering inclusive multistakeholder partnerships and coalitions to drive systemic change while forging new strategic alliances to amplify impact. At the same time, countries should also focus on moving away from piloting isolated solutions, and instead take a broader approach, concentrating on scaling what works and identifying – with UNDP and broader digital development community - how and where digital technologies are most useful and appropriate.

c. [What new opportunities and challenges have emerged over the years since WSIS which need to be addressed?](#)

**A shift from disconnected tech-focused innovation and solutions to building digital ecosystems** - during the COVID-19 response, digital transformation efforts primarily centered on standalone solutions, such as apps, databases, and e-commerce platforms; however, as these solutions have often struggled to sustain or scale, it has become clear that successful digital initiatives must connect to broader systems. This shift emphasizes the need for an ecosystem approach, engaging diverse stakeholders across society to deeply integrate digital solutions, ensuring they are resilient, scalable, and embedded within the fabric of society. This holistic, systemic approach includes the necessary governance arrangements, human and institutional capacities, regulatory frameworks, etc.

**A growing shift from techno-optimism to a rights-based, inclusion-first approach, with more attention to proper safeguards and guardrails** - UNDP notes an increasing awareness among partners that digital technologies are not neutral, and that achieving equitable benefits across regions and generations requires responsible and thoughtful development and governance of technologies. Without proper safeguards and guardrails in place, we risk creating digital systems that exclude vulnerable populations or violate fundamental rights. “Trust and safety” is an area of urgent action to ensure AI supports and advances sustainable development.

**Anchoring digital transformation efforts into foundational capacity building becomes an imperative task** - although already a WSIS focus area, capacity building is becoming increasingly important component of digital transformation work, as it remains the top request that UNDP receives from developing countries. Not everyone is equally able to take advantage of the opportunities presented by digital. The rapid growth of digital technologies has widened the gap in skills and resources, particularly in low- and middle-income nations where equipping individuals and institutions with digital skills and capabilities has become critical for catching up with the AI / digital revolution.

**The AI equity gap is growing, signaling a need to bend the arc of AI development and double down on inclusion** – while the visionaries of WSIS anticipated the transformative impact of digital technologies, the AI revolution has ushered in a new era of possibilities and challenges. From advancing access to healthcare and education to driving forward climate action, AI is already transforming lives and has the potential to accelerate human development and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. At the same time, on current trajectories, AI risks widening global inequalities and deepening the digital divide. To achieve a more equitable future, there is a critical need to steer AI’s global development towards inclusive green growth and sustainable development, ensuring that the Global South remains central to these efforts. WSIS can add urgency in ensuring that AI serves as a tool for global development. To keep up with rapid AI advancements, there is also a significant desire for governments to enable AI in public service delivery and cultivate a broader AI ecosystem in an ethical and responsible way.

**A strong momentum around Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI)** – our understanding of “ICT infrastructure” has evolved since WSIS, and in the last several years, a new appreciation has emerged for 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. The recent adoption of the Global Digital Compact (GDC) as an annex to the Pact for the Future is the first intergovernmental UN document to recognize its importance and potential of the digital public infrastructure, especially for scaling digital transformation efforts.



**Interconnected trends require new solutions and formats** – the substantial resource demands and emissions of digital technologies, especially AI, are becoming more central concerns. Developing countries bear a disproportionate share of digitalization’s ecological costs (growing e-waste and emissions, energy and water consumption of data centers) while reaping fewer benefits. This complex web of interconnected challenges and balancing digitalization efforts with mitigating its environmental impact requires new approaches and solutions.

- **Lessons learned in the implementation of the Summit outcomes in your organisation’s specific areas of responsibility**

**Countries with more established digital infrastructure are often able to respond quicker and more effectively to crisis** - for example, during the initial stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, Pakistan was able to provide emergency cash to 7 million people within 2 weeks thanks to a well-established national digital ID system. In the current crisis in Ukraine, the government - which had made a number of strategic digital infrastructure investments in recent years in part supported by UNDP - has been able to continue providing critical services to citizens.

**Thriving digital ecosystems require strong foundations** – Successfully achieving digital transformation is often more complex and costly for nations without foundational building blocks such as connectivity, DPI, and digital capacity, including skills and resources. Establishing these strong foundations enables and accelerates both public and private digital service delivery. For instance, components of DPI—such as digital payment systems, data exchange platforms, document verification and authentication tools, and digital identity solutions—act as critical enablers of transformation. They enhance the efficiency and scalability of public and private services and significantly contribute to countries' progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Equally important is building digital capacity. Our work with countries consistently underscores the transformative power of digital skills and competencies across all levels of society. From groups at risk of being excluded to policymakers shaping the digital agenda, robust digital capacity empowers everyone to harness the opportunities presented by digital technology. This inclusivity is especially vital as rapid technological advancements place growing demands on resource-constrained governments and societies, underscoring the urgency of investing in foundational elements of digital transformation.

**The need for global cooperation and stronger partnerships 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. As digital issues become increasingly complex and carry higher stakes, it is essential to strengthen global digital cooperation and broaden partnerships. Only through collective action can we ensure the sustainable, inclusive, and people-centered development and deployment of digital technologies—fostering prosperity and safety for all.

**The need to stay agile to remain relevant** – to remain relevant in a rapidly changing digital landscape, agility is essential. As the WSIS marks its twentieth anniversary, it is both an opportunity to reaffirm its



role and a call to adapt its focus to emerging challenges and opportunities, taking into account the Global Digital Compact. The evolution of technologies like AI, the pressing need for inclusive digital transformation, and the intersection of digital development with climate action highlight the importance of revisiting some WSIS priorities and refreshing the overall structure. By staying dynamic and responsive, WSIS can continue to drive meaningful digital cooperation and ensure its enduring relevance in shaping a sustainable and inclusive digital future.

- **Observations or recommendations concerning the future of WSIS and digital development, taking into account the outcomes of the Summit of the Future in September 2024**

The UN Summit of the Future, with the adoption of the Part of the Future and its annex, the Global Digital Compact, was a key moment in global digital discussions. The big question after the Summit is how to deliver on those promises and objectives in the GDC. The GDC follow-up processes and implementation mechanisms will be critical, and, as recognized in the GDC text, the WSIS process is foundational to delivering on the GDC's commitments.

With expanding global cooperation around digital and ICTs, building on existing mechanisms like the WSIS will be important. Building upon the WSIS multistakeholder model, engaging a broad range of actors, including private sector and civil society representatives, will foster more inclusive and transparent decision-making processes. Expanding participation would allow WSIS to draw on diverse perspectives and expertise, enhancing its capacity to develop effective, real-world solutions to complex digital issues. Strengthening cross-sector partnerships and global digital cooperation could strengthen WSIS's role in advancing universal connectivity, bridging digital divides, and ensuring that technological advancements benefit all.

The WSIS established a visionary agenda and a robust and agile institutional framework for addressing digital issues, which has helped it remain relevant over the past 20 years. Its Action lines remain relevant and enduring, pointing to the prescient forethought that went into its developments. And as WSIS marks its twentieth anniversary, it presents an opportunity to reaffirm the framework's importance while also refreshing and updating the needed structures, processes and possibly even its action lines to reflect critical changes in the digital landscape.

First, although already a WSIS action line, more attention on digital capacity building, particularly for developing and least developed countries, is needed as well-equipped officials will underpin the digital transformation. This should include how to leverage data for effective policy-making, as well as support for cyber-resilience skills, which are prerequisites for thriving digital communities.

Second, as AI is integrated across a dizzying array of applications, its benefits should be equally distributed across nations. WSIS can add urgency in ensuring that artificial intelligence serves as a tool for global development.

Third, the last twenty years have seen a marked escalation in the global climate crisis. AI is poised to accelerate this trend, as training and running AI systems requires significant computing power and data which contribute to further emissions. The WSIS outcomes identified the relationship between our natural environment and digital technologies; however, adding a greater emphasis on climate change through the WSIS review, both in the natural resource requirements and emissions produced by digital technologies and their potential to help deliver solutions, will be important to deliver on both the digital and climate transition together.

There are other areas where the WSIS outcomes could be refreshed as well. For instance, recognizing the critical role played by digital public infrastructure in development, remedying the absence of a gender perspective, and emphasizing the importance of human rights and their safeguards in the digital age. While still recognizing the enduring relevance and importance of the WSIS outcomes today, integrating these priorities will ensure that WSIS continues to provide a relevant and comprehensive roadmap, aligned with the evolving digital landscape.

- **Please identify publications, reports and other documents by your organisation which you consider can contribute to the work of the review.**
- Opp, R. 2024. Shaping the Future: Lessons from 20 Years of Digital Cooperation. Blog post, Council on Foreign Relations, <https://www.cfr.org/blog/shaping-future-lessons-20-years-digital-cooperation>
- SDG Digital Acceleration Agenda: <https://www.sdg-digital.org/>