

**Sixteenth session**

Geneva

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Future-ready ports: Energy and digital transition strategies**Summary prepared by the UNCTAD secretariat**

1. The parallel event featured four panellists: Managing Director, Port Jennefer, Plurinational State of Bolivia; President, Saudi Arabia Ports Authority; Chair, Board of Directors, Autonomous Port of Dakar, Senegal; and President, Port Authority, Gijón, Spain. The event, focused on the energy and digital transitions in ports, was moderated by a Consultant and the Chief, Human Resources Development Section, of the UNCTAD Train for Trade programme.
2. A representative of the UNCTAD secretariat opened the discussion by highlighting the rapid changes taking place across the port ecosystem. The energy and digital transitions required attention in order for ports to adapt sustainably; new key elements implemented in modern ports included the use of green energy, alternative fuels, electrification, automation, digital twins, port community systems and artificial intelligence technology. The representative of the secretariat underlined the need for resilience and adaptability, noting the strategic importance of ports in ensuring equitable and sustainable development for all.
3. One panellist stressed that green infrastructure, particularly solar and wind power, was fundamental in a sustainable energy transition. Further, investments in green assets could yield operational benefits for ports by helping to make them competitive.
4. Another panellist stated that, in order for the energy transition at ports to be durable and long-lasting, infrastructure priorities needed to be aligned with international frameworks and regulations. He stated that such frameworks should prioritize interconnectedness among stakeholders, both within and beyond ports, in order to ensure lasting impacts.
5. One panellist noted that globally connected port governance could accelerate the energy and digital transitions. In Senegal, collaboration among port actors was supported, with an emphasis on data-sharing and interoperability. Further, he stressed the importance of robust cybersecurity frameworks across all port activities.
6. Another panellist stated that pilot projects could enable inclusive innovative development in ports, particularly if ports assisted new projects in scaling up. A switch to digitalization was not only a way to modernize ports, but also provided an opportunity to manage climate-related challenges and reduce costs. The panellist noted that ports were seen as energy hubs, storing, using and often producing energy, and that fostering new energy capabilities at ports was essential, to remain competitive and resilient, along with robust cybersecurity frameworks across all port activities and a clear vision and strategy in order to reach decarbonization targets. Further, there was a need to strengthen investments in human capital through capacity-building programmes such as Train for Trade, to ensure that no port



community was left behind. Finally, she expressed support for flexible regulatory frameworks, to encourage resilient public–private partnerships for innovation.

7. During the ensuing discussion, one participant noted the need for closer minister-to-minister coordination, particularly between ministers of energy and transport, to ensure aligned strategies at the national level and strengthened integration across port actors; underlined the need to embed innovation in ports, in particular by providing support for innovation across all port operations; recommended that ports institute a chief innovation officer, to spearhead the fostering of sustainable and inclusive competitiveness; and underscored the importance of cybersecurity, advocating for inclusion and implementation by design.

8. Another participant highlighted the importance of collaboration among port actors; how ports could support small and medium-sized enterprises through new projects that fostered digitalization; and that well-structured and collaborative public–private partnerships were essential in order for ports to perform efficiently, given their operational nature.

9. One participant stated that Government strategies aligned with renewable energy could assist in reducing national debts while serving as a win–win model for sustainable growth and community development; and that a clear vision and strategy were required, to achieve decarbonization targets.

10. Another participant expressed appreciation for the Train for Trade port management programme and its ability to foster collaboration among ports.

11. The discussions served to show support for the port management programme, particularly the emphasis on developing skilled human capital across all working divisions of a port, as well as the established port networks fostered under the programme and the facilitation of partnership development, particularly regional, South–South and triangular cooperation; emphasize that further regional and international integration was required in order for ports to operate optimally, particularly given the changes related to the energy transition; and stress the importance of people, who would drive the energy and digital transitions. The secretariat reiterated the need for cybersecurity measures to be taken at all levels.

12. In his closing remarks, the Deputy Secretary-General of UNCTAD highlighted the importance of the Train for Trade port management programme for member States, alongside the need for greater investment and reliable and committed partners in the port sector. He emphasized the critical role of ports in global trade, including the need for innovation, competitiveness, resilience and collaboration.
