"Harnessing Artificial Intelligence for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)"

Date: 7 May 2024

Time: 3:00 pm - 6:00 pm

Venue: Trusteeship Council Chamber

Background:

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has emerged as a transformative force reshaping various social and economic sectors and industries worldwide. Defined as the simulation of human intelligence processes by machines, AI encompasses a range of technologies including machine learning, natural language processing, computer vision, and robotics. These technologies have the potential to revolutionize how we address complex societal challenges, including those outlined in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

As we progress towards the SDGs, understanding and harnessing the potential of AI has become increasingly important. AI technologies offer unprecedented opportunities to accelerate progress towards the SDGs by enhancing efficiency, innovation, and decision-making across various domains. From healthcare and education to environmental conservation and poverty alleviation, AI holds the promise of unlocking new solutions and pathways for sustainable development.

However, realizing the full potential of AI for sustainable development requires careful consideration of its social, economic and environmental implications. Concerns such as algorithmic bias, data privacy, and job displacement underscore the need for ethical and responsible AI governance frameworks that prioritize human rights, equity, and sustainability. It is crucial to recognize that the widespread adoption of AI in sustainable development efforts may also exacerbate existing inequalities if not accompanied by appropriate safeguards and interventions. There is a risk that AI technologies could widen the digital divide, as access to AI-driven tools and resources may be unevenly distributed across populations, regions, and between countries. Deploying AI is, however, not sufficient to tackle the issues associated with the SDGs. It is essential that these technologies are developed ethically, ensuring that more people and institutions, particularly in developing countries, can create their own technologies, in order to manage national health systems, for example, and guarantee the security of their populations' sensitive data. The concentration of data, computing power and financial resources creates a landscape that favors exclusion and lack of diversity, even for companies that are not able to take advantage of these resources. Furthermore, with a view to ensuring both the responsible use of AI and to leveraging the potential of AI in boosting productivity across sectors, it's imperative to develop AI competencies for all citizens. Beyond basic technical skills relative to using AI in learning, work and beyond, AI competencies must include foundational knowledge on AI and the ways in which AI systems are impacting different facets of our individual and collective lives.

Therefore, it is imperative to address these challenges through ethical, human-centered, inclusive and equitable approaches to AI governance, ensuring that the benefits of AI are shared equitably and that vulnerable groups are not left behind in the pursuit of the SDGs.

Against this backdrop, the Special Meeting for ECOSOC on "*Harnessing Artificial Intelligence for Sustainable Development Goals*" seeks to explore the intersection of AI and the SDGs.

By bringing together diverse stakeholders from governments, international organizations, academia, civil society, the private sector, technical standards organizations and AI experts, the meeting aims to foster dialogue, collaboration, and knowledge sharing on leveraging AI for sustainable development.

Through panel discussions, presentations, and interactive sessions, participants will have the opportunity to examine key issues, share best practices, and identify strategies for maximizing the positive impact of AI on the SDGs while mitigating potential risks and challenges. By catalyzing collective action and commitment, the meeting will contribute to advancing the global agenda for sustainable development in the era of AI. The discussions will focus on harnessing the potential of AI for sustainable development, guided by principles of equity, justice, and solidarity.

Objectives:

- Examine the role of governance frameworks in guiding the ethical and responsible deployment of AI technologies to support the achievement of the SDGs.
- Showcase real-life examples and case studies illustrating how AI has been utilized to address specific SDGs, highlighting successes, challenges, and lessons learned.
- Facilitate knowledge sharing, collaboration, and partnerships among stakeholders from government, international organizations, academia, civil society, the private sector, technical standards organizations and AI experts in leveraging AI for sustainable development.

Agenda

Panel 1: Governance, Artificial Intelligence, and the Sustainable Development Goals

This panel will encourage a discussion on the importance of ethical, transparent, and inclusive governance frameworks for AI deployment, involving representatives from governments, regulatory bodies, and international organizations. It will also explore regulatory and policy considerations to ensure AI aligns with human rights, social justice, and environmental sustainability, with inputs from legal experts and ethicists as well as identify opportunities for international cooperation and multi-stakeholder engagement in shaping responsible AI governance mechanisms, with perspectives from industry leaders, civil society, and international standards organizations.

Panel 2: Real-Life Examples of AI Contributions to the SDGs

This panel will aim to showcase AI applications, demonstrations, case studies and tools addressing different thematic solutions in healthcare, education, environmental conservation, poverty alleviation, disaster response and resilience, food security, gender equality and strong institutions.

Expected Audience:

The Special Meeting is expected to draw participation from a diverse audience, including:

- Representatives from UN Member States, particularly those involved in policymaking, international cooperation and sustainable development initiatives.
- Experts in artificial intelligence, including researchers, technologists and industry leaders.
- Civil society organizations, including NGOs, advocacy groups, and grassroots movements working on issues related to human rights, social justice, and environmental sustainability.
- Academics and scholars specializing in AI, governance, and sustainable development.
- Private sector stakeholders, including companies developing AI technologies and solutions.
- Representatives from international organizations, intergovernmental agencies, and multilateral development banks.
- Community leaders, activists and individuals with experiences relevant to the topics discussed.

Conclusion:

The Special Meeting for ECOSOC on "*Harnessing Artificial Intelligence for Sustainable Development Goals*" underscores the imperative of harnessing the transformative potential of AI to accelerate progress towards the SDGs. By fostering dialogue, collaboration, and innovation among diverse stakeholders, AI can be leveraged as a powerful tool for addressing global challenges and building a more sustainable and inclusive future for all.

The outcome of the meeting will be a summary by the President of ECOSOC, which will serve as an input for relevant UN intergovernmental processes.

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