



Opening statement by H.E. Paula Narváez, President of the Economic and Social Council, to the ECOSOC Special Meeting on Harnessing Artificial Intelligence for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Trusteeship Council Chamber

7 May 2024 – 3:00 pm

H.E. Amina Mohammed, United Nations Deputy Secretary-General

Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates,

I extend a warm welcome to the ECOSOC special meeting on harnessing artificial intelligence for the Sustainable Development Goals.

Today's meeting marks a crucial starting point for exploring the convergence between artificial intelligence (AI) and sustainable development. Our aim is to provide a platform for fostering innovative solutions using AI to enhance the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), while promoting understanding of the ethical and responsible practices necessary for the development, deployment, and use of AI to ensure equitable and sustainable outcomes.

We are at a pivotal moment in technology's evolution. This period represents a significant inflection point where artificial intelligence is reshaping our current world. Its transformative potential is profound. Once confined to research realms, AI now permeates our societies and everyday lives. It is a tool that can assist in poverty eradication, predict agricultural yields for sustainable farming, diagnose diseases, optimize logistics, foster industrial innovation, forecast climate trends, enhance education, and aid in managing renewable energy resources. These examples of AI's capabilities highlight the significant responsibility accompanying its immense power.



As this technology promises to break barriers and offer new solutions and pathways for sustainable development, it is imperative to carefully consider its social, economic, and environmental implications. Concerns such as algorithmic bias, data privacy, and job displacement, among others, underscore the critical need for ethical and responsible AI governance frameworks that prioritize human rights, equity, and sustainability.

It is crucial to recognize that widespread adoption of AI in sustainable development efforts could exacerbate existing inequalities if not accompanied by appropriate safeguards and interventions. There is a risk that these intelligent technologies may widen the digital divide, as access to AI-driven tools and resources may be unevenly distributed among populations, regions, and countries.

Currently, AI development is geographically biased, with data heavily skewed towards certain regions. This creates a vicious cycle where new models perpetuate informational bias because they lack the context to represent underrepresented areas, especially in the Global South. Similarly, women remain underrepresented in AI development, posing a risk of gender bias in this field. Currently, only around 30% of women work in AI.

Effectively addressing these challenges, closing the digital gap, and promoting equitable participation in STEM fields, especially for women, must prioritize inclusivity and representation, ensuring that all voices and perspectives are considered.

Moreover, it is imperative to uphold information integrity in digital spaces, preventing AI from being used to spread misinformation or manipulate public opinion. This requires the establishment of robust governance frameworks that not only regulate AI use but also promote its responsible and ethical application for the benefit of society as a whole.

Undoubtedly, AI can be a valuable asset in advancing the objectives of the 2030 Agenda, but its potential must be harnessed through approaches that prioritize human-centered governance. It is essential to



ensure that the benefits of AI are shared across all segments of society. By focusing on responsible and inclusive AI development, we can turn this technology into a powerful tool for achieving our goals and effectively addressing global challenges.

Excellencies,

As representatives from governments, academia, civil society, and industry, we are united in the mission to foster collaboration, knowledge exchange, and chart a path towards responsible deployment of AI to advance the 2030 Agenda.

The focus of this meeting has been on two distinct panels: one on governance and another on concrete examples of using AI to advance the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The governance panel aims to deepen discussions around regulatory frameworks, policy considerations, and necessary international cooperation to steer AI development towards responsible and ethical outcomes. Addressing governance challenges is key to ensuring that AI technologies align with human rights, privacy protection, and social values. Secondly, specific examples of AI applications for advancing the SDGs will be highlighted, showcasing real-world initiatives leveraging this technology for positive impact.

By examining these case studies, we can glean valuable lessons, identify best practices, and inspire further innovation in harnessing AI for sustainable development. The combination of these panels will provide a comprehensive perspective on AI's potential and underscore the importance of balancing innovation with ethical considerations to achieve equitable and sustainable outcomes for all.

Our discussions also form part of a broader conversation extending beyond the confines of this room, encompassing consultations on the Summit of the Future, the Global Digital Pact, and the recent General Assembly resolution on harnessing the opportunities offered by secure, protected, and reliable AI systems for sustainable development (resolution 78/265).



ECOSOC 
Special Meeting on
Artificial Intelligence

I invite you all to embark on a journey where hope intertwines with pragmatism. While we acknowledge the challenges and risks, we must also envision and collectively build a future where artificial intelligence genuinely benefits humanity.

Thank you very much.