

Introduction of the Report of the Secretary-General on Progress made in the implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of the World Summit of the Information Society at the regional and international levels

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Excellencies,

Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

- I am honoured to introduce the Report of the Secretary-General under this Agenda item (A/77/62-E/2022/8). The report has been prepared by the UNCTAD secretariat based on information provided by 31 UN entities and other international organizations and stakeholders concerning their efforts to implement WSIS outcomes in 2021.
- My presentation will focus five key aspects of the implementation of the outcome of in a year that was – again – marked by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- These five key aspects are:
 - Lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic,
 - Climate change and the environment,
 - New challenges in digital governance,
 - Data governance and cybersecurity, and
 - Digital cooperation

Lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic

- The role of digital technologies in mitigating the socio-economic impact of the pandemic has been substantial, notably in the areas of teleworking, online purchasing of goods and services, as well as online learning.

- Digital technologies have also played a decisive role in medical response, as the rapid analysis of clinical data has facilitated vaccine development and public health measures to contain infections.
- However, teleworking, e-commerce and online learning have not been accessible for all, and some digital inequalities have intensified during the pandemic
- Most importantly, progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals has slowed and, in some cases, been reversed.

Several lessons can be drawn:

- Affordable high-quality bandwidth to access digital resources and services is a crucial factor to achieve resilience and to mitigate adverse effects of the pandemic.
- The pandemic has demonstrated the value of data gathering, management and analysis in enabling societies to understand challenges, identify responses and make rapid adjustments.
- Some risks associated with digital technologies, as for instance in the areas of cyber security and personal data protection, have become clearer and addressing them, more urgent.
- The infodemic identified by WHO has reinforced the importance of disseminating information as well as countering misinformation and disinformation.

Climate change and the environment

- Alongside the pandemic, the international community has been focused on the climate crisis, including through commitments made at the COP 26.
- Digital technologies play a crucial role in the efforts to fulfil those commitments. Advances in data-gathering and analytics, for instance, are a central tool for reducing carbon emissions and mitigating climate impacts.
- The rapid growth of data traffic volumes has led to increased energy consumption. Frontier technologies such as cryptocurrencies will further accelerate this trend.
- The short life-cycle of digital devices such as mobile telephones contribute to problems of electronic waste.
- These trends illustrate the importance of digital environmental sustainability as part of the United Nations digital cooperation agenda.
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New challenges in digital governance

- New frontier technologies, such as machine learning and artificial intelligence, algorithmic decision-making, robotics, virtual reality and quantum computing, have the potential to radically transform societies and economies and to interact profoundly with efforts towards achieving sustainable development.
- This trend has been captured in UNCTAD's "Technology and Innovation Report 2021: Catching Technological Waves – Innovation with Equity".
- The United Nations, and in particular the Commission on Science and Technology for Development, need to consider ways to ensure that frontier technologies respond to the interests of all countries, for example through open-source approaches, transparency and technology-sharing.

Data management and cybersecurity

- There are intense debates concerning the international management of data and data location. While some wish to minimize restrictions on cross-border data flows, others prefer at least some types of data to be retained locally.
- UNCTAD's "Digital Economy Report 2021: Cross-Border Data Flows and Development – For Whom the Data Flow" examines international data governance and data location.
- Technology-driven societies are increasingly vulnerable to data breaches. Criminal attacks on both digital networks and individuals have intensified during the pandemic and are becoming more sophisticated.
- There are also concerns about disinformation and interference with democratic processes. International cooperation to maintain norms and improve standards of cybersecurity is therefore a priority.

Digital cooperation

- Progress has continued in implementing the UN Secretary-General's "Road Map for Digital Cooperation".
- The growing pervasiveness and rapid evolution of ICTs cut across traditional boundaries in public policy, requiring new types of governance, regulation and partnership between Governments, businesses and civil society.

- The global nature of digitalization, in particular the cross-border character of online services and digital transactions, also affects the boundaries between national and international governance. Rapid and unpredictable change requires greater agility among stakeholders, including the capacity to integrate new opportunities with established international norms and targets, such as those related to human rights and sustainable development.
- Multilateral governance should also evolve to take advantage of new opportunities for and risks to sustainable development.
- While partnership and collaboration are essential to achieving common international goals, the proliferation of multilateral forums concerned with aspects of the digital society risks duplication and makes it more difficult for developing countries to actively participate in decision-making.

Closing

- Today's information society differs greatly from what was envisaged in 2005. However, the WSIS commitment to building "a people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented information society" still remains highly relevant.
- The CSTD plays an important role in identifying today's and tomorrow's challenges and opportunities related to ICT.
- It will, for instance, be vital to build common goals in areas such as cybersecurity and artificial intelligence.
- In 2025, the international community will review the progress made in achieving the goals of the WSIS and the overall commitment under the United Nations to achieving sustainable development.

On behalf of the CSTD Secretariat, I would like to thank you for your continued commitment to this important process.