

High-level Panel Follow-up Roundtable 1B - Digital Public Goods

1st Session: 18 December 2019, 10am-12pm EST

Meeting Note

Recommendation 1B: We recommend that a broad, multi-stakeholder alliance, involving the UN, create a platform for sharing digital public goods, engaging talent and pooling data sets, in a manner that respects privacy, in areas related to attaining the SDGs.

Champions

Government of Norway, Government of Sierra Leone, iSPIRT, UNICEF, UN Global Pulse

Key Constituents

Arm, Belize (AOSIS chair), Botnar Foundation, Chile, Consumer Unity & Trust Society (CUTS), CISCO, Digital Impact Alliance (DIAL), Facebook, Finland, Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), Future Society, Graduate Institute Geneva, International Trade Centre (ITC), Mozilla, UAE, UN Environment Programme (UNEP), UN Office of Information and Communications Technology (OICT), United Kingdom (UK), Wikipedia, World Bank, World Economic Forum (WEF), World Health Organization (WHO), World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), World Meteorological Organization (WMO)

Opening Remarks from the Recommendation Champions

This area of the panel report is where fast progress can be made, not least because there are already very important initiatives underway. Challenge of this panel will be to take stock of what's already happening, to see where gaps may be, and to see what can and should be scaled up.

Champions UNICEF, iSPIRT, Norway are developing a prototype digital public goods platform. Not seeking to start from scratch, but rather build upon principles developed by existing communities of practice. Champions are committed to a broad-based alliance structure and a long-term solution for the operation maintenance and management of a global platform.

Among the priorities will be to engage with pathfinder countries and institutions who are applying digital public goods or creating their own digital public goods or who are interested in using them.

Generally, there is an interest in the broadest possible way of opening up access to data through many different models. In some cases, this means data being made freely accessible to anyone as a digital public good itself, in other cases, it's about finding the right data trusts and data markets that are going to maximise responsible access. The Champions envision interoperable systems that provide technical infrastructure for enabling access to all types of data.

It is also important that this Roundtable create linkages with work on recommendation 1A – which is seeking to accelerate global digital connectivity. Recommendation 1B can be a start as to what these new internet users can be connected to.

Themes raised by Key Constituents

Interoperability of DPG platforms: there was consistent feedback that existing and new initiatives in the digital public goods space need to work towards interoperability and make sure that the target user can easily navigate to the information they need. It will be important to achieve standardization, as much as possible, on language, referencing, search, datasets. Agreeing that open source and free DPG are the best, there is also a role for commercial products in the broader public data ecosystem.

Look beyond the recommendation: Several constituents noted that the recommendation is very useful, looking towards an open-source, free, digital public goods platform, but that there is useful data and best practices for policy makers and innovators that is broader in scope and that the recommendation should be a starting point in the DPG conversation.

Access to DPGs: whether through improved internet connectivity, language access, capacity building efforts, or standardized formats, digital public goods platforms need to take into consideration the needs of those who are in areas with little or bandwidth but who very much require good DPGs. It is also useful to incorporate the views and needs of users in developing countries who will be key beneficiaries of successful DPG work.

Funding and maintenance of DPG platforms: recognizing the benefits of having digital public goods platforms, several constituents were concerned that there needs to be a long-term funding model aside from Government grants. There needs to be an independent and sustainable model to ensure that DPG info is clean and organized for users.

Multistakeholder effort: there are data sets and valuable digital goods that can be made public by all stakeholder groups and an effective data ecosystem will harness as many as possible, including from the private sector, in order to facilitate achievement of the 2030 Agenda.

Governance of the data ecosystem: it was raised by several constituents that there should be some form of governance of the global data ecosystem. There were varying ideas about how a governance structure would be established and composed, there was agreement that it should seek to address certain data challenges like data ownership, licensing, quality, sovereignty, privacy and security.

Engagement at large data events: the issue of digital public goods should be raised at data conferences and fora, including the Global Governance Summit, the World Data Forum, and events of the World Economic Forum. Key messages should include an emphasis on interoperability, free and open-source data, sustainability, and cooperation.

Closing remarks

All champions agree that close collaboration among digital public good initiatives is essential for success. Noting the inspiration from already ongoing work in this space and the desire to build upon it. The need of governance was also noted, with recognition that it should be light-touch and agile.

It was agreed that a series of sub-groups should be considered for this recommendation.

Next steps

- Champions will circulate a one-pager where we refine recommendation in Jan;
- There will be someone assigned to be an operational link between 1A and 1B;
- There will also be outreach to the Digital Help Desks Roundtable

- Champions will share a list of pathfinder countries and potential Digital Public Goods that could be viable for this group (end January).