

High-level Panel Follow-up Roundtable 2 – Digital Help Desks

1st Session: 10 December 2019, 10-11.30AM EST

Meeting Note

Recommendation 2: We recommend the establishment of regional and global digital help desks to help governments, civil society and the private sector to understand digital issues and develop capacity to steer cooperation related to social and economic impacts of digital technologies.

Champions

International Telecommunications Union, United Nations Development Programme

Key Constituents:

Government of The Netherlands, Government of United Arab Emirates, Government of Russia, Government of Uganda, Government of the United Kingdom, IndustriALL Global Union, Consumer Unity & Trust Society (CUTS), International Trade Centre (ITC), Oxford Blavatnik School of Government, European Union (EU), DiploFoundation, World Bank, Arm, UNCTAD, UN-HABITAT, World Health Organization (WHO), UN OICT, UN Secretary-General's Task Force on Digital Financing of the Sustainable Development Goals (DFTF)

Opening remarks of the recommendation Champions

This Roundtable group can implement the Panel report recommendation by building on the many existing digital help initiatives inside and outside the UN system and to identify where gaps exist in capacity building and digital policy support. Where necessary, implementation of this recommendation should include a review of the goals it seeks to achieve so that solutions can fit existing gaps. ITU has 30 centres of excellence and is establishing digital transformation centres while UNDP, who are in 170 countries, have deep experience supporting countries in digital transformations.

Existing international organizations and bodies, such as the Broadband Commission and the Internet Governance Forum Secretariat can contribute their convening ability and shared experiences.

Themes raised by the Key Constituents

Risks of slow digital adoption: There was concern that slow action in the areas of capacity building and digital policy support would increase the widening digital gap between digitally advanced countries and those still developing. This was especially true for issues of digital finance, health services, data management and standard setting.

Coordination of actors: there were many key constituents who were implementing digital support for developing countries and it was widely agreed that better coordination would be beneficial to all. This parallel work is being done by the United Nations, bilaterally by governments, by UN bodies and by civil society, and there is a need for better alignment to avoid duplication and improving funding efficiency.

Alignment is also needed by thematic area, including on digital finance, digital health, data standards, AI, blockchain and others and across projects, like the eTrade for all initiative.

Sharing of best practices: digital transformations, digital policy templates and programs for digital capacity building have been around for many decades and it will be important not to re-invent many of the good practices that have been learned – for instance, ensuring that capacity building is targeted, reaches out directly to constituents, and is delivered by experienced professionals. It will also be important that there is continued discussion among actors on issues of new and emerging technologies like AI and blockchain where their application to emerging economies is still being realized.

Definition of objectives: Given the variety of activities already underway in this space it will be crucial for the Digital Help Desks to have a clear objective and, if necessary, a clear organizational home that is not duplicative. This clear objective is necessary if the work is going to scale at the needed pace and also to ensure that it identifies and fills gaps in the digital policy space – which will be very different by region. It was agreed that this should be an early objective of the Roundtable group.

Updates for Member States: In addition to active Member State participation in the Roundtable calls, it will be important to use more regular meetings to inform Member States of progress on the Panel report recommendations, including through the Group of Friends on Digital Technologies and through other meetings related to technology across the UN systems. Regularly publishing summaries of the Roundtable meetings would also be advised.

Closing Remarks

It will be important to build up a repository of all the experiences in the area of help desks – it is noted that we don't need to reinvent wheel but rather look to gaps and how we can fill them – recognizing that current efforts are insufficient and not meeting the need. There is a general consensus that we need to look carefully at the problems we need to solve, structural or otherwise. We should prepare a timeline and next steps before our next call.

HLP team on next steps:

- Champions to explore a mapping exercise of all ongoing initiatives
- HLP team will circulate a non-attributed summary once Notes are finalized along with the ITU report *Measuring Digital Development*
- Next roundtable in new year