



THE PRESIDENT
OF THE
GENERAL ASSEMBLY

1 June 2020

Excellency,

I have the pleasure to inform you that I will convene a virtual High-level Thematic Debate on The Impact of Rapid Technological Change on the Sustainable Development Goals and Targets on Thursday, 11 June 2020 from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

In accordance with General Assembly resolution A/RES/73/17 of 26 November 2018, the event will take stock of the progress made on the subject matter of the meeting. It will also provide an opportunity to highlight the efforts made by Member States, the United Nations system, other multilateral institutions, the private sector and stakeholders to achieve Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development, while considering the impact of rapid technological changes, such as artificial intelligence.

The draft concept note for the event is attached. Information regarding the list of speakers and the virtual arrangements for the meeting will be circulated in due course. For further details, please contact Mr. Bruno Ríos, Senior Adviser (bruno.riossanchez@un.org).

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a stylized, cursive script.

Tijjani Muhammad-Bande

All Permanent Representatives and
Permanent Observers to the United Nations
New York



DRAFT CONCEPT NOTE

Virtual High-level Thematic Debate on the Impact of Rapid Technological Change on the Sustainable Development Goals and Targets

10:00-13:00 hours, 11 June 2020

I. Introduction and Background

The General Assembly has been mindful of the challenges and opportunities brought by technological change for many decades. In 2015 the Addis Ababa Agenda for Action and the 2030 Agenda for sustainable Development established and launched the Technology Facilitation Mechanism in order to support the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In resolutions 72/242 and 73/17 the General Assembly specifically addressed the issues related to rapid technological change and the impact it poses on the SDGs and targets.

The spread of information and communications technology and global interconnectedness has great potential to accelerate human progress, to bridge the digital divide and to develop knowledge societies, as does scientific and technological innovation across areas as diverse as medicine, energy, and environmental conservation on land and at sea. It also has enormous potential to support the advancement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls by providing them with opportunities to obtain and share information, gain access to educational and health services, generate income, engage in networking and have their voices heard. However, there are also unintended negative consequences, labour displacement, concerns about privacy and respect for human rights are part of the concerns as is the possibility that harnessing technologies to advance towards achieving one of the SDGs would have negative effects on other goals and targets.

While the effects of new technologies transform the world, access to the internet remains a reality for only about half of the population in the developing world. For many, the quality and cost of mobile data remains one of the starkest obstacles to harness the benefits of connectivity. The risk that advances in digital technology shall benefit those who are already online and contribute to greater inequality within and among countries needs to be addressed by effective policies that advance the shared goal of leaving no one behind. The United Nations system has responded to the

challenges posed by new technologies through numerous initiatives and mandates conferred by Member States. Most recently, the Secretary General's High-level Panel on Digital Cooperation presented recommendations to optimize the use of digital technologies and mitigate its risks. In this regard, governments, the private sector, international organizations, civil society, the technical and academic communities and other stakeholders need to be aware of the impact of the latest developments in rapid technological change on achieving the SDGs and targets. Multi-stakeholder cooperation is crucial in order to benefit from the opportunities and address the challenges in this topic.

The Global Sustainable Development Report 2019, launched at the SDG Summit, recognized technology as one of four key levers for transformational pathways to development, including a focus to assessing the holistic impacts of new technologies to reduce trade-offs across all goals and targets; and deploying new technology to reduce inequalities.

Roundtable discussions followed the report of the High-level Panel and will lead to the presentation of the Secretary General's Roadmap on Digital Cooperation that will address key issues such as digital connectivity, digital human rights and trust and security.

II. Objective

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the way of life of our societies and forced to rethink how we work and learn and to find new methods for our peoples to cope with the social and economic fallout. This pandemic, and the consequences of the measures needed to stem its spread, have starkly illustrated the digital divide's inequalities. While many jobs can be done entirely remotely, and children in digitally connected families continue their schooling virtually, manual labourers and service workers are in many instances forced to risk their lives to earn a living, and the education of digitally unconnected children is suddenly halted, further entrenching existing inequalities.

The current circumstances demand that policy makers focus on addressing COVID-19's immediate socio-economic toll. Nevertheless, we must not lose sight of the commitments made to achieve the 2030 Agenda, which must remain our guiding principle from the multilateral arena, particularly as we take the first steps in the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development. Devising policies that incorporate new technologies and align with SDG implementation will be critical to 'build back better', and increase the global sustainability and resilience needed to weather any future systemic-shocks.

Following on the invitation made by the General Assembly on resolution 73/17 the thematic debate aims to highlight the efforts made by the UN system, other multilateral institutions, the private sector and stakeholders to achieve the SDGs while taking in consideration the impact of rapid technological changes, such as artificial intelligence, among others.

III. Format and level of participation

All Member States and observers are invited to participate in the thematic meeting at the highest possible level. The event, to be held on a virtual platform, will consist of an opening segment chaired by the President of the General Assembly with the participation of the President of the Economic and Social Council, the Secretary General and a keynote speaker. It will be followed by a high-level panel discussion that will comprise presentations by leaders of multilateral agencies and youth and civil society representatives. After the presentations Member States, Observer States and Observers of the General Assembly are invited to deliver statements on the topic.

A list of speakers will be made available in accordance with the established practices of the Assembly and will be open for inscriptions in due course. Due to time constraints Member States are strongly encouraged to deliver statements on behalf of a group of States and to limit their statements to three minutes for individual delegations and five minutes for groups. Delegations that do not have the opportunity to speak may upload their statements in the PaperSmart portal. The event will be webcast. Technical information to access the meeting will be communicated in due course.