In 2019-2020, UN DESA continued its leadership in harnessing science, technology and innovation for sustainable development and governance.

UN DESA...

- Coordinated across more than forty UN system entities for joint analysis and capacity building around science, technology and innovation for the Sustainable Development Goals (STI for the SDGs).
- Mobilized record participation at the Internet Governance Forum for community-shaped messages and best practice dissemination around issues such as cybersecurity and digital inclusion.
- Analysed the implications of COVID-19 for science-policy advisory systems and showcased technology solutions to the pandemic.
- Focused the biennial United Nations E-Government Survey on local governments and on use of digital instruments by national governments to respond to the pandemic.
- Strengthened multi-faceted and multi-stakeholder analysis and dissemination of impacts of emerging/frontier technologies on sustainable development.
Harnessing science, technology and innovation for sustainable development

UN DESA plays a global leadership role in advancing cooperation at the science-policy-society interface, and in multi-stakeholder engagement on science, technology and innovation for the SDGs, areas of work established through the Rio+20 conference and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This on-going engagement across multiple entities, disciplines and stakeholders, aimed at enhancing trust and capacity in STI, is proving particularly valuable during the ongoing global COVID-19 pandemic.

Mobilizing multi-stakeholder collaboration on science, technology and innovation for the SDGs

UN DESA, together with UNCTAD, brings together 44 entities across the UN system to advance STI for SDGs through the United Nations Interagency Task Team on Science, Technology and Innovation for the SDGs (IATT). The Task Team prepares regularly updated briefs on the impact of emerging technologies on the SDGs, including ethical and normative issues, and provides guidance to countries for developing STI roadmaps for the SDGs.

While the annual multi-stakeholder STI Forum was deferred due to COVID-19, webinars, virtual expert dialogues and surveys have engaged various stakeholders from across the world. In 2020 an innovation challenge competition attracted several hundred applicants with winners featured in an online exhibition. Developed in partnership with the Global Innovation Exchange, the challenge featured innovations that emphasize concrete action and transformative results, particularly through one or more of the six entry points for transformation identified in the Global Sustainable Development Report. In addition, an expert dialogue in February 2020 highlighted new areas for science-policy-society collaboration such as norms for open science, fighting misinformation, building public trust and ensuring universal access to global public goods such as vaccines.

In response to the urgent need for policy and good practices for addressing the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, UN DESA leveraged its analytical capacity to produce a policy brief on the science-policy-society interface in COVID-19 response. A weekly blog series, Dispatches from the field, featuring UN DESA-affiliated scientists and experts, further showcased technology-based strategies for combatting COVID-19. Webinars and virtual expert dialogues continued to mobilize stakeholders to identify collaborative STI solutions for the SDGs. Key recommendations and commitments developed through these initiatives and consultations were presented at the 2020 High-level Political Forum (HLPF) in July 2020 and other high-level UN conferences.

Supporting global cooperation on internet governance

More than 3,500 in-person and 3,000 online delegates came together at the 14th Annual Meeting of the Internet Governance Forum (IGF), hosted by the Government of Germany in Berlin, in November 2019. Participants included a record number of national parliamentarians...
and delegates from the Global South. Convened under the theme, *One World. One Net. One Vision*, the IGF provided a multi-stakeholder platform for exchanging good practices and discussing issues around digital policy. The event saw the UN Secretary-General and the German Chancellor both call for the Internet to be used as a global commons, while respecting human rights and guaranteeing inclusion. The meeting resulted in community-shaped messages on cybersecurity, data governance and digital Inclusion, as well as output documents outlining best practices on cybersecurity, gender and access, local content, big data, Internet of Things and artificial intelligence. As Secretariat of the IGF, UN DESA has begun preparations for the 15th annual IGF meeting to be held in 2020. Inputs are being received for each of its four thematic tracks: data, environment, inclusion and trust. The Forum will explore practices to foster participation of vulnerable groups, including women and youth.

**Assessing e-government for sustainable development**

An Addendum provides a timely analysis of the digital responses of countries to the COVID-19 pandemic. In general, governments increased their level of information-sharing as the pandemic progressed in their countries, including through using more social media channels to report on COVID-19 statistics, national policy updates and information on where people can receive social, financial or mental health support.

Capacity-building activities have built on the findings of the E-Government Survey. For example, the Development Account project on “Evidence-based e-government policies for advancing governmental service delivery and accountability in support of the Sustainable Development Goals” was implemented in LDCs to enable governments to grow and leverage their e-government capacity. The project supported initiatives such as Bangladesh’s Access to Information (a2i) initiative, and Ethiopia’s reform of its ICT Ministry into the Ministry of Innovation and Technology.

### INCREASING E-GOVERNMENT INFORMATION SHARING DURING COVID-19

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of information-sharing</th>
<th>LOW</th>
<th>MEDIUM</th>
<th>HIGH</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Types of information</td>
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<td>General health information (e.g. hygiene advice, emergency contacts)</td>
<td>• General health information (e.g. hygiene advice, emergency contacts)</td>
<td>• COVID-19 statistics</td>
<td>• Regular updates on policy developments and social distancing measures</td>
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<tr>
<td>Presidential statements and other political announcements</td>
<td>• Presidential statements and other political announcements</td>
<td>• Limited updates on policy developments and social distancing measures</td>
<td>• Information on social, financial and mental support (e.g. initiatives, other portals, telephone numbers)</td>
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<td>Use of digital platforms</td>
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<td>Government portals (e.g. Central government, Ministry of Health)</td>
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<td>Social media channels (e.g. Facebook, Twitter)</td>
<td>Dedicated public COVID-19 portals</td>
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<td>• Government-supported apps</td>
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Reviewing frontier technologies

UN DESA’s quarterly review of frontier technologies examines the implications of frontier technologies for sustainable development. The quarterly review has covered a rich range of topics, including exploring how technologies such as nanotechnology and genetic modification can help deal with plastic pollution, and how the rapidly expanding sharing economy shows little signs of delivering fair and equitable welfare gains. These reviews stimulate broader discussions to help guide effective, evidence-based policymaking, and inform contributions to other workstreams and interagency efforts across the UN system, including the **2020 Financing for Sustainable Development Report** and the UN Economists’ Network (UNEN) 75th Anniversary Report on megatrends.