



'Advancing human security through knowledge-based approaches to reducing vulnerability and environmental risks'

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Subject: Submission to the Global Digital Compact informal consultation process – Transforming climate action through participatory digitalization

The United Nations University, Institute for Environment and Human Security (UNU-EHS) welcomes the opportunity to submit views on the Global Digital Compact (GDC) process and in consultation with partners, is pleased to submit this text for consideration.

Background

The digitalization wave has exponentially enhanced access to information, thereby broadening avenues to collaborate across scales and actors. This democratization of access through technology has opened new possibilities to engage with people from all spectrums of the society and can be particularly beneficial in enhancing transformative climate action in the small and medium cities of the global south [1]. The same holds true for the rural areas – particularly in the global south - where innovations such as mobile money and other fin-tech tools are fundamentally reshaping access to information, finance and decision making to name a few [2].

While digital means are increasingly used to assist in managing different levels of governance, an untapped potential lies in using these means to facilitate participatory, locally contextualized policy making and implementation to catalyze transformative climate action. This holds special significance in the small and medium cities of the global south where digital means can augment the capacity of local actors and communities to collaborate on forward looking, transformative climate action. We believe that the battle against climate change will be won at the local level, and to do so, communities need access to science informed localized information and supportive digital means amongst others. However, researchers as well as practitioners have pointed out the lack of access as the main hindrance for digital transformation and information uptake. At the same time, providing reliable high-speed digital connectivity in many parts of the global south remains unaffordable [3]; The poorest 40% of the population in many parts of the world remain disenfranchised from Information and Communication (ICT) services [4]. We further argue that there is a growing willingness at the local levels of governance to work together with all stakeholders of the society. At the same time, as movements like ‘Fridays for Future’ and others have shown, there is a growing demand as well as drive from the society to actively participate in climate action and co-create a shared future. Given the shared motivation and enthusiasm, digitalization can provide pathways to collaborate in an effective and meaningful manner, and in-turn foster transformative climate action.

Through this submission, we would like to underline synergies between what the Secretary General has termed as “two seismic shifts of the 21st century – the climate crisis, and digital transformation” [5], particularly from the point of view of localized transformative climate action. This touches upon two themes mentioned in the GDC guidelines, namely; a) Connect all people to the internet, including all schools and b) Digital commons as a global public good. Through following core principles and commitments, we

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emphasize potential pathways for transformative climate action, especially targeted to the vulnerable and underserved communities.

Core principles to leverage Digitalization to foster Transformative Climate Action

We recommend that following core principles are embedded in the architecture of global digital compact to build on the synergies between transformative climate action and digitalization:

- **Leverage** digital public infrastructure (DPI) and data systems to provide safe, trustworthy and inclusive public and private digital services at scale with the goal to **empower people and catalyze participation of all stakeholders** in climate action decision making and implementation processes, specially the most vulnerable and marginalized communities, for example through Community Learning & Living Labs (CL3).
- **Prioritize local needs and regional priorities** using digital tools such as machine learning and artificial intelligence to collect and analyze tailor made dynamic data points and information from the local level, particularly through Big Data Analytics.
- **Utilize the potential of digital means to provide swift, transparent, affordable, last mile, multi-way communication and co-creation channels** thereby fostering participation, transparency, accountability and ownership in policy processes and climate actions.
- **Support the digital transformation through decentralized and participatory information hubs** in communities for example through public schools and community centers.
- **Foster blended data environments to strengthen local data capacities, evidence-based policymaking, and local governance** while improving responsiveness to community needs and building co-ownership of policies and projects. Further **involve citizens in the design and management of data ecosystems and digital infrastructures**.
- **Standardize data collection and governance protocols** to promote multi-stakeholder data alliances with community groups and the civil society while increasing efficiency and reducing redundancy
- **Ensure** alignment of data privacy and protection laws with universal declaration of human rights with particular attention to safeguard access and dignity of most vulnerable sections of society
- **Promote innovation practices** which are based on principles of openness, diffusion and shared vision. This need not rely solely on 'frontier technologies' but also involve 'frugal' and mundane innovations.
- **Critically assess and address pitfalls of digital technologies** (including rebound effects, trade-offs, unsustainable business models, widening digital inequality, privacy concerns, malevolent usages etc.)



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Key Commitments

To operationalize aforementioned principles, we call for a collective commitment along these lines:

- **Providing** the latest science to inform the decision making and implementation. To do so, it is recommended to deepen scientific research that enhances the understanding of impacts of climate change as well as digitalization, particularly on Least Developed Countries (LDCs), underserved groups and gender disparity. It is further recommended to increase the related knowledge-cooperation between countries through academic and practitioner knowledge clusters and best practice sharing.
- It is recommended **to consider access to the Internet as a basic human right** to foster the uptake of digital public infrastructures in underserved areas and for underserved people, and thus contribute to an inclusive digital society.
- **Establishing best practices and guidelines for inclusive and democratic access to digital commons**, taking into consideration context-specific requirements, capacities and constraints.
- **Empowering local communities in the transition to digital through Digital Public Infrastructures (DPIs)**. It is recommended to ensure connectivity of schools and vocational centers to digital means to empower the new generation, while augmenting capacities of community at large. Particular attention should be given to recalibrate the skill set of the current work force and empower women, economically and socially disadvantaged and other underserved sections of society.
- **Leveraging digitalization** to deliver more efficient, sustainable, affordable and inclusive local public services and urban environments.
- **Adopting** regulatory frameworks to facilitate inclusive digitalization and accommodate new practices.
- **Strengthening capacities and upskilling through contextualized and relatable information packages**. It is recommended to make the digital information packages locally available through reliable and affordable internet access and by co-creating user friendly contents in local languages.



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- University of Oslo, Institute for Technology Systems (UiO-ITS), Norway
- National Institute of Urban Affairs (NIUA), India
- The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI), India
- National Institute of Technology, Patna (NITP), India

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