UN Tech Envoy and UNDP launch initiative to ensure that digital infrastructure turbocharges the SDGs safely and inclusively

New York, 17 September 2023 – To realise the full potential of digital transformation while mitigating its risks, the Office of the UN Secretary-General's Envoy on Technology (OSET) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) launched today an initiative to develop the Universal Safeguards Framework for Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI).

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the resilience and adaptability of nations with strong digital frameworks. From disbursing cash handouts to deploying contact tracing mechanisms, countries that employed a DPI-approach were able to respond swiftly and effectively. Research suggests that digital identity systems alone can on average add 6% to emerging economies’ GDP. At the same time, there are concerns that improper design and implementation of DPIs could exclude marginalized groups, exacerbate progress on sustainability and lead to potential violation of human rights.

Speaking at the launch event during the high-level session of the UN General Assembly, UNDP Administrator Achim Steiner said, “Digital Public Infrastructure represents the roads and bridges of our new digital era, allowing countries to ‘transport’ a range of vital digital solutions to communities, from e-health to online education to social protection and driving progress across the Global Goals. This Universal Safeguards Framework for DPI represents one of the critical foundations for this new infrastructure, helping to ensure that key ingredients such as safety, security, inclusion, and human rights are included a part of a precise formula.”

Speaking at the launch event during the high-level session of the UN General Assembly, UNDP Administrator Achim Steiner said “Inclusive and rights-based DPI can deliver value and high impact that leaves no one behind.”

In his remarks, Amandeep Singh Gill, UN Secretary-General's Envoy on Technology, emphasized, “The benefits of DPI as a strategic enabler of progress on the SDGs are clear. However, success has been limited by the lack of people-centric governance and safeguards. The Universal DPI Safeguards will ensure that DPIs are well-governed, and consequently, they promote inclusion, human rights, safety of users, security of data, and sustainability. “

Going forward, the initiative will engage with key actors on DPI including the World Bank, the Digital Public Goods Alliance (DPGA), GovStack, Centre for Digital Public Infrastructure, Co-Develop and governments such as Bangladesh, Estonia, Germany, India, Norway and Sierra Leone. Working with knowledge partners across the DPI ecosystem as well as civil society organisations and philanthropies, it will seek to develop the Safeguards Framework in time for the Summit of the Future in 2024.
About the Office of the Secretary-General’s Envoy on Technology (OSET): OSET was created to champion global digital cooperation. Tasked with addressing emerging digital challenges, coordinating multi-stakeholder digital initiatives, and advising the UN leadership on technological trends, the Office plays a pivotal role in harnessing technology’s potential for the Sustainable Development Goals. Emphasizing an open, inclusive approach, the Envoy ensures synergy across UN entities, and serves as a primary contact for digital cooperation within the broader UN system.

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About UNDP: UNDP is the leading United Nations organization fighting to end the injustice of poverty, inequality, and climate change. Working with our broad network of experts and partners in 170 countries, we help nations to build integrated, lasting solutions for people and planet. Learn more at www.undp.org.

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