Implementing the Secretary-General's Roadmap for Digital Cooperation

APRIL 2021 HIGHLIGHTS

"A safe, inclusive and equitable digital future is essential for progress and peace. The Roadmap for Digital Cooperation that I launched in 2020 offers a vision for a digitally interdependent world that "Connects, Respects and Protects" all people, in which all can thrive, and in which digital tools do not cause harm or reinforce inequalities but instead are a force for good.

Wide-ranging efforts across a year of global upheaval caused by the COVID-19 pandemic have highlighted both opportunities and risks, and underscored the need for stronger collective stewardship. I thank the diverse groups and organizations that have been part of this journey, and I count on your support and commitment to work even more closely to realize the potential of the Roadmap."



The Secretary-General's Roadmap for Digital Cooperation was launched on 11 June 2020. It put forward concrete and action-oriented proposals in key thematic areas such as achieving universal connectivity, digital inclusion, digital human rights and digital capacity-building. In early 2021, the Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Technology was established. On the occasion of the High-Level Thematic Debate on Digital Cooperation and Connectivity, on 27 April 2021, organized by the President of the 75th Session of the General Assembly, the following update contains highlights of the work done thus far to implement the Roadmap, particularly through cross-regional, inclusive, multi-stakeholder Roundtables.

Connecting the Unconnected to Leave No One Behind in the Online Space



To achieve the Roadmap's goal of ensuring that every person has safe and affordable access to the Internet by 2030, including meaningful use of digitally enabled services, implementation of its recommendations on **global connectivity** has focused on ensuring a "people-centered' approach in leaving no one behind. This entails prioritizing aspects such as affordability and socio-economic aspects of accessibility, in addition to broader issues of broadband infrastructure and coverage.

Within the multi-stakeholder consultation process coordinated by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and UNICEF, and supported by the Office of the Envoy on Technology, ITU's Data and Analytics Division is leading a multi-stakeholder working group to develop a baseline framework for universal, affordable and meaningful digital connectivity. In direct response to the Roadmap's call for developing such a baseline, this framework will include: i) the proposed enablers of connectivity, ii) the expected outcomes for each enabler for the basic connectivity stage and the meaningful connectivity stage, and iii) the possible indicators to measure those outcomes. This will support a detailed and outcome-oriented analysis of where we stand today ('baseline') and the setting of targets of where we ought to be by 2030. The preliminary outcomes of this analysis are expected to be presented during the second quarter of 2021.

"GIGA" (https://gigaconnect.org/), the UNICEF-ITU initiative to connect all schools around the world to the Internet is a good example of what the Roadmap calls a "transformative model" to accelerate connectivity. As of March 2021, it has mapped over 800,000 schools globally, and 19 countries have formally joined the initiative. Almost 3,000 schools have been connected as part of pilot projects in Kenya, Sierra Leone, Kazakhstan, Brazil and the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States. GIGA is now also looking at developing and launching a global financing instrument for school connectivity, and country-level capital markets products



that explore and prototype innovative financing modalities. This is also part of the broader call in the Roadmap for affordability and the urgent need for financing of connectivity needs, in order to meet ITU's estimated price tag of \$428 billion to connect the remaining 3 billion people aged ten years and above to broadband Internet by 2030. The economic value generated by the digital economy will contribute better to Leaving No One Behind.

In November 2021, the World Telecommunication Development Conference (WTDC), held every four years to develop strategy and recommendations for information and communication technologies (ICTs), will be held in Addis Ababa on the theme of "Connecting the Unconnected to achieve sustainable development". In the lead-up to this and through the series of "Road to Addis" preparatory webinars, countries and different stakeholder groups are exploring innovative models for expanding infrastructure, financing connectivity and closing the access gap in this final Decade of Action to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

Leading UN humanitarian actors, including the inter-agency Emergency Telecommunications Cluster led by the World Food Programme (WFP), ITU and UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), as well as the GSM Association from the private sector, are setting up a working group to map existing initiatives and develop Terms of References. The group will identify potential for greater coordination and scalability in the area of emergency telecommunication, responding to the Roadmap's call to ensure connectivity in times of crisis and humanitarian operations.

Narrowing Digital Divides by making Digital Technology & Solutions Available to All

Narrowing the digital divides remains at the heart of Roadmap implementation; underpinning efforts at promoting digital inclusion and strengthening global digital capacity-building.



To address the fact that digital divides reflect and amplify existing social, cultural and economic inequalities, the Roadmap calls for a definition and framework to better measure **digital inclusion**, so as to establish a measurable and evidence-based foundation for further work.

Efforts to draw up a common understanding of digital inclusion and a specific assessment framework are underway through ongoing multi-stakeholder consultations under the leadership of UN Women and the Governments of Mexico and Canada, coordinated by the Office of the Envoy on Technology, through expert meetings in April and June. This work aims to eventually develop scorecards focused on the social dimensions of access as a tool for governments and other actors to assess their ongoing progress in promoting digital inclusion and identify gaps and areas for further support.



This effort is undertaken in collaboration with key actors working on inclusion issues; including leveraging on existing digital inclusion indexes, such as the UN Capital Development Fund's Inclusive Digital Economy Scorecards and the World Benchmarking Alliance's Digital Inclusion Benchmark for companies, which was released in December 2020.

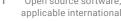
A digital inclusion "network of networks" is being conceptualized through the multistakeholder Roundtable process, which will bring together different digital inclusion actors working with different vulnerable or traditionally marginalized groups. The "network of networks" will serve as a platform for profound and dynamic collaboration for a more inclusive world and thereby help share best practices and information, create synergies between existing initiatives and alliances (such as the Generation Equality Action Coalition on Technology and Innovation and ongoing efforts by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees).

The Roadmap also highlights the critical importance of "digital public goods" (DPGs) and calls for greater efforts to promote DPGs. The Digital Public Goods Alliance (DPGA) https://digitalpublicgoods.net/ is a multi-stakeholder initiative established by the Governments of Norway and Sierra Leone, UNICEF and the technology think tank iSPRIT in direct response to the UN's call to promote DPGs. It has worked in the last few months to create a 5 Year Strategic Plan that will address the DPG recommendations in the Roadmap. This includes the development of a "DPG" Standard to ensure adherence with the Roadmap's definition of DPGs and promote their use. Over 500 DPGs1 have already been submitted for inclusion in the online database; in areas such as agriculture, education and literacy, social services, etc.

Partner organizations such as GitHub, New America, and Omidyar Network are also exploring joint research projects with the Office of the Envoy on Technology and the DPGA on the issues of funding for DPGs as well as their ethical and human rights governance implications. Additional pilot DPG initiatives and roll-out collaborations are being planned in conjunction with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and other implementing partners.

The Roadmap acknowledges the need for digital capacity building as an absolute prerequisite for achieving real and sustained progress, including in terms of meaningful affordable access. In congruence with this, UNDP and ITU are conducting a mapping exercise of existing digital capacity building efforts engaging a broad range of cross-sector stakeholders to better understand the landscape of available existing initiatives. Building on this, they will then publish a point-in-time snapshot of the digital capacity development supplier landscape, both inside and outside the UN system. This mapping will contain additional information on different categories and topics within digital capacity building globally, presented in a user-friendly public resource. This work is currently on track to be delivered by early summer.

[&]quot;Open source software, open data, open artificial intelligence models, open standards and open content that adhere to privacy and other applicable international and domestic laws, standards and practices and do no harm."





Addressing Digital Challenges and Online Risks

While recognizing the urgency to connect all and realize the benefits of digital technology to all without discrimination, the Roadmap also stresses that people must remain safe and secure online, with concerted action to address key challenges and online risks.



The Roadmap thus calls for the development of further guidance on **how human rights** standards apply in the digital age, for Member States to place human rights at the center of regulatory frameworks and legislation on the development and use of digital technologies, and for technology leaders to urgently and publicly acknowledge this as well as to take clear, company specific actions to protect the right to privacy and human rights in the digital age.

In response, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) is coordinating United Nations entities in the development of system-wide guidance on human rights due diligence and impact assessments in the use of new technologies. Within the United Nations, working groups have been set up to discuss and coordinate approaches on issues such as hate speech, disinformation, data protection and privacy and freedom of expression and social media. On the first anniversary of his Call to Action on Human Rights, the Secretary-General launched an online resource hub that centralizes authoritative guidance from the United Nations human rights mechanisms on how human rights standards apply in the digital space (www.digitalhub.ohchr.org).

The Roadmap also calls attention to the significant **impacts of advancing technologies on the environment**, particularly in terms of "ground-breaking opportunities to monitor and protect the environment, as well as overall planetary health." In response to this, a Coalition for Digital Environment Sustainability (CODES) has been initiated by the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), UNDP, the International Science Council, the German Environment Agency, the Kenyan Ministry of Environment and Forestry, and Future Earth and Sustainability in the Digital Age, as a global multi-stakeholder process which will convene a series of events to firmly anchor environmental sustainability needs within the Digital Cooperation Roadmap and catalyze a digital planet for sustainability. The initiative was launched on 31 March 2021 and is currently consulting with stakeholders to refine its key objectives and plan of activities, including working with the newly created IGF Policy Network on Environment and Digitalisation.





Consultations on the Secretary-General's proposal to establish a multi-stakeholder advisory body on **global Al cooperation**, to address issues of inclusion, coordination and capacity-building also continue, including via a digital platform (sparkblue.org/UNAlbody) for stakeholders. This follows a series of multistakeholder consultations organized last year by governments, civil society groups and UN entities to discuss Al-related issues and priorities. A Resource Guide on Al Strategies², a UN publication laying out existing resources on artificial intelligence ethics, policies and strategies on national, regional and international level, has also been released. compiling inputs from the multistakeholder participants and UN entities.



The Secretariat also continues to explore with Member States the Secretary-General's proposal for a broad and overarching global statement that would highlight the need for **safe and trustworthy deployment of digital technologies** with a view to realizing the 2030 Agenda. In September 2021, over 70 civil society organizations, eminent individuals and technical luminaries wrote to the President of the General Assembly calling for Member States to prioritize digital trust and security and supporting the proposal for a global statement, so as to send a clear signal that world leaders in government, industry and civil society are committed to closing the trust deficit in the digital age and securing progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals.

² The Guide is available at https://sdgs.un.org/documents/resource-guide-artificial-intelligence-ai-strategies-25128 and was prepared and published as part of the initiative of the UN Inter-agency Task Team on STI for the SDGs led by DESA.

Strengthening UN institutions and support from the United Nations in moving forward

The Roadmap recognizes the importance of the UN's in-country presence, particularly the role of the United Nations Resident Coordinators and Country Teams. An interagency Roadmap Response Team (RRT), was established in October 2020 to partner with the Resident Coordinators (RCs) and Country Teams in their support to national efforts towards the implementation of the Roadmap. The RRT is coordinated by the United Nations' Development Coordination Office, with standing members from the Office of the Envoy on Technology, ITU, UNDP, and UNICEF and engagement of other UN agencies, as needed.



Moreover, recognizing the critical need for more **coherent**, **coordinated and inclusive digital capacity-building support**, the Roadmap calls for the development of a Multi-Stakeholder Network on Digital Capacity Development, including a 'clearinghouse function' powered by a new ITU/UNDP joint facility, to help direct specific requests for support to potential providers of digital capacity building initiatives. To that end, a cross-sector working group led by ITU and UNDP has worked to develop a user-centered approach to designing the Network that will allow for more tailored and impactful support. These consultations will result in a proposal on the design, activities, target users, and operating model of the Network.







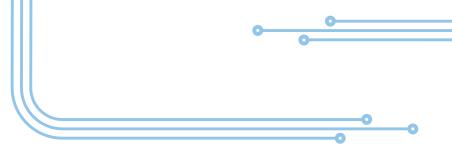
Recognizing the central role played by the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) in the **global digital cooperation architecture**, the Roadmap lays out a series of recommendations to strengthen the IGF. Work on this is proceeding, through close cooperation between the Office of the Envoy on Technology and the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), the IGF Secretariat, and working with stakeholders, including the IGF community.

As part of this, the Governments of Germany and the United Arab Emirates submitted an Options Paper for the Future of Global Digital Cooperation in August last year while the IGF Multistakeholder Advisory Group (MAG) created a working group on IGF Strengthening and Strategy, and prepared a response paper reacting to the Roadmap and elements of the Options Paper. A questionnaire on the proposal for a multi-stakeholder high-level body within the IGF was sent by UN DESA in consultation with the Office of the Envoy on Technology, to all Member States and open to stakeholders; with a public consultation held on this issue.

Follow-up discussions among the IGF community are taking forward specific Roadmap recommendations such as having a more focused IGF agenda; how to strengthen links among the global Forum and its regional, national, sub-regional, and youth initiatives; and ensuring that the IGF continue its high-level segments, ministerial and parliamentarian tracks. The MAG,

as supported by the IGF Secretariat, is considering further improvements as appropriate and as guided by the Roadmap, for the current preparatory process of the 16th Meeting of the IGF, to be held on 6-10 December 2021 in Katowice, Poland. The IGF website is being redesigned and the IGF Secretariat is proceeding with steps to improve their internal capacity for fundraising and evaluation, so as to help enhance the visibility of the Forum and support its long-term sustainability.

UN Agencies are also working to better harness digital technology to fulfill their mandates. To give some examples, the Office of Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has released a report3 on New and Emerging Technologies in Humanitarian Action, outlining the opportunities, challenges and road ahead in this area. As part of broader programming to support people-centered smart cities, UN-Habitat has recently launched their first United Nations Innovation Technology Accelerator for Cities (UNITAC) in Hamburg, Germany. Collaboration with the Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States and the Technology Bank for the Least Developed Countries is also ongoing, ahead of the upcoming LDCs+5 Summit next year, recognizing that access and utilization to digital technologies will be critical in supporting and enabling LDCs to build back better towards sustainable development. Synergies with the STI Forum are being explored to leverage its respective strengths.



The Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Technology looks forward to continue working in close consultation with stakeholders - Member States, civil society, private sector, the academic and technical community and others - as well as in coordination with UN entities, particularly the UN entities leading on digital issues, to implement the Secretary-General's Roadmap for Digital Cooperation, and realize its vision of a more open, inclusive and secure digital future. More information, including details of the Roadmap's work streams, is available at the Office's website (www.un.org/techenvoy) and latest developments and events can be followed at the Office's Twitter account (twitter.com/UNtechenvoy).

³ The Report is available online here.