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Remarks

Mobilizing Big Data and Data Science for the SDG Conference
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Department of Economic and Social Affairs UN (15 Min)

Q1. You wear several hats, of which one is being the Officer-in- Charge of the Office of the Envoy on Technology. How do you encourage member states engagement in supporting your work program and how does it impact the global goals?

<u>The Office of the Envoy on Technology</u>

The Office of the Envoy on Technology is charged with implementing the Secretary-General's Roadmap for Digital Cooperation and with the follow-up on the digital-related elements of the Secretary-General's most recent report, "our Common Agenda" on the future of multilateralism.

I will echo what just said by my distinguished co-panelists, Minister al Olama and Minister Ingabire. Technology is not an end in itself; it must serve the people and not harm them. It must operate to advance the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. Member States are at the heart of realizing this new vision and the UN system is there to support this action, including DESA in particular, as the "UN Secretariat" for the SDGs, if I can simplify a bit.

Indeed, more generally, at the United Nations we have been fortunate to have many member states which have been leaders on emerging technologies; bringing the international community through their own actions, innovations and initiatives, to grapple with these new issues, harnessing the benefits of technology for all, while addressing its challenges.

The Office of the Envoy of Technology, for instance, has worked closely with the UAE in its work; with the UAE serving as a champion of the work on Digital Cooperation Architecture. In particular, we were deeply honoured by the presence of the Crown Prince, His Highness Sheikh Hamdan bin Mohammed bin Rashid al Maktoum, as a keynote speaker at the launch of the UN Secretary-General's Roadmap for Digital Cooperation in 2020.

Now it is a commonly held experience that the digital world has no geographical barriers, it knows no borders. Technology companies like Facebook, Twitter and Microsoft are global in operations and now, more than ever before, our own physical lives are entwined with our virtual ones.

This requires global digital cooperation, with member states at its core but also in partnership and collaboration with other stakeholders like the private sector and technology regulators. Let's retain these two words: cooperation and multi-stakeholders.

Mobilizing Big Data and Data Science for the SDGs is a core objective of our work.

Let me emphasize that the focus of the United Nations is on the urgent implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Within the context of the event today, we indeed need to mobilize Big Data and Data Science to support the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. And doing so while upholding high quality standards and comparability, in order to be that authoritative and trustworthy source, a reference worldwide.

What are these data for? For example, using satellite data we can now more frequently and in more detail estimate agriculture and environment indicators. This will help to improve food security and stop further environmental degradation.

Another example is the use of Automated Identification System data to track the position and speed of every commercial ship in real-time, which allows to monitor and reduce the CO2 emissions of maritime transport.

These are concrete actions of using new technologies towards the achievement of the SDGs.

Q2. What can you tell us about the Secretary General's Road map for digital co-operation and its role in promoting broader global partnerships?

Let me start by linking the digital cooperation to what was said already here today.

As was mentioned in the previous session (and as was pointed out by Minister Ingabire), Rwanda has been actively promoting the use of Big Data and Data Science for the SDGs through its Regional Hub for Africa.

Further, as indicated by Mr. Liu in his statement, the Regional Hub for Big Data in the UAE supports building the necessary capacity in the statistical offices of the Middle East and North Africa region.

These Regional Hubs for Big Data, including also those in Brazil and China, are very good examples of South-South cooperation, in which we transfer technological solutions and build skills in all regions around the world.

Now with regards to the Roadmap for Digital Cooperation, this is based on the Secretary-General's vision of a more open, free and secure digital future for all; it lays out concrete actions in areas such as achieving universal connectivity, digital human rights, digital inclusion and digital capacity-building to achieve this vision.

Around this Roadmap, the Office of the Tech Envoy has brought together a wide range of over 100 stakeholders, from parts of the UN system, but more notably also from governments, major technology companies, the scientific community and civil society, all working together to implement its goals and recommendations, through dynamic multistakeholder partnerships.

So, at its heart, the Roadmap enshrines a multi-stakeholder approach to partnerships, recognizing that governments working by themselves cannot properly address the big challenges we face in this digital age. Instead, we need the engagement of other stakeholders, as I said, working together with governments.

This same philosophy is what animates the Secretary-General of the United Nations' proposal in his recent Common Agenda Report for a Global Digital Compact, by which all stakeholders, again, not just governments, come together to forge a consensus around the digital future we want. This Global Compact, to be agreed in September 2023, is an opportunity to turn the Roadmap, the Secretary-General's vision into an effort to reach agreement by everyone on the principles that should underpin the online space, and indeed, touching on issues like big data, AI and all the other important aspects that we have discussed today.

Q3. What is the readiness in smart services in the country? How will it help the society to reach a high quality of life?

Nowadays, a high quality of life necessarily includes being connected to the Internet. The critical area of connecting everyone to the internet, something that our experience during COVID has shown, is fundamental to basic societal functions, from remote schooling, to staying employed, and even in ensuring access to basic information and the participation in public life.

Yet, over 2.9 million people, mostly women and those in developing countries, remain offline and unable to realize the benefits of internet connectivity. Hence, to bridge this fundamental digital divide, the Roadmap for Digital Cooperation sets the target of achieving affordable and meaningful connectivity for all by 2030 and

puts forwards specific proposals to realize this goal. These proposals have been the basis of strong multistakeholder partnership and activity, such as the development of a common measurement baseline to determine what is affordable and meaningful, which will soon be published by the International Telecommunications Union, as well as spurring forward transformative connectivity models, such as the GIGA project, an ambitious partnership between the ITU and UNICEF, to connect all schools to the internet.

Further, the statistical community has been active in using mobile phone data for indicators on human mobility. This has been useful in improving policy decisions on Tourism and Migration, and has been especially effective in helping governments determine the spread of the virus during the ongoing COVID pandemic.

These are all examples of concrete applications of new technologies which have a positive impact on peoples' life and can improve their conditions for the best.

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