**Council Working Group for
Strategic and Financial Plans 2024-2027**
First meeting – Virtual, 29-30 September 2021

Contribution by the Secretariat

UN DEVELOPMENTS ON DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES AND COOPERATION

Summary

This document presents United Nations developments on digital technologies and cooperation to be considered for the development of the ITU strategic and financial plans for 2024-2027.

Action required

The CWG-SFP is invited **to note and consider** this document for the development of the ITU strategic framework for 2024-2027.

UN developments on digital technologies and cooperation

Some examples of the strategies relevant for the ITU Strategic and Financial Plans
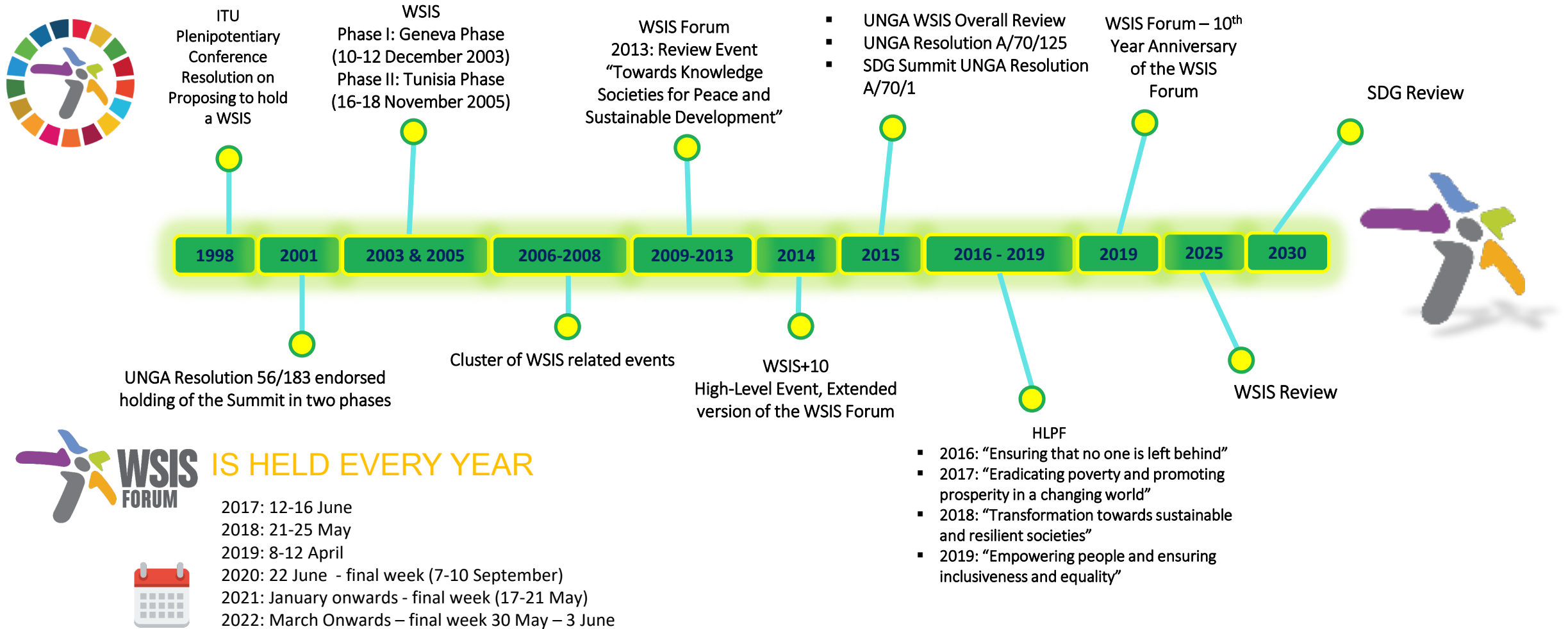
1st meeting of CWG-SFP – September 2021

UN strategies on digital technologies for consideration

A. Process of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS)

B. Key UN Activities on digital technologies that ITU is involved

C. UN Secretary-General's Roadmap for Digital Cooperation

D. UN Development System (Common Country Assessment)

E. UN's response to the COVID-19 pandemic (Future of work, Digital Transformation, HLCM)

F. UN's most recent Resolutions and Declaration on digital technologies

Process of WSIS

WSIS Process Timeline

ITU
Plenipotentiary
Conference
Resolution on
Proposing to hold
a WSIS

WSIS
Phase I: Geneva Phase
(10-12 December 2003)
Phase II: Tunisia Phase
(16-18 November 2005)

WSIS Forum
2013: Review Event
"Towards Knowledge
Societies for Peace and
Sustainable Development"

- UNGA WSIS Overall Review
- UNGA Resolution A/70/125
- SDG Summit UNGA Resolution
  A/70/1

WSIS Forum – 10th
Year Anniversary
of the WSIS
Forum

SDG Review

| 1998 | 2001 | 2003 & 2005 | 2006-2008 | 2009-2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 - 2019 | 2019 | 2025 | 2030 |

UNGA Resolution 56/183 endorsed
holding of the Summit in two phases

Cluster of WSIS related events

WSIS+10
High-Level Event, Extended
version of the WSIS Forum

WSIS Review

HLPF
- 2016: "Ensuring that no one is left behind"
- 2017: "Eradicating poverty and promoting
  prosperity in a changing world"
- 2018: "Transformation towards sustainable
  and resilient societies"
- 2019: "Empowering people and ensuring
  inclusiveness and equality"

WSIS FORUM

IS HELD EVERY YEAR

2017: 12-16 June
2018: 21-25 May
2019: 8-12 April
2020: 22 June - final week (7-10 September)
2021: January onwards - final week (17-21 May)
2022: March Onwards – final week 30 May – 3 June

Key UN Activities on digital technologies

Key UN work streams/activities on digital technologies

- Commission on Science and Technology for Development
- Technology Facilitation Mechanism (TFM) (STI Forum, 2030 Connect)
- Internet Governance Forum
- WSIS Forum
- UNGIS
- Technology Bank for Least Developed Countries
- Partnership for Measuring ICT for Development
- UNSG's strategy on new technologies: https://www.un.org/en/newtechnologies/
- UN Shared Cyber Hub by the UN Informal Working Group on Cyber Issues under the auspices of the UNSG's Executive Committee
- UN Data Strategy
- Generation Unlimited
- Generation Equality and its Technology and Innovation Action coalition (ITU co-leads)
- UN Global Pulse
- The HLCP Inter Agency Working Group on AI (ITU co-leads with UNESCO)
- Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development
- UN thematic inter-agency networks and working groups
- In pilot RCOs leveraging UNV
- Inter-Agency group (IATT) on Analytical work on emerging science and technologies and the SDGs

- ITU collaborates, participates, and interacts in UN work streams and activities with the aim to strengthen synergies and foster greater cooperation, information and knowledge sharing in order to fulfil programmatic, operational and management mandates in a more coherent and coordinated manner, and ensure that its priorities are strengthened and reflected in UN system-wide related work, outputs and agenda settings.

- Over recent years, these efforts have resulted in greater priority and recognition being given to the critical role of telecommunications/information and communication technologies (ICTs) for economic, social, and environmental sustainable development (See ITU Council reports on Collaboration with the UN system), as well as ITU's leadership as the UN specialized agency for ICTs.

Some lessons learned

- The overarching challenge/lesson learned is that **digital is everywhere at the UN these days** arguably making it more urgent for ITU to decide what it does and doesn't want to do and with what level of involvement, and for ITU to make more clear and well known our value add as a partner to other UN entities.
- There are risks of increased competition, inefficiencies and waste from duplication and lack of interoperability, risks of ITU being stretched too thin, but also huge opportunities to advance ITU mandates through collaboration with other UN agencies with access to deeper pockets for new and greater sources of funding at global, regional and local levels.
- Some examples of the changed UN landscape on digital include, *just to name a few*: priorities and strategies of the UNSG on digital and cyber issues, new UN resolutions on ICT and increased ICT references in other UN resolutions, new digital strategies and initiatives of UN entities for their own digital transformation, but also for their programmes, even digital themes for UN conferences and international days.

- ✓ As the UN specialized agency for ICTs, ITU is expected and must continue to engage.
- ✓ No single UN entity can stir the course of digital transformation.
- ✓ Collective action is the basis for the UN Secretary General's roadmap for digital cooperation.
- ✓ ITU's structure and divers membership (collaboration between governments, private sector, academia and other stakeholders) is key in providing innovative forms of the whole of society perspectives and solutions.
- ✓ Although there are many opportunities for partnerships and cooperation, there is a need to prioritize on concrete actions and outcomes to amplify impact.

UN Secretary-General's Report

Roadmap for Digital Cooperation

The UN Secretary-General's Roadmap for Digital Cooperation (June 2020) is a set of recommended actions for the international community to help ensure all people are connected, respected, and protected in the digital age.

CONNECT

We must achieve universal, safe, inclusive, and affordable access to the Internet for all by 2030. Overcoming the digital divide is key to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

RESPECT

Human rights exist online as they do offline and need to be at the center of digital technology. Putting human rights and human agency at the center of everything is crucial in the digital space.

PROTECT

We must mitigate online harms and rising digital security threats, especially for the most vulnerable amongst us.

Achieving universal, affordable, connectivity by 2030
—everyone should have access to the internet.

Promoting digital public goods to create a more equitable world
—the internet's open source, public origins should be embraced and supported.

Ensuring digital inclusion for all, including the most vulnerable
—under-served groups need equal access to digital tools to accelerate developmental progress.

Strengthening digital capacity building
—skill development and training are needed around the world.

Ensuring the protection of human rights in the digital era
—human rights apply both online and offline.

Supporting global cooperation on Artificial Intelligence
that is trustworthy, humanrights based, safe and sustainable and promotes peace.

Promoting digital trust and security
—calling for a global dialogue to advance the Sustainable Development Goals.

Building a more effective architecture for digital cooperation
—make digital governance a priority and focus the organization's approach.

ITU's Leadership focuses on its role as co-Champions

Global Connectivity

i) Establish a baseline of digital connectivity that individuals need to access the online space, as well as a definition of 'affordability'.

ii) Convene an expert group of investors and financing experts to consider the development of a financial platform and investment models.

iii) Promote transformative models to accelerate connectivity, such as the Giga initiative.

iv) Promote the development of enabling regulatory environments for smaller-scale ISPs.

v) Accelerate discussions on connectivity as part of emergency preparedness, responses and aid.

ITU also identifies harmonised spectrum for emerging technologies and develops related international standards, so as to bring affordability.

Digital Capacity Building

i) Mapping of existing digital capacity development initiatives (online self-serve database featuring over 100 providers)

ii) Rollout of a broad multi-stakeholder network (MSN) to promote and coordinate global digital capacity development initiatives (clearinghouse function to match supply and demand)

iii) Launch of a 'Joint Facility for digital capacity development' led by ITU and UNDP (holistic and targeted approach to strengthen digital capacities at the country level), 19 May 2021.

www.digital-capacity.org was launched by ITU, UNDP and the TE's Office featuring the ongoing work on the implementation of the key actions.

Digital Cooperation in the Declaration of the Commemoration of the 75th Anniversary of the UN

" **We will improve digital cooperation** […] Shaping a shared vision on digital cooperation and a digital future that show the full potential for beneficial technology usage, and addressing digital trust and security, must continue to be a priority as our world is now more than ever relying on digital tools for connectivity and social-economic prosperity. […] The United Nations can provide a platform for all stakeholders to participate in such deliberations."

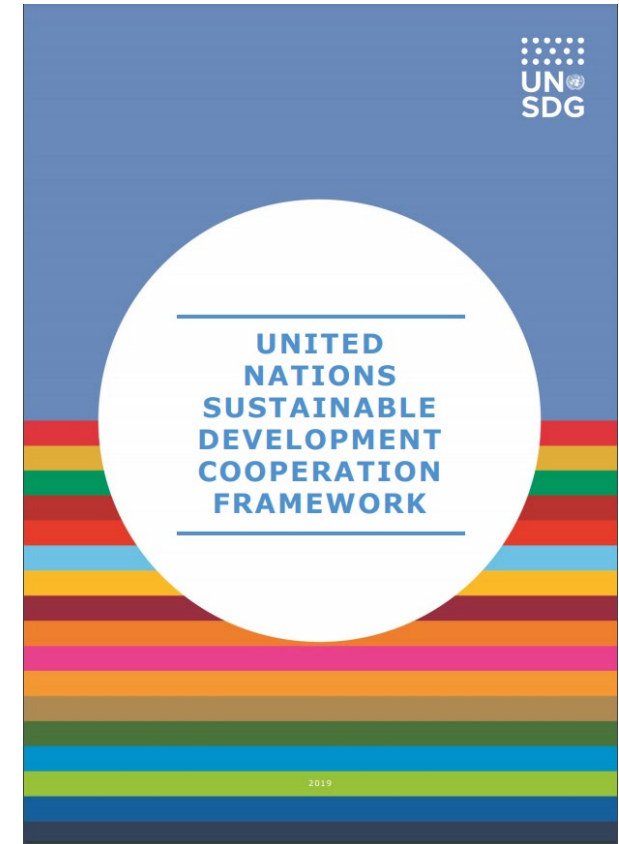# UN Secretary-General's "Our Common Agenda" (Sep. 2021)

- Mandated by the 2020 session of the General Assembly, the UN Secretary-General is producing a new report on "Our Common Agenda" with recommendations to respond to future and current challenges, in September 2021.
- "Our Common Agenda" will build on the 12 commitments contained in the UN75th Anniversary Declaration, including Digital Cooperation.
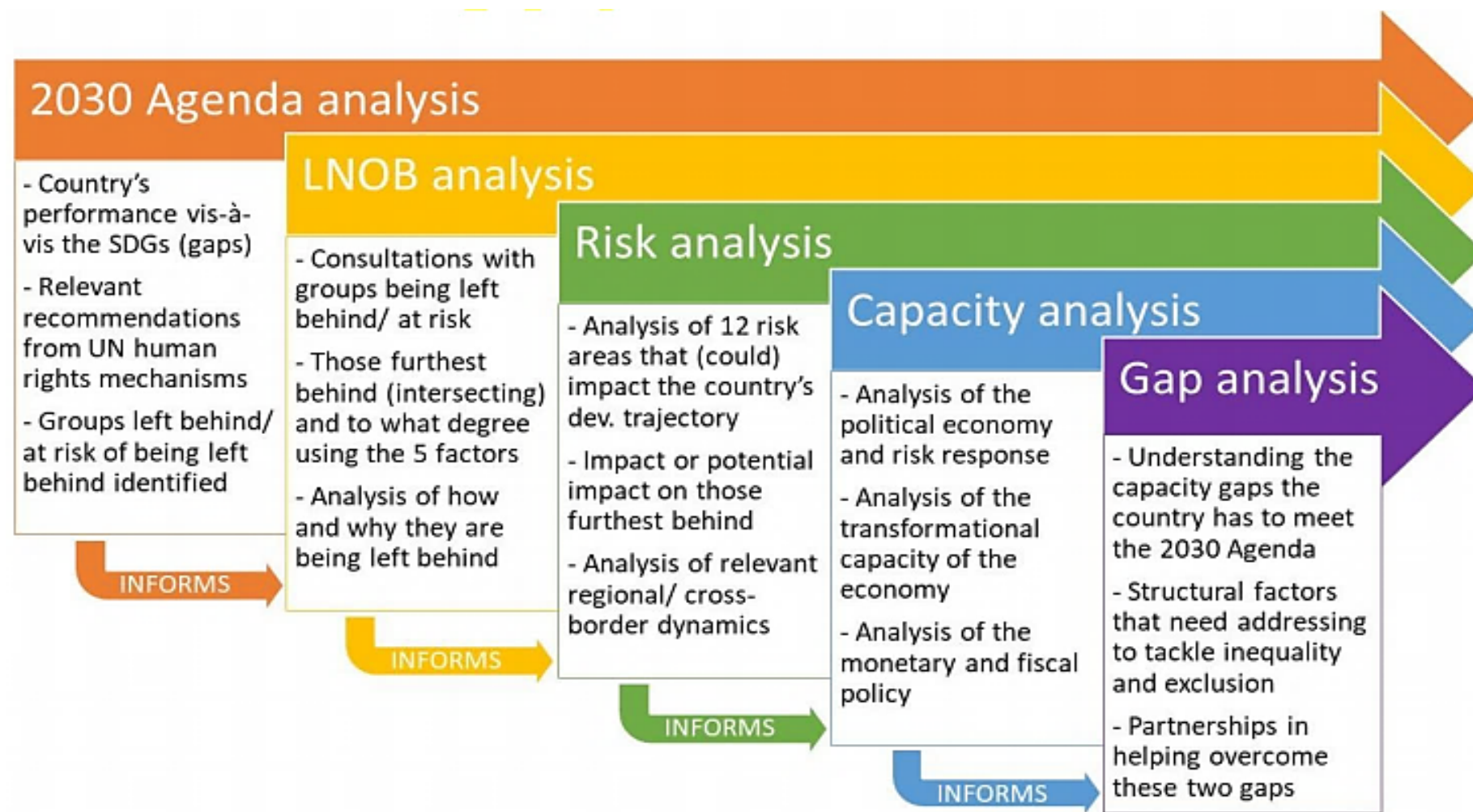
UN Development System

UN Common Country Assessment

Common Country Assessment (CCA)

- The 2030 Agenda requires bold changes to the UN development system (UNDS) for the emergence of a **new generation of country teams (UNCT)**, centred on a strategic UN Development Assistance Framework and led by an impartial, independent and **empowered resident coordinator (UNRC)**.

- The UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework represents the UNDS's collective offer to support countries in addressing key Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) priorities and gaps, and serves as a core accountability tool between the UNCT and the host Government for collectively-owned development results.

- As per the Cooperation Framework, **the Common Country Assessments (CCA)** is the UN system's independent, impartial and collective assessment and analysis of a country's situation for its internal use in developing the Cooperation Framework.

- It examines progress, gaps, opportunities and bottlenecks vis-à-vis a country's commitment to achieving the 2030 Agenda, UN norms and standards and the principles of the UN Charter, as reflected in the Cooperation Framework Guiding Principles.

UN®SDG

UNITED
NATIONS
SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT
COOPERATION
FRAMEWORK

2019

Elements of CCA

2030 Agenda analysis
- Country's performance vis-à-vis the SDGs (gaps)
- Relevant recommendations from UN human rights mechanisms
- Groups left behind/ at risk of being left behind identified

INFORMS →

LNOB analysis
- Consultations with groups being left behind/ at risk
- Those furthest behind (intersecting) and to what degree using the 5 factors
- Analysis of how and why they are being left behind

INFORMS →

Risk analysis
- Analysis of 12 risk areas that (could) impact the country's dev. trajectory
- Impact or potential impact on those furthest behind
- Analysis of relevant regional/ cross-border dynamics

INFORMS →

Capacity analysis
- Analysis of the political economy and risk response
- Analysis of the transformational capacity of the economy
- Analysis of the monetary and fiscal policy

INFORMS →

Gap analysis
- Understanding the capacity gaps the country has to meet the 2030 Agenda
- Structural factors that need addressing to tackle inequality and exclusion
- Partnerships in helping overcome these two gaps

Digital technologies in CCA/UNDS

- The UN development system's support focuses on fostering patterns of growth that improve the distribution of incomes, increase economic diversification, and **take full advantage of appropriate digital technologies and innovations**. It **embraces new technologies** and patterns of behavior that sustain low-carbon and resource- and energy-efficient growth.

- More specifically, the UN development system's joint monitoring systems, resources and activities, and collective planning and investment in monitoring services and technologies should support the strengthening of national data and information system.

- As highlighted in the most recent UN resolution ([A/75/75/233](#)), "[D]igital technologies can be a key enabler of sustainable development and […] unlocking their full potential is essential to attain the Sustainable Development Goals". The Resolution requests the UN development system **to leverage and utilize digital technological solutions in alignment with the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework**.

Digital technologies in CCA/UNDS

- With the focus on integrated analysis to leave no one behind, the CCA/UNDS could form the baseline to better map the technology or digital development needs in the country from various perspectives, such as broadband connectivity, digital inclusion, capacity development needs, governance and policy related issues, etc.

- The CCA/UNDS could point to crucial needs, gaps and challenges to develop the joint work of the UNCT – e.g., on digital technologies, and potentially the role of other national and/or international development partners, in support of and cooperation with the host government.

- Currently, ITU's contributions to CCA/UNDS includes providing ICT related data and expertise for, *inter alia,* Connectivity assessment for countries and regions, Digital development country profile.

Impact of COVID in the UN system

UN Response to the COVID-19

Future of Work - Background

The "**United Nations system strategy on the future of work**" (CEB/2019/1/Add.2), developed through the High-level Committee on Programmes (HLCP) under the leadership of the International Labour Organization (ILO), provides a **system-wide approach** towards assisting Member States **in addressing changes to the nature of work** in a way that contributes to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda and also **mitigates the risks and realizes the opportunities resulting from new technologies** and transformative demographic, environmental and economic megatrends.

Crosscutting Principles

These principles provide the underlying foundation for the Senior Leadership Commitments and should be incorporated into their operationalization.

1. **Leveraging technology** to enable new and more efficient ways of working.

2. **Embracing a truly 'One UN'** spirit that goes beyond each organization and genuinely places common objectives first.

3. **Being ecologically conscious** of how we work and act to ensure the lightest possible environmental footprint in everything we do.

1st principle:

Leveraging technology

Leveraging technology to enable new and more efficient ways of working.

Digital technologies are shaping our world and continue to transform the way we connect, communicate and collaborate. UN senior leaders encourage open communication by enabling robust data to be shared transparently wherever it is needed and to connect people and skills in new and innovative ways. Reinvigorating how we work needs cultural, behavioural and technological advancements to make this new era of collaboration beyond organizational boundaries a reality. These changes require systems thinking and agile mindsets where sharing information and decision-making power are actively encouraged to enable teams to act quickly and employees are given equitable learning opportunities, so nobody is left behind.

Future of Work - Impact of COVID in the UN system

Inputs from the Interim Report of the CEB Task Force on the Future of the United Nations System Workforce:

- The UN has maintained business continuity throughout the pandemic and assisted a large number of countries to adapt and mitigate the impacts of the COVID-19 crisis

- The COVID-19 pandemic ignited a large-scale social experiment: Majority of UN workforce started working remotely. The UN does not yet have the capacity to support all personnel to continue to deliver by providing proper equipment, appropriate policies**, sufficient internet access and bandwidth, robust cyber and data security measures**, ergonomic workspace support, etc.

- Some personnel were forced to equip their home with energy systems, expensive internet packages and VPNs to allow them to communicate securely and perform other online tasks. In some locations, internet is simply not available or affordable. **A dedicated team should be established to look at connectivity across the globe and to see if there are opportunities for UN agencies, corporations and member states to collaborate**.

- One of the keys to effective teleworking during COVID-19 crisis is the widespread use of Microsoft Teams and other collaboration tools. **What is needed is a global system-wide collaboration platform that links people, skills and projects across the UN system, enabling the UN to become an agile system with collaboration and continuous learning at its heart while unleashing the collective potential of its people.**

- Fostering **digital dexterity** within the organisation must be a priority in order to succeed, to keep pace with a world that is going digital. This requires organisations and their personnel to embrace new technologies and maximise personal learning and training.

UN's recent Resolutions & Declarations

Recent Resolutions & Declaration on digital technologies

- [A/RES/75/316](#) on the Impact of rapid technological change on the achievement of the SDG (August 2021)

- [E/RES/2021/28](#) Assessment of the progress made in the implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society (July 2021)

- [E/RES/2021/29](#) Science, technology and innovation for development (July 2021)

- [E/2021/L.26 – E/HLPF/2021/L.2](#) Ministerial declaration of the high-level segment of the 2021 session of the Economic and Social Council and the 2021 high-level political forum on sustainable development on "Sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic that promotes the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development: building an inclusive and effective path for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda in the context of the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development" (July 2021)

- [A/RES/75/202](#) Information and communications technologies for sustainable development (December 2020)

Key take-away points

- COVID-19 adaptations have accelerated digitalization, allowing the digitally connected to thrive while severely exacerbating the inequalities faced by the digitally disconnected.

- The digital divide is the new face of inequality in the COVID-19 era. It is particularly pronounced along rural-urban, language and gender lines, and in Least Developed Countries (LDCs), Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs), and Small Island Developing States (SIDS).

- The poorest and the most vulnerable in developed and developing countries alike, who are the hardest hit by this crisis, are also the farthest behind in terms of access to digital technologies.

- Leaving no one behind means leaving no one offline. Societies need tools to adapt and thrive to contend with these structural changes now.

- Urgent action must be taken to end the digital divide by 2030, to accelerate the implementation of the entire 2030 Agenda.

- Ending the divide will require whole-of-society cooperation, and multi-stakeholder and multi-sectoral engagement,

- Creating enabling regulatory environments and innovative financing models for investments into affordable connectivity and digital devices and applications; upscaling digital skilling and education; and empowering people everywhere through community networks and local content.

- The negative consequences of digitalization including disinformation, misinformation, cybercrime, the spread of violent extremism and terrorism, and online abuse and harassment – particularly targeting women and children – must all be addressed while simultaneously working to end the global digital divide. This will require greater engagement of all countries in global digital governance.

- Need to strengthen global digital governance, financing, investments.
- Upscaled cooperation for capacity building is needed to allow all countries to benefit from digitalization and e-trade.
- Digital cooperation and connectivity are critical for global green recoveries from the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly through more environmental data and observation systems.
- Environmentally friendly digitalization, in line with the SDGs, must be integral to every national recovery plan. 230 million digital jobs could be created in sub-Saharan Africa by 2030, but that would require overcoming challenges relating to infrastructure, training and skilling, and capacity building.
- Digital technology can help mitigate climate change and prevent disasters – but if the digital divide persists it will further impair citizens' resilience to climate change's impacts.
- Digital infrastructure must become as environmentally efficient as possible. Global digital energy consumption, including for data centers, and global e-waste, must be addressed, alongside all negative environmental impacts at every point along the digital supply chain.
- Equitable access to digitally-based emerging technologies, such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), 5G, the Internet of Things (IoT), Quantum Computing, Robotics, and Biotech will allow the international community to reap the benefits of digitalization and adapt to the future of work.
- The continuation of the digital divide, without broad access to such technologies, risks exacerbating fractures, leading to economic disruption that will have consequences for multilateralism.
- Need to build synergies across both the UN system and the SDGs highlighting how digitalization can support the 2030 Agenda, including efforts to address climate change.

Relevant Recommendations

When developing the strategic plan 2024-2027, the CWG-SFP may take into consideration:

- The UN-wide work on digital technologies and how ITU's strategies can step into the gaps and opportunities this presents

- That digitalization becomes one of the top priorities across the UN System, creating possible parallel tracks with ITU's mandates in the technical realm (e.g., universal connectivity) while at the same time bringing opportunities to strengthen ITU's role as an ICT leader within the UN System and beyond

  (*e.g., in the context of the following element presented by the Task Force for HLCM consideration and guidance:*)

  The HLCM could encourage the implementation, as appropriate for each UN organization, of technological solutions across the UN System: establishing a **dedicated team to look at connectivity across the globe** to assess opportunities for UN entities, corporations and member states to collaborate; encouraging entities to test and evaluate new **collaboration tools**; exploring collaboration and pooling of resources to foster **digital dexterity and remote support in a cyber-secure environment.**

- The need for a "One ITU" approach clearly articulating the strengths, services, products, and initiatives that ITU can provide, their importance, and the added value that ITU brings with these services.

- Continued to strengthen and build synergies across the UN system, through joint initiatives promoting ICTs as enabling tools to support the 2030 Agenda, including efforts to address climate change.

- The necessity of enhancing ITU-UN (including ITU Regional Offices and UNCT) ties, to more accurately reflect the critical role of ICTs in the UN development system, so as to support countries in addressing key SDGs priorities and gaps.