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Concept Note
Second Committee Special Event
"The role of governments and all stakeholders in mobilising ICTs for sustainable development"

(13 October 2016 10am-1pm – Conference Room 2**)**

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Background

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development recognizes that eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions, including extreme poverty, is the greatest global challenge and an indispensable requirement for sustainable development. The Agenda states the commitment to achieving sustainable development in its three dimensions – economic, social, and environmental – in a balanced and integrated manner.

The vital role of information and communications technology (ICT) as a catalyst for realizing the vision of the 2030 Agenda is specifically recognized in the Agenda which acknowledges that "the spread of information and communications technology and global interconnectedness has great potential to accelerate human progress, to bridge the digital divide and to develop knowledge societies, as does scientific and technological innovation across areas as diverse as medicine and energy".

Implementing the SDGs will require a quantum leap from business as usual as stated by the Secretary-General during the Ministerial Meeting of the Group of Least Developed Countries (LDCs) in 2015[1] . There are already many examples of how ICT can provide innovative solutions to the challenges faced by all countries in improving people's well-being, building sustainable economies and protecting the environment[2] . Such examples relate to how ICT can improve people's health – by linking community health workers to hospital facilities or assisting governments and decision makers in health planning[3] - bolstering education or stepping up agricultural productivity. ICTs can also enable people's participation in decision-making and in the lives of their communities. They can help boost the availability of data and information on education, health, finance such as government spending, social welfare, labour information and environment.

The need to harness the transformational potential of ICT and broadband to support the implementation of the SDGs has long been underscored by the Secretary-General and the Broadband Commission on Sustainable development created in 2010 at his request[4] . The Commission has underscored notably the role of ICT in strengthening resilience of critical infrastructure and helping to overcome social and economic exclusion.

The benefits of ICTs however are not available to all. The first progress report on Progress towards the SDGs presented to the high-level political forum on sustainable development underscores that "Fixed-broadband services remain largely unaffordable and unavailable across much of the population in developing regions, highlighting digital divides in access to high-speed, high-capacity Internet services" (E/2016/75 para 119). The report indicates that:

> "By 2015, fixed-broadband penetration had reached 29 per cent in developed regions, but only 7.1 per cent and 0.5 per cent, respectively, in developing regions and the least developed countries. Major disparities are also found in Internet use. In developing regions, one third of the population is online versus 1 in 10 people in the least developed countries. Data also reveal that more men than women are online."

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[1] http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=52102#.V8WYqD4rLZs

[2] How ICT can accelerate action on SDGs, Earth Institute of Columbia University and Ericcson, 2016.

[3] United Nations E-government Survey, 2016.

[4] http://www.broadbandcommission.org/about/Pages/default.aspx

Target 9.c of the SDGs therefore calls for significantly increasing access to ICT and providing universal and affordable access to the Internet in least developed countries by 2020. The 2030 Agenda also launched the Technology Facilitation Mechanism (TFM) which is a key instrument to mobilize and support cooperation in support of science, technology and innovation for the SDGs. The forum convened for the first time in June 2016 showcased ICT and other technology solutions in support of the SDGs. The related SDG Goal 17.8 calls for fully operationalizing the technology bank and science, technology and innovation capacity-building mechanism for least developed countries by 2017 and enhancing the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology.

ICTs are also referred in some other goals and associated targets. There is tremendous potential to improve education globally, and especially in the developing world, with the power of ICTs. Target 4.b requests to substantially expand globally the number of scholarships available to developing countries for enrolment in higher education, including vocational training and information and communications technology, technical, engineering and scientific programmes by 2020. ICTs will also play an important role in delivering both gender equality and gender empowerment. In that regard, target 5.b requests to enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women.

It is also important to highlight that, like every new technology, ICTs also come with risks and challenges. ICTs may bypass or even marginalize some segments of the population who lack ICT access and skills thus possibly deepening inequalities. Special attention thus needs to be given to how to maximize the benefits of ICT for all women and men, children, youth, persons with disabilities, older persons, and other categories of the population. There are also other concerns such as privacy and surveillance, cybersecurity, loss of human skills, digital exclusion, and child protection in the virtual world.

These divides, challenges and risks need to be addressed through policy action, programmes, international cooperation and partnerships. A major effort is needed to close the digital divide between and among countries.

Education and capacity-building are particularly crucial for enabling all countries and people to derive social and economic gains from technological innovation as stated in the report of the Secretary-General on the progress made in the implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of the WSIS at the regional and international levels (A/71/67). The General Assembly also stressed that capacity-building for the productive use of ICT should be given due consideration in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda. South-South cooperation[5], North-South cooperation, public private sector partnership and involvement of civil society all have important roles to play in implementing measures to support ICT capacity building in developing countries, including institutional capacity building, human resource training, transfer of knowledge and technical assistance.

The General Assembly in the 10 year review of the World Summit on Information Society (WSIS)[6] noted that a number of measures have facilitated significant gains in connectivity and sustainable development in many countries: (i) mainstreaming of ICTs in school curricula, (ii) open access to data, (iii) fostering competition, (iv) the creation of transparent, predictable, independent and non-discriminatory regulatory and legal systems, (v) proportionate taxation and licensing fees, (vi) access to finance, (vii) facilitation of public private partnerships, multi-stakeholder cooperation, national and regional broadband strategies, (viii) efficient allocation of the radio frequency spectrum, (ix) infrastructure sharing models, (x) community-based approaches and public access facilities. All

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[5] A/RES/70/184

[6] A/RES/70/125

stakeholders thus have a responsibility in mobilizing international and national collective action to leverage ICT for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

Overall, the Secretary-General's report to the General Assembly 71st session underscores that strong synergies are needed between the information society and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It notes that the more pervasive and capable ICTs become, the more impact they will have on each of the SDG, facilitating their implementation and enabling more effective monitoring and measurement of progress.

Objective, format and outcome

The side event will provide a platform for participants to (i) reflect on trends and actions to mobilize all stakeholders to put ICT in the service of the poor; (ii) exchange experiences and lessons on how Governments and other actors can mobilize ICT for realizing the SDGs; (iii) identify priority actions and possible approaches for the implementation of the outcome of the WSIS+10 and the 2030 Agenda in this area; (iv) exchange ideas in particular on how to maximize the role and impact of public authorities in putting ICT at the service of sustainable development, in the mobilization of financing and partnership as well as putting in place the necessary safeguards.

The event will consist of a few pointed presentations by governments and other representatives identifying good practices to be shared and challenges on which they would like advice or support. This will be followed by responses by other speakers on the panel and by an interactive dialogue among all meeting participants.

The outcome of the meeting will be an informal summary by the Secretariat highlighting the main points of the discussions and specific proposals or ideas leading to action-oriented results.

Suggested questions for discussion

- What are the critical immediate measures governments and other stakeholders need to take to reach universal connectivity by 2030?
- What are the main opportunities and challenges today for mobilizing ICT for implementing the SDGs? How can governments and other actors address them to accelerate progress, building on the provisions of the World Summit on Information Society (WSIS) and its 10 year review?
- How can we engage the private sector and other actors and mobilize partnerships for putting ICTs in the service of the SDGs?
- How can it be ensured that the benefits of ICTs reach the poorest and most vulnerable countries and people?

List of Participants

- Policy makers in the area of ICTs, public administration, health, education and other areas and Permanent Missions to the UN (2-3)
- United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), International Telecommunication Union (ITU), UN Regional Commissions (ESCAP, ECA, and ESCWA),
- Sustainable Development Solutions Network
- Representatives of civil society, academics and private sector