WORLD SUMMIT ON THE INFORMATION SOCIETY (WSIS) FORUM CONTRIBUTION TO THE HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT (HLPF) 2022

2022 Theme: *"Building back better from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development"*

SDGs under review: The HLPF in 2022 will review the SDGs and will also discuss in depth Sustainable Development Goals: 4 (quality education), 5 (gender equality), 14 (life below water), 15 (life on land), and 17 (partnerships for the Goals).

General Introduction

The UN General Assembly Resolution 56/183 (21 December 2001) endorsed the holding of the **World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS)** in two phases. The first phase took place in Geneva from 10 to 12 December 2003 and the second phase took place in Tunis, from 16 to 18 November 2005. The goal of WSIS is to achieve a common vision, desire and commitment to build a people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented information society where everyone can create, access, utilize and share information.

Through the Summit's first phase in 2003, a framework for an inclusive information society was created as set out in the Geneva Plan of Action[1]. Since 2015, the WSIS Process and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development are being aligned by stakeholders to integrate information and communication technologies (ICTs) into their approaches in implementing the activities/initiatives to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

In line with UN Resolution A/70/1 and Resolution A/70/125, ITU, in collaboration with more than 30 UN agencies, is continuously working towards strengthening the alignment of the WSIS Process implementation activities with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, thereby highlighting the direct linkages between WSIS Action Lines and SDGs.

About WSIS Forum
The WSIS Forum represents the world's largest annual gathering of the 'ICT for development' community. The Forum is co-organized by ITU, UNESCO, UNDP and UNCTAD, in close collaboration with all WSIS Action Line Facilitators/co-facilitators. The WSIS Forum has proven to be an efficient medium for coordination of multistakeholder implementation activities, information exchange, creation of knowledge, sharing of best practices and foster partnerships to advance development goals.

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[1] The Plan of Action sets forth a clear commitment to translate these principles into practice and to meet concrete and tangible targets with the aim of promoting sustainable development. https://www.itu.int/net/wsis/docs/promotional/brochure-dop-poa.pdf

The WSIS Forum 2021 was held virtually from January onwards and culminated in the final week on 17-21 May 2021 under the theme of ICTs for Inclusive, Resilient and Sustainable Societies and Economies (WSIS Action Lines for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals), with a focus on accelerating action on the impact of COVID-19 pandemic towards SDG achievement by 2030.

The WSIS Forum 2022 is scheduled to start from 15 March onwards in a virtual format with the final week that will be held on 30 May – 3 June 2022. The overall theme of the WSIS Forum 2022 is *ICTs for Well-Being, Inclusion and Resilience: WSIS Cooperation for Accelerating Progress on the SDGs* ([www.wsis.org/forum)](www.wsis.org/forum).

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, all component of the WSIS Process have been contributing to the COVID-19 response activities to build back better through the ICTs.

WSIS Action Lines and SDG Matrix
The WSIS-SDG Matrix developed by UN WSIS Action Line Facilitators serves as the mechanism to map, analyze and coordinate the implementation of WSIS Action Lines, and more specifically, ICTs as enablers and accelerators of the SDGs. This mapping exercise draws direct linkages of the WSIS Action Lines with the proposed SDGs to continue strengthening the impact of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) for sustainable development
 (https://www.itu.int/net4/wsis/sdg/).

A. Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the implementation of the SDGs under review in the 2022 HLPF from the vantage point of your intergovernmental body, bearing in mind the interlinkages with other SDGs

The implications of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic are stretching far beyond the health domain, causing serious socio-economic setbacks that pose risks to the achievement of the SDGs. Recovery from the pandemic that gets us back on track towards 2030 will require greater and more coordinated efforts from across sectors. It will also require more strategic approaches and best-fit tools, such as those enabled by ICTs. The pandemic has quickened the pace of digitalization, playing a prominent role in enabling governments and businesses to continue to function, enabling people to continue to work and collaborate, enabling education and learning to continue, among others. The pandemic also underlined however the stark divides that persist, showing how digital exclusion can exacerbate conditions particularly during a crisis (such as inability to access critical information and services), with implications for long-term development goals.

The interconnected nature of the impact of the pandemic will require integrated solutions. The multistakeholder approach in the WSIS Process and its interconnected WSIS Action Lines (that link directly to the SDGs) present a ready mechanism for supporting recovery that is inclusive. Through the annual WSIS Forum, stakeholders have access to knowledge and experts that will be crucial for helping inform recovery efforts. The WSIS Forum brings together a vibrant community of innovative thinkers, policy makers, and civil society, government, business leaders, and all stakeholders who year after year challenge us to see development through a different lens.

During the pandemic, from 2020, the WSIS Forums (2020 and 2021) had been organised in a fully virtual format. This adaptation by the global community towards a virtual format has opened up the dialogue to even more people, enabling freer and richer exchange while building a shared approach and commitment to addressing the pandemic. The WSIS Forum 2021, for instance, had

a cumulative attendance of over 50,000 participants *(zoom room, zoom recording, Facebook Live videos, YouTube, and other formats)* from over 180 countries. The virtual setting has cultivated a greater diversity of participants, enabling more open discourse among more stakeholders on emerging and evolving issues around information and knowledge societies (including on SDGs under review this year).

Partnership and collaboration are at the core of the WSIS process. It is, in itself, a demonstration of the commitment and unwavering support of stakeholders to leverage each other's expertise and capacities to achieve the SDGs. The WSIS Forum 2021 focused these on helping inform recovery pathways, convening on the theme "ICTs for Inclusive, Resilient and Sustainable Societies and Economies (WSIS Action Lines for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals)" to explore how the implementation of WSIS Action Lines link to recovery towards SDGs achievement.

The WSIS Forum 2021 hosted more than 250 sessions, including workshops, live interviews, WSIS TalkX, the high-level track, Hackathon and many more. It highlighted various topics, including connectivity, cybersecurity, ICTs infrastructure, creation of enabling environment, digital skills and access to information, gender equality, healthy ageing, to name a few. The Forum also provided a dedicated space for stakeholders to promote their projects and activities for mitigating the impact of COVID-19 pandemic, through a series of live interviews. This initiative provided an opportunity to showcase projects submitted to ongoing call of the [WSIS Stocktaking COVID-19 ICT Case Repository](#) that collects ICT-based solutions to respond to the widespread challenges brought by the COVID-19 pandemic while highlighting their alignment with the WSIS Action Lines and SDGs.

In the first edition of the special report [WSIS Stocktaking: The Coronavirus (COVID-19) Response ICT Case Repository](#), issued in November 2020, more than 200 projects were featured. During the WSIS Forum 2021 final week (17-21 May), the second edition of this report was presented with more than 400 ICT projects and initiatives responding to COVID-19.

B. Actions, policy guidance, progress, challenges and areas requiring urgent attention in relation to the SDGs and to the theme within the area under the purview of your intergovernmental body

WSIS is a UN process that includes an annual, multistakeholder Forum where governments, civil societies, private sectors, academia, international organisations, technical communities and others are able to network, partner, and share how to achieve the SDGs through the framework of WSIS Action Lines.

The UN General Assembly recognized the importance of ICTs in sustainable development through the overall review of the implementation of WSIS outcomes in December 2015. The UN Member States called for a close alignment between the WSIS Process and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, highlighting ICTs' cross-cutting contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals and poverty eradication.

The pandemic triggered an unprecedented reliance on ICTs. WSIS works collaboratively with its stakeholders to develop partnerships and initiatives to fully utilise ICTs to respond to and recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. The WSIS Forum is working with stakeholders to provide an electronic reference toolkit that will assist stakeholders in responding effectively to COVID-19 pandemic, under the framework of the WSIS Action Lines and the SDGs. The multistakeholder

outcomes derived from the WSIS Forum demonstrated how ICTs can foster creativity and innovation to accomplish the Sustainable Development Goals.

ICTs are not just devices; they are enablers of services, helping deliver what people need and helping more people to access services they need. To help guide efforts, the WSIS Forum facilitates sharing of new knowledge and best practices, opens up spaces for greater collaborative networks, and ensures a plurality of voices on innovative ICTs for advancing the global development agenda. It is now more urgent than ever to leverage ICTs to connect everyone everywhere and achieve the SDGs.

The forthcoming WSIS Forum 2022 will be a platform that enables stakeholders to engage in an open and inclusive discussion by identifying emerging trends while providing recommendation on the future of the implementation of the WSIS Action Lines. In line with the theme of the HLPF 2022, the WSIS Forum 2022 will focus on cooperation to accelerate the achievement of the SDGs. ICTs for development are a pivotal element in efforts to build back better for a stronger, safer, and more inclusive information society.

The agenda and programme of the WSIS Forum 2022 will be aligned with the WSIS Action Lines and the Sustainable Development Goals, highlighting the contributions and impact of ICTs to achieve the SDGs by 2030, particularly efforts and initiatives of digital cooperation in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The WSIS Forum activities are exemplified by a voluntary set of special initiatives driven by stakeholders that are particularly linked to SDG Goal 5 (Gender Equality) and SDG Goal 17, as follows:

- **ICTs and Gender Mainstreaming**
  In August 2021, WSIS launched a new repository called *WSIS Stocktaking Repository of Women in Technology* (http://www.itu.int/go/WSISGender). The initiative was derived from stakeholders' request and resulted from the discussions of the ICTs and Gender Mainstreaming special track at the WSIS Forum 2021.

  This repository provides opportunities to connect with women leaders and practitioners in all sectors of the ICT industry from all regions and to engage in various activities on ICTs and Gender Mainstreaming, such as workshops, training courses, networking events, WSIS Forum, and others that aimed at fostering a dialogue on the use of ICTs as a means for implementing the SDGs.

To promote the repository, WSIS has also launched a call for *WSIS Gender Trendsetters* to:
  - gather inspiring trailblazers for gender equality all around the world
  - identify the current ICTs trends on gender issues to promote gender mainstreaming and equality
  - organise workshops for the ICTs and Gender Mainstreaming special track at the WSIS Forum 2022
  - promote the WSIS Forum 50/50 gender balance challenge
  - promote and encourage stakeholders to join the WSIS Stocktaking Repository of Women in Technology
  - advocate for the inclusion of gender issues and gender digital equity in ICT discussions

The call is open for stakeholders who have a strong interest in the effort to achieve gender equality. Please submit the nomination [here](#).

- **ICTs and Older Persons**
  This special initiative addresses the role of ICTs in combating age-based discrimination in the workplace, achieving healthier ageing, building smarter cities, ensuring the financial inclusion of older persons, and supporting millions of caregivers across the world and in digital inclusion across the generations to enable the Decade of Healthy Ageing 2020–2030.

  As an outcome of the WSIS Forum ICTs and Older Persons special track at the WSIS Forum 2021, WSIS at the request of stakeholders have launched the creation of the *WSIS Multistakeholder Alliance on ICTs and Older Persons* consists of four sub-groups: (i) Design and Accessibility; (ii) Capacity Building and Education; (iii) Cybersecurity issues; and (iv) Innovation, led by Chairs and Co-Chairs.

- **WSIS Youth Campaigns**
  The WSIS Youth Campaigns strive to provide young people and to representatives of youth communities with a platform to share their vision for the efficient use of ICTs in enabling sustainable development, the challenges they might encounter on this path, and the solutions young people are already providing to their professional and personal communities. The activities of the WSIS Youth Campaigns aim to contribute to the purposes of the ICTs and Youth special track. In addition, it aims to foster a community of talented, ambitious, and diverse youth groups, whose work will be exhibited via the WSIS Forum.

  The first generation of 12 WSIS Youth Campaigners have been nominated due to their ongoing work with the youth communities and their dedication towards development activities. They will be strengthening the WSIS Forum 2022 ICTs and Youth special track with the following three campaigns:
  - ICTs & Youth Empowerment
  - ICTs & Business
  - ICTs & Climate Change

C. An assessment of the situation regarding the principle of "ensuring that no one is left behind" at the global, regional and national levels against of background of the COVID-19 pandemic in achieving the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, within the respective area addressed by your intergovernmental bodies

WSIS was created to build a people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented information societies, where everyone can create, access, utilise and share information and knowledge, enabling individuals, communities and peoples to achieve their full potential in promoting their sustainable development and improving their quality of life.

The WSIS Forum continues to serve as an open and inclusive platform to ensure the common WSIS goals are met. The transition of the Forum into a virtual format has resulted to a greater outreach that made the event more diverse, accessible, and inclusive.

The WSIS Process emphasises multistakeholder collaboration and cooperation across all regions and sectors, and is strengthened at the international, regional and national level by three main pillars - the WSIS Forum and its regional reviews, WSIS Prizes and WSIS Stocktaking.

- *WSIS Prizes* (www.wsis.org/prizes)
  WSIS Prizes recognized remarkable efforts made by entities and organizations from around the globe for their excellence in supporting the implementation of WSIS outcomes, in particular the WSIS Action Lines and the SDGs. The WSIS Prizes will honour 90 champions and 18 winners for their initiatives and projects that leverage the power of ICT. The WSIS Prize is awarded annually at the WSIS Forum.

- *WSIS Stocktaking* (www.wsis.org/stocktaking)
  WSIS Stocktaking process is a resourceful and effective platform for the collection of ICT-related projects based on the WSIS Action Lines and SDGs, providing useful contributions to the sharing of best practices at the local national, regional and global level.

While committed to the guiding principle of the SDGs of "leaving no one behind", priorities discussed at the WSIS Forum included the importance of bridging the digital and gender divide in access to and usage of ICTs. The challenge remains with 2.9 billion people who are still offline mostly in developing countries. There is a need to create and maintain multilateral partnerships with different actors in digital cooperation to strengthen the 2030 Agenda that will provide a harmonious development fair and equitable for all at the national, regional and international levels.

WSIS ensures that ICTs remain high on the agenda for the implementation of the SDGs. It includes participation of all people, including women and girls, youth, older persons, persons with disabilities and specific needs, and more.

D. Cooperation, measures and commitments at all levels in promoting sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic

Recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic needs to ensure long-term progress towards a future that is inclusive, sustainable and resilient. ICTs enable and accelerate social, economic and environmentally sustainable growth and development for everyone. As part of the effort in promoting the use of ICTs to support achieving the SDGs as well as to respond to such global crises as the COVID-19 pandemic, the WSIS Forum continues to forge collaboration and partnerships with all stakeholders.

The WSIS Forum is the perfect example of how to bring together many different stakeholders for the common good. In collaboration and at the request of stakeholders, WSIS initiated some activities to highlight the full power of ICTs to enhance resilience and recover from COVID-19 pandemic, as follows:

1) The WSIS TalkX is a platform, both virtual and physical, dedicated to sharing experiences and inspirational stories about ICTs for development (implementation of the WSIS Action Lines for Development) by stakeholders all over the world. More than 35 physical and virtual sessions have been conducted, in which some of the sessions have been converted into podcasts and are available to listen and download at WSIS TalkX Podcast. At the request of stakeholders, the WSIS TalkX also serves as a platform to celebrate the UN

international days by highlighting the ICTs component for sustainable development. The topics covered in the WSIS TalkX sessions are varied, including Food Loss and Waste, Smart Cities, ICTs and Peace, and many more.

2) As a part of the WSIS Stocktaking efforts to promote the innovative use of ICTs, the Coronavirus Response - ICT Case Repository collected projects and activities dedicated to responding to the COVID-19 crisis.

3) A Global WSIS Response - Amid the Pandemic documentary. The first-ever WSIS documentary in response to COVID-19 pandemic. As part of the WSIS Stocktaking: Coronavirus (COVID-19) Response – ICT Case Repository, this short film depicts efforts of WSIS stakeholders from across the world using ICTs to address some of the challenges caused by the pandemic. This in turn will help to further promote ICTs and WSIS as efficient tools to address emergencies and achieve the SDGs.

4) COVID-19 related workshops at WSIS Forum 2021. The WSIS Forum 2021 was held under the theme of *ICTs for Inclusive, Resilient and Sustainable Societies and Economies (WSIS Action Lines for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals*. More than 70 workshops organised by various stakeholders highlighted issues and efforts related to the topic of COVID-19 at the WSIS Forum 2021. Many emphasised the importance of ICTs, in particular internet access and connectivity for all during the COVID-19 pandemic.

5) ICTs for Well-being and Happiness special track: The new special track was launched at the WSIS Forum 2021, which consisted of a series of workshops focusing on efforts and success stories to promote healthy lives and well-being for everyone at all ages, in the context of COVID-19 pandemic.

WSIS is also working closely with the United Nations Group on the Information Society (UNGIS) members to accelerate digital development for all. UNGIS has launched a Digital Transformation repository, which will be used as a reference guide and repository for UN Agencies on different implemented initiatives/activities showing the direct impact of the WSIS Action Lines on SDGs.

At the regional level, WSIS continues working in close collaboration with all the five UN Regional Commissions towards strengthening the implementation of WSIS Action Lines and SDGs.

E. Various measures and policy recommendations on 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

The annual WSIS Forum has resulted in several outstanding outcomes, which include policy recommendations, achievements, publications, and other measures that shown the positive energy and commitment towards the WSIS Process and the strengthening of WSIS implementation activities to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Key outcomes of the WSIS Forum 2021[*] include the following publications that show clear linkages between the WSIS Action Lines and SDGs:
- WSIS Forum 2021: Outcome Document
- WSIS Forum 2021: High Level Track Outcomes and Executive Brief
- WSIS Forum 2021 Report: WSIS Action Lines and SDGs - Sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19

- WSIS Forum 2021 and SDG Matrix
- WSIS Stocktaking Report 2021
- WSIS Stocktaking: Success Stories 2021
- WSIS Stocktaking ICT Case Repository: The Coronavirus Response Special Report

*all documents are available online at
https://www.itu.int/net4/wsis/forum/2021/Home/Outcomes)

The annual WSIS Forum is hosted by ITU and co-organised by ITU, UNESCO, UNCTAD, and UNDP.