

## Roundtable at the Management Segment of the ECOSOC, 8 June 2023

### Transformation is possible: Actions from the ECOSOC system

Remarks by Ms. Ana Neves, Chair of the CSTD

*Excellencies,  
Distinguished delegates,  
Ladies and gentlemen,*

As we witnessed in yesterday's discussion, ECOSOC and its bodies and commissions has remarkable capacity in terms of policy analysis and advice on best practices. However, many key challenges lie in implementation at national level.

From our work at the Commission on Science and Technology for Development (CSTD), we recognize that **digital transformation** entails national policies, which can be a complex task for governments. There are many challenges there, and I will note five of them:

1. Funding and Resource Allocation
2. Coordination and Collaboration
3. Regulatory and Legal Frameworks
4. Skills and Talent Development
5. Public Trust and Ethical Considerations.

CSTD has a long experience that has accumulated in almost twenty years of monitoring the implementation of, and follow-up to the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society at the regional and international levels. This is work that the CSTD undertakes with the participation of a large number of UN entities and other international organizations (32 provided inputs to our last report) and other stakeholders concerning their efforts to implement WSIS outcomes.

Now, I will focus on three key aspects of the recent evolution of digital transformation in a context marked by economic uncertainty, fast and major developments in the digital space, and conflict, both real-world and digital, and which informed the contribution that the CSTD submitted to this segment. These three aspects are:

- The changing context of digital cooperation,
- The impact of conflict and the risk of cyberconflict, and
- Data governance

## **The changing context of digital cooperation**

Achieving digital development continues to present serious challenges that require the global community to come together through digital cooperation. For example:

- The world remains too far away from truly universal inclusion in the digital economy;
- We still need to fully integrate the digital dimension into actions to address poverty, gender equality, and climate change;
- Cybersecurity, including cybercrime raise increasing concerns

None of these challenges can be tackled successfully without digital cooperation.

Take the digital divide. Although 63% of the world's population is connected, least developed countries still only count 27% of their populations as internet users. As the CSTD has noted in the past the persistent connectivity can lead to a serious development divide, stalling the progress to achieve the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development. Digital cooperation, technology sharing, and partnerships remain crucial for connecting remote and underserved populations.

Work on the establishment of a Global Digital Compact (GDC) opens opportunities for positive developments in this regard. The ongoing process of consultations should outline shared principles for an open, free, and secure digital future for all. Digital cooperation must be recognized as central to this future.

The CSTD, with its longstanding experience and the stock of knowledge it has accumulated in its work on the WSIS outcomes, enjoys unique advantages to contribute valuably to the success of the GDC.

## **The impact of conflict and the risk of cyberconflict**

Conflicts in which digital technology plays an increasingly central role have become one of the most salient effects of digitalization on society and politics globally.

Digital technology is becoming increasingly weaponized in sophisticated ways. From cyberattacks that disrupt infrastructure and services to the theft of sensitive information and the destabilizing potential of deep fakes and fake news, information technologies are increasingly often among the major causes and means of conflict.

Countries lacking the cybersecurity infrastructure to protect themselves from these threats are liable to suffer disproportionately, amplifying global power imbalances.

But digital technologies can also provide solutions in conflict situations. They provide tools promoting accountability and accuracy and enable the challenging of dominant narratives.

They can also facilitate peacebuilding and help document and discourage human rights abuses.

### **Data governance**

Now let me turn to the importance of data governance. The multidimensional impact of digital data on all aspects of societies and economies continues to necessitate global conversations around regulation and governance. Areas of concern are wide-ranging and include the geographical concentration of digital innovation and data management, problems of cross-border jurisdiction, competition policy, consumer rights, and content moderation.

The regulatory challenges created by those questions are complex, particularly where the need for international enforcement interacts with differences in national laws and norms. International *fora* are increasingly concerned with such issues. For example, a growing number of initiatives aim to address the ethical dimensions of emerging technologies such as machine learning and artificial intelligence, raising the question of the risk of fragmentation in the treatment of these matters.

The emerging data divide is among the most salient examples of how, as noted earlier, a digital connectivity divide can ultimately lead to a significant development divide. There is a risk that the data economy will be permanently dominated by a few stakeholders from a handful of technologically advanced economies, even though their activities directly impact the lives and economic prospects of citizens in developing economies.

With its long-standing role in digitalization and development, the CSTD should be able to bring stakeholders together to collaboratively navigate these complex questions and help develop solutions that serve the global public interest.

### **Distinguished delegates,**

Although today's Digital Policy differs significantly from what was envisaged in 2005 when the member States adopted the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society, the Tunis Agenda remains highly relevant and should inform our future common endeavors in the digital field.

The General Assembly will review the WSIS process in 2025. The CSTD should support member States and other stakeholders to use this review to achieve a clear and actionable understanding of the persistent and emerging challenges of digitalization and development, the possibilities that were realized as well as those that were missed and the new ones that may be opening. It could thus help strengthen global consensus on the vision of our digital society's future and how that vision can be articulated with the Global Digital Compact and other global processes.

To conclude my statement, I wish to reiterate the deep commitment of the CSTD, as the focal point of the United Nations for science and technology for development, to fulfil its responsibility to provide an inclusive space for thinking and working on the present and the future of digital development.

Thank you for your attention.