



Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data

[www.data4sdgs.org](http://www.data4sdgs.org)

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We at the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data thank the co-facilitators for the opportunity to input on the Summit and Pact for the Future. The world is at a crucial juncture for the future of multilateralism, and ensuring global cooperation has never been more important. Yet, as highlighted in the UN's materials on the Summit of the Future, 'Multilateral governance, designed in simpler, slower times, is not adequate to today's complex, interconnected, rapidly changing world.' Nowhere is this clearer than the field of digital cooperation and the proliferation of artificial intelligence (AI). We are pleased to see that digital cooperation and data governance will be addressed in Chapter 3 of the Pact for the Future and in the Global Digital Compact. However, at the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data, a network of over 700 partners committed to the use of data and technology to accelerate the SDGs, we also believe that addressing the basic building blocks of digital cooperation should be a priority across the agenda.

### **Chapeau**

We believe the Summit and Pact for the Future must capitalize on the opportunities provided by new technologies, AI, and digital transformation. Technology offers the strongest opportunity to accelerate progress on the SDGs, providing [myriad benefits](#) to the economy, society and the environment. Without access to technology, good data, and effective analytics, responding to threats such as Covid-19 and the climate crisis is impossible. The best examples of rapid and effective response to such crises are underpinned by data and technology, such as how the government of Togo, in partnership with other stakeholders, rapidly deployed emergency cash transfers via mobile phones to the people hardest hit by COVID-19 at the height of the pandemic.

However, widespread access to the benefits of technology is not a foregone conclusion. It is not possible to scale these examples or harness the transformational potential of AI to achieve the SDGs without prioritizing data systems investments, or without setting out parameters for global governance of data and emerging technologies. Global governance has a critical role to play in setting standards, establishing guardrails to uphold human rights, fostering cooperation, and ensuring that the benefits from data and technology are more evenly distributed.

Ensuring equitable distribution of technology's benefits and protection from potential harms requires effective and agile multistakeholder, cross border collaboration. As the most inclusive multilateral forum, the UN has a critical role to play in shaping the agenda and setting norms and expectations. The

[Power of Data High Impact Initiative](#)<sup>1</sup> is a brilliant example of how the UN is already leading the way to create a future where all countries can take advantage of new technologies and digital transformation.

We congratulate the Secretary-General and the UN system on the successful launch of the High Impact Initiatives, including the Power of Data, which we are proud to co-lead. By strengthening national data systems, the initiative is vital for ensuring that all countries share in the benefits of new technologies. It is also a unique example of the agile multilateralism that is required to respond to current and future global challenges by combining global cooperation, national leadership, cross-stakeholder engagement, and local empowerment.

Time is running out on the SDGs. Data and technology are non-negotiable ingredients for success, and must therefore run through the Pact for the Future. This means the actions required are acknowledged in the Chapeau and chapters, in addition to a more in-depth discussion in the Global Digital Compact.

## **Chapter I. Sustainable development and financing for development**

### **In order to deliver on the promise of new technologies, the global community must invest in national data systems to underpin digital transformation and drive sustainable development**

There is a major financing shortfall to achieve the SDGs, it is critical therefore to prioritize investments that will unlock maximum impact and cut across multiple goals. Investing in national data systems will drive progress across all 17 SDGs by highlighting where resources are needed most, where good progress is already being made and informing decision making on what works to achieve impact. National data systems are the framework in which public, private, academic, multilateral, and civil society actors come together to develop, validate, and use data. Strong national data systems will unlock the power of new technology and better decisions to drive sustainable development. This is the aim of the Power of Data High Impact Initiative.

Investing in data systems makes good economic sense. [Recent research](#) commissioned as a foundation for the Power of Data initiative has shown that for **every \$1 invested in data systems, there is an average return of \$32 in the form of benefits to the economy, to the environment and to people's health**. Investing in data systems will revolutionize decision-making, accelerate digital transformation, and drive new economic opportunities.

The volume of funding required to strengthen data systems is relatively small, and a cross-cutting commitment to invest in data systems could include donors allocating 0.8% of ODA, alongside low-income countries allocating 0.5% and middle-income countries allocating 0.1% of annual expenditure. We congratulate the UK for its early commitment to the Power of Data High Impact Initiative and call on other funders to invest.

Tracking investments in data and digital transformation is essential to ensure that resources are being used effectively and are aligned to national priorities. At present this is not possible. Global leadership needs to expand voluntary purpose codes of the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development to track and report financing for data and digital transformation across all development sectors and all Sustainable Development Goals.

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<sup>1</sup> The Power of Data is one of twelve High Impact Initiatives launched at the SDG Summit to accelerate progress on the SDGs. At the heart of the Power of Data is the launch and support of cutting-edge national data partnerships, announced by an initial group of 15 countries across Africa, Asia and Latin America and supported by the UK. The 15 countries are: Bangladesh, Botswana, Cabo Verde, Colombia, Costa Rica, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Dominican Republic, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Paraguay, Rwanda, Somalia, Togo and Uruguay.

As digital transformation propels the global community into the future, prioritizing inclusion and widespread data and digital capacities will ensure that the journey is marked by agency, equity, accessibility, and empowerment for all. New investment should include commitments to strengthen data and digital capacity through education and upskilling across the public and private sectors, and for people of all ages and genders, to prevent wealth and expertise from being concentrated in high-income countries, further exacerbating existing inequalities. This will help address concerns over the negative impacts of digital transformation on labor markets around the world.

## **Chapter II. International peace and security**

N/A

## **Chapter III. Science, technology and innovation and digital cooperation**

As highlighted under chapter 1, to take advantage of the opportunities offered by technology **the global community must invest in data systems to underpin digital transformation**. Data is the life blood of the digital age. Without high-quality and well-funded data systems countries will be unable to take advantage of the myriad of opportunities offered by digital transformation and emerging technologies such as AI.

To ensure the impacts of technology are felt equally, **global leaders must seek convergence on principles of data and digital governance**. Digital systems and artificial intelligence run on data, and how this data is governed determines whether they help or harm. A new approach to global digital governance must reinforce transparency and accountability towards those most affected by use of their data in new technologies, not just protecting people's privacy but enabling people to have agency over their data and digital futures.

As the private sector is leading in developing digital technologies, governments are lagging in regulating them in the public interest. Chapter III of the Pact for the Future and the Global Digital Compact should acknowledge that data and digital governance is currently a patchwork of national and regional frameworks, and there is a need to converge on global principles of data and digital governance.

These principles should include:

- Accountability towards marginalized communities and those at greatest risk of being adversely affected by innovative use of their data in digital tools; this is central if we are to ensure that we achieve the Leave No One Behind agenda.
- Measures to ensure that people know, understand, and have agency in how they are represented in data and can participate directly or indirectly in deciding whether and how their data is used.
- Embedding Inclusive practices in all stages of design and decision making on digital tools and data use. Inclusion cannot be treated as an afterthought when scrutinizing leaders and institutions.

To keep pace with the rate of technological change, **the global community must promote agile governance of AI and other emerging technologies**. AI can be transformative for measuring and achieving the SDGs. The global community must unlock the potential of AI and use it where it can help, but the future of AI is unpredictable, and the potential harms could be destructive. AI demands a new, more agile governance driven by multi-stakeholder cooperation.

Any new governing mechanism for AI that is established by the Global Digital Compact or chapter 5 of the Pact must ensure that the design and use of the technology is transparent, safe and under accountable human oversight. Recent years have clearly shown the risks posed by the weaponization of emerging technologies to democracy, peace, and security. Creating agile governance mechanisms will help to future-proof governments and institutions around the world from the worst-case scenarios perpetrated by malignant actors. Such mechanisms must include:

- A central focus on upholding human rights.
- Open access to high value representative datasets with capacity to review for potential biases or exclusions, especially for historically marginalized groups.
- Ways of identifying where human intervention needs to be protected or re-introduced to automated decision making.
- Systems for reviewing, preventing, or halting unintended consequences or high-risk applications of AI.
- Standards for transparency and explainability of AI models.
- Mechanisms for the participation of affected people and communities in the design and deployment of new tools.
- A platform for sharing best practice across countries on new approaches to AI governance.
- Ongoing review of the application of AI and its impacts on development, democracy, human rights, peace, and security.

#### Chapter IV. Youth and future generations

N/A

#### Chapter V. Transforming global governance

Global governance has traditionally addressed interactions between people and nation states, but the world is changing. Humanity is living in an age where much of our social, economic, and political activities occur online and mediated by technologies that many of us do not understand or even know are there. **Governance must keep pace with changing human behavior and protect long-standing agreements on human rights to safety, privacy, dignity, freedom of expression and the right to work.** The Secretary-General has emphasized that multilateralism needs to evolve to keep pace with technological development. As the Pact for the Future reimagines the multilateral system, it is essential to focus on the future and what threats may lie ahead.

In our response to chapter 3 we highlighted more in-depth recommendations, but here we underline again that the transformation of global governance must include:

- A prioritization of agile governance of AI that can respond to people's evolving digital needs and the changing threats we face.
- A framework for global data and digital governance that protects and empowers people and communities to take control of their digital futures, guards against the perpetuation of bias and inequality, and is accountable to the people that the data and digital systems are intended to serve.