

The Role of Governments and All Stakeholders in Mobilizing ICTs for Sustainable Development

13 October 2016, New York, United Nations Headquarters

Second Committee met for a side event on “The Role of Governments and All Stakeholders in Mobilizing ICTs for Sustainable Development”, organised by UNDESA(DPADM) on 13 October 2016.

The panelists and speakers emphasized the tremendous role ICTs can play for achieving the 2030 Agenda. At the same time, while digital technologies have spread rapidly globally, the broader development benefits from using these technologies have lagged behind. The World Bank explained that to get the most out of the digital revolution, countries need to work not only through ICT policies, but also by targeting “analog complements”. Those include strengthening regulations that ensure competition among businesses, adapting workers’ skills to the demands of the new economy, and ensuring that institutions are accountable. Civil society participants recommended to consider access to information and privacy in Internet as “analog complements”. Panelists also suggested to consider other factors such as investment friendly environment for public private partnerships, effective regulation policies, developing citizens’ skills including digital literacy, and overcoming social challenges such as fear of technology.

It was suggested that some services can be delivered with the use of ICTs even without the entire population having access to ICTs. In such cases, ICTs can increase accountability, provide public services, assist in detecting losses, broken or tampered equipment, and decrease transaction costs. Panelists emphasized that SDGs require sustainable public services delivery. ICTs can notably allow reliable service delivery and lower transaction costs. But challenges related to service delivery in developing countries are very different than those in developed countries. As an example, online payment solutions in the developed world such as Apple Pay or Google Pay may not be suitable for developing countries. But customized local scaleable payment solutions, including mobile payments, can still decrease the transaction costs in developing countries.

Another example was how technology can save lives and protect people, countries and their economies by predicting future disease outbreaks. This can allow more proactive measures based on accurate predictions. Those are based on several types of data including weather, human movement, environment, and epidemiology. Communities in challenged areas are encouraged to participate by offering rewards through games. Public health officials launch health campaigns in the affected areas to raise awareness and take remedial actions. Challenges however include collecting real time data and convincing governments to embark on a new journey and develop proactive measures based on prediction.

Regarding connectivity, speakers addressed the challenges in realizing Target 9.c of the SDGs, which calls for significantly increasing access to ICT and providing universal and affordable access to the Internet in least developed countries by 2020. It was emphasized that, to achieve this target, it is critical that countries adopt enabling legal and regulatory environments that support competition, ease market entry, promote business confidence, lower transactional costs, ensure interoperability, and protect intellectual property and consumer rights. As one low hanging fruit to achieve universal and affordable access in LDCs by 2020, panelists suggested that member states study all phases of Internet connectivity (from the time Internet reaches a country until it reaches homes) and identify ways that reduce costs by introducing competition among all actors including public sector. In short, to address connectivity challenges, collaboration among all stakeholders including public sector, private companies, and civil society is needed.

Speakers highlighted the gender gap in using ICTs. It was however suggested that there are many areas where the gender gap is actually smaller when it comes to using ICTs. For example, more women are involved in peer to peer lending via ICTs than men. However, for areas where the gender

gap exists, panelists agreed that most of issues were social and cultural and that more efforts should be put forward to build and improve women's skill and education in ICTs.

Overall, there was also a strong emphasis that solutions for mobilizing ICT for the poor are countries specific. It was reemphasized that ICTs are not a shortcut to development, but they can be a very efficient accelerator.

The side event was part of the official programme of the General Assembly Second Committee. It aimed to provide delegates of the United Nations Member States with new evidence, information and ideas about how to mobilize ICT for sustainable development. The Acting Director of DPADM and the Director of Division on Technology and Logistics of UNCTAD delivered opening remarks. The panelists included speakers from the World Bank, Colombia University and representatives of private sector from Microsoft and AIME. The event is moderated by a representative of Socrata, a private sector data company, and attended by Member States and other stakeholders. For more information about the side event, including presentations, and opening remarks please visit: <https://goo.gl/6kJzsU>