



## **Second Meeting of the High-level Panel on Digital Cooperation**

Geneva, 21-22 January 2019

### Summary Note

At the second in-person meeting of the High-level Panel on Digital Cooperation, UN Secretary-General António Guterres called on Panel members to “be bold,” citing the compelling need for “new thinking and innovative ideas to harness the benefits and manage the risks of this digital age.”

Co-chairs Melinda Gates and Jack Ma also stressed the importance of devising ambitious and concrete proposals. Ms. Gates suggested that the Panel prioritize affordable, universal internet access and preparing institutions to manage shared digital challenges. Mr. Ma highlighted the need to embrace digital development, for inclusiveness and multi-stakeholder cooperation, and for education reform to empower future generations to benefit from digital technologies.

A sense of urgency and call for innovative solutions guided the Panel members’ deliberations. Highlights from the discussions are summarized below.

### **Engagement and Consultation Review**

Panel members began the meeting by reflecting on the insights that emerged from their engagement activities, which included visits to major tech hubs (China, India, Israel, Silicon Valley); a [call for contributions](#) (which has yielded over 100 submissions); [virtual discussion groups](#); participation in over 60 [conferences and workshops](#); and a large number of bilateral meetings with representatives from government, the private sector, civil society and academia. These consultations highlighted the wide spectrum of perspectives on digital technology across the world, from optimism about its potential to drive economic growth to wariness about its potential risks.

The following nine key “enablers” of digital cooperation surfaced across stakeholder groups, geographies and thematic areas:

Leadership and political will: Consultations revealed concerns that political fragmentation across nations and between governments and other stakeholders is impeding the development of cooperative, win-win frameworks to address digital policy challenges. Successful digital cooperation will be more likely when leaders are willing to pursue digital transformation and spearhead collaborative initiatives.

Incentive alignment: When different stakeholders possess competing or contradictory motivations for behaving in certain ways, it can be difficult to get them to work together on shared challenges. In order to induce effective digital cooperation, we must clearly articulate shared goals and reconcile incentives.

Implementation of guiding values and principles: Consultations and research revealed that a growing number of business leaders understand the need to integrate values and principles into their day-to-day operations, but many are unsure of how to do this concretely. Successful

digital cooperation will depend on clear implementation mechanisms to help institutions and governments embed these values in policy and practice.

Shared meanings: Over the course of consultations, most stakeholder groups noted that the lack of shared meanings and vocabularies around digital challenges has hindered cooperation. We must work to develop common understandings and language so that stakeholders from disparate communities can develop and pursue common goals.

Clear roles and responsibilities: Consultations revealed discrepancies and uncertainty about the roles and responsibilities of different stakeholders in the digital age. In order for the private sector, public sector and civil society to work together effectively, we need to better define (and continuously refine) their responsibilities in the digital policy space.

Coherence in action: Many stakeholders expressed frustration over the disjointed or redundant efforts and governance initiatives, from poor coordination among government ministries to the proliferation of competing digital policy forums. To strengthen digital cooperation, we need to foster greater coherence between these various efforts and initiatives.

Inclusiveness: The Panel has found that some stakeholders are excited about the power of digital technologies to foster equality, while others are concerned about their potential to create or reinforce social and economic divides. Including all relevant stakeholders in digital cooperation mechanisms will help ensure that the creation, deployment, and governance of digital technologies is inclusive, and that their impacts do not exacerbate inequities.

Trust: Before the General Assembly last year, the Secretary-General warned that the world was suffering from a “trust deficit disorder.” The Panel’s consultations corroborated this observation, with reports of low trust levels between governments, tech companies and users, and governments and citizens. Cooperation in any field requires trust between actors, but this is particularly true in the digital policy space.

Capacity: To harness the benefits of digital transformation, all actors must increase their capacity to effectively manage change and capitalize on new technologies. We can strengthen our ability to cooperate on digital policy challenges best only when all actors develop sufficient capacity to make informed decisions and take action.

These and other findings from the Panel’s engagement activities informed Panel members’ reflections on what the report should address.

## **Exploring the Digital UN Landscape**

At a lunch hosted by the Secretary-General of the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), Panel members met with heads of international organizations to discuss the UN’s role in the fast-changing digital policy space. The group shared reflections on the importance of innovation and digital technologies for achieving SDGs, and highlighted inspiring examples of digital cooperation.

UNCTAD (UN Conference on Trade and Development), for instance, outlined the opportunities of the digital economy for developing countries and shared new ways of fostering inclusive trade, such as the eTrade for All initiative. WIPO (World Intellectual Property Organization) has developed the Universal Dispute Resolution Procedure (UDRP) as a unique and innovative way to resolve conflicts around domain names. These and other examples could inform the Panel’s thinking on concrete mechanisms for digital cooperation.

## **Imagining an Ideal Digital Future**

On the second day of the meeting, Panel members were invited to imagine an ideal digital future: What world do we want to see two decades from now?

The responses were rich and varied, and included ideals such as environmental sustainability, social cohesion, and greater equality. Some Panel members imagined a world free of digital security challenges, in which no device ever gets hacked or infected by malware. Others advanced the idea of a human-centric world of digital technologies, with individuals retaining agency and choice among increasingly intelligent systems. Still others hoped to see governments develop their capacity to better manage the impact of digital technologies.

### **Areas for Potential Recommendations**

Over two days of interactive discussion, Panel members identified and explored the following areas where they felt their recommendations could add the most value:

Inclusiveness: How can we ensure that digital technologies are inclusive, especially for the most vulnerable parts of society? Can inclusiveness become the lens through which we create and assess digital policy? These were among the questions Panel members explored as they discussed ideas like Internet access as a human right; increasing participation in the digital economy; and education systems that ensure everyone develops skills for the digital age.

Digital Public Goods: Panel members felt that greater conceptual clarity on the term “digital public goods” would help us understand how they could serve as the backbone of inclusive participation in the digital economy. They explored ways in which digital public goods could be fostered, maintained, and shared on possible platforms.

Values and Principles: Many organizations and initiatives have put forth lists of values and principles to guide behavior in the digital age. But how can these values be implemented in practice? The Panel discussed potential mechanisms for helping organizations and governments embed values and principles in business practices and policy.

Governance: What mechanisms can we put in place to help us govern digital technologies and their impact on society? The Panel explored a range of possibilities, from reforming existing institutions to creating a global council for ethics and training public sector leaders.

Safety and Security: How can we encourage various stakeholders to come together to promote greater security and stability when it comes to digital technology? The Panel considered the major challenges of digital security and explored potential solutions, including stronger authentication and improving mechanisms for traceability and attribution.

Data: Some Panel members invoked the metaphor of data as the “life-blood” of the 21st century economy. In this context, Panel members asked: How do we ensure that data and data-driven technologies work for all? They also discussed ideas for managing the concentration of data, promoting the sharing of data, and potential parameters for treating data, such as anonymized health research data, as a public good.

### **Next Steps**

Following the second in-person meeting, the Panel has begun drafting its final report. Once a sufficiently robust draft has been developed, Panel members will begin road-testing the recommendations with stakeholders. A third and final meeting is likely to take place in Spring 2019.