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Item 7 of the provisional agenda

Round-table discussion

Investing in the power of data and digital transformation to accelerate progress on the Sustainable Development Goals and support evidence-based policymaking in Arab countries

Summary

The present document provides a background for a round-table discussion to be held as part of the proceedings of the sixteenth session of the Statistical Committee of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), and organized jointly with experts from the High Impact Initiative on the Power of Data. The round-table discussion will serve as a platform for dialogue on the transformative potential of data and the need to promote coordinated, coherent and strategic investments in data for the Sustainable Development Goals in the Arab region.

Member State representatives are invited to participate actively in the dialogue and consider joining the High Impact Initiative on the Power of Data to forge cutting-edge partnerships and leverage the transformative power of data in their countries.

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Introduction

1. High-quality data have become an indispensable asset in addressing complex sustainable development challenges, driving progress, innovation, and scientific research, and shaping informed decision-making and public policies across all sectors.
2. In the most recent report on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the United Nations Secretary-General has highlighted the importance of robust data that build on a strong statistical foundation, drawing on traditional data sources such as censuses and surveys, and integrating innovative data sources to respond to spurring data demand for SDG monitoring.¹
3. Data partnerships play a critical role in advancing collective and interconnected SDGs, and addressing multifaceted challenges, including poverty alleviation, access to education and health care, gender equality, economic growth, climate change, peace and justice, and financing for development.
4. Data partnerships are also necessary to build more robust data ecosystems that provide support for evidence-based decision-making and adequate responses to crises. The integration of the private sector, policymakers, academia and civil society in the data dialogue is key to broadening data literacy and promoting a fact-based worldview.
5. Recognizing the urgent need to address these challenges and unlock the transformative potential of data, the [High Impact Initiative on the Power of Data](#) was launched during the second [SDG Summit](#) (New York, 18–19 September 2023) as a new coalition to facilitate cutting-edge data partnerships, build and leverage commitment at the highest level of political leadership, and promote strategic investments in data. The expanding initiative currently comprises 15 countries across Africa, Asia and Latin America. It is supported by the United Kingdom and facilitated by co-leads, including the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data, the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Population Fund, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the United Nations Children’s Fund, the Committee for the Chief Statisticians of the United Nations System, the World Bank, and more recently, the United Nations regional commissions.
6. Analysis by Dalberg² has shown an average return of \$32 for every dollar invested in data systems, spread across sectors. By 2030, countries should have higher investment opportunities, more skilled people and stronger institutions and political leadership to mobilize the use of data and data technologies in ways that transform progress on the SDGs. Partnerships will bring together governments, technology companies, civil society, donors and other stakeholders to use data ethically. This will revolutionize decision-making, accelerate digital transformation, and drive new economic opportunities for more equal and sustainable development worldwide. National data partnerships are led by national governments and coordinated and supported by the United Nations system, with significant financial and other support from donor countries, foundations, technology companies, civil society and others. The High Impact Initiative on the Power of Data will capitalize on global summits, including the Summit of the Future and the World Data Forum, to build momentum for such partnerships.
7. The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) has undertaken significant investments and efforts to strengthen national statistical systems in member States, and develop data ecosystems and knowledge platforms taking optimal advantage of recent developments in technology, including artificial intelligence. Collaboration between the ESCWA secretariat, the High Impact Initiative on the Power of Data and the United Nations country teams is an additional means for supporting member States to achieve more progress in implementing their national SDG commitments as evidenced by reliable data and statistics.

¹ United Nations, [The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2024](#).

² Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data, [New analysis shows every dollar invested in data systems creates an average of \\$32 in economic benefits](#), 2022.

I. Purpose and objective

8. The round-table discussion focuses on the transformative potential of the High Impact Initiative on the Power of Data in advancing partnerships and promoting coordinated, coherent and strategic investments in data for the SDGs in the Arab region. It will present examples from recent national convenings on the power of data from countries engaged in the initiative to strengthen coalitions at country level. The discussion will advocate for the inclusion of more countries and partners in the initiative to invest in data as an effective mechanism to accelerate SDG efforts in countries in the pursuit of a more sustainable and equitable world.

9. Bringing together experts from various fields, the round-table discussion will provide new inputs and ideas and explore synergies, innovative practices, alternative methods and data sources for strengthening the data ecosystem and providing new information on progress on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

10. Key objectives of the round-table discussion are:

(a) Expand the data and statistics dialogue between countries and potential leading countries and new partners on the importance of data partnerships;

(b) Provide insight on the progress of establishing data partnerships at country level and share lessons learned to drive commitment at the highest level of political leadership;

(c) Discuss strategic priorities and the benefits of having more countries join the High Impact Initiative on the Power of Data to accelerate progress towards the SDGs;

(d) Provide new inputs and ideas by bringing together experts from various fields with a view to achieving fast progress in the data and statistical fields;

(e) Identify challenges and opportunities for expanding collaboration across sectors at global and country levels.

11. The main discussion points include the role of data partnerships in promoting transparency and accountability in the national context; best practices on data partnerships for fostering a productive dialogue between data users and producers; and case studies or examples of successful data partnerships and policy development.

II. Format

12. The round-table discussion is expected to last 90 minutes, with four to six speakers and two rounds of questions from participants.

III. Speakers

13. Country representatives and experts from the High Impact Initiative on the Power of Data will highlight how the initiative is driving coherence among existing national priorities and plans and mobilizing political support for their implementation.

IV. Expected outcomes

14. It is expected that the round-table discussion will result in recommendations on improving data partnerships, and accessing and using data and statistics for policymaking; strengthening relationships between data communities, including users, producers and policymakers; encouraging the exchange of knowledge and data; and identifying key areas for further research and collaboration.
