



EMBARGO UNTIL 10:00AM EDT ON MONDAY 10 JUNE 2019

Independent UN Panel Launches Report & Recommendations For Building an Inclusive Digital Future

An independent expert group appointed by the UN Secretary-General calls on governments, the private sector and civil society, to work together urgently to maximize the benefits and minimize the harms of digital technologies

10 June 2019 - New York

In its report, *The Age of Digital Interdependence*, presented to UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres today, a 20-person Panel co-chaired by Melinda Gates and Jack Ma calls for greater cooperation to make sure that the benefits of digital technology reach all of humanity while addressing a range of pressing associated challenges.

The report describes a world more deeply interconnected than ever before as a result of digital technology, yet struggling to manage the economic, social, cultural and political impacts of the digital transformation. The report makes a strong call for reinvigorating multilateral cooperation, arguing that it needs to be complemented by a multi-stakeholder approach -- involving a far more diverse spectrum of stakeholders, such as civil society, academics, technologists, and the private sector.

"We are living at the dawn of a new digital era," said Jack Ma, co-chair of the Panel. "Global cooperation among all parties -- private sector, government, citizens, academics and civil society - is needed to use technology to achieve more prosperity, more opportunity, and more trust for people around the world. We need to focus especially on making technology inclusive so more women, young people, rural populations, small businesses and developing countries can benefit. We also need to rethink our education systems so they will prepare our young people for the future, instead of for yesterday."

The Panel emphasizes the importance of leaving no one behind in the digital age and how digital cooperation and technology can contribute to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. It argues for greater collaboration around the use of data and development of 'digital public goods' to help accelerate achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals by enabling digital technologies to be used at scale. The report discusses the issues of mobile money, digital identification and government services, e-commerce and affordable access to the internet. It underscores that roughly half the world's population still lacks internet access or is using only a fraction of its potential despite being connected.

"Digital technologies can help the world's poorest people transform their lives, but only if we are willing to address the inequalities that already keep them from fully participating in the economic and social lives of their countries," said Melinda Gates, co-chair of the Panel. "Developing countries and marginalized communities must have a voice in deciding how these technologies are used. That's how we can guarantee that, instead of reinforcing old problems, digital technologies are a source of new solutions."

The Panel also focuses on issues of human rights, human agency, trust and security in the digital age. It stresses the serious problem of harmful content on social media, challenges to privacy, and the importance of trust and stability of the digital environment. It calls for more effective action to prevent trust and stability from being eroded by the proliferation of irresponsible uses of cyber capabilities. On the critical issue of artificial intelligence, the Panel recommends that



autonomous intelligent systems be designed such that their decisions can be explained and humans are accountable for their use.

The Panel calls for a strengthened architecture for global digital cooperation. It identifies gaps and challenges in current arrangements and proposes three potential options for governance architecture. The report notes that the international community need not start from scratch and can build on established mechanisms for digital cooperation including fora and networks of governments, industry, technical bodies and civil society, as well as existing regulations and 'soft law' such as norms, guidelines, and codes of conduct.

Finally, the Panel's report makes 5 sets of recommendations:

- Build an inclusive digital economy and society
- Develop human and institutional capacity
- Protect human rights and human agency
- Promote digital trust, security and stability
- Foster global digital cooperation.

"The landscape for digital cooperation has shifted since the Panel was launched last year; politicians and some technology leaders are now calling openly for closer scrutiny and smart regulation of the digital space. I hope this report will stimulate a global conversation on these issues between the private sector, civil society, governments, academia and more," said UN Secretary-General António Guterres.

###

The Panel's Recommendations

Build an Inclusive Digital Economy and Society

- Ensure that every adult has affordable access to digital networks and digitally-enabled financial and health services by 2030.
- Create alliances for sharing "digital public goods" and data for the SDGs
- Adopt policies to support digital inclusion and equality for women and marginalised groups; establish and use metrics for digital inclusiveness.

Develop Human and Institutional Capacity

- Establish regional and global "digital help desks" to help governments, civil society and the private sector manage the impacts of digital technologies.

Protect Human Rights and Human Agency

- The UN Secretary-General should conduct a global review of how human rights norms apply to digital technologies.
- Social media enterprises should work with governments, international and local civil society organisations and human rights experts to understand and respond to human rights concerns.
- Design autonomous intelligent systems so that their decisions can be explained, and humans are accountable for their use.



Promote Digital Trust, Security and Stability

- Develop a Global Commitment on Digital Trust and Security to shape a shared vision of digital stability and strengthen implementation of norms for responsible uses of technology.

Foster Global Digital Cooperation

- The UN Secretary-General should facilitate a consultation process to develop updated mechanisms for global digital cooperation, using the options proposed by the Panel as a starting point. Mark the UN's 75th anniversary in 2020 with a “Global Commitment for Digital Cooperation”.
- Take a multi-stakeholder “systems” approach to cooperation and regulation that is adaptive, inclusive and fit for purpose for the digital age.

About the Panel

The scale, spread and speed of change brought about by digital technology are unprecedented, while the mechanisms for international cooperation and governance have failed to keep pace. In response, in July 2018 the UN Secretary-General convened the High-level Panel on Digital Cooperation to advance global multi-stakeholder dialogue on how we can work better together to realize the potential of digital technologies for advancing human wellbeing while mitigating the risks.

“Digital cooperation” refers to the many ways in which governments, the private sector, civil society, international organisations, the technical and academic communities cooperate to address the societal, ethical, legal and economic impacts of digital technologies in order to maximise benefits to society and minimise harms.

The High-level Panel is the most diverse a UN Secretary-General has ever convened; it is comprised of 20 individuals from government, private industry, civil society, academia and the technical community, representing a range of disciplines, geographies and ages. Melinda Gates and Jack Ma serve as Co-Chairs.

The Panel consulted widely across regions, demographics, sectors and disciplines. Over a period of 9 months, Panel members and the Panel Secretariat engaged with over 4,000 individuals representing 104 states, 80 international organisations, 203 private sector companies, 125 civil society organisations, 33 technical organisations, and 188 think tanks and academic institutions. They conducted study visits to tech hubs in China, India, Israel, Kenya and Silicon Valley, participated in digital policy events, organised thematic workshops, held virtual meetings with subject-matter experts, launched an open call for contributions, and held briefings for various stakeholder communities as well as virtual townhall meetings open to the public.

The full report and further information about the Panel is available at: www.digitalcooperation.org.

CONTACT

Anoush Rima Tatevossian, Senior Communications Officer

anoush@digitalcooperation.org