



## 7TH REGIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON

**Effective Governance and Digital Transformation for Accelerating Progress  
towards the 2030 Agenda**

*Promoting Sustainable, Resilient, and Innovative Solutions*

## Outcome Summary

**19 October 2023, Incheon, Republic of Korea**



## **OUTCOME SUMMARY OF THE 7TH REGIONAL SYMPOSIUM**

19 OCTOBER 2023, INCHEON, REPUBLIC OF KOREA

The 7th Regional Symposium was attended by 1,734 participants, with 357 attending in person and 1,377 joining virtually. The event featured a High-level Opening Session, a Setting-the-Scene session, four thematic sessions, three special sessions, a youth session, two learning labs, a side event, and a Local Governance and Partnerships Forum. These sessions delved into themes ranging from strategic foresight for forward-looking policies, digital data governance for accelerating digital transformation, innovation and digital transformation at the local level, engaging youth for the acceleration of the 2030 Agenda, promoting women's leadership and gender-responsive public governance, results-oriented climate action, risk-informed governance, behavioral science and changing mindsets of civil servants, to local governance and partnerships.

The core messages conveyed during the 7th Regional Symposium include:

- Effective governance and strengthening public institutions are critical for accelerated and sustainable actions through a whole of government and whole of society approach.
- We are facing a stern situation as the 2030 Agenda is at peril and the world could face a big miss across the Goals if current trend continues. We need a rescue plan with systems transformation through levers and entry points to bring it back to the track.
- The lingering impact of COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, and war and conflict have aggravated the situation. Developing countries and the poorest and most vulnerable are bearing brunt.

## **SETTING THE SCENE SESSION: THE MID-WAY POINT TOWARDS 2030: FROM GOVERNMENT COMMITMENTS TO SUSTAINED ACTION TO DELIVER THE SDGS: KEY ACCELERATORS AND INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS**

- Urgent and coordinated action is imperative to reverse the current trends and prevent the SDGs from becoming unattainable by 2030.
- Harnessing innovation, technology, and transformative interventions, along with strengthening partnerships and addressing common impediments, is crucial to accelerate progress and achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
- Climate change poses an imminent risk to human development, with digital data and technologies offering effective means for mitigation and adaptation; digital technologies and data are also vital for pursuing sustainable development and supporting the 2030 Agenda, provided that measures are taken to ensure broad access and mitigate associated risks.

## **THEMATIC SESSION I. STRATEGIC FORESIGHT FOR FORWARD-LOOKING POLICIES AND PROGRAMMES IN THE CONTEXT OF UNCERTAINTY**

- Strategic foresight is essential for addressing the complex and interdependent challenges of the SDGs, fostering resilience, and building adaptive strategies. It involves anticipating future disruptions, engaging stakeholders, and understanding the SDGs as a holistic system.
- To achieve the SDGs, there is a need for widespread investment in foresight capacity, active engagement from decision-makers, and the promotion of gender parity in strategic foresight to respond adequately to future challenges. Additionally, the UN plays a crucial role in embedding strategic foresight through capacity building.

## **SPECIAL SESSION 1. UN DESA CURRICULUM ON GOVERNANCE FOR THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS – COUNTRY EXPERIENCES FROM MONGOLIA, MOZAMBIQUE, THE PHILIPPINES, SRI LANKA**

- UN DESA Curriculum on Governance for the SDGs is an important tool for capacity development and Member States should customize and contextualize the Training Toolkits for their specific needs and demands. The action planning with clearly defined objectives and roles of responsible agencies with timeline is important to ensure impact on the ground.

## **THEMATIC SESSION II. DIGITAL DATA GOVERNANCE TO ACCELERATE DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION**

- The exponential growth of data and data economy and the emerging knowledge society makes it a pressing policy priority to establish national data governance strategy and roadmap. The development of digital data governance is a critical component in accelerating digital government transformation worldwide.
- Governments must establish effective data governance frameworks to address data management, privacy, and security challenges, which are essential for harnessing the potential of digital technologies.
- Digital data governance, with its four major pillars and emphasis on data integration, partnerships, open data, and data use for public value, plays a crucial role in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and requires global collaboration to address cross-border data flows while upholding human rights and inclusivity.

## **THEMATIC SESSION III. INNOVATION AND DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION AT THE LOCAL LEVEL FOR BETTER PUBLIC SERVICE DELIVERY**

- The adoption of digital technologies and innovative approaches at the local level is crucial for enhancing public service delivery. Smart governance, well developed ICT infrastructure, and smart solutions like the Smart Plant of Huamao in Shanghai of China demonstrate how digital transformation can lead to cost reductions, energy savings, and increased efficiency, improving the quality of life for citizens.
- The global trend of urbanization, particularly in Africa and Asia, is leading to a growing urban population. Urban residents are more likely to use the internet, highlighting the importance of digital services in cities. However, there are disparities between urban and rural areas, emphasizing the need for digital inclusion strategies.
- Key steps to achieve local digital transformation, include fostering political will, building infrastructure, investing in digital literacy, and embracing innovation. These initiatives aim to empower local governments and improve public service delivery, ultimately benefiting the entire nation.

## **YOUTH SESSION. LEVERAGING DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION FOR THE ACCELERATION OF THE 2030 AGENDA WITH, AND FOR YOUTH**

- Youth can play an instrumental role in innovation and digital transformation. Governments should create an enabling conditions to boost the effective youth participation as well as equip young people with digital skills and knowledge.

## **LEARNING LAB 2. HARNESSING STRATEGIC FORESIGHT FOR EFFECTIVE GOVERNANCE**

Behavioral science and changing mindsets are important for innovation and public sector transformation. Transformational leadership is essential to foster innovation.

## **SPECIAL SESSION 2. PROMOTING WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP AND GENDER-RESPONSIVE PUBLIC GOVERNANCE TO ACHIEVE THE SDGS**

- The Asia-Pacific region is falling behind in achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with a significant gap in internet access and mobile phone ownership. Efforts are being made in the Asia-Pacific region to bridge the digital divide by improving internet access and mobile phone ownership and promoting gender equality through enhancing digital skills and ICT literacy, with a focus on addressing issues like gender-based violence and the gender digital divide.
- Institutional and policy framework should be in place for gender equality in public administration, and there should be accountability mechanisms in monitoring gender equality policies.

## **SIDE EVENT. INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF CORPORATE ESG MANAGEMENT SUPPORT**

- The proposed Basic ESG Act in Korea seeks to provide clear guidelines support and institutional backing for ESG implementation in companies emphasizing the importance of sustainable development through ESG practices.

## **THEMATIC SESSION IV. RESULTS-ORIENTED CLIMATE ACTION THROUGH EFFECTIVE POLICY-MAKING PROCESSES, INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS, AND MULTILEVEL GOVERNANCE APPROACHES**

- Climate action results can be achieved through efficient policy-making, institutional arrangements, and multilevel governance approaches.
- Parliamentarians worldwide have responded to the climate emergency by creating new climate laws, promoting net-zero targets, and implementing scrutiny and accountability mechanisms.

- Climate actions in developing countries need enhanced financial support, forged partnerships, human resources and knowledge.
- Climate change in cities is one of UN-Habitat's top priorities, and part of the New Urban Agenda and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction.
- Urban laws and urban governance define the management and development of the urban environment, and they have an important role to play in increasing cities' resilience and in helping cities reduce their emissions.

### **SPECIAL SESSION III. RISK-INFORMED SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: ACCELERATING RESILIENCE IN CITIES AND LOCAL COMMUNITIES THROUGH DIGITAL GOVERNMENT INNOVATION**

- With today's global and local challenges, such as climate change, socio-economic changes, migration, and other factors influencing or contributing to sustainable development, rural spaces should be developed considering the transition to a green, low carbon, and circular bioeconomy.
- Enhancing disaster resilience involves involving the entire community in policymaking and planning, fortifying institutions, coordination, communication, and risk-informed decision-making through innovative technologies, financial capabilities, and collaborations with various stakeholders, including national and local governments, NGOs, and CSOs.
- The utilization of frontier technologies, particularly ICTs such as AI, drones, and big data analytics, offers significant opportunities to enhance risk-informed governance by improving data collection, analysis, application, and data governance.
- There is an increasing acknowledgment of the need to invest in "Early Warning for All." We must expedite progress and translate the political declaration of the Mid-Term Review of the Sendai Framework into action. This involves two crucial aspects: enhancing governance understanding regarding risk and the importance of prioritizing disaster risk reduction a key dimension of promoting local action.

## LOCAL GOVERNANCE AND PARTNERSHIP FORUM

- The thematic focus of this Forum is to delve into the critical roles in engaging partnerships among national research institutions (NRLs), local and regional governments (LRGs), national government ministries (NGMs), and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) for SDG implementation at the local level.
- In disaster-prone Asia and the Pacific holistic innovation is crucial to safeguard development gains. A bottom-up approach empowering local communities, leverages local knowledge and values for context-specific sustainable climate adaptation and resilience.
- To "Localize the SDGs," five key enablers include establishing a supportive policy and institutional framework, developing robust data ecosystems, fostering multi-stakeholder engagement, securing adequate financing, and promoting innovation in the implementation of sustainable development goals at the local level.
- Local Action Moves the World! The road to sustainability runs through the world's towns and cities. Local Solutions to Global Challenges.

## THE WAY FORWARD

- The SDGs remain our best roadmap for a better world. We still have hope to turn the trend but our time is limited. We need to take urgent actions with strong political leadership and will. The cost of inaction is too big for us.
- Partnerships will be key to action over the next seven years. We should mobilize all resources and with all-hands-on-deck for SDG implementation.
- Learning from each other and sharing knowledge among countries through different platforms like this Symposium is important to replicate and emulate.
- UN agencies should invest more in enhancing capacities of developing countries including supporting their efforts in policy coherence, building resilience and climate action, and advancing digital transformation.
- Foster national ownership and local actions to strengthen partnerships for effective local-level SDG implementation.



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United Nations Project Office on Governance  
Division for Public Institutions and Digital Government  
United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs