

Summary of Side Event

Roundtable on Generative AI for the SDGs

4 May 2023

13h15 – 14h30 EST

Background on the event

The "Generative AI for the SDGs: Friend or Foe, Hope or Hype?" roundtable was hosted by the Broadband Commission, ITU, Global Partnerships Forum, and the Permanent Mission of Romania, and was co-moderated by Mr Amir Dossal, Broadband Commissioner and Founder & Chairman of the Global Partnerships Forum, and Ms Sinead Bovell, Founder of WAYE. In the first portion of the session, speakers discussed the potential use-cases of generative AI for accelerating progress on the SDGs, the associated risks, and necessary safeguards to protect users. In the second portion, speakers shifted focus to potential collaborations and partnerships for shaping future policies and frameworks that maximize the use and safety of generative AI.

Key Issues discussed

- **Leveraging AI for SDG Advancement:** AI can be harnessed to generate innovative solutions, analyze complex data, track progress on SDG indicators, and identify patterns that can inform and support progress towards the SDGs as well as facilitate evidence-based decision-making and targeted actions. However, it is important to recognize the importance of a more diverse tech sector so that such technologies can be developed in an environment that is more attuned to the array of opportunities and risks.
- **AI Transformation in Developing Countries:** Developing countries face challenges in generative AI adaptation related to digital ecosystem divides, limited accessibility due to lack of digital skills, unreliable electricity and internet speeds, and affordability of internet access and devices/handsets
- **Ethical approach:** To leverage the potential of Generative AI, stakeholders must come together around a shared vision that centers on ethics, transparency, and accountability
- **Information Ecosystems:** Generative AI has the potential to assist malicious actors in generating scams and malware, as well as amplifying biased, racist or sexist content and misinformation. The lack of data availability from disconnected regions contributes to informatic bias.
- **Language Disparity:** Generative AI's translation capabilities are underutilized in thousands of languages, particularly in indigenous and low-resource languages.

Key conclusions

- **Addressing connectivity and affordability in developing countries:** It is essential to prioritize efforts to improve digital infrastructure, expand connectivity, and ensure affordable access to technology and handsets in developing countries. This will help bridge the digital divide and ensure that no one is left behind in benefiting from AI advancements.

- **Building trust and developing ethical frameworks:** Governments, organizations, and industry stakeholders should collaborate to establish ethical frameworks and guidelines that promote transparency, accountability, and fairness in AI systems and build trust among users.
- **Implementing regulations that enable responsible benefit:** Regulations should be designed to strike a balance between promoting innovation and safeguarding against potential risks. It is important to have a regulatory framework that encourages responsible use of AI and continuous testing, while avoiding excessive restrictions that could hinder technological advancements.
- **Multistakeholder efforts and capacity building:** Collaboration among multiple stakeholders, including governments, industry, civil society, and academia, is crucial for addressing AI challenges effectively. Efforts should focus on deploying AI solutions and developing capacity building for front line workers to address real-world problems and benefit communities on the ground.