Concept Note: UNDESA–CBAS SIDS Knowledge-sharing and Briefing Event

On Big Data and Digital Tools for Sustainable Development in SIDS

2025 HLPF Side Event

Date & Time: Friday, 18 July 2025 | 3:00 PM – 4:30 PM

Venue: S-1520, 15th Floor Meeting Room, UN Secretariat Building

Organizers:

United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA)

International Research Center of Big Data for Sustainable Development Goals (CBAS)

Background and Rationale:

As the 2030 Agenda enters its final stretch, accelerating progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) requires more effective use of science, technology, and innovation (STI). In response, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), in partnership with the International Research Center of Big Data for Sustainable Development Goals (CBAS), has deepened collaboration through a series of strategic engagements, including the follow-ups of the 2024 STI Forum's session on building ecosystems for science, technology and innovation to drive economic growth and sustainable development in Small Island Developing States (SIDS), a capacity building workshop for SIDS in Beijing on utilizing Big Earth Data for the SDGs, and recent technical discussions on building capacity and exploring resources for implementing STI4SDGs roadmaps held at UN ECA in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, which explores remote sensing technologies for the SDGs and closing STI financing gaps.

Building on these key moments, this dedicated Knowledge-sharing and Briefing Event aims to share practical experiences, technical contributions, and lessons learned from joint UN DESA–CBAS efforts, particularly regarding the use of Big Earth Data, and capacity development in Africa and SIDS, and to facilitate discussions and exchanges with SIDS representatives in New York. It will also preview upcoming capacity development

opportunities, including a 2025 Beijing workshop on using Big Data and digital tools for sustainable development in SIDS.

The event will aim to leverage the presence of CBAS partners who will participate in the 2025 HLPF, offering an opportunity for timely, in-person engagement with SIDS stakeholders, particularly as a bridge between past and upcoming activities. It will respond directly to SIDS requests by sharing progress on how these priorities are being addressed through UN DESA–CBAS collaboration. And it will also provide an informal space for knowledge-sharing on how Big Data, remote sensing, and digital tools can help meet SDG priorities, especially in data-scarce island contexts.

As part of DESA's inter-divisional collaboration, the event will also introduce early reflections on how strategic foresight and systems thinking can complement digital tools. These approaches can help SIDS governments navigate long-term risks, identify emerging opportunities, and build more coherent and resilient STI strategies.

Objectives:

1. Provide an update on UN DESA–CBAS collaboration, including recent milestones and future plans.
2. Share insights from past SIDS-focused capacity building efforts and ongoing regional STI4SDGs collaborations.
3. Explore new and emerging applications of Big Data, remote sensing, and digital tools for national SDG implementation.
4. Encourage feedback and co-design for future initiatives tailored to SIDS priorities.
5. Promote inter-Divisional collaboration by engaging DESA's Statistics Division (big data) and DPIDG (foresight).

Substantive Focus Areas:

Leveraging Big Earth Data and Remote Sensing to Fill SDG Monitoring Gaps

Discussions will focus on CBAS's and other international partners' initiatives using Earth observation and AI technologies to address data gaps in SDG monitoring, particularly in climate-vulnerable and data-scarce contexts such as SIDS and LDCs. This is in response to growing demand for Earth observation tools to support VNR preparation and local resilience planning as identified in recent workshops.

Advancing Challenge-Led STI Roadmaps

CBAS and UN DESA experts will share insights on challenge-led roadmaps for accelerating SDG progress that integrate digital technologies, stakeholder participation, and systems thinking. These include: fostering open data platforms, strengthening research on SDG synergies and trade-offs, and ensuring community engagement.

Exploring Strategic Foresight and Systems Thinking in STI and Sustainable Development

Strategic foresight and systems thinking help countries anticipate risks, align science, technology and innovation (STI) with long-term goals, and plan proactively in uncertain environments. Strategic foresight is defined as an organized and systematic process to engage with uncertainty regarding the future" ([CEPA strategy guidance note on strategic foresight](#), 2021). It includes "the capacity to think systematically about the future to inform decision making today." By systematically exploring future possibilities, these approaches support the development of anticipatory policies, enable better crisis preparedness, and foster innovative strategies to improve people's well-being amid complex and rapidly changing conditions.

Capacity Development and Regional Exchange

Building on recent workshops in Beijing and Addis Ababa, the event will discuss effective models for regional training, localized innovation, and youth engagement in STI.

Fostering Multilateral and Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration

The event will offer a space to explore international initiatives, such as the Digital SDGs Programme, and how they can support localized implementation in SIDS through shared infrastructure and co-investment.

Target Audience:

Permanent Missions of SIDS, UN system entities, data experts, and partners engaged in STI and SDG implementation.

Programme

Time	Agenda Item
03:00 PM – 3:10 PM	**Opening Remarks** — UN DESA and CBAS Representatives - Ms. Astra Bonini, Chief, IPAB/DSDG, DESA - Prof. GUO Huadong, Director General, CBAS
03:10 PM – 3:30 PM	**Overview**: insights from SIDS-focused capacity-building efforts and potential for using foresight and geospatial datasets for national Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) Roadmaps - Mr. Wei Liu, DSDG, DESA - Mr. Luis Gerardo Gonzalez Morales, UNSD, DESA - Ms. Adriana Alberti and Ms. Azeema Adam, DPIDG, DESA
03:30 PM – 3:40 PM	**Presentations**: Highlights from 2024 Beijing Workshop & Workshop in Addis Ababa - Mr. Sai Navoti, DSDG, DESA - Prof. Gretchen Kalonji, CBAS
03:40 PM – 3:45 PM	**CBAS Presentation**: Data and Platforms to Support SDG Implementation in SIDS - Mr. Sun Zhongchang, CBAS
03:45 PM – 3:50 PM	**Update**: 2025 Capacity Building Workshop in Beijing and SIDS Tailored Support Plans - Mr. Wang Lei, CBAS
03:50 PM – 4:25 PM	**Open Discussion**: Member State Reflections and Suggestions for Future Work
04:25 PM – 4:30 PM	**Closing Remarks and Next Steps** by DESA, Summary and Invitations for Engagement - Mr. Sai Navoti, DSDG, DESA