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Evaluation

Management response to the evaluation of UNDP support to the digitalization of public services

I. Introduction

1. In 2023, the Independent Evaluation Office evaluated UNDP support to the digitalization of public services (DP/2023/9), in line with its multi-year workplan for 2022-2025. The objectives were to assess the role and contribution of UNDP in promoting digital transformation to improve public services; review the organization's capacity to enable digital systems and support digital transformation at the country level; identify the factors that have impacted the UNDP contribution; and identify lessons for future UNDP work in support of digital transformation in the public sector.
2. The primary focus of the evaluation was to analyse how the UNDP integrated programming approach, enabled by digitalization and innovation, contributed to the overarching objectives of strengthening the resilience of public sector institutions and accelerating sustainable development.
3. The evaluation understands digitalization of public services as being multi-faceted, and aiming to achieve the following objectives:
 - (a) Promote digital transformation and innovation within the public sector to enhance efficiency and effectiveness;
 - (b) Increase the resilience of the public sector to adapt to changes and challenges, particularly in the digital realm;
 - (c) Take into account the specificities of diverse contexts to ensure that digitalization efforts are locally relevant and culturally sensitive;
 - (d) Address the digital divide by focusing on inclusivity, particularly for women and those at risk of being left behind, in line with a human rights-based and gender-sensitive approach;
 - (e) Leverage the comprehensive UNDP programme portfolio to maximize its comparative advantage in promoting digitalization;
 - (f) Ensure that UNDP is well positioned to provide effective support to digitalization initiatives by assessing organizational readiness.



4. The evaluation assessed UNDP programmes for the period 2015-2023, spanning three strategic plans (2014-2017; 2018-2021; and 2022-2025). It focuses on eight programme streams to assess the extent to which UNDP approaches have contributed to the digitalization of public services.

5. Data were collected through a combination of methods including detailed portfolio analysis; 15 country case studies and in-depth studies; digital ecosystem analyses conducted in three regions (Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean); a benchmarking study of other multilateral organizations; and semi-structured key informant interviews. Protocols were developed for each method to ensure rigour in data collection and adherence to the United Nations Evaluation Group Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation. The evaluation engaged 25 country offices to explore national-level digital transformation. An external multi-stakeholder consultation process was also employed, involving a range of development actors at the global, regional and country levels. In total, 410 persons were consulted for the evaluation, of whom 70 per cent were from stakeholder groups outside UNDP. The evaluation synthesized 140 independent evaluations of 64 country programmes, using a number of different lenses: contribution analysis, digital ecosystem analysis, analysis from the perspective of leaving no one behind and gender analysis.

6. At the heart of the UNDP mandate is a focus on transforming the conditions of people living in poverty and those who are excluded and marginalized. As a result, “leaving no one behind” was established as one of the organization’s three overarching directions of change in the Strategic Plan, 2022-2025. As the halfway mark for implementation of the Strategic Plan approaches, the findings and recommendations of this evaluation are both timely and valuable.

7. These findings and recommendations will help guide the strategic direction of the organization in supporting the digitalization of public services and inform UNDP efforts to deliver the objectives of the Strategic Plan and its signature solutions. Even as the evaluation was concluding, UNDP was utilizing the momentum that it is developing around the concept of digital public infrastructure to drive a more holistic and strategic coherence to the role of digitalization in enabling delivery of public services. The findings of the evaluation will further guide the development of this cross-cutting approach and support the implementation of the overall digital strategy and of the gender strategy and crisis offer, and improve the UNDP contribution to the broader support of the United Nations system for digital transformation.

II. The global development context

8. Despite important progress, particularly in the first five years after the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals, an era of polycrisis – including the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, climate change and conflict – has pushed many of the Goals off track. Attempts to “build back better” following the pandemic have been hampered by debt burdens and conflict in several regions which in turn have affected global supply chains and instigated energy and cost-of-living crises. These issues are exacerbated by the changing climate and ever more frequent extreme weather events. At the midpoint on the way to 2030, focused and urgent efforts are needed to achieve these essential targets. In this context, digitalization has a vital role to play.

9. Digitalization is changing the way societies prioritize and allocate resources and how goods and services are delivered, how people engage with their governments and each other, and how global conversations take place. According to the Sustainable Development Goals Digital Acceleration Agenda, developed jointly by UNDP and the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and unveiled at the 2023 Sustainable Development Goals Summit, digital technology has the potential to directly benefit 119 of the 169 targets, including critical areas such as climate action, education, hunger and poverty. At the same time, 2.6 billion people – more than one third of the world’s population – still lack access to the Internet, 96 per cent of

them in developing countries. Moreover, while digital transformation opens innovative avenues to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, it raises new concerns around privacy and protection, and can widen existing divides and discriminations, affecting marginalized groups and individuals the most.

10. UNDP has supported information and communication technology (ICT) and digitalization initiatives for over two decades, with a notable increase in focus since 2015. Its first digital strategy (2019-2021), marked a significant milestone, laying the groundwork for a more comprehensive approach to digital transformation. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated these efforts, necessitating rapid digital responses to unprecedented global challenges. The UNDP Strategic Plan, 2022-2025 identified digitalization as one of the three key enablers to amplify development outcomes. The second digital strategy, covering the same period, marked a further shift in the organization's approach, advocating for a more holistic, ecosystem-based and risk-aware route forward, premised on clearly articulated human-rights principles.

11. Over the past two years, UNDP has identified digital public infrastructure as a critical catalyst for countries to advance their digital transformation. This relatively new concept is rooted in a human rights-centred and inclusive framework, aiming to ensure that digital legal identity, digital financial services and data interoperability serve as instruments for social justice, gender equality and inclusivity across a broad range of development areas such as social protection, access to justice, energy governance and carbon trade. By unlocking innovation and value at scale, this approach strengthens local digital ecosystems and empowers countries to exercise agency over their digital journeys, ensuring an equitable digital transformation that aligns with human rights standards and offers opportunities for all segments of society.

12. UNDP has demonstrated its leadership in digital public infrastructure in a variety of ways. In 2023 alone, UNDP was a knowledge partner for the Indian G20 Presidency, published a compendium and playbook for digital public infrastructure and co-led one of the high-impact initiatives of the 2023 Summit focused on this issue. At the country level, UNDP is supporting over 20 countries at various stages of their digital transformation journey, from early readiness assessment and strategy design to implementation and scaling-up. These initiatives illustrate the organization's clear position at the forefront of digital development.

III. UNDP support to digitalization of public services

13. Its broad development mandate, experience, country presence and ability to work with multiple levels of government equip UNDP to support a holistic approach to digital transformation.

14. Just as the period under review, from 2015 to 2023, has been transformative for the digitalization of public services globally, so UNDP has evolved its response and approaches to meet changing demands. Prior to the adoption of the 2019 digital strategy and the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, while UNDP had several large-scale e-governance initiatives in countries such as Bangladesh, India and Indonesia, the majority of digitalization activities focused on specific ICT initiatives rather than whole-of-government and whole-of-society digital transformation. Globally, UNDP and its United Nations partners, through the United Nations Legal Identity Agenda Task Force, supported Member States in strengthening their legal identity ecosystems to ensure that everyone has the right to be recognized as a person before the law and to access public and private services. This work has been foundational in guiding UNDP support to countries and in-country advocacy and partnerships to ensure that digital identity systems are well governed and their design informed by civil society.

15. UNDP launched its first digital strategy in mid-2019 to support digital transformation within the organization. Building on a long history of project-level digital support for partners, the strategy represented a systematic transformation to organize and reimagine the way UNDP

served its partners and operated its systems and processes. The 2019 strategy proved to be prescient given the dramatic acceleration in digital transformation that occurred in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Drawing on newly established capacities within the Chief Digital Office (established in 2019), UNDP supported over 60 partner governments to deploy critical digital technologies to maintain business continuity. In the first two years of the pandemic, UNDP adopted over 580 digital solutions in 82 countries, including 96 data-collection systems, 71 e-commerce systems, 61 e-learning platforms and 149 e-governance systems.

16. The evaluation acknowledges the critical role UNDP played during the pandemic in strengthening national digital ecosystems to ensure the continued provision of essential public services and support rapid expansion of social protection systems, especially in contexts where stronger national legal identity systems were already in place. UNDP was actively involved in implementing specific digital solutions and advising governments on taking a whole-of-society approach to digitalization.

17. UNDP has continued to develop new capabilities in digital programming to accelerate these efforts in response to growing demand from partner governments. Initiatives led by the Chief Digital Office, including the Digital Advocates Network, the digital readiness assessment tool and new digital programming guidance, have complemented ongoing efforts such as a comprehensive information technology transformation and increased focus on issues of digitalization across the Global Policy Network. The accelerator lab network had a positive impact on the ability of many country offices to respond to the needs of government counterparts quickly and with agility. For example, accelerator labs contributed a large portion of the digital solution responses to the COVID-19 pandemic and often provided much-needed capacity for digital innovations at the country level.

18. The digital strategy for 2022-2025 focuses on maintaining and accelerating the momentum, placing greater emphasis on the need for a rights-based and intentionally inclusive approach to UNDP digital work. In addition, the strategy outlines a two-pronged approach, to both embedding digital work across the UNDP thematic areas of work and supporting countries with cross-cutting initiatives to build inclusive digital ecosystems in support of national digital transformation.

19. The UNDP knowledge partnership with the Government of India during its Presidency of the G20 resulted in the declaration of the G20 Digital Ministers describing digital public infrastructure as a combination of shared systems with robust, responsive and accountable governance. Two global knowledge products were co-created with the G20 and countries from the Global South: a compendium which provides a global snapshot of the potential of inclusive digital public infrastructure across all 17 Sustainable Development Goals; and a playbook offering practical resources for countries to build inclusive and rights-based digital public infrastructure. This leadership was further validated at the 2023 Summit, where digital public infrastructure was acknowledged as one of the Secretary-General's high-impact initiatives, underscoring its transformative potential in fostering equitable and sustainable development globally. The use of the digital public infrastructure approach as a means of bringing strategic coherence to UNDP digitalization efforts has accelerated significantly in the months since the evaluation concluded.

20. In the wider digital ecosystem, UNDP has led global discussions on embedding safeguarding principles in technologies such as digital public goods; and shaped conversations on principles of openness, interoperability and scalability that enable countries to establish inclusive and adaptable digital ecosystems to respond to local needs, as well as crisis and other considerations. As co-host of the Digital Public Goods Alliance, UNDP stewards this multi-stakeholder initiative to accelerate the attainment of the Goals by facilitating the discovery, development, use of and investment in digital public goods that strengthen national and local

digital ecosystems, and countries' agency over core public sector capabilities in tech deployments.

21. This initiative complements other efforts by UNDP, such as the creation of the UNDP-ITU Joint Facility for Global Digital Capacity. This joint facility aligns with the Secretary-General's road map for digital cooperation, aiming to reduce duplication and build alignment in digital solutions for sustainable development.

22. UNDP has significantly advanced its efforts in building inclusive data ecosystems through strategic partnerships with German Development Cooperation and with the United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation. This collaboration led to the launch of the Data to Policy Navigator and its associated Virtual Data to Policy Network, both of which give policymakers globally access to previously unknown levels of information and expertise. They offer a step-by-step guide, supplemented by a variety of practical global examples, for integrating data into policy and programme development. A key component of this initiative is the Data to Policy Network, a dynamic virtual hub where policymakers can share knowledge, engage in learning opportunities and foster collaboration, including through South-South and triangular (South-South-North) cooperation.

23. Despite this significant progress and increasingly strategic approach, a number of barriers persist. As the evaluation report highlights, issues of interoperability between different systems and platforms pose significant challenges. There is a need for a more cohesive strategy focusing on user-centric design, digital legal identity and data interoperability. As noted above, in the months since data collection for the evaluation concluded, digital public infrastructure has become foundational to the UNDP approach to digitalization. The scale and scope of digital transformation globally necessitates approaches to maximize the opportunities to accelerate progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals and reduce the risks that digital technologies bring. The conventional approach is to create specific solutions to specific problems that work in limited contexts only. An alternative approach is to think of digital public infrastructure as a combination of the right technology architecture, transparent and accountable local digital ecosystems and participatory governance, which together drive sustainable innovation and scale.

24. In the meantime, UNDP recognizes the proliferation of numerous registries, platforms and systems that are not all interoperable. This is not only a technical issue, but in many cases is also influenced by lack of holistic strategies, weak government capacities to select and procure the right solutions, including issues of transparency and integrity. The role of UNDP in providing strategic advice and quality assurance in these processes is therefore becoming more important.

25. UNDP has been at the forefront of developing a model governance framework specifically for digital legal identification (ID) systems. While digital identity improves access to public services and contributes to their efficient delivery, it gives governments greater surveillance capabilities and more power to collect personal data, which may raise concerns among populations. This framework aims to guide the establishment of systems that are both inclusive and respectful of individual rights, also recognizing the crucial role of civil society in accountability and oversight. It builds on the United Nations system's long-standing experience with legal identity in its management ecosystem. The governance framework serves as a reference point for government partners, allowing them to adapt it to their specific contexts and circumstances. Proper governance ensures that stakeholders are both aware of the rules and committed to adhering to them, thereby ensuring accountability for shared infrastructure and streamlining decision-making on resource allocation.

26. Ensuring that identity management systems work in tandem and not in isolation is critical for enabling individuals to access a wide range of services seamlessly and securely across different domains and geographic locations, while maintaining control over their personal

information. This requires sharing and integrating data among identity management systems, reducing duplication of efforts and improving accuracy, efficiency and reliability. When identity management interoperability of this kind is in place, any individual receiving state, agency or government services can be assured that the person is entitled to receive the services and can – under strict data protection guidelines – move between different agencies with both parties knowing it is the same person.

27. More broadly, UNDP has been proactive in addressing the complexities surrounding governance and rights issues in digital transformation. It has launched the universal safeguards framework for digital public infrastructure in collaboration with the Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Technology. This initiative contributes to ensuring that digitalization is conducted in a manner that is rights-based, safe and inclusive.

28. Data privacy and the right to privacy have remained significant concerns in many countries, particularly where systems are vulnerable to cyberattacks, or where regulatory frameworks for personal or consumer privacy are not mature. While there have been positive advancements in civil registries and digital identity, data privacy remains a significant area of work that needs further attention.

29. The digital divide also remains a pressing concern, especially in the context of the leave no one behind principle and gender inclusivity. While strides have been made in middle-income countries, there is a noticeable gap in least developed countries (LDCs) and crisis situations. UNDP is committed to a more comprehensive and sustained strategy to ensure that digitalization efforts are inclusive and equitable.

30. UNDP recognizes that women's full participation and decision-making in innovation, technological change and digitalization are a prerequisite for the delivery of transformative impact in societies and to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. The digital age can provide new opportunities for women's economic empowerment; unlock women's access to essential digital services, including for education and health care; and increase their civic and political engagement and influence. Yet gaps in institutional and individual capacities, and in the structures and space for women's agency in harnessing digital advancements, are huge, reinforcing digital divides and compromising the achievement of gender equality by 2030.

31. Digitalization is explicitly prioritized in the UNDP gender equality strategy, 2022-2025 and is relevant across all of the signature solutions. Digitalization is recognized as an enabler of the overall strategy, which highlights the need to expand access to digital assets and close digital divides to remove barriers experienced by women related to availability, affordability and skills. This includes support to women's increased access to digital technologies, digital finance, e-commerce and digital value chains. In addition, by extending gender-responsive digital public and financial services and using digital tools for income generation and entrepreneurship, UNDP can promote women's economic empowerment. The capacity of States to recognize and address digital gender gaps is key. The UNDP Gender Equality Seal for Public Institutions, building public sector capacities for gender equality in 94 public institutions across 23 sectors and 30 countries to date, is one concrete channel.

IV. Recommendations

Recommendation 1. Building on its ongoing work in strengthening digital public infrastructure, UNDP should advance user-focused design and streamlined digital offerings for key digitalization drivers such as digital legal identity, digital financial services and data interoperability.

32. UNDP fully accepts the recommendation to strengthen its support for key drivers of digitalization, such as those mentioned above. While the importance of a holistic and

interoperable approach was not well understood in global practice until relatively recently, the UNDP approach has evolved and now employs a whole-of-government/whole-of-society perspective. The digital public infrastructure framework is deeply rooted in a human rights-centred and inclusive approach to ensure that digital transformation is not just efficient but also equitable, aligned with human rights standards and offering opportunities for all segments of society. UNDP will strengthen advocacy efforts and provide platforms for engaging stakeholders and building partnerships in the design and implementation of people-centric and rights-based digital public infrastructure. The focus will be on streamlining digital offerings in key areas such as digital legal identity, digital financial services and data interoperability. By convening experts, policymakers and civil society, UNDP aims to accelerate the adoption of best practices and innovative solutions that are aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals.

33. UNDP is committed to achieving Sustainable Development Goal target 16.9, legal identity for all, and the digitization of legal identity systems is seen as a key enabler. Digital legal identity and data interoperability not only promote the registration of people and close the global identity gap, but also increase the efficiency and effectiveness of public service delivery. These systems further unlock avenues for innovation across the entire ecosystem, including the private sector and civil society. However, UNDP recognizes the risks of digitizing legal identity ecosystems and enhancing data interoperability. Therefore, its interventions in this area have been, and will continue to be, human rights-centred, ensuring that all human rights, particularly around data protection and privacy, are adequately protected.

34. UNDP will continue to leverage global partnerships to strengthen this approach;¹ institutionalize engagement with civil society organizations (CSOs) to increase capacities for quality assurance of programming and will develop a governance framework for data exchange in the digital space.

Recommendation 2. UNDP has successfully supported digitalization initiatives in the health and social protection sectors. Given the critical role of digitalization in enhancing the efficiency of public services, UNDP should strategically and consistently engage with comprehensive programme options to enable sector-wide holistic digital transformation. UNDP should prioritize digitalization efforts at the local government level, to ensure the last-mile digitalization of public services.

35. UNDP fully accepts this recommendation. UNDP is actively working across thematic areas such as energy, climate, social protection, access to justice and health to integrate governance and gender equality principles in sectoral approaches to digital public infrastructure. This includes three layers of work across sectors:

- (a) A strong technical understanding of the technology ‘stack’ that facilitates interoperability, protections and controls, including local government stewardship of core public sector digital capabilities, where appropriate;
- (b) Robust and coordinated support on governance, especially the interactions of sectoral systems with overarching national regulatory frameworks such as on identity, data governance and artificial intelligence (AI) strategy;
- (c) A dynamic innovation and financing ecosystem that builds the capacities of local digital ecosystems to close the digital divide and create last-mile service delivery partnerships to ensure that digital public infrastructure is safe, inclusive and incorporates responsive grievance mechanisms.

36. UNDP will continue to strive towards a more ecosystem-based approach to responding to demand from country partners for strengthening the delivery of public services through whole-

¹ United Nations Development Programme, ‘UNDP and [Secure Identity Alliance] announce global partnership to improve digital identity systems,’ Press release, UNDP, New York, 17 October 2023, accessed 28 November 2023.

of-society efforts. This includes engaging national and subnational leaders, companies and digital innovators to develop digital ecosystems built on inclusivity, sustainability, accountability and rights. UNDP is enhancing the digital readiness assessment tool by incorporating readiness assessment at the local government level, such as the ongoing pilot in Kenya, which will inform actions for safe and inclusive access by a diverse range of stakeholders to services at the last mile, aligned to subnational priorities.

37. UNDP has a long history of engaging with community groups and civil society to enable people's access to and interactions with government and other service providers such as the private sector. Following the prioritization of last-mile inclusion in the high-impact initiative on digital public infrastructure sponsored by ITU and UNDP at the Sustainable Development Goal Summit, UNDP will work with community groups, including on issues of financing, to ensure that digitalization of services is designed and implemented for diverse contexts of low connectivity, low digital literacy and limited access to devices. This will inform the universal digital public infrastructure safeguards framework under development for global adoption by stakeholders and donors working on closing the digital divide.

38. Digitalization of public services (including at the subnational level) is a priority of the global programme to promote accountable, inclusive and effective governance, "Governance for People and Planet," one of the UNDPs global delivery mechanisms for governance assistance. The high-impact initiative on public sector transformation ('FutureGov') launched at the Sustainable Development Goals Summit will be another key global mechanism to strengthen integrated policy and programme support on governance and digitalization. Public service digitalization initiatives are important entry points and enablers for advancing government development priorities around inclusion and human rights. Digital transformation strategies for the public sector should include plans for human rights impact assessments.

39. UNDP will continue to improve and strengthen integrated policy and programming support from its Global Policy Network, together with the regional bureaux digital teams and resources and the Chief Digital Office. UNDP will leverage its Digital Advocate Networks, the communities of practice and other sectoral networks to facilitate cross-team engagement in the design of digitalization programming that results in new synergies, integrated portfolio approaches and strong governance in digitization of public services at the last mile.

40. UNDP will complete the development and launch of the digital guides on sector-wide digital enablement, providing critical guidance to country offices.

41. In this manner, UNDP will ensure that digital public services are designed, developed and implemented according to governance principles including regulatory frameworks, standard practices and policies that provide "guardrails" around the use of digital tools, so that they protect core principles including effectiveness, inclusion, participation and accountability, and support last-mile provision.

Recommendation 3. UNDP has put significant emphasis in its current and previous corporate frameworks to strengthen development accelerators and enablers through digitalization, innovation and development financing with positive dividends. While continuing and consolidating such an emphasis, UNDP should strengthen its efforts to enable development financing for sectoral efforts and digital transformation at the country level.

42. UNDP fully accepts the recommendation to put in place specific measures, processes and targets to enable development financing at the country level, including financing for digitalization and digital public infrastructure.

43. UNDP will continue to leverage its global leadership on development to steer global financing from government donors, philanthropic organizations and the private sector to areas of demand from countries, including playing the strategic role of integrator and facilitator of financing flows to countries with digital transformation projects. UNDP is active in a number of global discussions on directing official development assistance to countries working in this area, but more can be done.

44. Moreover, financing for digital transformation, including financing for the governance of digitalization, has only recently been better tracked, such as through the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

45. UNDP corporate tools such as the digital readiness assessment and integrated national financing frameworks include a strong focus on digital financing, including supporting governments and in-country donors to unlock financing to invest in areas that lead to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals and to more efficient resource allocations to avoid overlaps in funding. For example, the digital readiness assessments in Dominica and Trinidad and Tobago led to over \$35 million in financing from the World Bank for key areas identified by the assessments.

46. Throughout 2022 and 2023, UNDP has participated in the design and launch of a new Joint SDG Fund Digital Transformation Window, in partnership with other United Nations agencies and the European Union, to direct strategic financing for up to 23 countries on digital transformation areas, including digital public infrastructure readiness and capacity-building. UNDP, together with ITU, will provide technical support for countries applying to the digital window.

47. UNDP will enhance the consideration of digitalization in integrated national financing frameworks; strengthen partnerships, including with the United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF) in channelling more investments towards digital transformation at country level; and continue to strengthen capacities in this regard through its SDG Finance Academy.

Recommendation 4. In the LDCs, UNDP should adopt a targeted approach to strengthening digital public infrastructure and regulatory frameworks for improving public services and economic development.

48. UNDP fully accepts the recommendation to prioritize and adopt a targeted approach to digital public infrastructure and the regulatory frameworks for improving public services in LDCs. These countries face specific challenges when applying a digital public infrastructure approach due to lower levels of connectivity and a greater digital divide. Only 36 per cent of the population of LDCs uses the Internet, compared to the global average of 66 per cent. Resource constraints, regulatory bottlenecks and limited institutional readiness mean that LDCs are not able to take full advantage of their emerging markets for digital ecosystems.

49. As part of the LDC+5 process, UNDP has already committed to supporting 25 LDCs to implement inclusive and rights-based digital public infrastructure to accelerate national development priorities. UNDP is currently active in supporting digital transformation in around 20 LDCs with programmes related to digital public infrastructure, digital capacity and other digital transformation support. In addition, UNDP and partners have been creating guidance and resource materials with significant relevance for and content from LDCs, including *The DPI Approach: A Playbook* and *Accelerating the SDGs Through Digital Public Infrastructure: A Compendium of The Potential of Digital Public Infrastructure*. Moreover, UNCDF, with its focus on LDCs, offers support with respect to inclusive finance tools and knowledge.

50. UNDP will further identify the policy and institutional areas where support is most needed among LDCs to develop a differentiated approach to supporting digitalization efforts. As a

means of prioritizing digital public infrastructure in LDCs, UNDP will serve as a core partner in the ‘50-in-5’ campaign which seeks to support 50 countries in developing digital public infrastructure, with LDCs comprising up to half of the countries to be reached.

51. As part of its recognized leadership on digital development, UNDP will continue to engage with global groups such as the G7 and G20 to direct financing to LDCs. For example, building on its partnership with the Indian G20 Presidency in 2023, UNDP supported the design and launch of the One Future Alliance and Fund to support technical assistance in 75 countries of which at least 50 per cent are LDCs.

Recommendation 5. UNDP is well positioned to facilitate South-South and triangular cooperation for digital transformation and should strategically engage in enabling this.

52. UNDP fully accepts the recommendation to strategically engage in enabling South-South cooperation. UNDP will continue to strengthen its South-South cooperation initiatives to accelerate the development of additional capacities and lesson learning on digital transformation.

53. UNDP has already begun widely leveraging South-South cooperation to support digitalization efforts. Platforms such as the Data to Policy Navigator and Data Network are bringing practical cases of data use closer to decision makers outside high-income countries and facilitate knowledge exchanges among them. UNDP will serve as a core partner in the ‘50-in-5’ campaign together with the Digital Public Goods Alliance and with key partners such as the World Bank. The campaign features an exchange between ‘first mover’ countries, many from the Global South, and others in support of peer-to-peer exchange (including technical assistance).

54. Concerted efforts will be made to strengthen connection and integration between global partnerships and country-level programming. Through the high-impact initiative on public sector transformation, UNDP and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs will develop partnerships and facilitate technical assistance and learning between Member States, the World Bank and other organizations for more effective and inclusive digital transformations within wider public sector reforms. During the evaluation period UNDP, has begun to mobilize resources for increased South-South cooperation on the digital transformation of judicial institutions, which will continue to accelerate inclusive access to justice programming.

Recommendation 6. UNDP should support data privacy and legal identity management at the country level. UNDP programmes should incorporate the rights dimension in its legal identity support.

55. UNDP fully accepts this recommendation to support data security and legal identity management at the country level and to integrate the rights dimension into its support for legal identity. Human rights are at the centre of the UNDP approach to digital transformation and are a guiding principle in the UNDP digital strategy (2022-2025).

56. UNDP recognizes that human rights should be at the centre of legal identity management and that any risks to human rights, in particular to the right to privacy and data protection, need to be addressed at the design stage of the project to ensure that the interventions meet human rights standards and the UNDP social and environmental standards. A guide has been produced to assist Member States in drafting data protection legislation and in utilizing a model governance framework for digital legal identity. The importance of data security is also recognized and is typically addressed in countries in relation to legal, institutional (operational) and technological aspects. UNDP will strengthen and advance the integration of data security and legal identity by systematically incorporating the rights dimension through policy and programmatic guidance to country offices and partners.

Recommendation 7. UNDP should strengthen its support to bridging the digital gender divide at the policy level. UNDP should clarify resources that will be made available for implementing corporate gender strategies for an inclusive digitalization of public services.

57. UNDP fully accepts the recommendation to strengthen its support to bridge the digital gender divide and clarify resources made available to implement corporate gender strategies for inclusive digitalization. UNDP will work to strengthen partnerships with governments and the private sector on closing digital divides, with the objective of removing barriers related to availability, affordability and skills for women. In accordance with the gender equality strategy, 2022-2025, UNDP will support women's increased access to and use of digital technologies, digital finance, e-commerce and digital value chains.

58. UNDP is working to ensure that digitalization is an enabler for gender equality, including to prevent and respond to gender-based violence online, to leverage digital tools to close long-standing gender gaps and to build women's skills and leadership to help accelerate a gender-equal digital future. For instance, the gender social media monitoring tool leverages AI technologies to detect, alert and address gender disinformation and hate speech against women and girls.

59. Meanwhile, with its care georeferencing tool, UNDP and partners across Latin America are bringing digital solutions to tackle structural gender equality issues, fostering new ways to reduce women's unpaid care workload and increase opportunity for economic transformations that work for gender equality.

60. UNDP is exploring how digitalization can unlock women's economic empowerment. In Papua New Guinea, UNDP is building data capacity for climate and biodiversity planning at national and subnational levels with the objective of increasing livelihood opportunities for women in local communities. As part of this effort, UNDP will encourage country offices and regional hubs to articulate in their gender strategies a focus on bridging the digital divide and increasing women's access to digital technologies. UNDP will put in place measures to track investments in bridging the gender digital divide, so elevating awareness of the importance of gender-responsive digital strategies and solutions.

Recommendation 8. At both the country and global levels, UNDP should advocate to strengthen digital government measurement frameworks to assess e-service uptake and use. This data is essential to inform government efforts for inclusive services and accelerating last-mile efforts.

61. UNDP fully accepts the recommendation to advocate to strengthen digital government measurement frameworks to specifically assess e-service uptake and use.

62. In relation to the indices available, the United Nations E-Governance Development Index component on online services is measured at the country level and lacks the ability to be disaggregated, which is critical for ensuring inclusion and accelerating last-mile efforts. The human capital and telecommunications infrastructure components, however, have individual indicators that can be disaggregated by gender and other aspects.

63. UNDP will support advocacy for the E-Governance Development Index by advocating with United Nations teams working on these issues to coordinate efforts to provide improved disaggregated digital information. This will also help UNDP to better support government partners in integrating questions on uptake and usage of digital services within their measurement frameworks.

64. UNDP has developed a number of tools and indicators to better understand the status of digital transformation with a focus on inclusion, including gender inclusion. For example,

working with UNCDF, UNDP has developed the Inclusive Digital Economy Scorecard which has been implemented in 25 countries and will be expanded in 2023. The Women Inclusiveness Score, a sub-score of the overall scorecard, captures key components that can drive the level of inclusion of women in the digital economy. It considers indicators such as agencies promoting digital economy, status of infrastructure, ICT usage and ownership, gender gaps on innovation and digital products and gaps in skills and digital literacy. The data for this score are collected every year at the national level, with the aim of reflecting the national situation and allowing for active participation in the collection and ownership of the data.

65. The UNDP Digital Readiness Assessment has been implemented in more than 30 countries. These indices support the measurement of e-service use and uptake, particularly when it comes to those frequently excluded from service provision and those at the end of the last mile. The Digital Development Compass consolidates over 180 public data sets, including the E-Government Development Index and ITU Internet connectivity data, into interactive dashboards that align with the pillars of the UNDP Digital Development Framework. UNDP will continue to use these tools at the country level to improve the quality of analysis produced.

66. UNDP acknowledges the need to ensure that assessment of e-service uptake and use is built into programme design, implementation and monitoring. UNDP will review its programming guidance across the range of sectors in which it supports digitalization of public services to ensure that it addresses this aspect.

67. As co-lead of the high-impact initiative on public sector transformation, UNDP will advocate for, and support the use by governments of monitoring frameworks to inform public sector reforms, including digitalization. As a member and co-Chair of the Global Evaluation Initiative, UNDP will support the development of monitoring and evaluation tools to assess the utilization and relevance of digital services.

V. Future UNDP support to the digitalization of public services

68. Over the next four years, UNDP will continue to prioritize support to the digitalization of public services. Demand is growing rapidly from UNDP partners across regions on many issues, ranging from specific digital projects to policies and regulation. To meet this demand, UNDP will invest in building its capacity to be a key interlocutor and adviser, with the digital dimension built into all its work.

69. UNDP will focus on three interrelated areas in particular:

- (a) Continuing to develop the digital public infrastructure approach as the means of bringing strategic coherence to its work on digital transformation.
- (b) Persisting with work on the governance of digitalization to ensure that digital transformation is inclusive, rights-based, gender-sensitive and leaves no one behind.
- (c) Building a stronger digital and data ecosystem ready for future challenges such as the development and deployment of AI in the delivery of public services.

70. Over the past year, UNDP has identified digital public infrastructure as a key catalyst for countries to advance their digital transformation journeys. This relatively new concept puts UNDP ahead of the curve with respect to other United Nations agencies. The approach is deeply rooted in a human rights-centred and inclusive framework, aiming to ensure that digital legal identity, digital financial services and data interoperability serve as instruments for social justice, gender equality and inclusivity. The digital public infrastructure approach has gained considerable momentum in the wake of the Sustainable Development Goals Summit, where implementation of the approach was acknowledged as a high-impact initiative. The approach is more than a mere technological solution; it acts as a catalyst for systemic change. By unlocking innovation and value at scale, the approach strengthens national and subnational digital

ecosystems and empowers countries to exercise agency over their digital journeys, ensuring an equitable digital transformation that aligns with human rights standards and offers opportunities for all segments of society.

71. UNDP will continue to engage actively in relation to the so-called ‘twin technology’ challenge whereby many States are simultaneously spearheading innovation in cutting-edge technologies such as AI and quantum computing, while at the same time struggling to catch up in others, particularly with respect to closing the digital divide.

72. UNDP will continue to leverage its governance work, ensuring that inclusive and rights-based digitalization is both guided by and supports accountable, effective and inclusive governance, so that it more broadly serves the public interest. Key to this will be continuing to support digital legal identity as a critical building block of digital public infrastructure. Additionally, as global, regional and national debates on regulation accelerate, UNDP will continue to elevate the engagement and voices of a range of stakeholders – government, private sector and civil society – from partner countries in these debates.

73. The UNDP digital guides will support UNDP staff, partner countries and other key stakeholders in navigating the opportunities and risks of digital transformation and emerging technologies. Covering a wide range of topics, these guides address all six signature solutions and offer practical advice and clear insights. They provide a detailed look at the opportunities and challenges associated with using digital technologies in different development contexts, ensuring alignment with the key areas of UNDP focus. They address a total of 18 topics, providing a broad spectrum of information and actionable advice. This is a significant step towards embedding digital technology across UNDP development work and reflects the commitment to staying current and relevant in today’s increasingly digital world.

74. All UNDP work is subject to resource availability and funding constraints are a concrete barrier to expanding technical capacities and investing in digitalization of public services programmes at the country level. Donor commitment and flexibility are critical for UNDP to achieve success.

Annex. Key recommendations and the management response

Recommendation 1. Building on its ongoing work in strengthening digital public infrastructure, UNDP should advance user-focused design and streamlined digital offerings for key digitalization drivers such as digital legal identity, digital financial services and data interoperability.				
Management response: UNDP <i>fully accepts</i> the recommendation to strengthen its support for key drivers of digitalization, such as digital legal identity, digital financial services and data interoperability. UNDP will build on ongoing efforts to employ a whole-of-government/whole-of-society perspective ensuring that all human rights, particularly data protection and privacy, are adequately protected.				
Key action(s)	Completion date	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking*	
			Status	Comments
1.1 Convene (co-convene) two global advocacy events to bolster ongoing UNDP efforts in strengthening digital public infrastructure.	Q2 2025	Chief Digital Office (CDO)		
1.2 In partnership with the United Nations Legal Identity Agenda Task Force, UNDP will engage with the private sector and CSOs through consultation and policy dialogue to advance user-focused design and whole-of-society perspectives in programming at global, regional and country levels.	Q3 2024	Bureau for Policy and Programme Support (BPPS) (Governance)		
Recommendation 2. UNDP has successfully supported digitalization initiatives in the health and social protection sectors. Given the critical role of digitalization in enhancing the efficiency of public services, UNDP should strategically and consistently engage with comprehensive programme options to enable sector-wide holistic digital transformation. UNDP should prioritize digitalization efforts at the local government level, to ensure the last-mile digitalization of public services.				
Management response: UNDP <i>fully accepts</i> this recommendation and will build on efforts to strengthen the delivery of public services through ‘whole-of-society’ approaches that include engaging national and subnational leaders, companies and digital innovators.				
2.1 Establish through the high-impact initiative on public sector transformation, in partnership with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, a platform for the provision of integrated policy and programme support on governance and digitalization to enhance people-centric approaches, assess the public sector’s digital readiness and strengthen national and local digital ecosystems for inclusive and effective digital public services.	Q4 2024	BPPS (Governance)		

2.2 Launch a digital readiness assessment using the UNDP whole-of-society Digital Development Framework focused specifically for local governments.	Q3 2025	CDO		
2.3 Produce and disseminate guidance that cover key UNDP thematic offers, to support sector-wide holistic digital transformation and promote last-mile implementation of digital services.	Q4 2024	CDO		
Recommendation 3. UNDP has put significant emphasis in its current and previous corporate frameworks to strengthen development accelerators and enablers through digitalization, innovation and development financing with positive dividends. While continuing and consolidating such an emphasis, UNDP should strengthen its efforts to enable development financing for sectoral efforts and digital transformation at the country level.				
Management response: UNDP <i>fully accepts</i> the recommendation to put in place specific measures, processes and targets to enable development financing at the country level, including financing for digitalization and digital public infrastructure. UNDP will continue to leverage its global leadership on development to steer global financing from government donors, philanthropic organizations and the private sector to areas of demand from countries, including playing its strategic role as the integrator and public platform for financing flows to countries on digital transformation projects.				
3.1 Review how financing for digital transformation is included in integrated national financing frameworks and Sustainable Development investor maps and ensure guidance on how both enable governments to scale up investment in digital transformation or increase private investments into digital transformation.	Q4 2024	Sustainable Finance Hub		
3.2 UNDP will develop a resource mobilization framework for its digital offers that outlines the role of various funding sources available (or potentially available) to finance country-level digital activities.	Q4 2024	CDO		
Recommendation 4. In the LDCs, UNDP should adopt a targeted approach to strengthening digital public infrastructure and regulatory frameworks for improving public services and economic development				
Management response: UNDP <i>fully accepts</i> the recommendation to prioritize and adopt a targeted approach to digital public infrastructure and the regulatory frameworks for improving public services in LDCs. UNDP will further identify the policy and institutional areas where support is most needed among LDCs to develop a differentiated approach to support digitalization efforts in those countries.				
4.1 Develop a consideration/decision framework, informed by the insights and commitments from the Doha Programme of Action and the LDC+5 Conference, that underscores the differentiated approaches necessary for supporting digital public infrastructure and regulatory frameworks in LDCs.	Q4 2024	CDO		
4.2 Establish the digital public infrastructure -focused 50-in-5 campaign together with the Digital Public Goods Alliance and other partners, through which at least 10 LDCs will be supported.	Q4 2023	CDO		

4.3 Conduct advocacy events for the digital public infrastructure playbook in at least three countries, all LDCs. These events aim to catalyse collaboration between identity, payments and data exchanges to address development challenges in key sectors.	Q2 2025	CDO		
Recommendation 5. UNDP is well positioned to facilitate South-South and triangular cooperation for digital transformation and should strategically engage in enabling this.				
Management response: UNDP <i>fully accepts</i> the recommendation to strategically engage in enabling South-South cooperation. UNDP will continue to strengthen its South-South cooperation initiatives to accelerate the development of additional capacities and learning lessons on digital transformation. Concerted efforts will be made to strengthen connection and integration between global level partnerships and country-level programming.				
5.1 Establish the digital public infrastructure-focused 50-in-5 campaign together with the Digital Public Goods Alliance and other partners, through which at least 10 LDCs will be supported.	Q4 2023	CDO		
5.2 Strengthen the Data to Policy Network, in collaboration with the United Nations Office of South-South Collaboration, to offer at least five learning exchanges, provide curated content on data topics and to create online networking opportunities for over 100 policymakers on data topics, with a focus on those from the Global South.	Q3 2025	CDO		
5.3 Establish a platform (FutureGov) as a mechanism to support South-South and triangular cooperation	Q4 2024	BPPS (Governance)		
Recommendation 6. UNDP should support data privacy and legal identity management at the country level. UNDP programmes should incorporate the rights dimension in its legal identity support				
Management response: UNDP <i>fully accepts</i> this recommendation to support data security and legal identity management at the country level and to integrate the rights dimension into its support for legal identity. UNDP will strengthen and advance the integration of data security and legal identity by systematically incorporating the rights dimension through policy and programmatic guidance to country offices and partners.				
6.1 Strengthen data security through developing a model governance framework for data exchanges, integrating rights dimensions in the interactions between digital legal identity, digital financial services and data interoperability across key thematic areas of demand in countries.	Q1 2025	BPPS (Governance), CDO		
6.2 Implement the model Digital ID Governance Framework in at least five countries, and disseminate learning to internal UNDP communities of practice and external country networks such as ID4Africa	Q4 2025	BPPS (Governance), CDO		
Recommendation 7. UNDP should strengthen its support to bridging the digital gender divide at the policy level. UNDP should clarify resources that will be made available for implementing corporate gender strategies for an inclusive digitalization of public services.				

Management response: UNDP <i>fully accepts</i> the recommendation to strengthen its support to bridge the digital gender divide and clarify resources made available to implement corporate gender strategies for inclusive digitalization. UNDP will encourage country offices and regional hubs to articulate in their gender strategies a focus on bridging the digital divide and increasing women's access to digital technologies; and will put in place measures to track investments in bridging the gender digital divide.				
7.1 Implement the corporate resource mobilization strategy to secure flexible funding through stabilizing regular resources (core) funding and positioning the funding windows as a primary vehicle to invest in key thematic offers and priorities, including the corporate gender equality strategy.	Q4 2025	Bureau for External Relations and Advocacy (BERA), BPPS		
7.2 Position the gender funding window to drive flexible funding from partners by demonstrating the UNDP comparative advantage on gender equality and women's empowerment, including on digitalization	Q4 2024	BERA, BPPS		
7.3 Develop a comprehensive approach within the digital public infrastructure safeguards initiative, launched in 2023 to further incorporate gender dimensions of access and safeguards for women in the initiative.	Q1 2025	CDO, BPPS (Gender)		
Recommendation 8. At both the country and global levels, UNDP should advocate to strengthen digital government measurement frameworks to assess e-service uptake and use. This data is essential to inform government efforts for inclusive services and accelerating last-mile efforts.				
Management response: UNDP <i>fully accepts</i> the recommendation to advocate to strengthen digital government measurement frameworks to specifically assess e-service uptake and use. UNDP acknowledges the need to ensure that assessment of e-service uptake and use is built into programming design, implementation and monitoring. UNDP will review its programming guidance across the range of sectors in which it supports digitalization of public services to ensure that it addresses this aspect.				
8.1 Advocate for strengthening existing and new indices to better track e-services uptake and use	Q2 2024	BPPS (Governance)		
8.2 Building on the communities of practice and drawing from the experiences of countries that have successfully implemented e-services and their measurement frameworks, review and update programming guidance across various sectors supporting the digitalization of public services to ensure the inclusion of e-service uptake and use in the design, implementation and monitoring of programme activities.	Q3 2024	BPPS (Governance) CDO		

* The implementation status is tracked in the Evaluation Resource Centre.