Session Outcome Document

'The Future of Digital Agriculture: Process for Progress - Reflecting and Building on WSIS 20 years' journey', Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)

30th May 2024, 11.00-11.45 CEST

Session 349— The Future of Digital Agriculture: Process for Progress | WSIS+20 Forum High-Level Event (itu.int)

Key Issues discussed (5- 8 bullet points)

- The session aimed at capitalizing on the celebration of WSIS+20, showing with concrete examples that this anniversary has not only marked a decisive milestone for FAO in the common journey and the implementation of the Forum's original goal, towards building people-centric, inclusive, and development-oriented information and knowledge societies, but has also brought a unique opportunity to truly reflect on the achievements realized so far by all major stakeholders. It was the opportunity to set a sustainable way forward for FAO and its collaborators, for an ethical and safe use of ICTs in a landscape that is now more fast paced than ever with the emergence of new disruptive technologies such as AI, capitalizing on lessons learnt and best practices, built through joint efforts at the global level.

- Panelists showcased and discussed some of FAO's major contributions to WSIS in the realm of utilizing digital technologies to advance sustainable development and food security, eradicating hunger and poverty, as per the Organization's mandate.

- Those included over time:
- a. promoting digital technologies for agrifood systems transformation – with initiatives to harness mobile technology, remote sensing, geographic information systems (GIS), and other digital tools to support farmers in decision-making, crop management, and natural resource conservation-;
- b. developing knowledge sharing platforms and digital resources to facilitate the exchange of information and best practices among agricultural stakeholders;
- c. fostering capacity building -to enhance digital literacy and technical skills among farmers, extension workers, and agricultural professionals-;

- d. establishing the global E-Agriculture Community, as a collaborative platform for stakeholders to share knowledge and innovative solutions in using ICTs for agriculture and rural development-;
- e. providing policy support and technical assistance to governments and regional organizations in developing ICT policies and strategies for agricultural development; and finally, forging partnerships with other UN agencies, international organizations, academia, and civil society groups to advance the use of ICTs for agriculture within the broader context of sustainable development.

Towards WSIS+20 and WSIS beyond 2025, please share your views on the emerging trends, challenges, achievements, and opportunities in the implementation of the WSIS Action Lines to date (5-8 bullets)

- Overall, FAO's initiatives in digital agriculture contribute directly, since Geneva 2003 and Tunis 2005, to the objectives of the WSIS Action Line C7, for which the Organization has been a facilitator since the Forum's early beginnings, by harnessing the potential of ICTs to drive innovation, efficiency, and sustainability in the agricultural sector, thereby advancing the broader goals of inclusive and sustainable development.

- Bringing forward and scaling up concrete examples of amplified use of digital tools, big data, artificial intelligence, coherent action and enabling mechanisms for strengthening digital capabilities, FAO aims at building on the Vision for WSIS Beyond 2015, towards 2025 and mark progress towards also important UN led initiatives such as the Global Digital Compact and the Summit of the Future, strengthening its action on global digital collaboration.

- FAO aims at showcasing how, despite new challenges to tackle, in this revolutionary and historical period of new emerging technologies, that open new unknown horizons for all, the Organization can bring new solutions and build new partnerships. It considers and promotes the safe and ethical use of digital technologies, including AI, is now more than ever a critical component for accelerating the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development leaving no one behind, reaffirming the importance of WSIS Action Line 7 in a broader – although challenging- multi stakeholder context that need to be consolidated in a global governance framework.

Tangible outcomes (such as key achievements, announcements, launches, agreements, commitments, figures, and success stories (3-5 bullet points))

- FAO has been successfully leveraging the transformative power of ICTs in the food and agriculture field, also utilizing WSIS as one of the processes highlighting the need for ICTs in agriculture, fostering innovation and development. The need to continue digital collaboration along these lines, building on WSIS lessons learnt and the platforms for dialogue that it provides at global level to harmonize policies, frameworks, standards and initiatives was well highlighted.

- FAO reaffirmed its commitment to scaling up digital solutions that can help in addressing the current food crisis by using new, high-impact, sustainable digital-based and data driven solutions and this includes embracing new technologies, such as generative AI, which has the potential, and with strong focus on safe and ethical way, to revolutionize agriculture by improving efficiency, productivity and sustainability, through enhanced data-driven decision-making, precision farming, resource management, climate adaptation and resilience of agrifood systems.

- This year, under the WSIS Prizes, FAO's Digital Services Portfolio (DSP) that was presented during the session has been recognized as WSIS Champion Project, under the category C7 E agriculture. This great achievement comes out of 1049 submitted projects in total, 360 nominations and more than 2M votes reviewed. This is an outstanding recognition of FAO's innovation in empowering farmers to transform agrifood systems and helping Members achieve the SDGs and FAO Four Betters, highlighting the Organization's key contributions to leveraging ICTs for societal challenges and inclusive sustainable development.

Actionable plan and key recommendations (2-5 points)

- There is still a need for more interactive expert discussion on the impact on WSIS and its limitations/areas to improve, rethink or complement (e.g. with Digital Compact) and work less in silos. Major actors, including international organizations, should now think how WSIS shall evolve and be coherent with other initiatives at UN level (UN2.0, Global Digital Compact), for FAO more particularly from the perspective of agrifood systems' transformation.

- As the need to align with emerging technologies is now stronger than ever, we cant ignore the growing interest in AI, Big Data, and other emerging technologies, but we should continue advocating for guidance on their ethical use including in the food

and agriculture sector. This does not entail only a technological shift but trigger a whole economic, social and cultural revolution where the relevant safeguards to make a strong and lastly impact on our agrifood systems, should be well implemented, ensuring food security thanks and within a digitally safe environment.

- We shall also remain committed to digital inclusion, particularly for women and youth, in the transformation of agrifood systems and keeping broader focus on digital technologies.

- Keeping abreast of the latest developments worldwide to best address the world's global challenges, through targeted interventions to reduce poverty, hunger and increase economic development, directly contributing to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGS) should always be done in a collaborative approach for stronger impact worldwide.

Suggestions for thematic aspects that might be included in the WSIS Forum 2025 (WSIS+20 Forum High-Level Event) (one paragraph)

In the midst of the AI and digital revolution, we should continue highlighting the strong need to jointly develop ethical, safe and context-specific, digital capabilities for solutions that consider the unique needs and challenges of each region while striving for sustainable development worldwide and still being careful of still unknown risks. Governments, private sector, academia and civil society would need to work together to best catalyze new opportunities for furthering partnerships and better coordination of resources and to advance together in an inclusive way, concrete, integrated and targeted policies and actions to drive efficiently SDG transformation and the 2030 Agenda achievement, aligning on major UN led initiatives such as the SG Digital Cooperation Roadmap, the Global Digital Compact, the Summit of the Future.