



THE PRESIDENT
OF THE
GENERAL ASSEMBLY

11 April 2017

Excellency,

As part of my ongoing efforts to strengthen momentum around the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, I will convene on 17 May 2017 an SDG Action Event on Innovation and Connectivity.

The Event will provide Member States with an opportunity to engage with leading innovators, thought-leaders, and technology companies on the exponential take off of how new technologies can support the successful implementation of the SDGs. It will also seek to increase the understanding and awareness among Member States of how best to seize the opportunities and manage the risks associated with the exponential pace of technological change, while taking into account the political, economic as well as moral and ethical dilemmas that this represents for achieving the public good.

In the morning, an opening segment will be followed by two panel sessions. In the afternoon, an interactive discussion between presenters and Member States will be followed by a closing segment. A concept note and provisional programme is attached and additional details will be made available on my website (www.un.org/pga/71).

The Event will take place immediately following the annual ECOSOC Multistakeholder Forum on Science, Technology and Innovation.

For further details, please contact my Senior Advisors Ms. Itai Madamombe (madamombe@un.org) and Mr. Zhang Yi (yiz@un.org).

It is my hope that this dialogue will attract the highest possible level of participation from your Government.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Peter Thomson'.

Peter Thomson

All Permanent Representatives and
Permanent Observers of the United Nations
New York

SDG Action Event on Innovation and Connectivity
Organized by the President of the 71st session of the General Assembly
17 May 2017, 10.00 – 18.00, Trusteeship Council Chamber

Overview

The adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development saw world leaders commit to 17 comprehensive, integrated and ambitious Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The world in which the SDGs were adopted is radically different from that of the Millennium Development Goals. Giant leaps in technological advances are converging to make the unthinkable possible. These advances are also raising questions on societal impact.

Recognizing the need to support UN Member States and the UN System to adapt to this rapidly changing landscape, the President of the UN General Assembly, H.E. Peter Thomson, will convene a one-day SDG Action Event on Innovation and Connectivity. The Event will be held on 17 May 2017, at UN Headquarters in New York in the Trusteeship Council Chamber.

Background

The world is in the midst of an innovation renaissance. Significant invention in artificial intelligence, robotics, virtual reality, big data, biotech, drones, space exploration, 3D printing, FinTech, digital medicine, genetic engineering, and other areas are dramatically changing our every-day lives. The power of technology, once the preserve of big governments and industry, is now being democratized into the hands of ordinary citizens everywhere.

Hyper social networks and internet connectivity are enabling people to collaborate across boundaries and time; a number of independent initiatives are underway to connect the entire planet within 5 to 10 years. The connectivity of over 7 billion people creates unique opportunities to tap into the collective wisdom of the world to solve humanity's greatest challenges.

This unprecedented acceleration of technology in a hyper-connected world is also catapulting humanity into uncharted terrain, bringing anxieties about the societal impact. Discussions have centered on the need to increase safety, defining the ethics around emerging technologies, concern that artificial intelligence will take over jobs, cybersecurity and cyber-crimes. There is particular concern artificial intelligence will trigger runaway technologies with catastrophic changes or harm to human civilization.

In addition, hotspot innovation centers are sprouting around the world, but not everywhere. If not carefully navigated, this will exacerbate inequality among people and make it difficult to achieve the full ambition of the 2030 Agenda. Against this background, the achievement of the SDGs will require a radical shift in our perspective: from linear to exponential thinking.

Objectives

This High-Level Event on Innovation will provide leading innovators, thought-leaders, and technology companies an opportunity to engage with Member States and the UN system on how emerging technologies can be used to best effect and to ensure successful implementation of the SDGs. Specifically, it will seek to lay out the ground for achieving the following:

1. Increase the understanding and awareness of the opportunities and challenges of new technology and exponential change.
2. Strengthen the ability of the United Nations to act as a catalyst for innovation and solutions in support of the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.
3. Rally leading innovators and technology companies to develop, incubate and resource cutting-edge innovations to solve pressing challenges in support of the Goals.
4. Explore how to support collaborative platform(s) to facilitate the sharing of the best ideas and innovations to inform policy and inspire collective action for scale and global impact.

Expected outcome

This meeting will allow the Member States and the UN system to embrace innovation and new opportunities available to drive implementation of the SDGs, and strengthen the engagement of leading innovative companies and individuals in relevant intergovernmental processes.

Participants

The SDG Action Event is open to all Member States, the UN system, and invited guests.

Draft Programme

17 May 2017

SESSION 1: FROM LINEAR TO EXPONENTIAL INNOVATION

How can we harness the exponential innovation renaissance and adapt to the pace of change when our institutions, policies, and mind-sets tend to be linear?

- 10:00 - 10:10 The President of the UN General Assembly gives opening remarks
- 10:00 - 10:20 Address by the UN Secretary-General (tbc)
- 10:20 - 10:40 Perspective shift: linear to exponential innovation
Keynote presentation 1
- 10:40 - 11:00 Breakthrough innovation and making impact on the SDGs
Keynote presentation 2

SESSION 2: A NEW ERA OF CONNECTED PROBLEM-SOLVERS

How can connectivity help unleash the innovativeness of the global population to solve pressing challenges in pursuing the Sustainable Development Goals?

- 11:00 - 12:00 Moderated panel discussion with representatives from the innovation and technology industry, Member States and UN System
- The floor opens for questions

SESSION 3: SHOWCASE ACTION ON INNOVATION AND BREAKTHROUGH TECHNOLOGY

What are the examples of innovative approaches and where are the gaps?

- 12:00 - 13:00 Moderated panel discussion with representatives from the innovation and technology industry, Member States and UN System
- The floor opens for questions

SESSION 4: INTERACTIVE DISCUSSION ON OPPORTUNITIES AND RISKS

How can the United Nations and Governments manage risks and seize opportunities so as to be enablers to technological innovation and ensuring the public good?

- 15:00 - 17:00 Introduction to interactive session
co-Chair of the UN-Science, Technology and Innovation Forum
- Fireside chat with thought-leaders in technology and leading innovators
- Three minute interventions and/or questions from Member States and other participants, moderated by Ambassador Macharia Kamau

SESSION 5: CONCLUSION AND WAY FORWARD

What can the UN do to bring a bold innovative leadership approach to the implementation of the SDGs and to serve as a global catalyst for exponential innovative strategies to problem-solving?

- 17:00 - 17:15 How organizations are adapting to change and innovating
Guest speaker
- 17:15 - 17:30 Wrap up and strategy from the Deputy Secretary-General (tbc)
- 17:30 - 17:45 **The President of the General Assembly** gives final reflections