1st Nexus Series: Digitalisation for Circular Economy and Green Jobs for Youth
17th May 2023, 13:30 -17:00 CET
International Labour Organization (ILO), Rte des Morillons 4, 1211 in Geneva

The first in a series of UNEMG Nexus Dialogues on Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP) – "***Digitalisation for the circular economy and green jobs for youth***" was held in Geneva on 17 May 2023. Hosted by the International Labour Organisation, the event brought together experts and thought leaders from across the UN system to discuss the transformative power of digital technologies in advancing sustainable consumption and production practices and promoting decent and green employment opportunities for youth.

The dialogue served as a steppingstone to foster interagency collaboration for SDG12, promoting SCP as vehicle to address the triple planetary crisis and a sustainable economic transformation. The dialogue provided a platform for fruitful discussions with key actors from UN agencies and offered cross-cutting insights on leveraging digitalization for a green economy and green jobs. It highlighted the immense potential of digital technologies in driving the circular economy and emphasized the importance of collaborative policy making to ensure a fair and inclusive transition in countries.

Key messages noted during the Nexus Dialogue, include:

Representatives from the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), UN Women, and the Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth, spoke about the importance of joint, coordinated action to harness digitalisation for a circular economy, while creating green jobs for the youth. Inter-agency and multi-stakeholder partnership mechanisms such as the Coalition for Digital Environmental Sustainability (CODES) and the Partnership for Action on the Green Economy (PAGE) also contributed to the discussion.

Main takeaways from the dialogue:

- *Digital technologies for accelerating the shift to a circular economy*: Digital technologies can play a pivotal role in shifting to and sustaining the circular economy, through advanced data analytics, supply-chain analysis, and innovative design. Artificial Intelligence (AI) holds the potential to optimize resource utilization, whilst blockchain can make supply chains more transparent and reduce waste. Accordingly, the importance of standardization and innovation was highlighted by UN Agencies as a common ground for joint work and contribute to the Secretary General's Global Digital Compact.

- *Job opportunities in digitalisation for circularity*: The shift towards a circular economy was identified as a catalyst for the emergence of new job opportunities, particularly for youth. Participants emphasized the importance of nurturing skills and promoting entrepreneurship that align with circular business models. However, it was acknowledged that this transition holds the potential to rapidly change the employment landscape, affecting employment rates across sectors. The Green Jobs for Youth Pact was presented as an opportunity to facilitate the transition.

- *Joined-Up policy making for inclusion*: Considering the pace of change stemming from Artificial Intelligence (AI) and other digital technologies, the urgent need for joined-up policy making across the UN system and governments was acknowledged to ensure that no one is left behind in the transition to a circular economy. Participants emphasized the importance of collaboration, knowledge sharing, and coordinated efforts to address inequalities and promote inclusive and sustainable development in the digital age.

Lessons learned and gaps in the UN system in furthering the sustainability of digitalisation through circularity:

- There is momentum to address the twin transition of sustainability and digital transformation.
- Digital governance is a priority of the UN Secretary-General's Digital Compact, but more discussion is needed on the governance of digital technologies.
- Sustainable digitalisation (minimising environmental risks and impacts of digital technologies) and digitalisation for sustainability (monitoring and modelling environmental system and emissions; sustainable lifestyles; full supply chain transparency and circularity; automated decisions for sustainability and resource optimisation; and governance) should be fostered by the UN agenda.
- CODES supports the Secretary-General's Roadmap for Digital Cooperation and enhances digital environmental sustainability through multi-stakeholder collaboration. CODES engages in nine impact initiatives, one being the digitalisation for circular economy impact initiative-focusing on digital product passport.
- UN Agencies have developed knowledge products related to concrete standards for circular products, and blockchain technologies for traceability and Artificial Intelligence. Joint action can be fostered to integrate existing knowledge for universal principles, supporting wider implementation.
- The Internet of Things, e-waste management systems, and digital apps for recycling are some examples of projects at the country level presented by representatives of UN agencies such as UNIDO, UNDP and UNECE. Gathering examples and expertise from the UN system can further support governance and incentivize models that promote participation of key players including the private sector- especially Micro, Small and Medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs).

Opportunities and challenges for upskilling and reskilling youth in digitalisation for circularity and a green economic transformation:

- Green investments are more labour intensive than "unsustainable" investments. Improving energy efficiency and decarbonizing electrical power generation could create additional 8.4 million jobs. Reaching universal (90%) internet broadband coverage could generate an additional net 6.4 million jobs by 2030[1]. However, better measurement and data for policy design is required, especially for jobs in the circular economy.
- The "*Green Jobs for Youth Pact*" is an interagency initiative (UNEP, ILO and UNICEF) aimed at creating 1 million new green jobs, especially for women, greening 1 million existing jobs and supporting 10,000 young entrepreneurs. This Initiative can help the UN system unlock green investments and create new green businesses.[2]
- Investments in reskilling and upskilling are crucial for the circular economy over the long-term. By 2030, 78 million jobs can be created, but 71 million jobs could also be lost as part of the transition. Therefore, reallocation of workers is important through the right skills.[3]
- The core employability skills required for the green and circular transition are: environmental awareness; teamwork and communication skills; coordination and management skills; entrepreneurial skills; innovation and digital skills; marketing skills in green/circular products and services; and strategic and leadership skills.
- Enabling Inter-ministerial and institutional frameworks, environmental skills in sectoral policies, and implementation and monitoring of action plans, are essential across countries (*Ranging from high-level to low-income countries*) to facilitate a green, digital transition.
- UN consultations should be intergenerational. Youth should be actively engaged to create the next generation of decision makers. Partnerships with academic institutions and youth are important to find solutions for skills development. UNITAR along with other UN agencies can cooperate to maintain a one-stop shop for upskilling and reskilling.
- Women play a very important role in inclusive development. The project *"EmPower: Women for Climate Resilient Societies",* is an example dedicated to strengthening gender equality and human rights in climate change and disaster risk actions in the Asia and the Pacific region, driving and co-creating women's entrepreneurship.[4] This is an example of a UN project that can further promote green skills and entrepreneurship.
- The UN Youth Strategy (Youth 2030) aims at ensuring coherence, efficiency and effectiveness across UNCTs in integrating education and youth support in financing and policy frameworks. Youth 2030 can help leverage the UN system in creating Green Jobs for Youth in digitalisation and circularity.

Conclusions:

- Ample empirical evidence exists to support policy arguments for transitioning to a green and circular economy. The EMG could serve as a platform for aggregating a diverse set of information, which could be compiled into an accessible compendium along with other tools for Member States to utilize.
- Digitalisation to promote the circular economy and green jobs, while upskilling and reskilling the workforce (especially the youth), is a core area of opportunity for UN system- wide collaboration. Efforts are underway to enhance the involvement of youth and external

[1] ILO, "Green Jobs for Youth, Circularity and Digitalisation", presentation May17th 2023
[2] UNEP, Green Jobs for Youth Pact | UNEP - UN Environment Programme
[3] ILO, "Reskilling and upskilling needs and policy measures for the circular and digital transitions", presentation May 17th 2023
[4] Partners are UN Women, UNEP and the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA)

stakeholders in these discussions, with the aim of increasing engagement of marginalized groups and fostering a broader spectrum of perspectives.

- PAGE, CODES and the One Planet Network are existing multi-stakeholder mechanisms with programmes and initiatives well placed to serve Member States and to further interagency work to make a stronger impact on SDG12.
- Further exploration will be conducted into the "Green Jobs for Youth Pact", and the "Digitalisation for Circular Economy Impact Initiative" to align the UN system towards projects that foster the Secretary General's Global Digital Compact.

Credits

We would like to thank the panellists and organizations for their valuable contributions to the Nexus Dialogue.

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