



Remarks by Pakistan at the
69th Annual Session of the Trade and Development Board (TDB)
(20 June -2 July 2022)

Agenda item 6: – Digital Economy Report 2021: Cross-Border Data Flows and Development – For Whom the Data Flow

Mr. President,
Secretary General,
Director of the Division on Technology and Logistics,
Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,

Let me begin by expressing gratitude to Secretary General, the Director of the Division and panelists for presenting their insightful presentations.

We note with appreciation that the Digital Economy Report 2021 offers valuable insights and analyses. It points out complexities involved in governing data and data flows and shed light on the state of the international debate on how to regulate cross-border data flows and how the debate is at an impasse, and positions tend to be polarized.

Mr. President,

The world is at a critical inflection point for technology governance. The COVID-19 pandemic has made it further imminent and accelerated the process of digital transformation and added further urgency for Governments to respond.

A key challenge is how to govern and harness the surge in digital data for the global good. The current regulatory landscape is patchy, reflecting stark different approaches adopted by different countries, with strong influences from the major economic powers. An international framework is urgently needed to address this situation.

There is a proposal by the UNSG for establishing a new “strategic and empowered” High Level Multistakeholder Body with substantial digital policies related roles. Several developing countries have expressed their concerns on this proposal.

The proposed apex policy body will have private corporations and government nominees sitting as equals and the proposed body will rely largely on private (i.e., corporate) funding. The main proposal currently on the table for this Body suggests that any tech giant would be able to secure a seat in the body just by providing funding to it. If this happens, it would not be a good omen for traditional multilateralism and it will set a dangerous direction for the future of global governance.

We realize that the delay in setting up a governments-led UN body/mechanism/framework for digital policies, as mandated by the WSIS, leaves a temporary vacuum into which this proposed High Level Multistakeholder Body seeks to insinuate itself.

We second UNCTAD's recommendation of a balanced global approach to data governance, to increase trust in the digital economy. Creation of a new international body that focuses on data-related governance, with the full involvement of developing countries and all stakeholders is more viable and long-term solution. It will ensure sustainable development gains and economic benefits from the digital economy for people and businesses in countries at all levels of development.

It is more important than ever to set a holistic approach for digital and data governance. The current fragmented data landscape risks us failing to capture value that could accrue from digital technologies.

Finally, we urge UNCTAD to continue informing member States on how to engage in and benefit more from data and the digital economy. We note with appreciation that the ICT Policy Section carries out policy-oriented analytical work on the development implications of information and communications technologies. We call the UNCTAD Division for Technology and Logistics to continue assisting developing countries in building capacities to design and implement relevant policies and legal frameworks.

Thank you.