

October 2022

WORKSHOP IN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT PRACTICE
Preliminary Terms of Reference
Fall 2022 – Spring 2023

Project Title: **Misinformation in the Global South, Collective Intelligence and Climate Change**

Client/Host Agency: **UNDP Accelerator Labs Network**
<https://acceleratorlabs.undp.org>

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Background: The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) works in 170 countries and territories in partnerships with other UN agencies, governments, the private sector and civil society to build resilience and accelerate indigenous (domestic) public sector innovation towards meeting the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. A keystone element in this process is the Accelerator Labs Network. Started in 2019 with 60 teams covering 78 countries, the Network has now expanded to 91 locations supporting 114 countries.

UNDP is doing development differently because the pace and complexity of today's challenges are increasing. The design of the UNDP Accelerator Labs Network builds on a growing body of innovation work that approaches sustainable development as a wicked problem, with a high level of uncertainty and for which ex ante targets do not work, and best practices do not exist. This dynamic new capability for decision makers to explore, experiment, and grow portfolios of mutually reinforcing solutions to tackle today's challenges.

As a learning network, the Accelerator Labs Network captures patterns of emerging problem spaces in sustainable development. One of those clear trends has been the rapid spread of misinformation in the Global South and specifically the spread of misinformation in areas that critically affect the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

The spread of misinformation is not new. However, as social media and digital technologies expand, the cost of information flows has reduced and the spread of false information has become more common and diversified. Social media has also allowed a different range of actors to publicize unverified information to massive audiences more easily. Social media

has also allowed this information to travel more rapidly. For example, a 2018 [MIT study](#) has shown how false information travels six times faster than truth. The risks that come from misinformation spread are many, including eroding democratic processes, affecting public health campaigns and climate change initiatives, and even degrading evidence-based policy-making capacity in governments. Although misinformation research, and efforts to combat misinformation, are emerging in different geographies, these are still highly concentrated in developed countries. The UNDP Accelerator Labs Network wishes to understand how misinformation is affecting progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals and map out the existing efforts and approaches to tackle misinformation in the Global South in order to define potential portfolios of interventions in order to combat the spread of misinformation. This work will inform Lab experiment design particularly related to misinformation and climate change.

At the same time, the Accelerator Labs Network has been looking to the potential of “collective intelligence”¹ to collect and analyze more diverse sources of real-time data in order to better understand complex development challenges such as climate change, and to develop evidence-based solutions to these challenges. The Accelerator Labs Network has partnered recently with Nesta’s Centre for Collective Intelligence² to better harness “collective intelligence” methods to address climate change and other “wicked” sustainable development problems. In 2023, UNDP and Nesta plan to support up to 15 Accelerator Labs in designing innovative CI projects related to climate change through a “Collective Intelligence Design Studio.”

UNDP’s Accelerator Labs Network also has partnered with SIPA’s Workshop in Sustainable Development Practice in recent years to explore various issues, including scaling strategies for its own operations, different approaches to public sector innovation, and grassroots initiatives in clean and affordable energy,

Objectives:

This workshop project’s joint purpose is to provide UNDP with strategic information on its current portfolio and potential areas of work around misinformation in the Global South and how it affects sustainable development, with a focus on climate change.

The workshop project’s specific objectives will be to

- Document and support with background research an analysis of the current impact of misinformation in the Global South related in particular to sustainable development and climate change.
- Inform the design phase of the Collective Intelligence Design Studio 2023 by providing insights on learning frontiers and potential experiments to combat misinformation related to climate change.

¹ Gina Lucarelli, “21st Century Common Sense: Collective Intelligence for the Climate Crisis,” *Medium*, 11 June 2019. <https://acclabs.medium.com/21st-century-common-sense-collective-intelligence-for-the-climate-crisis-ca5de432735d>

² Nesta Centre for Collective Intelligence Design. <https://www.nesta.org.uk/project/centre-collective-intelligence-design/>

- Support and recommend UNDP positioning and role in this area of work, including through potential partnerships.

Tasks:

The work will be conducted in four workflows, comprising:

1. Scan existing research and UNDP's portfolio on misinformation in the Global South, particularly related to sustainable development and climate change

a) The SIPA team will conduct initial research to understand how misinformation is affecting sustainable development and climate change, and what are the current efforts to address these forms of misinformation inside UNDP. Access to relevant UNDP data sets and documents will be provided as needed.

b) The SIPA team's literature review will be conducted focusing on three key questions.

- What is the current portfolio of efforts to combat misinformation in the Global South, especially related to climate change?
- Who are the main actors, and how do these different work streams connect to each other?
- What are the different approaches to the work on misinformation, particularly related to combatting climate change myths? (Note that this geographical scope can include high income countries.)

c) Based on the findings, the SIPA team should engage and interview key actors both inside and outside UNDP to dive deeper into the questions in (b).

2. Represent and communicate the current portfolio of work and actors

The objective of this task is to visually represent the portfolio of projects, institutions, actors and approaches related to tackling misinformation in the Global South, especially related to climate change.

With guidance from UNDP, the team may also draft one blog post to be published in UNDP's channels, focusing on misinformation in the Global South, by early May 2023.

3. Inform the Accelerator Labs Network's learning agenda on collective intelligence and climate change

In 2023, UNDP and Nesta will run a dedicated new learning and mentoring program for a cohort of up to 15 Accelerator Labs. The Collective Intelligence (CI) Design Studio will support the Labs to design and test cutting-edge CI projects related to the climate crisis, and to build on the 'use cases' articulated in The UNDP Accelerator Labs' and Nesta's report, *Collective Intelligence for Sustainable Development: Getting Smarter Together*.³ The cohort will have a particular focus on developing practical new insights on how to mobilize people to act on climate change.

³ <https://smartertogether.earth/download-report>

The objective of this task is to inform the design phase of the Collective Intelligence for the Climate Crisis Design Studio, by providing meaningful insights on how the spread of misinformation is affecting people's views and likelihood to take action on climate change. Based on the SIPA team's initial desk research and interviews, the team will present initial findings by the end of Q1 of 2023 to select Lab teams, so that 1-2 Accelerator Labs will have the option to pursue a learning track that explores how to influence the cognitive bias that discounts the future (either among policy makers or citizens).

4. Recommendations for a portfolio of interventions

The objective of this task is to provide UNDP with options and recommendations for potential actions and partnerships to tackle misinformation in the Global South, especially related to climate change.

Deliverables:

The expected deliverables for the project include:

- Draft workplan by end of Q4 2022
- Background literature review by mid-February 2023
- Oral report on research findings to feed into Nesta Collective Intelligence Design Studio by end of February 2023
- Oral report on research findings and recommendations by end of April 2023
- Final report outline by end March 2022
- Draft report on key results and recommendations (including process/workflow documentation) by mid-April 2023
- Presentation of key results and recommendations at SIPA in late April 2023
- Presentation on Accelerator Lab Network Global Call in April 2023
- Final report by early May 2023.
- Optional: one blog post on findings by early May 2023.

Requirements:

Ideally, a team of around six members will allow for pairs to work on specific themes, interviews and research questions. Team members should have good research and communication skills. Specific interest in innovation methods, climate change, as well as in creative approaches to portfolio visualization and presentation, will be especially useful when working on the project. An ability to take initiative and contribute new fresh ideas will also be helpful. Excellent writing skills in English are required. Ability to conduct interviews in French, Spanish or Portuguese is desirable. Knowledge of the UN system is desirable, as is interest in climate change, collective intelligence and misinformation.

Logistics:

The team will be assembled in early November 2022, and will meet with the client contact to discuss the proposed scope of work and overall project schedule. Background documentation from UNDP will be shared with the team and reviewed as part of their desk research. Communication with the client contact at HQ level will be maintained throughout the project via a combination of email and regular Zoom meetings as required, supplemented by face-to-face meetings at the beginning and end of the project (if feasible). Subject to further

consultation with UNDP, travel to one or more Accelerator Lab countries for in-person meetings and interviews in mid-March (SIPA's spring break) may be arranged.