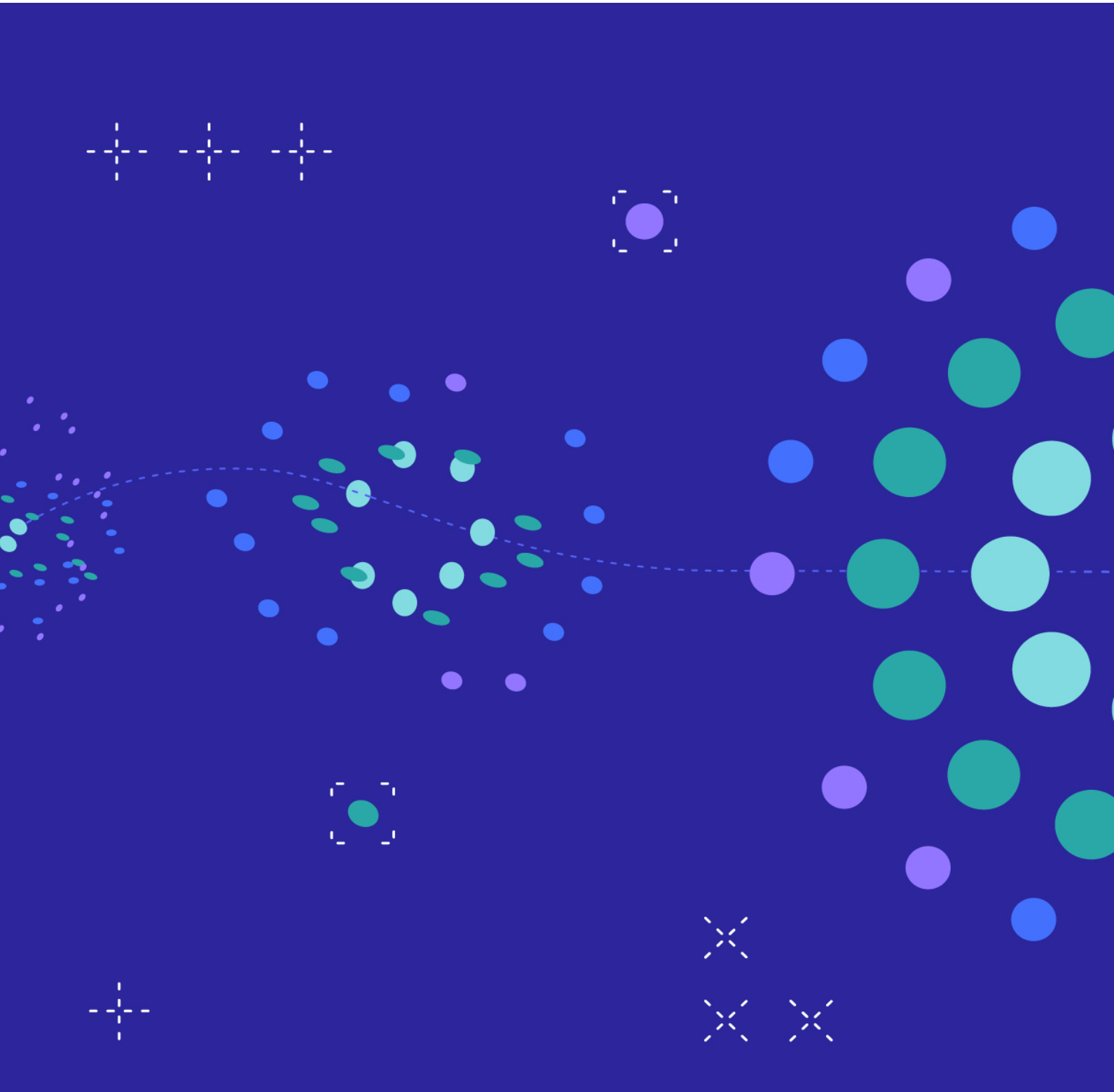# Digital Public Goods Alliance

5 Year Strategy

Digital Public Goods Alliance
5 Year Strategy

Unlocking the potential of open-source
technologies for a more equitable world.

November 15 2023

Written by: Liv Marte Nordhaug and Lucy Harris, Co-Leads of the Digital Public Goods Alliance Secretariat.

Table of Contents

Preface

Dear DPG community,

We are very pleased to present an updated version of the DPGA Strategy.

The first version of this strategy was written in June 2021 when the DPGA was in a formative stage. Since that time the DPGA has matured significantly: membership has expanded, the Secretariat has grown, and the DPG community has evolved a new understanding of digital public goods and their place and importance in the world.

Much of the understanding and vision articulated in the first version of the strategy remain true today. The Sustainable Development Goals will not be attained by 2030 without the transformative use of digital technologies. But the way these technologies are designed and developed matters. Open source solutions are an increasingly established antidote to many of the perils associated with digitisation and digital public goods specifically are emerging as a critical part of building and maintaining equitable digital ecosystems.

However, through our engagement with more than 30 new members, an expanded Board, hundreds of experts in communities of practices, and participation in numerous conferences and events, some aspects of how we conceive of the role of DPGs and the DPGA have shifted. The major changes that you'll notice in this version of the strategy are:

- **The removal of the mention of low- and middle-income countries, except as related to country-specific financing and resourcing**. A key aspect of DPGs is that they are being created by countries across all income levels, and - no matter where they are developed - they can be freely adopted and adapted by anyone regardless of geography. Frequent use of the term in the previous strategy distracted from the fact that DPGs are part of a globally relevant digital cooperation agenda.
- **Adding strategic targets**. In 2022, the DPGA Governing Board called on the Secretariat to develop more tangible targets to complement the strategic objectives. Through a consultation process starting in early 2023, open to all DPGA members and a few other key stakeholders, the Secretariat generated a set of four targets that build on the existing objectives but provide more focus to energise and align the DPGA membership around.
- **Aligning strategy and governance timelines**. Since the original publication of the strategy, a long-term governance structure has been established for the DPGA, with the Secretariat as a neutral entity overseen by a Governing Board. The strategy is an increasingly important tool for guiding and monitoring the progress of the DPGA and we felt it was important to take this opportunity to align DPGA strategic outcomes with the terms of the Alliance's governing body.

We feel we are entering this new stage ready to succeed - with the strength of new members, a more focused approach, and a more receptive environment, we are confident in our ability to unlock the transformative potential of DPGs for a more equitable world.

Liv Marte Norhaug and Lucy Harris,
Co-Leads of the Digital Public Goods Alliance Secretariat

How digital public goods help create a more equitable world

Photo by Calin Stan, Unsplash

The Sustainable Development Goals will not be attained by 2030 without the transformative use of digital technologies.

Across income levels and geographies diverse groups of stakeholders are therefore deploying digital technologies to take action against global challenges including climate change and information pollution, and countries are prioritising digitalisation to improve public and private service delivery and transform their economies and societies.

But while digital technologies hold immense promise to improve welfare and increase efficiency, they also exacerbate inequalities between and within countries. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted how technology can

both cause and prevent inequities in terms of delivery of social protection, healthcare and other emergency and recovery assistance.

The way these technologies are designed and developed matters. Digital public goods can help tilt the scales in favour of a more equitable digitalisation model.. DPGs are open-source software, open standards, open data, open AI systems, and open content collections that adhere to privacy and other applicable laws and best practices, do no harm, and help attain the Sustainable Development Goals.

DPGs promote multi-stakeholder cooperation and can help transcend geographical, institutional, sectoral and expertise boundaries that have shaped "traditional" international development discourse and initiatives to date.

As open-source solutions, DPGs can be the basis for community building, knowledge sharing, and joint approaches. Local adaptations and iterations can also be shared back with the core project to help continuously improve it and ensure its long term sustainability. DPGs can help safeguard human rights and foster inclusion by promoting relevant standards and providing transparency and accountability for citizens and users around how the core technologies that govern their lives have been designed, developed, and deployed. When those deploying a DPG (i.e. government institutions) maintain the open source license in their derivative, this transparency continues through to the implementation stage, allowing for more informed discourse and accountability.

DPGs have the potential to promote economic development and address the digital divide by reducing monopolies, powering startups and promoting innovation in the public and private sectors. DPGs can also empower youth to take an active part in building their own digital future by making it possible for them to learn about and contribute directly to technologies that affect their lives.

While the cost of procuring the services to implement open source software is often comparable to the cost of leasing proprietary systems in the short term, over the medium to long term the overall total cost of ownership may be lower. In addition, open source offers more control and independence, as well as the opportunity to build capacity and trust in the local maintainer who can continuously adapt the solution to fit their specific needs. DPGs reduce the risk of vendor lock-in, and provide greater adaptability and responsiveness to changing needs, making it easier for countries and communities to make strategic decisions and take a long term, holistic perspective when building their digital foundations.

In sum: DPGs represent an unprecedented opportunity to fundamentally alter power balances and knowledge asymmetries by enabling countries to access cutting edge features by default, drive their own digital transformation processes, and grow their local ecosystems to derive value.

However, the transformative potential of DPGs can not be fully or equitably realised unless we also transform the complex systems, structures and practices in which DPGs are embedded. This is why the Digital Public Goods Alliance is needed.

7

The Digital Public Goods Alliance advantage

The Digital Public Goods Alliance (DPGA) has an unprecedented opportunity to effect the transformative change needed through its:

- **Origins** - The DPGA is a direct response to _The Age of Digital Interdependence_ which called for, "the creation of a broad, multi-stakeholder alliance, involving the UN, that can support digital public goods", and has subsequently been endorsed by the UN Secretary-General as a means for improving international digital cooperation. Established as a coordinated initiative of the founding organisations; iSPIRT, Norway, Sierra Leone, and UNICEF, the DPGA has collaboration at its core.

- **Community** - The DPGA aligns and coordinates a diverse set of members around a common vision, strategic objectives, and the definition, standard and registry for DPGs. The community includes national governments, UN-institutions and international development banks, international development donors, non-governmental organisations, academic institutions, civil society organisations, technology companies, and other private and public sector stakeholders.

- **Structure** - The DPGA supports, coordinates and facilitates alignment among this community of like-minded organisations via an independent, neutral Secretariat. Using the DPGA Annual Roadmap as a formal coordination, alignment, engagement, and communication tool, the Secretariat supports without duplicating the work of the DPG ecosystem. The Secretariat is backed by a long term funding commitment to ensure predictability for stakeholders engaging with the DPGA.

In sum: The strength of the DPGA is its strong mandate in combination with the coordination and facilitation efforts of multiple like-minded organisations and maintenance of core functions in benefit of the entire DPG ecosystem. Collectively, this reduces fragmentation and duplication of efforts, while increasing impact across different regions and sectors.

> _"Digital public goods are essential in unlocking the full potential of digital technologies and data to attain the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular for low- and middle-income countries". Para. 78._
>
> -   _UN Secretary-General António Guterres - Roadmap for Digital Cooperation_

Vision

By the year 2030, the collaborative efforts of the strong multi-stakeholder Digital Public Goods Alliance have unlocked the potential of digital public goods to contribute to a more equitable world and accelerate attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Photo by Katja Anokhina on Unsplash

Objectives & Targets

The five year objectives of the Digital Public Goods Alliance are:

1. Digital public goods with high-potential for addressing critical development needs and urgent global challenges are discoverable, sustainably managed, and accessible for government institutions and other relevant implementing organisations.

2. UN-institutions, multilateral development banks and other public and private institutions that are of high relevance for supporting implementation of digital technologies have the knowledge, capacity, and incentives to effectively promote and support adoption of DPGs.

3. Government institutions have the information, motivation, and capacity to effectively implement DPGs that address country needs, including to plan, deploy, maintain, and evolve their digital public infrastructure.

4. Countries have public sector capacity and vibrant commercial ecosystems in place to create, maintain, implement, and incubate DPGs locally.

In support of the DPGA Vision and Objectives, the following four operational targets have been developed to prioritise, coordinate, and align DPGA member and stakeholder efforts:

Target 1: 50-in-5
    By the end of 2028, 50 countries have:
- leveraged digital public goods to design, launch and scale at least one component of their digital public infrastructure stack, in a manner that is safe and inclusive, and enables one or more priority use cases.

Target 2: Fighting climate change
    By the end of 2028, sustainably maintained and highly relevant digital public goods:
- have enabled diverse groups of stakeholders to take action and improve collaboration to fight and adapt to climate change; and
- are enabling long-term action and collaboration to fight and adapt to climate change.

Target 3: Fighting information pollution and restoring trust
    By the end of 2028, sustainably maintained and highly relevant digital public goods:
- have enabled diverse groups of stakeholders to take action and improve collaboration to fight information pollution and enhance information integrity; and
- have enabled new norm-shaping technologies to scale that help restore trust and protect and advance human rights.

Target 4: Making digital public goods the norm for preventing and responding to urgent global challenges
    By the end of 2028, digital public goods are part of the international community's default approach for rapidly empowering relevant stakeholders to prevent and respond to urgent global challenges, including through;

- a globally recognised and scalable methodology for rapidly establishing communities of practice to align on priority topics and help identify relevant digital public goods for preventing and responding to urgent global challenges; and
- the establishment of one or more financing instruments to fund digital public goods of high-relevance for preventing and responding to urgent global challenges.

Approach

The Digital Public Goods Alliance, through the Secretariat and its members take the following approach to achieve the above objectives and targets:

1. **Align international leadership around Digital Public Goods** - We leverage the global endorsement from the UN Secretary-General, international forums such as the UN General Assembly, the World Bank & IMF Annual Meetings, G7/G20, regional organisations such as the African Union and the European Union, and a coalition of high-level (c-suite/heads of state) supporters to advocate for transformation in policies, practices, and resource mobilisation.

2. **Establish and maintain the Standard and Registry for Digital Public Goods** - We use an inclusive and transparent approach to produce and maintain an internationally recognised and widely adopted open standard and registry for DPGs. The DPG Standard operationalises the definition of DPGs from the 2020 Roadmap for Digital Cooperation and advances a human rights based approach for digital development. The DPG Registry provides information on digital solutions that have been reviewed as DPGs against the DPG Standard. It has been designed for easy integration with, and reuse by, other platforms, as well as for direct exploration by those looking to discover DPGs. It also pilots the use of frontier technology and other innovative approaches to strengthen the infrastructure for identifying, vetting and contributing to DPGs.

3. **Engage expert groups to advance high impact DPGs** - We convene diverse groups of experts in Communities of Practice (CoPs) to identify, assess and advance DPGs with high potential for addressing critical development needs and urgent global challenges. CoPs facilitate cooperation and coordination between entities and across sectors/domains which enables the DPGA to identify, recommend, and advocate for DPGs with high impact-potential.

4. **Mobilise and direct funding and resources to effect transformative change across the entire DPG ecosystem** - We mobilise and align donors around existing and effective funding structures that cover relevant parts of the DPG ecosystem, and help create new funding, support structures, and mechanisms needed to fill relevant gaps[1]. This includes leveraging innovative financing and new opportunities presented by digital finance, while exploring how private capital could be raised to support financially sustainable models. We will engage the private sector strategically and sustainably around open source technologies and open content and data initiatives.

5. **Enable the UN System, development banks, regional institutions, and international development donors to better support country adaptations and implementations of DPGs** - Building upon the DPGA's origins, and leveraging the endorsement of the UN Secretary-General, we engage centralised UN structures, like the UN Technology Envoy's Office and the UN Innovation Network (UNIN), as well as sector-specific UN agencies, the World Bank and other development banks, regional institutions like the AU and EU, and

---

[1] Where such funding or support is directed to specific countries, it will only be directed towards countries that are eligible for official development assistance (ODA) as per the DAC List of ODA Recipients - OECD

bilateral and philanthropic donors to address and remove systemic barriers that limit stakeholders' capacity to procure, produce, and support country adaptations and implementations of DPGs. This includes capturing use cases, developing toolkits, and expanding awareness of open source and open licensing options.

6. **Strengthen country and regional capacity to build, implement, and manage Digital Public Goods** - The DPGA works with government entities and regional hubs to change the power balance around technology solutions. The DPGA supports the development of local capacity for the creation of new DPGs and for locally managed adaptation and implementation of existing DPGs. We use decentralised processes and frontier technologies to distribute opportunities for contributing to, and benefiting from, the work of the DPGA. We make tools and resources available to governments to navigate public procurement issues, and for supporting and advocating for the development of new government policies and procurement practices. We work to bolster and expand the impact of existing support structures that provide non-financial, technical, legal, and training assistance for the creation, implementation, and management of DPGs.

How the Digital Public Goods Alliance is organised and funded

Photo provided by DPGA Member, Government of Bangladesh

The Digital Public Goods Alliance (DPGA) is a multi-stakeholder community of countries, multilateral organisations, philanthropic and bilateral donor organisations, private companies, non-governmental organisations and research institutions working together to advance digital public goods. It was launched in December 2019, in response to recommendation 1B of the UN Secretary-General's High-level Panel on

Digital Cooperation. The DPGA was co-founded by four 1B Champions: The Government of Norway; The Government of Sierra Leone; The Indian Software Product Industry RoundTable iSPIRT; and UNICEF. In the 2020 Roadmap for Digital Cooperation, the UN Secretary-General welcomed the formation of the DPGA and asked the DPGA to continue to work closely with other emerging digital public goods initiatives.

● **The DPGA Membership** includes the co-founders and other organisations contributing to the DPGA's vision and strategic objectives in respective areas of strength, and in alignment with the DPG Standard and definition. DPGA members publicly commit to advancing a shared vision, transparently monitoring and sharing activities, and working collaboratively as part of the DPGA to support digital public goods. A full list of members can be found on the who we are page of the website..

● **The DPGA Secretariat** is a neutral entity that works to identify, inspire, and coordinate members of the DPGA to increase impact towards the DPGA's strategy. It operates in a transparent and participatory manner that mirrors its commitment to open source. The Secretariat leads the creation and maintenance of foundational components of and for the DPG ecosystem, such as the DPG Standard and Registry, and Communities of Practice. It also leads advocacy efforts that include highlighting DPGs, mobilising and aligning funding for existing mechanisms, and the creation of new financing mechanisms to fill gaps in the DPG ecosystem. The DPGA Secretariat is financed by a limited number of funders who are committed to advance one or more of the DPGA Strategic Targets. All funders operate in alignment with the DPGA Financing Code of Conduct which ensures that the DPGA Secretariat can be sustainably financed to work with neutrality and integrity to advance the DPGA's mission, strategic objectives, and targets.

● **Governance of the DPGA** is overseen by a Governance Board who reviews and approves strategic decisions for the DPGA. All Board member organisations are also co-hosts of the DPGA, with co-hosting contributions determined based on each organisation's comparative advantages. Contributions go beyond those that are financial, and can include convening and advocacy support, country outreach, and leadership in DPG implementation. The governance timeline follows the strategy period, from November 2023 until November 2028.   .

How the Digital Public Goods Alliance operates

There are three main types of DPGA activities:

1. The Secretariat performs **core, centralised functions** on behalf of the entire DPGA stakeholder community, such as maintenance of the DPG Registry, the DPG Standard, DPG Roadmap and DPGA communication.

2. The Secretariat performs **coordination functions together with DPGA members**, such as convening Communities of Practice, coordinating convenings, and producing reports.

3. The Secretariat works with DPGA members and other stakeholders to **identify, track and encourage their aligned activities** that deliver on the DPGA strategic objectives, but are not coordinated by the Secretariat.
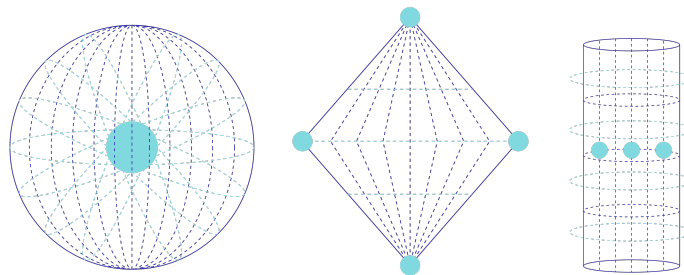
Appendix

Terms

Digital Public Goods (DPGs)
The DPGA defines digital public goods as open-source software, open standards, open data, open AI systems, and open content collections that adhere to privacy and other applicable laws and best practices, do no harm, and help attain the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Digital Public Goods Registry (DPG Registry)
The DPG Registry houses proposed DPGs that have either been nominated directly or have been pulled together from partnership databases. Once a nominated DPG has been reviewed against the DPG Standard it is considered a digital public good and labeled as such in the DPG Registry.

Digital Public Goods Standard (DPG Standard)
The DPG definition has been operationalised into a 9-indicator open standard by the DPGA, to enhance alignment and reduce fragmentation in the digital landscape. The DPG Standard has been designed to be relevant for all DPGs regardless of sector and to cover minimum criteria of general relevance. It incorporates and references existing guidelines and best practices such as the Principles for Digital Development.

Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI)
Refers to a secure and interoperable network of components that include digital payments, ID, and data exchange systems, and is essential for participation in markets and society in a digital era. DPI is needed for all countries to build resilient and innovative economies, and for the well-being of people.

Frontier Technologies
There is no universally agreed definition of frontier technology. However, there is a recurring common feature across the different technological advances in that they all "have the potential to disrupt the status quo, alter the way people live and work, rearrange value pools, and lead to entirely new products and services".

High-level Panel (HLP or H1B)
"High-level Panel" refers to the High-level Panel on Digital Cooperation which was convened by the UN Secretary-General to provide recommendations on how the international community could work together to optimise the use of digital technologies and mitigate risks. The report "The Age of Digital Interdependence" is the result of this panel, with

recommendation 1B in that report referring to digital public goods and the DPGA. It is sometimes abbreviated as HLP or High-level Panel Recommendation 1B (H1B) referring to the specific recommendation.

Horizontal Enablers

Refers to technologies that tend to solve problems "horizontally" across multiple sectors and is sometimes used as part of definitions of digital public infrastructures.

Open Source

Something is open source when it can be modified and shared because its design is publicly accessible. For software, data and content to be open source the source code, data, and content must be made accessible through the use of an open license. For software, the DPGA requires OSI approved licenses. For open content, a Creative Commons license is required. For data an Open Data Commons approved license is required. See the full license list for reference.

Digital Public Goods Alliance