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**IMPLEMENTATION OF AND PROGRESS MADE
ON DECISIONS TAKEN AT THE
SIXTH SESSION OF THE COMMISSION**

Note by the secretariat*

Executive summary

The present note has been prepared by the UNCTAD secretariat in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 2003/56, the report of the Commission on Science and Technology for Development on its sixth session and the provisional agenda and documentation for the seventh session of the Commission. It provides an account of the work carried out during the inter-sessional period 2003–2004, in such areas as information and communication technologies, promoting the application of science and technology to meet the Millennium Development Goals, and the Science and Technology for Development Network. The present note also includes a brief update on the Commission's earlier work and other activities.

* The late submission of this document was due to the workload of the Division concerned in connection with the preparations of UNCTAD XI.

1. Economic and Social Council resolution 2003/56 calls on the Commission on Science and Technology for Development (CSTD) to review at its seventh session the implementation and progress made on decisions taken at its sixth session.¹ Pursuant to that decision, the present note has been prepared by the secretariat as a background document for the Commission's consideration of this agenda item. It also provides an update on the earlier work of the Commission, as well as other activities undertaken by the secretariat on the Commission's behalf.

2. As a follow-up to the work of the Commission on its previous substantive theme on technology development and capacity-building for competitiveness in a digital society, the Commission has been invited to: (a) interact closely with the ICT Task Force; (b) play an active role within the United Nations system in the analysis, promotion and recommendation of applications of science and technology to meet the development goals contained in the Millennium Declaration; (c) ensure further development of the Science and Technology for Development Network (<http://www.unctad.org/stdev/>); and (d) liaise with the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) to further develop its ICT benchmarking tool.

Coordination with the United Nations ICT Task Force

3. Building on the collaborative relationship it has established with the Task Force in undertaking its work on the substantive theme² of the previous inter-sessional period, the Commission, through its secretariat, held consultations with the secretariat of the Task Force in carrying out various ICT-related work.

4. At its sixth session, the Commission was invited, as feasible, to update its publication *Knowledge Societies: Information Technologies for Sustainable Development* with a view to raising awareness on recent developments in the field of ICT. To this end, the UNCTAD secretariat has been collaborating with the UN ICT Task Force to prepare a concise source booklet for policymakers and practitioners in developing countries. It will include concrete policy options designed to facilitate the formulation of national ICT strategies. Seeking to fill gaps in existing literature, the booklet will focus on policies, related regulations and governance, "old and new" ICTs, innovation, learning, capacity-building and financing.

Science and technology and the Millennium Development Goals

5. The Commission's work in this area has focused on policies and measures that would (a) improve the policy environment for the application of science and technology to development, (b) strengthen basic and applied research in developing countries, (c) strengthen technology support institutions and science advisory mechanisms, and (d) promote affordable universal Internet access. In order to contribute to further understanding of the issues, the secretariat convened four electronic working groups from June to September 2003, as well as a panel meeting, which was held in Tunis, Tunisia, from 29 to 31 October 2003. The findings and recommendations of the Commission are contained in the report of the Secretary-General, presented under item 2 of the provisional agenda.

¹ The report on the sixth session (5-9 May 2003) of the Commission is contained in E/2003/31.

² The substantive theme for the inter-sessional period 2001-2003 was entitled "Technology development and capacity-building for competitiveness in a digital society. The Commission had focused its work on three principal aspects of the theme: a) the measurement and benchmarking of technology development; b) the role of foreign direct investment in transferring technology and in building national ICT capabilities; and c) policy options for ICT development in developing countries. Findings have been made widely available to ICT-related bodies both within the UN system such as the ICT Task Force and ITU, as well as outside notably the World Summit on the Information Society.

Science and Technology for Development Network (STDev)³

6. The STDev is an electronic gateway to information on science and technology for development. At its sixth session, the Commission recommended that it be further developed and expanded into an inter-agency gateway on information on science and technology activities, which would also link information technology networks at the regional, subregional and interregional levels to the network.

7. To this end, the secretariat has identified a number of regional and subregional networks on science and technology and has established hyperlinks to their websites from the STDev. The secretariat continued its efforts to further expand the STDev information database on national institutes of science and technology. In this context, it has contacted over 100 permanent missions of member States to the United Nations Office in Geneva to gather relevant information on national S & T bodies and institutions. As of February 2004, over 70 responses had been received and included on the STDev website. It is hoped that this electronic directory will serve as an important first step in facilitating regional and subregional exchange and collaboration in the area of science and technology.

8. Efforts have also been under way to redesign the gateway, including the restructuring of navigation and interface to make it more user-friendly, as well as introducing a search engine, which allows users to have direct access to dynamically generated information on science and technology issues within the UN system.

9. Furthermore, in an effort to update the electronic compendium and user guide to UNCTAD's work on issues of technology for development, the secretariat has identified 50 additional documents. These will be digitized for inclusion in the compendium.

ICT benchmarking tool

10. Designed to assist policy makers in setting up and implementing their national ICT strategies, the ICT benchmarking tool enables policymakers to assess the ICT capabilities of their respective countries and to make comparisons with other countries.

11. The ICT benchmarking tool has been developed by the secretariat in collaboration with the Institute of Software Technology and Interactive Systems of the Vienna University of Technology⁴, with a financial grant from the Austrian Government.

12. An interactive web-based system operating with flexible open-source software, the tool may be configured to suit specific needs of users. Parameters may be classified into two categories: those related to basic connectivity and usage criteria, and those related to ease of access. The tool is currently linked to an interactive database with figures for up to 11 ICT parameters for about 40 countries.

13. The ICT benchmarking tool was launched on 10 December 2003, to coincide with the first phase of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), held in Geneva from 10 to 12 December 2003. During the Summit, the Product Report was widely disseminated and the tool made available through the STDev (<http://www.unctad.org/stdev/ictbenchmark>). The UNCTAD secretariat has received positive feedback from various users who found it user-friendly; in addition, it has been

³ <http://www.unctad.org/stdev/>

⁴ Professor A. Min Tjoa.

recognized as the first tool that allows online assessment of parameters of speed of access to the Internet.

14. The UNCTAD secretariat has also updated its "Technology Indicators Database", which is hosted on the STDev website. It is envisaged that users would use the database in conjunction with the benchmarking tool.

Gender Advisory Board

15. In its resolution 2003/56, ECOSOC noted with appreciation the work carried out by the Gender Advisory Board (GAB) of the Commission, particularly at the regional and national levels, and requested the Commission to take into account the need to meaningfully and systematically integrate a gender component into all its programmes and to improve its collaboration with its Gender Advisory Board. To this end, the UNCTAD secretariat and the GAB secretariat added each other to their respective listservs for information-sharing and updates. The GAB was invited to join the CSTD online working groups, as well as to participate in the panel on the Commission's inter-sessional substantive theme. The secretariat has also ensured, through consultation with the GAB, that gender dimensions are reflected in the report of the Secretary-General on promoting the application of science and technology to meet the development goals contained in the Millennium Declaration.

Other activities

16. Within the context of the report of the Commission on Science and Technology for Development on its sixth session (E/2003/31), the Economic and Social Council, at its substantive session of 2003, took note of the contribution of the Commission to its high-level segment on rural development. The Commission had addressed at its fifth session in 2001 the theme "National capacity-building on biotechnology." In its report, the Commission addressed the opportunities and challenges presented by biotechnologies and underlined the need for national capacity-building in biotechnology to support efforts in rural development, including food security, agricultural productivity, health and environmental sustainability.

17. The UNCTAD secretariat prepared a report of the Secretary-General on the impact of modern biotechnology on health, food security, sustainability and economic productivity (A/58/76). The report was submitted to the General Assembly at its fifty-eighth session in 2003. The General Assembly, in its resolution 58/200, urged the relevant bodies of the United Nations system to work cooperatively to ensure that countries receive sound scientific information and practical advice to enable them to take advantage of biotechnologies to promote economic growth and development. The same resolution requested the Secretary-General to report to the General Assembly, at its next session in 2004 on the status of coordination between the relevant organizations and bodies of the United Nations system with a view to strengthening coordination of activities in the area of biotechnology within the United Nations system. As part of the Global Biotechnology Forum,⁵ a number of representatives of United Nations organizations made presentations about their activities in the area of biotechnology and agreed to establish an Inter-Agency Cooperation Network on Biotechnology. The Inter-Agency Network would interact virtually and meet, as necessary, in conjunction with international events on science and technology, e.g. at the annual regular session of the CSTD.

18. The UNCTAD secretariat organized three policy dialogues within the context of its Science and Technology Diplomacy Initiative in 2003. These policy dialogues addressed issues related to

⁵ The Global Biotechnology Forum (GBF) was convened from 2 to 5 March 2004 in Concepcion, Chile, under the auspices of the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) and the Government of Chile, with assistance from the International Centre for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology (ICGEB).

biotechnology applications and trade, a proposal for an international science and technology treaty, and policy options for developing countries with regard to genetically modified organisms (GMOs) and trade.

19. The Commission participated at the preparatory process of the World Summit on the Information Society and attended its first phase. The secretariat also attended the Global Biotechnology Forum, held in Concepcion, Chile; the World Association of Industrial and Technological Research Organizations (WAITRO) meeting in Colombo, Sri Lanka, and the Organization of American States (OAS) Workshop on Science and Technology for Social Development, held in Kingston, Jamaica.
