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Methods of work of the Commission

**Review of methods of work of the Commission on Science and
Technology for Development**

Report by the Secretariat

Summary

The present report responds to General Assembly resolution 57/270 B, in which the Assembly requested each functional commission to examine its methods of work in order to better pursue implementation of the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits on the basis of a report with recommendations to be submitted by the Secretary-General to each functional commission. The report reviews the methods of work of the Commission on Science and Technology for Development and examines the progress it has made thus far to improve its methods of work to enable it to better adapt to changing circumstances and mandates. The report concludes with a number of recommendations for further improving the methods of work of the Commission.

¹ E/CN.16/2005/1.

I. Introduction

1. In paragraph 46 of its resolution 57/270 B, the General Assembly requested each functional commission to examine its methods of work in order to better pursue the implementation of the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits, recognizing that there is no need for a uniform approach since each functional commission has its own specificity, on the basis of a report with recommendations to be submitted by the Secretary-General to each functional commission. The General Assembly stipulated that the functional commissions and other relevant bodies of the Economic and Social Council should report to the Council no later than 2005 on the outcome of that examination. The present report has been prepared in response to that request.

II. Mandates and terms of reference of the Commission

2. The Commission on Science and Technology for Development was established as a functional commission of the Economic and Social Council in 1992 by Council resolution 1992/62 of 31 July 1992. The primary functions of the Commission, as derived from General Assembly resolutions 34/218, 41/183, 42/192, 44/14, and 46/235, are to provide, at the request of the Council, scientific and technical expert advice as may be necessary for the discharge of the mandate of the Council, and through the Council, expert advice to other intergovernmental bodies of the United Nations system. In addition, the Commission is to formulate policy guidelines for the harmonization of policies of the organs, organizations and bodies of the United Nations system in regard to scientific and technological activities; promote the improvement of linkages between the organs, organizations and bodies of the United Nations system, monitor the activities and programmes related to science and technology within the organs, organizations and bodies of the United Nations system; undertake early identification and assessment of new scientific and technological developments that may adversely affect the development process as well as those that may have specific and potential importance for that process and for strengthening the scientific and technological capacities of the developing countries; and select subjects of particular significance with major science and technology dimensions with a view to providing an assessment of technology and related policy analysis in order to facilitate the debate of the question in the Assembly.

3. Following a review of the role of the Commission in 1998, the Economic and Social Council, in annex I (A) of its resolution 1998/46 of 31 July 1998, called on the Commission to establish effective coordination with all other functional commissions, the Economic and Social Council and, in particular, the Commission on Sustainable Development and UNCTAD. The Commission was requested to improve and make more effective its coordination with other relevant United Nations bodies, including regional commissions.

4. General Assembly resolution 54/201 called for the strengthening of the Commission. The Council subsequently adopted a series of measures designed to provide further support to the Commission in carrying out its roles and its mandates. The measures

included the annualization of the Commission's regular sessions, beginning with the sixth session. Another measure was the setting-up of an open-ended working group to analyse ways and means of improving the role and participation of the Commission in the recommendation and policy-making process of the United Nations system on science and technology issues.

III. Methods of work of the Commission

5. The General Assembly, in paragraph 47 of its resolution 57/270 B, underscored that “the functional commissions, when mandated, should continue to have the primary responsibility for the review and assessment of progress made in implementing United Nations conference documents, while taking on a new focus on their methods of work”.

6. The Commission on Science and Technology for Development has continually reviewed and revised its methods of work. Innovations in relation to the working methods of the Commission that have been introduced over the past few years are outlined below.

(a) Reduction in the number of inter-sessional panels and the length of the annual session

7. Council resolution 2002/37 authorized the annualization of the regular sessions of the Commission effective May 2003. In order to offset the budgetary implications of the measure, the Commission's Bureau recommended, for the Council's adoption, to 1) forego the Commission's entitlement for a two-week session on a biennial basis in favour of a one-week session on an annual basis; and 2) reduce the number of inter-sessional panels/working groups from four to one.

(b) Greater reliance on information and communications technologies (ICTs) to improve interaction and coordination

The STDev electronic network

8. The Economic and Social Council, in resolution 1999/61, called upon the secretariat and the Bureau of the Commission to interact closely with bodies of the United Nations system in order to promote greater information exchange and coordination of activities in science and technology for development. In response to this request, a Science and Technology for Development Network (<http://stdev.unctad.org>) was launched at the Commission's fifth session in 2001. STDev serves as a gateway to information on science and technology activities for development within the United Nations system, other multilateral and bilateral development institutions, and non-governmental organizations. It contains up-to-date information on S&T activities both within and outside the United Nations system, on international S&T-related treaties and protocols, and on international initiatives and forthcoming major events and summits. Thus far, the network has undergone three phases of development with a search mechanism that provides direct access to documents and websites of other organizations within the United Nations system. The network has exchanged hyperlinks with electronic gateways

and websites of a number of United Nations entities, such as the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) of the UN Secretariat, the United Nations Information and Communication Technologies Task Force (ICT Task Force), the Asian and Pacific Centre for Transfer of Technology (APCTT), and the FAO Electronic Forum on Biotechnology. A partnership agreement has also been established with the Development Gateway of the World Bank. New developments are under way to create a virtual space for sharing examples of good practice among national and regional institutes of science and technology.

Internet working groups

9. In order to better assist the Commission in the preparation of its work, the Secretariat organized a number of Internet working groups to gather inputs on substantive themes. Four pilot on-line working groups were held between June and August 2003, with approximately 140 individuals. The members of the Working Groups represented more than 30 countries and included government representatives, non-governmental organizations, intergovernmental organizations and researchers.

CSTD listserv

10. A listserv was set up in 2001 with a view to facilitating communication among the Commission members and with the Secretariat. The Secretariat regularly disseminates, via the listserv, information on news, policies, documents, decisions and events related to science and technology. The listserv has become an indispensable tool in organizing the work of the Commission.

(c) Closer interactions with other entities in the United Nations system and other functional commissions

11. This was achieved through the STDev website and participation in panels by representatives from the regional commissions and UN specialized agencies, especially Geneva-based ones. Among the UN entities with which the Commission through its Bureau and secretariat has worked closely are DESA, the UN ICT Task Force, the UN Millennium Development Goals Task Force on Science, Technology and Innovation, APCTT, the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), the International Atomic Energy Agency, and UNCTAD.

12. Representatives of the Bureau of the Commission have participated in a number of joint Bureau meetings organized by the Bureau of the Economic and Social Council. Most recently, one of the Commission's vice chairpersons attended the meeting of the chairpersons of the functional commissions with the Council in July 2004, during the substantive session of the Council in New York. Since 2001, during the annual sessions of the Commission, teleconferences have been held by the Bureaux of the Commission and ECOSOC.

(d) Closer interactions with national science and technology bodies

13. In order to promote networking, share national experiences, facilitate information flows and increase the impact of its work, the Commission is currently establishing an international network of science and technology institutions, including national science and technology commissions and other stakeholders in development. Members of the Network will interact on-line through the Science and Technology for Development Network (STDev). In this regard, the secretariat has established a database of science and technology bodies, including public, academic and private institutions. At the time of the preparation of the present note, almost 400 entities have been identified, with a little over four-fifths from developing countries. Of these, 40% are in sub-Saharan Africa, 4% in North Africa, 11% in Latin America, 6% in the Caribbean, 5% in West Asia, 5% in East Asia, 8% in South-east Asia and Oceania, and 5% in South Asia. The remaining 16% are located in Eastern Europe.

(e) Proactive role as a “think tank”

14. The Commission has played a key role in the early identification and assessment of new scientific and technological developments that may adversely affect the development process, as well as those that may have specific and potential importance for developing countries. Over the years, it has selected subjects of particular significance with major science and technology dimensions and has submitted its outcomes to other functional commissions and bodies of the United Nations system. For example, the Commission's 1998 publication on Knowledge Societies, which culminated its ground-breaking work on ICTs from 1995, was submitted to the UN ICT Task. The Commission's work on biotechnology led to the creation of the Inter-Agency Task Force on Biotechnology in 2004. The ICT Development Indices, developed jointly with UNCTAD and the ICT Task Force, were submitted to the first phase of the World Summit on the Information Society, held in Geneva from 10 to 12 December 2003. Since 2003, the Commission has been focusing its work on promoting the application of science and technology to meet the development goals, including those contained in the Millennium Declaration (MDGs). The outcomes of its work have been forwarded to the Millennium Project Task Force 10 on Science, Technology and Innovation.

IV. Recommendations

15. The following recommendations are put forward for consideration by the Economic and Social Council through the Commission on Science and Technology for Development:

- (a) The Commission may wish to develop mechanisms to ensure that the outcomes of its examination of thematic issues on promoting the application of science and technology to meet the MDGs are integrated into the implementation process of the MDGs at national, regional and international levels, including the Millennium +5 summit of the General Assembly;

- (b) With regard to its programme of work, the Commission may wish to review the possibility of adopting a biennial programme of work, with the first year focusing on policy analyses and the second year focusing on implementation;
- (c) The Commission may wish to identify means to mainstream science, technology and innovation into all development initiatives, activities and discussions held within the United Nations system, with a focus on promoting joint programming and common action, synthesis of results achieved, and issues that remain to be tackled;
- (d) The Commission may wish to encourage active participation of civil society and the private sector in its panels, electronic working groups, and annual sessions;
- (e) The Commission may wish to find ways and means to link its work with that of the other functional commissions of the Council, for example through cooperation and coordination between the various substantive secretariats and bureaux, particularly in the context of integrated and coordinated implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits in the economic and social fields.