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COMMISSION ON SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY  
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**THE FUNCTIONING OF THE COMMISSION ON SCIENCE AND  
TECHNOLOGY FOR DEVELOPMENT, INCLUDING ITS ROLE IN  
COORDINATING SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY FOR DEVELOPMENT**

Note by the secretariat

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

At its fifty-fourth session, the United Nations General Assembly, through its resolution A/RES/54/201, set in motion the move to strengthen the Commission on Science and Technology for Development. This was premised on the recognition that the degree of access to and adaptation of science and technology determine, to a large degree, the pace of development. The cross-cutting nature of science and technology within the United Nations system called for coherent policy guidance and better coordination. The Economic and Social Council subsequently adopted a series of resolutions (2001/31, 2001/32 and 2002/37) designed to empower the Commission to strengthen its roles and to carry out its mandates.

## **I. New working modalities**

1. On the recommendation of the Commission on Science and Technology for Development (CSTD), the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) adopted resolution 2002/37, which authorizes the Commission to meet annually. Beginning with its sixth session in May 2003, the Commission is to hold its regular sessions on an annual instead of a biennial basis. The CSTD Bureau has discussed the implications of the decision and is recommending to the Commission that it may wish to consider, at its sixth session, new working modalities. The Commission may wish to recommend to the Council that the current entitlement to meet for two weeks (as stipulated in General Assembly resolution 46/235, Annex, para. 7 (a) (v), and Council resolution 1998/46) be reduced to one week and that the number of inter-sessional panels/working groups be reduced from four to one.

2. Pursuant to ECOSOC resolution 2002/37, an open-ended working group is being established by the Commission 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 (S&T) issues, with the aim of working towards the strengthening of the Commission.

## **II. Coordinating S&T activities within the United Nations system**

3. S&T is a key driver of development, and as such is a cross-cutting element in all aspects of development work. Notwithstanding the complexity of the issue of coordination, the Commission has been collaborating with United Nations system entities active in science and technology through the activities described below.

4. *The Science and Technology for Development Network.* The Science and Technology for Development Network (STDev) was set up by UNCTAD in response to General Assembly resolution A/RES/54/201. 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. It is envisaged that with the active involvement of all relevant United Nations entities, STDev will play a key role in facilitating coordination in the area of science and technology within the UN system. Hyperlinks have been exchanged with the websites of other organizations within the United Nations system as well as with other electronic gateways, such as that of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) of the UN Secretariat, the United Nations Information and Communication Technologies Task Force (ICT Task Force), and the Asian and Pacific Centre for Transfer of Technology (APCTT). A partnership agreement has also been established with the Development Gateway of the World Bank.

5. *Work with other UN agencies.* The Commission has, in carrying out its own work, adopted a collaborative approach by inviting relevant UN agencies along with other

international organizations to participate in its work panels. Its current work on ICTs, for example, has benefited from inputs by DESA, the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) and UNCTAD. Whenever possible, the Commission and its secretariat also brief member State delegations and observers on CSTD activities, whether on an adhoc basis or through intergovernmental bodies such as UNCTAD's Commission on Investment, Technology and Related Financial Issues and its Trade and Development Board. Furthermore, reports and findings of the Commission and its panels are made widely available, especially through e-mail and the STDev website.

6. Through its Bureau and secretariat, the Commission has also participated in and contributed to various S&T-related activities of UN bodies. Its secretariat routinely cooperates with other UN bodies through joint meetings and on-line discussions. It has provided inputs to the work programme of the Commission on Sustainable Development, as well as to various reports of the Secretary-General. Its representation at the Inter-Agency Network for Safety in Biotechnology (IANB) meeting in Vienna in April 2000 resulted in the Commission's activities' being featured in the IANB newsletter. The Commission, as well as its secretariat, has collaborated closely with the ICT Task Force. As an initial step, the Commission's publication *Knowledge Societies: Information Technology for Sustainable Development*, a derivative of its work during the inter-sessional period 1995–1997, has been made available to the ICT Task Force. The CSTD Bureau has also appointed a focal point to liaise with the ICT Task Force, which in turn has actively participated in the Commission's work on ICTs, specifically on Panels I and III. In addition, there has been collaboration with the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) Task Force on Science, Technology and Innovation. The work of the Commission's Gender Advisory Board, established to examine the gender implications of S&T, has been closely followed by the Commission on the Status of Women and its secretariat, and has benefited from UNDP/UNIFEM support. Through its secretariat, the Commission routinely provides input into UNCTAD's S&T-related activities, including expert meetings, such as the one held in Geneva in November 2001 on "Industrial and Environmental Biotechnology: Implications for Trade and Development".

7. *Input into major international conferences, summits and initiatives.* General Assembly resolution A/RES/56/182 stipulates that the Commission's expertise be harnessed and that it play its coordinating role during the preparatory and follow-up processes of major international conferences, summits and initiatives, including the World Summit on Sustainable Development, the World Summit on the Information Society and the UN Millennium Declaration.

8. The Commission presented the findings of its work at the following forums: OECD Working Party on Biotechnology (October 2000, Paris); Meeting of G-15 Experts on S&T: Use of ICTs as a Development Strategy (December 2001, Caracas, Venezuela); Preparatory Committees of the World Summit on the Information Society (July 2002 and February 2003, Geneva); International Conference on Science, Technology and Innovation: Emerging International Policy Issues (September 2002, Cambridge, Mass.); the Group of 77 South–South High-Level Conference on S&T (October 2002, Dubai) and the World Telecommunication/ICT Indicators Meeting, organized by the International Telecommunication Union (January 2003).

9. In addition to its role of coordinator of S&T issues within the UN system, the Commission has been designated as the forum for improving the understanding of S&T issues and for the formulation of recommendations and guidelines thereon (ECOSOC resolution 2001/31, para. 1). It also has the mandate of coordinator of UN activities supporting the efforts of developing countries to obtain, utilize and benefit from S&T (General Assembly resolution A/RES/55/185). These two functions are natural corollaries of the Commission's role as coordinator of S&T activities within the UN system. The Commission's fulfilment of these mandates is therefore dependent on the strengthening of its principal role as coordinator of S&T activities within the UN system.

### III. Strengthening the role of coordination

10. The main objectives of coordination have been identified as: (a) to improve the exchange of information among agencies, organizations and intergovernmental bodies concerned with S&T; (b) to promote joint programming and common action; and (c) to avoid duplication and to focus on work based on the respective areas of expertise of the different bodies. To this end, the following elements aimed at strengthening coordination have been proposed:

- *Inter-agency network for science and technology*, through the appointment of focal points for the exchange of information through STDev and through participation in the Commission's sessions and panel meetings. Regular inter-agency interactions would help to identify problems and challenges arising from new and innovative technologies such as ICTs and biotechnologies, as well as to minimize duplication and overlapping of activities. The outcome of such interactions could be posted in the STDev and presented to the next session of the Commission. It should be noted that General Assembly resolution A/RES/55/185 called for proposals to promote complementarity of activities in the area of new and innovative technologies.
- *Joint S&T studies*. Besides being a potentially effective vehicle for inter-agency cooperation, the Commission could harness the participating agencies' comparative advantage and specialized competencies. To this end, UN system entities active in science and technology are encouraged to contribute to the work of the Commission, especially in areas of new and emerging technologies, such as biotechnology and ICTs.
- *S&T technical cooperation*, especially in the transfer and absorption of new technologies, should be undertaken with maximum inter-agency coordination and, where feasible, public-private partnerships. A case in point is the ICTs, which have been spread through various forms of partnerships — opportunities for IT partnerships in developing countries are posted in the "Partnership Locator Facility" of the STDev. With the establishment of the ICT Task Force, the Commission's guidelines for ICT strategies could be used by developing countries and countries in transition when implementing the recommendations of ECOSOC resolution 1997/62 to formulate a national ICT strategy.

- *Follow-up to conferences and collaboration with other UN commissions*, which was mandated by the General Assembly under resolution A/RES/56/182, requires close and systematic collaboration with the secretariats of the various commissions.
- *Promoting application of science and technology for the achievement of the MDGs*. Science and technology can facilitate achievement of the MDGs on education, gender, health and sustainable development. The CSTD should serve as a forum to advance understanding of the application of science and technology in general to meet the MDGs. All parts of the UN system working in areas addressed by the CSTD should make an input to the annual sessions of the Commission and its panel meetings. The CSTD will be encouraged to focus on topics of common interest and to provide support to international events and initiatives.

11. A recent report prepared by the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU/REP/2001/2) contains a number of recommendations for enhancing the coordination of S&T activities within the United Nations system. It suggested *inter alia* that "the United Nations Commission on Science and Technology for Development may wish to discuss the desirability, feasibility and timeliness of a United Nations system joint programme for science and technology, modelled on the UNAIDS [programme]". Such a joint programme would enable member States to address more comprehensively the opportunities and risks for global society, and would serve as a vehicle for the Secretary-General's key proposals on S&T to the UN Millennium Summit (September 2000), the Summit Declaration of the Group of 8 (July 2000) and the Group of 77 Dubai Declaration for the Promotion of Science and Technology in the South (October 2002).

12. In order to maximize the impact of its current work on ICTs, the Commission should also strengthen its ties with the ICT Task Force, the World Summit on the Information Society, the MDG Task Force on Science, Technology and Innovation, as well as with the regional commissions.