

**CSTD 2015–2016 Inter-Sessional Panel
on "Smart Cities and Infrastructure" and "Foresight for Digital Development"**

Opening session 11 January 2016

Statement by
Taffere Tesfachew

Acting Director, Division on Technology and Logistics; Director, Division on Africa, Least
Developed Countries and Special Programmes, UNCTAD

It gives me a great pleasure to welcome you - on behalf of UNCTAD - to the CSTD Inter-Sessional Panel meeting to discuss - among others - two important and timely issues: "Smart Cities and Infrastructure" and "Foresight for Digital Development". This Inter-Sessional Panel is timely because it comes at a critical juncture in the international development discourse - and a time of transition from the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to the much broader 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the much more ambitious Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). A succession of international Conferences and agreements during 2015 has created a new global development agenda. In September, world leaders adopted a comprehensive and ambitious 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the United Nations Sustainable Development Summit, committing themselves and the international community to ending poverty in all its forms and dimensions. In July, they adopted the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, which complements and supports the means of implementation for the 2030 Agenda. In December 2015, at the 21st Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, they agreed, with similar ambition, to limit global warming to 2°C and pursue efforts to limit it to 1.5°C.

The outcomes of all these agreements have - both direct and indirect - implications for many of the issues that the CSTD will be addressing in the coming years, including in the coming three days here in Budapest. When viewed from a broader perspective, collectively the outcomes are the result of a culmination of a half century of profound changes in the world economic order which have at times supported, and at times hindered, the efforts of developing countries to achieve a more prosperous and dignified life for their populations. Sustainable and inclusive development remains a challenge for many countries and communities; and meeting this challenge will require integrating the economic, social, technological and environmental dimensions of sustainable development, nationally and globally, and creating an enabling environment for inclusive and sustainable development.

In an increasingly more complex and inter-dependent world, Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) are key drivers of the inclusive and sustainable development to which the 2030 Agenda aspires. As a UN Commission - responsible for articulating the nexus between STI and development and as a subsidiary body of the ECOSOC with its universal membership - the CSTD has a critical role to play in defining and supporting the science and technology-related actions which flow from recent global agreements. This is a momentous responsibility

- but also in line with the overall mandates and Terms of Reference of the CSTD, which was established to provide the ECOSOC and General Assembly with policy advice on the implications of Science and Technology for sustainable development. Above all, the CSTD could serve as a multilateral forum for sharing experiences and best practices in the application of STI for achieving the SDGs. There is no doubt that STI is inextricably linked to the outcome of the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development and the successful conclusion of the SDGs. In this respect, I wish to highlight four points:

First, practically all major international agreements completed in last year or so have recognized the critical role of STI in the development process - and this is reflected in their action plans and the policy measures proposed. For example, goal 17 of the SDGs identifies technology as one of the important means of implementing and achieving the SDGs by 2030. Similarly, the Financing for Development Conference in Addis Ababa in July 2015 and its outcome - the Addis Ababa Action Agenda (AAAA) - have singled out technology for special emphasis in the new Global Development Partnership for advancing the universal development goals. In fact, the first outcome from the Addis Ababa Conference to be implemented was related to technology. I am referring - of course - to the establishment of the United Nations Interagency Task Team on STI for the SDGs and the launching of the Technology Facilitation Mechanism (TFM). How the TFM will function and its role vis-à-vis the CSTD may require further discussion. Nevertheless, its establishment signals the recognition by the international community of the critical role of technology in achieving the new and more ambitious and universal development goals. In the same vein, the recently adopted Paris Agreement on Climate Change has also underlined the centrality of STI in the mitigation and adaptation efforts.

My second point is to highlight that - regardless of the official declaration of the importance of STI - given the diverse, multidimensional, ambitious and absolute nature of the SDGs - it will be practically impossible to achieve all these goals successfully by 2030 without the development and appropriate application of STI. With the vision of "no one must be left behind", the 2030 Agenda has raised the bar and demands unprecedented actions and efforts. It is clear that in the new global development agenda, islands of prosperity surrounded by poverty, injustice, climate change and environmental degradation are viewed as neither sustainable nor acceptable. It is no longer enough to reduce poverty by half - as envisaged by MDGs - we must now eradicate it totally and everywhere - while ensuring availability of water and sanitation for all, ensuring access to affordable and reliable energy for all, reducing inequality within and among countries, making cities and human settlements inclusive, resilient and sustainable, and so on.

For many developing countries, such ambitious goals will be practically impossible to achieve in 15 years without effective and widespread application of technology and innovative ideas. From recent experience, we know already - that new technologies and innovations can transform economies and improve the living standards of many people within a short period. For example - information and communication technologies have had major macro- and micro-level impacts in many low-income economies, especially with increasing application of mobile phones and the internet to find solutions to the challenges facing the poor and

marginalized communities. Other technologies, such as synthetic biology and recent advances in gene editing technology equally hold promises for addressing key challenges in developing countries, such as food security, improvement of agricultural productivity and health care. The development of renewable energy technology is another area where poor countries will be able to develop adaptation and mitigation strategies for climate change while, at the same time, decoupling production from negative environmental impacts. These are only a few examples, but as many of you know, the achievement and sustainability of many of the goals in the next fifteen years will not happen without active - in some cases - extensive application of technologies.

The third point concerns the issue of "inclusiveness", which is one of the critical criteria of achieving the SDGs along with "sustainability". The point is - in implementing the Goals - it is equally important to ensure that the "inclusiveness" principle also applies to the dissemination and application of technologies and new innovative ideas to improve productivity and promote social development. This, in effect, means that efforts must be made to apply STI in an 'inclusive' manner and ensuring that existing technological gaps do not leave some countries and communities behind. The two major topics addressed in this Inter-Sessional Panel namely "Smart Cities and Infrastructure" and "Foresight for Digital Development" provide excellent examples of the types of new technologies and innovations that are indispensable for advancing the sustainable development objective but difficult to access for poor economies where resources are limited, although urbanization in these countries is taking place at a very fast and unsustainable pace and production is dominated by informal activities and low-pay and low-productivity jobs. As you will see in the course of the next three days, smart technologies can contribute to the achievement of goal 11 by making human settlements in urban areas safe, comfortable, resilient and sustainable. A good example, as shown in the draft background paper, is the deployment of smart water meters in Mumbai, India, which are helping to control water supply remotely and reduce portable water waste by as much as 50%.

However, harnessing STI for SDGs requires an enabling environment, in particular the skills, basic infrastructure (both soft and hard), appropriate policies to facilitate technology transfer, a conducive regulatory framework and a domestic productive capacity, which is essential if technology transfer and diffusion is to take place through linkages. The role of CSTD will be critical in articulating the policy measures and actions that developing countries, especially the least developed among them, need to take in order to facilitate technology transfer and the application of STI aimed at meeting the SDGs.

Finally, the trade-off between the benefits and risks of applying STI for achieving SDGs must be assessed carefully. The potential risks of intensifying the technological divide between communities and countries if the development and application STI is not applied judiciously and the potential dangers of creating dependency on technologies that are incompatible to local production capability and resource endowment need to be factored in policy actions that promote STI for implementing SDGs. All these are issues that the CSTD is mandated to address and share its findings and policy recommendations to member States through the General Assembly. Inter-Sessional meetings among experts - such as this one - provide

opportunities to address how STI could be made an effective tool to meet the universal goals that all member states of the United Nations agreed to achieve by 2030. As a final note, I wish to reassure you that UNCTAD - as a secretariat of the CSTD - will continue to provide - both the substantive and logistical support - that the Commission requires to discharge its responsibility and become an effective forum for addressing new and emerging issues in the area of STI and its contribution to the collective and global vision of inclusive and sustainable development. I look forward to the discussions in the coming three days.

Thank you for your attention.