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**The role of science, technology and innovation in accelerating the recovery
from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and the full implementation of the
2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at all levels**

Statement by

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THE REPUBLIC OF THE GAMBIA
Ministry of Higher Education, Research, Science and Technology
Senegambia Highway, Bijilo, West Coast Region

DRAFT SPEECH

United Nations Commission on Science and Technology for Development (CSTD) Twenty-fifth Annual Session

Ministerial Roundtable on

***“The role of science, technology, and innovation in accelerating the recovery from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at all levels*”**

Distinguished guests, ladies, and gentlemen,

It is my honor to address you all today on behalf of Hon. Minister Professor Pierre Gomez, Minister responsible for Higher Education, Research, Science and Technology of the Republic of The Gambia on the crucial topic of the role of science, technology, and innovation in accelerating the recovery from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at all levels, with a particular focus on the challenges facing developing countries such as The Gambia.

The COVID-19 pandemic has ravaged the world in ways that were previously unimaginable. The virus has affected millions of lives and disrupted economies, health systems, and societies worldwide. In sub-Saharan Africa, the pandemic has highlighted many of the region's pre-existing challenges, including policy implementation challenges, duplication of efforts from various development partners, plethora of policy priorities, lack of focus on priorities of socioeconomic relevance, and lack of follow up and follow through beyond support to develop or review policies. However, the pandemic has also offered opportunities to rethink development efforts into the long-term future.

To address these challenges, it is imperative that we recognize the vital role of science, technology, and innovation in accelerating the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and achieving sustainable development in sub-Saharan Africa. Science, technology, and innovation have the potential to transform societies and economies, creating new

opportunities for growth and development while improving the lives of people the world over.

In the fight against COVID-19, science has played a vital role in developing vaccines and other medical technologies that have helped to curb the spread of the virus. The rapid development and deployment of COVID-19 vaccines have shown us the transformative power of science, technology, and innovation, providing a ray of hope to millions of people worldwide. However, much more needs to be done to ensure that these vaccines and other medical technologies are accessible to everyone, regardless of their socioeconomic status or geographic location.

Innovation, on the other hand, has enabled countries to adapt to the pandemic by developing new technologies and strategies that help to mitigate the effects of the pandemic. For instance, the use of digital technologies has allowed many African countries to continue providing essential services, such as education and healthcare, despite the pandemic's disruptions.

To fully leverage digital technologies for pandemic recovery and achieving the SDGs, it is important to address the systemic weaknesses that the pandemic has exposed. This includes investing in education and training to build digital skills and competences, ensuring that digital technologies are accessible to all and affordable by all. We must therefore strengthen digital infrastructure to enable development and effective operability of other digital tools including digital health, digital financial inclusion, digital education, digital literacy, digital agriculture (farmers platforms), digital energy, digital identity (inclusion of marginalized communities) and open data platforms (to increase transparency and accountability in government and promote evidence-based decision-making) with the effective implementation of these tools factoring local needs and cultural norms, we can in effect close the digital divide and accelerate social and economic progress.

Our countries still face significant challenges in harnessing the power of science, technology, and innovation. The region is characterized by policy implementation failures, duplication of efforts from various development partners, a plethora of policy priorities, lack of focus on priorities of socioeconomic relevance, and lack of follow up and follow through beyond support to develop or review STI policies.

To address these challenges, there is a need for a coordinated approach that involves all stakeholders, including governments, the private sector, civil society, and development partners. Such an approach should focus on building the necessary infrastructure, promoting innovation and entrepreneurship, investing in long term capacities and capabilities of developing countries build the skills and competences of its youth through local TVET institutions, increase investments and collaboration in research and development, and strengthening the capacity of institutions responsible for developing and implementing policies.

Moreover, it is crucial to ensure that policies and strategies are tailored to the specific needs of sub-Saharan Africa. These policies should prioritize socioeconomic relevance and be informed by evidence-based research. Additionally, there is a need

to ensure that policies and strategies are implemented effectively, with clear follow-up and follow-through mechanisms in place to ensure accountability.

In conclusion, the role of science, technology, and innovation in accelerating the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and achieving sustainable development in sub-Saharan Africa cannot be overemphasized. To overcome the challenges facing the region, we need a coordinated approach that involves all stakeholders and prioritizes policies and strategies that are informed by evidence-based research and tailored to the specific needs of sub-Saharan Africa. We must ensure that all countries have access to the latest technologies and innovations, and that no one is left behind. With this approach, we can harness the transformative power of science, technology, and innovation to create a better future for all.

Thank you..