

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

**High-level Roundtable on  
“The impact of rapid technological change on sustainable development”**

**13 May 2019, 3 p.m.  
Room XVII, E-building, Palais des Nations**

**Concept Note**

## **1. Background**

The General Assembly, in resolutions [A/RES/72/242](#) and [A/RES/73/17](#), requested the Commission on Science and Technology for Development (CSTD) to give due consideration to the impact of key rapid technological changes on the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). At its twenty-first session in May 2018, held in Geneva, Switzerland, the CSTD selected “The impact of rapid technological change on sustainable development” as one of its priority themes for the 2018–2019 intersessional period. In this context, the Commission will convene on the afternoon of Monday, 13 May, a High-level Roundtable on the impact of rapid technological change on the achievement of the SDGs.

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 science, technology and innovation (STI). Rapid technological change can contribute to the faster achievement of the 2030 Development Agenda through several mechanisms, including by improving real incomes (through increased productivity and reduced cost of goods and services), by enabling faster and wider deployment of novel solutions to economic, social and environmental obstacles that operate as binding constraints on development, by supporting more inclusive forms of participation in social and economic life, by replacing environmentally costly modes of production with more sustainable ones, and by giving policy-makers powerful tools to design and plan development interventions.

While the application of new and emerging technologies represents an opportunity for faster progress towards the SDGs, they can also disrupt markets and economies, exacerbate social divides, and raise normative questions. Automation from the convergence of artificial intelligence, machine learning and big data could impact trade, competition, growth and employment in ambiguous and potentially negative ways. Rapid technological change has the potential to perpetuate existing divides within and between countries as well as between women and men, rural and urban populations, and rich and poor communities. Frontier technologies also pose profound concerns regarding how legal, social, ethical, and cultural norms could be affected in aspects ranging from the integrity of human life to the safety of the natural environment, the respect for personal privacy, security, and safety or the prevention of any forms of discrimination.

## **2. Objectives**

The High-level Roundtable will feature global leaders at the frontier of rapid technological change. It will provide an opportunity for dialogue with policymakers, international organisations and other stakeholders on the current and future state of new and emerging technologies and how rapid technological change can advance as well as hinder the achievement of the SDGs. High-level policymakers are encouraged to exchange concrete

experiences, lessons learned and best practices, and to discuss success stories and challenges faced at the national level.

### **3. Questions for discussion**

The following questions will guide the discussion:

- What is the current state and likely future trajectory of technologies associated with “rapid technological change” and what is the capacity of policies to shape technological trajectories?
- How is rapid technological change currently contributing to inclusive sustainable development, particularly for women and girls and marginalized groups?
- What are the developments in renewable energy technologies and related frontier technologies that provide opportunities for developing countries to accelerate their efforts to build green economies?
- What are best practices, at the national level, for developing an AI strategy? What are lessons learned for a successful consultation process involving multiple stakeholders?
- How can we ensure the swift diffusion of rapid technological change that is inclusive, development-oriented, and accessible to all countries, regardless of whether they are technological leaders, early adopters, or followers?
- How are non-governmental actors - including charitable foundations, academic institutions, and civil society - supporting rapid technological change for sustainable development?

### **4. Format**

The Roundtable will begin with a video on recent capacity-building workshops in China jointly organized by the Ministry of Science and Technology of China and UNCTAD. Following introductory remarks by UNCTAD’s Deputy-Secretary General and a brief introduction by the moderator, Ms. Julia Sieger (Presenter of Tech24 Programme at France24), members of the panel will make their initial interventions (5-8 minutes), broadly addressing the guiding questions. After this the moderator will initiate an interactive discussion among high-level policy makers and other participants, including those from the floor.

### **5. Supporting documents**

- UNCTAD (2019). Report of the Secretary-General on the impact of rapid technological change on sustainable development (E/CN.16/2019/2), [https://unctad.org/meetings/en/SessionalDocuments/ecn162019d2\\_en.pdf](https://unctad.org/meetings/en/SessionalDocuments/ecn162019d2_en.pdf)
- UNCTAD (2018). Technology and Innovation Report 2018, UNCTAD/TIR/2018, [https://unctad.org/en/PublicationsLibrary/tir2018\\_en.pdf](https://unctad.org/en/PublicationsLibrary/tir2018_en.pdf)