

**United Nations Commission on Science and Technology for Development (CSTD)  
Twenty-fourth annual session**

**“Applying gender lens to STI policies to deliver SDG 5”**

**21 May 2021, 14.00-14.45 (CEST)  
Concept note**

**Background**

With the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015, gender issues were placed at the forefront with a stand-alone SDG 5 on gender equality. Gender equality is also recognized as being cross-cutting and key to progress across all SDGs (5 targets and 54 indicators are in fact related to gender equality).

Yet years after the adoption of the SDGs, and decades after the adoption of the *Beijing Declaration at the Fourth Conference on Women* as well as the report of the *Gender Working Group to CSTD (1993)*, gender equality in science, technology, and innovation (STI) remains a global challenge.

In fact, out of the estimated 3.6 billion people still unconnected, the majority are girls and women. According to ITU<sup>1</sup>, on average, 52 per cent of women remain totally offline, compared with 42 per cent of men. But even these discouraging figures do not paint the complete picture, because it is not only about how women access technology, but also how they use and benefit from it.

One main challenge in bridging the gender divide in STI has been women’s participation in the sector. In fact, women are still under-represented in the tech sector, reaching levels below 30% in developed and developing countries alike, at a time when digital technologies are dramatically re-shaping our societies.

Digital technologies, digital-based information, and applications available are not reaching women as they are reaching men. What is the reason? Part of the answer is that given that women are chronically un-represented in the sector, these technologies often do not adequately target their needs. Another reason, observed often in developing countries, is that internet and other costs of digital devices are simply prohibitive for many women.

Gender disparities are therefore widespread in terms of access, ownership, digital literacy, and capacity to make meaningful contributions to development and deployment of technology. In addition to these more traditional sets of challenges, new technologies have brought about attention to newer challenges. For instance, an *UNCTAD report on Shaping STI: Applying a Gender Lens to deliver SDG 5 (forthcoming, 2021)* finds that bitcoin, while having the potential to enable women to control their own income and increase women’s status, equality, and empowerment; also cautions against the fact that these benefits to women from new tech are neither automatic nor guaranteed.

Moreover, the gendered effects of new technologies --especially digital technologies, AI, gene manipulation and new monetary systems--, are not yet well understood. They could in fact pose new risks for women and reverse momentum in achieving gender equality.

The Covid-19 pandemic has undoubtedly triggered a digital boom. The fast-changing and wide-ranging technological changes currently unfolding have implications for every facet of society, health and the economy. Consequently, while longstanding more “traditional” challenges to achieving gender equality in STI remain, the pandemic has added another layer of complexity to such challenges in our rapid-paced technological world.

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<sup>1</sup> ITU's 2019 Measuring Digital Development [report](#)

## Objective and guiding questions

The objective of the session is to share national experiences and initiatives from different regions and countries in support of equal participation of women in STI, that stimulate and enable inclusive STI policy environments. Participants will be invited to share their thoughts on policies that increase the participation and retention of women in STI and share examples of national policies and practices as well as regional partnerships that are working to achieve gender parity in STI.

The session will seek to address an overarching theme: What key actions are needed at the national, regional, or international levels for ensuring that STI serves the needs of women as well as men? What are the important leverage points, approaches and partnerships that are successful to help achieve these goals?

More particularly the meeting will be guided by the following questions:

1. **What national policies and actions have proven effective in enhancing women's participation in development and deployment of technology?**
2. The reasons for women's under-representation in STI and STEM are known, and many successful examples are emerging to redress this under-representation at all levels of education and employment. **What strategies and measures have worked best to increase the representation of women and under-represented groups at all levels of STI?**
3. Many developing countries do not have adequate digital infrastructure and for many women internet and other costs of digital devices are prohibitive. Some women do not have adequate technological skills and other socio-cultural norms may restrict women's access to technology. **How can governments, the international community, the private sector, academia, and civil society partner to overcome these obstacles?**
4. **What meaningful indicators could help inform decision makers in the design of effective policies aimed at bridging the gender STI divide?**
5. More needs to be known about the benefits and risks associated with new digital technologies. **What more can be done to understand better how can new technologies benefit women and under-represented groups?** How can they provide opportunities for developing countries to accelerate their efforts towards sustainable development?
6. **What actions can CSTD and the international community take to strengthen global STI cooperation aimed at closing the gap on SDG 5?**

## Format

The session will begin with the introduction of draft report by the *UNCTAD Secretariat on Shaping STI: Applying a Gender Lens to deliver SDG 5*. Following the introduction, panelists will make initial interventions (5-7 minutes), broadly addressing the guiding questions. Subsequently, the Moderator will initiate an interactive discussion inviting interventions from participants.

## Background documents

- UNCTAD (2011): UNCTAD Applying a gender lens to Science, Technology and Innovation, [https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/dtlstict2011d5\\_en.pdf](https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/dtlstict2011d5_en.pdf)
- UNCTAD (2021): UNCTAD Technology and Innovation Report, Catching Technological Waves, [https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/tir2020\\_en.pdf](https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/tir2020_en.pdf)