

**INTERSESSIONAL PANEL OF THE UNITED NATIONS COMMISSION
ON SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY FOR DEVELOPMENT (CSTD)**

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Contribution by UNWTO

to the CSTD 2023-2024 priority theme on “Global cooperation in science,
technology and innovation for development”

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PRIORITY THEME 2: Global cooperation in science, technology and innovation for development

United Nations Commission on Science and Technology for Development (CSTD)

1. *What STI cooperative mechanism(s) at global or regional levels has your organization initiated or joined in?*
2. *To what extent the existing cooperation programmes are aligned with the development priorities of participating developing countries?*
3. *What are the main outcomes of such mechanism(s)? And what are the impacts of the resultant cooperation on participating countries? Pls. include the gender dimension.*
4. *What are the main difficulties your organization has encountered or is facing when implementing the cooperation mechanisms?*
5. *In respect of achieving the objectives and goals, what are the factors contributing to the success or failure of the cooperation mechanism(s) in which your organization has joined?*
6. *What cooperation could your organization propose to CSTD in coordinating and imparting directionality to international STI collaboration and technology sharing?*

UNWTO Inputs:

1.) STI Cooperative Mechanisms:

UNWTO has been actively engaged in fostering innovation and technology within the tourism sector on a global, national and regional level. We take on a multifaceted approach through our Department of Innovation, Education and Investments to cultivate and support new projects in innovation and technology within the tourism sector by actively engaging in the sourcing, supporting, and capacity building of startups within our innovation offer, coupled with comprehensive education initiatives both online and offline in our education programmes, along with support in investments to ensure long term sustainability.

Recognizing the pivotal role startups play in driving innovation, UNWTO creates a conducive environment for networking, mentorship, and collaboration allowing startups to showcase ground-breaking solutions and connect with industry experts and investors, thus infusing cutting-edge technologies into the tourism landscape. Moreover, UNWTO recognizes that investments are a cornerstone of startup growth; thus, their inclusive approach extends to providing training in investment strategies, facilitating a robust funding ecosystem that accelerates innovation adoption.

Simultaneously, UNWTO's commitment to education is exemplified by the Tourism Online Academy (<https://www.unwto-tourismacademy.ie.edu>) offering a suite of online resources and courses that disseminate industry insights, sustainable practices, and digital marketing strategies, empowering global professionals with essential skills.

This holistic approach underscores UNWTO's dedication to cultivating a technology-driven, sustainable tourism industry that remains adaptive to emerging trends, fuelled by startups, empowered professionals, and strategic investments, contributing to the sector's resilience and prosperity.

Additionally, and notably, the organization organized three side events that underscored the importance of partnerships for tourism and innovation as part of the **UN Interagency Task Team on STI for the SDGs (IATT)**. Launch of the UNWTO SDGs Global Startup Competition in at the High-level Political Forum 2020. In 2022, UNWTO hosted an event at the STI Forum (<https://www.unwto.org/event/partnerships-for-tourism-and-innovation>), which emphasized the role of partnerships in driving innovation in tourism. Similarly, in 2023, UNWTO held another side event (https://sdgs.un.org/sites/default/files/2023-05/Entrepreneurship_Side_Event.pdf) that focused on entrepreneurship and innovation in the context of sustainable development.

Furthermore, UNWTO actively collaborates with global stakeholders for advancing innovation towards the SDGs through the participation in the following UN led activities:

- In the **UN Innovation Network (UNIN)**, a collaborative community of UN innovators interested in sharing their expertise and experience with others to promote and advance innovation within the UN System.
- As an active implementer of the **United Nations Innovation Toolkit (UNIT)** created under the leadership of the CEB and the operations of the United System Staff College (UNSSC) since its launch in 2019. Within this framework, and amongst the involvement in yearly activities, the following ones have already generated global reach:
 - On-site event: Open Innovation Day for UNWTO Personnel (2020)
 - Online event: UNSSC live with UNWTO on the UN Innovation Toolkit –Partnerships to Achieve the SDGs (25 February 2021)
 - Joint research programme (2020 and 2021): paper built to document the mainstreaming and lessons learned of the UN Innovation Toolkit within UNWTO.
- As **vice chair the ITU-T Focus Group on Metaverse (FG-MV)** since 7 March 2023. Also, UNWTO has created the Task Force on Tourism, formally approved in July 2023.

2.) Alignment with Development Priorities:

UNWTO's programmes are designed to align closely with the development priorities of participating developing Member States. These initiatives aim to equip countries with the necessary tools and knowledge to harness technology and innovation for sustainable tourism development, thus contributing to both the national development goals and the broader global sustainable development agenda.

We employ a specific and a comprehensive strategy to foster innovation and technology within the tourism sector, encompassing startup engagement, capacity building, online and offline education, and investment support, with a notable focus on Least Developed Countries (LDCs) which is expanding. The Organization recognizes that LDCs can greatly benefit from technological advancements, and their active participation is crucial for sustainable global tourism development. Building on this commitment, UNWTO extends its support to LDCs through targeted initiatives, as evidenced in their collaboration with these countries during the UN Conference on Least Developed Countries. This includes facilitating knowledge exchange, providing technical assistance, and offering tailored capacity-building programs that equip LDCs with the tools and expertise to harness technology for tourism growth as well as access to financing mechanisms with various partners. UNWTO's approach is aligned with the priorities of LDCs, emphasizing inclusivity, accessibility, and sustainable development. By actively engaging with LDCs in these endeavours, UNWTO contributes to bridging the technological gap and fostering a resilient tourism sector that benefits all nations, while advancing the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals and leaving no one behind.

UNWTO's commitment to inclusivity extends beyond LDCs, notably in our Tourism Online Academy as our education programs are designed to democratize learning and enhance accessibility, particularly through the provision of free courses and a robust scholarship program for certifications. This approach aligns with the organization's dedication to ensuring that students from all backgrounds, including those from underserved communities, can access quality education that equips them with essential skills for the tourism industry. By fostering innovation, democratizing education, and prioritizing LDC engagement, UNWTO contributes to a resilient and inclusive tourism sector that thrives on technological advancements, sustainable practices, and the collective empowerment of individuals worldwide.

3.) Main Outcomes and Impacts:

UNWTO's initiatives have yielded remarkable outcomes and impactful contributions within the innovation and technology landscape of the tourism sector. In the realm of innovation, UNWTO's commitment is evident through the execution of 14 Startup Competitions, which attracted a staggering 18,000 participants from 150 countries, as well as 8 Innovation Challenges engaging over 2,500 participants from more than 130 countries. These efforts have culminated in fostering the UNWTO Innovation Network with over 5,662 active stakeholders. Competitions and challenges have been launched to specifically support women founded business and the number of female founders

supported has been steadily growing. The innovation ecosystem thrives with the support of 110 mentorship sessions and 20 accelerations, which have collectively nurtured innovation and entrepreneurship. The tangible impact of these endeavours is evidenced by the participants' collective achievement of raising a total funding of USD \$2,193,349,536.00, reflecting the market's recognition of their potential.

Moreover, the dissemination of knowledge and empowerment through education is a cornerstone of UNWTO's commitment. Its pioneering Tourism Online Academy has attracted 22,136 students from over 150 countries, offering 24 courses in multiple languages such as English, Spanish and Arabic. The collaboration with 14 partners across 10 countries and the allocation of 9,250 scholarships underscore their dedication to making education accessible through the UNWTO Tourism Online Academy has a Scholarships Programme to further extend its outreach in the countries which need more support, especially Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and Small Island Development States (SIDs). Thus far, 9,250 free-of-charge certificate scholarships have been allocated. Furthermore, this commitment extends beyond individual courses, with the establishment of partnerships for degree programmes and certifications, benefitting 229 students.

The reach of UNWTO's education initiatives extends globally, as exemplified by the 221 programs from 79 institutions that have received the prestigious UNWTO.TedQual Certification, fostering a culture of excellence in tourism education. The Organization's contribution to job creation is evident through the UNWTO Jobs Factory, where over 47,000 job offers are available to those seeking opportunities in the sector.

UNWTO's emphasis on investments is equally impactful, evidenced by the creation of 12 Global Reports on Foreign Direct Investment and investment frameworks (<https://www.unwto.org/investments>). Our dedication to a sustainable and green transition is underscored by partnerships with multilateral organizations such as the International Finance Corporation (IFC) from the World Bank. Initiatives like the Green Investments for Hotel Revitalization and Cooling Solutions showcase the organization's alignment with environmentally conscious goals. Additionally, our engagement in investment forums and capacity-building activities has facilitated the exchange of ideas, insights, and resources, contributing to a more robust and resilient tourism investment landscape.

In conclusion, UNWTO's comprehensive approach has resulted in tangible outcomes and lasting impacts, shaping the innovation, education, and investment facets of the global tourism industry. Through innovative competitions, accessible education, sustainable investment frameworks, and strategic partnerships, UNWTO continues to be a driving force in propelling the tourism sector toward sustainable and technology-driven growth. Furthermore, the strategic collaborations through signify the depth and breadth of UNWTO's engagement with various stakeholders.

Lastly, specifically with STI and engagement at the STI Forums, UNWTO has provided platforms for knowledge sharing, collaboration, and the exchange of best practices among stakeholders. The gender dimension has been acknowledged, and the impacts of these mechanisms include empowering women to be creators, innovators, and leaders within the science and technology ecosystem.

In this regard, UNWTO has been consecutively recognized (2020 and 2022) as a leader and benchmark Agency within the United Nations system by the biannual UN Mapping of Innovation, Data and Digital Capacities carried out by the Chief Executive Board (CEB).

4.) Difficulties and Challenges:

Implementing cooperation mechanisms in the context of tourism and innovation can face challenges. Additionally, ensuring that the benefits of these mechanisms are inclusive and accessible to all, including addressing gender disparities, remains an ongoing challenge. While UNWTO's efforts have brought about significant outcomes and impacts, they have not been without challenges. Implementing initiatives and mechanisms in the context of STI in tourism and innovation encounters several difficulties namely:

- **Disparities in Technological Readiness:** One of the foremost challenges lies in the varying levels of technological readiness among participating countries. The digital divide can be substantial, with some nations possessing advanced infrastructure and capabilities while others struggle to keep pace. This imbalance can impede the effectiveness of collaborative initiatives, as disparities in access to technology hinder equal participation and contribution.
- **Capacity Building Needs:** The rapid evolution of technology demands constant upskilling and reskilling of individuals across the tourism sector. Developing nations, in particular, may face challenges in providing adequate training and education to their workforce. Bridging this gap requires concerted efforts to offer comprehensive capacity-building programs that empower individuals to harness technology effectively.
- **Inclusivity and Accessibility:** Ensuring that the benefits of cooperation mechanisms are inclusive and accessible to all remains a persistent challenge. Gender disparities, economic constraints, and geographical remoteness can hinder the participation of certain groups and regions, limiting the overall impact of initiatives. Overcoming these barriers demands tailored approaches to accommodate diverse backgrounds and circumstances.
- **Sustainability and Funding:** Sustainable innovation and technological integration often require substantial investments. However, securing funding for initiatives that drive sustainable growth and development can be challenging. Balancing short-term financial constraints with the long-term benefits of innovation poses a complex dilemma that necessitates innovative funding models and partnerships.
- **Regulatory and Legal Frameworks:** The tourism sector operates within a complex regulatory landscape that can differ significantly between countries. Navigating legal frameworks related to data privacy, intellectual property, and cross-border transactions can pose challenges when fostering international collaboration in technology and innovation. Harmonizing these regulations across diverse jurisdictions is a persistent hurdle.

Addressing these difficulties necessitates a holistic approach that combines education, capacity building, policy advocacy, and collaborative efforts. UNWTO's dedication to fostering innovation and technology in the tourism sector requires proactive solutions that account for these challenges, ensuring that the benefits of technology are accessible to all, contributing to sustainable and inclusive growth.

5.) Factors for Success or Failure:

The success of UNWTO's cooperation mechanisms can be attributed to dedicated leadership focused on innovation and education, emphasis on strong targeted partnerships with top-level support across the tourism value chain from, knowledge sharing, and capacity building. Effective engagement with stakeholders from UNWTO Member States, private sector entities, and academia is essential for success.

Targeted partnerships spanning the tourism value chain infuse necessary cutting-edge resources into their initiatives. This success is further augmented by a commitment to knowledge sharing, fostering an environment of collective learning and adaptive growth. UNWTO's dedication to capacity building equips stakeholders with the necessary skills to effectively leverage innovation and technology, while their recognition of the gender gap and active engagement of women contribute to diverse perspectives and enriched outcomes.

In terms of Innovation, building upon these foundational principles, UNWTO has cultivated a comprehensive strategy that empowers startups and facilitates education within the tourism sector. In the realm of education, the Department employs a holistic strategy designed to ensure that current and future practitioners within the tourism sector have access to high-quality, affordable upskilling, and reskilling programs. By advocating for the transformation of education through innovative formats, such as online and hybrid learning, diverse scopes encompassing both vocational and managerial aspects, and various types including formal and lifelong learning, UNWTO seeks to empower individuals to take ownership of their learning journeys. This strategy encourages educational institutions and Member States to take proactive measures in shaping a modernized educational path and curricula. By aligning with these goals, the tourism sector becomes better professionalized, recognized, and capable of generating high-quality jobs, ultimately elevating its status as a value-added sector characterized by its commitment to excellence. Through these strategic pursuits, UNWTO envisions a future where

innovation, education, and collaboration harmonize to drive the sustainable advancement of the tourism sector.

Furthermore, UNWTO's recognition of the gender gap within the science and technology domain and their active engagement of women within these mechanisms enriches the perspectives and outcomes, leveraging the immense opportunities to support empowerment and gender balance that the tourism sector offers.

UNWTO research has previously shown the enormous potential of the tourism sector to empower women of all backgrounds. 54% per cent of the global tourism workforce is female, the gender-wage gap is lower in tourism, and the proportion of women in leadership roles is higher than in other sectors. However, much progress is still to be made and this is why UNWTO focuses in this gap.

6.) Proposed Cooperation for CSTD:

UNWTO could propose several cooperation avenues to the CSTD for enhancing international STI collaboration and technology sharing:

- **Sustainable Partnerships:** Foster sustainable partnerships between governments, businesses, and educational institutions to drive innovation in the tourism sector.
- **Innovation labs:** Establish innovation labs within the tourism sector and across the value chain that facilitate collaboration, knowledge exchange, and technological experimentation, particularly targeting regions with limited access to technological resources.
- **Data Sharing & open innovation:** Promote data sharing and analysis to measure the impact of technology and innovation on the tourism sector alongside fostering sharing and lessons learned through events and collaborative platforms and networks.
- **Capacity Building:** Organize capacity-building workshops that address the technological needs of developing countries, while emphasizing gender equality and the empowerment of women in technology-driven fields using our network of female founders.
- **Gender-Inclusive Innovation:** Encourage initiatives that promote gender-inclusive innovation ecosystems in tourism by providing training, mentorship, and support for women and girls in science, technology, and innovation.