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

Geneva, Switzerland
21-22 October 2024

Contribution by Belize

to the CSTD 2024-2025 priority theme on "Diversifying economies in a world of accelerated digitalization"

Dear CSTD Member

The [27th CSTD annual session](#) selected "Diversifying economies in a world of accelerated digitalization" as one of the priority themes for its 28th session (2024-25 period). This theme directly addresses SDG 9 "Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation" at the 2030 Agenda.

Although the contribution of science, technology and innovation (STI) to the achievement of other sustainable development goals (SDGs) is discussed in every session of the CSTD, its role in upgrading and diversifying industrial capabilities and the linkages with industrial policies have not been specifically addressed for several years in the Commission. Economic diversification, including through the upgrading of industrial capabilities, is an essential component of economic development and a key area of SDG 9, which aims at enhancing scientific research and accelerating technological upgrade of industries through innovation, particularly in developing countries.

Under this priority theme the Commission could discuss challenges and opportunities brought about the rise of new digital technologies, as Artificial Intelligence, for industrial and innovation policies aiming at increasing productive capacities and diversifying the industrial structure toward higher value productions to benefit all while preserving cultural identity, including indigenous knowledge. The accelerating pace at which frontier technologies emerge and develop makes policymakers struggle to navigate and design responsive policies. Under this theme, the Commission can examine the challenges and opportunities specific to countries at different level of development, and what can least developed countries do to face the disproportionate challenges they face; work to identify best practices and inform inclusive policies for innovation and economic diversification; discuss how to leverage international cooperation to guarantee that uneven technological capabilities will not worsen inequality.

The CSTD secretariat is in the process of drafting an issues paper on the theme to be presented at the CSTD inter-sessional panel meeting to be held in the second half of October 2024. In this context, we would like to solicit inputs from CSTD member States on this theme. We would be grateful if you could kindly answer the following questions based on your experience in your country.

1. What are the specific challenges your economy is facing to develop or adapt frontier technologies and AI?
   - **Having the relevant human capital in country, that is, experts in the STEM fields, especially with a focus on research and development and publications**
   - **Funding for small and medium term enterprises to access these technologies**
   - **Infrastructure challenge (internet/electricity)outdated hardware/software**
   - **Ability to leverage the AI aspect, the legislations that are specific to key services require alignment with the newly enacted E-legislations. These supporting legislations are usually updated when a system is being introduced.**
   - **AI Works better when we have large datasets and having access to it for a small country like Belize is challenging**

2. Can you provide successful examples of AI and other frontier technologies uptake in your country?
   - **In Belize, the most common and successful example is the use of ChatBots in industry such as in the Information Communication Technology sector (service providers, banking, online businesses).**
   - **The Civil Registry and Vital Statistics System is adopting evolving technology for the management of the Civil Register. It is not necessarily adopting AI, but does encompass some key features such as:**
     - **Verifiable Certificates via QR codes**
     - **Integration with other systems for secure and trusted data sharing**
     - **Certain degrees of service process automation**

3. Has your country put in place inclusive policies for innovation and economic diversification specifically tailored to diffusion of digital technologies and AI?
   - **Yes, the Government of Belize through the Science and Technology Unit of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Science and Technology has embarked on drafting Belize's first ever "National Strategy for Science, Technology and Innovation," this is taking into account policies for innovation, diversification especially inclusivity. An STI Advisory Committee consisting of scientists and stakeholders was formed to guide this initiative and develop a road map for Belize for the next 10 years. Also, Belize launched the National Digital Agenda in 2022 - 2025. This agenda touches on Digital Culture, Innovation, Integration, Data Driven, Open Access, Security, Resiliency and the closing of Digital Gaps in both the public and private sectors. The agenda is coming to a close soon and a revised agenda will seek to include a higher emphasis on AI technologies.**

4. Do you have examples of policy instruments in place to favour the diffusion of frontier technologies in the economy and targeting specific sectors?
   - **Currently this is a work in progress but a few Ministries, such the Ministry of Public Utilities, Energy, Logistics, and E-Governance, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Science and Technology have in place guiding principles and policies to guide the diffusion of specific technologies in Belize economy.The establishment of Digital Connect Centers in rural and urban areas of the country, providing training and accessibility to quality digital education.**

5. Has your country put in place mechanisms to strengthen industrial capabilities through partnerships among different stakeholders (e.g., university-industry, or private-public)?
   - **Yes, the University of Belize, the national university, has established partnerships to address specific institutional and industry needs. However, these efforts are still in their early stages and require significant support and financial assistance. Similarly, the Science and Technology Unit of the MoECST has formed partnerships to develop a digitally literate workforce, but substantial support and funding are needed.**
   The Government of Belize, through the Ministry of Education, Culture, Science, and Technology (MoECST) and the Ministry of Public Utilities, Energy, Logistics, and E-Governance (MPUELE), has been collaborating with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) to enhance technological capacity. Additionally, the MPUELE, with support from various

international financial institutions, has been conducting digital literacy capacity-building training for youth and the elderly. This training is delivered through Belize's network of digital connect centers, managed by local village councils. However, continued funding is necessary to support and sustain this initiative. Partnerships for managing and supporting these centers have been established with area representatives based on each center's geographical location.

6. How can international cooperation support the uptake of new technologies and the development of technological capabilities in your country and ensure that industrial policies will benefit all and do not worsen inequality?
   a. **Funding**
   b. **Infrastructure development (PPP, funding for projects)**
   c. **Capacity building / training**

7. What can the UN CSTD do to support an economic transformation that enhances your country's productive capabilities and foster an inclusive digital transformation?
   a. **Forums to bring together funding partners**
   b. **Policy review support**

Please indicate contact person(s) responsible for projects/policies and international collaboration in this context in case we need clarification on the inputs.

Please send your responses and any further inputs on the theme to the CSTD secretariat (stdev@unctad.org) by 24 July 2024. We look forward to receiving your valuable inputs.

Sincere regards,

CSTD secretariat