

**UNITED NATIONS COMMISSION ON SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY
FOR DEVELOPMENT (CSTD), twenty-third session (virtual meeting)
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Opening Ceremony

Opening statement by

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Opening Remarks for Virtual CSTD

Dr. Mukhisa Kituyi

Secretary General, UNCTAD

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2:00PM

Excellencies,

Distinguished colleagues and friends,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I warmly welcome you to this online session of the Commission on Science and Technology for Development (CSTD). It is indeed a testament to the virtues of technology, that we can implement and adapt to new working methods to continue delivering on our mandates.

This year, 2020, will be defined by the unprecedented challenge that the world is having to endure as a result of the novel coronavirus – Covid-19. A challenge that can only be surmounted by the application of science, technology and innovation (STI) solutions by all countries.

Technology and innovation have enabled many of us – to a great degree – to continue to live, work, study and virtually maintain social contact with one another as best as possible during the lockdown period. And our hopes of a potential remedy for the virus also rest on the trajectory of STI advancement, be it for the development of a vaccine or other therapies.

Despite the well documented advantages that technology offers in solving a vast range of problems, for many people around the world it remains a distant prospect. Scaling technologies so that everyone, including the most vulnerable in our global community can benefit from affordable and unrestricted access, requires a coordinated approach to initiating global cooperation for scientific advancement and resource mobilization.

In this regard, allow me to outline two important points for action:

Firstly, we need to ensure that the international cooperation and solidarity we have witnessed in response to the pandemic remains beyond this period and is formalized in ways that ensure longevity. Cooperation should involve all possible actors, including scientists, governments, private enterprises, academic and research institutions and civil society organizations across different countries and regions.

- This coronavirus pandemic has illustrated that there is strength in numbers. We learn more, and faster, together. Collaboration taking place among the scientific communities in different countries – whether it is in research, sharing clinical trial data and quality standards – stem from the realization that such initiatives facilitate the breakthroughs that help humanity advance.
- Multilateralism offers the greatest opportunity for nurturing a collaborative approach to scientific research, promoting evidence-based policy making, and sharing best-practices. This will be fundamental to solving some of the biggest challenges of the twenty-first century.
- There is also a valuable development dimension to sharing knowledge and research. International scientific collaboration is particularly important considering the gaps in research capabilities within developing countries, and the limited ability of many countries to undertake technological horizon scanning, foresight, and risk assessment. We saw during the Ebola outbreak in 2014-15, that strengthening research capacity in developing countries is vital for preventing, responding to, and ending an epidemic.

Secondly, funding and resource mobilization for STI should not become a victim of budget cuts in the looming economic downturn. It should be protected and enhanced as much as possible.

- STI-related activities should be incorporated in any recovery packages. Not only can this spur economic activity, but it can also ensure that the resilience of countries to cope with future crises are not compromised.

- Already, some regional organizations have set targets for R&D expenditure as a percentage of GDP, such as the European Union's 3% and the African Union's 1%. Commitments such as these signal the continuity and predictability of government R&D support. This has an overall positive effect and enhances trust for future investment, which in turn ensures that critical research continues.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Despite the enormous difficulties we are currently facing as a result of the coronavirus, pandemics are not the only greatest challenge of our time. We must not overlook the other unresolved emergencies – climate change being another silent killer – which poses existential threats to humanity and will stay with us when this pandemic subsides.

Both health and environmental challenges, among others, require the utilization of science, technology and innovation tools to protect us. If 2020 will be remembered for our battle against COVID-19, then the twenty-first century will arguably be shaped by our collective response to tackling climate change.

What the pandemic has demonstrated is that Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development is important for everyone, not just developing countries. And while COVID-19 has thrown a spanner in the works to some extent, it must not be used as an excuse to scale back our efforts in achieving the Goals. On the contrary, it provides us with more impetus to accelerate our collective efforts and step up the much-needed coordination and collaboration required to meet global challenges.

The priority themes for the Commission's twenty third session on space technologies and on rapid technological change share a commonality – frontier technologies can drive progress towards the achievement of the SDGs only if:

- a) they reach the people who need them most, and
 - b) if people have the capacity to make productive use of them.
- Long-term benefits from emerging space programmes can only be realized if developing countries can address their constraints in processing raw data accumulated by satellites. For example, the process of filtration, refinement

and modelling for translating data into usable information in forecasting models require huge computing capacities and appropriate skills in machine learning and AI.

- Rapid technological change is essential to deliver these transformations, but it is not enough on its own. Because those who are left behind by less inclusive development patterns are also those who are more vulnerable to the consequences of environmentally non-sustainable economic practices, technological change and innovation must be directed towards the SDGs holistically.

Conclusion

None of us are secure, until everyone is secure – be it from the effects of pandemics, the perils of climate change or the threat of global economic depression. The international community must unite in the realization that only a multilateral approach offers the most effective way of addressing challenges which transcend borders and regions. And only then can science, technology and innovation truly achieve the type of transformations we know it can.

As we countdown the clock for the decade of action, this Commission's role as the UN's focal point for the analysis of science, technology and innovation for sustainable development becomes ever more valuable. The CSTD can play a leading role in multilateral efforts to facilitate cooperation and coordinated policy responses in science, technology and innovation for sustainable development.

As the UN's torchbearer for discussions on STI for development, I have every confidence that this Commission will continue in the same vein for the next decade and beyond.

Thank you.