

**UNITED NATIONS COMMISSION ON SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY
FOR DEVELOPMENT (CSTD), twenty-fourth session
Geneva, 17-21 May 2021**

Applying gender lens to STI policies to deliver SDG 5

Presentation of the CSTD Secretariat

Mr. Angel Gonzalez Sanz
Head, Science, Technology and ICT Branch
Division on Technology and Logistics, UNCTAD

DISCLAIMER: The views presented here are the contributors' and do not necessarily reflect the views and position of the United Nations or the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development.

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)

Notes for intervention

- The international community has long recognized that fully engaging women in all aspects of social and economic life is crucial for development. Despite efforts dating back to the Working Group on Gender at CSTD in 1993, gender equality in science, technology, and innovation (STI) remains a global challenge.
- The issue has certainly gained more attention over the years in the run up to *SDG 5 on gender equality* within the 2030 Agenda. And yet, while some advancements have been reported, the Covid-19 pandemic has raised the concern that we may be at risk of reversing such progress.
- It is against this background that UNCTAD decided to carry out research on *Applying a Gender Lens to STI for SDG 5*. With this report, we aim to both, update our previous research on the subject and raise attention to new challenges and opportunities that STI can bring for women and society in a post pandemic era.

It is therefore my pleasure to share the following five key preliminary findings of this study which we expect to release soon:

- **First, promoting women’s contribution and leadership in S&T continues to be a challenge.** In fact, women remain underrepresented among graduates in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (the so-called STEM sector), failing to continue progression as they move up the career ladder. In fact, our study finds that while women are about 35 per cent of the world’s STEM graduates, they make up only 30 per cent of the world’s researchers, falling below 20 per cent at the position of Heads of research institutions.¹ We find that these numbers are even more worrying in the private sector, with some reports indicating women represent as little as 5.3 per cent of Board Chair positions.²
- **A second finding is that digital technologies, digital-based information, and apps are not reaching women to the same extent as men.** Experience has shown that technology approaches have neither adequately addressed women’s perspectives or needs, nor have considered constraints women face in access to resources, information, training, and finance, among others.
- **Third, the effects of new technologies need to be better understood.** The gendered effects of new technologies – particularly digital technologies, AI, gene manipulation and blockchain (including cryptocurrencies) – are not well understood today. They can have real potential to reverse momentum in gender equality through effects on women’s employment and labour force participation, access to financial resources, and can therefore affect their economic and livelihood opportunities.
- **At the same time though, some findings suggest that new technologies can offer opportunities for increasing women’s status, equality, and empowerment.** For example, one observation made in the report is that bitcoin and mobile money may enable women to control their own income and allow

¹ (Ngila et al., 2017; UNESCO, 2015).

² Deloitte Global Center for Corporate Governance, 2019

them to enter the formal banking system³. So, digital technologies can therefore offer women access to information, education, and opportunities they might not otherwise have,⁴. Nevertheless, these benefits are neither automatic nor guaranteed.

- **A fourth finding of the study is the Covid-19 pandemic has endangered some productive and innovation capabilities coming from women.** Women make up the majority of those unemployed, due to their employment in part-time and service level positions. They tend to be the parent who cares and home-schools children, sacrificing professional, education and paid activities. As household incomes decline, a vicious circle ensues leaving many women and families behind.
- **Fifth, partnerships among government, civil society, the private sector, academia, are all important facilitators in gender inclusion and sustainable development.** However, the best results are obtained when women's groups and civil society organizations are part of these conversations as active agents of change.

In moving forward, the study offers five (5) key recommendations:

1. **First, there is a need to mainstream gender at the level of technological design to address more comprehensively and consistently the potential of gender-responsive technologies,** those technologies that respond to women's needs, perspectives, and priorities. These technologies should be at the service of women: they ought to provide the knowledge they need, open opportunities, ease their work loads, meet their health and sanitation needs, and increase their production and incomes.
2. **Second, there is a need for more research on the implications of new technologies such as robotics, AI and blockchain on women and minority groups.** More attention needs to be paid on the gender dimensions of the data used to implement these technologies as well as implications of technologies such as blockchain and mobile money to increase women's access and control of financial resources.
3. **Third, while there is a need to train women in typically masculine professions, such as water, engineering, or construction, it is equally important to ensure job positions for women are available in high levels of governance systems in these sectors.** Policies should encourage and enable women to enter STEM careers and remain there along their full career path.
4. **Fourth, there is a need to identify barriers and opportunities for scaling gender and socially inclusive innovations.** In this regard, it is important to identify the changes required to address these barriers and the root causes of biases to enable innovative solutions and deeper, more transformative change.
5. **Finally, wide-ranging, multi-partner, multi-level and multi-stakeholder programmes are needed to mainstream gender into policy and action in different sectors in a coordinated way.** Collaboration between sectoral and gender ministries is critical. But equally important are partnerships that include women's representative organizations as active agents of change.

In closing, allow me to highlight that, while it is true that the pandemic has exposed women and girls to vulnerabilities, it has also opened unique opportunities to rethink our STI system and promote decisive action to close the gender gap and move closer to attain SDG 5. CSTD can play a major role in advancing this agenda and for this reason we welcome your inputs and experiences in these discussions.

Thank you for your attention.

³ (Suri & Jack, 2016).

⁴ (Sey & Hafkin, 2019; UNCTAD, 2014; ESCWA, 2019)