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**Using science, technology and innovation to close the gap on Sustainable  
Development Goal 3, good health and well-being**

Statement submitted by

H.E. Mr. Ebrima Sillah  
Minister of Information and Communications Infrastructure  
Gambia

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**STATEMENT BY HONOURABLE EBRIMA SILLAH, MINISTER OF  
INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION INFRASTRUCTURE AT  
THE VIRTUAL MINISTERIAL HIGH LEVEL ROUNTABLE ON USING  
SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION TO CLOSE THE GAP  
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL (SDG) 3 ON GOOD HEALTH  
AND WELL-BEING**

**18<sup>TH</sup> MAY 2021**

**Mr. Chairman,**

**My colleague Ministers from The Philippines, India, Pakistan and Nepal,  
Distinguish Panelist,**

**ladies and gentlemen,**

**All other protocols duly observed.**

**First and foremost, please allow me to congratulate the United Nations  
Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) for organizing and  
successfully hosting the 24<sup>th</sup> session of the Commission on Science and  
Technology for Development.**

**I am indeed honoured to be part of this important roundtable under the  
theme “Using Science, Technology and Innovation to close the gap on  
SDG 3 on good health and well-being”.**

**Mr. Chairman,**

**The significance of Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) in the quest for sustainable development cannot be overemphasized as it is considered a viable avenue to introduce significant and lasting positive change in the global South. The Government of The Gambia, conscious of this fact, has in the past decade led the institutionalization and establishment of landmark and game changing projects in the Gambia's ICT and STI sectors where remarkable growths have been registered in terms of access and quality service delivery since the roll out of the National Fibre Backbone and the landing of a Submarine Cable in 2012. These landmark achievements have also enriched the spirit of competition in the ICT sector and helped ensure that services are affordable to the average Gambian end user.**

**Additionally, The National Information and Communications Infrastructure (NICI) Policy adopted in 2005 set the tone for ICT sector policy evolution in The Gambia. It provided strategic direction for the attainment of the ICT development vision of the government. The NICI policy was anchored on building and sustaining partnership with the private sector and donors, providing an effective information and communication infrastructure, enabling countrywide connectivity and achieving a liberalized and competitive ICT market that offers consumer choice and affordable cost with guaranteed quality of service. It also prioritized critical socio-economic issues like the proliferation of ICT driven socio-economic solutions in Education and most importantly, in**

**Public health delivery. Recently, as part of the ICT Masterplan formulation concluded in 2020, the Technology Enabled Education and STI Development Strategy 2020-2024, was developed and adopted. This Strategy envisions to create a knowledge base economy by improving STI readiness in The Gambia, in terms of access to broadband, e-government platforms, reliable electricity, good transport network, identifying incentives for STI development and most importantly, identifying sources of funding for STI development.**

**However, The Gambia, just like many developing countries has had to, and continues to grapple with numerous challenges to the realization of its ICT policy goals and e-health targets in particular.**

**Mr. Chairman,**

**The COVID-19 global pandemic has had significant negative impact on all sectors of the economy. However, what is evident is that the digital response to the pandemic has helped in greatly improving the negative impact.**

**One of the success stories of the adoption of Science and Technology for enhanced public health delivery in The Gambia has been the roll out of the District Health Information System by the Ministry of Health. As part of COVID-19 response and mitigation strategies, the Ministry of**

**Health was able to ride on the existing District Health Information System (DHIS) for health data, disease control, tracking etc.**

**Also, as part of actions to accelerate tracking, Digital Call Centres have also been locally explored. Conscious of the fact that these measures may have implications on the right to privacy and protection of personal data, with regards to health-related data, such has been addressed in our policies and legislations (Data Protection and Privacy Policy) and IC Act, 2009.**

**Mr. Chairman,**

**To ensure good health and well-being of students during the peak of COVID-19 pandemic in The Gambia, and keeping in view the importance of business continuity, the government of The Gambia, through the Ministry of Education, leveraged on the potential of Technology to some degree to keep teaching and learning active during this period. The use of TVs/Radios to deliver lectures countrywide and use of existing video conferencing platform such as Google hangouts, zoom, Webex, etc substituted quite efficiently for the usual learning method and set the tone for education in the ‘new normal’,**

**Ensuring safer digital space: To keep the government machinery running at such a critical juncture, my Ministry had to double up efforts and intensify the need to resort to tried and tested ICT platforms and**

**systems. But such enthusiasm was met with setback on the face attempt and as is usual with such platforms, the threat was none other than security. To attest to this, the first online validation meeting on the Draft Broadband Policy and Strategy 2020-2024, via zoom was hacked. But MOICI has formulated Cybersecurity Policy & Strategy 2020-2024 and Cybercrime legislations (2020) to help address Cybersecurity and Cybercrime related issues and also strengthen the country's international cooperation in the fight against Cybercrime. The Gambia is part of many Global Cybersecurity alliance bodies and also a signatory to conventions including GFCE, OCWAR -C and is in the process of domesticating the reputable Budapest and Malabo Conventions.**

**Mr. Chairman,**

**Building modern e-governance systems: the essential of scaling up MOICI's e-Government program could not have come at a better time. The COVID 19 Pandemic has served as wakeup call for government to prioritise the upgrade of the e-Government Data center which is hosting government platforms, applications and services and email system. This as mainly owing to the fact that the DHIS system currently deployed in the COVID response and mitigation efforts is not hosted at the government data centre and this might as well lead to security implications if not remedied. To avoid such and ensure the optimal use of the Data Centre especially in trying times like this, MOICI is currently**

**working to formulate e-Government integrated architectural framework that would allow interoperability and seamless communication between different e-Gov platforms, applications, services and system in Government.**

**Crucially also, during the COVID-19 pandemic, videoconferencing licenses for zoom, Microsoft teams etc. were procured by some Government departments and MOICI is also in the process of procuring a Videoconference solution for Cabinet and reviving websites of Ministries Departments and Agencies in order to enhance information flow between the government and the citizenry.**

**Protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, Internet freedom: The Gambia's Constitution guarantees these rights in line with internationally accepted standards and MOICI as the leading stakeholder is in the formulation process of a freedom of information bill.**

**Improving Digital Skills and Literacy: In our quest to keep up with the unprecedented pace of evolution in today's digital world, MOICI has resorted to rigorous and robust capacity building for its ICT Cadre. Similarly, the Ministry of Health in collaboration with the National Disaster Management Agency (NDMA), established a national task force to respond to COVID-19 with strategic interventions including sensitization, training and a robust advocacy program to encourage the citizenry to actively report suspected cases.**

**More so, the implementation of the Google Plus Codes digital address mapping system in The Gambia, will ease the burden on contact tracing and will also boost local postal service delivery and other revenue generating services.**

**Mr. Chairman,**

**In conclusion, please allow me to reiterate our sincerest commendation to UNCTAD for organizing and successfully hosting the 24<sup>th</sup> session of the Commission on Science and Technology for Development. This session is not only timely but apt as it seeks to provide the platform where CSTD members will not only share experiences on digital measures put in place by our respective countries to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 3 on good health and well-being, and keep Covid 19 at bay, but also to try to figure out how ICTs can help resume socio- economic activities following the impacts of COVID 19 on the global economy. Therefore, I wish to seize this opportunity to express on behalf of the Government of The Gambia, our renewed commitment of support and collaboration with UNCTAD.**

**I thank you for your kind attention.**