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IMPLEMENTATION OF AND PROGRESS MADE
ON DECISIONS TAKEN AT THE FIFTH SESSION OF THE COMMISSION

Note by the secretariat

Executive summary

The present note has been prepared by the UNCTAD secretariat in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 2001/31 on the report of the Commission on Science and Technology for Development on its fifth session and the provisional agenda and documentation for the sixth session of the Commission. In particular, it addresses work carried out during the inter-sessional period 2001- 2003 in such areas as information and communication technologies, biotechnology, science and technology diplomacy, and coordination of work in science and technology.

1. In accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 2001/31, the Commission on Science and Technology for Development (CSTD) is to review at its sixth session the implementation of, and progress made on, decisions taken at its fifth session. Further to that decision, the present note has been prepared by the secretariat as a background document for the Commission's consideration of this agenda item.

2. As part of the follow-up activities to the earlier work of the Commission on national capacity-building in biotechnology, the secretariat was requested to (a) coordinate and liaise, in its work on biotechnology, with other international organizations working in biotechnology, including the United Nations regional economic and social commissions; (b) use its newly created electronic network for science and technology to make available information on legal and regulatory frameworks to national authorities, as well as other relevant balanced information on developments in biotechnology to policy makers and diplomats, the public, non-governmental organizations, journalists and the private-business sector; (c) using extrabudgetary resources, help developing countries, in particular least developed countries, to develop strategies and national plans, including through the undertaking of national capacity needs assessments; (d) using extrabudgetary resources, develop special programmes and organize workshops, and contribute to ongoing programmes for training scientists, diplomats and journalists in science and technology diplomacy, policy formulation and regulatory matters to assist developing countries, in particular least developed countries, in international negotiations and international norms and standard-setting; (e) using extrabudgetary resources, initiate or contribute to studies on the specific problems faced by developing countries in the areas of technology transfer, capacity-building, regulation and biosafety; and (f) collaborate with the Bureau of the Commission to ensure the implementation of its recommendations, including mobilization of extrabudgetary funds.

3. The above requests were addressed by the secretariat by means of a number of activities, including wide dissemination, through the Science and Technology for Development Network (<http://www.unctad.org/stdev>), of the outcome of, and background information from, the panel sessions, country case studies and background papers on biotechnology prepared by the CSTD during the inter-sessional period 1999- 2001, including information on legal and regulatory frameworks. The secretariat published in 2002 *Key Issues in Biotechnology* (UNCTAD/ITE/TEB/10), which reviews several key issues in modern gene technology and its applications in the areas of crop agriculture and medicine, and presents a balanced view of the potential benefits and challenges associated with them. The study concludes with the major implications for policy makers.

4. Additionally, the secretariat has prepared a report of the Secretary-General on the impact of biotechnology in agriculture, health, economic productivity and sustainability and the related aspects of technology transfer and capacity-building, including the need to protect intellectual property rights and the special needs of developing countries. The report will be submitted to the United Nations General Assembly at its fifty-eighth session.

5. Furthermore, the secretariat, in collaboration with the Science, Technology and Innovation Program of Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government, launched the Science and Technology Diplomacy Initiative. The main objective of this Initiative is to mobilize scientific and technological expertise to enable developing country diplomats and

representatives to participate fully and to make informed decisions on emerging issues, where science and technology play an important role in international forums. The Initiative seeks to provide direct support to trade negotiations and to build negotiating capacity within developing countries through the provision of specific policy briefs and organization of targeted training and executive forums.

6. It is envisaged that the Initiative will be carried out in close collaboration with other international organizations working in biotechnology, as well as the United Nations regional commissions. An executive forum was organized by UNCTAD on 10 June 2002 to launch the Initiative as well as to address some of the key issues related to trade and technology transfer. Other executive forums/policy dialogues, including on biotechnology applications and trade, on new approaches to technology transfer, and on the interplay of science, technology and trade rules, with special focus on sanitary and phytosanitary measures (SPS) and technical barriers to trade (TBT), have been planned for the first half of 2003.

7. The Commission was requested to (a) encourage the national authorities in charge of science and technology, and when appropriate at regional level, to coordinate their strategies, and to provide substantive support in this regard; (b) propose concrete guidelines to facilitate development of, access to and dissemination of information, new technologies and technology-based products on affordable terms, including preferential terms; and (c) encourage partnerships among interested parties, including through international cooperation.

8. As a first step to addressing these requests, the Commission and the secretariat have sent out a questionnaire on national policies on science and technology. The questionnaire was sent out to the permanent Missions in Geneva for forwarding to their capitals. In addition, it has been made available on STDev. As of December 2002, the secretariat had received 15 responses.

9. In addition, a study entitled "The Biotechnology promise: Capacity-building for participation of developing countries in the bioeconomy" has been undertaken by the secretariat. Through country case studies and examples of developing countries' success in building national biotechnology industries, it highlights the major biotechnology opportunities and challenges for developing countries, especially in industrial and environmental sectors as well as in agricultural and pharmaceutical industries. Designed as an integrated manual for policy makers in developing countries and economies in transition, the study describes all stages of developing a biotechnology industry, and presents both private and public initiatives to illustrate how and why some cases were more successful than others. The study takes into account the work of the Commission during its inter-sessional work programme for 1999- 2001 on national capacity-building in biotechnology.

10. On the issue of partnership, the secretariat published in 2001 a study on *Partnerships and Networking in Science and Technology for Development* (UNCTAD/ITE/TEB/11), which contains an analysis of global partnering and strategic alliances trends, including an inventory of opportunities for developing countries.

11. In response to the Commission's decision on the substantive theme, namely "Technology development and capacity-building for competitiveness in a digital society",

and other activities for the 2001-2003 inter-sessional period, four panel meetings were organized:

- A preparatory panel and CSTD Bureau meeting on the new substantive theme for the inter-sessional period 2001-2003, held in Geneva from 13 to 14 November 2001;
- Panel I on "Indicators of Technology Development" held in Geneva from 22 to 24 May 2002;
- Panel II on "Linking Foreign Direct Investment, Technology Development for Capacity Building and Strategic Competitiveness", held in Colombo, Sri Lanka, from 15 to 17 October 2002; and
- Panel III on "Enhancing Strategic Competitiveness in ICTs", held in Luanda, Angola, from 15 to 17 January 2003.

The reports on these panel meetings are before the Commission.

12. Additionally, the secretariat published the following studies on information and communication technologies (ICTs):

- *Coalition of Resources for Information and Communication Technologies* (UNCTAD/ITE/TEB/13);
- *Changing Dynamics of Global Computer Software and Services Industry: Implications for Developing Countries* (UNCTAD/ITE/TEB/12); and
- *Electronic Commerce and Music Business Development in Jamaica: A Portal to the New Economy?* (UNCTAD/ITE/TEB/8)

13. The Commission and the secretariat responded to the call to ensure that the Commission's previous findings and recommendations on ICTs be brought to the attention of the main players in bridging the digital divide, such as the United Nations Task Force on Information and Communication Technology, together with various other international initiatives on ICTs. Copies of the book entitled *Knowledge Societies: Information Technologies for Sustainable Development*, which emerged from the work of the Commission on ICTs during the 1995-1997 inter-sessional period, were provided to the United Nations ICT Task Force. In addition, the secretariat presented the main recommendations and findings of the Commission's work on ICTs at the Meeting of G-15 Experts on Science and Technology on massive usage of information and communication technologies as a development strategy, held in Caracas from 6 to 7 December 2001.

14. The Commission and the secretariat have interacted closely with the ICT Task Force in order to promote greater information exchange and coordination of activities in ICTs. The Commission appointed a Vice-Chairperson of the Commission as a focal point for liaison and following up on all activities related to the Task Force. The secretariat and the Vice-Chairperson have participated in meetings of the Task Force and reported back to the Commission on the outcome of those meetings. The ICT Task Force secretariat participated

in panel I on "Indicators of Technology Development", and in panel III on "Enhancing Strategic Competitiveness in ICTs".

15. On the recurrent issue of coordination of science and technology for development in the United Nations system, the secretariat was urged to continue its efforts to use the newly established science and technology network as a gateway to disseminate information on science and technology activities for development and to update information on scientific and technological developments that are particularly important for developing countries.

16. The secretariat responded to this request by exchanging hyperlinks with other organizations within the United Nations system as well as other electronic gateways, such as the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the United Nations ICT Task Force, and the Asian and Pacific Centre for Transfer of Technology (APCTT). It has also established a partnership agreement with the Development Gateway of the World Bank. Key content and events from STDev are featured on the frontpage of the Knowledge Economy topic page of the Development Gateway and are included in broadcasts to the Knowledge Economy member community. STDev is regularly updated to provide information on activities in the area of science and technology within the United Nations system, other multilateral and bilateral development institutions, and non-governmental organizations. The STDev also provides information on international science and technology-related treaties and protocols, as well as on international initiatives and forthcoming major events and summits.

17. The secretariat launched on STDev in April 2002, a compendium and user guide to UNCTAD's work on issues of technology for development from 1975 to 2001 (<http://www.unctad.org/stdev/compendium/index.html>). The compendium contains more than 400 reports and studies as well as other titles organized by major themes, including but not limited to international conventions, arrangements and codes; channels, mechanisms and best practices for transfer; acquisition and absorption of new technologies, including information and communication technologies, and biotechnology; technology partnerships; intellectual property rights and protection of traditional knowledge; and the collected publications of the Commission. It was launched on 16 April 2002 to coincide with the first meeting of the newly established WTO Working Group on Trade and Transfer of Technology. The secretariat participated in the meeting of the Working Group, and briefed its members on the work of the Commission.

18. Additionally, the secretariat and the Chairperson of the Commission participated in the South-South High-Level Conference on Science and Technology, held in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, from 27 to 30 October 2002. The conference was the first-ever held on science and technology under the aegis of the Group of 77. The secretariat provided for the conference substantive background documents on biotechnology and on partnership and networking in science and technology in developing countries. The Dubai Declaration on the Promotion of Science and Technology, which emerged from the conference, emphasized the importance of the role played by UNCTAD and the United Nations Commission on Science and Technology for Development in promoting science and technology transfer and development in developing countries.

19. The secretariat briefed participants in the seventh session of UNCTAD's Commission on Investment, Technology and Related Financial Issues on the function and work of the

Commission. The Chairperson of the CSTD attended ECOSOC's meeting of its functional commissions in New York in July 2002.

20. The secretariat attended the first and second Preparatory Committee meetings of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), and reported on the Commission's work on ICTs. It also participated in the International Conference on Science, Technology and Innovation: Emerging International Policy Issues, organized by Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government in collaboration with UNCTAD in Cambridge, Massachusetts, from 23 to 24 September 2002 and made a presentation on the work of the Commission on ICT Development Indices.

21. The Economic and Social Council, in its resolution 2001/32, recommended that a special trust fund for activities in the area of science and technology for development be established in the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, with a view to assisting in implementing various mandates received or to be received by the latter in the area of science and technology for development. In response to this request, a trust fund for science and technology has been established in UNCTAD. Remaining resources in the Trust Fund for Special Activities in Science and Technology for Development, established by the Secretary-General on 4 April 1985, were transferred to the newly created trust fund in UNCTAD. The Chairperson of the Commission has sent letters to the donor community inviting them to contribute to the trust fund.

22. Additionally, the Economic and Social Council, in its resolution 2002/37, requested the Commission to establish an open-ended working group for the purpose of analysing ways and means to improve the role and participation of the Commission in the recommendation and policy-making process of the United Nations system on science and technology issues, with the aim of working towards the strengthening of the Commission. A letter has been sent to all member States of the United Nations, inviting them to appoint an expert to serve as a member of the open-ended working group. As of 10 March 2003, 21 countries have replied to the request positively.¹

¹ As of 10 March 2003, nominations to the CSTD open-ended working group had been received from the following United Nations member States: Argentina, Austria, Belarus, Congo, Croatia, Egypt, Ethiopia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq, Kenya, Lebanon, Lithuania, Oman, Pakistan, Portugal, the Russian Federation, Sri Lanka, Trinidad and Tobago, Tunisia, Turkey and Uruguay.