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ROLE AND ACTIVITIES OF THE COMMISSION REGARDING THE
COORDINATION OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY FOR DEVELOPMENT

Note by the UNCTAD secretariat

1. The Commission on Science and Technology for Development (CSTD), having superseded the former Intergovernmental Committee on Science and Technology for Development and having assumed its wider mandates, was also given the specific task of coordinating the activities of the United Nations system in the area of science and technology for development and of making recommendations, if so required, on how the coordination and effectiveness of these activities could best be pursued. In line with this mandate, the issue of coordination has continued to receive the attention of the Commission as manifested in its sessional deliberations or its inter-sessional activities.

A. First session of the Commission

2. At its first session in April 1993, The Commission for Science and Technology for Development for the first time took up the issues of coordination and cooperation in science and technology within the United Nations system. After its deliberations, the Commission expressed the view that the objective of system-wide coordination in science and technology should be to create synergies. Since many agencies were involved with science and technology, the Commission considered that inadequate communication had often led to unnecessary duplication which could be remedied by the creation of an information network as a means of information exchange and dissemination within the United Nations system. As a first step towards performing its coordinating role, the Commission adopted a resolution entitled "Activities of the United Nations system in science and technology for development" in which it requested the Secretary-General to prepare for its second session a report on the progress achieved in coordination and cooperation of the science and technology activities of the United Nations system.

3. The subject of coordination was also raised by the Economic and Social Council at its substantive session of July 1993. Following its review of the issue, the Council requested the Commission (resolution 1993/71) to consider, at its second session, the outcome of the coordination segment of the substantive session of the Council of 1994. In that same resolution, the Council also requested the Secretary-General to prepare a report containing an analysis and action-oriented proposals for improving coordination mechanisms of the organs, programmes and specialized agencies that are involved in the science and technology activities of the United Nations system.

Inter-sessional activities

4. Apart from responding to the above-mentioned resolutions, the Commission had also selected a number of themes for its inter-sessional activities deemed to be of particular importance not only in their own right but also from the perspective of coordination and cooperation, given that a number of agencies and organizations of the United Nations system are involved in these areas. Among these themes are:

- Gender, science technology and development;
- Science and technology aspects of integrated land management;
- Science and technology for small-scale economic activities for meeting the basic needs of the low-income populations.

5. The Commission had set up Working Groups in order to deepen analytical work on each of the substantive themes for submission to the second session of the Commission. In undertaking their respective tasks, the Working Groups had sought, whenever possible, cooperation and substantive inputs from relevant organizations and agencies of the United Nations system.

6. In the case of the theme on gender, science, technology and development, the Working Group had requested the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) to review the activities of selected United Nations agencies and organizations. On the basis of the information received from the respondent agencies and organizations, UNIFEM prepared a report containing a number of recommendations aimed at enhancing coordination and cooperation among the various agencies and organizations within the United Nations system dealing with gender, science, technology and development. These recommendations were incorporated in the wider report of the Working Group on Gender, Science, Technology and Development, which was submitted to the Commission at its second session.

7. In the area of science and technology for land management, FAO had provided substantive inputs to the preparation of the Working Group's report. For its part, FAO organized a workshop on the issue of land management (November 1995) in which other agencies such as UNEP and IFAD participated. The UNCTAD secretariat has been in touch with FAO regarding the preparation and outcome of this workshop.

8. In the case of science and technology for small-scale economic activities for meeting the basic needs of low-income populations, a number of organizations and agencies had been involved, in various degrees, with the activities undertaken under this theme, culminating in the report of the Working Group. Amongst them are WHO, ILO, FAO, IFAD, UNIDO, UNESCO, UNECA, ESCAP, ECLAC, UNDP, UNU/INTECH, the United Nations Department for Development Support and Management Services (UNDDSMS).

B. Second session of the Commission

9. At its second session, the Commission on Science and Technology for Development considered the reports prepared in response to its own request, or that of the Council, and in particular document 1994/1, containing the agreed conclusions of the Council on the question of coordination and cooperation. In reviewing the science and technology-related activities reported by the agencies of the United Nations system, the Commission noted that the possibilities for overlapping mandates and programmes could not be excluded. In this regard, the Commission considered that the purpose of coordination should be to promote the complementarity of the various activities while avoiding duplication as much as possible.

10. The subject of coordination was again taken up by the Council at its substantive session of June-July 1995. In adopting resolution 1995/4, the Council recalled the agreed conclusions on coordination of the policies and activities of the specialized agencies and other bodies of the United Nations system related to science and technology for development adopted at its substantive session of 1994. In this context, the Council decided that the Commission, in its substantive work, should maximize coordination in undertaking its inter-sessional studies on specific issues by relating to competent United Nations organs and agencies, as well as multilateral organizations. These considerations were to be reflected in the ensuing

inter-sessional activity, whenever the opportunity arose.

Inter-sessional activities entailing coordination and cooperation

11. Having selected, at its second session, information and communication technologies as the main substantive theme for its inter-sessional activity, the Commission requested its Working Group on Information Technology to prepare for its third session a policy-oriented report on this theme, which should include information on the activities of the United Nations system in this area. The Working Group held its first meeting in Cartagena (Colombia) in January 1996 for the purpose of outlining the structure and scope of the report. The deliberations of the Working Group benefited from the substantive inputs provided by representatives from other agencies and organizations such as UNESCO, United Nations University Institute for New Technologies (UNU/INTECH), United Nations University Institute for Software Technologies (UNU/IIST), and the World Bank. ITU had also provided statistical data for the report. In addition, the secretariat was able to incorporate in this report information received from the various agencies and organizations regarding their activities for science and technology for development. To the extent that agencies are now better informed about each other's activities, this could open a window of opportunity for a greater coherence through cooperation among the agencies and organizations in the United Nations system in this specific area.

12. The Commission's Science, Technology and Investment Policy Review (STIP) of Colombia was another activity in which the Commission benefited from the participation of UNIDO.