

Commission on Science and Technology for Development, 19th Session
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Opening Statement by the Deputy Secretary-General of UNCTAD

AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY

Excellencies,
Mr. Chairman,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to welcome you to the 19th session of the Commission on Science and Technology for Development.

I am delighted to see, once again, the convening power of this Commission. If you look around, this room is full. We have Ministers and other high-level participants from various parts of the world, representatives from civil society and also the private sector. A truly global and multi-stakeholder participation.

Let me take this opportunity to thank Peter Major, our Chairperson, and the Commission's Bureau for their leadership and tireless work to make this session possible.

This is a symbolic session.

It is the first time we gather after the adoption of the landmark agreements reached last year. It is the first time we meet after the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals.

And this is also an important session, because the lofty ideals of Agenda 2030 still contrast with a harsh reality.

We still live in a world where 1 billion people live in extreme poverty.

We still live in a world where 600 million women are engaged in vulnerable jobs or unpaid family labor.

We still live in a world where – if climate change remains unchecked – up to 188 million people in sub-Saharan Africa could be exposed to floods and droughts by 2030.

There is still a wide gap between the reality of today and the hopes of tomorrow.

We have to bridge this gap. And this Commission has a task to do: ensure that technology brings us forward, and that it also narrows, rather than widens, the disparities in our societies.

And I am impressed by the forward-leaning agenda you have before you today: Smart Cities, Big Data, the Internet of Things, 3D Printing, Automation, and Massive Open Online Courses.

The scientific expertise and policy knowledge that you bring to these exchanges are essential to achieve the world that we want.

With the remainder of my time today, I'd like to share three messages with you.

First, the SDGs cannot be met without a strong push for science, technology, and innovation.

Second, harnessing Science, Technology and Innovation for the SDGs will require us to maximize its benefits and minimize its risks.

Third, CSTD and UNCTAD have a central role to play in making Science, Technology and Innovation work for a new global development agenda.

First, the SDGs cannot be met without a strong push for science, technology, and innovation.

Let me explain why with reference to Smart Cities.

In 2008, for the first time in human history, more people lived in cities than in rural areas. By 2030, over 60% of the world's population will live in cities. We're talking about staggering movements of people.

And the challenges to making cities that are inclusive, safe, and sustainable are growing. Let me share with you some figures.

Nearly 70% of people living in cities today are exposed to pollution above recommended levels. Research suggests that air pollution could kill 6.6 million people annually by 2050. That's about a population the size of Rio de Janeiro dying of air pollution every single year – unless we act.

While 70% of global greenhouse gas emissions come from cities, they only make up about 5% of the earth's landmass.

To meet the SDGs, we'll need smart mobility, smart energy, smart buildings, smart water, smart waste management, and smart health.

And for this, we'll need science, technology, and innovation.

But science, technology, and innovation can also be used in other ways to meet the SDGs.

In Uruguay, for instance, the One Laptop Per Child program increased access to technology in low-income households. This boosted their productivity and led to a 33 percent increase in their hourly labor income.

Digital competition among Bangladeshi communities in the UK reduced the costs of sending remittances through Western Union from 12% in 2008 to 7% of the transfer amount by 2014.

And in Nigeria, the country's e-ID program curbed corruption and saved USD \$1 billion annually by identifying 62,000 public sector "ghost workers."

These are only few examples. But I think they are enough to make my point: If we do not promote enough science and technology today, we compromise the achievement of the SDGs tomorrow.

This leads me to my second point: maximizing the benefits and minimize the risks technology.

Technology is a double-edged sword.

On the one hand, technology and innovation have been behind striking advances. It is, for instance, thank to them that productivity has increased nearly everywhere and in every sector, fostering economic growth.

On the other hand, technology has led to labor-saving production techniques with impacts, at least in the short-run, on employment and equality. For example, on study from the US predicted that 47% of current work tasks could be automated in the coming decades. And a separate report suggested that this share could reach up to 66% in developing countries..

There are certainly downsides, but we cannot renounce to technology.

We must find ways of maximizing its benefits while minimizing its risks.

We must champion technology as a vehicle for development without turning a blind eye to its potential implications.

We must ensure that technology and innovation are inclusive. And this is not the case today. For instance, while every day there are about 4 billion Google searches, today there are also about 4 billion people with no access to the Internet, at all.

This is unfortunate, as the Internet has immense potential to boost growth in developing countries.

Even people and small businesses that have access to the Internet have not yet started to leverage it commercially. For example, while more than 70% of the UK already buys things online, the equivalent share in countries like Mexico and South Africa is about 5%. In most developing countries, the shares are even lower.

Technology has proven its power to drive development. It is now up to us to ensure that it does it for all – rather than for the few.

And this is where we come into the picture, and my third message.

This Commission and UNCTAD have a central role to play: making Science, Technology and Innovation work for a new global development agenda.

Let me use two examples to explain to you what I mean.

My first example is our Science, Technology and Innovation Policy Reviews, or STIP Reviews – which originated here in the CSTD. They have been helping governments to strengthen national innovation systems and promote STI policies that improve competitiveness.

So far, we've completed reviews in over a dozen countries, and the results speak for themselves. For example, after our STIP review in Peru in 2010, the national budget dedicated to STI increased over 20 times in

a single year. In Oman, the STIP review's recommendations provided the basis for a government-wide effort to prioritize technology and innovation in response to tumbling oil prices.

My second example is the UNCTAD's Aid for eTrade initiative. UNCTAD is also teaming up with partners in the private sector and in other international organizations for this initiative. The goal is to have a demand-driven mechanism in which development partners pool resources to achieve sufficient scale to help developing countries benefit from e-commerce.

If we are successful, developing countries should find it easier to navigate the supply of capacity building. And donors should have a clearer picture of programs that they could fund.

In the aggregate, this initiative would add greater transparency and efficiency. It would improve matching between supply and demand, reduce duplication, and promote collaboration for scalability – almost to the point of creating a one-stop shop.

For these three reasons, we think of Aid for eTrade as a means of harnessing the digital economy for economic and social gains.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Reflecting on the last few years and looking ahead to 2030, I am confident that UNCTAD and this Commission can make major contributions to the SDGs.

And in this context, we look forward to our ministerial conference in Nairobi this July to affirm a strong global partnership for our objective of prosperity for all.

Let me conclude by wishing you a productive and engaging discussion. Your efforts today are important to building the world that we want by 2030.

Thank you for your attention.