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COALITION OF RESOURCES

Note by the secretariat

Background

1. The need for the coordination and better focusing of donor support to developing countries through a "coalition of resources" has received wide attention in recent years. The concept of a coalition of resources covers finances as well as human and intellectual resources and logistical services that might be available to assist developing countries. It also involves a wide range of stakeholders, including the private sector and civil society.

2. In response to resolution 1993/73 of the Economic and Social Council and General Assembly resolution 48/179, a consultative meeting was convened in December 1994 to discuss the concept of a coalition of resources for science and technology for development and to explore possible ways and means of organizing such a coalition. The meeting emphasized, among other things, the need to ensure that a coalition of resources takes into account user/recipient needs and demands and individual donor mandates. It also stressed that instead of a single global coalition of resources, such as the one envisaged in the Vienna Programme of Action on Science and Technology for Development, it would be more effective to develop mechanisms that focused on specific and well-defined themes.

3. It was noted that the funding of activities related to science and technology depended largely on a spontaneous market-driven response by donors. Most of the existing coordination schemes by donors in the areas of science and technology have been organized on an ad hoc basis with no umbrella mechanism. A better understanding of the role of a coalition of resources as a funding mechanism and its application in the context of developing countries is essential. To that end, the Commission on Science and Technology for Development (CSTD) was requested to provide a forum for the exchange of views and interaction among partners on the mechanisms and strategies needed to bring about a coalition of resources for the development of science and technology in developing countries. This recommendation was subsequently endorsed by the Economic and Social Council in its resolution 1997/62, which recommended that the CSTD should convene a workshop on coalition of resources, particularly in relation to information and communication technologies (ICTs). The focus on ICTs provided an opportunity to build on earlier work of the CSTD which had highlighted the difficulties faced by some developing countries in accessing ICTs and in financing projects that contribute to the building of a national information infrastructure. A coalition of resources was viewed as critical in facilitating the capacity of developing countries, in particular the least developed countries and countries in transition, to gain access to ICTs and to promote the application of such technologies in development-related projects.

4. The main objectives of the workshop, which was held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, from 17 to 18 November 1997, were: (a) to generate dialogue among CSTD members and invited experts on the concept of a coalition of resources; (b) to find out more about existing schemes for the coalition of resources in the area of ICTs; (c) to examine the various channels available for networking between project managers, private sector finances and donors, including through the Internet; and (d) to develop guidelines and policy recommendations on coalitions of resources for financing the application of ICTs in the areas of transmissions infrastructure, health and education.

5. The workshop discussions were based on three working papers, each of which dealt with one of the main themes under consideration; namely: (a) coalition of resources for the application of ICTs in transmissions

infrastructure; (b) coalition of resources for the application of ICTs in education; and (c) coalition of resources for the application of ICTs in health.

6. In addition, presentations were made by participants in the workshop, which included CSTD members, experts in ICTs and experts in policy formulation, project management and financing.

7. The examples presented in the working papers and at the workshop show that the changes in the global economic environment in recent years have had a major impact on the way coalitions of resources for the application of ICTs are organized and on the role of different stakeholders.

8. Increasingly, coalitions of resources are acquiring a global dimension, with the active participation of and contributions by the private sector, technology suppliers and global service providers. However, in order to maximize opportunities for a coalition of resources in support of science and technology for development, there is a need to, inter alia, balance private and social profitability in project design; design a clear and transparent national policy framework and regulatory environment, and develop the capacity to inform potential investors, lenders, donors, equipment suppliers and service providers about specific opportunities to create new coalitions of resources in a particular location or jurisdiction.

Follow-up work on a coalition of resources

9. The working papers presented at the workshop raised a number of issues that require further exploration. For example, there is a need to explore further the concept of a coalition of resources in the current global environment. The Bureau of the CSTD has decided that the working papers and the overview, as well as a synthesis of the documents presented by the participants, will be published under the supervision of the UNCTAD secretariat. The publication is expected to be finalized and issued by mid-1999.