Phase I: Opening Message – The Role of Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) in addressing development challenges

Dear Colleagues,

We warmly welcome you to Phase I of the e-discussion ***"Building the future we want with science, technology and innovation (STI) and culture"***, which will take place between **18 February and 4 March 2013**, moderated jointly by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as part of the 2013 Annual Ministerial Review (AMR) process. The AMR is being organized at a critical juncture as it follows the clear articulation of the 'Future we want' voiced at the Rio+ 20 Summit and comes in time to inform the design of the future global development agenda.

This part of the e-discussion will focus on the importance of STI for development and the critical role it plays in informing our understanding of the mechanisms of sustainable development, developing options for inclusive growth and facilitating development of new technologies and evidence-based practices.

Strengthened STI frameworks could accelerate the progress on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and become a key component of the future global development agenda given their impacts on key issues such as food, water and energy security, public health, and environmental and social sustainability. For example, the power of knowledge, innovation and creativity is critical for the creation of sustainable jobs and robust economies, capable of withstanding fluctuations in global markets. Improved technology and know-how can positively improve all sectors, for example in agriculture technology can increase agricultural productivity to meet the growing demand for food globally. Achieving public health outcomes requires not only access to essential medicines, but also enhanced health systems which promote innovation, address neglected health needs and ensure access to vital medical technologies. Finally, responding to the dual challenge of reducing energy poverty while mitigating climate change would inevitably entail promoting the development, as well as transfer, adaptation and dissemination, of renewable energy and other environmentally sound technologies.

The inherent challenge is to ask ourselves what kind of science, technology and innovation the world needs in order to build sustainable knowledge societies and create stronger connections between science policy and society. Knowing that sustainable development requires the meaningful involvement and active participation of regional, national and local actors, including women and indigenous peoples, both gender issues and the mainstreaming of indigenous knowledge systems are central for consolidating the role of STI in the overall map of sustainable development.

A further challenge for policy makers is to create an environment where development and STI policy build on each other in a mutually reinforcing way. Developing genuine partnerships between the public and private sectors but also between scientific community and policy makers will also be crucial to help harness the potential of STI for development.

Considering the above, we would like to present before you the following three questions. Whenever possible, please bring examples of successful application of new technologies and innovations to enhance people's well-being or country experience in leveraging STI for this purpose. In this sense, this platform could be used to contribute to establishing a bridge between achievements (what has been done) and challenges (what we can and must do in the future).

1) Why is STI critical for sustainable development? What is the role of STI in achieving the MDGs? Why and how should STI be integrated in the post-2015 Development Agenda?

What type of STI activities (R&D, technology transfer, adoption, adaptation) should be promoted in developing countries for supporting sustainable development? What policies and policy instruments should be put in place? What changes are needed in governance structures? Can we measure the contribution of STI to sustainable development? Which indicators could be applied? What should be the benchmarks?

2) How can we ensure that STI benefit those living in poverty or are excluded from society? How can we ensure that existing and emerging innovations and technology can help reduce inequalities and not reinforce them?

How can STI promote inclusive societies? How can STI be shaped (content-wise) to address social needs vs. economic interests? How can research, innovation and entrepreneurship be better connected to benefit the poor? How to better promote / establish a culture of science and innovation, with gender equality and empowering the youth for sustainable development? What is the role of Indigenous knowledge systems? How can indigenous knowledge be mainstreamed into sustainable STI policies and practices?

3) How can the interface between science and policy be strengthened to better serve sustainable development?

While R& D and science find their quick uptake in the private sector, they rarely inform traditional policy-making. How could we ensure that the policy is influenced by new developments in science and research? What mechanism and incentives should be put in place to bridge research, science and policy? What are the lessons learnt and best practises in connecting scientific knowledge to decision and policy-making?

Finally, we are pleased to introduce Ernesto Fernandez Polcuch (UNESCO, Montevideo) who will assist us in the moderation role by bringing in an expertise in STI practice and policies for sustainable development.

We wish you all a fruitful and stimulating discussion!

Kind regards,

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