

Keynote/presentation on main outcomes of the Eighth Multi-stakeholder Forum on Science, Technology and Innovation for the SDGs (STI Forum)

H.E. Mr. Thomas Woodroffe, United Kingdom Ambassador to the UN Economic and Social Council, Co-Chair of the 2023 STI Forum

Session on “Science, technology, and innovation: Triggering transformation and sustaining a science driven recovery” (4:30pm, Monday, 10 July 2023)

Excellencies,
Dear colleagues,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It was an honour for me to serve as co-chair of the eighth annual Multi-stakeholder Forum on Science, Technology and Innovation for the SDGs, together with my friend and co-chair, H.E. Ambassador Joyini, Permanent Representative of South Africa to the United Nations.

This year’s STI Forum was held on 3 and 4 May under the theme “Science, technology and innovation for accelerating the recovery from COVID-19 and the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at all levels”. The Forum focused on how UN and Member States can better harness STI through innovative policies, and deliver measurable commitments and high-impact initiatives to achieve the 2030 Agenda. Greater detail on the opportunities to do so can be found in the co-chair’s summary, issued as document E/HLPF/2023/6.

As in previous years, the STI Forum attracted wide participation from across the scientific and technological community, civil society and the private sector. This year, more than 1,200 stakeholders registered to attend, in addition to Member States representatives. A large number of participants also followed the discussions online.

The STI Forum fulfils an important role in creating space for open collaboration across these many communities who are applying science and technology to increase resilience to shared global challenges. The importance of such open, trusted international exchange and collaboration on science cannot be understated. It is essential for accelerating progress on the SDGs.

This year's Forum featured seven thematic discussions. These included strengthening trust in science and technology; ensuring access to digital technologies; artificial intelligence; research funding and cooperation; and how to increase the participation of women and girls in STI. We also had a presentation of the 2023 Global Sustainable Development Report by the Independent Group of Scientists.

There were also a series of side events and several high-level special events, including a dialogue with the scientific and technological community major group; an innovation exhibit and a metaverse for SDGs lab; and events on STI4SDGs roadmaps and on emerging science, frontier technologies and future scenarios. The Global Digital Compact was highlighted as a potential future normative framework for equal, responsible, and ethical digitalization.

In addition, the Forum highlighted STI solutions to key challenges that the world is currently facing, such as the recovery from COVID-19, the impacts of artificial intelligence, education and technology gaps, the triple crisis of climate change, nature loss and pollution, as well as ongoing conflicts.

The Forum examined ways in which the world can enhance trust in science and technology, close the gender gap in STI, make digitalization more inclusive, and increase global research cooperation and funding through new partnerships. It also showcased concrete integrated technological solutions to the energy, food, water, and climate crises, and highlighted ways in which we can increase community innovations and make cities smarter, more inclusive and sustainable.

Notably, more than 300 scientists and engineers submitted science-policy briefs ahead of the Forum – 110 of the peer-reviewed briefs are available on the Forum's website.

These briefs show how the multilateral system can ensure that the benefits from technology outweigh its risks and negative impacts. They focus on matters such as the importance of ethical considerations around AI algorithm development, a review mechanism on achieving universal access to the Internet and digital technologies, and biotechnology.

Colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

Among the highlights of this year's Forum was the spotlight it put on young people and on Africa.

Young innovators and entrepreneurs were featured prominently across the Forum's sessions. They discussed means of building sustainable innovation ecosystems of the future that are commensurate with the SDG aspirations, including national research and engineering institutions and infrastructures.

And in connection with the Forum, a first-ever STI in Africa Day was held under the theme: STI4SDGs – Levers, Priority Areas and Actionable Steps for Africa. Africa Day focused on how to strengthen STI ecosystems in support of the SDGs on the continent, mobilizing the African diaspora, empowering African youth, harnessing the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) for STI development, and capitalizing on technological solutions for industrial diversification.

One of the key outcomes of the day was the launch of a new STI for Africa Coalition. This marks an important step towards mobilizing global support for Africa's STI and development. As of today, co-leads of the Coalition include Cameroon, Ethiopia, Ghana, Morocco, and South Africa.

The many global recommendations that emanated from the Forum include those by the Secretary General's 10-Member Group of High-level Representatives for the Technology Facilitation Mechanism in their report on "Science, Technology, and Innovation for the SDGs – Progress, Future Vision, and Recommendations".

The report makes six proposals and eleven specific recommendations for consideration by decision-makers. Some of these recommendations include

- i. the development of national STI4SDG roadmaps;
- ii. work on policies, regulations, initiatives, funding to build the next generation Web 3.0 distributed system that will work for all by 2027;
- iii. increased capacity for using, developing, and understanding the impacts of generative AI;
- iv. the creation of a one-UN programme on digitalisation and sustainability to support developing countries;

- v. the creation of a global carbon dioxide removal fund and market to facilitate the deployment of this technology; and
- vi. boosting global public investment in global public goods to reach 0.2% of GNI.

Excellencies,

Over the past eight years, the UN Technology Facilitation Mechanism has made significant strides in promoting science-based, solution-oriented, multi-stakeholder, and collaborative approaches. It has become an effective new UN entry point for science and technology communities and has led to many complementary multi-stakeholder partnerships and actions. However, significantly more resources are needed to support the Mechanism for it to be commensurate with the ambitions of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The Forum also took stock of progress in the work of the UN Inter-agency Task Team on STI4SDGs (IATT), an important component of the Technology Facilitation Mechanism. The IATT has supported collaboration and enhanced partnerships on STI4SDG roadmaps, emerging science and technologies, capacity building, and gender equality in STI, among other topics. The IATT should be strengthened and adequately resourced to enhance its outreach efforts, share information about its open capacity building activities on STI, and provide targeted support to Member States.

To conclude, Ambassador Joyini and I would like to take this opportunity to express our great appreciation to Her Excellency Lachezara Stoeva, President of ECOSOC, for her trust in appointing us as co-chairs.

We would also like to thank H.E. Mr. Csaba Kőrösi, President of General Assembly; Under Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs Mr. Li; the 10 Member Group; DESA and UNCTAD and all colleagues in the Interagency Task Team whose dedication has been decisive in making this year's Forum a success.

I wish you all a fruitful discussion at this year's HLPF, as we build upon this year's STI Forum to further the SDGs.

Thank you.