

April 18th, 2023

Concept Note

Science, Technology and Innovation in Africa Day 2023

At the margins of the 2023 Multi-stakeholder **Forum** on Science, Technology and Innovation for the SDGs

Theme: STI4SDGs – Levers, Priority Areas and Actionable Steps for Africa

Venue: Conference Room 2, UN HQ

Date: May 2nd, 2023

Time: 10:00am – 6:00pm, New York time

Introduction

1. The collaborative Multi-stakeholder Forum on Science, Technology, and Innovation for the Sustainable Development Goals (STI Forum) was established pursuant to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as part of the Technology Facilitation Mechanism (TFM). The Forum is convened once a year and seeks to examine, define, strategize, and explore implementation pathways for science, technology, and innovation to meet the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The aspirations and goals of the 2030 Agenda are closely aligned with those of the ‘Agenda 2063: the Africa We Want’.

2. It is against this background that the first **STI in Africa Day** will be held at the margins of the 2023 STI Forum in New York, with a focus on *STI4SDGs: Priority Areas, Levers and Actionable Steps for Africa*. The **STI in Africa Day** has two main purposes: (a) To serve as a vehicle for connecting the global community to cooperate, network, showcase, share experiences, build strategic alliances, and, wherever possible, set in motion concrete actions that advance Africa’s STI4SDGs priorities; and (b) to bring the outcomes of the African Regional Science, Technology and Innovation Forum to the global STI Forum and vice versa, with a view to guiding facilitative actions on both ends.

3. The theme of the **STI in Africa Day** is aligned with that of the Fifth African Regional STI Forum, held in February 2023 in Niamey, Niger, namely “*Accelerating development and diffusion of emerging technologies for a green, inclusive and resilient Africa*”¹. The African Regional STI Forum has grown into the pre-eminent continental platform for the exploration of priority issues of science and technology, showcasing emerging developments relevant to African STI4SDGs, building, and enhancing technical and entrepreneurial culture among young people, and forging long-lasting partnerships and alliances that are sustainable and potentially self-sustaining in the long run. Since 2019, the continental STI showcase has attracted over 3,000 delegates representing African countries, United Nations agencies, the academia, industry, civil society, youths, and marginalized groups, among others.

¹ See: <https://www.uneca.org/events/fifth-african-science%2C-technology-and-innovation-forum-2023/fifth-african-science%2C-technology>

Selected Levers and Priority Areas of Focus for the First STI in Africa Day

4. Over the last three decades, Africa has made significant progress in empowering its young people, building its industrial base, and creating a large internal market that have collectively enabled Africa to withstand global crises. The first STI in Africa Day will explore how Africa can mobilize and leverage the youth, diaspora, the African Continental Free Trade Area, and growing industrial base to drive STI to meet its development aspirations and meet all SDG targets.

5. **Youth:** Africa has the youngest population in the world, with about 60% under the age of 25 and only 4% above age 65. By 2030, Africans will account for around 42% of the global youth. If positively cultivated, empowered, and channelled, this youth population could be a major driver of innovation and entrepreneurship and a force for sustained development. By so doing, the youth become positive gamechangers and drivers of peace and harmonious existence as well as tackling the ‘brain drain’ issue.

6. **African Diaspora:** The African Diaspora constitutes an estimated 40 million in North America, 113 million in Latin America, 14 million in the Caribbean, and 4 million in Europe. About half a million Africans are thought to be in China for doing businesses or studies. This is a significant resource that, if mobilized, could serve as a wellspring of knowledge, bridge for promoting trade, investment, social, technological, and cultural exchanges between Africa and the world, and fostering a sense of belonging for the diaspora. While designated the “6th Economic Region” by the African Union, mechanisms, and measures to enable the diaspora to contribute to the development of sound scientific, technological, and industrial systems in Africa are urgently needed. Thus, there is an urgent need to promote and support the TFM and its visibility as a global go-to platform – a STI for Africa Coalition to be launched, for bringing youth, diaspora, and other global partners together in support of STI4SDGs.

7. **The African Continental Free Trade Area:** The ratification of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) has created the largest regional market of 1.3 billion people with a GDP of \$3.2 trillion and household spending of about \$1.9 trillion. Currently, most of knowledge intensive products made in Africa, such as pharmaceuticals, are consumed internally. As such, AfCFTA can drive industrialization, promote innovation, and drive science and technology. It is also essential to increase investments in agricultural technologies that boost Africa's food production and food security in the face of climate change and build necessary synergies with converging initiatives like the climate resilience Food Systems coalition. It will also reduce dependence on turbulent external markets and can thus serve as a lever for STI4SDGs on the continent.

8. **Building Value Added Service, Manufacturing Industries and Agriculture Sector:** Among the priorities areas of Agenda 2063 are: Sustainable and inclusive economic growth; STI driven manufacturing/industrialization and value addition; Economic diversification and resilience; and Hospitality/tourism. Currently, Africa accounts for 1.9% of global manufacturing, less than 1% of global digital platforms, and 2% of global service exports. One in five people in Africa (20.2% of the population) is facing hunger partly due to significant gaps in the production of nutritious foods and low level of income generation by the rural population to improve the

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affordability of healthy diets. There is a huge space for Africa to diversify its economies by exploiting STI to produce value added services and enhance productivity in manufacturing and agriculture, thus serving as a lever for STI4SDGs. The COVID-19 pandemic has underlined the transformative role of STI to address global and complex challenges and its contribution to accelerate progress towards achieving SDGs. STI has a critical role to play in building Africa's own vibrant manufacturing industries and modern agricultural sector.

9. To be held on 5 May 2023 also in connection with the STI Forum, the Global Solutions Summit (GSS) 2023 will strive to amplify the discussions at the STI in Africa Day Event and further discuss how the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) can expand opportunities for regional as well as local technology development and deployment. It will also discuss opportunities for enhancing value addition in Africa's service, manufacturing, and agricultural sectors.

Objectives

10. **STI in Africa Day** will provide a platform for new initiatives by the private and public sectors, UN and partners, exchanging ideas and exploring ways to accelerate the development, application, and scaling up of technologies to fast-track progress on the SDGs and Agenda 2063.

Expected Outcomes

- Increased partnerships, networking, and cooperation among African institutions and the creation of a global go-to platform and STI for Africa Coalition for harnessing the diaspora's capacity to serve as a bridge between local communities and the broader regional and global innovation ecosystems;
- Disseminate and advocate for the implementation of policy recommendations of the fifth African Regional Science, Technology and Innovation Forum and its Bootcamps and innovators;
- Increased awareness and understanding of the immense scientific, technological and industrial opportunities for emerging technologies in Africa, and;
- Enhanced sharing and collaboration in the design, implementation, and monitoring of science, technology and innovation policies and roadmaps in Africa.

Expected Outputs

- A report of the event with key messages and policy recommendations to be used in advocating and focusing attention on STI for Africa's development, in line with adopted global normative instruments in STI;
- Launch of STI for Africa Coalition;
- Official launch of Origin and the Alliance of Entrepreneurial Universities in Africa.

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Format and Participants

The event will be held in person with the participation of government officials from all UN Member States, representatives of African diaspora and youth leaders, high-level representatives from African regional institutions, senior representatives from the UN system, bilateral and multilateral partners, business leaders, women groups, the media, and civil society.

Co-organisers

The co-organisers of **STI in Africa** Day at the 2023 STI Forum are DESA and ECA, with the support of FAO, MIT, UNESCO, and Office of the Special Adviser on Africa (OSAA)/IDTFAA.