

**Sixth Annual Multi-Stakeholder  
Forum on Science, Technology and Innovation for the Sustainable Development Goals**

<https://sdgs.un.org/tfm/STIForum2021>

Virtual based at UN HQ, New York, 4 and 5 May 2021

**DRAFT Concept Note**

Prepared by the Inter-Agency Task Team on Science, Technology and Innovation for the SDGs (“IATT”) and the 10-Member-Group of High-level Representatives of Civil Society, the Private Sector and Scientific Community in support of the TFM (“10-Member Group”)

**Mandate and background**

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development launched a Technology Facilitation Mechanism (TFM), which had been established by the Addis Ababa Action Agenda in order to support the Sustainable Development Goals. Member States agreed that it would “... *be based on a multi-stakeholder collaboration between Member States, civil society, the private sector, the scientific community, United Nations entities and other stakeholders and will be composed of a United Nations inter-agency task team on science, technology and innovation for the sustainable development goals, a collaborative multi-stakeholder forum on science, technology and innovation for the sustainable development goals and an online platform.*”

The collaborative Multi-Stakeholder Forum on Science, Technology and Innovation for the Sustainable Development Goals (“STI Forum”) is convened annually by the President of ECOSOC and expected to “*discuss science, technology and innovation cooperation around thematic areas for the implementation of the sustainable development goals, congregating all relevant stakeholders to actively contribute in their area of expertise.*” It will “*provide a venue for facilitating interaction, matchmaking and the establishment of networks between relevant stakeholders and multi-stakeholder partnerships in order to identify and examine technology needs and gaps, including with regard to scientific cooperation, innovation and capacity-building, and also in order to help facilitate development, transfer and dissemination of relevant technologies for the sustainable development goals*”.<sup>1</sup>

**Objectives and functions**

The Forum brings together a wide range of stakeholders from Member States, UN system, civil society, academia, private sector and various science and technology communities to help harness STI for the SDGs. *Inter alia*, the STI Forum provides formal inputs to the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development and its review of SDGs. More specifically, the STI Forum will pursue the following objectives and functions, as per General Assembly resolutions 70/1, 72/242 and 74/229, while keeping in mind overarching considerations such the COVID-19 pandemic, and rapid technological change.

- (1) **STI cooperation:** “*Discuss science, technology and innovation cooperation around thematic areas for the implementation of the sustainable development goals*”: The Forum will bring together a wide range of stakeholders, share success stories, discuss solutions towards overcoming challenges in scientific and technological collaboration, especially for the SDGs in

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<sup>1</sup> See Paragraph 70 of ‘Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development’, A/RES/70/1.

focus at the HLPF, as well as opening up new areas such as the creative economy<sup>2</sup>, towards the attainment of the SDGs and as part of the COVID-19 recovery efforts.

- (2) Needs and gaps analysis: *“Identify and examine technology needs and gaps, including with regard to scientific cooperation, innovation and capacity-building”*: The Forum will explore STI needs, gaps and divides. It will bring together existing analyses and build on related findings from previous STI Forums, related meetings, and the IATT work on STI4SDG roadmaps. This will also be an opportunity to take stock of the progress made in harnessing STI for the SDGs.
- (3) Networking: *“Facilitate interaction, matchmaking and the establishment of networks between relevant stakeholders and multi-stakeholder partnerships”*: The Forum will discuss and call for new initiatives and partnerships on STI for the SDGs at various levels. It will discuss interdisciplinary approaches and new open and collaborative innovation models. The Forum will also provide an opportunity for winners of a UN innovation competition for the SDGs to network with other innovators, funders and the wider STI community through pitches and other interactions.
- (4) Harnessing technologies for the SDGs: *“Facilitate development, transfer and dissemination of relevant technologies for the sustainable development goals”*: The Forum will be an opportunity to identify and showcase high-impact technologies for sustainable development, particularly those that could address difficult trade-offs, or accelerate inclusion. This could include discussions of practical, innovative solutions, good practices and case studies for scaling up; enabling environments for technology development, deployment and access; innovative financing of STI; and to explore ways of promoting the use of technologies and know-how that are freely available in the public domain.
- (5) Examining the impact of rapid technological change on the SDGs in the light of COVID-19: GA resolutions 72/242 and 73/17 requested the TFM and the CSTD to consider *“the impact of rapid technological change ... on the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals”* and to report their findings at the STI Forum. These discussions on the impacts of digitalization, artificial intelligence, biotechnology, nanotechnology, and other technologies are expected to continue, which as in previous years will also be supported by a brief presentation of the latest TFM findings by the Secretariat. The COVID-19 pandemic in the past year has amplified and accelerated some of these trends, as was discussed at the June 2020 Session of the CSTD and at its January 2021 Intersessional panel, and in other multi-stakeholder meetings and events. As in previous years, the STI Forum will build on related discussions convened by the President of the General Assembly, in particular the High-level Thematic Debate on Digital Cooperation and Connectivity on 27 April 2021.

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<sup>2</sup> In line with the 2021 International Year of Creative Economy, the discussion on creative economy for economic and social recovery could contribute to the outcome of the Forum.

## Overall thematic focus of the STI Forum 2021

The sixth annual STI Forum will be held in a virtual format from 4 to 5 May 2021<sup>3</sup>. As in previous years, the theme of the STI Forum will be closely aligned with that of the HLPF<sup>4</sup> but have an exclusive focus on the role and contributions of science, technology and innovation.

Accordingly, the theme for the STI Forum 2021 is: *“Science, technology and innovation for a sustainable and resilient COVID-19 recovery, and effective pathways of inclusive action towards the Sustainable Development Goals”*.

### Organization of work

The Forum will be convened by the President of ECOSOC who has appointed two co-chairs - H.E. Mr. Andrejs Pildegovičs, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Latvia to the United Nations, and H.E. Ambassador Mohammad Koba, Charge d’Affaires of the Indonesia Mission to the United Nations.<sup>5</sup> The two co-chairs will provide political leadership, mobilize high-level participation and galvanize overall support for the Forum.

As per its mandate, the Forum will be organized by the Interagency Task Team on STI for the SDGs (IATT), convened by UN-DESA and UNCTAD, and the 10-Member-Group of high-level representatives appointed by the Secretary General. The Secretariat will be responsible for the overall coordination and preparation of the STI Forum, including the opening and closing sessions and dedicated high-level segment. Members of the IATT and the 10-Member Group will self-nominate to join sub-groups to organize the sessions. The organizers of each session will prepare a concept note, and identify and issue invitations to potential speakers. The co-chairs of IATT and of the 10-Member Group will ensure coherent approaches across sessions.

The STI Forum will be held over a period of two days, allowing for opening and closing sessions, and several thematic sessions. As in previous years, a short high-level segment help facilitate high-level statements. Thematic sessions will be expert panels/roundtables followed by interactive dialogue.

Sessions of the Forum are expected to:

- a) Discuss lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic in terms of a better science-policy-society interface, a resilient recovery, and rapid solutions for global challenges;
- b) Identify top priorities for R&D and STI solutions for “building back better” and accelerating progress towards the SDGs (emphasizing SDGs 1, 2, 3, 8, 10, 12, 13, 16 and 17 in-focus at HLPF 2021);
- c) Examine promises and potential risks of emerging technologies, and addressing technological and capacity divides in sustainable and equitable ways;
- d) Link to IATT workstreams on STI4SDG roadmaps, emerging technologies, capacity building, gender, and the TFM online platform;
- e) Discuss opportunities and the way forward: TFM priorities and other global and regional initiatives of a multi-stakeholder nature.

<sup>3</sup> It will be the first to be held in a virtual format as the 2020 Forum could not be held due to COVID-19, following a decision by ECOSOC.

<sup>4</sup> The theme of the 2021 HLPF has been decided as “Sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic that promotes the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development: building an inclusive and effective path for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda in the context of the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development”.

<sup>5</sup> The President of ECOSOC has decided to appoint H. E. Mr. Mohammad Koba, Ambassador, Charge d’Affaires of the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Indonesia to the United Nations as the co-chair of the STI Forum who replaced H.E. Ambassador Dian Triansyah Djani, Permanent Representative of Indonesia to the United Nations, due to completion of his tenure.

The STI Forum and its sessions aim to be as interactive as possible, to explore user-friendly virtual conference facility (easily accessible by participants from developing countries), use of different media (videos, and visualizations), streaming on different platforms such as UN WebTV to reach a wide audience and to feature side events, innovations exhibits and affiliated events contributing to the discussions.

In addition, all stakeholders will be invited to organize side events. Building on the benefits of a virtual format, these could be held round the clock with reporting back to the Forum. Furthermore, several special events will be organized before, after or during the lunch breaks of the two days of the STI Forum. As in the past they could include events by associated conferences, meetings or initiatives. Finally, as in years past, the winners of a global call for innovations will be invited to exhibit their work in a virtual format at the Forum. The STI Forum will also seek to ensure linkages/synergies with the General Assembly's High-level Thematic Debate on Digital Cooperation and Connectivity to be held on April 27, as well as other multilateral processes and events taking place in 2021.

As an immediate follow-up of the Forum, building on the experience gained this year with virtual platforms, a broader engagement across the world might also be explored through encouraging TFM partners to hold policy hackathons and substantive meetings around the world, and discussions on technology scenarios. Several of these elements are expected to be connected to further development of the on-line platform TFM Connect 2030.

### **Speakers and moderators**

A list of potential speakers and moderators will be provided by the UN IATT and 10-Member Group for the Co-Chairs' consideration on the basis of their expertise in different areas and sectors of STI, bearing in mind geographic and gender balance, as well as balance between developers/ creators and users of technologies (i.e., those who innovate and those who need innovations). Co-chairs will also propose speakers.

As in previous years, the 10-Member-Group of high-level representatives are expected to serve as moderators or speakers, in line with their expertise and the session's thematic focus. In particular, the co-chairs of the 10-Member Group typically play an important role in a "way forward" or "implementation" session, by providing reflections on the future direction of the TFM including the STI Forum.

Session panels will comprise a mix of high-level speakers, such as Ministers and high-level policy makers, representatives of international organizations with expertise in STI for SDGs; eminent STI experts and practitioners from science and engineering communities, academia, technology companies, and civil society; as well as entrepreneurs and innovators.

Winners of the innovation competition (see below) may also be invited to kick-off thematic sessions with short "innovation pitches" presenting their winning innovations.

### **Participation**

The STI Forum is open to participation by delegates and representatives of various stakeholder groups through an open call for registration. The STI Forum is collaborative and multi-stakeholder in nature. It brings together Member States and government institutions related to STI; United Nations entities and other international organizations; the scientific and engineering communities and academia; science and technology funders; civil society, NGOs and especially youth; as well as the technology companies and philanthropic entities. The Forum is expected to mobilize decision-makers, practitioners and experts; users, innovators and developers of technologies, and it is thus

important to secure participation from a broad range of communities, comprising science, technology and innovation aspects.

### **Inputs and outputs**

In line with STI Forum mandate, there will be a wide outreach for substantive inputs and documentation from stakeholders, including the following:

- Meeting documentation prepared by IATT and 10-Member Group for all sessions.
- Summary of responses to call for innovations and winner's showcase.
- Substantive IATT background report bringing together inputs and perspectives from across the TFM, including materials from IATT work streams (including the "TFM findings on the impacts of rapid technology change on the SDGs")
- Other relevant submissions on outcomes of related meetings and research by TFM partners.

The main output will be the co-chairs' summary of the STI Forum 2021, which is a mandated input to the meetings of the HLPF in the context of the follow-up and review of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. As in previous years, the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, supported by IATT and 10-Member-Group, will provide a draft for the co-chairs' consideration and also manage the formal processing and translation of this "Note by the Secretariat" for the HLPF.

Additional outputs will include summaries of the side events, associated meetings, innovation winners' profiles and new or strengthened partnerships and initiatives, as well as any commitments made. Proceedings will be made available for online open viewing. Synergies with the private sector will be sought through the Partnership Forum.

### **Side events and UN innovation competition**

Member States and all stakeholders will be encouraged to organize side events on specific topics and key initiatives that support the work of the TFM. These will be provided space for more in-depth discussions and support the official sessions of the STI Forum. Applications for a limited number of side events must be made in prescribed format published on the Forum website for approval and consolidation by the organizers. Side event organizers will provide summary reports to the Secretariat which will be considered in the overall reporting of the outcomes of the Forum.

As per its mandate, one important function of the STI Forum is to promote networking across multiple stakeholders and promote matchmaking of technology supply and demand. Therefore, as in previous years, the Secretariat is organizing an innovation competition, through a partnership with the Global Innovation Exchange and under the guidance of the 10-Member Group. This year, the call focuses on proven and practical (non-medical) innovations addressing challenges created by the COVID-19 pandemic. Following a selection process, a small number from amongst those submitted will be presented during the STI Forum and also featured in a virtual exhibition and matchmaking event. The exhibition will also include the winners of the 2020 competition (chosen before the 2020 STI Forum was deferred). For more details about the call, see: <https://sdgs.un.org/tfm/STIForum2021>

### **Follow-up**

The STI Forum 2021 is part of a continuum of annual events from 2016 to 2030, each building cumulatively upon the last to progressively develop a roadmap of policy and practical initiatives to harness STI for the SDGs. The Forum also connects, on a reciprocal basis, to similar sector-specific or regional initiatives undertaken with similar objectives. This arrangement and the IATT workstreams enable a sustained follow-up.