STI FORUM

Science, Technology & Innovation for the Sustainable Development Goals

6th Multi-stakeholder Forum on Science, Technology and Innovation for the Sustainable Development Goals

4-5 May 2021, UN HQ New York (virtual)

Session Session 7: Delivering in Decade of Action for achievement of the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs: Next steps for the TFM and its partners

Background note and guiding questions

Background

Paragraph 70 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development announced the launch of a "Technology Facilitation Mechanism" (TFM) to support the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The TFM will facilitate multi-stakeholder collaboration and partnerships through the sharing of information, experiences, best practices and policy advice among Member States, civil society, the private sector, the scientific community, United Nations entities and other stakeholders.

The TFM comprises three components: The United Nations Interagency Task Team on Science, Technology and Innovation for the SDGs (IATT) together with the 10-Member Group of representatives from civil society, the private sector and the scientific community; the annual Multi-stakeholder Forum on Science, Technology and Innovation for the SDGs (STI Forum)' and the TFM online platform 2030 Connect as a gateway for information on existing science, technology and innovation initiatives, mechanisms and programs.

Despite limited resources, significant progress has been made towards an operationalization of the TFM. IATT membership has increased to comprise 43 UN entities and brings together more than 120 experts who exchange experiences and coordinate their work, consolidated through ten workstreams. The IATT works closely with the 10-Member Group and representatives of the academic, business and NGO communities. The TFM has engaged thousands of scientific, technological and other stakeholders through its workstreams and annual STI Forum meetings, many of whom have not previously been actively engaged with the UN. In fact, several thousand people have been engaged so far. In the past five years, the TFM has explored a new multi-stakeholder model of work for the UN system. In addition, the STI Forum has catalyzed and built cooperation with related, regular conferences and Forums, such as the Global Solutions Summit and the G-STIC (Global Sustainable Technology and Innovation Conference series). Participation in TFM activities has continuously increased and widened, including among policy makers, entrepreneurs, academics and the youth. Through the summary of its STI Forum, the TFM provides formal mandated input in support of the HLPF's SDG review and its mandated science-policy function. Compared to the past, this is an unprecedented level of UN-led cooperation on STI.

Emerging technologies and associated policy issues of major concern have been part of the TFM agenda since inception. For example, this includes issues of frontier technologies, artificial intelligence, robotics,

nanotechnologies, biotechnology, new materials and green technologies. Several expert group meetings have been organized on the potential impacts of these technologies on the SDGs. Scientists and engineers have contributed policy briefs highlighting key issues for policy attention and TFM partners undertake targeted joint research.

In line with GA resolutions resolution 72/242 and 73/17, TFM findings on the impacts of rapid technological change continue to be reported to the STI Forum. While this focused more on economic and social issues in the past, attention is now also moving to considering the environmental implications of these technologies. Analytical inputs gathered are used in various UN system publications.

The IATT has undertaken substantial analytical and operational work, including on STI roadmaps and action plans for the SDGs, in cooperation with the World Bank, the Government of Japan and the Joint Research Centre of the EU. This includes a joint Guidebook, many expert consultations and projects to assist governments in several pilot countries with the development of national STI roadmaps for the SDGs. This pilot work is currently being expanded to a wider group of countries through a proposed Partnership in Action process.

A related IATT work stream on STI capacity-building has pooled training materials, developed a UN system wide training programme and UN staff experts have been jointly delivering multi-day sub-regional training courses to government officials in Jordan and Panama, with others scheduled for implementation once the COVID-19 pandemic allows. At present, online material for future blended learning is also being developed by the group.

More recently, the IATT has been addressing STI issues related to COVID-19, in line with the Secretary-General's COVID-19 response. This includes, for example, a call for COVID-19 technology solutions, the results of which are featured on the 2030 Connect platform. Led by DESA, TFM/IATT also organized an HLPF side-event on "*COVID-19 vaccines: scientific advances, access models and vaccination acceptance*", featuring prominent experts from WHO, GAVI, CEPI, Wilton Park and the USCIB foundation among others. In June, it organized a webinar on "*Science, Technology and Innovation for the SDGs and recovery from Covid-19*" and an expert group meeting on "*Lessons-Learnt from the COVID-19 Pandemic for Better Cooperation on Science and Technology Advice*" in May 2020. A related DESA Policy Brief 62, entitled "The COVID-19 pandemic: a wake-up call for better cooperation at the science-policy-society interface" highlighted some of the issues.

In response to a recent call by the President of ECOSOC for online stakeholder consultations in preparation for STI components of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF), the IATT also reached out to all interested STI stakeholders to provide written responses to a series of survey questions on: (1) STI action on COVID-19; (2) STI solutions and good practices for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); and (3) cross-cutting STI issues and "levers" of change.

Among the most important remaining constraints for the TFM are lacking funds and other resources for the TFM activities – as many of the joint activities are not appropriately included in the participating entities work programmes. Most of the TFM activities, including the mandated 10-Member Group and the online platform, remain unfunded.

Objectives and likely key messages

This session will begin by presenting a number of initiatives from across the world that support the science-based, solution-oriented, multi-stakeholder and collaborative approach of the Technology Facilitation Mechanism (TFM) including discussions on broadening their impacts, partnerships and closer connection to the TFM. The session will also include the TFM's online platform 2030 Connect, which connects technology seekers with providers of technologies and other resources and aims to function as a hub for connecting different (open source) databases. The session aims to stimulate discussions among TFM partners and to shape a collective vision of the future of the TFM. It will conclude with a presentation of the way forward for the TFM.

Format

The session will be structured as a moderated panel discussion (5 minutes per panelist), the panel discussion will be followed by interactive discussion. After their intervention, the moderator will take comments and questions from the audience.
The session will close with a brief presentation of main outcomes of the discussion by the moderator.

Questions for discussion

The discussion will be guided by the following questions:

- What are the lessons-learned from the work of the Technology Facilitation Mechanism (TFM) so far?
- What is the best way forward, including with regard to opportunities in a post-COVID world for more innovative and effective multi-stakeholder collaboration?
- How can we further elevate and include marginalized voices within the scientific community through the TFM work?
- How can the United Nations and other international organizations help build up innovation ecosystems that are inclusive of women, indigenous and young innovators, and innovators living with disabilities, to advance the SDGs and leave no one behind? How a Central Open Source Database can help? What role can online tools and platforms like 2030 Connect play in advancing inclusive innovation?
- How could we raise adequate resources for the TFM of the future?

Supporting documents/publications

- UN Inter-agency Task Team on STI for the SDGs (IATT) Background Information Work Updates
- Partnership in Action on Science, Technology and Innovation for SDGs Roadmaps
- Concept note on UN Central Database of Open-Source technologies
- IATT report for the STI Forum: "Emerging science, frontier technologies, and the SDGs – Perspectives from the UN system and science and technology communities" (forthcoming)
- TFM progress report (forthcoming)