



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

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

Special Event: Promoting Inclusion to accelerate innovation

[Background note and guiding questions](#)

Background

The 2030 Agenda is rooted in a commitment to leave no one behind, and this principle reflects a moral imperative but also a practical reality. In today's globalized world, progress in one region or one population will not be durable unless it is shared with all, and the kind of extreme inequality that currently defines our world is hobbling progress toward sustainable development.

The Covid-19 pandemic has both exposed and exacerbated the social and economic inequalities that diminish human wellbeing around the world. Vulnerable and disadvantaged communities have suffered disproportionately from the virus in all countries, and as long as the vaccine rollout prioritizes rich countries over poor ones, the global pandemic will continue to rage. This same interconnectedness characterizes other development challenges as well, from the need for sustainable livelihoods and social wellbeing to the need to address climate change and biodiversity loss.

For these and many other challenges and crises, innovation can bend the curve of development, overcoming seemingly intractable obstacles and fast-tracking development. But as illustrated by the Covid-19 vaccine distribution inequities, it is clear that genuine progress will be impossible unless the fruits of innovation benefit all populations in developed and developing countries alike, including women, youth, indigenous peoples, local communities, people with disabilities, and other vulnerable groups. The innovation ecosystem must be inclusive in terms of its *users and beneficiaries*.

The innovation ecosystem must also be inclusive in terms of its *actors, drivers, thinkers, and doers*. Innovation is born out of human experience and creativity, often spurred by adversity and necessity, and so members of vulnerable groups and diverse communities have much to offer. Without an inclusive approach that capitalizes on the strengths and expertise of all, the global family risks undermining the strength of its innovation ecosystems.

Currently, much of global technological creation and innovation originates from high and middle-income countries. Based on an assessment by the World Intellectual Property Organization

(WIPO), out of over 1.5 million patent applications received in 2018, less than 0.1% came from low-income countries, while 97.4% came from high-income and upper middle-income countries combined.

Women also have traditionally been grossly underrepresented in patent applications. According to WIPO, in 2020, 16.5 percent of inventors named in international patent applications were women, and while this number is higher than it has been in years past, progress has been slow. Women inventors are more likely to work within academia than in the private sector, and they tend to be concentrated in specific disciplines, with biotechnology, food chemistry and pharmaceuticals being the most common.

Indigenous peoples and local communities likewise have traditionally lacked access to the resources and networks that can help them to scale up innovations and take an active role in the wider scientific, technological and entrepreneurial sectors. Local and indigenous systems of knowledge represent a deep well of expertise and creative thought that can spur innovation and lead to solutions to a range of development challenges, so the fact that indigenous innovators are often denied a seat at the table represents not only an injustice but also a massive missed opportunity.

According to the World Bank, there are currently one billion people living with some form of disability, and when people living with disabilities are unable to access educational, financial and other resources needed to engage in the broader innovation ecosystem, the world loses out on a huge pool of potential innovators and entrepreneurs. These innovators can make critical contributions to accessible technology and other aspects of a “universal design” approach that makes the built environment useable by all regardless of ability. And of course, like innovators from all vulnerable and underrepresented groups, innovators living with disabilities make contributions to all aspects of development and moving the 2030 Agenda forward.

Objective

This session will consider the advancement of the SDGs by building up an inclusive innovation ecosystem that nurtures and champions the contributions of all, including women, youth, indigenous peoples, local communities, people with disabilities, and other vulnerable groups. It will also include the TFM’s online platform as a means for connecting technology seekers to providers of technology and other resources.

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 current session will focus on concrete ways to open up the innovation landscape and build inclusiveness, both as an end in itself and as a way to maximize the impact of scientific, technological and social innovations. The discussion will address the following questions.

- What are the key policies and strategies at local and national levels that enable a society to capitalize on the innovation and creativity of all populations and communities, including those that have been historically under-represented?
- What can non-government actors, including from academia and civil society, do to encourage and support innovators from under-represented populations? What are good practices in engaging with local communities to encourage the uptake and adoption of innovations?
- What role does the private sector play in advancing inclusive innovation? What are some of the current initiatives underway and what are the remaining roadblocks?