Progress Report and Way forward of the activities of the

Interagency Task Team (UN-IATT) Work Stream 6 (WS6)

on Capacity Building on STI for SDGs

April 2021

Background

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda identify key Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) policies and actions for meeting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The main instrument established by these initiatives was the Technology Facilitation Mechanism (TFM) to create STI capacities and mobilize STI activities as fundamental components of national strategies for attaining the SDGs.

An integral part of TFM is the UN Interagency Task Team on STI for SDGs (IATT). The IATT brings together UN specialized agencies with STI mandates and regional commissions to cooperate on technology policy programmes and enable the transfer of policy know-how to build up economic, technical, and managerial capacities targeting the SDGs. The IATT is currently composed of diverse entities, including UNCTAD, UNIDO, UNESCO, UNU MERIT, WIPO, UNDESA, UNEP, ITU, the World Bank, and the regional commissions. This Group is open to all United Nations agencies, funds and programmes. Additional partnerships include organizations outside the UN system, such as the EU-Joint Research Center and the OECD.

The IATT comprises of 10 workstreams, which combine operational and thematic initiatives, in collaboration with the 10-Member Group to support the Technology Facilitation Mechanism; including among others, mapping STI within UN; Gender and STI; STI policy frameworks, action plan and roadmaps; capacity building in STI for SDGs, and analytical work on emerging technologies and the SDGs. Founding members of Work Stream 6 (WS6) on capacity building on STI for SDGs are UNDESA, UNEP, UNIDO, UNESCO, UNCTAD, ITU and WIPO. These were joined later by the UNU MERIT, the Technology Bank, UNESCWA and other regional commissions that contribute to specific activities as the need arises. UNU-MERIT coordinated the WS6 until July 2020 and now is coordinated by UNESCO and UNCTAD.

Evolution of WS6

WS6 started its activities soon after the adoption of the SDGs by UN's General Assembly. UNIDO proposed a comprehensive concept note for UN system-wide capacity building in STI for development in October 2015. However, founding members decided to complete an initial mapping exercise on STI activities being carried out by the TFM as a prerequisite to identify a focus for the working stream's capacity-building activities. Delays in completing the mapping exercise prompted UNIDO to present a revised proposal in November 2016, which included the comprehensive approach to capacity building across UN and a more modest approach, namely, to start with pilot workshops focusing on STI policies. This proposal was discussed again in May 2017 after the 2nd STI Forum and once the mapping exercise was completed. UNCTAD strongly supported a modest start as 'proof of concept', a view that was then seconded by UNDESA and eventually backed by most of the other WS6 agencies. At that time, UNU MERIT committed to leveraging its existing training on innovation policies, set aside resources for three years, and provide IT support in support of the endeavors of WS6. WS6 agreed to go ahead with the pilot workshops proposal and commit individual agency resources to the initiative.

After a period of intense discussion, the WS6 agreed that the workshop will focus on STI for SDGs and will be structured along with three core elements:

- Conceptual Framework
- Design and Implementation of STI Policies
- Monitoring and Evaluation of STI Policies

The conceptual framework module of the training analyses the links between STI and development, and how to leverage STI to achieve the SDGs. The module on design and implementation of innovation policies addresses both STI policy content and policy process in an SDG context. The monitoring and evaluation part of the training discusses methodologies, collection approaches and standards for STI indicators, research and development (R&D) and innovation surveys, as well as M&E of policy implementation with a focus on STI policy instruments, legal frameworks and contextual factors.

The training content was designed in a format of a 5-day course, easily adaptable to the local context of regions and countries, with facilitators and trainers of the UN – IATT professional staff. To begin with, sub-regional training workshops, rather than national ones, were given priority.

- The first pilot workshop took place in Amman, Jordan, in April 2018 and was held in cooperation with UNESCWA and with Jordan's Higher Council for Scientific Research (HCST).[1] UNCTAD's long-standing relationship with ESCWA helped kick the event off. The workshop was delivered in an integrated and interrelated manner by specialist staff from UNDESA, UNIDO, UNESCO, UNCTAD, ITU, WIPO, UNESCWA and UNU MERIT. The workshop enabled thirty-one mid- to high-level decision-makers in STI from regional organizations, academia, and research institutions in the Arab region. The course allowed participants to increase their understanding of innovation and innovation-related policies and learn about the best practices in STI policies globally, regionally, and nationally and concerning the SDGs. It was an opportunity to exchange experiences at the national and global levels on the state of innovation in the Arab region through the ESCWA framework for innovation policy and its various components, which was shared with the

---

[1] https://www.unescwa.org/events/workshop-innovation-policies-sdgs-arab-region

participants. These initiatives' achievements were presented from the floor during the 3rd STI Forum in May 2017 in New York and explained in detail during the side-event organized by WS6.

- The second pilot workshop took place in Panama in May 2019,[2] organized in collaboration with Panama's Secretaría Nacional de Ciencia, Tecnología e Innovación (SENACYT), the country's national STI Council. The 3-day workshop was delivered in Spanish and English by professional staff from UNIDO, UNCTAD, UNDESA, UNECLAC, UNESCO and UNU MERIT. Around 20 participants from government agencies, universities, research institutes, universities and technical cooperation agencies working on STI for SDGs in the Latin America and Caribbean region joined the training, sponsored by SENACYT. The workshop was another unique opportunity to exchange experiences on how to make STI work to achieve the SDGs and the Group agreed to continue exploring the issues after the completion of the event. As in the previous year, the workshop results were presented from the floor during the 4th STI Forum in New York and in a side event for this purpose convened by WS6.

- Following the successful delivery of the two sub-regional training workshops, preparation for new regional and national training courses had been undertaken, in partnerships with regional partners, such as the Southern African Development Community (SADC) for a training activity for officials from Southern African countries, and with the UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) for South-East European and Central Asian countries. However, due to the global pandemic, the training activities in presence had to be postponed and the travel and sanitary conditions in most countries still don not allow reprogramming of these trainings.

Therefore, WS6 reorganized its work and delivered a series of pilot online training workshops on STI policy and instruments in SDGs, attended by mid-level STI policy-makers from developing countries, from November 2020 to early December 2020. The series was composed of three sessions: 1) Current approaches to STI Policymaking in the context of SDGs; 2) STI Policy instruments: Design and implementation; and 3) Innovation and entrepreneurship. The online sessions attracted over 70 participants from 28 countries and 40 representatives from different UN bodies. Innovative tools such as Mentimeter were used to promote the interactivity of the online format. The successful delivery of the pilot online sessions has spurred calls for more sessions by participants, as reflected in the online surveys carried out by WS6 to collect the opinions and suggestions to the training and potential training topics as important inputs to the design of future sessions. The proposed topics include STI policy formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, multistakeholder engagement, technology transfer, intellectual property, STI roadmaps, etc. With the completion of three sessions, WS6 member agencies have jointly developed a communication piece for the events[34], following the principle delivery as one. Additional online sessions at regional level have been planned in the upcoming months.

Active participation in TFM activities has been at the center of WS6 efforts to generate awareness, promote advocacy and build partnerships to deliver future capacity-building workshops. Several side

---

[2] http://www.unesco.org/new/es/natural-sciences/about-us/single-view/news/training_on_technology_facilitation_brings_together_official/
[3] https://www.unido.org/news/building-science-technology-and-innovation-capacity-developing-countries
[4] https://en.unesco.org/news/successful-sti-policy-training-more-interactive

events have been organized in the margins of the STI Forums. For instance, the Panama workshop resulted from the approach of a SENACYT representative during the WS6 organized side event at the 3rd STI forum in 2018. Another WS6 side event during the 4th STI Forum in 2019 led to a request from South Africa's Department of Science and Technology (DST) for a workshop in the SADC region. Initial discussions with the Technology Bank to cooperate with WS6 were held on the sidelines of the 4th STI Forum.

Side-events at the STI fora have played a pivotal role in increasing the demand for WS6 trainings, but they attract mostly member states and stakeholders who are already aware of the workgroup's activities. Announcing WS6 achievements from the floor at the different fora helps to increase the awareness of member states and other stakeholders but is limited by the short time allocated and by the lower participation and concentration span, as the main interest is on the podium presentations. Hence, to sustain future demand and expand the delivery of training workshops to more Member States, it is important that the need to build stronger STI policy capacities is emphasized during the main sessions at an upcoming STI fora, including the work of WS6, as an example of UN Delivery as One. With the successful delivery of the pilot sessions and more requests raised by countries and regions, it is critical to present the IATT WS6's training activities and discuss future plans to scale up the pilot training during the 2021 STI forum.

Current Status

1. LAC online training workshops

WS6 discussed the way forward immediately after delivering the online pilot sessions at the end of 2020. After consulting the suggestions from WS6 members and participants of the pilot sessions, the proposal was made to repeat the series of three online training workshops starting with LAC. It was also perceived as a way to maximize the impact of existing training materials and make the impact of WS6's work more sustainable. Since then, WS6 has been preparing the online training series for LAC regions. The training will be held from 19 to 21 April 2021 in Spanish.

2. SADC online training workshops

Planned activities for 2020 included delivering a five-day workshop for the SADC region. South Africa temporarily leads the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) and felt it would be a major contribution to the SDGs' achievement in the region if WS6 could deliver such training. Conversations between DST, SADC and WS6 followed and it was agreed to deliver the workshop in the first week of May 2020. The fifteen SADC member countries were expected to send 1-2 representatives to the training to be held at the University of Pretoria premises. A training programme was drafted and shared by UNU-MERIT. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the event was not able to be delivered in presence. Therefore, a new agreement was achieved on an online training course in 2021. The training will consist of two parts: delivery of the 1st three introductory sessions on STI for SDGs in July 2021, followed by more in-depth sessions 2nd half of 2021 (online or on-sight depending on the situation). The course will involve participants from the 16 countries part of the SADC. SADC and DST will be the main partners for the delivery of the course.

3. Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) on STI for SDG

WS6 is collaborating with EU JRC's work to prepare a MOOC on STI for SDG. The MOOC will be composed of 6-8 modules and follow the guidebook structure. Discussion is being held on the design of the structure.

4. Collaboration with UCL

A collaboration was established between University College London (UCL) and WS6 through UNESCO. A group of master students from UCL Department of Science, Technology, Engineering and Public Policy will contribute to a background paper on capacity building in STI for SDG and communication for WS6's work. Possible contribution also includes a policy brief.

5. WS6 Webpage

In response to the UN website's reorganization (sdg.un.org), WS6 has prepared a dedicated [web page](#) to disseminate its achievements and coming events. The online content will be uploaded to the webpage in the coming week.

6. STI forum side event on capacity building in STI for SDG

WS6 has requested a side event in the 2021 STI forum. The 1h side event aims to raise the awareness of capacity building in STI for SDG, present the achievements and plans of WS6 and invite partners and participants from the previous sessions to share their perspectives and suggestions, as a way to collect important inputs to the scale-up the pilot training sessions and expand partnership.

7. Activities on hold due to the global pandemic

After long and protracted discussions with the Cabinet of the Minister for Innovation and Technology Development from Serbia by our UNECE partner, there was finally the confirmation of an earlier request to deliver an STI policies for SDG workshop in Belgrade at the end of May 2020. The workshop was to be supported by the Central European Initiative, which had agreed to partly finance the event following an approach by UNCTAD. Discussions were also being held with Serbia's Ministry of Education and Technology and EU's Joint Research Center (JRC) to work together in the delivery of this workshop, when the COVID-19 crisis erupted. The activity is also temporarily put on hold.

As a member of the WS 6, the Technology Bank has proposed to deliver during 2020 three workshops to their constituency: Asia and Francophone and Anglophone Africa. The initial suggestion is to start with one 4-day workshop, possibly in Cambodia, together with UNESCAP, initially during the first semester of 2020. But again, the COVID-19 emergency does not allow yet to set a starting date.

Due to the first 2018 workshop's success, UNESCWA requested its repeat, although this time either in Kuwait or Oman. UNESCWA is searching for funding for participants and, should they succeed, the event would have taken place in the last quarter of 2020, which was also postponed due to the pandemic situation

WS6 has also been quite active in trying to raise funds for its activities. A recent approach to Germany's Ministry of Development Cooperation (BMZ) has resulted in an email confirmation by GIZ, the ministry's implementation arm, stating that they may be able to fund on an ad-hoc basis one or two events provided these take place in Morocco and Tunisia. Budgets have been submitted to GIZ, but the COVID-19 crisis has slowed down the progress of negotiations. These funds could be used to work with UNESCWA in their planned workshop, although the venue would have to change to Morocco and/or Tunisia.

Altogether there was a demand for 6-7 workshops during 2020, a major increase to the yearly workshop that was being delivered in the past. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic has left all these demands up in the air and there will be no clarity as to whether and when can they be satisfied until the pandemic

is controlled. However, WS6's work has been adapted to the pandemic situation and has yield fruitful results despite the difficult situation. The pandemic has motivated WS6 members to work together in finding alternative ways to engage with Member States to deliver their service.

Way Forward

During the recent 2020 STI Forum preparatory meeting in February 2020 in Vienna the WS6 members began revising the content of the training provided. After two pilot workshops in presence, a series of online training workshops, and several more coming ahead, it was considered the right moment to address some of the perceived opportunities to improve the content and delivery of the training. While the delivery of the workshops has been considered successful, judging by the comments by participants and the course evaluations, the Group still feels there is room for improvement in exploring in detail STI policies, in aligning the STI policies closely to the SDGs and in providing more guidelines and experiences for policy implementation. It was also felt that participants would benefit from using the different STI for SDGs policy frameworks that are being developed, like the UN TFM's recently completed guidebook on STI road maps for SDGs.[5]

Following the Vienna meeting, the WS 6 planned to revise the curriculum based on a proposal produced by UNU-MERIT. Meanwhile, the team is planning to prepare a global repository of training materials in STI for SDG. These two materials will serve as the entry points to design an in-depth course structure, which will be further adapted to the needs of countries and regions. The demand for training in Asia and the Pacific region and LDCs has also been raised in WS 6's discussion as a way forward.

Challenges

A challenge relates to enlarging the number of agencies involved in WS6 to bring more expertise to the Group and divide the delivery burden among more agencies. During the Vienna meeting, WIPO and ITU, which had been involved in the early stages of the initiative but later dropped out, were invited to rejoin. WIPO has been able to rejoin and has been actively engaged in the 2021 online training workshops while ITU informed the WS6 that due to the current workload it would only expect to contribute as of 2021, possibly with e-learning modules for innovation ecosystems. During the Vienna Meeting, UNECA, IAEA and the United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs (UNOOSA) also indicated their interest in participating and some have already joined in some conference calls held by WS6. Whether they will remain in the Group and whether more agencies can be brought in remains a question mark. More support is necessary from member states and from the leadership of agencies so that the activities of WS6 can be included in work programmes. Making WS6 tasks part of UN agencies work programmes and planning would certainly help to sustain WS6 activities in the future.

Finally, there is the issue of finance. Thus far the two workshops in presence have been financed by each individual agency paying for its own costs and the participants' costs have been paid by the host or a regional commission. The funding for the upcoming workshops would follow the same approach. Members of the WS6 are very committed to the activities of the stream and try self-funding whenever they can. The problem is, however, that since WS6 activities are an unplanned and unprogrammed contribution to the TFM, it is easy to allocate funding for one or two staff to travel to deliver a course once

---

[5] https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/partnership/?p=33852

or twice a year. But as activities grow, as they are beginning to do now, agencies will be requested for more staff time and travel money for activities that may not be considered core. Further, because there is no regular source of funding for participants, the workshops' dates are set for when funding is available, complicating significantly planning especially for agencies that require long lead times to organize their travel. A secure source of funding for WS6 would help convince agencies to allocate human resources to the workshops on a regular basis, include WS6 activities into their work programmes, and better plan the activities of the staff involved in WS6.

WS6 is aware of this predicament and hence the approach to BMZ, but this has so far has turned out only in a one-off funding. Obviously, should the work done by the WS6 be to the satisfaction of BMZ the agency may consider additional funding in the future, but this is at this stage a long shot. WS6 is also teaming with the Technology Bank to search together for funding for a 3-5-year training programme, but this is only at its initial stages. Without a guaranteed source of financing it may be difficult to sustain the activities of WS6 in the long run.