

Seventh annual UN Multi-stakeholder Forum on Science, Technology and Innovation for the SDGs

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Co-chairs, Excellencies,

I am delighted to speak on behalf of the United Kingdom at the Science, Technology and Innovation Forum.

Science, technology and innovation provide huge opportunities to make progress towards achieving the 2030 Agenda, and tackling the major global threats that the world faces. Indeed, the improvements in life expectancy and reductions in extreme poverty seen in the past decade have been underpinned by major scientific advancements: such as effective treatments for malaria, and for HIV, that have saved millions of lives; the green revolution in agriculture, that has increased agricultural yields; and rigorous evidence on what interventions do and do not work, that has increasingly shaped development investments.

We know the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly disrupted development, exacerbated poverty and inequality, and will have a scarring effect for many years to come. The secondary economic impacts of Russia's invasion of Ukraine – including on food supplies and fuel prices - will take a further toll. But Covid-19 has also shone a light on what can be achieved through scientific exchange and collaboration. As a scientist working in UK government, I have benefited from multiple conversations with scientists from all around the world, where we have exchanged evidence and learning about COVID-19, and new variants. The international

response set a new benchmark for the speed with which we can develop and rigorously test new vaccines, therapeutics and diagnostics for emerging health threats. It has accelerated technology adoption and fuelled innovation in ways of working – including through remote working. Above all, it has underlined the importance of partnership – between countries, the public and private sector, research institutions, philanthropists and civil society.

The UK recognises the importance of S&T, and of international collaboration, as a way for R&D to achieve rapid progress to address major challenges. Climate is a major priority, spanning collaboration to support clean energy access and ways to achieve clean, sustainable economic growth, and to reduce the impacts of climate change on the world's most vulnerable communities. This includes through the Transforming Energy Access platform, the new Adaptation Research Alliance, and the Agricultural breakthrough initiatives, all announced at COP26. Pandemic preparedness is a significant priority -with the G7 and G20 100-day mission setting out our ambition to be able to respond more effectively when the next pandemic threat emerges. Our rigorous research generates evidence and data to inform priority areas. This includes economic research that informs the design and construction of billions of dollars' worth of sustainable infrastructure every year, and evidence on how to strengthen humanitarian response – to better predict and act quickly in situations of crises.

It includes research that shows what interventions can halve rates of domestic violence, and what interventions may deliver learning outcomes to children in schools.

There are, of course, still many challenges to overcome in order to capitalise on the opportunities that science and technology can provide to deliver progress on the SDG Agenda. For example, access to COVID-19 vaccines remains low in developing countries. The UK is working hard to address this, both through COVAX support on vaccine roll outs, as well as through our support to CEPI, that is seeking to strengthen developing countries ability to produce vaccines and treatments.

As we see continued advances thanks to the emergence of powerful new technologies, we need to be alive to the risks and unintended consequences that could cause further disruption for development.

Digital divides are a case in point: virtually all 2.9 billion people who have never used the internet live in developing countries, and most are women and girls. It essential that our efforts to accelerate digital transformation go hand in hand with our efforts to protect human rights online, if we are to build an inclusive digital world. We need to work collectively, to promote a diverse information ecosystem, where all voices are able to engage and contribute.

The UK has a strong science sector, and a global network of research partnerships, supported through our research funding, University and private sector networks. We will continue to be a major funder of science, technology and innovation that seeks to generate new and scalable solutions to major development challenges. We want to continue to strengthen our research partnerships with low and middle-income countries, to achieve the

opportunities of technological change, whilst navigating the risks that some new technologies may also create.

We look forward to working in collaboration with like minded partners, to make science, technology and innovation the powerful engine of development that we know it can be.

Thank you.