

Eight annual Multi-stakeholder Forum on Science, Technology and Innovation for the Sustainable Development Goals

Thematic Session 3: Think global, act local – people and community led- innovation and tech infrastructures in cities (16:30-18:00 EDT, 3 May 2023)

Interactive discussion by Jason Cheng (3 minutes)

Thank you Mr. Moderator. My name is Jason Cheng from the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) Youth speaking on behalf of the UN Major Group for Children and Youth. As an urban planner based in Los Angeles, I've worked with cities of all sizes across the US to develop "smart" cities and innovative approaches to urban planning with a focus on transportation and social equity. To facilitate innovation and inclusive technology for cities, there are two foundational issues that I believe all of us should reflect upon.

- Firstly, technology is not always the solution. This misconception is common in discussions about "smart" cities and it leads people to focus too much on technology despite the fact that it may not be necessary or beneficial. The harmful effects of technology are often neglected and resources that could've been otherwise dedicated to more effective non-technology solutions are wasted.
- Secondly, innovation and technological development are often carried out using a top-down approach and defined by groups with the most power and wealth. As a result, innovation and technology often hurt people who are marginalized based on race, gender, income, ablebodiedness and other factors. The lived experiences and local knowledge of such groups is disregarded and they are not given the power and autonomy to dictate how innovation and technology affects their communities.

To ensure that technology and innovation benefits all people in cities, particularly those who are marginalized, there are several solutions to consider:

- **Establish technology policy and regulatory frameworks that ensure technological development is accompanied by political reforms.** Technology is a tool, not a panacea for urban problems because it does not always change underlying dynamics of how power and resources are distributed in cities. For example, introducing a new digital mobile tax payment platform does not necessarily fix inequities in a city's tax code. When new technologies are introduced, governments should ensure accompanying policies and regulations fix systemic injustices that hurt marginalized people.
- **Create innovation-focused policies and programs that help marginalized communities develop solutions for local problems.** Members of marginalized communities know local problems most intimately and many already developed innovative approaches to solve them with indigenous ideas or nature-based solutions without digital technology. Providing funding, incentives, and infrastructure to them without a neo-colonial approach will facilitate more innovation and experimentation that helps rectify systemic harm and oppression done to them.
- **Invest in digital infrastructure and programming to ensure everyone can access and benefit from technology equitably.** Efforts can include expanding reliable and affordable Internet access for computers and mobile devices, developing digital literacy and skills training programs for marginalized communities, offering free recycled computers for people in-need, and building public facilities like libraries and community centers with high-speed Internet access. All efforts should prioritize the specific digital needs and habits of marginalized communities and ensure they can enjoy a higher quality of life through such investments.

Thank you for your time and I look forward to a productive discussion.