

STI FORUM Session 1. Strengthening trust in science and technology

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What has traditionally been understood as science in the context of S&T—the natural and exact sciences—is advancing by leaps and bounds, and contributing as never before to technological development. The UN Secretary-General has rightly stated that, *as a global society, we have the technology, resources and (technical) know-how to improve living standards worldwide.*

And yet, with all this science-based technological “progress”, globalization has increased inequality. Political, socio-economic resource- and knowledge inequalities *are a global problem.* People, sectors, regions, entire nations are left behind, with a sense of frustration and little chance of getting ahead.

Where are we failing then, do we need *more* S&T, is it for lack of S&T that humanity is not making progress towards the sustainable development goals (SDGs)?

The theme of the ministerial session that has just ended was “Innovating to deliver the SDGs”. Today *innovation* is on everyone's lips, it has become a buzzword. Innovation is built into the very name of this Forum. And yes, we do need to innovate, *beyond the realm of S&T.* We should start by turning the concept of innovation on its head; *bring in new thinking*; redirect our knowledge-creation efforts to where they are most needed. We urgently need innovative research to better understand the social and human factors that have brought us to the point where we face crisis next to crisis.

S&T is moving faster than we are, and it alone is not enough to meet the goals of the 2030 Agenda. Evidence-based policy needs to include evidence of what works and what does not. We need the critical insight of sociology, economics, philosophy, political sciences, geography, psychology, ethics, cultural studies, history, diplomacy, ... and ethics again, in order to understand our failures, to contextualize S&T and its applications, to change our way of thinking and acting, and to guide politicians and decision-makers on how best to address current challenges and *prevent* crises rather than manage them.

Take for example the World Bank's Development Report 2023 on Migrants, Refugees and Societies. Today's tragic migration flows are unfavourable migrations, for which there seems to be nothing but deportation and blockade. However, faithful to the laws of the market, and driven by the concern to solve the structural problem of ageing in rich nations, the report suggests that countries of origin actively *manage* migration, by making labour migration an explicit part of their development strategy and teaching skills that are in high demand elsewhere. Obviously, such a labour-export model would exacerbate economic asymmetries and dependency, by responding to *external needs* rather than internal development requirements, again at the expense of the countries of origin. This speaks to the urgency of new thinking in economics.

In the words of the Secretary-General: *Let us not fool ourselves. The legacy of colonialism still reverberates—in North and South.* Also new and critical thinking in social and political science, history and the humanities in general, is badly needed to change our mindsets and to shift the

actual conditions of domination and dependency towards a world of equality, democracy and protection of natural resources, as called for by the SDGs.

Fortunately, there are some initiatives that are successfully moving in this direction; cases where S&T work in close collaboration with the humanities and the social sciences. In my country, Mexico, for example, the National Research Council's Strategic Programmes promote transdisciplinary and participatory projects in the SDG-related priority areas of human health, education for all, water, toxic agents, food security, energy and climate change, which articulate the most advanced S&T capacities with social actors, from the public or private sector, and maintain a continuous dialogue with the diversity of knowledge and experiences brought by the communities. It goes without saying that the experience is enriching for all parties. It would be extraordinarily useful to share other initiatives like this and learn from each other.

In concluding, I believe that *trust in science and technology will be strengthened* to the extent that it is shared openly and brought to bear in an atmosphere of receptiveness, solidarity and respect for diversity.