ECOSOC Partnership Forum 2024

A SIDS side event

"Resilient prosperity: Strategic Partnerships to Advancing Science, Technology, and Innovation in Small Island Developing States"

January 30, 2024, 1:15 – 2:30 PM

Trusteeship Council Chamber, UN Headquarters, New York

Remark by Rodney Taylor

Secretary General

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Thank you, Madam Chair,

Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

Let me first express my appreciation to ECOSOC for this opportunity to speak very briefly on this topic of Resilient prosperity: Strategic Partnerships to Advancing Science, Technology, and Innovation in SIDS. I am happy to bring a perspective from the Caribbean, a region that is characterised by several small island developing states, many working together under the rubric of the Caribbean Community or CARICOM, with a view to promoting economic integration and cooperation among its members, to ensure that the benefits of integration are equitably shared.

I believe that it is safe to say that we all have an appreciation for the role that science, technology and innovation plays in driving social and economic development and in building resilient societies. At the same time, we must be cognizant that this does not necessarily happen organically. It takes a very determined and strategic approach, local and international partnerships in order to ensure this prosperity and resiliency, particularly in SIDS.

It requires collaboration among governments, international organizations, private sector entities, academia, and civil society.

There are some examples that we can draw on as we address this issue. For example, when you look at the issue of multi-stakeholder collaboration, particularly in science, technology and innovation, the United Nations Internet Governance Forum (UN IGF) comes to mind.   It has consistently provided a platform for multi-stakeholder participation on issues around the internet, one of the greatest innovations of our lifetime. While there are challenges that small states face with respect to participation, there can be no doubt that it offers a global stage for SIDS to make their voices heard and to help to shape the future development of the internet in many policy areas.

Likewise the Caribbean Internet Governance Forum (CIGF), now in its 20th year, has provided a similar space for SIDS in the Caribbean to engage in a multi-stakeholder process concerning technology issues. I was very pleased to have been a part of the process that led to the hosting of the 1st SIDS IGF in August of 2022.

We will make every effort to host a 2nd SIDS IGF in the margins of SIDS4 in Antigua and Barbuda later this year.

Beyond providing a platform for multistakeholder engagement, there is a need for partnerships that promote capacity building. Investment in capacity building initiatives, strengthen the scientific, technological, and innovation capabilities of SIDS.

The provision of training, education, and skills development programs is critical in developing the digital skills required to ensure technology sustainability. We in the region have benefitted from learning platforms such as the ITU Academy and its Centres of Excellence that aim to support capacity development in the field of information and communication technologies (ICTs) by offering continuous education to ICT professionals and executives in the public and private spheres through face-to-face, online or blended learning. There have been other successful partnership that I can point to including the United States Telecommunications Training Institute (USTTI), Diplo Foundation and others that have very specific and tailored programmes aimed at capacity building in SIDS and provide useful models for emulation.

Furthermore, facilitating technology transfer and knowledge sharing between SIDS and other countries, regions, and international organizations is essential. We must establish partnerships for the exchange of best practices, research findings, and innovative solutions in areas relevant to sustainable development, such as renewable energy technologies, climate-smart agriculture, and marine conservation.

In addition, the promotion of digital public goods initiatives such as open source software, open data, open AI models, open standards and open content that adhere to privacy and other applicable laws and best practices, do no harm, and help attain the Sustainable Development Goals.

As the UN Secretary General pointed out in the Roadmap for Digital Cooperation, digital public goods are essential in unlocking the full potential of digital technologies and data to attaint the SDG, in particular in low and middle-income countries.

In this context the Digital Public Goods Alliance, is an excellent initiative that should be promoted so that all SIDS are aware of its existence and take advantage of the benefits that it offers.

The Caribbean Telecommunications Union (CTU) advocates for open data policies, and encourages free and open-source software which will give developing countries access to tools and encourage the availability of raw data. The CTU has advocated, with the support of the Caribbean missions in New York, for these principles to be incorporated into the Global Digital Compact (GDC) to leverage global digital commons for the developmental needs of SIDS, LDCs, and underserved areas.

The caveat remains that connectivity plays a crucial role in facilitating access to global digital commons and ensuring that 'no-one gets left behind'. Without reliable and affordable connectivity, the benefits of global digital commons may remain inaccessible to many.

Of course, I cannot overemphasize the need for financial and technical assistance to provide the resources that are still needed to make these technology investments. International financial institutions are critical in this regard.

I will close by touching on the issue of Policy Coherence and Alignment, drawing reference to initiatives such as the CARICOM Single ICT Space, the objective of which is to provide the ICT-enabled foundation for enhancing both CARICOM's functional cooperation and fulfilling the social, cultural and economic imperatives of the region.

While there have been challenges with respect to is full implementation, it remains a useful framework to promote policy coherence and alignment across government ministries, agencies, and sectors to support STI-led sustainable development initiatives in SIDS. It allows for the development of integrated policy frameworks, strategies, and action plans that mainstream STI considerations into national development agendas and sectoral policies.

Once again, I express my appreciation to ECOSOC for this opportunity to share these few thoughts.

Ladies and gentlemen, I thank you.