

Multi- Stakeholder Forum on Science Technology and Innovation for the SDGs (STI Forum) 2025

INTERVENTION BY THE SECRETARY FOR HIGHER AND TERTIARY EDUCATION, INNOVATION, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY DEVELOPMENT, PROFESSOR F. TAGWIRA, ON THE OCCASION OF THE MINISTERIAL SESSION ON HARNESSING SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY FOR THE EFFECTIVE DELIVERY OF SUSTAINABLE AND INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS (5 MINUTES): 7 May 2025 (1100 – 1300)

Mr. President;

Excellencies;

I am honoured to share Zimbabwe's journey and aspirations in harnessing science and technology for the effective delivery of sustainable and innovative solutions, in pursuit of Vision 2030, a vision that we desire to place our nation firmly on the path to becoming an upper middle-income economy that is modern, industrialised, and inclusive, leaving no one and no place behind.

As we engage in conversation around progress towards attaining the five key Sustainable Development Goals under review in this year's edition of the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, allow me to outline the steps Zimbabwe is taking in anchoring its development strategy on innovation, resilience, and knowledge.

At the heart of our strategy is the National Development Strategy, anchored on our Education 5.0, a home-grown higher education philosophy that moves beyond teaching, research, and community service to include innovation and industrialisation as critical missions in our drive towards a resilient knowledge driven economy. This model

is designed to equip Zimbabweans graduates not just with knowledge, but with the practical ability to deliver goods and services that improve lives and livelihoods, especially from local resources and heritage.

In this endeavour, Government has been promoting the beneficiation of indigenous plants which grow abundantly in our drier, climatic and environmentally vulnerable regions. Through application of biotechnology, our science agencies have set up manufacturing plants for producing juices, wines, jams, and cosmetic oils from these fruits, creating local employment, encouraging environmental stewardship, and strengthening local economies. The trees from which these fruits are harvested are now being protected by the communities as they recognise their value. This contributes directly to SDG 3 on health and well-being, and SDG 8 on decent work.

Despite sustained progress, we face persistent challenges, particularly in gender disparities in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). Currently, only 30% of Zimbabwe's STEM enrolment is female, a figure that falls short of our aspirations for equity and full participation under SDG 5.

In order to address this disparity, the Honourable Minister of Higher and Tertiary Education, Innovation, Science and Technology Development Ambassador, Dr Frederick Shava, has directed the introduction of a strategic scholarship programme targeting girls at primary and secondary levels. The goal is to create a strong, sustained pipeline of female students who will pursue STEM fields all the way through to higher and tertiary education. Complementing this is the annual Women in STEM Conference, which Zimbabwe proudly hosts to celebrate achievements, share best practices, and inspire the next generation of female innovators and leaders.

In addition, Zimbabwe continues to make significant investments in building the ecosystem to support

innovation. Across the country, innovation hubs and industrial parks have been established at universities and technical institutions. These are complemented by specialised science agencies the Zimbabwe National Geospatial and Space Agency, the National Biotechnology Authority, the Centre for Education, Innovation, Research and Development, and the Centre for Dryland Agriculture, focused on resilience solutions tailored to climate-challenged regions of Zimbabwe. These institutions are not only supporting research but ensuring that ideas are transformed into products, enterprises, and sustainable livelihoods.

Excellencies;

While we believe in the paramount importance of national solutions and country-led initiatives, we recognize that global challenges such as climate change, gender inequality, and youth unemployment require collective solutions and global solidarity.

We therefore call for enhanced support and collaboration on the following key areas:

- Support for collaborative research and innovation programmes that link Zimbabwean institutions with global centres of excellence;
- Provision of STEM scholarships for women and girls, particularly in rural and marginalised communities;
- Provision of laboratory and ICT equipment to enhance the teaching of science in rural schools; and
- Partnerships in the integration of AI and emerging technologies to leapfrog development challenges in health, agriculture, and environmental management.

Let me conclude by reaffirming Zimbabwe's commitment to a future that is knowledge-driven, innovation-led, and inclusive. Science, technology, and innovation, and not only economic drivers, but also promote societies that are

resilient, equitable, and sustainable, for generations to come.

Let us all work together, in the spirit of SDG 17, to deliver on the promise of the 2030 Agenda, for Zimbabwe, for Africa, and for the world.

I thank you.

