Scaling Science, Technology and Innovation Policy Capacity Building: lessons learnt, gaps and the way forward

8:00-9:30 EST New York Time, 6 May 2026

Organized by: UN Inter-agency Task Team on STI for SDG Capacity Building (IATT-WS6)

SUMMARY

The event contributed to the Forum discussions by examining one critical enabling condition for effective STI systems: the capacity of governments, at all levels, to design, implement and evaluate STI policies.

Since 2017, the UN Inter-Agency Task Team (IATT) Workstream 6 on Capacity Building has organized STI policy trainings and workshops for policymakers and practitioners from developing countries. To date, the initiative has reached more than 2,000 policymakers and practitioners from over 100 countries across Africa, Asia-Pacific, Latin America, the Arab States and beyond. The side event brought 11 speakers from regional organizations, development banks, philanthropic organizations, UN agencies and research institutions to reflect on lessons learned from these efforts and discuss how STI policy capacity building should evolve in response to rapidly changing contexts. The event was joined by approximately 150 participants.

Discussions highlighted that while demand for STI policy capacity building is increasing significantly, major gaps remain in funding to ensure sustained long-term support. Participants also reflected on how the role of capacity building itself is evolving in the age of AI and digital access to knowledge.

Key issues discussed

- Participants highlighted that countries increasingly require support not only in STI policy design, but also in policy implementation, **monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL)**, particularly as many countries are entering implementation phases of STI strategies.

- Discussions emphasized that STI governance challenges are becoming increasingly cross-sectoral, requiring **stronger coordination between STI**, industrial development, climate, agriculture, health and digital transformation policies.
- Speakers stressed that STI capacity building should move beyond one-off knowledge delivery towards **long-term institutional strengthening**, **peer learning, collaboration platforms and ecosystem-building approaches**.
- Several participants noted that in the age of AI, access to knowledge is becoming less of a challenge, while the need for trusted spaces for dialogue, consultation, stakeholder coordination and applied problem-solving is becoming more important.
- Participants emphasized the importance of **demand-driven and context-specific approaches to capacity building**, embedded within national and regional STI priorities and frameworks such as STISA 2034 in Africa.
- Discussions highlighted the importance of **experimentation, adaptive policymaking and learning-by-doing approaches to STI governance**, including the need to create institutional space for piloting and iterative policy learning.
- Development partners stressed that sustainable STI system transformation requires **long-term investment**, institutional support and strengthened capacities **for STI financing and resource mobilization.**
- Speakers repeatedly emphasized that scientific excellence alone is insufficient for societal impact, and that **transdisciplinary and multi-stakeholder approaches** involving governments, academia, private sector actors, civil society and local communities are increasingly essential.

Key recommendations for action

- Strengthen STI policy capacities in **monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL),** including adaptive learning approaches that help policymakers reflect on implementation challenges, learn from experience, and continuously improve policy design and delivery.
- Move beyond one-off training activities towards **sustained institutional and ecosystem-level support**, including peer learning, "learning by doing," long-term technical assistance, and stronger national STI institutions and funding agencies.
- Promote **more coordinated and mission-oriented STI governance** by strengthening collaboration across ministries and sectors, particularly in areas such as climate resilience, industrial transformation, health, agriculture and digital transition.
- Ensure that STI policy support remains **demand-driven and context-specific**, aligned with national and regional priorities and frameworks, while embedding transdisciplinary, participatory and multi-stakeholder approaches from the beginning to maximize societal relevance and impact.
- Strengthen **partnerships** among UN agencies, development banks, philanthropic organizations, regional institutions, research organizations and governments to **mobilize complementary expertise, financing and implementation capacities for long-term STI system strengthening.**

- Speakers highlighted that initiatives such as **IATT Workstream 6** should increasingly evolve from training providers into global **platforms for collaboration, peer exchange and partnership-building.** In this context, representative from International Development Research Centre (IDRC) emphasized the importance of embedding capacity building within real-world institutional practice and national STI systems through "learning by doing," while representative from Asian and Pacific Centre for Transfer of Technology (APCTT), ESCAP, highlighted the value of combining regional networking platforms with diverse international expertise to support technology cooperation and policy learning.