

UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL,
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Address by
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at the Opening Session of the Global Forum:
Building Science, Technology and Innovation Capacity for
Sustainable Growth and Poverty Reduction

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Vice President, Human Development Network, World Bank,
Executive Vice President, Inter-American Development Bank,
Deputy Secretary-General, UNCTAD,
Ambassador Munir Akram, Permanent Representative of Pakistan to the
UN and Chairperson of the Group of 77,
Distinguished Ministers,
Your Excellences,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

On behalf of Mr Koïchiro Matsuura, the Director-General of UNESCO, I would like to thank first and foremost, the President of the World Bank for inviting UNESCO to share a few thoughts with participants of this very important Forum. First of all I think as has been highlighted in several of the Forum's background documents, "STI capacity building is an absolute necessity for poor countries". It is encouraging to observe a few more recent trends; for instance, as was mentioned earlier, the CARICOM meeting held in May 2006 which recognized STI as the driver of the global economy and approved the Tobago Plan of Action for Harnessing Science and Technology for Caribbean development.

More recently, in fact just two weeks ago, the 8th African Union Summit of Heads of State and Government, which focused on "Scientific Research, Technology and Innovation for Africa's Socio-economic Development", resulted in highly important commitments such as increasing investments in science to at least 1% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of national economies by 2010.

Examples show that there is now a strong political will at the highest levels to use science as an instrument for development. The challenge is to embark on concrete initiatives to use science and I should particularly highlight here the gender dimension in science for poverty reduction and for sustainable growth. The building of STI capacities in developing countries is indeed a key element in this enterprise so as to ensure ownership of development initiatives in these poor countries. It is for this reason that our Director-General, in his message on the occasion of the World Science Day for Peace and Development in November 2006, stated, and I quote: "no Nation that wants to achieve social and economic progress can afford to be without independent capacity in science and technology. Over the past two decades, inadequate human and institutional capacity in science has been identified as one of the recurring factors preventing developing countries from reaching national and international goals".

The excellent concept paper developed for this Forum has wisely posed the question: What capacities must be built? It has also identified the capacity to acquire and use existing knowledge and the capacity to produce and use new knowledge. Let me highlight a few provocative points now and pose some questions to you. First of all, we don't live in an ideal world. Many countries are in conflict situations. UNESCO, recently created IPSO (the Israeli-Palestinian Scientific Organisations) and if we look into the African continent, many countries are in post-conflict situations. What does the theme of this very meeting, building science, technology and innovation capacity for sustainable growth and poverty reduction, mean in such a context? Secondly, what does it mean in a context like disasters? You know we are increasingly facing disasters at unprecedented rates and unprecedented impacts on communities. Another question is of course STI capacity building can not perform without the use of ICTs. And of course the question is what does it mean in the context of both education systems and culture systems? We are even discussing what does adaptation to climate change mean in terms of different cultural contexts.

Finally two points. One or two questions. First of all, don't we need to be more focused and targeted if we talk about capacity building in STI and secondly, don't we need new concepts and new approaches to capacity building itself?

From our experience in UNESCO, we see the need to assist developing countries in building these capacities for the reform and governance of the national science, engineering, technology and innovation (SETI) systems. This will complement the capacities being developed, with the assistance of the development banks, for the reform and governance of the economic systems. Through the reform of the governance of SETI systems, UNESCO wishes to ensure a well-functioning linkage between national SETI systems and economic systems.

Let me just cite one example of UNESCO's current ongoing work, in this case in Nigeria. With funds provided by the Nigerian Government and the UNESCO/Japan Funds-in-Trust for the Capacity Building of Human Resources, we are assisting the "Reform and Revitalization of the Nigerian SETI System". The project has resulted in the training of 450 Nigerian officials on the concept of national innovation systems, another 120 on S&T budgeting, the creation of the Nigerian Forum on Science, Technology and Parliament, the design of institutional mechanisms for coordinating SETI activities in Nigeria, including a high-level science governance council to be chaired by the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, and the

development of guidelines for self-evaluation by SETI institutions, science-based ministries and the Federal Ministry of Finance.

I could go on, but it is in essence the whole system of STI in a particular Member State, in this case Nigeria. The project, and we have already received expressions of interest from other, in particular African countries, could be used as a model in building the governance capacities of national STI systems.

Let me now turn to a question which I am sure would be of concern to the Forum organizers – How does UNESCO hope to work with its Member States, the World Bank, regional development banks and other organizations to help develop the necessary national STI capacities? Our first role could be in fostering inter-agency cooperation for building the capacities of governments to formulate STI policies, thereby ensuring its harmonization with trade, investment and industrial policies.

This will lead to an improvement of the current situation where individual agencies are working independently and are often approached by the same client countries.

Secondly, UNESCO is willing to cooperate with the World Bank and other partners in the elaboration of science investment programmes at the national level. The “One UN approach” resulting from on-going reform of the UN makes this a realistic proposal, especially within the UNDAF framework. In the Nigerian example cited earlier on, all UN Agencies in Nigeria have designated focal points for the STI reform project and they will be working jointly to provide inputs to the second phase of Nigeria’s National Economic Empowerment Development Strategy (NEEDS II).

A continuous multilateral dialogue on building science, technology and innovation capacity is a vital requirement for all the stakeholders of science, including the scientific community, policy- and decision-makers, as well as international organizations. Promoting such a dialogue is a priority action for UNESCO. In 2005, at the 33rd session of its General Conference, UNESCO organised a high-level Ministerial Round Table meeting on “The Basic Sciences: Science Lever for Development”. Now, in 2007 again in the framework of our forthcoming General Conference, we will hold a Round Table on “Science and Technology for Development: the Role of UNESCO”. This is an outcome of what was mentioned earlier at discussions of the G77 in China, in Rio, and it is also an outcome of the meeting of the Balkan ministers last year in Ljubljana. I think the emphasis that should be put on such ministerial level meetings can not be over emphasised. And in

fact this year's meeting is expected to be the first global meeting of science and technology ministers of all nations at UNESCO.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me to be here with you this morning. I would like to assure you that our Director-General will give great attention to the recommendations emanating from this Forum. I wish you fruitful deliberations and look forward to our continued cooperation.

Thank you.