UNITED NATIONS
Mauritius and Seychelles

Keynote Address for Workshop on: **Building Capacity and Exploring Resources for Implementing STI4SDGs Roadmaps** **08 October 2024**

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

INTRODUCTION

It gives me great pleasure to join you for this session *"Building Capacity and Exploring Resources for Implementing STI4SDGs Roadmaps"*. If anything, recent years have shown us that science, technology and innovation (STI) is essential for almost all aspects of our sustainable development aspirations.

I had the privilege recently of participating in the fourth International Conference on Small Island Developing States (SIDS4) hosted in Antigua and Barbuda where STI was recognized arguably as a game changer for SIDS and it is also a key priority in the pact of the recently concluded Pact of the future.

Workshops like today's illustrate power of co-creation and collaborative to advance the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Allow me to extend my appreciation to the co-oganizers UN DESA and UN ECA with support by UNESCO, Future Africa, EC/JRC, International Science Council (ISC), Africa-Europe Science and Innovation Collaboration Platform (AERAP), and the International Research Center of Big Data for Sustainable Development Goals (CBAS).

SIDS CONTEXT & CHALLENGES

The opportunity for increased resilience afforded by STI is particularly relevant for Small Island Developing States (SIDS) who face significant vulnerabilities and structural constraints such as small land mass and population size; geographic isolation; high per capita cost of infrastructure; and extreme exposure to climate change and natural hazards. As most SIDSs are MICs, they also suffer from limited concessional finance, and climate finance – a key priority in the long-term resilience agenda.

In terms of issue and opportunities let me cite 5 key points

- **Infrastructure.**   Insufficient infrastructure to include access and affordability of digital connectivity is a big hindrance to ramping up economic activates but also deterring technology uptick and infusion. technology is also important for Blue and marine economy Seychelles and Mauritius alone account for 3.6 million square KM of EEZ. Combined island size of of 2300 Skm km. Benefiting from this requires science funding, technology.

- **Data gaps** – this is a big issue for most SIDs that deter investment prioritisation and decision making. For MOST SIDS who have no naturel resource than marine, they need to apply significant foresight- what kind of economic trajectory do they want to be and work backwards in terms of investments and education. Without data this is not possible. Equally for monitoring ocean space it is crucial to have technology satellites and data.,

- **Effective institutions is key for STI enabling**. We may have great policies but implementation will be low implementation if institutions are weak, right incentives are not there. STI really require high-level cross-cutting political commitment to make it happen.   Many countries such as Mauritius and elsewhere you will see this issue is not left at the level of a sectoral ministry. It sits high at the PMO or even presidency which i believe is the case for Rwanda.

- **Skills and education.** Small population size also means limited skills and shortages of skilled professionals including in STEM; For SIDS is the current education system geared towards the jobs of the future? If I look at university enrolments in Mauritius we are finding the STEM area is still low with only 5 5 of all students opting for it.

- **Last but not least collaboration and partnership**. SIDS are small so we need to to think partnership, . interoperability, to address scale economies. And at the regional level, despite considerable expertise, we are not able to mobilise cross-

border, **knowledge** ecosystems, to enable innovation and to access regional markets.

- Here in the Indian ocean we have the Indian ocean commission, SADC, which can provide collaborative and knowledge sharing gateways. So the upcoming project should really look at this regional knowledge facilitators. This should also include Fostering a knowledge based culture that prioritises research and development (R&D), scientific research including with research institutions and universities.

- Mauritius is a frontrunner in the continent with development digital and fintech services. The country has an STI and digital Mauritius strategy with AI as one of its pillars

- Both countries have STI roadmaps, circular economy plans, as well as NDC targets, (all accomplished with support form the UN) but you will see significant challenges remain with regard to implementation. In Seychelles for example, we did a revie of the STI policy – 70 percent not implemented. All pointed to issues of institution coordination, capacity and financing.

I have over 25 Un agencies who are very active working with government on the STI issues, One great example is the support of the UN Joint SDG Fund which mobilized 5 UN agencies to addressing key challenges face by the two island nations namely regarding climate change, energy transition, circular economy and food security. Through the SDG fund, In Mauritius we are supporting the Government to meet it NDC target by via technological investment in ocean renewable energy and via mobilising universities and research institutions as partners. In Seychelles we are leveraging science and technology to address pollution , greening and recycling opportunities.

Similarly UNCTAD has supported national capacities in Seychelles to design and implement policies that foster the learning, diffusion and adoption of technologies in

agriculture and energy sectors. Other UN sister agencies such as WHO and UNDP have supported institutions capacities, and technology upgrades to improve health governance and systems in both countries. While UNESCO has launched a pilot project Island watch programme in Seychelles through a citizen science approach by integrating digital and technological advancements to improve data collection methods and management systems and decision making. There are many more initiatives too long to cite including the UN supported Early Warnings 4All and the UNODC Maritime Crime Programme (GMCP) which focus on satellite, data technology for disaster risk management, coastal resilience as well as maritime security,.

CONCLUSION

The good news is that SIDS small size also makes them ideal to piloting comprehensive innovate methodologies to test scale up and achieve transformative results. I believe the fact that we are all here from so many different organizations to help brainstorm on the design of a pilot programme for the three lusophone countries will allow for the brining in the granularity and contextualization necessary to really ensure a quality programme on one hand, while setting the stage from the outset for meaningful partnership that can also contribute to the implementation and innovation.

I wish you all fruitful deliberations and look forward to the transformative ideas that will emerge from today's discussions.