Joint Webinar on UNCTAD flagship Technology and Innovation Report

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1. Multi fold growth in the domain of information and technology has marked the dawn of the 21st century. Expansion in research on computing power and innovation is witnessing the development of advanced technologies at a pace faster than any other time in the history of mankind.

2. This has increased the process of integrating complex technological solutions to societal issues that have been demanding attention and fuelled the revolution of societies, and democratisation of participation.

3. A small body of research exists around the evolution and growth of civil societies, and an even smaller group addressing the crossover between civil societies, the digital revolution and its implications.

4. The internet and telephone world, in the recent past, have demonstrated the power of ever modernising network technologies, fostered user engagement, and have broadened the scope of the global economy. For instance, a mobile money system in Kenya, M-Pesa has played an catalytic role in the success of using mobile money in the African continent.

5. This mobile money system has made it easier to pay with a mobile phone in Nairobi than in Athens! Initiated as a network to foster secure

borrowing and repayment of loans quickly evolved to becoming a secure, trustworthy money transfer scheme, extending to disbursing salaries and paying bills.

6. While there are developing nations in Asia at various stages of technological advancement, India has been in the forefront of experimenting, innovating and integrating technology into industries that have seen an increase in usage and footfall since the pandemic. For example, India is one of the few nations that have been successful in the COVID19 vaccine area.

7. Apart from China, India is the only nation that has developed an indigenous vaccine and manufactured it at breakneck speed. A second one on licence from abroad have made available two vaccines to people in India and abroad. Millions of units have been share with 75 other countries under the Government of India's Vaccine Maitri (friendship) programme.

8. Quad member nations (India, US, Japan and Australia) have also invested in this well-developed vaccine manufacturing ecosystem in providing an alternative to the Chinese vaccine in the Southeast Asian region; helping India create a system of vaccine delivery that can rival the best in the world.

9. The Indian education system has also been immensely successful at the face of the pandemic, in breaking geographical barriers, and overcoming

the challenges of infrastructure to ensure a continued flow of virtual learning to the students in the nation.

10. As more educational institutions in India have started adopting the medium of digital learning, it has provided the opportunity for personalised and interactive teaching. The intersection of education and technology, in the future, is going to redefine the student experience in India and will set an example to the rest of the world.

11. The domain of information and technology to India, provides both opportunities and challenges. Just like India lept into mobile telephony, with a strong financial technology ecosystem from being an unbanked nation a few years ago, emerging technologies provide India with the potential to spearhead innovation and development into the next generation. By sustaining its reform momentum, seizing opportunities and providing benefits to manufactures, the challenges can be overcome.

12. During the last quarter of 2019, CUTS International Washington DC Center had organised two roundtables in Washington DC and New Delhi which offer good insights for this event also. Some of the takeaways:

13. Need for Optimal Governance Framework: Structuring a balanced regulatory framework for innovation across sectors to enable higher productivity. It is important that both sides, businesses, and regulators, understand where each other is coming from and cooperate to shape a standard regulatory framework. If the cost of regulation and compliance is too high, we risk driving the industry further towards the fringe, closer

towards illicit and risky activities — impeding innovation. Businesses must work with the government to develop an optimal governance framework as neither side can tackle issues alone.

14. Innovation is the bonding factor: Knowledge sphere is the foundation for bilateral relations between India and the US, hence collaborative endeavours in innovation should be promoted vigorously. Innovation is the vital bond between the US and India in crucial ways. Building innovation cooperation has been a prime focus of the bilateral partnership in some way or another. However, the full potential is yet to be realised. Bilateral initiatives that encourage innovation to play a greater role in steering socioeconomic development in the two countries do exist.

15. Incentives: Retaining its position as the world's third-largest startup hub, India is strategically poised to drive the next wave of technological advancement. Recent policy interventions have ensured that progress is made in this direction. However, there is still work to be done in terms of sending a strong signal that investors/foreign investments are welcome and to ensure that tax subsidies are made more lucrative and in favour of startups as well as electricity and relatively skilled workforce is made available.

16. Unrestricted flow of data: The success of India's IT industry is largely attributed to the routine flow of cross-border data from abroad and back. The routine flow of cross border data should not be curtailed. Data moving across borders is critical for the services that sustain global

commerce, expand prosperity and equality, improve health and safety, promote social good, and enable the technologies of the future. Furthermore, the world is increasingly more connected through sharing data with the emergence of artificial intelligence (AI) and blockchain. Data must be free to move across borders to continue the growth of the global economy and foster innovation.

17. Startups and Intellectual Property Right (IPR): India and other developing countries need to build awareness on IPR and innovation issues in the industry, particularly startups. Startups need to look at IP, not as a matter of compliance alone, but as the creation of an asset. Most startup businesses are based on innovative ideas. Therefore, basic awareness to protect innovations (i.e. patents) and brand reputation (i.e. trademarks) is extremely critical.

18. Going further, addressing challenges being faced by civil societies in developing nations should be a priority. One such challenge that puts civil societies in a deadlock is that of implementing technology-based solution due to the lack of resources, training of staff and platform management.

19. Here exists the potential of an emerging fourth sector, as mentioned by the CEO of PACT International, who suggests a convergence between the verticals of the government, private sector and the civil society, which would help in mutual growth and development.

20. Such virtual meetings are extremely important in understanding the role of innovation in strengthening the research and development of it. This is apart from addressing the challenges they pose in the policy and regulatory perspective. The sectors in focus of this webinar include, but are not limited to frontier technology, sustainable development, innovation, equity and the role of civil society organisations in influencing developing nations to adapt frontier technologies.

I thank UNCTAD for collaborating with us for this roundtable and the South Centre, ETC Group for agreeing to participate as panellists and deliver special addresses. In addition, I thank all the speakers in the panel and the participants for taking time out from their busy schedules in joining us today.