

*Draft statement*

**ECOSOC 08 Coordination Segment Roundtable Meeting on Rural Development**

*Excellencies,  
Distinguished representatives,  
Ladies and gentlemen,*

It gives me great pleasure to be here with you today, in my capacity as the newly elected Chairman of the Commission on Science and Technology for Development (CSTD), to share with you the work of the Commission in rural development, and also to explore concrete ways and means for translating the recommendations and findings of this Commission into the programmes and operations of the United Nations system.

The CSTD has been actively promoting the use of science and technology in increasing agricultural productivity, upgrading human resources skills in rural areas, and ensuring environmental sustainability. The Commission has concluded that knowledge, science and technology hold the promise of improving nutrition, increasing yields of cash and subsistence crops, improving soil management, and creating efficient irrigation systems. Technological innovation has also become critical in management of freshwater resources. To address many of the challenges facing agriculture today and in the future, will require more innovative and integrated use of existing knowledge, science and technology, as well as new and emerging approaches for agricultural and natural resource management.

The earliest work of the Commission in this area dates back to 1995, when it examined the role of science and technology in integrated land management. The Commission concluded that most of the basic scientific knowledge and applied technologies needed were already available. These included for example global satellite surveillance systems and powerful computer-based GISs, as well as other methods for planning and evaluating land use, reducing wind and water erosion, and increasing the productivity of the land. However, lack of awareness of and easy access to information on already established and proven technologies is a constraint to their adoption in developing countries. Also, the capacity for the assessment and/or modification of particular technologies to suit local conditions in developing countries was often a major constraint in the technology transfer process. The Commission called for intra- and intergovernmental cooperation; private-public partnerships; targeted training and technology-support programs.

In 2001, the CSTD considered “National Capacity-building in Biotechnology” as its priority theme. The Commission recognized that agricultural biotechnology offers the potential for increasing and improving food production capacity and promoting sustainability. However, developing countries faced particular barriers to the successful acquisition, development, deployment and management of these technologies. Key requirements for successful capacity-building included adequate legal and regulatory frameworks, substantial financial resources and human skills, efficient communications infrastructure and utilities supply, enhanced laboratory facilities and greater public awareness. The Commission called on national Governments, with the help of international organizations, to initiate a process of cohesive policy formulation by undertaking national assessments for biotechnology.

At the international level, the Commission identified research cooperation and collaboration with and between developing countries as important mechanisms through which developing countries could access new technologies. Collaborative networks that link expatriate scientists from developing countries to their home institutions could bring benefits, such as access to new techniques, which would to some extent mitigate the problem of the “brain drain”. They also highlighted the need for capacity-building of developing country representatives to negotiate international regulatory instruments for science and technology, including biosafety and intellectual property rights agreements.

The CSTD examined the role of science and technology in meeting the Millennium Development Goals(MDGs) during its 2004-2006 inter-sessional work programme. In recognition of the fact that two thirds of the world's poor – some 900 million people – live in rural areas, and many depend on agriculture for their livelihood, the Commission reiterated that biotechnology could be a potent tool in improving food productivity and combating poverty: it could be used to produce new plants and higher-quality food in environments that were perceived as of low or no productive potential. Plants and crops resistant to disease and environmental stress were produced and applied in agricultural and food production systems in many developing countries. Soil biotechnology was crucial to production and productivity in tropical countries. The Commission also recognized that the evolution and growth of biotechnology, including its application, were characterized by uncertainty. There was uncertainty about socio-economic and ecological benefits and risks. Public debate and anxiety over the potential negative environmental, economic and human health impacts of some of the products and processes of biotechnology had intensified in the past decade or so, mainly because of the limited understanding of the nature of the risks. Additionally, many developing countries lacked scientific and administrative expertise to put in place the necessary regulatory regime.

Most recently, a proposal has been put forward to organise an international conference on agricultural technologies, to be held jointly with UNCTAD and the CSTD, to raise awareness about the need to adapt agricultural technologies to deal with the food crisis.

*Ladies and gentlemen,*

Now allow me to highlight some concrete examples of how the work of this Commission has been translated into concrete operations and programmes.

In response to the call by the Commission for more international collaboration in under-funded agricultural research, UNCTAD established a project on Network of Centres of Excellence which aims at South-South cooperation in scientific research. Within this framework, more than 100 African scientists have been trained in areas related to agricultural genetic engineering, and ICT application in agriculture.

Another important initiative was the launch of UN-biotech, an inter-agency cooperation network on biotechnology, which was set up by UN agencies undertaking biotechnology-related activities, following a recommendation of the Secretary-General for an integrated framework for biotechnology development. The Network was set up to improve coordination between the relevant entities of the United Nations

system working on biotechnology, to complement and add value to existing programmes and so as to maximize system-wide coordinated action and coherence, as well as the effectiveness of the support provided to member States in their efforts to achieve the development goals contained in the Millennium Declaration and the outcome of World Summit on Sustainable Development(WSSD).

Drawing on these good practice examples, I would like to encourage UN programmes and entities to make more effective use of existing coordinating mechanisms and fora such as the EC-ESA, CEB, and UN-Biotech to achieve greater coherence in this important area of work. I would also like to invite all of you, and especially my esteemed colleagues from the FAO and WEF to contribute to the organization of the international conference on the role of science and technology in addressing the global food crisis.