

Contribution from the Commission on Science and Technology for Development to the 2016 ECOSOC Integration Segment

“Implementing the 2030 Agenda through Policy Innovation and Integration”

Integrating strategic foresight thinking into policy making

The Commission on Science and Technology for Development (CSTD) has been advocating the relevance and the use of strategic foresight in policy making.

In the field of STI, Foresight is defined as the process of forecasting the evolution of technologies and their impact on society with a view towards developing policy within government and/or strategy within firms. Strategic foresight is an innovative tool for policy planning that explores potential long-term futures. When implemented in coherence with public policies strategic foresight can help shaping the future in a desirable way that allows maximizing the benefits while mitigating risk. During 2014-15, the CSTD addressed *Strategic foresight for the post-2015 development agenda* as one of its priority themes. During its 18th session, CSTD conducted a horizon scanning of the STI sector as a whole and identified key trends in relation to the post-2015 development agenda and arrived at policy lessons¹. For example, the Commission noted that the foresight approach can be used to identify potential gaps in education sector and help strengthen vocational education. Also, the Commission noted that foresight exercise can be used a process to conduct structured debate among all relevant stakeholders and create a shared understanding of long-term issues and build consensus around future policies. This points to the need and relevance to apply foresight methodology to sectors beyond STI.

As a follow-up to the work of its 18th session, the CSTD will examine '*Foresight for digital development*' during its upcoming 19th session in May 2016. The Commission will analyze new digital trends such as 3D printing, Big Data, Internet of Things, Massive Open Online Courses and automation from a policy perspective. The report of the Secretary-General² on this theme contains recommendations on potential policies that might be needed to make the best of the opportunities offered by these emerging digital trends as well as to minimize the risks posed by some of them. For example, the discussions called for developing greater regulatory policies on data and to strengthen certain core ICT infrastructure to harness the potential of these technologies.

The conclusions that emerged from the discussions on the strategic foresight themes at the CSTD highlight the importance of applying the methodology to other policy areas, especially those relevant for the SDGs. It is important to proactively identify emerging trends to better respond to them through effective and innovative policies. Strategic foresight exercise can help in this

¹ Read policy recommendations included in the Secretary General's Report available here: http://unctad.org/meetings/en/SessionalDocuments/ecn162015d3_en.pdf

² Available here: http://unctad.org/meetings/en/SessionalDocuments/ecn162016d3_en.pdf

process. There are different methodological approaches to foresight, including focus groups, the Delphi Method, simulations, scenario-building, and interviews. There are successful examples of countries, regions, cities that have not only predicted the future but actively shaped it (with respect to digital development), both in developed as well as developing countries. These initiatives often entail multi-stakeholder processes involving academia, private sector, research institutes, government, financial institutions, and others in determining priorities, pathways and technological choices. Many industrialized countries set science and technology policy priorities through foresight initiatives. For example, Japan used foresight for its national S&T policy going back to the 1970's. The emergence of Japan's electronics sector was supported by a foresight process that defined a path followed up by intense training, learning, and innovation efforts³.

Therefore, during the integration segment, it would be worthwhile to highlight the importance of integrating strategic foresight thinking into the national planning and policy process as an important policy innovation that would help in the implementation of the 2030 agenda.

³ Source:

http://unctad.org/meetings/en/SessionalDocuments/CSTD_2015_Issuespaper_Theme2_ForesightDigitalDev_en.pdf