

UN technology dialogues 2014
Discussion notes for dialogues 1 and 2

29-30 April 2014

Background - Where are we in relation to fulfilling technology mandates?

The Rio+20 Conference outcome document *The Future We Want* requested relevant United Nations agencies to identify options for a facilitation mechanism that promotes the development, transfer and dissemination of clean and environmentally sound technologies by, inter alia, assessing the technology needs of developing countries, options to address those needs and capacity-building. It also requested the Secretary-General, on the basis of the options identified and taking into account existing models, to make recommendations regarding the facilitation mechanism to the sixty-seventh session of the General Assembly.

Both these mandates were fulfilled. The options identified by UN agencies have been published.¹ The Secretary-General submitted the report A/67/348 with recommendations regarding a technology facilitation mechanism.

At its 67th session the General Assembly decided to hold a series of four one-day workshops on the development, transfer and dissemination of clean and environmentally sound technologies and requested the Secretary-General to present a report for consideration by the General Assembly at its sixty-eighth session on the discussions, options and recommendations from the workshops.

Both these mandates were fulfilled. The workshops were held.² The Secretary-General submitted the report A/68/310 on the discussions, options and recommendations from the workshops.

At its 68th session the General Assembly decided to hold a series of four one day structured dialogues to consider possible arrangements for a facilitation mechanism to promote the development, transfer and dissemination of clean and environmentally sound technologies and further decided that the dialogues will result in a summary of discussions and recommendations emerging therefrom, including on possible modalities and organisation of such a mechanism, to be submitted by the President of the General Assembly to the Assembly at its sixty-eighth session and for consideration and appropriate action by the Assembly at its sixty-ninth session, with the aim of reaching a conclusion in this regard.

The General Assembly special event of 25 September 2013 on the MDGs acknowledged the process to develop options for a technology facilitation mechanism along with other processes mandated in the Rio + 20 outcome document that are now underway, in particular the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals and the inter-governmental committee of experts on Sustainable Development Financing, and urged that these processes should complete their work in a comprehensive, balanced and expeditious manner by September 2014.

Dialogues 1 and 2 begin the process to fulfil these latest mandates in the technology area.

¹ <http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/index.php?menu=1455>

² <http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/technology/2013>

Issues proposed for consideration at dialogues 1 and 2

Stocktaking of UN debates on technology facilitation

- UN debates on technology transfer and technology facilitation to date have largely consisted of an exchange of monologues. Participants have the sovereign right to pursue the present cycle of meetings in the same manner.
- They also have the alternative option to engage in a dialogue. That would imply evolving beyond customary debate methodology which tends to oscillate between:
 - Presenting statements to each other laying out official beliefs about respective wish lists, and
 - Conducting detailed negotiations on prescriptive text to be included in resolutions about a possible technology transfer mechanism.
- Moving from a set of parallel monologues to a dialogue would imply that participants agree to conduct exchanges on their proposals and views regarding technology facilitation in a manner whereby they are prepared to offer the reasoning behind beliefs and agree to discuss these in an interactive and iterative debate.
- The Secretary-General strove to facilitate this debate since 2012 with two substantive reports including recommendations, each time with a slightly different approach³:
 - A first report in 2012 (A/67/348) provided a detailed description of what a new and additional technology facilitation mechanism could look like. The analysis contained in this report, while of course requiring an update, remains largely valid and its recommendations remain on the table.
 - A second report in 2013 (A/68/310) provided for a gradual approach combining activities that can strengthen technology development and dissemination, and also promote a more cooperative spirit in technology transfer debates, thus enabling participants to engage in discussions on the desirability and feasibility of more ambitious technology transfer. The recommendations of this report also remain on the table.

Questions proposed for discussion

Which recommendations contained in the Secretary-General's report A/68/310 offer a chance to make rapid and tangible progress in the area of technology facilitation? Which of them can be taken up and implemented within existing institutions and UN bodies?

Which recommendations contained in the Secretary-General's report A/67/348 merit further discussion with a view to identify common ground amongst participants?

What concrete difficulties prevent participants from acting upon any of the recommendations offered in either of the two reports by the Secretary-General?

³ Both reports can be found here:
<http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/index.php?menu=1632>

Options and ongoing efforts for strengthening technology facilitation at the international level

- The principal proposal on the table in UN debates regarding technology facilitation in recent years has been one calling for the establishment of a new and additional technology facilitation mechanism.
- The principal counter-proposals or arguments heard at UN debates tended to highlight the merits of the existing "ecosystem" of international organisations (some being specialised agencies of the UN) as well as bi-lateral and pluri-lateral international cooperation agreements and arrangements supporting technology development and/or transfer in one or more sectors, and de-emphasize or reject the importance of or the need for a new and additional mechanism or initiative.
- To date, there has not been a specific proposal focusing on reforming this "ecosystem" as such, as distinct from proposing a new addition to the ecosystem.
- The key new and additional function most frequently emphasised in proposals for a technology facilitation mechanism is coordination (of existing and future efforts). Others consist of new and additional funding for technology facilitation as well as an international secretariat to support such activities.

Questions proposed for discussion:

What characteristics does a technology facilitation mechanism need to possess so that:

- *It can provide coordination at the global level, and*
- *It is not a decision making body, and yet,*
- *It is more than a talk-shop, and that its deliberations have tangible impact, and*
- *It can provide coordination on issues across the whole technology cycle and facilitate technology cooperation, not just transfer?*

Fragmentation or decentralisation?

- Figure 1 illustrates existing and planned contributions of, and selected partnerships by, UN entities, as contained in their submissions to the support the Secretary General's report A/67/348 in 2012.
- Discussions at UN technology workshops held during the first half of 2013 have highlighted two contradictory assessments regarding the present state of international technology facilitation, namely that they are characterised by:
 - A damaging or wasteful fragmentation of efforts, or
 - A healthy decentralisation which enables different international bodies or groups of countries engaging in bilateral or multilateral cooperation to spot opportunities for new initiatives to fill gaps.

Questions proposed for discussion:

To be able to take a realistic and faithful picture of the current technology landscape, there is a need to develop a more detailed understanding of the following:

- *To what extent fragmentation consists of gaps, i.e., unaddressed technology needs?*
- *To what extent fragmentation consists of duplication of efforts?*
- *To what extent fragmentation consists of information gaps, i.e., countries or entities within them not being aware of facilitation that is on offer?*
- *To what extent fragmentation consists of difficulties in countries' capacity (or that of specific groups of them) to make full use of existing mechanisms.*

What type of activity is best suited to establish a faithful picture of the existing landscape of international technology facilitation with sufficient granularity of information across country groups and sectors relevant for clean and environmentally sound technologies? An expert study on global clean technology needs assessment, and/or an on-going inter-governmental peer review process, and/or a global reporting mechanism?

What type of international capacity building effort is best suited to assist countries in understanding fully and making use of what is on offer?

Arguments for a technology facilitation mechanism. What concrete reforms and actions have a chance to receive broad support?

Questions proposed for discussion:

What concrete results should the present cycle of dialogues aim at? What sorts of recommendations for action by the President of the General Assembly are likely to receive broad support?

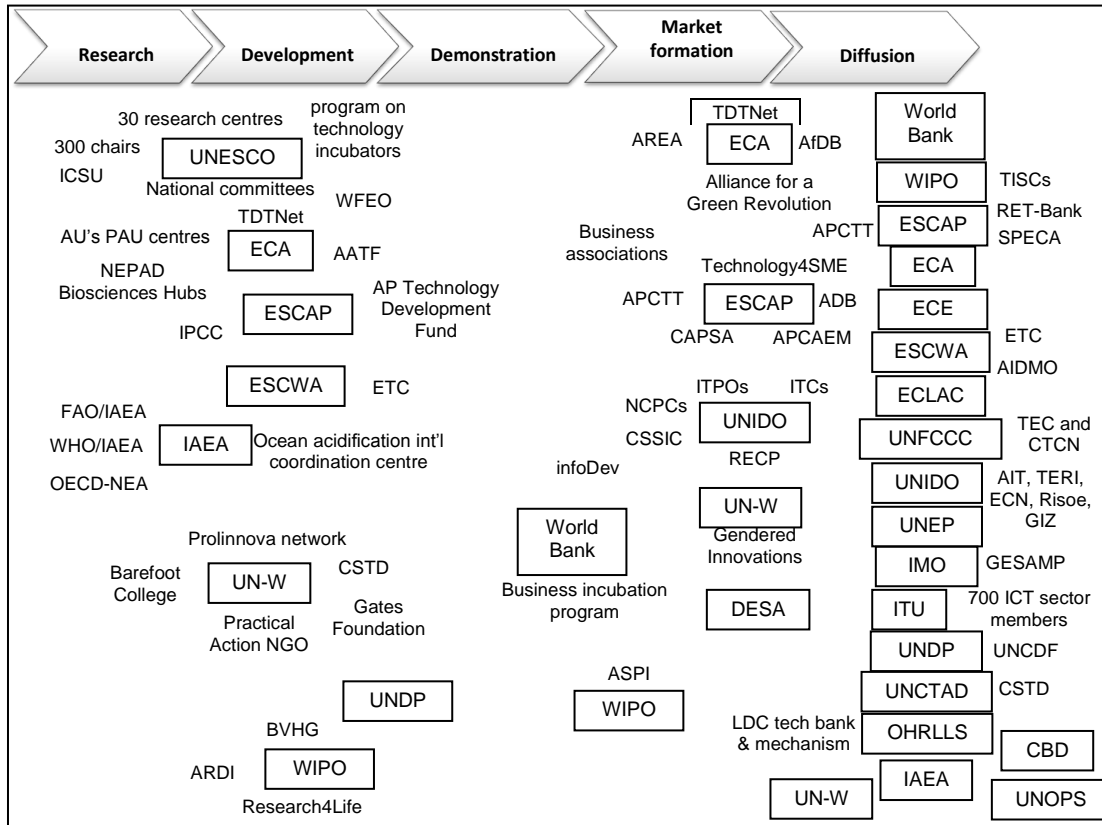
Should the aim be to propose a mechanism to coordinate international technology facilitation efforts for all countries and all aspects of clean and environmentally sound technologies?

Or, should the aim be to think hard about how an existing international mechanism or a set of mechanisms can be re-oriented, re-deployed and reformed to address the need for better coordination in this area?

If the preferred option is a new mechanism, what type of international arrangement is best suited to provide technology facilitation with sufficient focus on and coordination of existing mechanisms?

Figure 1

Overview of UN contributions (boxes) and selected partnerships (without boxes)



Source: "Options for a facilitation mechanism that promotes the development, transfer and dissemination of clean and environmentally sound technologies", Report of the Secretary-General, A/67/348, 4 September 2012.