



Technology and Innovation with Equity

Perspectives from Asia and the Pacific

Thursday, 24 February 2022 (8:30 am to 10:00 am CET, 2:30 pm - 4:00 pm Bangkok)

Concept note

Objective

The event co-organized by UNCTAD and ESCAP will briefly present UNCTAD's Technology and Innovation Report 2021 and ESCAP's Frontiers of Inclusive Innovation Report which will be followed by a roundtable discussion by experts and policymakers from Asia and the Pacific region. The discussion will be centered around artificial intelligence for social good and ways of sharing the benefits and risks of frontier technologies. The event will raise awareness of policy options for countries in the region to harness these frontier technologies and leave no one behind.

Background

We live in a time of growing prosperity alongside growing inequalities. People on average are living longer and healthier lives, getting more years of education and having better access to clean water, sanitation and electricity. A global middle class has emerged, fueled by rapid growth in emerging economies. At the same time, extreme poverty is stubbornly persistent in some pockets in developing countries and within country inequalities have increased in many countries. Crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic lays bare these and other gaps.

Against this backdrop, technology is ambiguously seen both as a friend and a foe. Innovation drives prosperity, and frontier technologies (e.g. AI, robotics, biotechnology, and nanotechnology) could be transformative in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). But rapid advances can have serious downsides if they outpace the ability of societies to adapt. There are fears, for example, that jobs are disappearing as more economic activity is automated, and that social media are exacerbating divisions, anxiety and doubt. The implications could be serious for developing countries – if poor communities and countries are either overwhelmed or simply left behind.

What is the impact of frontier technologies on inequalities? How can governments minimize risks and maximize opportunities? What are critical policy considerations to ensure that the promotion of technology and innovation leaves no one behind? And how can international cooperation help? The answers to these questions are critical for the achievement of the SDGs.

Technology and Innovation Report 2021

UNCTAD's *Technology and Innovation Report 2021* critically examines the possibility of frontier technologies widening existing inequalities and creating new ones. The Report focuses on low and middle-income developing countries and least developed countries, as well as on the most vulnerable segments of societies while providing discussion on the effects on high-income countries as parts of the broader context and major drivers of frontier technologies.

The Report argues that frontier technologies are essential for sustainable development, but they also could accentuate existing inequalities. It is up to policies to reduce this risk and make frontier technologies contribute to increasing equality. Low- and middle-income developing countries and the least developing countries cannot afford to miss the new wave of rapid technological change. Success in the twenty-first century will require a balanced approach – building a robust industrial base and promoting frontier technologies that can help deliver the 2030 Agenda and its global vision of people-centered, inclusive, and sustainable societies.

Frontiers of Inclusive Innovation: Formulating technology and innovation that leave no one behind

Science, technology and innovation (STI) can increase the efficiency, effectiveness and impact of efforts to meet the ambitions of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Nevertheless, STI have exacerbated inequalities and created new types of social divides and environmental hazards, establishing new and harder to cross frontiers between those that benefit and those that are excluded. In the context of increasing inequalities and a major pandemic, Governments need to look more seriously at harnessing STI for the Sustainable Development Goals and to leave no one behind. This may require shifting the focus from chasing frontier technologies to expanding the frontiers of innovation. Many promising technologies have already arrived. Economic growth does not have to be the only bottom line of innovation activities. Innovative business models are offering pathways that benefit society and the environment as well as the bottom line.

To maximize STI for inclusive and sustainable development, Governments need to intentionally expand the frontiers of innovation. STI policies must seek not just to explore emerging technologies, but, most importantly, to ensure that more citizens, enterprises and countries can benefit from such technologies and innovations.

Programme

Opening remarks

- Ms. Shamika N. Sirimanne, Director of the Division on Technology and Logistics, UNCTAD
- Ms. Rupa Chanda, Director of Trade, Investment and Innovation, ESCAP

Presentations

- **Technology and Innovation Report 2021** - Mr. Clovis Freire, Economic Affairs Officer, Division on Technology and Logistics, UNCTAD, Team Leader of the Technology and Innovation Report 2021
- **Frontiers of Inclusive Innovation Report** – Ms. Marta Perez Cuso, Economic Affairs Officer, TIID, ESCAP, Team Leader of the Frontiers of Inclusive Innovation Report

Panel discussion

Moderator: Mr. Jonathan Tsuen Yip Wong, Chief of Technology and Innovation, Trade, Investment and Innovation Division, ESCAP

- Ms. Kanchana Wanichkorn, Vice President, Office of National Higher Education Science Research and Innovation Policy Council (NXPO), Thailand
- Mr. Parminder Jeet Singh, Executive Director, IT for Change
- Mr. Marcus Bartley Johns, Asia Regional Director, Government Affairs and Public Policy, Microsoft
- Mr. Mark Findlay, Professorial Research Fellow and Director, Centre for Artificial Intelligence and Data Governance, Singapore Management University

Q&A - The floor will be opened to questions and contribution from the audience (via chat function).

Closing

The webinar will be in English.