

UNITED NATIONS



NATIONS UNIES

OPENING STATEMENT

Ambassador Néstor Osorio
President of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)

2013 AMR Regional Meeting for Africa

Dar es Salaam, Tanzania
14 March 2013

Honourable Ministers,
Excellencies,
Under-Secretary-General Wu
Director General Gurry
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a particular pleasure to be here to address this important meeting on behalf of the Economic and Social Council. At the outset, I wish to thank our host, the Government of Tanzania, for its warm hospitality and for making today possible. I especially congratulate our partner, the World Intellectual Property Organization, for their support in convening this important dialogue.

Innovation is the essence of modern society. Without harnessing its power, we will not be able to create healthy, educated or inclusive societies. Innovation is indeed at the core of the three pillars of sustainable development and the Millennium Development Goals. Innovation is a key driver of economic growth, development and more jobs. This is why the 2013 Annual Ministerial Review of ECOSOC will place the spotlight on how to harness the power and potential of science, technology and innovation (STI), as well as culture, to achieve the MDGs and promote sustainable development.

This is a crucial matter at a critical juncture for the future of development. Mankind is confronted with enormous challenges that require a change in the way we perceive development.

The African continent, with its rich cultural heritage, holds a great and unexploited potential that could build on the strong identity of its peoples in a globalized world, create jobs through the development of cultural industries and sustainable cultural tourism, and attract investment in areas where public funds are lacking.

Economic growth must be compatible with the well-being of present and future generations. People must be at the center of sustainable development. World leaders

acknowledged these simple truths at the Rio+20 Summit held in July 2012. They have requested that broad-based sustainable development goals be elaborated to guide actions toward this end.

The Rio+20 Outcome also confirmed ECOSOC's key role in promoting sustainable development through a balanced integration of the economic, social and environmental dimensions. Also, science, technology and innovation were identified as important elements of viable long-term solutions to sustainable development challenges.

This is why we are here today. We are here to take stock of the remarkable progress you have made in Africa and discuss the challenges you continue to face. Our discussions should aim to maximize the benefits of innovation at a global level, and to harness the role of culture as an enabler and driver for sustainable development. We are also here to learn from each other's experiences in dealing with exciting challenges in ways that work.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

There is much to celebrate in the substantive improvement in people's lives as a result of innovation. Consider the financial and mobile revolutions witnessed in Africa.

Lacking access to basic financial services is one of the characteristics defining poverty. The advent of mobile money transfer offers an alternative for serving poor customers where traditional banking does not exist. It provides the poor with better access to education, income-earning opportunities and protection against disasters.

Outstanding progress in digital financial reforms has been made in many countries in Africa. In Kenya, 73 percent of adults use mobile money, including 67 percent of the population defined as living on less than \$2 a day.

Similarly, innovation in public health improves people's lives. Thanks to the increase in research and development collaboration among African medical institutions and governments, treatment of many illnesses, such as HIV/AIDS, malaria and other tropical diseases, is improving. Moreover, mobile communication technologies provide people with greater access to health care and health-related services.

Despite this remarkable progress, daunting challenges remain. For many people, the risk of being excluded from rapid economic growth remains. Often, production harnessing the potential of traditional knowledge brings few benefits to local communities. Moreover, research and development face both a dearth of funding and difficulties of recruiting and retaining talent.

In Rio+20, the Heads of State recalled the provisions on technology transfer, finance, access to information and intellectual property rights, as agreed in the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation.

Greater efforts are needed to build partnerships among the international community to promote and spread innovation for sustainable development in Africa. Nevertheless, if transfer of technology is elusive or sparingly provided, it is necessary to assume responsibility and commit to develop and assign responses to science, technology and innovation. Appropriate budget allocations means less arms and more education.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

For over 60 years, ECOSOC has been serving as an important interface between policymakers and other stakeholders, including the scientific community. The Council brings together Member States to collectively take innovative and effective ways to meet specific challenges. ECOSOC recognizes the critical role of science, technology and innovation in pursuing sustainable development.

Through its Regional Commissions, such as the Economic Commission for Africa, ECOSOC supports the implementation of regional policies for technology dissemination and innovation. One good example here in Africa is the Economic Commission for Africa's Innovation Prize.

ECOSOC will continue to provide an open environment for dialogue on creating environmentally, economically and socially sustainable policies. I am confident that many innovative and inspiring ideas will emerge from today's discussion.

At the core of this discussion is the need to ensure that millions of people living below the poverty line are no longer denied the benefits of global development. The stakes are high and we cannot afford to fail.

I thank you.