



**Statement by Cosmas Gitta,
Chief, Division of Policy, Partnerships & Resources,
Special Unit for South-South Cooperation in UNDP,
at the Global Science Corps-UNDP Workshop,
Nairobi, 16 January 2006**

Mr. Chairman,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I wish to begin by welcoming all of you to this very important meeting. Your presence here represents a significant step forward in building a new future for Africa — a future founded on the talents and creativity of Africa's peoples. UNDP is very grateful to the Institutes for Advanced Studies at Princeton and the African Academy of Sciences for organizing this timely event, particularly for the work that Arlen Hastings, Kiera Carlisle, Professor Okelo, Professor Hassan and Jackie Olang have put into this event. Thank you all very much.

In the year that just ended, Africa, has been under the microscope of the world community. The problems afflicting the continent have received considerable attention in the UN Secretary-General's report "In Larger Freedom" which lamented the fact that Africa is falling behind on meeting the Millennium Development Goals, with many problems of food insecurity, high child and maternal mortality, growing numbers of people living in slums, and an overall rise of extreme poverty.

The Commission for Africa report issued by the UK's Department for International Development went to great length in analyzing the factors across Africa that have led to this crisis. Among the conclusions reached by the report was the need to build professional skills and knowledge in Africa by revitalizing Africa's higher education, especially in science, engineering and technology. The group of experts advising the Secretary-General on measures needed to meet the MDGs also paid particular attention to Africa noting that the number of poor is rising, more people are unable to find productive employment, agriculture has stagnated and HIV/AIDS has taken a tremendous toll on people in their most productive years.

Proposed solutions to these challenges include the call for increased aid, fair trade and debt cancellation. These initiatives, amplified by the Live8 concert this last summer, are quite necessary and plausible but some of them are emergency solutions for crisis management.

What Africa needs most are permanent solutions, and I believe these are to be found in scientific and technological competence, replacing crisis management with effective knowledge management.



This is why this meeting is a critical step towards permanent solutions to Africa's problems through science and technology.

We, at the Special Unit for South-South Cooperation in UNDP, view development as a two-prolonged learning process that involves “emulation and innovation.”

a) Emulation offers the opportunity for countries lagging behind on the development spectrum to learn from those at the forefront. Scientific and technological advancements have allowed some developing countries to adjust well to globalization while also reducing poverty and aiding in the achievement of some of the Millennium Development Goals. Scientific breakthroughs including the green revolution in China, the IT capacities powering the outsourcing industry in India, relatively high levels of internet connectivity in Botswana and Mauritius — all illustrate development solutions for emulation by other countries through South-South cooperation in science and technology.

b) Through investments in education and experimentation, some developing countries have become innovators rather than followers in a number of fields, including the development and production of sophisticated goods and services. The new trend that is taking shape regarding the role of education in powering social and economic progress, places universities and research institutions at the center of the development process. Universities can facilitate the development of business and industrial firms that spur high-tech growth and economic advancement by conducting R&D for private companies, creating their own spin-off firms, encouraging enterprise development and the transformation of research into profitable and job-creating enterprises.

This, we hope, will be the result of the Global Science Corps. I would like to recognize and express my deep appreciation for the vision of Dr. Harold Varmus who has spearheaded this idea and has motivated each of us, either directly or indirectly.

Time and again, we are faced with the issue of the African brain drain, in which the continent loses skilled workers to the North. According to World Bank studies, from 1990 to 2000, the intensity of this “brain drain” has increased in Western and Eastern Africa. As of 2000, West Africa was losing 26.7% of its skilled workforce, with tertiary education, while East Africa was losing 18.4% of this same group.

Other World Bank studies suggest that financial remittances, the enhanced productivity of returned emigrants and the incentives created for increased educational attainment in sending countries offset some of the losses of human capital and taxes from the countries of the South. This may well be true, but rather than bemoan the loss, I believe this innovative strategy of the Global Science Corps offers a way to turn the “brain drain” into a “brain gain.” For this to happen our challenge these two days is to work out arrangement that will enable African scientists overseas and their partners from the



United States and Canada to collaborate or network with their peers here in Africa in order to deepen scientific capacity on this continent which is so highly endowed in resources.

In the Secretary-General's recent statement marking the second annual UN Day for South-South Cooperation, he stressed the need to involve émigré populations in the development process as a chance for these individuals to give back to their countries of origin through their skills and knowledge.

I look forward to the discussions both formal and informal over these next two days and I hope you will all develop a passion for this programme and for its potential to create a brighter future for Africa.

I thank you.



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