



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

Organisation
des Nations Unies
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Organización
de las Naciones Unidas
para la Educación,
la Ciencia y la Cultura

Организация
Объединенных Наций по
вопросам образования,
науки и культуры

منظمة الأمم المتحدة
للترقية والعلم والثقافة

联合国教育、
科学及文化组织

Assistant Director- General for Natural Sciences

***Dr Shamila Nair-Bedouelle, Assistant Director General,
United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization***

Presentation to the National COVID-19 Conference

31 July 2020, South Africa

*Harnessing science, technology and innovation in response to COVID-19: a
national and international effort*

Honorable Ministers, Excellences, Ladies and Gentlemen,

UNESCO and me personally is privileged to join South Africa today in this innovative webinar. I bring you greetings from the Director General of UNESCO. UNESCO congratulates the South African Government and His Excellency, President Ramaphosa for convening this timely webinar on how science is being harvested.

I also thank the Honorable Ministers for inviting me.

I am delighted and deeply honoured to moderate this on line virtual meeting with such distinguished leaders of science.

Today, the focus is on identifying boundaries and tipping points that could have far-reaching consequences for our planet's equilibrium and, thus, for ourselves. International scientific co-operation is arguably more imperative than ever before, if we are to reverse the knowledge gap and, thereby, ensure that development is inclusive and sustainable for humanity as a whole. As the Madiba said 'lets put a face to science' for an equitable access to science and technology for development.

The spread of COVID-19 is one the biggest public health challenges we have faced, and research has a key role to play in the fight against it. This panel is dedicated to sharing ongoing health innovation and research in support of COVID 19 (therapeutics, diagnostics and testing). Our distinguished panelists will share experiences and identify lessons learnt in health research collaboration.

The current COVID-19 pandemic has reminded us of the critical role of science and health research and the crisis has anchored the role of science technology and innovation as a driver for evidence-based decision-making. Governments are referring to science to guide them in the measures taken in order to protect their nations, contain the spread of the virus and manage the pandemic.

If there is a silver lining in the Covid-19 pandemic, it is the solidarity shown by the international scientific community and medical profession from the outset.

The Covid-19 pandemic has brought together a unique and productive coalition of scientists who are exchanging scientific and epidemiological data and information in a race against time to diagnose new cases and develop a vaccine that could save millions of lives.

Covid-19: open science in action

The world's scientific community have come together in a true demonstration of 'open science' without borders – and when we tell the story of the COVID it will be about how research data is shared freely, 'unrestrained by competition, paywalls and patents'.

By making science more connected to societal needs and by promoting equal opportunities for all (scientists, policy-makers and citizens), Open Science can be a true game changer in bridging the science, technology and innovation gaps between and within countries and fulfilling the human right to science.

The international response to the Covid-19 pandemic is a sterling example of open science in action. In the context of pressing planetary and socio-economic challenges, sustainable and innovative solutions must be supported by an efficient, transparent and vibrant effort that stems not only from the scientific community but from society as a whole. It is in this spirit that UNESCO's 193 Member States have tasked the Organization with developing an international standard-setting instrument in the form of a UNESCO Recommendation on Open Science for 2021.

This Recommendation is expected to define shared values and principles for open science, as well as to identify concrete measures for expanding open access and open data.

South Africa is leading by example- hosting the only open science platform for the entire continent. The Africa Open Science Platform will ensure 'no one is left behind'. UNESCO congratulates South Africa for taking the lead and we will continue to work together.

Scientific humanism in a troubled world

Today, we can all bear witness to the convening 'soft power' of science. This 'soft power' is uniting nations, civil society, the private sector and the world. It epitomizes evidence-based decision-making. This 'scientific humanism in a troubled world' is at the heart of the UNESCO Recommendation on Open Science currently in preparation.

UNESCO congratulates South Africa for this extraordinary conference and looks forward to sharing the lessons learnt in South Africa across the world.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Shamila Nair-Bedouelle
(PhD - University of Cape Town, HDR- University of Paris V)

