

Establishing the International Centre for Science Diplomacy

Introduction

Science diplomacy is not new, but it has never been more important. Many of the defining challenges of the 21st century – from climate change and food security, to poverty reduction and nuclear disarmament – have scientific dimensions. No one country will be able to solve these problems on its own: the tools, techniques and tactics of foreign policy need to adapt to a world of increasing scientific and technical complexity (Royal Society, 2010).

In today's world, both science and diplomacy play key roles in providing solutions for many of the existing problems and are considered essential components of the path towards sustainable development. Thus, linking science and diplomacy in the form of science diplomacy can help the development of science and the improvement of international relations. However, the concept and potential of science diplomacy are not well understood and both the scientific and diplomatic/policy-making communities of many nations would benefit from training and capacity-building exchanges in the field. In this context, it is proposed to establish an international centre for science diplomacy.

Idea

As many of the issues we face are global in nature, setting up the first centre in the world for the advancement of science diplomacy would be of fundamental importance.

Implications of the centre

One of the purposes of the center would be to recognise, promote and support excellence in science and to encourage the development and use of science for the benefit of humanity. Second, by providing an environment for analyzing critical issues, the centre would provide scientific advice for policy. Finally, the centre would foster international and global cooperation by bringing together scientific and diplomatic communities with civil society and other stakeholders to discuss, debate and resolve critical issues at the interface of science and politics.

The centre aims to be the premier centre in the world for the advancement of science diplomacy. It will be guided by the overall goal of implementing science diplomacy to build linkages between countries and to promote scientific cooperation among them.

Benefits

This centre will help build human resource capacity in the field of science diplomacy; increase attention to transboundary issues; and also promote public-private-partnerships between countries. The centre would also seek to strengthen ties between countries and pursue providing relevant and effective advice to the policy-makers.

In particular, the centre would address:

- The use science for strengthening relations where traditional diplomatic channels are strained;
- The need for international collaboration when developing large-scale scientific infrastructure;
- The increasing need for a two-way dialogue between science and policy; and
- Ensuring that science and technology are used to help achieve sustainable development goals.

Challenges

The challenges the centre faces in its conception, establishment and eventual administration and programmatic areas likely include:

- Financial and human resources;
- Governance structure;
- Location of the centre (venue);
- Different approaches of different countries towards the concept of science diplomacy;
- Cultural, social and political differences; and
- Support from stakeholders (commitment and representation).

Role of the scientific community

Scientists must play the role of the both providers and receivers of knowledge. They must increase the scientific literacy of the diplomatic community – by increasing interactions with experienced diplomatic personnel and helping to train young diplomats – and should raise awareness of science diplomacy among the scientific community. Scientific organizations and science-based NGOs should also increase interactions with the diplomatic community, emphasizing the importance of bilateral and multilateral cooperation to both communities. In this way, scientists can be more effective and efficient in international environment.

Role of the diplomatic community

Diplomats need to better understand and to disseminate the concept of science diplomacy. They should provide an appropriate platform for the interaction among science communities, and also provide an appropriate platform for the scientific community to be able to communicate to governments. Politicians can provide training in and increase awareness of science diplomacy issues among the scientific community and should help develop links between the scientific and diplomatic communities.

Steps to implementation

As a first step in establishing the proposed international centre of science diplomacy, consultation with international bodies such as the UN would be crucial due to the cultural, religious, social and economic and scientific differences of different countries and regions.

The next phase would be to launch a bid/proposal process. The results of this process would help in selecting the host country, and in defining the management method, funding resources, a suitable venue(s) for the headquarters, and staff recruitment procedures.

The final phase would be establishment of the centre at an international level with adequate funding for an active series of training and research programmes.

References:

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