



EDITORIAL

DEVELOPING OUR FULL POTENTIAL IN SCIENCE



TWAS President Bai Chunli

At the first TWAS meeting in 1985, 250 delegates representing 50 science academies and councils from the developing world came to Trieste in support of an idea: that developing nations would be more prosperous, more independent and more stable if they built their research capacity. Academy Founder Abdus Salam made this point clear in his opening address. He said: “Our major task is – first and foremost – the health of science itself in the South.”

The 30th anniversary of that meeting is a good moment to assess the Academy’s impact and its future. TWAS has made a historic contribution thanks to the commitment and energy of its leaders and Fellows, its staff, and many partners. Today, we have a responsibility to maintain the vision of our Founders. In the past three years, we have continued to achieve progress.

We have exerted ourselves to find new Fellows from nations where we have little or no representation. We have elected members from the Central African Republic, the Republic of Congo, the Palestinian Territories, Hungary, Austria and Sweden, among others.

Of the 44 TWAS Fellows elected in 2015 in Vienna, 10 are women, and women now comprise nearly 11 percent of our membership. This is up significantly from years past, but it is not enough. If TWAS is going to be a global leader, we must increase the ratio of women in our membership and leadership.

Programmes in education and training are achieving impressive growth. In 2012, we had 163 PhD fellowships; by the end of 2015, that has nearly tripled – to 441 fellowships. The CAS-TWAS President’s PhD Fellowship programme since 2013 has awarded 540 fellowships to young scientists from 49 countries, most of them in the developing world.

A new agreement with South Africa will provide 80 new TWAS fellowships per year. And an agreement with India is expected to provide

100 fellowships over five years, plus training in science diplomacy.

Over the past three years, TWAS has been a key voice in discussion of the post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals [SDGs]. Global science leaders are looking to TWAS for perspective on a range of issues.

Our initiatives in communication are extending the global reach of our ideas and our work. Our online and print publications have a new, dynamic focus. TWAS and CAS recently released an excellent film about young scientists at the CAS-TWAS Centres of Excellence.

There is another important goal, and I think it is often overlooked: We need to continually build networks for South-North cooperation.

This is not a new idea. The theme for the first TWAS meeting was “South-South and South-North Cooperation in Sciences”.

But we are living in a new era: Today, we face regional and global challenges detailed in the SDGs – climate change and biodiversity loss, threats to our oceans, and the need for sustainable food and energy.

To address these challenges, South-South networks are essential. But so is South-North collaboration. All of us can learn from the North – from the way that their policies, R&D investment, and their universities and research centres shape a powerful ecosystem for innovation.

Of course TWAS is focused on science in the developing world. That will always be our mission. But for The World Academy of Sciences, it is a natural role to bring South and North together, to help the world develop its full potential in science and engineering.

Bai Chunli, *president, TWAS*