



EDITORIAL

SCIENCE AND POLICY – A MODEL OF COOPERATION



▲ Mohamed H.A. Hassan,
TWAS executive director
[interim]

When United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon convened the first meeting of the Scientific Advisory Board in 2014, he set an important mission: to strengthen the dialogue between scientists and policymakers, so that the science could make a robust contribution to deliberations on sustainable development and other issues.

The secretary-general assembled an extraordinary team of international scientists, and in September, they delivered a final report that assessed issues ranging from food security and climate change to the value of indigenous knowledge and the power of the data revolution. All of these topics are central to the pursuit and achievement of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

But Secretary-General Ban and the Board achieved another success, less noticed, yet worthy of close attention: They sent a signal to the world about the central role of science in policy – not just at the United Nations, but at every level, and in every nation.

The mission to achieve the SDGs by 2030 makes the scientist-policymaker relationship more salient, and more urgent. Among the 17 goals and 169 targets, many have a strong component of science or social science.

TWAS and our associated organisations have long worked to connect scientists and policymakers. For many years, the annual TWAS General Meeting has featured a session that brings together top researchers with science ministers and other high-level government officials; we will hold that session again this year at our meeting in Kigali, Rwanda. The Organization for Women in Science for the Developing World (OWSD) and GenderInSITE, a project hosted by TWAS, both have worked to bring issues about gender in science to the attention of policymakers.

Another associated organisation, the InterAcademy Partnership (IAP), regularly

issues reports and statements on science policy, reflecting the collective expertise of world's science academies. IAP's annual conference in South Africa last March focused on providing science advice to governments.

Perhaps this record helped to persuade the Scientific Advisory Board to hold its final meeting in Trieste. The event was organised and hosted by UNESCO, in cooperation with four international organisations based in Trieste: the Abdus Salam International Centre for Theoretical Physics; the International Centre for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology, IAP; and TWAS.

Each of the organisations made presentations to the board, both in business meetings and in a public session. The two-day meeting also featured presentations by a wide range of TWAS allies and partners, including the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation and the Italian National Research Council. Debora Serracchiani, president of the Italian region of Friuli-Venezia Giulia, made an inspiring speech.

During the Trieste meeting, board members worked intensively to refine and finalise many of the papers that were included in the final report to the Secretary-General. At TWAS, we are proud that five of our Fellows have served on the panel: Abdallah Daar of Oman; Reiko Kuroda of Japan; Carlos Nobre of Brazil; Zakri Abdul Hamid of Malaysia; and Nobel laureate Ahmed Zewail of Egypt.

Sadly, Prof. Zewail passed away in August, before the final report was complete. But we are confident that the work done by him and his Board colleagues will have a valuable influence long into the future.

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