




# “TO REACH OUR FULL POTENTIAL”

*In a ceremony opening TWAS’s 27th General Meeting, speakers from both Rwanda and the Academy recognized the value of closer cooperation.*

 by Cristina Serra and Edward W. Lempinen

The opening ceremony of the 27th TWAS General Meeting celebrated a mission shared by both Rwanda and TWAS: to advance science and technology in support of sustainable human prosperity.

Standing before 500 science and policy leaders from Rwanda and 50 other countries around the world, Rwandan President Paul Kagame offered a stirring call to embrace science, citing its power to transform economies and human relations. Then TWAS President Bai Chunli, in his opening address, cited the shattering impact of the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi people and the long and difficult recovery led by Kagame. [For full speeches, see page 9 and page 11]

Rwandan Education Minister Musafiri Papias Malimba, in his welcome to the audience, cited a large team of Rwandan scientists who had been invited to the meeting.

“I know that there are many opportunities to be gained from a strong collaboration with TWAS,” Musafiri said. “I trust that you will truly benefit from the interactions with the many esteemed scientists gathered here from around the developing world.”

The TWAS General Meeting opened on Monday 14 November in Kigali, Rwanda’s capital city. It featured symposia and lectures on a range of topics related to science and development.

The opening ceremony, following a TWAS tradition, celebrated scientific excellence by awarding prizes and awards to researchers from across the developing world. It also offered an opportunity to celebrate Rwanda’s progress,

and to affirm the Academy’s partnership with Rwanda and all of sub-Saharan Africa. The event drew journalists from Rwanda and China; it was broadcast live on Rwandan television and livestreamed to the world.

The mood of the event was both solemn and hopeful, a recognition of the remarkable commitment Rwanda has made to employ education, science and technology – and international partnerships – to recover from devastation. The genocide left up to a million people dead, including many teachers. It destroyed schools and equipment.

Claire Lyngå recalled a two-year stay in Rwanda earlier in her career, teaching physics at the National University of Rwanda. Though few resources were available, the university “had its aims set high, and with a vision of how to transform itself”.

Today, Lyngå is a research adviser in the Unit for Research Cooperation at the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency [Sida]. “Coming back, more than ten years later, to what is now the University of Rwanda, I see a university that is transformed,” Lyngå told the audience. “The government of Rwanda should be commended for their commitment to science.”

Flavia Schlegel, UNESCO’s assistant director-general for natural sciences, struck a similar note in a video address to the conference. Under President Kagame’s leadership, she observed, Rwanda has increased its efforts to build prosperity and economic growth through science, and today the nation is emerging as an African leader in science.

▼ His Excellency President Paul Kagame of Rwanda, joined by TWAS President Bai Chunli and Rwandan Education Minister Papias Musafiri Malimba, makes a ceremonial entry into the opening session of the TWAS General Meeting in Kigali, Rwanda. [Photo: Robert Mugabe/Rwanda Ministry of Education]





“Rwanda is a shining example in harnessing education and scientific research to meet national development needs and in creating a strong basis for scientific cooperation in the region,” Schlegel said.

Her point was underscored by Stefano Salmaso, Secretary of Legation, Scientific and Technological Unit, at the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation.

“Italy strongly believes that TWAS can act globally and locally, with an integrated approach toward the local scientific communities and an expanding global vision,” Salmaso observed. “We are confident that TWAS will be able to play an important role in the perspective of further

▲ Left to right: Stefano Salmaso, Secretary of Legation, Scientific and Technological Unit, at the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation [Photo: Robert Mugabe/Rwanda Ministry of Education]; Flavia Schlegel, UNESCO’s assistant director-general for natural sciences; and Claire Lyngå, research adviser in the Unit for Research Cooperation at the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida).

improving its synergies in the context of the Trieste Scientific Hub.”

Speakers noted TWAS’s valuable efforts to create opportunities for women in science – but increasing those opportunities remains a crucial need. The participation of women in scientific fields must increase, Lyngå said.

“It’s not only a human rights issue, but also an economic imperative,” she said. “It makes sense to use the full potential of the population.”

The Rwanda Academy of Science was formally launched during the week of the TWAS meeting to support the role of science and to provide evidence-based analysis to leaders at all levels. And Rwanda has built a productive network of partnerships.

As illustration, Kagame offered several examples of high-quality scientific centres based in Rwanda that have been developed with overseas partners. Among them is the East African Institute for Fundamental Research, based in Rwanda, a partner to the Abdus Salam International Centre for Theoretical Physics in Trieste, Italy, and a Category 2 UNESCO institute.

“The transformative power of science is

“Our common dignity as human beings matters. And no one can be left out of the scientific enterprise.”

*Rwandan President Paul Kagame*

known,” Kagame said, “and we must harness it to serve our ambitious goals for sustainable development and prosperity.

“But science has another, less visible, but no less valuable, dividend: The scientific mindset makes us better people. In both conception and utilisation, scientific work is blind to divisions or prejudices that only hinder further progress for everybody.

“Our common dignity as human beings matters,” the president concluded. “And no one can be left out of the scientific enterprise.”

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