

Push to link South science with politics

Summit agrees to boost role of science in African governments

A NEW ROUTE for linking developing country science to developing country politics was announced at a South-South summit of science ministers this month. The Consortium on Science, Technology and Innovation for the South (Costis) will give decision makers in developing nations direct access to scientific know-how produced in the global south. The consortium was announced at a science ministers' summit of the Group of 77 developing countries on 3 September in Angra dos Reis, Brazil.

"This will enable G77 to have direct access to a network of scientific institutions that are responsible for some of the best scientific research in the developing world," said Chintamani Rao, president of the Academy of Sciences for the Developing World (TWAS).

The mechanisms through which Costis will link science and policy are being drawn up by a joint task force of scientists and policy makers. These will be operational by the end of 2006 and will among other things include best practice models for sharing scientific solutions between developing countries.

"I believe that the synergism created by this partnership could have a significant impact on poverty elimination and economic development efforts across the south," said Rao. Ministers at the summit emphasised the need for more advanced developing countries to help the less so. "There is a wealth of knowledge and information on international cooperation in science and technology that we can share among us," said Mosibudi Mangena, science minister of South Africa.

"We will be able to learn from countries like Brazil and India," Romain Murenzi, science minister of Rwanda, told Research Africa. "Together, we'll be able to make common policies, and ministries of science in Africa will understand the importance of science and technology for development."

A key problem in African countries is the low profile science has in governments. Many bundle science with several other ministerial briefs such as education, or even sport. Dumisani Kumalo, president of the G77 and South Africa's ambassador to the UN, said that the new consortium will help increase the visibility of science in developing countries. "Politically, what we are doing is saying to governments that science and technology is important. For example, you need science for better health. But people only remember the pill they take. They don't remember how the pill was made," he told Research Africa.

Progress has already been made on several fronts, he said. "At the G8 meeting in Russia in July, there was for the first time a discussion of how to bridge the gap between developed and developing countries in science and technology. At that level, they are beginning to think about this."

Science and technology was also on the agenda of a meeting between India, Brazil and South Africa (IBSA) on 11 to 13 September. "We are beginning to elevate science and technology to very important levels. It's just as important as discussing migration or borders, or anything else," said Kumalo.

THE MINISTERIAL coincided with the 10th general assembly of TWAS. Together, India and Brazil pledged \$1 million to the organisation's endowment fund, bringing it to a total of \$10 million.

Jacob Palis, professor of mathematics at the Institute of Pure and Applied Mathematics in Brazil, was elected the next president of TWAS. He will assume his three-year term in January 2007.

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