

North Eastern Africa Workshop Series on the Role of Science in Assisting Regional Policy Development

Welcoming remarks

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Your Excellency Prof. Afework Kassu, State Minister, Fellow EAS
Prof. Oladoyin Odubanjo, Chair of INGSA Africa & Executive Secretary, NAS
Workshop facilitators and moderators,
Invited guests,
Fellows of the Ethiopian Academy of Sciences,
Ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of the Ethiopian Academy of Sciences and on my own behalf, it gives me a great pleasure to welcome you all to this important workshop “[The Role of Science in Assisting Regional Policy Development](#)”.

I would like to recognize the presence of:

- Jan-Marco Müller, International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis
- Lara Cowen, Senior Program Officer, INGSA
- Nasreen Jessani, Africa Centre for Evidence
- Mahlet Mesfin, Penn Biden Center for Diplomacy and Global Engagement
- Renee Street, INGSA Africa
- Emily Hayter, Senior Program Specialist, INASP
- Marjorie Alain, Monitoring and Evaluation, Partnership for Economic Policy
- Connie Nshemereirwe, Global Young Academy
- Matthew Wallace, International Development Research Center

Thank you all for coming. Some of you travelled long distances. We are delighted to have you all here to participate and share your experiences in Science Advice to Policy Development.

Nowadays, science advice is playing important role in the formulation of policy and decision-making. As a key element of the policy-making, science advice should be embedded at all levels of policymaking process. Evidence-based information is required to fuel policy. However, science advice can be a valuable input to sound policy-making depending on how well it is formulated and communicated; as well as on how it is perceived by its target policy audience.

Countries in our region, particularly the least developed countries, are facing numerous problems including scarce human capital and skilled labour, shortage of finance and material resources, dual disease-burden, poor infrastructure, uncontrolled population growth, unemployment, and lack of good governance.

Governments, need to put in place the right policies to mitigate these problems, and science advice is imperative. Academy of Sciences are expected to play essential roles in providing evidence based-policy advice to governments. The Ethiopian Academy of Sciences has carried out quite a number of conferences, workshops and consensus studies and has provided policy makers with reports and policy briefs. Some examples that address the Sustainable Development Goals include: State of Agricultural Science and Technology in Ethiopia, Biotechnology for Africa's Development (9th AMASA, November 2013), Implementation Plans for the National Biotechnology Road Map (**SDG 2: Zero Hunger**); Mapping Research Landscape in the Health Sector, Integration of Nutrition with Agriculture and Health, Establishing a New Vaccine Intelligence Unit (**SDG 3: Good Health and Wellbeing**); Re-envisioning Higher Education and Research in Ethiopia (2nd Congress, November 2015); Quality of Primary Education in Ethiopia, Standards for undergraduate university laboratories and workshops, Preparation of Amharic Science and Technology Terms Glossary, Curriculum-based University Exit Exams in Ethiopia (**SDG 4: Quality Education**); Science and Technology – Survival of a Nation (1st Congress, December 2011); The State of Engineering & Technology Education and Research in Ethiopia,

Development of Industrial Products from Byproducts of Sugar Industries (**SDG 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure**).

Our universities are being challenged of their role in society. The outputs of the three traditional missions, teaching-learning, research and community service may not be considered adequate contributions to society anymore. Measurements of mission accomplishments and societal relevance of our universities are shifting from output to outcome, from performance to impact. Whether graduates entering the workforce have the requisite knowledge and skills; whether research and community outreach are making societal impacts will be indicative of accomplishments of university missions.

Emphasizing the urgency of Science advice, Edward W. Lempinen reports “In an era of complex, high-priority challenges, scientists can provide valuable advice to policymakers. But providing that advice is not as simple as it seems. Science and policy are two different cultures, with different values and different languages. Scientists often don’t know how best to communicate with policymakers, and policymakers might not understand science. Sometimes, they don’t want to hear from scientists at all.”¹

Sir Peter Gluckman, the founding Chair of INGSA, Chief Science Advisor to the Prime Minister of New Zealand underscores “Science advice requires earning and keeping the public’s trust and to act as a broker rather than an advocate for science”. The decision to act upon evidence or set it aside rests solely with the policy or decision maker.

I had the opportunity to attend an informative, engaging and interactive “*African Regional Government Science Advice Workshop*” held in Kigali, Rwanda, 22-24 August 2018. Let me share with you some of the lessons I learned:

- That **science-policy nexus** is presumed governments are more likely to make better choices when they use well-developed evidence wisely;

¹ TWAS Newsletter, Vol. 28 No. 2, 2016, IAP Conference and a parallel workshop in South Africa

- That **the most important aspects of evidence** in the context of policy are its **sufficiency** and **quality**;
- That **science-policy nexus is evolving** in the contemporary world;
- That the nature of **policy making is evolving** as the relationship between science and society is changing;
- That **scientists are very good at problem definition**; less so at finding workable, scalable and meaningful solutions;
- That policy is rarely determined by evidence but **policy can be and should be informed by evidence**;
- That **advice** is either **unsolicited or solicited**;
- That **advice should** take note of what is known about the issue; what is the consensus (need, impact, alternatives, monitoring etc.); what is not known, and **provide options and trade-offs**;
- That **Academies are source of deliberative advice** (solicited or unsolicited);
- **That Academies need to build and sustain trust and respect with politicians, policy makers, the public and the science community**;
- That **understanding the audience, context and timeline** is of a paramount importance in preparing advice.

Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to Sir Peter Gluckman for accepting our request to hold this workshop in Addis. I also would like to indebted to Lara Cowen, Senior Program Officer INGSA, Binyam Sisay, UNESCO and Global Young Academy, Abenet Girma, EAS for your unwavering commitment and hard work to make this workshop possible.

I trust we will have engaging and interactive days ahead of us.

Thank you for your attention.

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Capital Hotel, Addis Ababa