

Beat: Technology

UN report calls for a greater place for science in international decision-making

Presented to Ban Ki Moon by Irina Bokova

Paris, Washington DC, 15.09.2016, 18:07 Time

USPA NEWS - In fact, all nations must invest more in science technology and innovation (STI), argues The Future of Scientific Advice to the United Nations, A Summary Report to the Secretary-General of the United Nations from the Scientific Advisory Board, which will be presented to Ban Ki-moon by Irina Bokova

Science is a public good and deserves to be valued more highly and used effectively by decision-makers at all levels. But science requires more resources to become the game-changer it could be in dealing with global challenges.-----

In fact, all nations must invest more in science technology and innovation (STI), argues The Future of Scientific Advice to the United Nations, A Summary Report to the Secretary-General of the United Nations from the Scientific Advisory Board, which will be presented to Ban Ki-moon by Irina Bokova, Director-General of UNESCO on 18 September.

“STI can be a game changer in dealing with nearly all the most pressing global challenges,” claim the experts of the Scientific Advisory Board arguing that STI also have a key role to play in accomplishing the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations. As an example, the report notes that scientists and engineers improved the efficiency of solar panels and wind turbines faster than had been expected, raising the hope that we will be able to reduce our dependency on fossil fuels. Yet, only 12 countries* dedicate more than 2.5% of their Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to research and development (R&D). This is far from enough considering what is at stake, say the authors of the report. They call on all countries, including the poorest, to invest at least 1% of their GDP on research and urge the most advanced countries to spend at least 3% of GDP on R&D. This effort must also focus on reinforcing science education, notably in developing countries, and on improving girls’ access to science courses. Director-General Irina Bokova in a message published in the report says, “It is a powerful resource for the Secretary-General and the UN System as a whole, so as to reinforce its role as an interlocutor of world leaders and as a central actor in defining solutions to global problems and the way these manifest themselves at multiple levels, from global to local.”-----

The members of the Scientific Advisory Board contend that science should weigh more heavily on the decisions of political leaders. They note that almost 25 years passed between the scientific community’s first warnings about climate change and the adoption, in December 2015, of the Paris Agreement on that subject. “Decisions are often taken in response to short-term economic and political interests, rather than the long-term interests of people and the planet,” they note.-----

Though the United Nations cannot provide solutions to all the world’s great challenges alone, it is best placed to set international objectives for doing so. “The world surely has a right to expect and even demand that the United Nations deliver what no other institution can: setting global priorities, promoting and coordinating research and action to address the most challenging problems, enabling the effective worldwide use of all data.” Big data exchanges around the world offer an illustration of the role the United Nations could play to favour fair access. The report notes that the United Nations and its agencies can facilitate the gathering of all types of data while overseeing both quality and access. It also calls for international collaborative projects in this area.-----

The Scientific Advisory Board of the United Nations Secretary-General was established in 2014 to formulate recommendations in the sciences, technology and innovation (STI) that will enlighten the work and decisions of the United Nations. The Board numbers 26 scientists of world renown appointed to take stock of scientific needs to tackle global challenges. UNESCO serves as the secretariat of the Board which produces documents on subjects such as the data revolution, the role of the sciences in meeting sustainable development goals or the Delphi Study, which identifies major scientific concerns for the future of the planet. Source UNESCO

Article online:

<https://www.uspa24.com/bericht-9159/un-report-calls-for-a-greater-place-for-science-in-international-decision-making.html>

Editorial office and responsibility:

V.i.S.d.P. & Sect. 6 MDSStV (German Interstate Media Services Agreement): Rahma Sophia RACHDI

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