

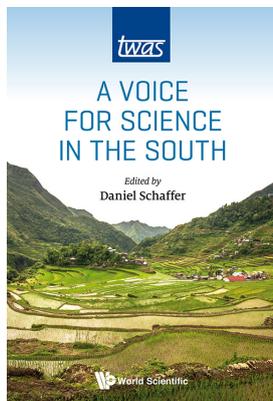


From Third World to developing world: The changing face of science in the South

BOOK TITLE:

TWAS: A voice for science in the South

BOOK COVER:



EDITOR:

Daniel Schaffer

ISBN:

9789814740425 (hardcover)

PUBLISHER:

World Scientific Publishing,
Singapore; GBP46

PUBLISHED:

2016

REVIEWER:

Dorothy Ngila

AFFILIATION:

National Research Foundation,
Pretoria, South Africa

EMAIL:

dorothy.ngila@nrf.ac.za

HOW TO CITE:

Ngila D. From Third World to developing world: The changing face of science in the South. *S Afr J Sci.* 2017;113(5/6), Art. #a0211, 1 page. <http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/sajs.2017/a0211>

TWAS: A Voice for Science in the South is a significant contribution to the history of science in the developing world, and a celebration of scientific capacity and excellence achievements that can be attributed to the gap filled by The World Academy of Science (TWAS).

TWAS was established in 1983 as the 'Third World Academy of Science', later known as 'TWAS: the Academy of Sciences for the Developing World', and now 'The World Academy of Science'. These name changes can be seen, literally, as TWAS' response to a changing science world, and, figuratively, as signifying the leaps and bounds that science in the South has experienced – changes to which TWAS' existence has contributed.

Written as a celebration of TWAS' 30 years of existence, the biographical lenses of eminent scientists are used to recollect their interactions with TWAS in its leadership structures, as its members, as leaders in complementary organisations such as the International Centre for Theoretical Physics, and as the next generation of scientists who not only aspire to be members of the academy but also have been recipients of the scientific capacity strengthening that has become congruent with TWAS in all its years of existence.

Through their stories of scientific excellence, the growth of their scientific capacities – including in national, regional and global science leadership mandates, and the passion that has led to their commitment to a thinning of the North–South divide in science, the book not only provides an opportunity to celebrate the contributions of the 11 scholars (representing Latin America, Africa, the Arab Region and Asia) but also weaves their stories with that of the growth of TWAS, and the changes witnessed in the global South on the role of science, technology and innovation (STI) as an engine of development in the last 30 years. These stories are of STI development and individual science career development in the South. They are stories that validate the contribution of the South to global science. Interwoven in their writing is an admirable chronicle of how TWAS' founding father and Nobel Laureate Abdus Salam's dream and vision has found deep resonance with so many others who have taken up the baton, leading with their own convictions but never departing from the original vision: the existence of a global academy of science at the forefront of building scientific capacity and excellence in the South, and in the words of Jacob Palis in the book, 'not just for the sake of science but for the sake of society'.

Academies of science perform a variety of functions: honouring and promoting scientific excellence; harnessing the collective intellectual capacities of their members to contribute to informing science policy; and, in some instances, being managers of research. The Royal Society of London, the French Academy of Science and the United States National Academy of Sciences are amongst the oldest national academies of science in existence. Globally, the advent of TWAS sought to fulfil a crucial need for an institution that would profile scientific excellence in the South; be a leader in contributing to scientific capacity building in the South; and be a voice of developing world science in global engagements and opportunities as that voice had been limited in the years following the Cold War.

For an academy that seeks to represent the voice of science in the South, the book falls short in its examination of the role of the social sciences and humanities, both within the academy and in the future TWAS. This gap is jarringly felt by the concentration of contributing authors in the natural and applied sciences, and the scant introspection given to how the future of TWAS should consider further expansion of the social sciences and humanities in its ranks of membership. This is specifically important in a 21st-century world in which interdisciplinarity, multidisciplinary and transdisciplinary are growing outlooks through which interwoven, transboundary and complex global challenges will be solved.

From a developing world (and in fact developed world) perspective, in its contemplation of the future of TWAS, the book provides a blueprint for the continued development of STI in the South – an exercise that seeks to magnify the vision of Abdus Salam. In the spirit of collegiality, increased partnerships and collaboration: (1) the quest towards an inclusive science that considers gender, geographical distribution, age and the North–South divide is an imperative; (2) institutional mechanisms governing science must be innovative with the changing face of science; (3) the role of academies of science in the science–policy nexus must be intensified to support growth of knowledge-based economies and evidence-based policymaking in the developing world; (4) leveraging, raising and optimal use of financial resources for STI should be vigorously and continually pursued; and (5) there must be a consistent re-examination of the growing South–South divide between emerging economies and scientifically lagging countries.

This book is relevant for those interested in the history and sociology of science.

