

The contribution of UNESCO to Regional and Interregional Cooperation to Strengthen Basic Sciences in Developing Countries

Julia Hasler, Programme Specialist, UNESCO Natural Sciences Sector, Division of Basic and Engineering Sciences

UNESCO, established in 1945, is the sole agency in the UN System having a clear mandate for the basic sciences. It is also the only agency with a mandate for engineering, which extends basic scientific know-how to important applications, forming a crucial driver for science-based sustainable development. The UNESCO programme in basic and engineering sciences is rooted in partnership with the appropriate competent representatives of civil society through Framework Agreements with the International Council of Science (ICSU) and its Scientific Unions, and with the World Federation of Engineering Organizations (WFEO). It is also strongly involved in creating, and coordinating, the activity of the UNESCO Intersectoral Platform on Science Education. In addition, the current basic and engineering sciences programme is complemented by tackling two research-based issues of particular importance to the Member States: the Renewable Energy Programme, and the Natural Disaster Reduction and Awareness Building Programme. Also, a unique UNESCO-I'OREAL partnership For Women in Science, coordinated by the basic and engineering sciences programme, forms a core of UNESCO activities to secure gender equality and equity in science on a global scale.

The major programme in support of basic sciences at UNESCO is the International Basic Sciences Programme (IBSP) operational since the autumn of 2005. IBSP was established to harness international cooperation to build national capacities in the basic sciences and science education. Under its mandate, IBSP promotes institutional and human capacity-building, scientific networking, transfer and sharing of scientific information and excellence in science through North-South and South-South cooperation, the creation and/or strengthening of centres of excellence, the provision of scientific expertise for, and advice to, policy- and decision-makers, and the increase of public awareness of opportunities offered by the basic sciences for meeting societal needs.

IBSP streamlines activities into a limited number of priority actions undertaken on a cost-sharing basis with signed agreements with principal partners, which makes the IBSP a programme co-financed by extra budgetary resources throughout its spectrum of projects. The majority of current IBSP actions target Africa, as well as gender equality, and all are focused on the Organization's priorities in science (science education, capacity building, and science policy). Some examples of IBSP actions are the SESAME Project, the Global Microscience Experiments Project, the ICGEB-TWAS-UNESCO/IBSP partnership on capacity-building in molecular biology, the CERN/IBSP partnership for Electronic Libraries in Africa, the CERN/ICTP/IBSP Training of Trainers project, the IBSP/UNESCO Satellite for science education, the IBSP Advanced Schools in the Basic Sciences for Africa project, and the IBSP/IBRO partnership for Building Brain Sciences in Africa project.

For further details : http://portal.unesco.org/science/en/ev.php-URL_ID=6287&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html

