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## Role of Professional Societies in Development

Industrialized countries are that way because of science and its translation into productive technology by engineers. Thus science and engineering are crucial to successful development of less affluent nations. But the record of technology as a tool for development is mixed. Technology transfer has been imperfect. Common complaints are that the engineering and science communities in receiving countries are inadequate to the task at hand, or that those individuals involved in the industrialized countries are not at the forefront of their professions. If development is to be effectively fostered, this must change.

Although structures of scientific and engineering communities vary dramatically between nations and economic systems, their components and framework are essentially disciplinary. The disciplinary societies bestow a large portion of the nonfinancial rewards to professionals in many countries: they publish research papers, award fellowships and prizes, elect leaders, and convene prestigious meetings and conferences. In addition, they set professional standards and provide continuing education. Because the societies are influential and do such things well, it makes sense for them to become involved in development activities. In recent years, a number of U.S. disciplinary societies have taken initiatives. For example, the American Chemical Society has held development-related chemistry workshops in Egypt and India. The American Society for Engineering Education has cooperated with engineering educators from many nations in establishing an international network of organizations. The American Statistical Association has arranged seminars in Latin America in cooperation with local groups and assisted them in forming their own associations.

Leaders of professional societies have noted the importance of attracting the highest quality talent to development tasks. D. Allan Bromley, in his AAAS presidential address on 6 January,\* stated that "societies can provide channels for the involvement of some of the most talented scientists and engineers in the development process." That same week M. G. K. Menon, in his Indian Science Congress Association (ISCA) presidential address in Mysore,† emphasized the importance of basic research and a self-reliant base of science and technology in national development. Also noting the need for quality, he stated, "Scientific academies, professional societies and those concerned with the publication of scientific and technical journals have an exceedingly important role to play in setting standards of excellence for scientific research."

The first steps toward focusing societies on development problems on a global scale were taken in New Delhi in December 1980 at a seminar organized by AAAS, ISCA, and the Indian National Science Academy (INSA). Cochaired by A. K. Sharma and Kenneth Boulding, respectively ISCA president and AAAS board chairman at that time, the seminar included over 100 leaders from disciplinary, federative, and related institutions from about 40 countries around the world. The participants documented prior activities of the societies in furthering development and identified the capabilities of the societies in this respect. Considering the broad spectrum of participants, the report on the seminar‡ is a unique thesaurus of what societies can do and how they may become involved, and its recommendations lay the groundwork for future action.

A Continuing Committee on the Role of Scientific and Engineering Societies in Development has been formed to coordinate and guide this effort, and regional meetings are planned to examine the general principles in the context of regional conditions and problems. Thus the scientific and engineering societies have an opportunity to influence the development process in its most sensitive area: the quality of the people involved. The challenge should be met.—J. THOMAS RATCHFORD, *Associate Executive Officer, AAAS*

\**Science*, 26 February 1982, p. 1041. †*Science Today*, February 1982, p. 9. ‡*Report on the Global Seminar on the Role of Scientific & Engineering Societies in Development* (INSA, New Delhi, 1981).