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## Hemispheric Cooperation in Science

Ten years ago a new mechanism was announced for facilitating cooperation among scientists of the Western Hemisphere. Interciencia, as it came to be called, is largely an association of associations for the advancement of science. Founding members included organizations in Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Mexico, the United States, and Venezuela. Goals announced for the Interciencia Association included the linking of the American scientific community, fostering national development and human well-being, and stimulating the formation of associations for the advancement of science.

At the start the organizers agreed on the necessity of good communication. Accordingly, one immediate objective was the creation of a trilingual journal devoted to such topics as energy, tropical agriculture, tropical diseases, and transfer of technology. This goal was achieved with most credit belonging to Marcel Roche, editor, and to the Venezuelan government, which has furnished a large fraction of needed funds. The journal has published excellent material and has appeared on its bimonthly schedule since its first issue in 1976. Circulation of the journal has not reached the levels that its quality deserves. Latin America has been suffering the worst depression in 50 years.

A second major form of communication has been 24 international symposiums organized to address pressing practical problems involving applications of science. In general, the symposium topics have been chosen and participants selected by co-arrangers from the two halves of the hemisphere. Scientists associated with the participating organizations serve as communications nodes for their countries. They are in position to identify and contact qualified talent in their respective countries.

Among some very successful symposiums was one on energy conducted at Guarujá, Brazil, in 1978 and a second on biotechnology held in 1983 in Costa Rica. The sessions on energy, which lasted nearly a week, were attended by about 100 invited participants from 16 countries. The symposium on biotechnology was of great interest to the participants and to their countries. An expert from a leading U.S. biotechnology company has written, "The quality, energy, and enthusiasm of the participants in the symposium were most impressive. My initially skeptical attitude about how much could be accomplished through such a meeting has been transformed into a real conviction that there is a great deal of value which can be accomplished at relatively low cost in developing biotechnology in the Americas. I believe the Interciencia conference will have played a vital role in catalyzing this development."

Attempts to encourage formation of associations for the advancement of science have met with mixed success. On the positive side has been the adherence of Canada, Jamaica, Peru, and the National Research Council of Costa Rica. Efforts begun in several other countries have been delayed by political uncertainties.

The most recent initiative of Interciencia Association is the linking of research institutions in the hemisphere to promote utilization of lesser known trees and plants of promising economic potential. Known as PIRB (Interciencia Biological Resources Program), this is a cooperative venture to uncover new sources of food, energy, chemicals, and materials and will be coordinated from Colombia.

Interciencia Association\* has survived during difficult times and has made effective use of limited resources. It has been a catalyst in bringing scientists of the hemisphere together. It has been especially useful in fostering cooperation among Latin American scientists. To achieve greater effectiveness will require the participation of more scientists and obtaining the requisite financial support.—PHILIP H. ABELSON

\*The first presidents of Interciencia Association were Oscar Sala, Universidade de São Paulo (1975–1979), and Leonard M. Rieser, Dartmouth College (1979–1983). The current president is Michel Bergeron, Faculty of Medicine, University of Montreal, Montreal, Quebec H3C 3T8. The executive director is James W. Rowe, AAAS, 1776 Massachusetts Avenue, NW, Washington, D.C. 20036.