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EDITORIAL

Closing the gaps in the science-policy interface

The year 2015 will arguably go down in history as a year of global consensus. The member states of the United Nations agreed to adopt the 17 ambitious Sustainable Development Goals to ensure a better future for all peoples, the Sendai Framework on Disaster Risk Reduction to enhance resilience in the midst of escalating risks, and the Paris Accord to prevent greenhouse gas-induced warming of the planet from reaching catastrophic levels. Under the aegis of these global agreements, it is becoming more and more evident that policy decisions must be based on sound scientific knowledge. Mary Midgley’s words appear to be more salient than ever:

“Most of us have begun to see the party is over. The planet is in deep trouble; we had better concentrate on bailing it out... The discrepancy between image and fact is growing too wide to be tolerated. For general sanity we need all the help we can get from our scientists in reaching a more realistic attitude to the physical world we live in.”¹

R.P. Guimaraes once posed an interesting question, which is relevant in this discussion of decision-making informed by scientific data. He asks: When an issue raised by the scientific community has been effectively incorporated in the general public discourse, are actual policy changes guaranteed? The author came to the grim conclusion that they aren’t. He argues that politics remains to be the “missing link” in the science-policy interface.² Indeed, this argument can be extended beyond scientific data to include all types of information used by the government in its decision-making. For example, within the discourse on climate change, many believe that we have already reached a saturation point in terms of the science. It is now time to involve other experts such as economists and human rights advocates.

Important decisions will be taken by a handful of people who have been given the responsibility – politicians, we call them, otherwise known as our leaders. It would take extremely tenacious leaders with

¹ Midgley, M. (1992) *Science as Salvation: A Modern Myth and its Meaning*. London & New York: Routledge. 256 pp.

² Guimaraes, R.P. (2006) Politics, the missing link in the science-policy interface. *IHDP Newsletter*. 3–4, 8–13.

great foresight and unadulterated care for the well-being of people and the planet to steer us in the right direction by listening to what multiple stakeholders and experts have to say.

UNU Peace and Progress (UPP) is proud to present its third volume containing the voices of graduate students from around the world on various issues of global importance: climate change, migration, health, peace and human security, and sustainable development. These articles provide insights from the leading scholars of tomorrow regarding the multifaceted global threats which are currently emerging. The authors featured in this issue believe that better solutions to global problems exist, and challenge our leaders of today to rethink current governance constructs and find ways to implement necessary changes.

Piscano discusses environmental migration in the context of climate change, and argues the need to revise how the international community defines refugees in order to include those who were environmentally displaced. Lapidez' technical note illustrates how scientists obtain projections for future climate using a case study in the Philippines. His results indicate changing rainfall patterns, and highlight the need for increasing the adaptive capacity of the affected communities. Meanwhile, De Leon identifies implementation gaps in climate change adaptation policy in the Philippines, and provides recommendations on how to address these barriers. On another note, Zekeng discusses possible pathways and partnerships for enhancing health care in Sub-Saharan Africa, emphasizing the need for a high level of sustained commitment from various parties involved, including the government and NGO's. Under the Peace, Security, and Human Rights cluster, Dam provides a retrospective review of the US intervention in Panama, and contends that an approach to rebuild vital institutions in the aftermath of the intervention was lacking. His paper also highlights the importance of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine in such situations. All these papers also highlight the need for comprehensive solutions through the involvement of a wide range of stakeholders: the international community, governments, scientists, economists, NGO's, locals, and marginalized groups, among others.

Once again, UPP explores a rich variety of global concerns from the perspective of graduate students. The problems faced by our generation are complex, and our brightest minds can undoubtedly work together and learn from past mistakes in our quest for better solutions. UPP is, in many ways, a microcosm of the voices of young scientists, leaders, and future policymakers. It is hoped that through this microcosm, lessons on what constitute the human experience of peace and progress can be learned. In turn, it is hoped that these lessons prove to be useful in initiating the necessary changes in our journey for a better world.



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