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Discussion paper: The International Science Council's role and unique value proposition in science diplomacy

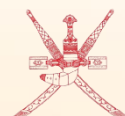
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For discussion



**International
Science Council**

وزارة التعليم العالي
و البحث العلمي والابتكار
Ministry of Higher Education
Research & Innovation



The International Science Council's role and unique value proposition in science diplomacy

A discussion paper for ISC Members' feedback

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This discussion paper aims to foster dialogue among the ISC Members on the evolving role and practice of science diplomacy and the role of the ISC and its Members in advancing the use of science diplomacy to address global issues and support global collective action. Based on the ISC's statutes, this paper highlights the importance of leveraging science diplomacy to address shared challenges, strengthen international collaboration and promote the role of science in global governance and articulates the unique contribution that the ISC could bring in a fast-changing landscape.

1. The changing nature of science diplomacy

Science has long played a prominent role in international relations, facilitating bilateral and multilateral technical cooperation across borders and allowing for the peaceful study of ungoverned spaces (such as the Arctic and outer space), but also serving economic and political expansion goals (including colonialism), the development of weapons and more. Science and diplomacy are increasingly entangled with global challenges, including the growth of emerging and disruptive technologies.

Over the last 10 years, the landscapes of science and diplomacy have changed significantly due to rapid technological developments, the securitization of STI policies, an increasingly multipolar world, and a multitude of actors in global governance. Science and technology are increasingly recognized as drivers of economic growth and tools of soft power, with their role in diplomacy and national security becoming more prominent. Inequality within and between nations is also partly driven by the capacity to engage and derive benefits from science. Growing populism, nationalism and misinformation, combined with numerous ongoing conflicts, have led to greater tension within and between nations and has had repercussions for both scientific collaboration and multilateralism.

There is a growing diversity of voices in diplomacy including more non-state and subnational actors, such as cities, regional governments and corporations. More scientists are entering diplomatic roles and some ministries of foreign affairs are starting to appoint science advisers. Diplomatic roles are evolving, with the roles and profiles of science attachés and advisers in diplomacy expanding to reflect new global priorities. The role of scientific diaspora is increasingly being acknowledged as pivotal in fostering connections and economic development for nations.

2. The ISC's unique role and value added in science diplomacy

The ISC has a long and rich history of engagement in science diplomacy including through its predecessor organizations, in promoting international collaboration, exchange and mobility; defending academic

freedom and the responsible conduct of science; advocating for science to inform diplomatic negotiations and decision-making and delivering scientific advice in diplomatic fora; enhancing the protection and good governance of global commons (e.g. ocean, atmosphere, biodiversity, outer space, polar regions); and anticipating and building the scientific base on issues that have global development and security implications.

The ISC's strength lies in its ability to act as a non-partisan global platform, leveraging scientific expertise from its diverse membership, to facilitate international dialogue across different disciplines, sectors, geographical and geostrategic borders on global issues.

The ISC's work in science diplomacy should focus on the following key aspects:

a. Fostering equitable dialogue on issues of global concern

The ISC can play a major role in promoting inclusive and equitable conversations on global issues to foster knowledge sharing, support shared understanding of the issues requiring global collective action and helping to reduce knowledge asymmetries that can hamper the ability of countries to participate in and influence global governance. This is particularly acute around new and emerging issues (e.g. disruptive technologies and the rapid changes and new risks related to the global commons).

By leveraging its relationships with multilateral organizations, fostering relationships with the diplomatic community (foreign ministries, permanent missions), and drawing on the full breadth of expertise of its Members, the ISC can proactively foster open and inclusive dialogue on global issues.

b. Fostering international scientific collaboration and equity in science

The ISC can play a pivotal role in promoting openness, inclusivity and equity in science given unequal scientific capacities and opportunities between countries, and given that competing geostrategic interests or tensions translate into heightened concerns over research security, undermining international scientific collaboration and science as a global public good. The ISC can advocate for equitable access to scientific collaboration and data sharing while working to minimize misuse or politicization of research in a way that prioritizes equity, transparency, and fairness.

The ISC can also facilitate international dialogue and support for at-risk, displaced and refugee scientists and for science systems, institutions and infrastructure in times of crisis (conflicts, natural, technological and other disasters and humanitarian emergencies). It can facilitate the engagement of displaced scientists and scientific diasporas in international science enhancing the resilience of science systems.

c. Encouraging responsible governance of disruptive technologies and the protection of the global commons

The ISC can promote the ethical governance of emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence, synthetic biology, and geoengineering. By leveraging its global reach and expertise, the ISC can facilitate multilateral dialogues to address gaps in governance and support the development of regulatory frameworks to ensure that developments in science and technology support equitable sustainable development and minimize risks of misuse or unintended negative consequences.

Additionally, the ISC plays a crucial role in safeguarding the global commons, such as the atmosphere, oceans and polar regions, by stimulating research and scientific cooperation and promoting peace,

security, equitable access and responsible use.

By mobilizing the breadth and depth of its members' expertise, it can play a major role by anticipating and building the scientific base on issues of global concern.

d. Strengthening science-policy interfaces and providing science advice to inform decision-making

The ISC can serve as a trusted scientific advisor to multilateral organizations and coalition of actors by providing multidisciplinary scientific inputs into international discussions and negotiations ensuring that diverse perspectives are represented in developing shared understanding and shaping solutions to critical global issues. The ISC also contributes to the creation and implementation of mechanisms of scientific advice given its experience in organizing scientific advice at the international level.

In this regard, the ISC can draw on its multiple partnerships with multilateral organizations and enhance the capacity of its members to navigate science-policy interfaces and engagement in science diplomacy.

3. Conclusion

In summary, the ISC's unique value proposition in science diplomacy lies in its ability to provide non-partisan, inclusive and reliable leadership. It can remain flexible and responsive to emerging issues, ensuring that its approach to diplomacy aligns with the changing needs of the global scientific community while maintaining impartiality and inclusivity. By fostering collaboration, mobilizing resources, and advocating for science-based solutions, the ISC can pave the way for a future where science diplomacy plays a central role in addressing global challenges and building a sustainable world. The ISC bridges disciplines, regions, and knowledge systems, positioning itself as a hub for inclusive, global science diplomacy.