

Egypt's president 'to link science to society'

But researchers call for reform to the country's funding system.

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Egypt's newly elected president, Mohamed Morsi, has ambitious plans for science and is committed to linking research to local needs and boosting private sector science funding, officials say.

"Morsi's main strategy is to 'localise' science," Mohamed Sharef, deputy director of the Education and Scientific Research Committee at the Egyptian parliament's lower house, and a member of the Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated Freedom and Justice Party (FJP), told SciDev.Net.

This will require engaging researchers in solving public problems and linking science closely to the needs of local industry.

Sharef added that President Morsi, who is a member of both the Muslim Brotherhood and FJP and holds a PhD in engineering from the University of Southern California, will be working on a national strategy to develop mechanisms to support innovation dealing with community issues.

He will also work towards boosting private sector investment in research, so that, within a decade, the private sector would provide 40 per cent of Egypt's science funding.

Maged El-Sherbiny, president of the governmental Academy of Scientific Research and Technology, told SciDev.Net that Morsi had promised to improve the state of Egyptian hygiene, traffic, and food security during his first 100 days as president.

He added that in order to achieve the promised improvements, any increase in the budget for scientific research should be directed towards these three topics, generating positive change for citizens.

Ahmed Khorshid, former president of the Food Technology Research Institute at the Egyptian Ministry of Agriculture and Land Reclamation, told SciDev.Net that 80 per cent of Egyptian research was unrelated to social problems and that "this should be changed quickly".

He said that clear research priorities should be set up to ensure that increases in science funding — for example, science funding was raised from US\$83 million last year to around US\$216 million this year (about one per cent of Egypt's gross domestic product) — are well used.

But Alaa Idris, chairman of the scientific research committee of the science-supporting foundation Misr El-Kheir, said that "doubling the budget for scientific research without changing the laws governing the system of innovation makes this money worthless".



Jonathan Rashad

Scientists say that Mohamed Morsi must reform Egypt's science funding system.



regulations for allocating research project funding were too slow and bureaucratic. "Before increasing budgets, the laws and regulations blocking the arteries that transmit funds for scientific research should be changed," he said.

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Another issue is the lack of regulation covering intellectual property rights, which discourages the private sector from channelling funds towards innovation and inventions, according to Idris.

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