

Islamic nations are 'failing on R&D links and funding'

Lack of investment threatens science in Organisation of Islamic Cooperation countries.

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Islamic countries are failing to cooperate on key development issues and to invest enough in research to drive their development in the face of the global economic downturn, a conference of the Islamic World Academy of Sciences heard in Dhaka, Bangladesh, last week (5–9 May).

Speakers said that, despite having sufficient funds, Islamic states continue to spend less than the world average on research and development, posing difficulties for the development of their science, technology and innovation sectors.

"Not only are Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) countries spending below the world average on R&D, but there also seems to be a clog in [ensuring the money reaches] the research system when resources are available," Moneef R. Zou'bi, director general of the academy, told *SciDev.Net*.

Agreements made at previous academy meetings to increase funding and boost collaboration have failed to result in effective changes, he said.

"Collaboration in science and technology at the national, regional as well as the OIC level has been lacking," Zou'bi said, with individual OIC researchers seeming to be more active in their individual capacity than their institutions in this area.

If previously agreed collaborations among OIC countries had been implemented, Zou'bi said, "we would have definitely been better off in the domain of water and food security, as well as in the area of solar energy".

The participants strongly recommended that OIC member states spend at least one per cent of GDP (gross domestic product) on research and development related to future challenges, focusing especially on food, water, energy, health and climate change.

Nagih El Rawi, a member of the Iraqi Academy of Sciences, also highlighted the need for greater research collaboration on these issues.

"We recommended more attention on science, technology and innovation because they are the only means of advancement in the modern world," he told *SciDev.Net*.

Abdallah Daar, professor of public health sciences and of surgery at the University of Toronto, Canada, told *SciDev.Net* that university-

based research should be directed not only at increasing humanity's pool of knowledge, but also at developing products and services that can increase national wealth.



With the financial crisis bringing sharp falls in trade, foreign investment and access to international financing in the OIC countries, science, technology and innovation will make a vital contribution to sustainable and lasting recovery and to the longer-term growth prospects of most economies, the conference heard.

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More than 200 scientists, policymakers and academicians attended the conference, which was organised by the Islamic academy, the Bangladeshi government, the University Grants Commission of Bangladesh, and the Bangladesh Academy of Sciences.

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