



Remarks by Sir Peter Gluckman at the opening plenary session of the European Union Global Challenges and Global Collaboration Conference

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Everyone agrees that science and its application are central to economic, human and environmental developments. But equally, science-driven technology creates challenges in itself. What will be the impact of synthetic biology or geo-engineering – technologies that if implemented will have transnational implications from the outset?

So much science crosses national boundaries and interests – the question is what science needs to be coordinated across boundaries, and how. It has been relatively easy for defined, big infrastructure projects like CERN and even virtual ones like the human genome project, but what is the role of formal international science coordination in more diffuse areas like climate change or chronic disease? Is it sufficient to leave it to the capricious place of the science funding marketplace that remains largely intra-jurisdictional?

One new model was led by NZ – the global research alliance on agricultural greenhouse gases that now has over 30 countries, both developed and developing, working together on research to mitigate emissions associated with agriculture. It started with simply getting the scientists to stock-take their activities then finding the gaps, and for largely within-jurisdiction funding, but now some countries and particularly NZ are leading the way by opening funds up to trans-jurisdictional collaboration.

But trans-national research has many problems: those of multiple assessment jeopardy, those of who sets the agenda, those of research being used as a way of projecting soft power, those of ensuring standards are equivalent and so forth.

There are also very diverse ways in which knowledge is incorporated into policy, as policy always has strong values components and this too creates trans-national inconsistencies affecting science. Finally – and not trivially as science is a tool of economic growth – there are tensions in how open access and collaborative research is captured for economic benefit. National perspectives on the open access question may differ significantly.

These are all complex questions requiring dialogue about science and policy at a high level and at a global level. It is the one area of major global importance where the quality of global discourse is limited. I applaud the EC in opening this conversation to a broad range of perspectives.

There are several initiatives that have started to address these issues such as the Global Science Forum. One that may be a particularly important initiative is by the International Science Council or ICSU which is the most globally representative science structure and is planning to host in August 2014 a meeting of science advisors like myself or equivalents who work at the interface between science and policy to think about some of these issues.

Thank you.

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