

TWAS Science Diplomacy Alumni Review Meeting

Thilinakumari Kandanamulla*
Scientific Officer
National Science Foundation, Sri Lanka

The World Academy of Sciences (TWAS) organized its first Science Diplomacy Alumni Review Meeting from 9 to 12 November 2020 on a virtual platform. Thirty participants, mostly from developing countries, attended this meeting. It provided an opportunity to assess the impact of the Science Diplomacy training provided by TWAS so far and to discuss new ideas and strategies to enhance the content and extend the reach of future Science Diplomacy programmes. Based on the inputs provided, a new plan of action for 2022-2026 will be prepared.

The participants were selected based on their responses to the TWAS Alumni Evaluation Survey. The feedback provided by 93 of the 300 alumni revealed profound insight on the impact of Science Diplomacy events organized by TWAS had on the participants and helped in raising Awareness, Capacity and Action in this field. Sena Galazzi (Associate Programme Officer, TWAS) presented a detailed summary of the survey responses.

There were presentations on regional perspectives of Science Diplomacy conducted by alumni from several global regions. Dr Fátima Antonethe Castaneda Mena (UNESCO Chair on CON-E-ECT, Guatemala), Dr Jauad El Kharraz (MEDRC, Oman), Dr Monika Jaggi (CSIR-NISCAIR, India) and Dr Stanley Maphosa (ASSAf, South Africa) provided an overview of the science diplomacy efforts being taken in their respective geographic regions, Latin America and the Caribbean, Middle East, Asia and Africa, respectively.

The TWAS Science Diplomacy Programme aimed, among other things, to deliver training to produce ‘science diplomats’ (scientists and policymakers) who are aware of their roles in advancing science in their countries and how to use science to benefit their societies. It strived to foster linkages between scientists and policymakers and using scientific input and advice to shape policies. A Theory of Change (ToC) model was applied to assess the impact of the Science Diplomacy programmes by TWAS (Fig. 1).

Ann-Murray Brown, Monitoring and Evaluation Consultant, shared the theory behind this concept with the participants during the second day. The ToC model has been conceived in the framework of sustainability. The model develops in terms of Input and Strategies, Outcomes (measurable through Indicators for Awareness/ Capacity/ Action) and the Change/ Impact (the long-term change is viewed as a world where researchers and policymakers work together for sustainable development, as captured through the Sustainable Development Goals).

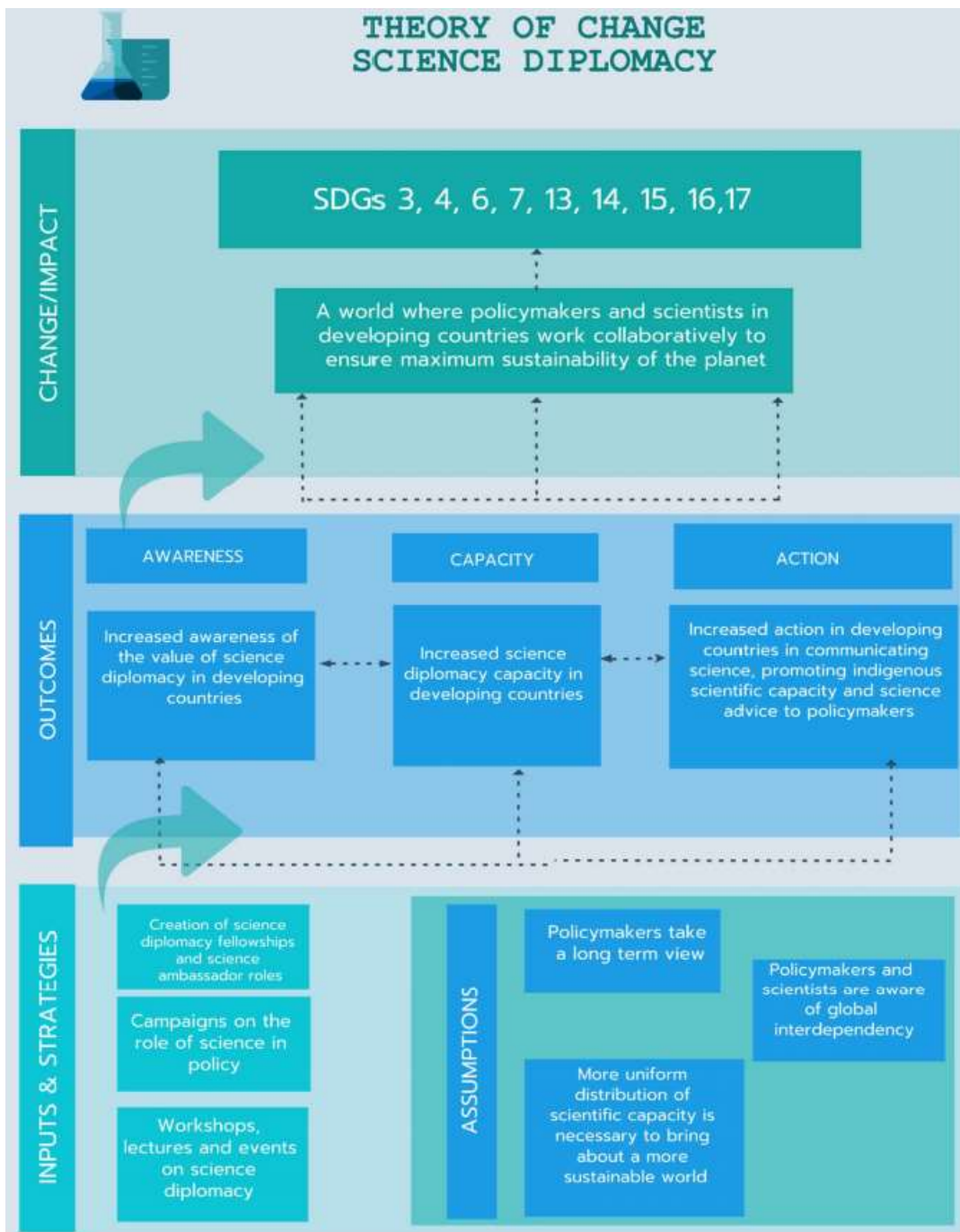
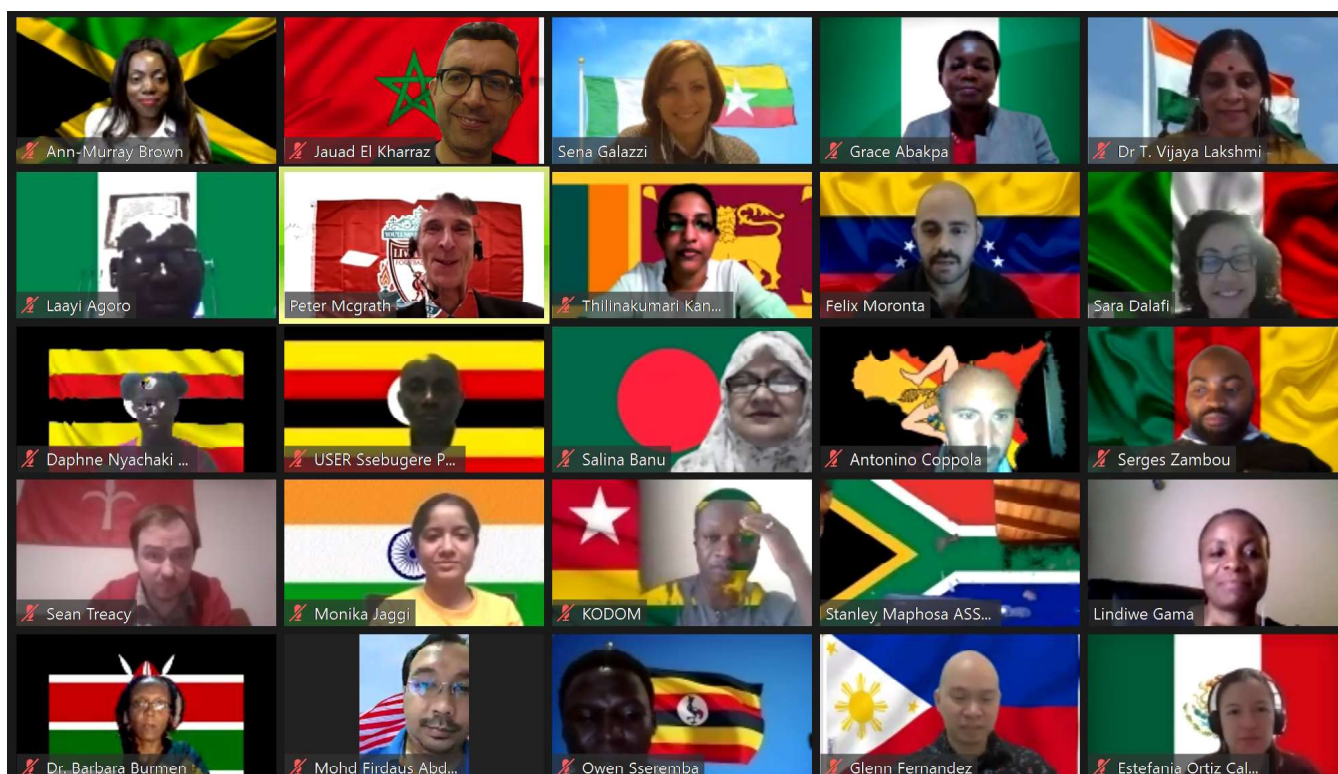


Figure 1. Theory of Change (ToC) model of Science Diplomacy.
Credit: TWAS and Ann-Murray Brown.

Following the introduction to the ToC model, six presentations were made by selected alumni on their personal experiences in Science Diplomacy. Dr Felix G. Moronta Barrios (ICGEB, Italy), Ms Thilinakumari Kandanamulla (NSF, Sri Lanka), Dr Mohd Firdaus Abdul-Wahab (UTM, Malaysia), Dr Grace Onyukwo Abakpa (NABDA, Nigeria), Dr Tomkouani Kodom (Université de Lomé, Togo), and Dr Barbara Burmen (KEMRI, Kenya) shared their journeys as scientists, science administrators, research administrators, etc. and offered precise insights on the impact of the TWAS Science Diplomacy Programmes that strengthened their knowledge in this fast-emerging area.



The third and fourth day of the meeting had breakout sessions aimed at designing a new five-year programme according to the ToC model and fostering evidence-driven policies that ensure health, well-being and gender equality in developing and least developed countries. The participants shared their inputs on designing an alumni network (scope, structure, etc.) for the TWAS Science Diplomacy programme attendees. Each breakout group presented its views on keeping, modifying and discarding the existing elements of the TWAS Science Diplomacy programme and what new elements can be added in the future training programmes. The group work, which led to extensive discussions between alumni, was presented during the final day of the meeting.

Presentations on alumni networks were made by Prof. Yin Li (Institute of Microbiology, Chinese Academy of Sciences, China) and Dr Atiya Mosam (PRICELESS SA, South Africa) during the third day of the meeting about the TWAS Young Affiliates Network (TYAN) and the IAP Young Physician Leaders (YPL) networks, respectively.

The flash training on ‘Digital Science Diplomacy Communications: Creatively Tweeting Your Research GIF’ conducted by Mr Giovanni Ortolani, IAP Communications Assistant, was an interesting item of this meeting which was thoroughly enjoyed by participants. GIF images created by the participants on various themes were tweeted and retweeted as a part of Science Diplomacy Twitter Storm during the last day of the meeting.

The Chat function was very active and the discussions were lively throughout the meeting, which provided a virtual space for attendees to network and to share their views with fellow participants. The inputs during the meeting would be utilized for future planning of a new Science Diplomacy Programme by TWAS.

*The author is the alumna of TWAS Science Diplomacy Training Workshop (2017) and participant of the TWAS Science Diplomacy Alumni Review Meeting (2020).