Public scrutiny of the public purse

There is growing awareness that science financed by the public purse should be subject to public scrutiny. This mandate falls to advisory councils. However, many of these bodies are run, wholly or partly, by the government. This concentration of science governance is typical of Latin America, where the same organization may be in charge of both policy-making and policy implementation and even of strategic priority-setting.

In other developments, two new science ministries were established in Chile and Colombia in 2019. These have absorbed the countries’ previous agencies, namely, Chile’s National Commission for Scientific and Technology Research (CONICYT) and Colombia’s Administrative Department of Science, Technology and Innovation (Colciencias).

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AGENDA

Countries at different stages of preparedness

The United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC, 2019) has warned that the world is not on track to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

In 2016, the Forum of the Countries of Latin America and the Caribbean on Sustainable Development was established to review implementation of The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Since its inception, the forum has produced several reviews. In Colombia, the Green Book 2030 (Colciencias, 2019) contains the explicit objective of attaining the SDGs by 2030. For its part, Brazil’s National Strategy for Science, Technology and Innovation 2016–2022 sets out to ‘strengthen the foundations’ of society for sustainable development.

Bolivia, Chile, Costa Rica and Panama make no explicit reference to the SDGs in their strategies but these do emphasize relevant social goals such as better health, energy efficiency or poverty alleviation. Guatemala (UNESCO, 2017) and Mexico, meanwhile, are in the process of adapting their own development plans to the SDGs framework. Mexico presented its National Strategy for Implementation of the 2030 Agenda in December 2019; this includes a set of projects at the federal and state levels to attract investment and mobilize resources for sustainable development, as well as the design of sectoral projects, training opportunities and legislative changes.

Gradual convergence of different knowledge systems

A World Bank study (2015) estimates that 42 million Latin Americans are indigenous, representing 7.8% of the region’s population. The five countries with the highest percentage are Bolivia (41%), Guatemala (41%), Peru (26%), Mexico (15%) and Panama (12%).

Indigenous and local knowledge has been integrated in the STI policies of some countries, including Bolivia,