



BOSTON 2008

## Annual Meeting Explores Cooperation, Competition in Global Science Efforts

**BOSTON**—AIDS is still the number one cause of death in Africa and seventh largest cause of death worldwide, but recent success in fighting the epidemic is a hopeful sign that cooperation between scientists and policy-makers can address problems like HIV/AIDS on a global scale, according to experts at the 2008 AAAS Annual Meeting.

Competitively priced antiretroviral drugs from new production centers in places like India, along with the work of international collaborations to distribute those drugs, have expanded HIV treatment significantly in the developing world, said AAAS Chair David Baltimore, the panel's moderator. Today, more than 3 million HIV/AIDS patients in the developing world receive antiretroviral medications, compared to 200,000 patients in 2001.

The complex mix of national competition and international cooperation that defines the response to the HIV/AIDS crisis is indicative of how science is practiced around the world, Baltimore suggested in his presidential address to open the Boston meeting. Under the banner "Science and Technology from a Global Perspective," the meeting brought leading scientists, engineers, educators, and policy-makers from 56 countries together to discuss how the twin themes affect cutting-edge research in ocean pollution, nuclear smuggling, climate change, and science education.

International cooperation has been a tremendous benefit to infectious disease researchers, particularly those working on HIV/AIDS. Plenary speaker Jim Yong Kim, director of the Francois Xavier Bagnoud Center for Health and Human Rights at the Harvard School of Public Health, called the response to the AIDS epidemic "the first time in history that the wealthiest, most powerful people have committed to chronic care for chronic conditions to the poorest people on earth."

But Kim and the other speakers in the global health panel said scientists need to do more to bring the best HIV care into communities. And at a breakfast for journalists on the first day of the meeting, Baltimore said scientists were "not any closer than we were in the 1980s" to developing an HIV vaccine—a startling comment to many of the reporters. The insight will "inform my future coverage of AIDS," said Clive Cookson, science editor of the *Financial Times*.



(L-R) Jim Yong Kim and David Baltimore

In several sessions, participants discussed whether international cooperation might undermine individual countries' efforts to train and retain members of the S&T workforce. In a typical lecture on American-European science cooperation, the speakers acknowledged fierce competition between nations to lure scientists from the developing world and research-based businesses such as pharmaceutical companies. But global science "need not be thought of as an arms race," since countries tend to benefit as much from multinational research projects as they do from national projects, said Shirley Ann Jackson, president of Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute and a past president of AAAS.

Rwanda is one developing country that hopes to strengthen its economy through S&T investment and international cooperation. Rwandan President Paul Kagame, who shared the meeting's opening plenary with Baltimore, said his government plans to spend 5% of its gross domestic product on science and technology capacity by 2012. Repeating a request made last fall when Baltimore visited Rwanda, Kagame asked for help from AAAS's network of scientists in rebuilding his country's research capacity.

"We're absolutely committed to working together with [Kagame]," said AAAS CEO Alan I. Leshner in an interview with Robert Frederick, the host of *Science* Podcast. "Anybody who shows that level of dedication and commitment to the application of science for the advancement of a very poor country deserves our collaboration."

Boston's mix of high-profile scientists and policy leaders like Kagame impressed journalists like *Ars Technica* Science Editor John Timmer. "It was like a Davos meeting filled with people who tell the actual Davos attendees what's important," he wrote in his blog.

Indeed, a number of those who attended the Boston meeting were veterans of the 2008 Davos World Economic Forum, where the issue of climate change was discussed prominently. In their AAAS plenary speeches, Davos participants Nina Fedoroff, science and technology adviser to the U.S. Secretary of State, and Judith Rodin, president of the Rockefeller Foundation, urged scientists to become more involved in solutions that address the unequal burden of climate change around the world.

—Becky Ham

INTERNATIONAL

## AAAS Strengthens S&T Ties with Vietnam

A new agreement between AAAS and Vietnam's National Institute for Science and Technology Policy and Strategy Studies strengthens AAAS's ties with the science and technology leaders of one of Asia's most dynamic economies while supporting further innovation in Vietnam through the promotion of science and scientists.

The memorandum of understanding, signed at AAAS Headquarters on 27 February, follows more than 2 years of high-level conferences and visits between AAAS officials and their Vietnamese counterparts. It formalizes the Association's plans to "collaborate in the advancement of science, technology, and innovation policy and studies," and to pursue joint activities.

AAAS Chief International Officer Vaughan Turekian signed the agreement along with Tran Ngoc Ca, the National Institute's vice director. Turekian said the presence of more than 30 Vietnamese officials at the signing was "a real indication of the depth and breadth of the relationship" between the United States and Vietnam on S&T issues.

Tran Quoc Thang, Vietnam's vice minister for science and technology, said the cooperative agreement will help "to contribute to our friendship between two nations."

One of the first projects under the new agreement will be a symposium planned by AAAS under the auspices of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum, to be hosted by Vietnam and co-sponsored by the governments of China, New Zealand, and the United States this fall. The symposium will focus on R&D priorities and developing public-private partnerships among APEC's 21 members.

—Ginger Pinholster and Earl Lane