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# Science museums and UNESCO join to meet SDGs



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**By: Luisa Massarani**

UNESCO and the US-based Association for Science and Technology Centers (ASTC) signed an agreement on 10 November to “use science centers and science museums as platforms to communicate sustainable goals (SDGs) through the

organisation of ad-hoc events on local, regional, and international levels”, during a meeting in UNESCO headquarters, as part of the commemorations of the first International Day for Science Centers and Museums (IDSCM).

The agreement also aims to enhance informal science, technology and math education (STEM) with hands-on, interactive exhibits, inquiry-based science education programs that advance STEM learning and innovative ways.

According to Flavia Schlegel, Assistant Director-General for the Natural Sciences at UNESCO, in the closing session, science centers are the crucial part of the puzzle to hook up children and their families in science.

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***Luisa Massarani, SciDev.Net***

Talking to Anthony F. (Bud) Rock, CEO of ASTC, he believes that this agreement will help to strengthen science centers among the UNESCO country members. “In return, we will try to address the SDGs every year, on the International Day for Science Centers and Museums”, he said.

As the head of RedPOP, the Latin American sister of ASTC and a professional of a hands-on science center in Brazil (Museum of Life), I welcome the initiative myself.

Science centers have been increasing around the world. In my own region, there has been an increase in their establishment since the 1990s. At least 470 science centers were identified in the last survey conducted by RedPOP – although keeping them alive every year is still a big challenge due to budget constraints.

Most of the science centers are in bigger cities and many countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as in other parts of the developing world – particularly in Africa, still have too few initiatives. We need to persuade

policymakers to build and maintain more science centers around the world, which can also reach the rural areas, for example through itinerant exhibitions and activities.

***Due to this international effort, about 300 science centers around the world participated in the IDSCM. The agreement can only succeed if UNESCO engages meaningfully with other networks around the world in this initiative.***

***Luisa Massarani, SciDev.Net***

Elizabeth Rasekoala, President of African Gong, the African network for science communication, argued at the event that many science centers are Eurocentric. “We need to think about the developing world context and the needs of the developing world”.

Razekoala is right. There are good examples of science centers that have been doing a good job in engaging people in the developing world. But we need to do more. If we want to make a difference through science centers, we need to create strategies to make them even more relevant for the developing world. They should be a culturally accessible space for dialogue and for public participation on science issues that impact peoples' lives.

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The plan is to make IDSCM an annual event. It was organised on the occasion of the World Science Day for Peace and Development by UNESCO, ASTC (United States), International Council of Museums (ICOM) and the regional networks

RedPOP (Latin America), ASPAC (Asia Pacific), Ecsite (Europe), SAASTEC (Southern Africa), and Names (North Africa and Middle East).

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*This piece was produced by our Latin America and Caribbean edition.*

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