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[Home](#) > [Science & Innovation Policy](#) > [Science networks](#) > [News](#)

SCIENCE & INNOVATION POLICY: SCIENCE NETWORKS

NEWS

Physics for development movement 'needs a strategy'

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[BRUSSELS] The emerging global 'physics for development' movement needs a common strategy to define the field, a conference has heard. This would enable practitioners to work towards common goals of improving physics education and [research](#), with a view to using results in development.

The importance of such a strategy emerged at the First European Physical Society (EPS) Conference on Physics for Development in Brussels, Belgium, last week (11–12 October).

Carlo Iorio — conference co-organiser, deputy chairman of the EPS Physics for Development group, and a physicist at the Université Libre de Bruxelles, Belgium — said the conference aimed to establish [networks](#) for providing low-cost, locally-produced equipment for physics teaching and research. It also hoped to facilitate North-South research fellowships to reduce [brain drain](#) issues in the global South.

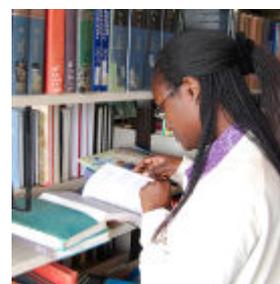
Another goal was to create an exchange hub, bringing together organisations and academics to motivate "good students to be there for the development of the country", said Iorio.

But it has emerged that EPS conference participants lack a common definition for the 'physics for development' slogan.

Different researchers have "different interpretations" of the slogan, said Elena Sassi, a researcher at the University of Naples Federico II, Italy, who works to build capacity amongst students at Gulu University, Uganda.

François Piuzzi — conference co-organiser and chairman of the EPS Physics for Development group — said that a way forward could include: building research networks based around specific projects; bringing together academics already working in this field; and setting up a website to host physics for development resources.

Physics has the potential to transform development in a range of areas, from medicine to water and sanitation. Examples cited during the conference included solar energy and medical equipment programmes in [Africa](#).



'Motivating good students' to embrace physics for development is a key goal
Flickr/ Book Aid International

Ernst van Groningen, programme director at Uppsala University's International Science Programme, in Sweden, said the EPS may need a strategic document similar to that [launched by the Astronomy for Development community](#) to say "what it is that [the] physics for development [community] wants to do."

But last week's meeting concluded with no such document.

Claus Madsen, senior advisor for international science policy at the European Southern Observatory, and 'Astronomy for the Developing World' strategy presenter at the EPS meeting, said that while the Astronomy for Development strategy was not a major shift in working practice it had successfully galvanised support for [astronomy](#) with the specific aim of fostering development.

One of the strategy's key motivations was to "see what's out there, what is working, and whether we can pull it together into some coherent system," Madsen said. Analyses of relevant data, such as on national [education](#) systems, "gave us a clear picture of what would be realistic in a certain region or country," he added.

While this methodology could be applicable to physics — "which can lay claim to supporting development in a much wider and stronger sense than astronomy can" — physics may have a harder time matching the astronomy community's key asset: the quality of being inspirational.

Physics is also a wider, less tightly-knit community than astronomy — factors which could also hamper the development of a shared 'physics for development' strategy.

Participants agreed to hold a second conference, possibly under the auspices of the Abdus Salam International Centre for Theoretical Physics (ICTP) in Trieste, Italy, at one of ICTP's Physware workshops for tertiary physics education in developing countries. At this second conference, participants would agree a regular, biennial meeting, with the third conference earmarked to be held in [Africa](#).

lorio added that an EPS-sponsored conference in December 2013 in Cameroon would also help contribute to driving the agenda forward and delegates were also invited to forthcoming meetings of the African Physical Society, where similar themes would be on the agenda, according to its vice-president Paul Wofo.

The EPS conference was attended by delegates mainly from Africa and Europe, but also from [Latin America](#) and [South Asia](#).

<http://www.scidev.net/en/science-and-innovation-policy/science-networks/news/physics-for-development-movement-needs-a-strategy--2.html>

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