Multilateral

The third major category is that of the multilateral or association of more than two participants. It is the category which has grown most since 1945 because the advance of science during and after the Second World War created new needs for closer cooperation by means of new institutional arrangements. Between 1945 and 1955, 58 new non-governmental and intergovernmental scientific organizations were created giving by 1976 an overall total of at least 300 international organizations concerned with science. A 1979 UNESCO study presents an illustrative list of 55 multilateral S&T organizations operating in the European and North American regions alone.

In the non-governmental sphere the multilateral category of international collaboration in S&T is illustrated by such major societies as the World Federation of Engineering Organizations, the International Council of Medical Sciences and the International Council of Scientific Unions (ICSU). The latter represents 18 scientific unions and 68 nations and has as its main objective the international coordination of their activities. It also acts as the main link between the national scientific unions and the United Nations and its specialized agencies.

A characteristic of intergovernmental multilateral activities is the number of specialized S&T elements existing within larger organizations having wider than just scientific or technical objectives. These differ in scope (world, regional), in thrust (military, development assistance), and in function (research performer, funder). Within the United Nations for instance, are found amongst others the Food and Agricultural Organization, World Health Organization and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. None of these has its own research establishment but rather provides such services as organizing international conferences and subsidizing scientific work, institutions and research establishments. The UN's World organizations are reflected at the regional level by the special advisor groups and subsidiary bodies of the six UN regional economic commissions.

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development has several different functional types of S&T body. The Committee for Science and Technology Policy, as its name implies, is largely concerned with studies and exchanges of experience regarding national S&T policies. The International Energy Agency, on the other hand, acts as a focus for actual multilateral research projects carried out jointly by scientific establishments of member countries.