

One of the indicators that allows for highlighting the importance of research in every country is the investment made in terms of their Gross Domestic Product (GDP) year after year. In countries such as the United States, Germany or the United Kingdom, the percentage of GDP invested to this area varies between 1.3 and 2.1 per cent; in Japan, Korea and China there are values between 0.8 and 1.1; while in our region Brazil has achieved values close to 1.0 per cent. It is important to clarify that those values are included among the contributions made by the private sector, or others such as defense and security, which contribute with an even higher percentage in some parts of the world.

In Colombia, up to 2009 the percentage of GDP destined to research did not exceed 0.05 per cent. In 2010, Consejo Asesor de Regalías approved Agreement 029 to fund research projects in Science, Technology and Innovation (CTI; initials in Spanish) with available resources in Fondo Nacional de Regalías. This new source of means for research that started its operations in 2012 is equivalent to, by constitutional command, ten per cent (10%) of the resources that the State receives from exploitation of non-renewable natural resources, which has allowed for increasing significantly the available resources for research.

This Fund for Science, Technology and Innovation from the Sistema General de Regalías is independent of the General State Budget, as well as from the General Participation System; and does not depend on COLCIENCIAS or any other institution. On the contrary, it is part of a new scheme in which decisions on investment are made between territorial governments, universities representatives and the National Government through the Órganos Colegiados de Administración y Decisión (OCAD).

Their missionary goal is to make the most of the incomes arising from the exploitation of non-renewable resources, found in the regions and that will be used up as time goes by, to build in those regions themselves capacities for the future and, in this way, encourage a model of development based in knowledge and innovation, which guarantees sustainable growing and contributes to the prosperity of the entire population. The resources are distributed between all the departments, based on the indicators of population dissatisfied basic needs and poverty, as established by the Legislative Act 05, 2011.

Although the resources from this Fund are kept in an account ran by the Ministerio de Hacienda y Crédito Público, once OCAD approves a program or project, the money must be transferred to the project executant appointed by the corresponding OCAD. The projects that can be funded through this means have several determining factors such as:

All projects subject to funding shall be oriented towards regional development and the strengthening of the territorial institutions, as well as it is noted in Article 28, Law 1286, 2009.

Basic applied research and experimental development projects shall be funded, as well as technological and social innovation projects.

Creation and strengthening of regional research units shall be supported, as well as research and technological development centers, science and technological parks, technology based incubators, among others.

Part of the regional programs for the formation of human talent shall be intended for research, innovation and management of CTI.

Colciencias, as rector entity of the CTI sector, shall be in charge of making viable these projects, previous presentation for approval by Consejo Asesor de Regalías.

The agreement points out the criteria for viability and eligibility, as well as the minimum requirements that territorial entities must accomplish in order to present these projects, which must include indicators of research and development, innovation, scientific and technological formation and training, and scientific and technological services.

This outlook has opened a new possibility for the development of research capacities in universities and technology development centers in the country, but it implies that research must be oriented to the search of solutions for the problems and necessities of the regions and, therefore, they can have a high social content. In a concrete way, the research units and groups in our faculties, associated to the extension units, have a possible source of funding and means that shall be explored through the search of strategic alliance with territorial entities, NGO's, ethnic minorities, for the improvement of their quality of life conditions.

However, and in correspondence with this, our University must generate the necessary conditions and adjustments to make viable and functional these alliances, regarding the creation of a research fund that does not depend on the university main budget, the decentralization in the decision-making processes, requests and procedures, administration and management of resources coming through this way, in addition to vigilance and internal control.

César Augusto García-Ubaque
Director