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Opinion – I'm Science: Elections 2022 and the funding of Science

It is worth repeating: Much of Brazilian science is carried out in universities and public research institutes, that is, they depend on public resources to produce studies and enhance the country's development. And this fact is not unique to Brazil. In most developed countries, the state does the same.

Despite this, the last 3 years were hard for these institutions, hit by cuts in resources that took investment to levels of 15 years ago. Even with the enormous challenge of the pandemic and the demonstration of the value that science has for the country, the setback we are experiencing is dramatic.

As we do not know exactly the size of the cut of resources and where those that should be applied in Science were destined (and were not), the Center for Studies Society, University and Science (SoU_Ciência), has carried out a detailed survey of the data.

The unpublished information will be presented in a few weeks, both in a seminar being promoted by the center with the support of Folha de S. Paulo, as well as in a panel to be presented in partnership with the Serrapilheira Institute.

In these spaces, the budget losses of universities and federal institutes will be demonstrated, as well as losses in resources from CAPES, CNPq and Finep – the main federal agencies for funding science in the country.

Brazilian society needs to know the size of the underfunding suffered in 2019 and 2020, even in the face of the demands brought about by the pandemic. And to recognize the efforts of the scientific community to respond to the necessary demands even in such an adverse context.

Brazilian science quickly articulated and brought advances in vaccine studies, new diagnostic methods, new treatments, new materials, among so many public goods. It was also during this period that the sector entities worked with the National Congress for the approval of Law 177/2021.

The law in question, which deals with the Liberation of the National Fund for Scientific and Technological Development (FNDCT), brought great hope to the suffering academic community. This fund, created in 1969, is made up of collections that aim to promote scientific and technological research and development.

Which, as we know, hasn't been happening for a few years, as resources have been frozen.

As if the lack of funding in the entire area were not enough, two articles of Law 177/2021, which would guarantee the transfer of resources, were vetoed by President Jair Bolsonaro. Despite this offensive, the Chamber of Deputies overrode the vetoes, reaffirming the importance of science.

Insistently, the Bolsonaro government, still in 2021 and in the midst of the pandemic, resorted to a maneuver of the Budget Guidelines Law (LDO) of 2021, which again caused resources to be stuck or contingeted again. We cannot forget that we ended last year still under the impact of the coronavirus, threatened by dismantling, lack of resources and lack of scholarships.

Already the year 2022 brought the news that the FNDCT resources will be released (if no surprises occur). These are on the order of R$ 9 billion, of which only a part will be applied directly to the research. The other will be available for loans to companies that develop technologies. Traditionally, these loan resources have not been used because they are not attractive to the sector.

If, on the one hand, there will be a dose of oxygen for the Science and Technology sector due to the release of the FNDCT, the result of years of daily struggles and tragedies, it will not be possible to despise the harmful effects of the dismantling undertaken in recent years. There are countless laboratories that need maintenance, infrastructures that need renovations, many of which are at risk of fire or collapse, obsolete libraries, equipment stopped due to lack of repairs or supplies for its operation.

There are hundreds of researchers without funds for funding, students without scholarships or with very low values ??for subsistence, in addition to many moving to other areas or even leaving the country to work in other research centers around the world.

The consequences will be enormous and the setback will be felt even more in the coming years. That is why it is so important to know what needs to be recovered, based on a priority plan that recovers installed capacity before it is lost.

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Therefore, it is necessary to present data and proposals clearly and to know which candidates in the next elections will really commit to science and, therefore, to the future nation.

We celebrate the release and achievement of the FNDCT, but science continues to agonize. It is necessary to recover what was lost and, at the same time, to resume social and economic progress through the strengthening of universities and research centers. This will be a great challenge, but Brazilian science will not shy away from facing it.

Despite the attacks and denialism promoted by the federal government, in the same period, trust in scientists grew by more than 40%, as did the population's interest in both science and politics.

Brazilian science saved lives and became a political agent. Candidates who respond to this call should have more support, as they will be closer to people's reality. It is now up to us to follow up on the proposals.

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