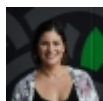


Science, In Service of Puerto Rico ^[1]

Submitted by Mónica Ivelisse Feliú-Mójer ^[2] on 24 January 2020 - 1:46pm



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Science benefits humanity through the development, application and exchange of knowledge. Through education, science encourages critical thinking and empowers.

That is why in Puerto Rico, and in many other parts of the world, much of scientific research is financed with taxpayers' money. Because, in other words, science is a public service.

And if there is something that has become crystal clear during the past month of earthquakes, it is that science is a public service that is essential for the welfare of Puerto Rico. During the past few weeks, Puerto Rican science has stepped up to the plate, big time. Despite budget cuts and being under constant threat, the Puerto Rico Seismic Network continues monitoring earthquakes, educating and informing the country. Its scientists work long hours collecting, analyzing, and interpreting geological data to protect lives. Experts and alumni of the Seismic Network have given dozens and dozens of interviews to local and international media.

Experts working at institutions in Puerto Rico and abroad have written newspaper articles, blogs, and opinion columns, and created videos and podcasts. Others have engaged with people on social media and even in public squares, answering questions, debunking myths, and appeasing concerns. Student groups have conducted science, technology, engineering and math activities to educate and entertain people of all ages in shelters and camps in the south of the island. Scientific organizations have collected donations, created educational campaigns and events.

But the reality is that Puerto Rican science has always been present and at the service of Puerto Rico. The scientific community has been saying for decades that it was necessary to prepare for a strong earthquake and update the country's public policy to improve infrastructure, security, and seismic awareness, among other things. Moreover, the scientific community has been saying for decades "we are here to help with all of that." I remember when shortly after the earthquake that devastated Haiti in 2010, several Puerto Rican scientists were invited to appear before the Senate of Puerto Rico to offer suggestions on how to improve earthquake public safety. What did legislators do with these recommendations? Nothing.

Every day — through my work with Ciencia Puerto Rico, the world's largest network of Puerto Rican scientists — I bear witness to the commitment of la ciencia boricua (Puerto Rican science) to public and civic service. I see a scientific community ready to continue putting its expertise at the service of the country; so that the archipelago is better prepared and informed about hurricanes, earthquakes, climate change and whatever else comes. Moreover, the scientific community is ready to inform and help forge an evidence-based public policy to help prevent political disasters like the ones that have hurt Puerto Rico after the natural disasters of the past three years. And that's the way it will continue to be: la ciencia boricua will always be ready to serve.

The author is a neurobiologist and science communication expert.

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