

Speech by Naledi Pandor MP, Minister of Science and Technology, Science Forum South Africa, CSIR, Pretoria, 8 December 2015, 9.00 am

The Department and Ministry of Science and Technology in South Africa are pleased to welcome all distinguished guests and delegates to the Science Forum South Africa.

All of you gathered here will agree that we have many events at which we discuss science and technology matters, however it is rare to hold a meeting in which we discuss the science we are doing on the continent.

This is the first time we organise such a forum in South Africa. We have taken the liberty of borrowing from ESOF and the STS Forum of Japan.

Our forum programme brings together over 1500 participants for discussion and debate in over 36 sessions. We hope the Forum will convince you Africa is engaged in science and technology and growing its capacity for research and innovation.

Our key motivation is to foster public engagement on science and technology, to showcase science in South Africa and to provide a platform for building strong African and global partnerships.

We have many more parallel sessions than originally planned; this is because we were overwhelmed by the very enthusiastic response from speakers, and institutions.

We are very pleased at the participation and presence of several international organisations and thank them for their support for the Forum.

Our primary rationale for this conference resides in our conviction that Science, Technology and Innovation can and must play a central role in achieving sustainable development.

Africa cannot advance without investing in science. At present, there are efforts to enhance the status of science and to increase investment in research development and innovation.

Unfortunately, science is still at the margins of government attention – seen as less significant than water scarcity, food security and disease burdens. Yet, all of these can be addressed through Science.

This Forum is not a platform for resolutions or declarations but we hope when the Forum closes on Wednesday you will leave determined to do least seven things.

First to call on your governments and institutions to invest in Science and Innovation in Africa.

Second, to devote increased attention to developing robust national systems of innovation.

We must have eco systems that allow a smooth flow and take up of creative ideas from knowledge generating institutions through to enterprises and industry. We need joint industry research, public private partnerships, technology diffusion and movement of human capital.

Third, communities must be informed about science and be encouraged to value the potential for development intrinsic to science, technology and innovation.

Fourth, we must seek out and secure flagship science initiatives such as the Square Kilometre Array (SKA) as such initiatives have the potential to support our training and production of the next generation of scientists and technologists in Africa. Scientists need iconic challenging initiatives that will respond to their search for new knowledge and innovative technology.

projects such as the SKA allow for robust government industry and university partnerships. For example, Cisco, IBM, the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University are already partners with the CSIR in various SKA initiatives.

Fifth, we should have increased investment in the health sciences as this will be a direct investment in improving the quality of life. Leaders on the continent have committed to creating an Africa that is more in control of its fate scientific discovery in the health sciences can advance these goals.

Sixth, much more must be done to foster African science collaboration as well as global collaboration. Funding must grow as must research partnerships. universities are key to this goal. we are excited at the early signs of progress, as shown by the formation in March 2015 of the African Research Universities Alliance in Senegal. this network of 15 higher education institutions from eight African countries is a positive start.

The Partnership for Africa`s Next Generation of Academics is another promising initiative. At the global level the opportunities

offered through the EU research initiatives such as the EDCTP, the programmes of the International Astronomical Association, the World Academy of Sciences. the International Council for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology are all useful platforms for collaboration.

Seventh, our youth must be encouraged to prize knowledge and its potential for attaining the development trajectory of Africa.

If we commit to these seven we will definitely achieve the lofty goals we have set out in our Agenda 2063 for Africa.

And of course, eighth is our wish to see you back here at our next Science Forum.

Thank you.