

## **Minister Pandor's speech at the 3<sup>rd</sup> DELTAS Africa Annual General Meeting**

Department of Higher Education and Training

Indaba Hotel, Johannesburg

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9 am

Dr Boitumelo Kgarepe, African Academy of Sciences Vice President for Southern African Region

Prof Nelson Torto, Executive Director, African Academy of Sciences

Prof Korraisha Abdul Kareem,

Dr Simon Kay, Director International Operations and Partnerships, Wellcome Trust, UK

Dr Eunice Muthengi, Senior Research Officer, DFID, Kenya

Prof Tawana Kupe, Acting Vice Chancellor, Wits University

Janet Byaruhanga, Senior Programme Officer, NEPAD Agency

Prof Abdallah Dar, Chair of AESA's Independent Scientific and Strategic Advisory Board

Prof Kevin Marsh, Senior Adviser, African Academy of Sciences

Elizabeth Marincola, Senior Adviser, African Academy of Sciences

All DELTAS Africa Programme Directors

An advert currently airing on South African television screens claims the first person, who will reach the age of 200 years, has already been born. I'm not sure whether we should rely on TV adverts for scientific truths, but it's unlikely that the person has been born in Africa. Generally life expectancy is lower in Africa, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa.

It's a fact that the poor in marginalized communities suffer most from poor health. Health research and health development is therefore an important social justice issue. Our research work must include a focus on how we can improve health outcomes for those that are most severely affected. It is vital that African governments invest in health research.

Diseases such as malaria, tuberculosis and HIV Aids still pose major health challenges on the African continent and it is correct that our research agenda is focused on building knowledge to limit and even eradicate these diseases in Africa.

Research in and for Africa is political. What is being researched, and who is doing the research matters. It matters for Africans. It matters that African scientists find solutions to African problems.

African-led research is coming into its own. It's taken time. But there are encouraging interventions by governments and by philanthropists.

For example, the €1.6 billion European and Developing Countries Clinical Trials Partnership (EDCTP) is being implemented from 2014-2024 as part of the European Framework Programme for Research and Innovation, Horizon 2020.

South Africa has enjoyed an active partnership with the EDCTP over many years. Cooperation under the EDCTP is truly one of the flagships of not only South Africa-EU but also Africa-EU cooperation.

One of the lessons we've learned from the EDCTP is the importance of African science leadership and African project co-ownership. It's now co-owned by African governments. This has enabled a greater African strategic input into the design and implementation of the programme. Not only has this approach built Africa's research and innovation capacities but it is also enhanced Africa's profile as a research partner for other continents.

But co-ownership also means co-investment. African countries are committed to and are increasing investment in research and innovation. Partnership frameworks such as the EDCTP create an opportunity for leveraging even greater returns on these investments.

Let me elaborate. Sub-Saharan Africa contributes about 2.3 per cent of world gross domestic product but is responsible for only 0.4 per cent of global expenditure in research and development (R&D). With 12 per cent of the world's population, it is home to only 1.1 per cent of the world's scientific researchers.

([Kevin Marsh](#): "Africa is home to 15% of the world's population and 5% of the world's gross domestic product (GDP) but accounts for just 1.3% of the globe's investment in research and development (R&D). It also holds only 0.1% of the world's patents, which leads us to question how effectively the existing research and development investment is being used.")

Now the African Academy of Sciences is part of this drive and is doing sterling work to build intra-Africa research and development partnerships. The Academy's Alliance for Accelerating Excellence in Science in Africa (AESA) manages the \$100 million Developing Excellence in Leadership, Training and Science (DELTAS Africa) Programme.

As the DELTAS Africa Programme reaches the mid-point of a first 5 year trajectory, and as you engage in a mid-term review, I am sure that you have many many questions over what more you can do to improve African-led health research.

I'm told that close to 1300 Master's, PhD and postdoctoral Fellows have been recruited in the three years of the programme.

This is an outstanding achievement and the research work that is being undertaken by this body of researchers is sure to have a significant impact on the African ability to respond to health development and health challenges on our continent.

This surely creates a human-resource pipeline that can sustain this area of research work into the future, and which contributes to the availability of a critical mass of globally competitive African health scientists.

We need highly capable African scholars.

We need African research leaders able to hold their own in a global environment.

We already have some of these. We need many more.

Moreover, we need to break the stereotypes, and ensure the development and progression of young scholars and women scholars in Africa, an issue that I note this programme has taken to heart.

The \$100 million investment in the DELTAS Africa programme is a substantial one, and we must ensure that the investment is well used, both in terms of the research outputs that are forthcoming, and in terms of the research capacity that it built in African institutions.

I see that the programme has allocated about \$20 million to two South African led programmes involving the University of the Witwatersrand and the University of

KwaZulu-Natal. I trust that there is also participation from our formerly black universities in the consortia.

Thanks to the Wellcome Trust and the UK's Department for International Development for funding the DELTAS Africa Programme.

Thank you also to the African Academy of Sciences for leading this important initiative.

My hope is that the DELTAS Africa Programme goes from strength to strength, and that it strengthens the health research outlook in Africa.

I look forward to further engagement and to working together to strengthen intra-Africa research collaboration.