

Minister Pandor's address: Official opening ceremony of the sixth African Higher Education Week and RUFORUM Biennial Conference 2018

Nairobi, Kenya

23 October 2018

First Lady of Uganda and Minister Museveni

Cabinet Secretary and Minister of Education in Kenya

Ambassador Amina Mohammed

Ministers, Deputy Ministers, Executive Director of RUFORUM

Vice Chancellors, Chair of Council of University of Nairobi

Excellencies, Ambassadors and High Commissioners

Distinguished guests

What should African governments do to achieve the goals of STISA and agenda 2063?

South Africa is one of the champions for the new Science, Technology and Innovation Strategy for Africa (STISA) adopted by African leaders at the July 2014 African Union Assembly. STISA focusses on Africa's science, technology and innovation investment in six socio-economic benefit areas: one, eradicating hunger and ensuring food security in Africa; two, preventing and controlling disease, and ensuring human welfare in Africa; three, improving intra-African communication, through investing in physical and digital infrastructure; four, protecting Africa's natural resources; five, building African communities, addressing aspects such as democratisation, urbanisation and conflict resolution; and

six, creating wealth for Africa.

Science is at the heart of the AU's Agenda 2063. Little will come of this plan unless each African country adopts a policy of science-led development and puts an efficient government department in place to pursue it. Only then will our grand plans be able to leverage private and philanthropic participation - like the Alliance for Accelerating Excellence in Science in Africa (AESIA), an initiative of the African Academy of Sciences and the New Partnership for Africa's Development.

Here are five features that I believe are necessary to achieve the STISA goals.

First, universities and researchers need academic freedom and freedom of expression. The output of researchers is valuable in evidence-based decision making on science policy. In South Africa the National Advisory Council on Innovation and the Academy of Sciences play a critical role in preparing independent reports that are key reference points for government and policy makers. The work of science councils impacts on policy in areas such as agriculture health, urban development environmental management and climate change responses. Of course, the advice of science councils is not without controversy. From time to time this means we need to consult broadly to allow the public to comment on emerging policy or the views of scientists. This sometimes makes the interaction between scientists and policy makers tense and challenging.

Second, effective science policy needs international partnerships. Science and innovation in South Africa has benefited immensely

from a well crafted and energetic international science diplomacy strategy. Our strategy supports individual researchers, institutions and government in establishing well designed and impactful international partnerships. Such links have led to very productive interdisciplinary research outcomes, and have also allowed policy makers to form associations that have multiplied access to resources in the form of access to research infrastructure and funding for collaborative teams.

Third, policy makers must provide funding for high level development of graduates and support for both established and emerging researchers. Linked to this is the need for policy makers to have a concrete science agenda with key focus areas clearly articulated to scientists and formally funded by government.

Fourth, and last, evaluation is extremely important. Regular review and the existence of reliable and effective data gathering institutions that report regularly on the system and provide quality data that can be used to reform where necessary. Evaluation criteria must also include a focus on indicators of performance that measure research output.

Fifth, the trust deficit between governments and knowledge institutions must close, our universities must be regarded as trusted advisors providing well researched advice to help us resolve our difficult challenges.

Many countries in Africa do not have all these features and they also tend to be isolated from international collaboration. We all need to strengthen our efforts at inclusion as we can no longer be satisfied with the inadequate innovation capacity of Africa.

In conclusion, it is important to stress that building and sustaining a high performing science, technology and innovation system and higher education system requires hard work, committed focus and investment. However once such systems are entrenched in our continent we will never look back, we shall answer to no one and we will independently determine our fate and our path to development. One of the key foundations for such an advance will be a viable productive agricultural sector – that is why RUFORUM's work is so important to support.