

Germany, SA initiative to boost local innovation

CAPE TOWN: A research co-operation initiative between Germany and South Africa can help South Africa develop more local innovations, the Minister of Science and Technology Naledi Pandor said on Monday, 16 April 2012.

In her address to the German-South African Year of Science event at the Cape Town International Convention Centre, Pandor said though South Africa had made a significant contribution to technological innovation worldwide, the country remained heavily dependent on imported technology.

This was the reason why the country was building stronger science and engineering partnerships with a number of countries.

The German-South African Year of Science is an initiative between the Department of Science and Technology and Germany's Ministry of Education and Research.

The initiative honours the two countries' strong relations in science and research, which stretch back to 1996 when the two nations signed a science and technology cooperation agreement and led to a joint research fund established to support research and development (R&D) projects in several sectors.

Pandor, who admired Germany's well-funded research landscape - with about 230 institutes involved in basic and applied research, said The Year of Science would offer both countries an opportunity to attract young people to science, technology and innovation.

During a recent call for initiatives under the German-South African programme, more than 200 applications were handed in by the science community of both countries.

Of all applications 41 initiatives have been jointly agreed on which represent all thematic fields of the German-South African Year of Science 2012/2013 and receive funding.

These include a collaboration between the Bauhaus-Universität Weimar and the North West University on sustainable resource-based sanitation and organic waste and a project between the University of Pretoria and the Fachhochschule Kiel aimed at promoting gender equality in sciences by financing a woman's science conference.

She said she hoped the partnership would among others things, help increase joint ventures between the two countries and help to establish a platform to expand and deepen bilateral science, technology and innovation cooperation.

The focus of the year would be on several strategic areas, including climate change, human-capital development, the bio-

economy, megacities, astronomy, health innovation and social sciences and humanities.

"Social innovation or innovation for development is a key component of our collaboration. Projects such as the Communal Water House of the Ikwezi local community in the Eastern Cape, intended to support management of water resources, is one such example," she said.

She also thanked her counterpart for helping to set up the Southern African Science Service Centre for Climate Change and Adaptive Land Management (Sasscal) - a joint initiative between Germany, South Africa and several neighbouring African countries to address the challenge of climate change.

Germany's Minister of Education and Research Annette Schavan said the initiative aimed to pool both countries' scientific capacity and strengthen existing research partnerships in Germany and South Africa.

She, however, pointed out that money alone was not the most important thing when it came to boosting innovation and research, but that strong vocational training of students by business was essential.

Companies had to be open to receiving new students for research-type positions, said Schavan, pointing out that the 600 German companies in South Africa were an ideal place for graduates to get good on the job training.

Speaking after her address, Pandor said she hoped that the decision as to who will host the Square Kilometre Array (SKA) radio telescope project, would be made on the next expected date.

The decision was delayed at the beginning of the month and a new date has been set for the middle of May.

Pandor said if South Africa won the bid to host the SKA, it would turn the continent into a place of research, would motivate more children to become interested in science and innovation career paths and would also result in improved internet bandwidth for businesses.

"If we have someone winning the Nobel science prize, because using the SKA in Africa they discovered who's out there and they get the prize because of the SKA, I think that will just be the cherry on the top..." she said.

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