

Speech by Minister Naledi Pandor MP, at the 3rd International Organisation for Research Management Societies conference, ICC.

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Representatives of INORMS sister organisations

Distinguished guests and delegates

It's a great pleasure to welcome you all to South Africa.

I'm pleased that you chose to hold your conference in South Africa.

I'd like to begin by thanking the Southern African Research and Innovation Management Association (SARIMA) and the Association for Commonwealth Universities (ACU) for collaborating in hosting this event.

Research management is a rapidly growing field of specialization. In developed countries in the north, universities and research institutions have invested heavily in research management structures over the past twenty years.

However, in most developing countries, research management has been slower to take root.

Barely ten years ago, most South African research-intensive universities had few research policies in place, and researchers usually entered into their own research contracts.

The growth in the research-management specialization in industry has largely been the consequence of two broad trends.

The first is that corporate business no longer does all its own research in corporate laboratories, as it used to.

The second is that corporate business r&d is now global.

Corporates now locate research centres where they sell their products, in foreign markets, and it is a critical component of their decision to locate in a town or a region if there is an excellent university there whose scientific expertise they can use.

Moreover, corporates no longer automatically choose to invest in their home countries. I can still remember the sense of shock we all felt when SASOL, one of South Africa's largest state-owned enterprises, located one of its major r&d centres in Edinburgh in Scotland.

These two trends have changed the way universities work with business and government. More and more corporates and governments rely on universities for contract and longer-term research projects.

It is university academics who are at the cutting edge of research and innovation and who collaborate in international networks.

Last week, palaeontologists from Wits University revealed a new species of human to the world. Wits Professor Lee Berger suggests that this discovery could turn out to be "the Rosetta stone that opens up the Homo genus" and could explain key aspects of human evolution. However, the Wits paleos didn't work alone. There was an international network of 60 and more scientists who contributed to making sense of this unprecedented discovery.

This conference provides a unique opportunity to raise the profile of the research and innovation management activities in Africa.

Recently universities in sub-Saharan Africa have been expanding and showing promising growth in student enrolment. Enrolments tripled between 1991 and 2005, expanding at an annual rate of 8.7%, which is one of the highest regional growth rates in the world. However, the spending per student declined from an average of US \$ 6 800 per year to a low of US \$ 981 in 2005 for 33 countries.

African countries need to invest more in their universities but more resources must also be matched with a commitment towards building and strengthening African higher education systems in ways that genuinely contribute to social, economic and political development and the alleviation of poverty, disease and war.

Africa has grown impressively over the last decade, according to the Africa Competitiveness Report (2009). Not, of course, as fast as the developing nations of Asia, but South Africa, Kenya and Tunisia are up there with the most innovative countries not only in Africa but also in the world.

What is the role of government in research management? What is the role of government, if any, in innovation management?

Well, first of all it's government obligation and duty to invest in fundamental research.

Business cannot do that. Business has to rely on governments to educate scientists and technologists – innovation depends on an educated work force - and to maintain the basic infrastructure of research at universities and research institutes. Of course, the IT and pharmaceutical corporates still have huge research laboratories, but it is governments who have to look to the long term and invest in basic research.

And, second, governments lay down policies and standards that can promote r&d and innovation.

I know there are many who think that innovation is best left to the markets. But governments need to set standards for new technologies, particularly in IT and in access to the internet. Governments need to encourage a culture of innovation, to encourage entrepreneurs, and to encourage start ups from the one woman bands in garages to the large than life in hi-tech companies.

Governments have done a good deal to develop policies that will create environments that encourage research and its associated activities.

Intellectual property is protected in national and international law. In the case of South Africa, the Intellectual Property Rights Act promulgated into law in 2007 provides for the establishment of National Intellectual Property Management Offices and Offices of Technology Transfer with the object of putting into place a regime for the protection and exploitation of the country's intellectual property.

The establishment of the Technology Innovation Agency as a dedicated vehicle for encouraging innovation has been a watershed development in South Africa.

This conference presents you with an opportunity to consider the best policies to promote innovation and protect or share intellectual property, among other matters – what they are, what effect they are likely to have, and how best they are to be managed.

The Southern African Research and Innovation Management Association has done a lot of work in training research managers and leading discussions among key innovation stakeholders in the region to develop a model to optimise intellectual property management and technology transfer in South Africa's higher education institutions and science councils.

I'm pleased to hear that among the delegates here are interns who are placed at research offices in higher education institutions, to do their internship for a period of twelve months.

And, last, governments have to ensure that innovation leads to social and economic benefits.

Our societies have benefited enormously from medical, pharmaceutical and IT innovation. But not all innovation has a beneficial social or economic impact. Not all financial innovation, for example, is beneficial.

In closing, let me say that at this year's conference there will be the first ever meeting of the INORMS Funders' Forum, which is hosted by the National Research Foundation. The forum will promote the dialogue between universities from developing countries, their counterparts in developed countries and the funding bodies.

I wish you a very successful conference, knowing that the outcomes of your deliberations will help us on our way to the thriving knowledge economies.

Thank you for your attention.