

PROFILE



Dr BE Nzimande, Minister of Higher Education, Science and Innovation

Science, Technology, and Innovation for Africa and towards Agenda 2063

Our continent finds itself in a fast and ever-changing global environment. Many of the shared challenges which currently inform the global political economy, have for the first time in history, propelled Africa from the margins of global governance to the very centre. From issues of food and nutrition security, energy supply and climate change to health, and geo-political conflicts, Africa is increasingly having a seat at the table. Therefore, the world's problems are Africa's opportunities. However, developing an African Research and Innovation Agenda is one of the keys that will mitigate the threats posed by an ever-transforming global environment, while unlocking all that our continent can offer its people and the world.

Scientific knowledge and research are critical drivers for raising the standard of living, human health, economic development, and for environmental sustainability. Despite this, research outputs across the African continent are still relatively low as governments still only marginally fund innovation, research, and development. The African continent represents 20% of the earth's surface and is home to 1.3 billion people. It boasts 60% of the world's arable land, 30% of the world's reserve of minerals and the youngest population of any continent. Despite these riches, the continent produces only 3% of global GDP, accounts for less than 3% of international trade and contributes just 2% of the world's research output, 1.3% of global research spending and produces 0.1% of all patents. This is not surprising as most countries have been unable to meet commitments made through the African Union in 2006, to spend at least 1% of their gross domestic product (GDP) on research and development.

Historically the public sector remains the largest funder of research and

development in most African countries. International sources form a substantial proportion of research and development funding in many African countries. Partnerships with international institutions are of utmost importance in achieving any form of development and economic transformation. But the key for African countries to maximise investments leveraged through international collaboration, is the development of an African Research Agenda. This requires African governments to provide an enabling environment by stimulating a greater interface between policy, research, academia and the private sector and industry.

The African Union's Agenda 2063 and STI Strategy for Africa (STISA2024), clearly outline the priorities that will unlock innovation led growth and create decent quality and well-paying jobs for the large youth population. This, while stimulating industrialisation and infrastructure development to bridge the rural-urban divide, encouraging intra-Africa trade and market sophistication.

We are particularly encouraged and stand ready to support the efforts of the African Union Commission (AUC) in implementing the African Education, Science, Technology and Innovation Fund (AESTIF). AESTIF is an Africa initiated fund led by the African Development Bank (AfDB) and championed by the AUC. The fund will facilitate long-term investment in STI, TVET, STEM, Higher Education, and Research and Innovation (RDI) in Africa. The goal of the fund is to promote long-term investments in education, science, technology, and innovation, to enable African countries to reduce poverty and achieve economic growth. **BR**

Abridged version of the speech delivered at the inaugural STI in Africa Day prior to the Multistakeholder Forum on STI for the SDGs 2023, 2 May 2023, United Nations.