

SA facing 'grand challenges'



Johannesburg - South Africa does not depend exclusively on foreign technology, Science and Technology Minister Naledi Pandor said on Tuesday.

This was based on the Human Sciences Research Council's 2005 innovation survey, she said in an address at the National Innovation Summit in Gauteng.

The survey found that most innovations were developed by enterprises in South Africa and the influence of foreign partners was comparable to that experienced by other countries.

The study further suggested that current public funding programmes for innovation in South Africa could be intensified and better publicised.

This would establish more trusting relationships between funders and innovators.

"We can do something about the low level of interest in public funds for innovation," Pandor said.

She said her department planned to do so through the country's ten year innovation plan which contains five "grand challenges" that build on and expand South Africa's current research strengths.

"These areas offer great potential to steer South Africa towards a knowledge based economy," she said.

The challenges included tapping into the potential of South Africa's bio-economy for the local pharmaceutical industry.

The second challenge was to build on local investment in space science and technology.

A National Space Agency would foster growth in this area, Pandor said.

The third challenge was to move toward the use of renewable energy while the fourth was to play a leading regional role in climate change.

Pandor said: "The fifth and final grand challenge is termed 'human and social dynamics'. This challenge is at the core of nearly every major challenge facing South Africa, from climate change to creating a competitive and innovative work force.

"The fifth grand challenge is to increase South Africa's ability to anticipate the complex consequences of change," said Pandor. - Sapa

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