

**NATIONAL ADVISORY COUNCIL ON INNOVATION  
CONFERENCE**

**Utilisation of Research Findings: Strategies for Improving Return on R&D  
Investment**

**9 -10 October 2003**

**Eskom Convention Centre; Dale Road, Halfway House**

**Opening address**

**by Ms Buyelwa Sonjica**

**Deputy Minister of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology.**

Dr Roy Marcus, Chairperson of the National Advisory Council on Innovation

Dr Rob Adam, DG of the Department of Science and Technology

Members of NACI Council

Honoured Guests

Ladies And Gentlemen

Thank you for the invitation to participate in the opening ceremony of this significant conference.

I wish to extend a warm welcome to all, especially the key note speaker, Prof Barry Bozeman from the USA, other speakers, delegates from neighbouring countries and South African institutions. I trust that your participation in the proceedings and – equally important – your informal interactions over the next two days will further strengthen collaboration across disciplines, institutions and national borders.

South Africa is a country of unique opportunity, whether it be its mineral wealth, its human potential, cultural diversity or political transformation. Unlocking the growth potential of this spectrum of opportunity often requires novel approaches and methods. A case in point is clearly the deep-mining technology this country had to

develop to mine gold reefs at levels around two kilometres below surface. Without that technological innovation we would economically not have been where we are today.

In principle, what applies to the case of deep-level mining also applies to many of the other challenges around us. Take the challenges with regard to the eradication of poverty, or the provision of primary health care, or illiteracy, or the need to develop the rich potential of the SSE sector, job creation...and so I can go on. We cannot simply borrow best practices from other countries, given how complex and interwoven all these challenges are. And it is in this regard that the scientific community can make a significant impact, namely in helping find solutions contributing to optimising current practices and to discovering and inventing totally new opportunities and approaches.

This really means that South Africa has to rely heavily on its research community, its scientists and all support workers to address the challenges confronting us.

In this regard, I am proud to refer the appropriateness of our National R&D Strategy. As you will know, the point of departure of the strategy is to link R&D closer to the national priorities of the country. Towards this end it identifies new technology missions towards which part of our resources can be directed. Here I can remind you of four of those missions, namely, poverty reduction, advanced manufacturing, key technology platforms (like biotechnology) and technology for resource-based industry. I am convinced that the scene has been set for the scientific community to contribute more productively to the growth and welfare of our country. The R&D strategy calls upon the research community actively to make its research for the country – for economic growth and the improvement of the quality of life of all.

As you know, however, a policy and strategy at best create an environment conducive to the undertaking of a particular activity – it is not the successful execution itself. In the present case:the research community has to avail itself of the opportunities created by the R&D strategy.

The philosophy of the R&D strategy is an interactive one. By this I mean, that we should look at the system as an interactive – even collaborative – relationship

between producers of knowledge and users of that knowledge. Gone are the days that any government can in a kind of blind faith optimism finance projects – any projects for that matter - without being sufficiently convinced about the expected short to medium term outcomes, and the long term impacts.

This is why, I believe, the NACI study on the utilisation of research findings and this conference are so important: To consider how all the role players can make research work more productively for them. I have been informed that the study shows that the best approach to do this, is through close collaboration between researchers and users of that research information. In this regard it is gratifying to see that NACI has provided for all the major categories of stakeholders to present papers –

- Government, in the form of DST and National Treasury
- Knowledge producers, namely the higher education system and science councils
- Knowledge users, such as business

Allow me a few comments on the conference itself. NACI should be congratulated on its inclusive and interactive approach to the finalisation of the conference. The topic has implications for all role players and I think it is especially wise to test the findings and conclusions within this wider forum, before finalising the report for submission to the Minister and me. In this way we can also be sure that the final product would account for views from all stakeholders.

I want to conclude by alluding to the very positive subtitle of the conference, namely **Strategies for improving of the return on R&D investment**. If one of the outcomes of this NACI study and conference would be even only a small improvement in the return on resources government spends on research, then it would in its own right be an example of the productive use of research findings! It is my sincere hope that this will indeed be the case.

With these few words I declare this conference officially opened. May all of you derive much value and benefit from the presentations and discussion sessions and share ideas and opinions for the greater good of all the people of our country.

Thank you.