

The National Research Foundation –

An Agent of Change? By Robert Kriger

In three seminars and a two-day workshop, we will explore the creation of the NRF during a period of great excitement as it was viewed by all as a key ‘*Agent of Change*’ mandated with effecting core transformatory processes across and within especially the higher education research sector of the country.

Section 1: Background of the Political History of Higher Education and Research in South Africa

The first seminar scheduled for **Friday, March 20, 2015** seeks to **contextualise the historical challenges** of more than a century of higher education and research in South Africa by placing these into the associated, broader and formative socio-political developments since the establishment of the first university, the creation of the Union of South Africa through to that of the ‘Bush Colleges’ created by the apartheid state.

Section 2: ‘Building the National Research Foundation’

The second seminar, scheduled for Friday, April 24, 2015, will present findings regarding the ‘building of the NRF’ based on available documentation from the various review processes initiated by the then Department of Arts, Culture, Science & Technology (DACST); on task team reports in preparation of the merger between the Foundation of Research Development and the Centre for Science Development (CSD); on the strategic planning processes, plans and implemented funding programmes and instruments; on minutes of the NRF Board, the Corporate and Executive bodies; reports of institutional and programme reviews and evaluations, and on interviews with a range of key individuals within the National System of Innovation (NSI).

Section 3.1: The ‘Agency’ in the Developmental State

*The third seminar, scheduled for **TO BE ANNOUNCED**, will primarily seek to respond to the questions as to whether the NRF has satisfactorily met the challenges it faced at its establishment; whether the policy options and choices made were, indeed, the ‘correct’ ones; whether it had been adequately resourced by the state; whether the funding instruments and mechanisms initiated by the NRF in concert with the DST – e.g. the CoE and SARChI programmes have lived up to expectations; and, whether it had successfully facilitated the internationalisation of South African research and that of higher education.*

Secondly, against that presented at the second seminar, the discussion will turn to the roles, functions and policies guiding the NRF within the context of an emergent (BRICS)

economy as, for instance, determined in the National Development Plan 2030 (NDP 2030). That is, as the agency tables its third strategic plan – NRF VISION 2020 – to the Minister, S&T, the NRF Board and to the stakeholder communities, will there be appropriate capabilities, scope and resources to effectively and efficiently make a significant contribution towards overcoming the growing inequality, poverty and unemployment across the South African population and, indeed, to fulfil its mission of ‘contributing to a better life for all’?