

A Contextual Introduction and Institutional Overview of IERI at 5.5

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As of today, the 6th of May 2010, we share the world with at least 6,819,184,140 other human beings (US Census Clock Widget¹). Can I encourage you to participate in a mind experiment; and normalise that rather large number to just 100 people. Now, in this imaginary though proportional world; our national spreads, based on geography and not ethnicity, would read as:

- 1 from Oceania
- 12 Europeans
- 13 Americans
- 13 Africans and
- 61 Asians

This world's total income (saving or consumption potential) for 2009 would be distributed as:

- 26 own 61%
 - Of which 6 on their own take 59% (USA) and
- 74 of us will share the remaining 39%.

Such is the state of the world in our common era. It is a planet under stress of ecological and environmental pressure; an undercurrent of insecurity contagiously spread by mistrust of financial instruments and rampant international inequality.

¹ <http://www.census.gov/main/www/popclock.html>

Simultaneously, the structure of geopolitical power is also undergoing transformation. The rise of Brazil, India and China with a resurgence of Russia is changing the diplomatic landscape on the basis of economic dynamism.

Domestically, we have just realised the first 16 years of post-apartheid reconstruction. As at least recognised by one of the national liberation movements and its allies; we have made significant advances though more attention is required to address systemic and structural impediments to realising a better life for all.

It is within such a context of change and challenge that I would like to present an overview of the work of the Institute of Economic Research on Innovation. Since our formal launch in September 2004; we have brought together at least 60 people in various assignments whilst remaining a core of which has never exceeded five full-time academics. As some of you would be aware, we even explored the potential of a single-agent operating virtually for some time.

IERI collectively generated over 150 pieces of research output over the last five years. Whilst the gap between this large volume of output and the accredited publications is significant; it also speaks volumes to the transformation path we are still traversing. Now with a dedicated Ministry of Higher Education and a dedicated minister; we can look forward to an intensified process of redressing legacies and establishing our own indigenous metrics of achievement.

To highlight the journey of IERI it may be appropriate to contrast two books which are both products and inputs into the work of the Institute. Back to the launch of the Institute; we had then the visiting professor Mammo Muchie, formally launching Putting Africa First in this country. We hope that our subsequent research agenda has sought to achieve the normative objective. Mammo, with the support of our colleagues and friends at Aalborg University,

has made sure that we have copies of the book here today. Mammo has also persevered beyond merely recognising constraints and also founded and proudly launch an internationally peer-reviewed journal: The African Journal of Science, Technology, Innovation and Development (AJSTID). Copies of both, with the AJSTID now in its 2nd Volume; are available this afternoon at the end of formal programme.

Five and a half years later; we are also immensely proud to offer the seminal monograph of Proferssor Mario Scerri: The Evolution of the South African System of Innovation since 1916. This addresses a major lacuna in the literature and is a magnificent example of scholarly practice in the service of developmental objectives. Copies of Mario's book will also be available at the end of the formal programme.

I will now briefly turn to our teaching and learning experiences. We now are completing the 3rd Cohort of the Short Learning Programme: Science, Technology and Innovation in South Africa. This was a pilot exercise in partnership with the Department of Science and Technology. The certification of the programme will take place later in the programme. After the 4th Cohort in the second semester, this SLP expands beyond our domestic context and will be offered as a SADC programme. Locally, elective modules will contribute to the formal Masters degree in Economics of the Faculty.

We have also launched and are in pilot mode with the first intake of the Joint African Masters Programme in Comparative Local Development. This represents a global first: with the nexus of development being premised on capability formation, innovation and learning. The programme is also innovative in the consortium approach with the bringing together of Higher Education Institutions of Botswana, Italy, Mozambique, Namibia and South Africa. Lindile Ndabeni and Mario Scerri have played the roles of Academic Coordinators of JAMP.

The DST-NRF South African Research Chair on Innovation Studies was bestowed on Professor Mammo Muchie and we are now moving at an accelerated pace with doctoral and post-doctoral programmes. More details of the schedules and opportunities are regularly posted to the IERI Website.

Our international collaborations have also generated positive outcomes. We have worked on bilateral projects such as the Cooperation Framework on Innovation Systems between Finland and South Africa; and the South African German Dialogue on Science for Sustainability. We will now play the secretarial role for the expansion of the latter process to other partners such as China, India and Brazil.

We have also been engaged with multilateral processes. The Universities in Development research project was coordinated by our strong ally: the Research Policy Institute of Lund University and sponsored by SIDA and IDRC. UniDev spanned 14 countries and covered 4 years of work. It will now start publishing at least 2 volumes of research. It has also spawned a spin-off in the form of UniDev2Southern Africa. More on this will be announced in June.

Another major exercise for IERI has been its partnership with institutes of the emergent BRICS. Here we have completed the first cycle of activities which will see at least six volumes of work being published this year. They will cover: SME's, TNC's, Financing, Inequality and the State and then a bigger comparative study of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa.

Our domestic engagements have also been numerous. A major part of our time was devoted to the Socio-economic Review of our country for the African Peer Review Mechanism. This work was led by another founding member of IERI,

who is unfortunately not present today: Dr Thomas Pogue. Tom also led the work in generating the STI Scorecard in 2008. In doing so, Tom greatly advanced a real knowledge gap: that between the existing baseline data; and the expected outcomes.

In advancing a more rational and logical exploration of policy options, choices and determination; we should remain guided by our overall strategic objectives in this stage South Africa's reconstruction and Development. Such a path may cause us to reconsider mythical chasms and advance our country beyond merely repeated characterisations. We have data, information and knowledge and are building the analytical competencies across the system of innovation.

Our work going forward will of course seek out new answers to enduring problems. In this we will continue to seek to shape theory from facts. We are committed to evidence-based research which influences policy choices. We hope to also ensure that the structural impediments at a most acute and local level is also redressed. We are a product of the new South Africa and proudly seek together to achieve a better life for all.

I thank you

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