

LOCAL RELEVANCE: GENDER, GEOGRAPHY AND SCALE

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Thank you chairperson, Honourable Deputy Minister, our Vice Chancellor and Principal, all protocols observed, ladies and gentlemen.

My name is Lindile Ndabeni. I work here at this Institution as one of the staff members. As Rasigan has correctly pointed out, indeed our work seek out new answers to a number of problems that we experience as a locality, as a province, as country, and a region, as a continent, and as a world. By and large we do this through research and dissemination of its results. For example, one of our research focus concerns local relevance; gender, geography and scale. In this specific research focus, we are particularly interested in the relationships between science, economy, and innovation. This research focus is informed by our observation that the South African economy has been undergoing transformation from its origins as a primarily resources-driven complex towards a form which seeks to become increasingly knowledge-based (Maharajh and Motala, 2008). This transition is being undertaken within a context of rapid insertion into the global political economy whilst simultaneously seeking to redress the inherited inefficiencies and associated legacies of apartheid capitalism. A significant demand in this evolution is the requirement for large numbers of highly skilled and technically competent human resources. It is in that context and as part of our competency building program, that I was privileged to be seconded to the Department of Science and Technology in 2005-06 as director responsible for human capital.

It is expected that the transformation of the South African economy will increase productivity, enhance national competitiveness and contribute to generally improving the quality of individual lives.

An equally important challenge concerns the creation of relevant and appropriate knowledge-based economic and social strategies which will seamlessly ensure the application of science-led innovation as a driving force in the transformation of the national economy. Within this transformation agenda, it becomes inadequate to think of innovation in technological terms alone. The process of innovation involves consideration of finance, marketing, organizations, training and so on.

Another important challenge is that of making innovation relevant to specific sectors. Typically, while some of our research colleagues continue to undertake SMME research by analyzing SMMEs only on the basis of the size of the firm, we take a step further by classifying industries on the basis of their technology intensity. Thus we can make a distinction between high-tech firms, medium-tech firms and low-tech firms.

Furthermore, we emphasize that innovation is not only an economic phenomenon but also a social one. Through such a framework, we are able to contribute to social transformation by incorporating poverty, gender, and social development into our research focus.

Local relevance remains important in our research. We do this by undertaking research on Local Economic Development (LED). Our analysis is that of local systems of innovation. Through our analysis, we are able to establish a link between LED and the quest to create livable cities or localities. In this way, LED concerns a number of initiatives such as;

- Economic growth
- Poverty reduction
- Employment creation strategies
- Increased local incomes and,
- Healthy population

Through our approach, we emphasize that LED as a policy instrument should help advance stronger national and regional economies. We continue to think global but keep local relevance of what we do. We are a small organization by numbers and we do not mind that as long as small is beautiful.

I thank you.