

Skills development in science for a better future

THE DATE 16 JUNE 1976 is etched into the collective consciousness of our nation. Commemoration of that date as Youth Day, and indeed, June as Youth Month, has contributed towards bringing into sharper focus the importance of intellectual liberation and, in particular, the imperative of equipping our young people with skills that will positively contribute to this country's future.

Coinciding with Youth Month, the June edition of *ScienceScope* focuses on our human capital development initiatives. In a quest to be at the fore front of research both nationally and internationally, the CSIR places a great deal of emphasis on the development of people to ensure that it continues to foster technological innovation and generate new knowledge.

The research human capital that we build within the CSIR contributes to the development of a national pool of scientists, engineers and technologists.

The positioning statement of the CSIR's new brand that we introduced early last year, 'our future through science', expresses the unshaken resolve of the CSIR to harness the power of science and technology for building a prosperous future for South Africa. This future can, however, materialise only if the young people of today move into careers in science, engineering and technology in bigger numbers than before. The CSIR contributes to this effort by providing opportunities for skills development and career progression through creating a vibrant research culture.

The industrialised nations of the world derive about two-thirds of their income from knowledge-based enterprises. South Africa needs to increase its knowledge generation capacity in order to achieve global competitiveness. The imperative to grow our skills base is acknowledged by government's Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative of South Africa (AsgiSA) and is being addressed through the Joint Initiative on Priority Skills Acquisition (JIPSA), under the leadership of the country's Deputy President. We need to increase the current number of researchers by at least four times to achieve the critical mass that would enable us to sustain our economic growth and compete with the leading nations of the world. While this is going to be a challenging target to reach, we are convinced that it is achievable. The CSIR is doing its part by putting every resource it can behind the drive to increase the quantity and quality of our researchers, with special emphasis on black people and women.

This edition of *ScienceScope* demonstrates South Africa's potential in scientific research and technological innovation, by featuring some of our people involved in the various human capital development programmes within the CSIR. The programmes include student programmes such as bursaries, studentships and internships that are meant to create a pool of suitably qualified researchers for the CSIR and the country's general research fraternity. Some of our other programmes focus on developing researchers who are already in the employ of the CSIR, by providing a range of learning opportunities for professional growth. Our emerging research areas provide exciting opportunities for researchers to rub shoulders with and learn from the best in the world. We also recognise the important role played by all those who serve as mentors, formally and informally, within our ranks. These unsung heroes, driven by a selfless desire to see others grow and prosper, walk the extra mile to provide much needed support, guidance and encouragement to our future stars.

The initiatives illustrated here demonstrate that the CSIR is ultimately a people institution: an institution with the primary task of empowering people through knowledge so that they may then go out and – in a variety of ways – contribute to making a difference to South Africa. Increasingly, thinking regionally, this has also become a necessary role in the southern African region and on the rest of the continent.

It gives me great pleasure to present this edition of *ScienceScope*. We hope that as you read this publication, you will share in our enthusiasm for human development in the various areas of science, engineering and technology.

– Dr Sibusiso Sibisi, CSIR President and CEO

