

## **The importance of Research Chairs in furthering research, development and innovation in South Africa**

**Dr Nana Boaduo, Director Research Chairs & Centres of Excellence, NRF**

DST, CSIR and NRF colleagues, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen on behalf of the CEO of the NRF, Dr Molapo Qhobela and the Deputy CEO, Dr Gansen Pillay and the Executive Director, RCCE, Dr Makobetsa Khathi, all cannot be here with us today and send their sincere apologies; and also on behalf of the NRF at large our heartfelt gratitude to CSIR for partnering with us and making a generous multi-year financial investment in the DST-NRF led South African Research Chairs Initiative (SARChI). This collaboration has resulted in the establishment of the first two Research Chairs in Waste Management in South Africa in response to two key elements of South Africa's Waste Research, Development and Innovation (RDI) Roadmap; Waste and Climate Change and Waste and Society.

The DST-NRF SARChI funding instrument was established in 2006 to improve South Africa's international research and innovation competitiveness while responding to social and economic challenges of the country, including transformation of the South African society so that there is equitable and inclusive participation in the generation of knowledge where such knowledge translates into socio-economic benefits.

It is in continuation of the spirit of building an inclusive growth path for societal benefit that the DST-NRF partnered with CSIR to establish the Waste Research Chairs, we are launching here today together.

The partnership between CSIR, the DST and NRF epitomizes a quadruple helix of collaboration between government or public sector, science council, the private sector, universities and communities, from which the Chair holders are drawn. Accordingly, we believe that the two Research Chairs we are launching today, will live up to the expectation and make impact in their respective communities and society at large through human capacity development including the production of high quality Masters and PhD graduates that can be readily absorbed by the National System of Innovation; through the production of high quality knowledge and innovation outputs that can be translated into technology packages, prototypes, products, processes, services and policy briefs and of course through science and community engagement. We hope and believe that the Chair holders will contribute to, and help the NRF realize the vision of catalyzing knowledge production for societal benefit, transforming lives and inspiring a nation.

The SARChI funding instrument has been successful in retaining leading South African researchers and attracting leading foreign researchers and expatriate researchers to South Africa. The SARChI funding instrument has not been as successful in ensuring racial and gender equity. Going forward the NRF has taken a deliberate decision that in making future Chair awards, preference will be given to Blacks and females, provided they first meet the minimum requirements for a SARChI Chair. Needless to say, from the NRF's perspective transformation and excellence are intertwined and mutually inclusive, meaning that one cannot be achieved without the other.

To date the DST-NRF SARChI funding instrument has awarded 233 Research Chairs (100 females and 133 males) and of those awarded 220 are currently operational.

Notwithstanding, what is encouraging about the launch today is that the 2 co-funded Research Chairs are females, and as we all know August is month dedicated to celebrating women. The DST-NRF SARChI funding instrument in the 2017/18 financial year awarded 33 Chairs to females the second highest

number since the award of the 42 females Chairs in the 2015/16 financial year. Ladies and gentleman we hope that you appreciate that this evidently shows that the NRF in partnership with like-minded entities are not only paying lip service to transformation but are indeed committed to transforming the NSI.

In conclusion and on behalf of the NRF I congratulate the Chair holders for the well-deserved respective awards following a competitive, stringent and rigorous peer-reviewing process that upheld the prestige of the SARChI funding instrument. I wish the Chair holders resounding success. I am confident that the Chair holders, without any exception whatsoever, will return the investment made by our government by moving South Africa forward towards an inclusive knowledge economy, transforming lives and inspiring the nation through their research findings.

Thank you