

**Keynote address by the honourable Minister of Science and Technology of the Republic of South Africa, Mr Mosibudi Mangena, to the second Southern African Development Community (SADC) workshop on indigenous knowledge systems in Livingstone, Zambia**

28 March 2007

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Delegates from SADC member states  
Holders and practitioners of indigenous knowledge  
Ladies and gentlemen

Allow me to express my sincere appreciation to the government and people of Zambia for their warm hospitality and willingness to host this workshop themed "Policy Development and Regional Co-operation". I acknowledge all delegates from abroad and wish them a pleasant stay in beautiful Livingstone. I am told the area has not been spoiled and still maintains its original feeling and spirit, thus setting the appropriate tone for our discussions.

Ladies and gentlemen, in 2004 I mentioned that my Department was in the process of drafting a national Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) policy. In the same year the policy was approved by Cabinet heralding a significant breakthrough in the development, promotion and protection of IKS in South Africa. To date, South Africa's commitment in recognising the undisputable wealth of Indigenous Knowledge (IK) that survived the past centuries of repression is validated by numerous programmes being implemented by various departments in response to the adoption of this policy.

Last April our IKS plan received international acclaim as it was tabled as a World Intellectual Property (WIPO) working document at the ninth Intergovernmental Committee (IGC) on traditional knowledge, expression of folklore and genetic resources in Geneva.

It has also been translated by the WIPO into French, Russian, Chinese and Spanish and posted on the organisation's website. We have translated the policy into six indigenous languages and hope to aggressively market it to our clients.

Under this policy framework, the most visible example of my Department's work to co-ordinate government's efforts on IKS was the establishment of the National Indigenous Knowledge Systems Office (NIKSO).

The NIKSO has since achieved success on key cross cutting issues. At the moment we are in the process of establishing a Ministerial Advisory Committee, comprising institutions, communities, indigenous knowledge holders and practitioners which will advise us on matters relating to the protection, recognition, affirmation, development and promotion of IK in South Africa.

Individuals appointed to this committee will be leaders in their respective fields willing to extend advice to government on matters pertinent to IK. In addition

they will conduct inquiries, studies and consultations that are consistent with my Department's priorities, policy and strategic objectives and will be guided by the principles of our National System of Innovation (NSI).

Ladies and gentlemen, there are aspects of IK that should be developed in their context and in terms that are authentic to their nature which can serve as models for indigenous systems of knowledge and practice. Such holistic and context based knowledge must be recognised and brought into the ambits of national policy implementation and where appropriate, rewarded accordingly.

However, for this to happen, these forms of knowledge must be documented and systematised and the information fed into government initiatives at all levels. Therefore, in the coming year the NIKSO will commence with the development of IKS databases following an audit of those existing at various institutions.

We also envisage the development of a hardware multimedia recordal system to capture synchrotextual documentation such as the registration of IK holders, interviews and satellite information linkages.

IK centres should be established as local level vehicles for capturing IK wealth located within various communities. The first pilot IKS centre is being established at the University of Zululand, in Richards Bay.

Another exciting initiative in this area is the establishment of IKS research chairs, to be based within higher education institutions (HEIs). In the coming year, NIKSO together with our research organisation, the National Research Foundation (NRF) will establish chairs in the following priority areas: traditional medicines, knowledge studies and indigenous food security.

The objectives of the IKS research chairs will be to increase the human capital required to do research and develop skills in IK in various academic fields including chemistry, ethno-mathematics and farming, among others. These IKS research chairs are perceived as one of the ways in which my Department can mainstream IKS as a science and address the question of the shortage of scientists in this field. Furthermore, the IKS research chairs will contribute towards the positioning of IKS within the NSI.

Through these initiatives, my Department intends to create an enabling environment for the participation of local communities in research and development work. We have already started doing this in several ways, one of which being the engagement of civil society in setting the research priorities. The co-operation of holders and practitioners of IK with the Department encouraged the move to progress towards an overall protection of this knowledge.

In our work, we want to ensure that projects actually benefit indigenous peoples on many fronts by promoting their human rights and cultural values, creating wealth and strengthening the ability of communities to be organised and to advocate for change. And we also want communities to get more involved in the design, implementation and evaluation of these projects.

Other developments include my Department's collaboration with other departments to ensure, among others, that traditional leaders play a meaningful role in the protection and promotion of IKS, the conservation, propagation and uses of medicinal plants, safeguarding the intellectual property rights of indigenous knowledge holders, access and benefit sharing.

Ladies and gentlemen, this workshop comes at a time when there is unprecedented debate on intellectual property rights, both at regional and international levels which makes this meeting the most appropriate in the context of building the SADC region as a player in the global knowledge based economy.

In striving to achieve this objective, it is imperative for the region to put in place the necessary mechanisms to ensure real collaboration between government, civil society and academia to create a large reservoir of intellectual capital.

The Inter-Governmental Committee (IGC) of WIPO is now decisively moving towards the adoption of an internationally binding instrument for the protection of IKS, expression of folklore and genetic resources. In this regard the SADC and the African stance at the IGC has afforded us the opportunity to continue our internationally recognised leadership role in advancing our agenda on IKS, at the same time ensuring that the concerns and priorities of the developing world especially Africa are duly addressed. Hence, the SADC is not only entrusted with an important leadership role in Africa, but it also has a specific responsibility to safeguard and advance the interests of developing countries in the field of IKS, expression of folklore and genetic resources.

South Africa and other SADC member states have been consistently emphasising in international forums such as the IGC on protection of traditional knowledge/traditional expression of folklore and genetic resources, Conference of Parties (COP), or Trade Related Aspects on Intellectual property Rights (TRIPS) the critical importance of IKS and this workshop offers us a valuable opportunity to bolster that campaign.

However, a substantial challenge facing our region is our comprehensive response to the decisions reached at the 10th IGC in December 2006. In order to successfully adhere to these decisions, a co-ordinated response will be needed among SADC, New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), the African Union (AU) and other regional organisations.

Let us focus our spirits and minds towards a search for an equitable legal dispensation to protect IK that is built on the respect for human dignity and African cultural values. We must continue to critically assess and interrogate current intellectual property regimes since these legal instruments continue to deny IK practitioners the economic benefits they deserve.

In closing, allow me to once again express my hope and confidence that within the SADC, both governments and civil societies will progressively develop strong partnerships towards the achievement of our regional priorities. Some of the initiatives already alluded to promise to give us some firm footing in the new knowledge based economic revolution.

May you hold constructive and fruitful deliberations in the next few days. It is important for the region to hold more such engagements as they afford us excellent opportunities for pooling together our respective strengths and expertise to make the SADC a premier hub of IKS in Africa.

We look forward to the report on the outcomes of your deliberations and suggestions on our new regional partnership programme.

I thank you!

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