

## National contact points place CSIR and South Africa on S&T map

The CSIR's contribution to the world of science, both locally and internationally, is intensified by the participation of CSIR experts in their fields in the successes of the European Union's (EU) Framework Programmes (FPs). South Africa has been involved in the FPs for over 10 years, starting with FP4, and "we have gained vast amounts of experience," explains Dr Geoff Meese of the CSIR. He has been involved with the EU FPs within the international cooperation, food technology and later food quality areas. The current Framework Programme (FP7) runs from 2007 to 2013.

The FPs were established by the EU (implemented by the European Commission [EC]) to support and promote coordinated science and technology (S&T) among the member states of the EU and also to source and interact with international players outside Europe. South Africa was among the first of the non-EU countries to introduce a network of national contact points (NCPs), appointed by the Department of Science and Technology (DST), based on the model used in Europe. Within the FP7, the NCPs are a great help for researchers and scientists who previously found it challenging to belong to a community of colleagues, access information in their specific field, as well as explore opportunities and become members of project consortia. Among others, the responsibilities of the NCPs are:

- information and awareness raising – circulating latest information from the EC, calls for proposals, workshops, seminars and marketing;
- advising, assisting and training – explaining the operations of the programme, administrative procedures and contractual issues; and
- signposting – reporting to the DST and informing the counterparts abroad about developments and initiatives in South Africa.

Researchers who want to know what others are doing in their field, or who are interested in running a specific research projects with European partners, apply for funding, or become part of a consortium, may contact the following 14 NCPs for assistance:

1. Aeronautics - Dr Kamalluddien Parker (AMTS incubated at the CSIR);
2. Food, agriculture and biotechnology - Dr Geoff Meese (CSIR);
3. Information and communications technologies - Johan Eksteen (CSIR);
4. Transport - Mathetha Mokonyama (CSIR);
5. Security - Dr Barend Taute (CSIR);
6. Space - Mothibi Ramusi (SAAB Grintek);
7. Legal and financial - Cristina Pinto (University of the Witwatersrand);
8. Marie Curie actions - Dr Val Munsami (NRF);
9. Nanosciences and nanotechnologies, materials and new production technologies - Dr Molefi Motuku (Mintek);
10. Socio-economic sciences and humanities - Dr Christa van Zyl (HSRC);
11. Energy - Dr Boni Mehloakulu (DST);
12. Environment - Renee le Roux (NRF);
13. Fission research - Dr Van Zyl de Villiers (NECSA); and
14. Health - Professor Iqbal Parker (UCT).

“Thematics change with each programme and throughout the years, there has been immense growth in fields such as food and health,” says Meese, adding that research is increasingly complex. Because of this, the European South Africa Science and Technology Advancement Programme (ESASTAP [www.esastap.org.za/esastap/home/index.php](http://www.esastap.org.za/esastap/home/index.php)) was established, implemented by the DST and funded by the EU, to disseminate information of mutual concern and provide assistance for South African researchers interested in closer cooperation with EU and other international researchers.

“The EU created the framework programmes with the aim of attending to Europe’s research needs and expanding their research outputs, however, we as Africans have also found spaces of benefit and growth,” says Johan Eksteen. He is also one of CSIR's open source migration champions.

The NCPs' role fits in with South Africa's national strategies of creating S&T excellence. The security theme is relatively new within the EU framework programmes and its scope is non-defense, focusing on issues such as organised crime and terrorism from a civil perspective. “This includes ensuring the security of citizens and infrastructure such as electricity supply, intelligent surveillance, border security and security during crises,” says Dr Barend Taute, adding that the framework programmes are about knowing what is important to the EU, while simultaneously finding synergies with what is important to South Africa.

“Never in the history of transport research has funding prospects looked brighter. While full participation in FP7 is competitive, I believe that South African researchers have expertise that competes with the best in the world,” says Mathetha Mokonyama, adding that FP7 and related initiatives such as ESASTAP provide a unique opportunity to substantially improve research capacity in South Africa.” Within the framework programme, transport is under one thematic, with various aspects, such as land transport under Mokonyama, and aeronautics under Dr Kamalluddien Parker of the Advanced Manufacturing Technology Strategy (AMTS) that is hosted by the CSIR on behalf of the DST. Parker's theme focuses on, among others, advanced and light material technologies, electronics and aeronautical systems, air traffic navigation and management. "In this case, we need to push the technology agenda, focus on the facilitation, design and experimental capabilities and couple it with skills development," says Parker. "This is a global theme seeking global sustainability and linkages in the technologies of aeronautics, sourcing strategic allies and student transfers," says Parker, adding that his team is constantly searching for technology platforms that fit in locally and globally. "It is imperative for the local aeronautics research fraternity to link with the global fraternity in a sustained manner of mutual benefit. The aim is to work with the best and become the best. This is partly dependent on local research entities learning to work together in networks of competence."

The NCPs attended an FP7 training course in December 2006 in Brussels, Belgium, where they met and interacted with NCPs from other countries. Numerous information sharing sessions will be scheduled throughout South Africa to further improve South Africa's participation in FP7. Some joint initiatives are also envisaged, such as the joint security and ICT call for proposals that are planned by the EC for later this year.



*CSIR experts who have been appointed as national contact points for the European Union's Framework Programmes - Dr Barend Taute (security), Mathetha Mokonyama (transport), Dr Geoff Meese (food, agriculture and biotechnology) and Dr Kamalluddien Parker (aeronautics)*



*The CSIR's Johan Eksteen, national contact point for information and communications technologies*

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