

**STATEMENT BY Scientific and Technology Community,
Made by Dr Lindiwe Majele Sibanda
Friday 9 may 2008, 1145hrs
Thematic Discussions on AFRICA, UNCSD-16 New York.**

A Call for a new regimen of research-extension interface and technology transfer

Mr Chairman, in our submissions in the past 4 days, the Scientific and Technology Community has emphasized the need for increased investments in Research and Development. Our ultimate objective is to increase technology uptake so as to improve the livelihoods of rural dwellers. The need for better infrastructure has been highlighted, however one area which we believe is key in promoting technology uptake is improved Information Communication Tools (ICTs). Africa's rural community needs better access to information if they are to move beyond farming to creating a dynamic rural economy.

As researchers we are aware that the new agriculture-for-development agenda must be supported by far-reaching reforms in the traditional research and extension models in order to impart new skills and provide timely information across the value chain. Traditional models of research and extension delivery have done little to unleash the potential of the smallholder farmers. With the depletion of the extension worker force as a result of the HIV and AIDS pandemic, and low staff retention capacity, most African governments cannot meet the optimum extension worker to farmer ratio- therefore a new platform for "research-extension worker-farmer" interface will be critical in driving the new agriculture-for-development agenda. THIS IS THE OBSTACLE WE FACE

WHAT THEN ARE THE BEST PRACTICES-

Mr Chairman, In India the SwamiNathan Foundation has pioneered a rural knowledge network of Village knowledge centers (VKCs) which provide information across the agricultural value chain. These village knowledge centers are particularly suitable in the Sub-Saharan Africa context where self-employment in agriculture is, by far, the

most dominant activity with those with skills and information having greater opportunities. There is, thus, need for an urgent policy priority for Africa to attract investments in ICTs so that new models of research and extension are adopted - in order to increase smallholder competitiveness in a new rural economy.

The Swami Nathan model extends timely and relevant research and extension information and skills through a Virtual Academy that connects via uplink and downlink satellites. This model brings together the experts and grassroots level communities in a real time two-way communication, through WiFi based video conferencing, satellite based video conferencing, offline CDs for both audio and video, community newspapers allowing knowledge to reach every household.

NEXT steps

New agricultural breakthroughs will not be realized without more and better international commitments to innovative approaches that link the multiple stakeholders at local, national and global levels. The scientific and technology community is ready to support the new agriculture agenda and is aware that this will require building new capacities for smallholder farmers and their producer organisations, new capacities for agribusiness, and new strategic partnerships between the state and other actors. Development partners and national governments will need to re-align their support to new extension models. Africa urgently needs investments in rural ICT, bridging the digital divide this will enable closer links and continuous interactions between researchers, providers of technologies and the users. This morning, Dr Ogunlade Davidson and other panelists in yesterday afternoon's session have all highlighted the need to strengthen South-South linkages, we believe Africa has a lot to learn from India with respect to ICT for the rural economy.