

# Science promotes dialogue among youth

Young scientists from across the globe meet to discuss the way forward

A palpable chemistry fills the East Rand township of Tsakane as 60 young scientists from 40 countries congregate with enthusiastic young South Africans. The purpose of this meeting? To explore strategies for science outreach and engagement. The result? Inspiration, hope and valuable new perspectives on old challenges.

It is a typical winter day on the East Rand and dodging potholes on dusty streets en route from their conference venue fills 60 young scientists with a sense of uncertainty. However, upon arrival at the African School for Excellence, the excitement is tangible: 50 smartly dressed members from two independent Science Spaza clubs have long awaited this visit.

The delegates are representatives from National Young Academies of Science from over 40 countries, in South Africa for the Third Worldwide Meeting of the Young Academies of Science, a conference aimed at fostering global co-operation and networking among young scientists. A number of questions are on their minds, which have triggered this outreach and engagement with young science learners: where are the spaces for scientists to engage with the public? How can scientists talk to young people to inspire them towards careers in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (Stem)? And how can they, in turn, hear about the challenges young people face?

The afternoon's meeting is the initiative of the South African Young Academy of Sciences (Sayas), which partnered with Science Spaza, a science clubs programme to facilitate the proceedings. Soon, the air is teeming with paper planes (hands-on activities are the hallmark of the Science Spaza experience) and attendees of all ages explore the complex scientific principles at play.

The ice is broken and invigorating inter-generational discussions unfold: the older delegates ask young



Scientists from over 40 countries met at the Third Worldwide Meeting of the Young Academies of Science, the conference fosters networking among young scientists. Photos Department of Science and Technology

learners how they motivate themselves, and what their biggest obstacles are on the path to achieving their dreams. Their responses include lack of parental support for science,

inadequate funding, a lack of belief in themselves and the need for clear focus.

The scientists share their experiences of overcoming these obstacles

with perseverance, hard work, goal setting and choosing the right support systems. There is also important advice about avoiding risks and pitfalls — including early pregnancy.

The learners challenge the scientists on the continued development of an HIV cure, the consideration of environmental impact and the importance of remaining curious. These are relevant and inspiring insights stemming from the experience of living in under-resourced and vulnerable environments.

The insights from the Science Spaza clubs are testament to the success of the program. Science Spaza brings science directly to the public through activity-based learning resources, addressing the desperate shortage of opportunities for young people to undertake hands-on science learning in South Africa. The national network of over 150 self-initiated science clubs, an initiative of science communication agency Jive Media Africa, is an open invitation to young South Africans to form their own science clubs and receive resources and support. Science Spaza does all it can to facilitate science-society dialogue and advocates awareness and debate among its members in pursuit of tangible solutions.

The Third Worldwide Meeting of the National Academy of Sciences, which took place in Johannesburg from July 20-21 was hosted by Sayas, an affiliate organisation of the Academy of Science of South Africa. Sayas represents the voice of young scientists in South Africa on national and international matters and provides a platform for young scientists to influence policy decisions.

The meeting was co-hosted with the Global Young Academy, a global body that represents the voice of young scientists around the world. It works to empower early-career researchers to lead international, interdisciplinary, and intergenerational dialogue by developing and mobilising talent from six continents. Its purpose is to promote reason and inclusiveness in global decision making.

As the sun drops low, Tsakane is bathed in golden light and the delegates board their busses. Many are about to embark on journeys to the other side of the world. They are taking with them the hopes and dreams of the next generation of South African scientists. Scientists and science club members are already thinking of ways to make the world a little bit better and a little bit safer for all of us.



## National Science Week 2017

### 5-12 August 2017

### Advancing Science Tourism



science  
& technology

Department:  
Science and Technology  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

