

ANC government's corruption steals from the national system of science and innovation, human capital development and Postgraduates

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Ndiyanibulisa ngalentsasa

Covid-19 has forced us to comprehend the importance of science in decision-making, the importance of technology in navigating through the global health crisis, and innovation to sustain the phases. South Africa has long neglected to match its commitment to improved education and skills with a dedicated focus on science and innovation to drive job-creating economic growth and enhance service delivery. The institutions created to promote innovation for growth have been largely invisible and their activities have not been appropriately coordinated or integrated with initiatives in the private sector and most importantly all entities have been poorly funded!

The stark reality is that many cadres don't want to hear that the ANC has lost billions of taxpayer money to corruption to a point where efficient departments such as science and innovation have no budget to perform its functions today. Today over R1 billion meant for funding postgraduates has been cut, maybe to bail out SAA. R1,3 billion meant for research has been cut may be lost in the darkness of Eskom's loadshedding and over R700 million meant for science innovation projects, amongst them is R200 million taken from the CSIR's Cyber-Infrastructure R&D programme, R358.7 million cut from the Square Kilometre Array's capital contribution to research allocation; R200 million cut from the NRF's human resources development for science and engineering initiative; all at the cost of the ANC governments theft of the countries budget.

It is high time as the country we see science and innovation as a key driver of service delivery and developing technologies and innovations that will make our education, health and public service give the best quality.

It all starts with allocating adequate funding to:

- Developing Curriculum in TVETs and supporting University scientific research.
- Produce research and postgraduates to innovatively solve South Africa's problems.
- initiatives such as Biometrics for Home Affairs to enhance service by government departments.
- SKA for us to be a catalyst in big data and artificial intelligence.
- CSIR developing a digital healthcare platform.

To be a winning nation, South Africa must also be a place where new ideas are generated. This should include ideas to improve the way we deliver services, ideas for new products that can generate income

as seen at the CSIR, ideas to improve the efficiency of processes in both the public and private sector and ideas to solve our key societal challenges – for example in education, health, housing and job creation.

Every year the 30th of September is an important date for prospective university students at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. It is the closing date for admission applications, while the National Research Foundation is expected to have finalised its plan for 2020 postgraduate funding. It has become blatantly clear that there is a need for an expanded postgraduate specialisation base. The big question is whether South Africa is producing enough postgraduates, with the requisite skills and, if not, what the key obstacles are. To answer this is to state the obvious; No!

I agree with the expert's approach that we need to target funding for postgraduates especially those in specialist areas, this would be a great step in the right direction. For a while now, there has been more focus in resourcing undergraduates at the detriment of postgraduates. This is quite evident when you look at the postgraduate students funded between 2010 up to 2014 by NRF, they only managed to support 1.4% of the students who studied their honours right through to their doctoral studies. The government adds insult to injury for the NRF's 2020/21 budget as it has been cut by R753 million.

These pockets of excellence must be jealously guarded and cultivated to provide solutions in the future to enhance service delivery.

Its quite clear that there should be;

- No cuts to the Department of Science and Innovation and its entities considering the already existing underfunding for their sustainability while essential to socio-economic development, service delivery and to avoid collapsing them forever.
- No cuts to the NRF instead reinvest and increase funding for Postgraduates and research to build expert human capital to enhance the South African economy and solve problems through science.

We commend the department, its entities and the broader National System of Innovation (NSI) have all contributed to the various initiatives underway to strengthen the public health system during this time and the efficient contribution made even with years of a stringent budget.

In conclusion, we must cultivate a culture of science and innovation, fund it, use it to enhance service delivery and most importantly as an important department that can solve South Africa's problems in Education, Health, Policing, efficiency and production amongst others. It all starts by properly funding it rather than pay lip service Minister!