

Research for Sustainability and the Bilateral Science and Technology Agreement

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BUILDING BLOCKS

The 1st South African-German Dialogue on Science for Sustainability in 2008 identified important themes for D4S cooperation. Four crucial topics were addressed: 1.) environmental technologies and services; 2.) global change; 3.) sustainable energy use and 4.) sustainable resource management. The 2009 call for proposals built upon these four essential topics, and added three more themes of importance: biotechnology, nanotechnology and advanced manufacturing.

RESULTS

With the successful incorporation of these focal points, the proportion of sustainability research proposals under the bilateral science and technology agreement increased from 25% in 2008 to 51,5% in 2009. A wide array of sustainability-related topics are already a part of bilateral lighthouse projects funded on a large scale by research organisations, private sector, DST and BMBF- Inkaba ye Africa, Biota, EnerKey, Communal Waterhouse, Integrated Water Management Olifants, GENUS-as well as about 20% of roughly eighty known independent projects.

FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

Currently, the overall context of future sustainability topics will include UNFCCC processes and results, green jobs and the South African REFIT that will also trigger further research and development and applied sciences-oriented projects in the context of climate change and renewable energy. Furthermore, a German-South African MoU on renewable energy cooperation is currently elaborated upon.

On the environmental front, there is an international climate change initiative by the German government with eight current projects addressing climate change issues in South Africa.

D4S and the envisaged joint committee panel will focus beginning in 2010 on sustainability projects and programs. Future projects will address: regional science services centres on climate change (RSSC), earth system sciences (SPACES), sustainable land management, and other important issues.

Major emphasis is placed on the criticality of opening up the industrial sector (South Africa is currently weighing options which would allow open participation of SMEs in projects under the S&T agreement; joint research call). Consideration could be given to set up a cluster initiative on solar technologies. Similar to the EU, there could be a technology platform incorporating German and South African research organisations, as well as the public and private sectors.