

**Address by the Minister of Science and Technology, Naledi Pandor MP, at South African Association of Women Graduates (SAAWG) book launch '*Rights and Wrongs in this land of ours*', UCT Medical School, Wednesday 3 September 2014**

Ms Hazel Bowen, Immediate Past National President of the South African Association of Women Graduates (SAAWG), Members of SAAWG  
The South African Association of Women Graduates has a proud history of putting its expertise back into “growing” communities.

You have channeled your efforts towards providing support to girls and women, while developing and deepening your understanding of the critical impediments to attaining success.

You have focused not only upon the South African context, but have located yourselves within the African and international contexts.

I applaud your efforts in providing mentorship support, outreach initiatives, and scholarships specifically focused on girl learners and women students.

The book we launch today, “*Rights and Wrongs in this land of ours*”, is a record of 90 years of struggle at overcoming prejudice against women graduates in all walks of life.

I want to reflect on three statistics about women graduates.

First, four in ten academics are women, but they produce only two in ten publications. We have introduced interventions to encourage women to publish: the provision of equipment grants; special conference funding; workshops in publication and writing skills; postgraduate grants and research fellowships for women, special concessions for study leave (including lecturing replacements), as well as active institutional communication about research opportunities.

Without incentives that support and recognise women in research, significant change is unlikely to take place.

Second, 40% of South Africa's researchers are women. Of the 40,000 researchers in universities, science councils and business that our [latest R&D survey](#) records, nearly half are women. That makes South Africa one of the leading countries for female researchers.

However, statistics can mislead. Thandi Mgwebi, the executive director for institutional engagement and partnership development at the National Research Foundation, the grant funding agency of the DST, says in a [recent article in the Mail and Guardian](#) that: "Of the 2 959 NRF-rated researchers, as at February 2014, only 30% are female and only 510 of them are conducting research in natural sciences, engineering and technology." She says this is the reality, despite parity of enrollment at school with boys and a majority of women over men in tertiary education.

It is well known that the better educated women are the better it is for a country's social and economic development. If women lag behind in science and technology disciplines, then they put themselves at a disadvantage and that's not good for all of us.

Third, and last, men over fifty - an 'aging cohort' Thandi Mgwebi calls them - have turned South African universities into one the worlds most efficient research sectors. According to the [National Advisory Council on Innovation, Science and Technology Indicators for 2013](#), over the last ten years our publication output has risen above the world average. And it's cost effective.

They didn't do it on their own. They worked within a science and innovation ecosystem carefully crafted to give them the carrot of financial incentives and the stick of institutional support. And the absence of effective female competition. How much better our record would have been if there were more women with whom to compete and collaborate.

In closing, I would like to reiterate that significant progress has been made in South Africa with regards to the issues facing women in education.

We recognise our national and international obligations in relation to addressing inequalities between men and women in the education system, and we need to move beyond a demographic transformation to address the qualitative experiences of young people in the education system at all levels.

I would like to acknowledge the contribution of women in our struggle for liberation, and in particular to remember the heroines who struggled for equality in all spheres of life, but who are not able to see the benefits of their struggle in the huge improvements that have been made in women's lives.

Thank you.