

**Welcome address by Prof Russel Botman,
Rector and Vice-Chancellor, Stellenbosch University,
at the University's dinner for delegates to the
6th African Science Academy Development Initiative conference,
hosted by the Academy of Science of South Africa,
Wallenberg Research Centre, STIAS, 9 November 2010**

Good evening, everyone. Welcome to all of you. We are honoured to have you with us here in Stellenbosch. We wholeheartedly support the overarching goal of your conference, which is to develop science in Africa, because we believe science is good for development. And we share your specific concern for improving access to energy in sub-Saharan Africa. So, this is a great opportunity for us to forge mutually beneficial ties.

The DVD you have just seen would have given you some background about Stellenbosch University's HOPE PROJECT, which is an ambitious way of positioning our institution to be of service to society. What I want to do now, is to briefly emphasise a few relevant points.

A few years ago, a compilation of night photographs taken from space and released by NASA caused quite a stir. It starkly showed the contrast between the world's developed and underdeveloped areas. The industrialised world – Europe, North America, Japan and so on – was brightly lit up. But Africa was mostly dark, apart from a few spots, mostly along the edges of the continent and clusters in the south, north, east and west. This served as a graphic illustration of one of the biggest problems in Africa: poverty.

When we at Stellenbosch University started thinking about these issues, it became clear to us that it was our duty to use our strengths – our academic excellence and cutting-edge research – to be of service to society.

So, we analysed the UN's Millennium Development Goals and our government's Medium-Term Strategic Framework, and distilled the five themes of the HOPE Project.

We are convinced that if we use our science to (1) eradicate poverty and related conditions, and promote (2) human dignity and health, (3) democracy and human rights, (4) peace and

security; as well as (5) a sustainable environment and a competitive industry, then we will help to change the world.

Clearly, Africa needs more energy to advance its economic development, but it also needs cleaner and more efficient energy so that industrial and human development can proceed with minimal damage to the natural environment.

Stellenbosch University has for some time been a leader in this field through the work of the Centre for Renewable and Sustainable Energy Studies. The Centre is headed up by Professor Wikus van Niekerk, who is here tonight.

Another of our academic leaders in this field is Professor Emile van Zyl, a microbiologist. He was awarded a senior research chair in “Energy Research”, specifically “Biofuels and other clean alternative fuels”, by the South African National Energy Research Institute (SANERI). Emile is also here tonight, and I am sure both he and Wikus will welcome this networking opportunity.

The last energy-related example that I want to mention, is the “Energy and the Environment” initiative of our Faculty of Engineering. Some of their research areas include energy efficiency, electrification and renewable energy, including tapping into the power of the wind, the sun and ocean waves.

Let me tell you about a very exciting development. This coming Friday, which as you would know is African University Day, PANGeA is being launched here at Stellenbosch – no, not the pre-historic supercontinent, the Partnership for Africa’s Next Generation of Academics. This is a collaborative network consisting of Stellenbosch University and the universities of Botswana, Malawi, Dar es Salaam, Makerere and Nairobi.

In time, we aim to expand it to other universities across the continent, and also to go beyond the Humanities and the Social Sciences, which is its current focus.

The problem that PANGeA is trying to address is that Africa’s output of graduates and quality research is too low. Every year, the brain drain robs us of some of our best minds. And surveys

have also shown that sub-Saharan Africa is not making enough of a contribution to the global body of scientific knowledge, supplying only 0,7% of research findings.

PANGeA is linked to our Graduate School and African Doctoral Academy, which are initiatives of our Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences.

The Graduate School is aimed at growing and sustaining world-class postgraduate programmes, and coordinating relevant research in Africa. It started functioning in January this year, with a first cohort of 31 fulltime doctoral students on scholarships, 22 of whom are from outside the borders of South Africa.

The African Doctoral Academy is the mechanism through which advanced support in research skills training and scholarship development is being provided.

Ladies and gentlemen, all of you in this room are working on important issues in your respective fields. But occasions such as these underline the importance of working together for the common good of Africa. Because one thing is certain – the rest of the world is not going to switch on our lights. We have to do it ourselves.

Let us take hands and work together to lift Africa out of poverty and turn it into a powerhouse of human development.

Please discuss any questions you might have with me or any of my colleagues here tonight. Again, welcome here and enjoy the rest of the evening. And may your conference conclude successfully.