



AN AFRICAN RENAISSANCE IN SCIENCE EDUCATION: A UK-SOUTH AFRICA PARTNERSHIP

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Background South African President Thabo Mbeki's call to all Africans throughout the world to work together to solve Africa's problems and empower Africa's people has been conceptualised in his vision of an African renaissance. In the fields of science, maths and technology in South Africa, the imperative to deliver this vision is particularly crucial, especially as Chisholm (1991/2:1) claims that 'one of the most profoundly pernicious legacies of apartheid schooling has been the concentration of mathematical and scientific knowledge in the white community'.

Phafogang Education Network (PEN), a Black-led science NGO based in South Africa's North-West Province, and the African-Caribbean Network for Science and Technology (the Network), a Black-led educational charity based in the UK, have taken up the challenge of working in partnership to deliver the President's vision. Both organisations have a unique leadership role in their respective countries, as they are the only organisations solely focused on addressing the under-representation, under-achievement and under-participation of Blacks in Science, Engineering and Technology (SET) in both societies, where the challenges and patterns of disadvantage and inequality are very similar.

The links between the Network and PEN have been continuous since 1998, thanks to the support of the South African Government Department for Arts, Culture, Science and Technology (DACST) and the National Research Foundation (NRF).

Achievements to Date The Network and PEN have supported the delivery of initiatives at national and provincial levels. Activities have included:

- South Africa's First Year of Science and Technology 1998: activities in the North-West Province benefited 70,000 students, teachers and parents throughout the year.
- South Africa's First National Science and Technology Camp for Girls, Hilton College, 9-17 July 1999; funded by DACST, this was a high-profile initiative, launched by the National Minister for Arts, Culture, Science and Technology, involving sixty-three girls (age eleven to sixteen) and eighteen maths/science teachers (two teachers and seven girls per province were chosen to participate).

- South Africa's First National SET Week (20-25 March 2000); this inaugural SET Week was targeted at three provinces - the North-West, Northern Cape and Western Cape - and featured a variety of interactive activities, exhibitions and hands-on displays to engage everyone's interest in, and awareness of, the impact of science in their everyday lives. The national media were effectively used to popularise the aims and objectives of the week.

Activities in the North-West Province Within the North-West Province, the partnership's activities have been given political support by the Member of the Executive Council (MEC) for Education and the Premier of the Province. This has also involved strategic working partnerships with the Advisory Support Services for Schools, and links with the two universities in the province, the University of the North-West and Potchefstroom University. Links have also been developed with the local media, and leaders and chiefs throughout the province have also lent their support.

The core activities of the partnership in the province have involved the provision of additional support for students in maths, science and technology, in-service training (INSET), and support for parents, to enable them to effectively support their children's educational attainment. A key challenge to the work in the province is its largely rural geography (sixty per cent of population live in rural areas). The activities delivered by the partnership in the province include:

- Marang Science Clubs - after-school study support programmes in maths, science, technology, physics, chemistry, biology and other related subjects.

Thus far, these programmes have been delivered on Saturday mornings to Grade 10-12 students. Plans are under way to extend this provision to weekday sessions, after school hours, and for students from Grades 7 to 12.

We've only just begun... While the partnership has achieved a great deal in its short period of existence, they believe that they are very much at the beginning of an exciting but challenging journey, and that there is much more to come, and much more that we want to achieve for black youth in South Africa and the U.K.

This dynamic partnership has been led, driven and sustained through the commitment of, as they like to call themselves, 'the two fat ladies in science', Liz Rasekoala, the Director of the Network and Cynthia Chishimba, the Director of PEN. The British Council's support for this partnership through its sponsorship of Mrs. Chishimba's U.K Study Tour in the UK in summer 2000 has enabled the recruitment of more UK-based partners to support the delivery of its programmes in the UK and in South Africa. The teachers, students and parents who participate in, and benefit from, the activities of the Network in the UK have been empowered through Mrs. Chishimba's visit, and have learnt from her experiences in terms of dealing with challenges in South Africa.

This is what makes this partnership unique, empowering and innovative, as it is about learning and sharing across both countries. It is a level playing field where no one feels patronised, exploited or dominated, and brings Africans together within a constructive and positive framework.