

Africa Engineering Week aims to change lives

Africa Engineering Week is currently underway at the University of Johannesburg's Doornfontein Campus from 1-4 September.



The week is a collaboration between the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), the South African Department of Science and Technology (DST) and the Engineering Council of South Africa (ECSA).

The week's programme includes a conference on sustainable engineering and a four-day exhibition, showcasing the nine different engineering disciplines offered at various universities around the country. Teachers should encourage their pupils to attend this exhibition, which is open to the public at no charge.

The main objective of Africa Engineering Week is to educate the youth and the general public about the significance of engineering in their lives. The week-long event is themed 'Engineering is a life changer!' and will be filled with activities ranging from educational workshops and public awareness events, to mentoring activities and even women's events.

Science solves challenges

"We are at the forefront of using science to solve the various challenges of our nation," said Minister of Science and Technology, Naledi Pandor, speaking ahead of the opening of the event. "We understand the importance of the engineering profession, and we are confident that we will increase the number of young people, especially women, who intend entering the profession."

According to Irina Bokova, Director-General of UNESCO, the role of engineering needs to be far more visible and better understood if more individuals are to choose it as a career. "Problems in the developing world need to be highlighted, as do

the dangers of not having enough skilled engineers to fill the numerous positions. It is estimated that approximately 2,5 million new engineers and technicians will be needed in sub-Saharan Africa alone if this region is to achieve the Millennium Development Goals of improved access to clean water and sanitation."

Bokova said although many African countries were still experiencing economic crisis, the challenge presented great opportunities for engineers on the continent. "World leaders now recognise the importance of funding engineering, science and technology. They understand that investments in infrastructure, technology for climate change mitigation and the adaptation in areas such as renewable energy may provide a path to economic recovery and sustainability," she said.

Youth is needed

President of ECSA, Cyril Gamede, agrees that the profession needed more young blood to bring new innovative thinking to dealing with the challenges of the future.

"We need the youth to transcend our expectations and elevate the profession to new heights by applying modern technologies and systems to the resolution of the challenges our grandchildren will face one day. We intend to impact and influence the profession with topical discussions that look at global best practice, and hope to inspire the youth to pursue a rewarding career in engineering," Gamede said.

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