

## Media Release

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For immediate release:



**Front row from left to right:** Mahlodi Lekoana and Tshegofatso Motlatla.

**Back row from left to right:** SKA SA representative, Ms Anja Fourie, Kabelo Maifadi, Morakoane Madiba, Itumeleng Katjedi and Ms Onicca Lekgothoane, a teacher at SJ Van Der Merwe Technical High School.

### **SJ Van Der Merwe Technical High School crowned National Schools Debates champions**

SJ Van Der Merwe Technical High School from Limpopo Province beat eight schools to be awarded the title of the 2017 South African Agency for Science and Technology

Advancement National Schools Debates champions on Friday evening at a glittering award function, at the Southern Sun Hotel in Pretoria.

SJ Van Der Merwe Technical High School went head-to-head against eight other competing high schools from around the country for the coveted prize, all of whom are the respective provincial winners out of 90 schools that competed in all provincial finals.

The panel of adjudicators including nanoscientists and debating experts, judged the team from SJ Van Der Merwe Technical High School learners to be the most well-rounded debaters, presenting well-balanced content and persuasive arguments.

All nine schools debated the question: *Should South Africa increase its investment in the development of medical nanotechnology and will this benefit everyone in South Africa?*

The topic was on nanotechnology in the field of medicine and how it could transform the way we detect and treat damage to the human body and disease. Nanotechnology is being applied in the development of more effective drug delivery systems and “smart drugs” are now able to target particular areas in the human body. Introduction of nanoparticles into the human body comes with associated risks and not all of these risks are known.

Competing schools were tasked to argue this question and the topic from four different perspectives, these being: Application and Benefit, Economic, Socio-Cultural and Political. The contestants are only allowed to pre-prepare their opening statements but subsequent responses and closing speeches must be prepared during the competition.

In addition to increasing their knowledge on nanotechnology and gaining experience in the debating arena, the Square Kilometre Array (SKA) is awarding the team and their educator an all-expenses-paid science tour to the East Coast of the USA.

The tour will include, amongst others, a site visit to the Greenbank Radio Astronomy Observatory in West Virginia; guided tours of the NASA Goddard Space Flight Centre and Smithsonian Museums, including the Air and Space Museum, in Washington, DC; and an internship at the American Museum of Natural History in New York.

It is quite easy to be ignorant and have an opinion. It is much more difficult to be informed, well read and educated on a topic and to be able to distil this information into an argument and to then deliver this argument in a manner that everyone understands. One also then needs to be open, wise and humble enough to hear other people arguments and possibly even adjust one’s own perspective based on these arguments,” said Michael Ellis, Manager of Science Communication for SAASTA.

“Debate is a lively and valuable platform that makes scientific information relevant to learners; it’s the spark that can light the fire which fuels a lifelong quest for innovation,” added Ellis.

The SAASTA National Schools Debates Competition is an annual programme that aims to encourage young people to address key issues around science and technology that are faced by their communities.

Conceived and hosted by SAASTA, a business unit of the National Research Foundation, the programme seeks to foster the confidence to speak about science in high school students from Grades 9 to 11. It also gives participants the opportunity to develop research, critical thinking and information literacy skills, as well as the ability to work as a team to present logical, clear arguments.

The National Schools Debates Competition is supported by the Department of Science and Technology-funded public engagement programmes – HySA Public Awareness, Demonstration and Education Platform and the Nanotechnology Public Engagement Programme - and the Square Kilometre Array.

ENDS

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**About the South African Agency for Science and Technology Advancement (SAASTA)**

SAASTA is a business unit of the National Research Foundation (NRF) with the mandate to advance public awareness, appreciation and engagement of science, engineering and technology in South Africa.

SAASTA's contribution to the NRF's vision is to grow the pool of quality learners today who will become the scientists and innovators of tomorrow.

It aims to be the leading science advancement agency in the country by promoting and communicating the value and impact of science, technology and innovation in a dynamic knowledge economy. It also intends to contribute significantly towards building a science, engineering and technology (SET) human resource base. For more information on the operations and programs within the NRF please visit [www.saasta.ac.za](http://www.saasta.ac.za)

**About the NRF:** The National Research Foundation (NRF) was established on 1 April 1999 as an independent statutory body in accordance with the National Research Foundation Act. The NRF is a key public entity responsible for supporting the development of human resources for research and innovation in all fields of science and technology. The

organisation is one of the major players in educating and training a new generation of scientists able to deal with South African and African needs. The organisation encourages public awareness and appreciation of science, engineering and technology, and facilitates dialogue between science and society. Its vision is to contribute to a prosperous South Africa based on a knowledge economy. For more information on the operations and programs within the NRF please visit [www.nrf.ac.za](http://www.nrf.ac.za)