



SAASTA
South African Agency for Science
and Technology Advancement

PO Box 1758
Pretoria 0001
South Africa
Tel: (012) 392 9300
Fax: (012) 320 7803
Int. Code: +27 12
info@saasta.ac.za

www.saasta.ac.za

To all Media

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For immediate release:

Inquisitive young minds to explore science from different perspectives

South African Grades 9-11 learners across the country are researching and contemplating important issues around science in society as they prepare their submissions for the National Schools Science Debates competition, hosted by the South African Agency for Science and Technology Advancement (SAASTA), on 6 May 2022. The topic, **‘the importance of indigenous knowledge systems in responding to climate change’**, will spark robust discussion, as many learners are already experiencing the effects of climate change in South Africa.

This unique and inspiring debating competition aims to expand learners’ critical thinking and communication skills, while exposing them to different perspectives about science and its role in society that they may not be exposed to in the classroom. Through researching and debating science topics during the competition, SAASTA hopes learners will become science communication ambassadors, so that they will go on to encourage social conversations around science in their own communities.

It is imperative for the youth to be driving conversations about science and topics such as climate change. Extreme weather events and changes in climate patterns, such as those experienced in KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape recently, as well as around the world, are showing South African citizens the severity and the impact of climate change. The challenges brought about by climate change are complex and require many stakeholders such as government, scientists and NGOs to come together to find solutions. Indigenous communities that hold and develop indigenous knowledge are vitally important to help develop local solutions to adapt and improve resilience to climate change.

Each debating team will have five learners and will explore the topic of climate change from different perspectives. These perspectives are: *application and benefit*, which asks learners to think about the use of knowledge, science and technology; *economic*, which asks learners to think about financial investments and implications; *socio-cultural*, which ask learners to consider how social dynamics and cultural values influence and are impacted by science; and last but not least, the *political* perspective, which asks learners to consider how science and technology developments take place within a political environment and the relationship between science and our democracy.

“Encouraging debate is a way to strengthen an individual and ultimately to strengthen society and, thus, put the world of science in the hands of society,” said Mr Michael Ellis, Science Communication Division Manager at SAASTA.

Over 200 schools are expected to participate in this year’s competition. They must prepare and submit an opening and closing statement for judging today (6 May 2022). Then ten (10) schools per province will be selected to compete in the provincial phase of the competition in August and September. The top school per province will then participate in the national final in October 2022

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Notes:

For more information about the National Schools Science Debates competition, visit: <https://www.saasta.ac.za/competitions/national-schools-debates/>

Contact:

Mrs Lithakazi Masilela, NRF-SAASTA, at L.Masilela@saasta.nrf.ac.za

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

About the National Research Foundation (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.