

Budget Vote Debate 30 Science and Technology
By
Hon. M Hlengwa MP

21 May 2015

Honourable Speaker,

The Square Kilometre Array (SKA) being located in the Karoo in the Northern Cape represents a great achievement for the scientific community in South Africa and will provide an opportunity for them to study the far flung ends of our universe.

Despite this, those communities surrounding the installation site of these radio telescopes are still not benefitting from this project. Many still languish in poverty while billions are being spent around them. If it was not for the SKA project, one wonders if these communities would even be remembered at all, because service delivery, poverty and unemployment still ravage these communities.

South Africa is fast becoming a scientific hub of activity and this does present us with a great opportunity to contribute to the technological advancements of our modern world. However, to level success cannot be maintained without continual improvement at grassroots, signified by provision of scientific tools for schools and communities to access.

Otherwise we will end up relying on accidental scientific successes, which fool us into thinking we are keeping up with the ever changing technological and scientific landscapes.

We need to get back to basics when it comes to science and technology. Our levels of maths and science in the country are appalling, with the country being listed the worst when it comes to these subjects 2 years in a row on the Global Information Technology report released by the World Economic Forum. Most of our schools in the townships and other areas inhabited by black people are dysfunctional and those considered to be located in the wealthier parts of our country outperform all others.

If this situation remains as it is, we cannot expect to be scientifically and technologically ready to meet the needs of our people in this modern era. The department must ensure that the foundations of scientific advancement are in place before bragging about successful projects on an international scale. Otherwise our country will always be considered to have great potential yet incapable of truly benefiting from it.