**National Assembly**

**Tuesday, 17 May 2022**

**Budget Vote 35: Science and Innovation**

**Hon. MD Hlengwa, MP (delivered on behalf of Hon. S Zondo, MP)**

Honourable Chairperson,

Since the outbreak of Covid-19, we have been witness to many technological shifts in the way we work, socially interact and prioritise our social and environmental responsibilities. Our number one focus has been putting considerable effort into addressing the shortcomings of our public health system. As a result, science and innovation has a crucial role to play in guiding the trajectory of South Africa in this regard.

Science and innovation needs to play a more active role in developing our national and global emergency protocols, whereby factual information is the key driver to decision-making by the government. With the development of the 4th Industrial Revolution and all its various tools, information is readily available but not accessible to all. What is needed is a more complete strategy that delves into the details of the vision of the socio-economic needs of the country, the required supporting infrastructure across the economic spectrum, as well as proper emergency response mechanisms. This is something that government’s current NDP falls short of in many aspects.

It is the duty of this Department to ensure that science and innovation becomes fully integrated in the decision-making of all citizens of this country. For example, we have seen many conspiracies, which have led to a surge of suspicion around the Covid-19 vaccination, which could be attributed to a lack of overall understanding of the treatment. This is something that the government needs to invest in over the foreseeable future, so that people are not misguided or coerced into decisions because they do not have all the relevant information readily accessible to them.

Honourable Chairperson, we must strive to grow our capacity in support of the Committee’s recommendations regarding its transformation agenda.

The development of transformation growth, beyond funding at undergraduate levels of education, is a sought-after reform for this sector. We are clear witnesses to the tragic underrepresentation of skilled and capable women in the science, technology and innovation fields. Women who come from previously disadvantaged backgrounds need to be supported at postgraduate level, so that they may contribute  and inspire more women in this field. Moreover, whilst some ground has been made, there are still large gaps when it comes to female graduates in science who are employed in the private sector. They are paid considerably less than their male counterparts and underrepresented in all industries. This does not only extend to the IT and Technology sector but all sectors that make use of advanced analytics and science, be it the food, waste, transport, logistics industries and more. Whilst this is an area where the Department of Employment and Labour has not yet seen the required reforms, this Department must find ways for women who have science degrees to find equal opportunities.

In closing, the IFP would like to support the Committee’s recommendation that the Department explore mechanisms to broaden their science communication and outreach activities, so that more people are aware of the work of the Department and its entities.

The IFP supports this Budget.