

Sustainability and collaboration emerge as key African themes for International Year of Chemistry

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Published: 04 Feb 11

The role of chemistry in Africa's future development was the theme of the fortieth South African Chemical Institute (SACI) convention, held recently at the University of the Witwatersrand, in Johannesburg.

The convention was the first in a series of events planned by the International Union of Pure and Applied Chemistry (Iupac) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (Unesco) for the International Year of Chemistry (IYC) and a prelude to the official IYC opening ceremony, on January 27 and 28, at the Unesco headquarters, in Paris.

The joint fortieth SACI and third Federation of African Societies of Chemistry (FASC) meeting was geared towards building collaboration between African chemists on sustainable chemistry and creating a platform for presenting current research work. In total, 450 delegates attended the event.

Research activities in all traditional branches of chemistry (organic, inorganic, physical and analytical) as well as inter-disciplinary areas (such as materials, nano- science, bioinorganic, green and environmental chemistry) were showcased. The event was also seen as an opportunity for chemists on the continent to build links to strengthen the Pan African Chemistry Network launched in Kenya.

The SACI convention featured eight speakers from around the world who focused mostly on chemistry for sustainable development, including the UK's former chief scientific adviser and the University of Oxford's Smith School of Enterprise and Environment's director, Sir **David King**, and South African professor, **Tebello Nyokong**, who holds a Department of Science and Technology (DST)/National Research Foundation chair in medicinal chemistry and nanotechnology at Rhodes University, in the Eastern Cape.

The FASC meeting is held every two years. On the last day of the conference, the focus moved from the SACI to the FASC, the theme being green chemistry. The plenary lecture by the University of Nottingham's Professor **Martyn Poliakoff** focused on how Africa can use green chemistry as the focal point for developing its chemical industry, says SACI conference chair Professor **James Darkwa** of the University of Johannesburg. Poliakoff is also a council member of the

Institution of Chemical Engineers.

The DST also briefed the conference on its efforts to develop programmes for green chemistry in South Africa and the SACI green chemistry division elected its office bearers for 2011/12, he adds.

Other delegates at the convention included Iupac president Professor **Nicole Moreau**; FASC president Professor **Temechehn Engida**; Royal Society of Chemistry president Professor **David Phillips**, American Chemical Society president Dr **Nancy Jackson** and SACI president Professor **Ivan Green**.

BASF, of South Africa, was one of the main sponsors of the SACI/FASC event and two of its representatives were keynote speakers at the convention.