

SPEAKERS' BIOGRAPHIES

DAY ONE – 2 June 2026

Official opening, Small business theme and Pitching session

Why Invest in the IK-Based Technology Innovation Sector?

TERMINAL A



1 Prof Rasigan Maharajh is a South African academic, activist-scholar, and research leader with work experience spanning over four decades. His research focuses on evolutionary political economy of science, technology, and innovation. He has held significant leadership roles in national and international institutions and has an extensive record of scholarly publications, community engagements, and global collaborations. Rasigan has a Ph.D. in the Political Economy of Research Policy from Lund University and is concurrently: Full Professor of Public Affairs at Tshwane University of Technology; Elected Member of the Academy of Science of South Africa; Associate Research Fellow of the Tellus Institute; Ministerial Representative to the Council of Rhodes University; and Trustee of the Canon Collins Trust.

Response speeches by the Hosting Partners

TERMINAL A



2 Dr Joe Molete (NWU) is an accomplished executive leader, strategist, and academic with extensive experience in higher education, biotechnology, research, and technology commercialisation. He has over 15 years of experience in research and innovation, more than a decade in academia, and several years in executive leadership roles in both South Africa and the United States. He currently serves as Deputy Vice-Chancellor at North-West University, where he leads Student Life, Transformation, People and Culture, and strategic oversight of the Mahikeng Campus. Previously, he held senior leadership positions including Executive Director at the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research Biosciences, CEO of BioPAD, and leadership roles at several universities such as CUT, DUT and VUT. Dr Joe is passionate about building educational and innovation ecosystems that drive regional economic growth, entrepreneurship, skills development, and collaboration between academia, industry, government, and communities. He holds a PhD in Biochemistry and Molecular Biology from Pennsylvania State University, an MBA from University of Cape Town, and completed the Advanced Management Programme at Harvard Business School.



3 Mr Victor Kgomoewana (UL) has been Executive Director of Marketing and Communication at the University of Limpopo since November 2021 to date. In this role, he interacts with several stakeholders in the higher education sector daily, from students, to media and government, serving as the spokesperson of the institution, among others. Victor is bestselling author of two books, namely, 'Africa is Open for Business: Ten Years of Game-Changing Headlines' (2014) and 'Africa Bounces Back: Case Studies from a Resilient Continent' (2021) – both published by Pan Macmillan.

He is a highly experienced speaker and media commentator specialising in African business and economic affairs, who is known for his Afro-optimistic perspective and vigorous advocacy work for the economic rebirth of Africa. He is a highly experienced conference facilitator and programme director with a career spanning over three decades in all sectors of the economy. His public speaking experience goes back to his school days in the 1980s when he was a fiercely competitive debater to date when his voice and opinion are among the most trusted on the continent. As a student at the University of

the North (now University of Limpopo) in the politically turbulent mid- to late-1980s, he was a student activist who led, and participated in, highly charged public discussions. As a teacher in the 1990s he was a union leader. Victor started his broadcasting in 1996 at a community radio station during his tenure as youth development officer in the Gauteng Department of Education (Springs/Nigel/Devon District) to foster cross-cultural integration of learners coming from diverse backgrounds in post-1994 South Africa.

Since then, he has been in the media as presenter, producer, columnist, commentator, analyst, and consultant – for online, print, radio, television media, including the SABC, KayaFM, PowerFM, Talk Radio 702, CNBC Africa, eNCA, CNN, BBC, among others. His private sector experience includes being Business Development Executive at PPC Ltd and Associate Director at EY's Africa Business Centre, where he advised clients on navigating the African business environment. He has travelled to 30 African countries on business.



4 Dr Bangani Jeffrey Mpangalasane (TIH) is currently the Chief Executive Officer of The Innovation Hub, an innovation agency of the Gauteng Province and a subsidiary of the Gauteng Growth and Development Agency, strategically tasked with driving innovation and entrepreneurship in the province. He holds a PhD focusing on developing a diagnostic readiness framework for the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) and an MBA from North West University Business School. He has a Post Graduate Diploma in Management at Regenesys Business School and an undergraduate degree (Information and Communication Technology (ICT) which was acquired from the Vaal University of Technology in conjunction with the Baden-Württemberg Cooperative State University, Loerrach in Germany, where he was an exchange student. Over the years, he has been exposed to global and local entrepreneurial innovation in the SADC region, Germany, Switzerland, India, the USA, China, etc. He is a seasoned executive and his experience spans over more than twenty years, during which he worked as an Innovation and Strategic Management Lead and Corporate Governance. He also holds leadership roles in the state-owned enterprises, private, and public sectors. He has vast experience serving as a member of the Ministerial Executive Committee, Senior Executive Committee, Senior Management Committee, Government CIO Council (GITOC), Sub-Committee Chairperson (CIO Council), ICT Steering Committee, Non-executive Director, and Innovation Executive Council (Asia, Middle East, and Africa). He is currently serving as the Advisory member for the BRICS Incubation Committee. He is passionate about entrepreneurship and the possibility of innovating to solve societal challenges that we are facing in society.



5 Prof Fulufhelo Netswera (UNIVEN) is the DVC for Research and Postgraduate Studies at the University of Venda since October 2025. He concurrently heads the BRICS Research Institute, which was established in 2021. Before joining UNIVEN, he was the Executive Director of the Faculty of Management Sciences at the Durban University of Technology for six years. He has served historically as the Director of the NWU Business School, the Deputy Dean for Research at CPUT, Director of Research Management at UNISA and Researcher at various institutions.



6 Prof Nnenesi Kgabi (NSTF) is Chief Director of Research and Postgraduate Support at the North-West University. She currently serves in research management and governance space as Chairperson of the National Science and Technology Forum (NSTF), Chairperson of the SADC WaterNet Board, and Vice President of the Southern African Research and Innovation Management Association (SARIMA). Prof Kgabi is member of the Water Research Commission (WRC) Board where she also serves as chairperson of the Human Resource Committee. She is also member of the South African Bureau of Standards Technical Committee of Research Management (SABS/TC1201). She represents Support (Non-academic) Staff in the North-West University Council.

Prof Kgabi currently serves as reviewer for The Solution-oriented Research for Development (SOR4D), a joint funding instrument of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF). She previously

participated as review panel member in the Swiss Programme for International Research by Scientific Investigation Teams (SPIRIT), and the Council Higher Education (CHE) Doctoral review panels, and later on Institutional Audit panels. She also participated as SADC expert offering technical assistance to the SA-EU Dialogue Facility focusing on the impact of COVID-19 on the EU and SADC Water Research Agendas. She also made significant contribution to establishment, growth and sustenance of the SARIMA-NWU Community of Practice on Research Output, Outcomes and Impact (COP-ROOI), which is now the SARIMA COP-ROOI.

SMMEs and Entrepreneurship-Focused Research, Development and Innovation

TERMINAL A



7 Ms Retang Phaahla: Setsong. Surveying from the University of Pretoria. Driven by a passion for sustainable development, she transitioned from the built environment to the agro-processing and agri-tourism sectors in 2016. She is now the Chief Executive Officer of Setšong Tea Crafters, an indigenous tea manufacturing company rooted in the unique biodiversity of Sekhukhune, Limpopo. Setšong Tea Crafters specializes in harvesting and processing indigenous flora into teas renowned for their health benefits, such as calming nerves, relieving muscle tension, balancing blood pressure, and providing essential nutrients like Vitamin A (Beta-Carotene), Fiber, Calcium, and Zinc. Under Retang's leadership, the company has developed a celebrated range of indigenous teas and established cultural tea tours that educate visitors on indigenous knowledge systems and the cultural significance of traditional teas, bridging the gap between tourism, heritage, and eco-conscious enterprise. A committed social entrepreneur, Retang has worked alongside her mother and business partner, Nondumiso Phaahla, since 2013 to implement a socio-economic model that empowers rural communities – particularly women – in the Sekhukhune District. Together, they've created meaningful opportunities in harvesting, processing, packaging, and distributing teas, driving rural economic growth while preserving indigenous heritage. Setšong Tea Crafters is a proudly women-owned social enterprise and has earned numerous accolades for its innovation and impact, including:

- Most Progressive SMME – Johannesburg Chamber of Commerce Bio-Entrepreneur of the Year – Africa Bio
- Top Female-Run Enterprise – SA Innovation Summit
- 2nd Runner-Up in Agro-processing – Eskom Business Investment Competition
- Food Lover's Market Seeds of Change Winner 2022
- Best Agro-processing Enterprise – Department of Agriculture 2023
- Jacaranda FM's Her Perfect Pitch 2024
- Veuve Clicquot Bold Woman Award 2025
- Retang champions inclusive, community-based development and continues to use entrepreneurship as a catalyst for sustainable socio-economic change in South Africa



8 Mr Prince Msomi: Prijap is one of the founders of Prijap Biolife Biotechnologies and an entrepreneur, indigenous knowledge holder with a strong passion for advancing healthcare through innovation and traditional wisdom. He holds a National Diploma in and has further strengthened his expertise through certifications in entrepreneurship, business administration, international cooperation, and quality management. Driven by a commitment to improving lives, Prince Msomi focuses on the development of new medicines inspired by traditional knowledge and indigenous healing practices. His work aims to bridge the gap between biotechnology and African Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS), promoting sustainable healthcare solutions and scientific innovation rooted in cultural heritage.

Through his leadership, Prince Msomi is dedicated to advancing research-driven natural health products and contributing to the growth of indigenous biotechnology innovation in South Africa and beyond.



9 Mrs Mirl Cunningham: Honeybush is an experienced business leader and community development advocate with over four decades of experience in the chemical industry, having served as an Accounts Manager since 1984. Driven by a strong passion for sustainable development and indigenous knowledge systems, she assumed management of Thornham Honeybush in 2020 and currently serves as a Director of the company as well as a Board member of the South African Honeybush Tea Industry Association (SAHTA).

Under her leadership, Thornham Honeybush evolved from a small honeybush seedling nursery into an agro-processing facility focused on value addition, innovation, and community empowerment. The enterprise produces a range of honeybush-based products, such as honeybush green tea infusions, honeybush infused jams, crunchies, and wellness products such as bath salts, all inspired by the health-promoting properties of indigenous honeybush tea.

Mirl is passionate about using local natural resources to create sustainable livelihoods, particularly for women, youth, and small-scale farmers. Through skills development, employment creation, and enterprise support initiatives, she has helped transform indigenous commodities into marketable products that promote both wellness and economic inclusion.

Beyond business, she is actively involved in social and environmental initiatives, including educating school learners about the importance of indigenous plants, supporting pensioners, and participating in environmental conservation programmes such as alien vegetation removal. Her work reflects a commitment to sustainable rural development, biodiversity conservation, and the promotion of South Africa's indigenous herbal tea heritage for both local and international visitors as the business is located in a tourist hub, Tsitsikamma.



10 Mrs Joyce Nomathamsanqa Rwekwana (I-Brand) is currently serving as the Marketing and Sales Officer at the University of the Free State, within the Pharmacology department under Professor Motlalepula Matsabisa. Since 2022, she has been responsible for developing and implementing marketing, communications and sales strategies to promote the department's offerings and support organisational goals. Mrs Rwekwana holds an Honours degree in Marketing from the Central University of Technology, bringing valuable expertise and a strategic approach to her role.

Respondents:

11 Mr Rendani Tshishivhiri (SEDFA) is a Chartered Accountant with deep expertise in development, infrastructure, corporate, and structured finance, spanning markets in South Africa, the UK, and the USA. He currently serves as an Investment Principal at Sedfa's SME Wholesale Lending, where he leads the appraisal process and manages deals through to final approval.

Throughout his career, Rendani has mastered the full deal lifecycle, from initial origination and sophisticated financial structuring to technical risk mitigation. He has a strong track record of delivering high-impact projects, including those supported by government grants, mezzanine finance, and large-scale infrastructure developments. Beyond the numbers, Rendani is deeply committed to driving sustainable socio-economic growth, with a particular passion for empowering Black Industrialists and black-owned SMEs across South Africa.



12 Mr Zakheni Ngubo: IRCA is the Founding Director of IRCA – Innovation & Research Commercialisation Agency and President of The Blankett Technologies Group, overseeing commercialisation and venture development initiatives across Southern Africa, with a footprint spanning Botswana, Namibia, and South Africa. He specialises in transforming research, intellectual property, and early-stage innovations into commercially viable ventures, bridging the gap between academia, industry, entrepreneurs, and investment ecosystems.

He is the creator of Syafunda Digital Libraries and Kelo Digital Bookshop and has played a key role in launching and scaling technology ventures through venture creation, strategy, and commercialisation. His work extends across universities, technology transfer ecosystems, and research institutions including CSIR, TIA, USAf, universities and innovation partners across South Africa, alongside regional ecosystem collaborations in Namibia through the Namibia National Commission on Research, Science and Technology (NCRST), and Botswana innovation and commercialisation initiatives.

Passionate about entrepreneurship and ecosystem development, Zakheni remains actively involved in business mentorship and coaching through Impact Hub SA, SAB Foundation, Business and Arts South Africa (BASA), EDHE Entrepreneurship Intervarsity Competition, TIA, CSIR, DUT Innobiz, Nedbank, and SAB Foundation. Zakheni is a Mandela Washington Fellow, graduate of the Branson Centre Fellow and a member of Sir Richard Branson's Disrupting for Good leadership gathering on Necker Island.

His work has earned national recognition, including being named among Mzansi's Top 100 Young Independents and Disruptive Entrepreneurs, Destiny Man Top 30 Young Achievers, and Power of 40 Top 40 Under 40 Industry Leaders and Innovators in South Africa.

Pitching sessions: Programme Director



13 Dr Phuti Chelopo-Mgobozi (TIH) is the Bio-Innovations Manager at the Technology Innovation and Cluster Development division of The Innovation Hub Management Company (TIHMC). At TIHMC, she executes the Bio-economy innovation programmes for Biotech, Health-tech, Medical-tech, Agri-tech and Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS)-based technologies. Dr Chelopo-Mgobozi's role involves strengthening strategic partnerships with key stakeholders for programme implementation. She manages various innovation programmes, which include a flagship Accelerator Innovation Competition in the Biosciences and Medical categories; AgriPark @ TIH, a food security anchoring programme operated at the high-tech greenhouse facility; and an Entrepreneurship Programme, a business skills development programme for the elevation of IKS-based innovations. Dr Chelopo-Mgobozi obtained her PhD qualification in Pharmaceutical Chemistry from North-West University (NWU) in 2017. She is an active member of the Institute of Directors South Africa (IoDSA). She serves on multiple Advisory Committees in the Bio-economy sector. Dr Chelopo-Mgobozi is passionate about contributing to innovation ecosystems and economic growth strategies in Africa, as well as participating in various youth empowerment and mentorship programmes for future leaders.

Pitching session A: Evaluation panel members

TERMINAL A



14 Dr Michael Magondo

Entrepreneurship and Innovation: Dr Magondo has extensive practical experience in entrepreneurship, having spent over 30 years as an entrepreneur himself playing various roles in small to medium business from founding new business to venture capital investor to turn-around specialist. In this period Dr Magondo has been directly involved in over 20 entrepreneurial ventures ranging from new start-ups to medium-sized businesses with a turnover of R100m per annum. Dr Magondo has been involved in a number of industry first innovations across a number of different industries using his experience to find market gaps that are suitable for innovation. He has adopted open innovation as a key driver for leveraging innovation to address many of societies socio economic challenges. Dr Magondo's business, "Wouldn't It Be Cool" has mentored over 6,000 start-up businesses and currently is engaged in supporting a number mentorship and incubation programmes in Gauteng, KZZ. Northwest, Northern Cape, Limpopo and Eastern Cape provinces.

Business Mentorship: Dr Magondo has over 20 years' experience providing business mentorship and entrepreneur coaching to participants across a number of programmes. From high tech innovative cutting-edge business concepts with programme partners such as Resolution Circle, Blue Fields and Total South Africa and Sophiatown green incubator to more basic business concepts by first time young entrepreneurs on programmes such as The Raymond Akerman Academy with the UJ Center for

Entrepreneurship. In this period Dr Magondo has personally mentored over 5,000 businesses and entrepreneurs.

Business Strategy Consulting: With over 25 years of business strategy formulation, planning and execution. The diverse experience has provided Dr Magondo with exposure to practical application of various business strategy and operational models. This experience has been supported by formal education from Unisa and GIBS in strategy and strategy formulation.

Technology Skills: Dr Magondo has had over 20 years of technology exposure at a technical implementation level and technology management level. These skills have been honed through practical application of technology in a number of different industries through the various roles he has played over the last 20 years. Dr Magondo has numerous technical certifications in architecture, development, systems engineering and implementation from various technology vendors that has been amassed over the 20-year period. Dr Magondo has extensive skills in conceptualizing technological solutions to address core business problems.

Management Skills: Dr Magondo has an extensive track record of people, strategy and organisational management skills in both large corporates and small start-up businesses. As chief Architect at GijimaAst Dr Magondo managed a large team of technical resources placed through the organization and as Chief Executive Officer of Notsi Group Dr Magondo managed a complex organizational operating structure with a combined turn-over of over R100m and up to 100 staff.

Investment Management: Dr Magondo has post graduate qualification in Investment Analysis and Portfolio Management from Unisa (2008) and an extensive track record of fund management, mergers and acquisition. Dr Magondo has acquired experience and expertise as an entrepreneur having undertaken a number of mergers and acquisitions Notsi Group and as a mentor supporting 100's of entrepreneurs to structure and transaction on credit and equity transactions successfully. Dr Magondo has led investment teams that have successfully developed 3 funds and directly disbursed over R150m to SMME's with the fund exceeding contracted financial and social impact indicators.



15 Dr Edwell Gumbo (EDHE; USAF) is an ecosystem builder specialising in entrepreneurship, digital innovation, business incubation, and economic development. With a strong passion for fostering entrepreneurial mindsets and ecosystems, he has worked across academia, business incubation, government and industry to develop sustainable solutions that drive economic development. Currently serving as the Director of Entrepreneurship (EDHE) at Universities South Africa (USAf) which is a representative organisation of all the 26 public universities, Dr Gumbo plays a pivotal role in shaping entrepreneurship development and support structures within South Africa's higher education sector.

Dr Gumbo holds a PhD in Entrepreneurship from the University of Pretoria, an MBA from Nelson Mandela University, an MPhil in Entrepreneurship from the University of Pretoria and a National Diploma in Metallurgical Engineering followed by a BA (HSS) from UNISA. His career began in Metallurgical Engineering and later transitioned into education. In the public sector, Dr Gumbo served as Deputy Director for Skills Development and Acting Director for SME Development for the City of Johannesburg. In these roles, he coordinated skills and SME development across city departments and municipal entities, fostering entrepreneurship and empowering SMEs to thrive in a competitive business environment. At Awethu Project, Dr Gumbo served as a startup mentor and Incubation Manager responsible for incubating early stage entrepreneurs. At Wits University's Tshimologong Digital Innovation Precinct, Dr Gumbo supported startups and facilitated the internationalisation of South African startups through initiatives like the Irish Tech Challenge South Africa. Before joining USAf, he served as the Head of Enterprise Development at Wits University's Tshimologong Digital Innovation Precinct and as Director of the Wits Entrepreneurship Clinic, leveraging university resources to support entrepreneurs within and beyond the university ecosystem.



16 Prof Oladapo Aremu (NWU) is DSTI-NRF SARCHI in Indigenous Knowledge-Driven Medicinal Plants Utilisation and Conservation Strategies for Human, Animal, and Crop Health (IK-Medplants4HAC). The SARCHI is integrating Indigenous Knowledge (IK) with cutting-edge scientific research and offers a dedicated platform to drive equitable economic benefits, enhance sustainability, and advance South Africa's bioeconomy

Pitching session B Evaluation panel members

TERMINAL B



17 Ms Ofentse Nobela (SARAO) is a Commercialisation Specialist at the South African Radio Astronomy Observatory (NRF/SARAO). As a biotechnology and intellectual property professional with experience in innovation management, technology commercialisation and IP strategy, she supports the commercialisation of advanced scientific technologies and contributes to strengthening South Africa's innovation ecosystem. Her role involves evaluating new invention disclosures for commercial viability, conducting market research, and identifying potential industry partners for the utilisation of NRF technologies. Before joining SARAO, Ofentse spent time at The Innovation Hub, where she supported entrepreneurs and helped coordinate bio-innovation initiatives such as the CoachLab Entrepreneurship Programme, the Gauteng Accelerator Programme, the World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO) IP Management Clinic project, and AgriPark operational activities. Ofentse has a passion for advancing African innovation systems, empowering entrepreneurs, and translating research into sustainable societal and economic impact. Bringing a unique multidisciplinary perspective that bridges science, innovation, and law, she obtained her MTech qualification in Biotechnology from the University of Johannesburg and recently her Bachelor of Laws (LLB) at the University of South Africa



19 Mr Masibonge Silevu (ECEDEAT) is a registered Natural Scientist (Agriculture) with a master's degree in Sustainable Agriculture from the University of the Free State. Currently working as a Director: Agro processing at the Eastern Cape Department of Economic Development, Environmental Affairs, and Tourism. Previous roles played include Chief Officer: Technical at CASIDRA, Regional Operations Manager at PPECB, Deputy Director at the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment. Other qualifications include a Post Graduate Diploma in Business Administration from UWC, Public Administration Honours from Stellenbosch University, and a Fisheries Policy and Planning certificate from the United Nations University in Iceland. I am deeply fascinated by the Agro-industry development and its impact on economic development. I am highly passionate about the cutting-edge technologies in areas like smart farming methods, IT in Agro-processing, and marketing.



20 Mr Kgosana Seth Galethuke: Thuni Holding is a dedicated advocate for rural development and sustainable agriculture in South Africa. Born in Klerksdorp, he grew up in the Eastern Cape (former Transkei), where he developed a strong connection to rural life and its challenges. In his mid-teens, he moved to Gauteng. Inspired by his Eastern Cape roots, Mr Galethuke founded Thuni Farms, a farm consultancy focused on empowering rural communities and small-scale farmers through practical, sustainable solutions that promote biodiversity and incorporate indigenous knowledge holders. He remains committed to bridging urban and rural opportunities for greater national progress.

Pitching session C: Evaluation panel members: Sophia Room

INTERNATIONAL BUILDING



21 Dr Mongezi Mbangcolo (ECDA) holds a PhD in Agronomy and brings over 20 years of experience in the agricultural sector, with a strong passion for rural development and entrepreneurship. His career spans academia, agricultural advisory services, research, food security, and infrastructure project management. Between 2008 and 2014, he lectured in Agronomy, where he developed a strong academic and professional foundation with a particular focus on winter grain production. Prior to this, while pursuing his studies, he worked with Agribusiness in Sustainable Natural African Plant Products (ASNAPP) from 2006 to 2008. ASNAPP is an organization dedicated to supporting the growth of African indigenous plant products and horticultural industries through supply chain development, capacity building, productivity enhancement, and investment promotion aimed at reducing poverty and hunger. From 2014 to 2015, Dr Mbangcolo served as a Senior Agricultural Advisor in the Cape Metropole, Cape Town, where he focused on the development and support of small holder producers. He later joined the Döhne Agricultural Development Institute as a Professional Scientist in Agronomy from 2016 to 2020, concentrating on grain value chain research and development. Over the past six years, Dr Mbangcolo has served at the Eastern Cape Department of Agriculture as Deputy Director: Food Security, where he has led initiatives focused on crop and livestock production as well as value chain development. He also served as Acting Director for Project Implementation and Management Services (PIMS), overseeing agricultural infrastructure project implementation. He currently serves as the Acting Director: Food Security (2025–present), continuing to drive strategic agricultural development and food security initiatives within the province.



22 Mr Themba Maduna (DLRRD) is a Senior Rural Technologies and Innovation Researcher at the Department of Land Reform and Rural Development. He is heading the Rural Technologies and Innovations Sub-directorate. His work focuses on building sustainable pathways for indigenous-based technology innovations to thrive commercially and to contribute towards improved rural livelihood and development. He also has a keen interest in Intellectual Property management and using available legal instruments for protection of Indigenous Knowledge-based technology innovations. Prior to this appointment Mr Maduna worked for the Department of Trade and Industry from 2009 to 2011, under the Innovation and Technology Chief Directorate, where he was responsible for developing technology strategies for various sector desks and contributed to the development of the Industrial Technology Policy Framework.



23 Mr Zakheni Ngubo: IRCA (SEE #12)