S.E.T. for socio-economic growth

National Science and Technology Forum (NSTF)

media release

Powering industrialisation through research and innovation

Celebrating Prof Marcia Mkansi on Africa Industrialisation Day, 20 November 2026

Africa's future prosperity depends not only on what it produces, but also on how efficiently goods, services and information move across the continent. Strong supply chains, innovative technologies and efficient industries are essential for economic growth, job creation and sustainable development. As the world marks Africa Industrialisation Day on 20 November, attention turns to the role of research and innovation in building competitive industries and strengthening Africa's economic resilience.

To acknowledge this important day, the National Science and Technology Forum (NSTF) proudly honours **Prof Marcia Mkansi**, recipient of the Management Award at the 2026 NSTF-South32 Awards, known as the 'Science Oscars' of South Africa (SA). Prof Mkansi is recognised for making significant contributions to societal research and for promoting human capital development by strengthening skills, knowledge and research capacity. She translates supply chain research into digital innovations and builds institutional capacity for research-led commercialisation.

Reflecting on her research, Prof Mkansi says: "research should not end with publication, but should contribute to practical systems, institutional capacity and real-world impact."



About Prof Marcia Mkansi: She is the Head of the Department of Operations Management and College Head of Research and Innovation at the University of South Africa (UNISA). Her research bridges the gap between theory and practice, specialising in supply chain management, operations management, innovation and commercialisation. She focuses on developing practical, technology-driven solutions that improve coordination, strengthen value chains and enhance operational efficiency across sectors. By translating research into digital innovations and mentoring the next generation of researchers, she contributes to economic development, industrial growth and human capital development in SA and beyond.

Going beyond research and innovation, Prof Mkansi builds partnerships between academia, industry and international research institutions. These collaborations help turn research findings into practical solutions that benefit society and industry. She also promotes research commercialisation and innovation through training, public engagement and knowledge-sharing activities. This includes a Technology, Entertainment and Design (TEDx) presentation at UNISA, where she highlights the role of research in driving innovation and creating societal impact.

As a supervisor and mentor, Prof Mkansi guides master's and doctoral students and supports the development of emerging researchers. She contributes to postgraduate training through workshops, mentorship, and cross-disciplinary research collaborations. She also developed the Research Methods Index (RMI), a system that helps manage and integrate research activities.

"*Beyond contributing to knowledge, research allows me to pursue work with purpose. Through the artemisinin-based combination therapy (ACT) innovation, I collaborate with students to translate supply chain knowledge into a practical digital solution that addresses supply chain coordination challenges.*"

One of the most rewarding aspects of Prof Mkansi's work she says is collaborating with her students and seeing their research create real-world impact. She values co-creation and enjoys guiding students as they develop solutions that address practical challenges. Seeing ideas move from research projects to real applications is one of the highlights of her career.

A particularly memorable milestone was when a small business using one of her team's innovations achieved International Organization for Standardization (ISO) 9001:2015 certification, an internationally recognised standard for Quality Management Systems. By supporting the business, her students experienced first-hand how research can drive innovation, improve productivity and contribute to the development of digital solutions in healthcare. The achievement demonstrated the value of translating research into practical tools that make a difference.

Another rewarding experience for Prof Mkansi is seeing fellow researchers view their work through an innovation lens and successfully secure funding to advance their projects. She finds great fulfilment in helping researchers recognise the potential impact of their work and supporting them in turning research outcomes into practical innovations with societal and economic value.

Strong industries are built on more than factories and machinery. They rely on efficient supply chains, innovation and skilled people who can turn ideas into practical solutions.

"Managing competing priorities and securing the resources needed for success remains a challenge. As academics, we constantly balance research, teaching and innovation. Innovation in academia is often a tortoise in a race of hares," says Prof Mkansi.

Africa Industrialisation Day: The day highlights the importance of industrial development in driving economic growth, creating jobs and improving livelihoods across the continent. Established by the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) and the former Organisation of African Unity (OAU), the day highlights the role of innovation, technology, and industrialisation in Africa's development.

Industrialisation relies on efficient value chains, reliable logistics systems and the effective movement of goods, services and information. As explained above, these are the areas in which Prof Mkansi is making a significant contribution.

As Africa seeks to strengthen local manufacturing, expand regional trade and build sustainable industries, researchers such as Prof Mkansi show how science, technology and innovation can help transform industrial systems and unlock economic opportunities. Her work reflects the spirit of Africa Industrialisation Day by advancing solutions that support productivity, industrial competitiveness and inclusive economic development.

Read more: Mail & Guardian news supplement on the NSTF-South32 Awards and its winners: p5 for Prof Mkansi's article.

Call to action: The NSTF encourages the South African government and businesses to work together to strengthen SA's industrial capabilities through research, engineering, technology, entrepreneurship and skills development. Collaboration among researchers, businesses, practitioners and policymakers is essential to build efficient supply chains, support local industries, and drive sustainable economic growth. Investments in innovation-led industries and efficient supply chains are essential for building a more prosperous, competitive and sustainable African economy. Young people are encouraged to explore careers in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM), or logistics and supply chain management, where they can contribute to Africa's industrial future.

About the NSTF and the NSTF-South32 Awards: NSTF is an independent non-profit stakeholder body and network – a civil-society forum of over 150 member organisations across six membership sectors, involved in science, engineering, technology (SET) and innovation in SA. The NSTF-South32 Awards (the 'Science Oscars') recognise excellence in SET and innovation in SA across 16 categories. The gala dinners to announce the winners took place in two cities simultaneously (Cape Town and Johannesburg) on 16 July 2026.

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References:

- African Industrialization Day — November 20, 2026 | National Today
- Africa Industrialization Day, 20 November | United Nations

About the NSTF

The National Science and Technology Forum (NSTF), established in 1995:

- is a broadly-representative stakeholder body for all science, engineering and technology (SET) and innovation organisations in South Africa
- gathers stakeholders around burning issues of national and global interest, across the public and private sectors, including matters of public policy
- includes a network of professional societies in SET and STEM education (STEM = science, technology, engineering and mathematics) - the NSTF pro*SET* membership sector.
- recognises, awards and profiles the outstanding contributions of individuals and groups to SET and innovation through the prestigious NSTF Awards
- runs and supports collaborative projects and youth outreach, including recognition of top performance in mathematics and science, role modelling, bursary and STEM career information
- runs and supports the STEMulator.org which attracts youth and educators to Explore>Discover>Learn the world of STEM including careers. (Established by NSTF pro*SET*)

For more information
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