



**Call for Proposals:**  
**2<sup>nd</sup> SAYAS Symposium on Science and Society in Africa**  
**Fact, Fiction and Media: Re-imagining science engagement and its impact**  
**Cape Town 28-29 Sept 2015**

There is a need for broader societal engagement with important research findings and developments across scientific disciplines: natural, social and medical sciences, arts and humanities. Channels for converting patentable knowledge into profitable products are the focus of considerable investment, as are ways for translating beneficial knowledge into public initiatives or policies. For example, the significance of the discovery of a prehistoric fish, or the implications of the findings of the Square Kilometre Array (SKA) observatory in the South Africa's Karoo region, are often unknown to the public despite, scientific projects of this kind being substantially supported by public funds.

#### Provocations

- **How can the reach of academic work extend beyond a closed circle of academics, and find a wider audience?**
- **What actions, agents and conditions are necessary to create an intellectually engaged society, which is receptive to this kind of information?**

This workshop - organised by the South African Young Academy of Science (SAYAS) - focuses on the potential of engagements outside the domain of traditional science communication—in particular, science non-fiction writing in both books and printed journalism, science fiction, and science in images and sound. This workshop seeks to explore the human lens through which oft-complex science concepts may be viewed and through which public imagination might be captured and engaged, including – but not limited to - critiquing the impact of widely accessed TED talks; science writing in fiction and non-fiction formats; social media platforms such as blogs, twitter and Facebook; and less prominent science communication methods such as citizen journalism and participatory visual methods. These approaches offer excellent topics for interdisciplinary work, combining fields as diverse as astrophysics, anthropology and ethics, with epidemiology, genetics, theology and philosophy.

#### Questions

- **What can we learn from science fiction as we seek to expand public imagination and interest in blue-sky and exploratory science in the African context?**
- **How can science writing approaches be applied by scientists to engage the public around new scientific concepts and to spark interest in science in Africa?**
- **Are there examples of science writing and science fiction in Africa that have contributed to creating a more engaged society?**
- **In what ways can sound and image - including music, film and visual arts - be used to produce data and to engage society in science in Africa?**

We invite thinkers, researchers and practitioners to submit abstracts aimed at enriching the discussion. We would also welcome panel proposals to organize your talk and those of willing collaborators under a topic. We encourage joint submissions from those already involved in partnerships between academia and practitioners. Successful applicants will be encouraged apply for funding independently. However, limited funding (particularly for African early career practitioners and scholars) will be available to contribute to costs of attendance for selected speakers.

#### Proposed panels

- **Science Fiction and Communication**  
As the nature of societies change, and with new scientific discoveries, new technologies and evolving social systems, science fiction offers a lens through which worlds that differ from the current can be interrogated, and can allow people to envision a future that is different from their own. This panel will explore the potential of science fiction and communication as an alternative media of science engagement that can consider fundamental philosophical questions about, and the consequences of, the changing African society. The panel will also explore the potential of this form of engagement to inspire a broader societal interest in otherwise complex concepts across diverse scientific disciplines
- **Science non-Fiction Writing**  
This panel will focus on the way that non-fiction writing about science has developed recently—tackling issues such as the emergence of bestseller books about science that are often highly critical of traditional science journalism, and the ongoing love-hate relationship between scientists and the press, for example. It will ask what purposes non-fiction writing about science serves in a democratic society, how to balance accuracy with comprehensibility, and especially what functions this genre can play going forward in African society.
- **Science in Media**  
Most scientists consider visibility of their research findings in media important, especially when controversial issues or important policy consequences are at play. These media include traditional journalism, social media and more interactive

forms such as Ted talks. This panel will explore different forms of media as a tool to capture public imagination, convey key scientific discoveries and influence behavior in society.

- ***Sounds and Images in Science***

In recognition of the need to understand and engage in increasingly complex social and scientific contexts, researchers, practitioners and science communicators are increasingly exploring alternative modalities for both the production and dissemination of data. This panel will explore and interrogate the use of sound and image – including music, film and the visual arts – as scientific method, as data, and as a way to disseminate scientific findings to multiple publics within African society. The panel will consider the methodological and ethical implications of working with these non-traditional research and communication modalities, and explore how such practice is changing the ways science and society interact in Africa.

#### **Symposium Outputs**

- Opinion Editorials series in African newspapers
- Special issue in Academic Journals
- SAYAS report submitted to Department of Science and Technology

**Please send abstracts (300 words max.) by 15 May 2015 to [scisocafrika@gmail.com](mailto:scisocafrika@gmail.com). Successful applicants will be invited to give presentations and engage in panel discussions based on their submission.**

#### **Symposium Organizers**

Dr Tolu Oni (UCT)

Professor Alex Broadbent (University of Johannesburg)

Prof Jo Vearey (Wits)

Dr. Mandisa Mbali (Stellenbosch University)