



REPUBLIC OF BOTSWANA

**Minister of Tertiary Education, Research, Science
and Technology**

**Hon. Dr Douglas Letsholathebe Member of
Parliament for Tati East Constituency**

Botswana Innovation Fund

LAUNCH OF GRAND CHALLENGES BOTSWANA

Part of Grand Challenges Africa

Wednesday 24 February 2021

1000 HRS

VIRTUALLY

- Director of Ceremonies
- Minister of Tertiary Education Resercah Science and Technology Hon Dr Douglas Letsholathebe, member of Parliament for Tati East Constituency
- Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Tertiary Education Research Science and Technology, Prof Nelson Torto
- Deputy Permanent Secretary and Chairman of the Botswana Innovation Fund, Dr Kekgonne Baipoledi
- Director of the Alliance for Accelerating Excellence in Science in Africa at the African Academy of Sciences, Prof Tom Kariuki and your team
- Chief Executive Officer Botswana Innovation Hub, Mr Alan Boshwaen and your team
- Grand Challenges global family representative Dr Karlee Silver
- Grand Challenges Ethiopia representative, Dr Abebe Genetu
- Grand Challenges South Africa Representative, Dr Zoleka Ngcete
- Botswana Academy of Sciences President, Prof Ishamael Masesane
- The Research and Innovation Community representative Dr Tshiamo Motshegwa
- Media houses here represented

- Ladies and gentlemen, distinguished guests
- All protocols observed.

Good afternoon,

- 1.As we convene on this virtual platform, let me thank you all for taking the time to be with us this afternoon. I would also like to give special thanks to the panelists who shared their perspectives and vision on research and innovation requirements for addressing Africa's challenges.
- 2.The Government of Botswana has made commitments to supporting research and innovation as a means to attain the national vision 2036; a knowledge-based economy.
- 3.In our efforts to achieve this, my Ministry has committed funds during NDP 11, under the Economic Recovery and Transformation Plan (ERTP), to stimulate innovation and procurement

through the Botswana Innovation Fund, a special fund gazetted under the Finance Management Act.

4. The Botswana Innovation Hub, which is soon to be re-branded as the Digital and Innovation Hub has been tasked with administering this Special Fund on behalf of the Accounting Officer, i.e. the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Tertiary Education Research Science and Technology.
5. The Botswana Innovation Hub submitted a proposal to the Alliance for Accelerating Excellence in Science in Africa (AESA), an initiative of the African Academy of Sciences, the African Union Development Agency (AUDA-NEPAD) and Global partners, to launch the Grand Challenges Botswana as a unique but collaborative initiative under the Grand Challenges Africa initiative.

6. The Grand Challenges Africa (GC Africa) programme seeks to promote Africa-led scientific innovations to help countries better achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by awarding seed and full grants to the continent's most impressive solutions.
7. It supports big, bold impactful innovative ideas that have a potential for impact, scale, and sustainability.
8. The Grand Challenges family of initiatives seeks to engage innovators from around the world to solve science, technology and innovation, health, and developmental challenges. Grand Challenges initiatives are united by their focus on fostering innovation, directing research to where it will have the most impact, and serving those most in need.
9. The Grand Challenges methodology has a proven track-record and has delivered world

class solutions in science, technology and innovation on the continent.

10. I am pleased to note that in Botswana we already have some recipients of Grand Challenges Africa funds. Their innovations include that of Eco-rangers which provided training for cattle herders to minimise the negative impacts of climate change and alien plant invasions to wetlands and riparian zones; and Young Love which aims to empower girls to make safer sexual choices to reduce their risk of pregnancy and contracting HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases.

11. To further enhance the impact of GC Africa, GC Botswana seeks to spotlight the significance of the Grand Challenges approach, with special emphasis on challenges specifically for Botswana tailored around national pressing challenges.

12. It is on this basis that as we launch Grand Challenges Botswana, we hope to build upon the success of the GC approach and tap into the existing capacities in expertise, specialized infrastructure, robust processes, seed and grant funds to deliver impactful and commercially viable solutions.
13. Launching Grand Challenges Botswana today, gives me renewed hope that we are on course towards achieving our national Vision 2036 aspirations.
14. The Challenge on Agriculture and Tourism solutions is out for innovators, developers, entrepreneurs, and researchers to participate.
15. We are seeking space science solutions that will make use of datasets from our initiative to design and launch a micro satellite. This will tackle some of our national challenges going forward.

16. The current call for proposal will be funded through the Botswana Innovation Fund.
17. Future challenges under this partnership will address among others Covid-19 pandemic with special emphasis on digital solutions as we embrace the new normal.
18. We are looking at a five-year implementation plan with AESA in which we target supporting key projects that will scale commercially locally and regionally, building a portfolio with potential to create jobs.
19. For innovation and technology-driven entities coming out of initiatives such as these, the current service offering under the Botswana Innovation Hub including incubation/acceleration and commercialization of those deserving projects will remain even after it has fully transformed into the Digital and Innovation Hub.

20. I therefore urge the research and innovation Community in Botswana, to proactively participate. Stand up and be counted.
21. Lastly ladies and gentlemen, I wish to thank the African Academy of Sciences through the Accelerating Excellence in Science in Africa (AESA) initiative for having committed to this novel collaboration.
22. My commitment and support to this course remains, as I will constantly engage the Research and Innovation community for feedback, as well as to appreciate progress in the implementation of this initiative.
23. Thank you and have a good afternoon!