

Food security and innovation focus at BIO Africa Convention

The gathering will aim to promote the biotechnology industry in South Africa, writes **Jyothi Laldas**.

Food security, sustainability and biotech innovation are set to take centre stage at the 6th annual BIO Africa Convention set to take place at the Durban ICC in KwaZulu-Natal from 1 to 6 September.

Hosted by AfricaBio, the convention is an annual event that facilitates an enriching and collaborative platform for the exchange of groundbreaking ideas and opportunities in the biotechnology industry. All biotechnology innovations pertain to the health, energy, agriculture and entrepreneurial sectors.

In 2023, BIO Africa is embracing the theme 'Re-imagining biotechnology innovation for Africa's development and security'.

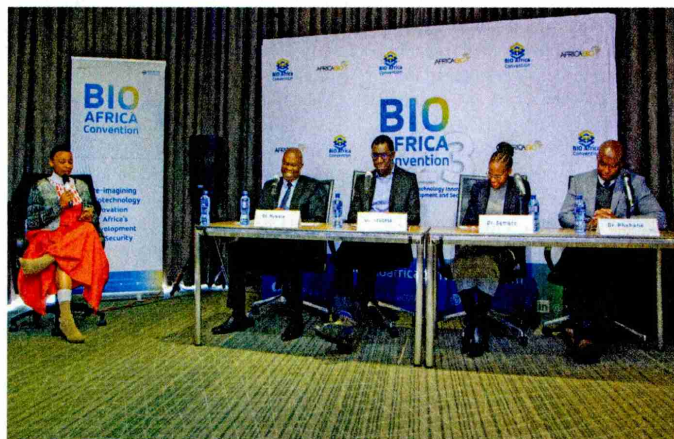
At the BIO Africa Convention in 2022 there were over 1 000 registered delegates, 34 countries participating, both African and international, 13 theme tracks, six plenaries and 41 sessions.

'WE HAVE A RESPONSIBILITY TO INVEST IN NEW TECHNOLOGIES AND SCIENCE CAPABILITIES'

The convention is pan-African, with many partners throughout Africa attending, including Villgro Africa, Advancing Healthcare Innovation in Africa and the International Centre for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology. However, its main champion from the onset has been the Department of Science and Innovation.

The BIO Africa Convention is also supported by industry experts, who were also in attendance at the official launch in Pretoria on 11 July.

They included CEO of the South African Health Products Regulatory Authority Dr Boitumelo Semete, director at Emory Institute of Drug Development (Emory University) Dr George Painter, chairperson of Next2People Dr Giorgio Roscigno, Dr Chris Smith (known as The



At the BIO Africa Convention launch, from left: facilitator Dr Lwazi Manzi from the Department of Science and Innovation, Dr Phil Mjwara, executive vice-president of BIO Africa and Strategic Partnerships, Dr Siyabulela Ntutela, CEO of SAHPRA, Dr Boitumelo Semete from Emory University, and Dr Vuyisile Phehane, an executive at Bio-Economy. SUPPLIED

Naked Scientist) from the University of Cambridge, and Dr Vuyisile Phehane, an executive at Bio-Economy.

At the event launch, executive vice-president of BIO Africa and Strategic Partnerships Dr Siyabulela Ntutela said this year's convention would tackle critical issues, including vaccine manufacturing, using biotechnology to address the issue of food security, and access to medicine.

"We are excited to announce that there will be a 'Start-up Stadium' and we have invited SMMEs that will showcase their innovation to a panel of judges at the pre-convention," Ntutela added.

The Start-up Stadium is a dedicated space within the convention specifically designed to showcase the potential of emerging biotech start-ups.

It offers a unique opportunity to gain exposure, network with industry veterans and potential investors, as well as receive valuable feedback from experts in the field.

It also aims to foster collaboration and partnerships that can drive innovation and contribute to Africa's sustainable development.

Director-general in the Department of Science and Innovation, Dr Phil

Mjwara, said it was important to support the BIO Africa Convention.

"We have a responsibility to invest in new technologies and science capabilities, but also to look at the potential of the continent," said Mjwara.

"We are liaising with the Department of Agriculture, Labour Reform and Rural Development as we begin to look at biotech to modernise the agriculture sector," he said.

AfricaBio, in partnership with its stakeholders, is offering to sponsor a selected number of students for the BIO Africa Convention. The selected students will get an opportunity to attend the pre-convention taking place on 2 and 3 September, as well as the convention that will be happening from 4 to 6 September.

Applicants must be a master's, PhD or postdoctoral student currently enrolled in a STEM programme at their institution and must be willing to travel to Durban for the BIO Africa Convention.

To apply, students can download the form from bioafricaconvention.com/, register, and email the completed form to studentchapter@afribio.com by 11 August. General registration for the BIO Africa Convention is now open at bioafricaconvention.com.