

South African Higher Education Community Engagement Forum Initiates National Seminar Series:

Jayshree Thakrar

SAHECEF Seminar Series Project Manager

The South African Higher Education Community Engagement Forum (SAHECEF) launched a year-long seminar series with financial support provided by the Talloires Network. The inaugural Seminar entitled 'Sustainable Livelihoods: Cooperatives, Access to Markets, Health and Wellness' was held on the 4th and 5th September 2012, at the Potchefstroom Campus of North-West University. 35 delegates representing 19 universities attended.

Recognising that the development of cooperatives has been identified as one of the most critical and viable means to alleviate poverty in the South African context, issues such as access to markets and sustainability (and survival) of cooperatives prevail. Furthermore, it is argued that both the public (across the three tiers of government) and private sector have limited understanding of cooperatives as a form of business. In addition to sustainable livelihoods, the link between agricultural cooperatives and health and wellness is also identified as a critical one. With that in mind, the Seminar sought to address the following: What is the role of the University in this regard? What innovative practices are Universities and/or other stakeholders involved in that promote development and transformation of the local economy? What challenges have they noted? What opportunities can be identified for cooperation, collaboration, and partnership, amongst Universities, and between Universities and relevant stakeholders?

Professor Frikkie van Niekerk, Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Research, Innovation and Technology, launched the Seminar with a presentation on university-community engagement in the North-West context. Further presentations were made by Mr Thandokwakhe Sibiya, South African Cane Growers Association; Dr Phineus Chauke, University of Venda; Professor Anna-Marie Kruger, North-West University; Dr John Boughey and Ms Lulu Cele, University of Zululand; Mr Mpho Putu, FoodBank South Africa; and Mr Ursula Titus, Department of Trade & Industry. The various presentations stimulated debates and discussions, and informal and formal networks were identified. A number of case studies were also submitted by participants attending the Seminar, and these shall be collated and shared through the SAHECEF network.



Professor Frikkie van Niekerk



Seminar Participants