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National Institute for
Theoretical and Computational Sciences

COLLOQUIUM

Science for global transformation

Prof Stephanie Burton (University of Pretoria)

DATE: Monday, 16 September 2024 | 16h00–17h00 SAST

VENUES:

- Neelsie Cinema, Stellenbosch University
- Online

--- A recording of the talk will be published on the NITheCS YouTube channel afterwards ---

ABSTRACT

“Science is as much an act of persuasion as it is an act of discovery” ~ Matt Might

Scientists across the world value research that provides new understanding, and communities place high value on scientific solutions to the challenges that we face globally. It is important, then, not only that we should generate new knowledge, but also that we communicate about our knowledge and our discoveries – it is our shared responsibility to make correct, evidence-based information available to enable the understanding of a range of different communities, from within and outside of academia. This requires translation of complex concepts, to make information accessible to colleagues, the broader public, and policymakers, who can use it for evidence-based decision-making.

The next question is how to ensure that our discoveries and new knowledge are translated and converted into tangible benefits and transformative change. Involving scientists and policy makers in discussions on the implications of science information requires purposeful deliberation. International meetings such as the upcoming S20 Science Forum, associated with the 2025 G20 Summit, present prime opportunities for such interactive, inter-disciplinary discussion. The 2024 S20 meeting resulted in a communique focused on AI, bioeconomy, energy transition process, health challenges, and social justice. The 2025 S20 meeting has the theme, ‘Health and well-being’. While these topics may seem far-removed from theoretical sciences, the principles of fundamental and applied science, and of inter-disciplinary interaction and communication, to seek global transformative change, remain central to science broadly.

This presentation will explore aspects of the translation of science and communication by scientists in a range of disciplinary and transdisciplinary fields, and how we might address and maximise the understanding of, and societal value for, the outcomes of our research.

BIOGRAPHY

Stephanie Burton is Professor in Biochemistry and a Faculty Fellow at Future Africa at the University of Pretoria (UP). She is the former Vice-Principal for Research and Postgraduate Education at UP. She is the interim President of ASSAf, and co-chairs the national organising committee for the S20 Science Forum. She is a past President and a Fellow of the RSSA, a Research Fellow for USAf, a member of the Governing Council of Future Earth and Co-chair on the Board of the IAP. She leads and coordinates national projects on postgraduate training, capacity development and mentoring for early career academics, on behalf of USAf. She holds an MSc in Organic Chemistry and PhD in Biochemistry from Rhodes University (RU). She lectured in Biochemistry at RU, and Chemical Engineering at UCT. She subsequently served as Director of Postgraduate Studies and Director of the Biocatalysis and Technical Biology Group at CPUT before taking up her position as DVC at UP. Her research interests are in applied biochemistry and sustainable processes.



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