

Business Enterprises in the Innovation System (OECD Reviews of Innovation Policy: South Africa 2007)

The institutional focus of much policy thinking about innovation systems can easily lead to over-emphasis on the state institutions involved. This seems to have been the case in South Africa, as much description and discussion of the innovation system has focused heavily on components associated with government organisations and activities. Such a perspective downplays, or even ignores, some of the major roles played by business enterprises, not only in turning knowledge into improved livelihoods, higher incomes and delivered public services, but also in generating the knowledge and human capital to undertake those tasks. The well-known shortage of people with strong mathematical and scientific skills entering the higher education system and remaining there long enough to become research and development (R&D) workers affects industry as much as the knowledge infrastructure. Given the large number of non-R&D industrial innovation activities for which such people are needed, industry is arguably even more affected by this shortage. However, while industry suffers from this human resource problem, it is also a key part of the solution.

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