**Top ten FameLab SA finalists to compete for the chance to share their research on an international stage.**

**Ten finalists will compete at the national finals for the coveted title, ‘South Africa’s Pop Idol of Science’, at the Going Global Conference in Cape Town on 4 May 2016.**

**The 10 finalists were selected from nineteen top young science communicators across the country at the FameLab South Africa semi-finals on Saturday 12 March at Sci-Bono Discovery Centre.**

“The FameLab semi-finalists were brilliant and they delivered top class talks. Our judges had a tough time in selecting the 10 finalists,” said Science Communications Manager at the South African Agency for Science and Technology Advancement, Mr Michael Ellis.

“At SAASTA our focus is not only on the ultimate National FameLab winner but we believe that all of the participants benefit greatly from the competition. They gain valuable science communication skills which they will use throughout their scientific careers,” added Mr Ellis.

The 19 semi-finalists, selected at seven regional heats across the country, were brought to Gauteng ahead of the semi-finals for a two-day science communication masterclass, hosted by the British Council. Head FameLab international trainer, Malcolm Love from the United Kingdom, shared his knowledge and experience on best practises to follow when talking about your science.

The impact of the masterclass was evident in the quality of the presentations that were heard at the semi-finals, creating a difficult decision for the judges to select only 10 participants to go through to the finals.

The format of the FameLab competition requires participants to present a scientific topic or concept to a panel of expert judges in a time of no more than three minutes. Talks are judged on content, clarity and charisma. The challenge is that talks should be accurate and informative but also entertaining and original, all while making sure the public audience understands.

This comes at a time when the importance of public engagement and discourse in science and technology is better recognised, as evidenced by the Department of Science and Technology’s Science Engagement Strategy. Science should serve society and can only do so if the public is able to engage with it. Unfortunately, scientific concepts and findings are not always communicated effectively to the public. This is what FameLab strives to address.

**FameLab is an international competition** and training programme designed to inspire, motivate and develop young scientists and engineers to actively engage with the public. With over 30 participating countries, worldwide, it has been dubbed the ‘Pop Idols of Science’! The South African winner will go on to compete against their peers on an international stage at The Times Cheltenham Science Festival in the UK in June 2016.

The ten passionate young scientists selected to participate in the national finals are:

Tashnica Sylvester Molecular Biology and Human Genetics – Stellenbosch University

Margaret Siyawamwaya Pharmaceutical Sciences - University of Witwatersrand

Nozipho Gumbi Nanotechnology and Water Sustainability (NanoWS) - UNISA

Savannah Nuwagaba Biomathematics - Stellenbosch University

Tendai Samkange Pharmaceutical Sciences - University of the Western Cape

Claude Moshobane South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI) and the Centre for Invasion Biology - Stellenbosch University

Charles O’Donoghue Department of Chemistry - Rhodes University

Wandisile Sixhoto Agricultural Extension - University of Fort Hare

Robert Schlegel Department of Marine Sciences - University of the Western Cape

Marli Louw Institute for Wine Biotechnology – Stellenbosch University

FameLab in South Africa is made possible by a partnership between the British Council, the South African Agency for Science and Technology Advancement and Jive Media Africa.

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**EDITORS’ NOTES**

**About the British Council:**

The British Council is the UK’s international organisation for educational opportunities and cultural relations. We create international opportunities for the people of the UK and other countries and build trust between them worldwide.

For more information, please visit: <http://www.britishcouncil.org.za/>. You can also keep in touch with the British Council through <https://twitter.com/zaBritish>

**About Jive Media Africa:**

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Jive Media Africa strategises the best combination of media for the message, and importantly, for the target audience.

For more information, please visit <http://jivemedia.co.za/>. You can also follow them on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/JiveMediaAfrica>

**About SAASTA:**

The South Africa Agency for Science and Technology Advancement (SAASTA) is a business unit of the National Research Foundation (NRF) with the mandate to advance public awareness, appreciation and engagement of science, engineering, innovation and technology in South Africa.

SAASTA’s contribution to the NRF’s vision is to grow the pool of quality learners today who will become the scientists and innovators of tomorrow.

All science engagement programmes within the NRF reside under three key strategic areas that combine to form an integrated and seamless approach.

Through education we build up the supply of tomorrow’s scientists and innovators.

Through communication we celebrate South African achievements in science and technology and build the public’s appreciation of the benefits of science.

By growing the awareness of science through exploration, exhibitions and actual experience, we instil in people an enthusiasm about the wonder and application of the subject, while encouraging greater public engagement in SET issues.

By taking overall ownership of science advancement initiatives within the NRF and on a countrywide scale, SAASTA is responding to an organisational as well as national imperative.

For more information, please visit <http://www.saasta.ac.za/>.

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