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Science and Innovation on gross domestic expenditure on research and development

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Gross domestic expenditure on research and development increases for the first time in three years

The 2021/22 National Survey on Research and Experimental Development (R&D survey), released in February showed that in real terms, gross domestic expenditure on research and development (GERD) grew by 6,9% year-on-year in 2021/22 – from R25,965 billion in 2020/21 to R27,756 billion in 2021/22.

GERD as a percentage of GDP was 0,62% in 2021/22, which is two basis points higher than the 0,6% recorded in 2020/21.

The R&D survey is undertaken annually by the Centre for Science, Technology and Innovation Indicators, which is based at the Human Science Research Council (HSRC), on behalf of the Department of Science and Innovation (DSI). The survey is finalised in partnership with Statistics South Africa. The results of the survey provide important evidence on the size, growth and composition of R&D expenditure and human resources devoted to R&D.

Unlike the 6% contraction in GDP witnessed during the Covid19 epidemic in 2020, South Africa experienced a notable recovery, with a 4,7% increase in GDP in 2021. The increase in GERD was driven by the R&D expenditure from the business sector.

Nominal R&D expenditure increased in all five institutional sectors, particularly in the business sector, which increased by R3,48 billion. R&D expenditure in the higher education sector increased by R446 million; the government sector increased by R235 million; while the not-for-profit sector increased R&D expenditure by R31 million.

Increased R&D activity in the manufacturing and financial sectors, bodes well for the future.

Within the business sector, the financial services (financial intermediation, real estate and business services) and manufacturing sectors continue to drive most R&D expenditure, accounting for 45,7% (R6,187 billion) and 29,9% (R4,049 billion) of total expenditure respectively. The financial services sector increased by R1,937 billion and the manufacturing sector by R1,154 billion in 2021/22.

The survey also showed that the social sciences and medical and health sciences remain the strongest research areas, with the majority of R&D (22%) taking place in the medical and health sciences (R8,718 billion) and 18,4% in the social sciences (R7,041 billion).

Historically, the main sources of funding for R&D in South Africa have been the government and business sectors. Government-funded R&D amounted to 52,5% (R20,049 billion), while business-funded R&D was 29% (R11,081 billion) and foreign-funded R&D totalled 14,5% (R5,539 billion). Foreign funding is the largest it has

been in 10 years, contributing R1,078 billion more in 2021/22. Foreign investment appears to be generally trending upwards over the last 10 years, most of it directed to the higher education and business sectors.

R&D in most priority policy areas increased, which shows that the DSI is going in the right policy direction.

Biotechnology increased by R326 million in 2021/22. Furthermore, R&D expenditure rose by R613 million for research connected to space science, R550 million in the field of new materials, and R475 million for research related to the environment.

[The 2021/22 R&D survey can be downloaded from the DSI website.](#)

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