

Analysing an organism's DNA

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BIOTECHNOLOGY and genetics have grown into large industries in highly developed parts of the world, such as the US and Europe, and SA is gaining a foothold in this potentially lucrative market.

Tania Hide, MD of Electric Genetics, says the company is Africa's first genomics enterprise. It bases technological development on analysis and understanding of an organism's DNA.

Hide says the company began by successfully transferring cutting-edge technology for analysing the human genome from a local university research institute to a start-up company.

The products are sold to pharmaceutical, biotechnology and genomics companies around the world and are provided free to academic research groups.

"Clients typically use our products to better understand the genetic nature of disease."

Hide says Electric Genetics' academic collaborator, the SA National Bioinformatics Institute (Sanbi) at the University of the Western Cape, is a world leader in its field.

Since the company and the institute are housed in the same premises, commercial employees and postgraduate students are provided with opportunities to develop their skills fully.

Both groups are able to perform research and development that leads the world market.

"Funding from the arts, culture, science and technology department's Innovation Fund has allowed our groups to take our research and development to a new level," Hide says.

She says Winston Hide, director of Sanbi, has built a research group at the university that culminated in a postgraduate programme in bioinformatics/computational genomics.