

BIG DAY: Manager Mary-Ann Chetty received a certificate of completion signed by President Barack Obama

NMMU manager meets Obama at leaders' summit

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FOSTERING economic growth and enhancing democratic government were just some of the topics up for discussion when NMMU senior innovation manager Mary-Ann Chetty took part in the 2015 Mandela Washington Fellowship for Young African Leaders earlier this month.

Chetty who returned home at the weekend, was one of 500 fellows selected from more than 30 000 applications that spanned sub-Saharan Africa to be part of US president Barack Obama's flagship programme.

"This programme was a life-changing experience," Chetty said.

The work that she and other fellows undertook as part of the programme would change lives through the creation of sustainable jobs and new industries, she said.

The Mandela Washington Fellowship launched by Obama's administration five years ago aims to support emerging African leaders as they drive economic growth, enhance democratic governance, and strengthen the civil society structures that will help the continent grow and prosper.

Chetty said she had returned from the United States feeling better-equipped to lead initiatives within NMMU.

She also felt energised to do more to accelerate innovation

nationally. On completion of the six-week academic component, which included specialised training in public management at Virginia Commonwealth University, Chetty travelled to Washington DC, to participate in the presidential summit hosted by Obama.

Chetty also took part in networking and discussions with the other fellows of the programme and US leaders from the public, private and non-profit sectors.

"It was an honour to be part of the fellowship and a privilege to shake hands with President Obama," Chetty said.

She said it was now up to each of the Mandela Washington fellows "to lead the change we want to see in the world".

Chetty plays a vital role in the NMMU innovation office, working with students, researchers and entrepreneurs to protect their intellectual property and commercialise their innovations.

She also manages a number of NMMU partnerships, including the Giant Flag Project being implemented in the Graaff-Reinet area – a project that will see a massive South African flag created out of desert plants and solar panels in the Karoo.

The aim is to encourage tourism to the area.

The project's founders say the flag will be visible from space.

Chetty also assists other Eastern Cape universities to manage and commercialise their intellectual property, particularly as they do not yet have fully-fledged technology transfer offices.

