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Introducing the HSRC

The Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), South Africa’s statutory research agency for the social sciences, conducts research that generates critical and independent knowledge relative to all aspects of human and social development. Poverty alleviation and public policy development and implementation are central to all its research activities. Its research extends beyond South African borders through projects and collaborations in other African countries.

The HSRC is committed to making a difference in the quality of life of ordinary people and is often commissioned to undertake large-scale research on behalf of government departments at national, regional and local levels. The organisation also serves the research needs of parastatal organisations, the private sector and local and international development agencies to track service delivery, evaluate performance and measure the efficacy of interventions.

The HSRC’s collaborative approach to research provides a platform for interaction with research experts in our country, elsewhere in Africa, and internationally. The organisation proactively disseminates its research findings in peer-reviewed and other publications, and through seminars, invited lectures, and media briefings.

Functioning as a knowledge hub, the HSRC contributes to bridging the gap that so often exists between research, policy and action. The research undertaken by the HSRC has been configured into four interdisciplinary research programmes, namely:

- Child, Youth, Family and Social Development
- Democracy and Governance
- Education, Science and Skills Development
- Social Aspects of HIV/AIDS and Health

Five ‘cross-cutting’ research units and three centres have been established to interactively contribute to, as well as draw from, the four research programmes in order to integrate and enhance the work of the HSRC as a whole. The units are:

- Knowledge Systems
- Social Aspects of HIV/AIDS Research Alliance (SAHARA)
- Policy Analysis
- Capacity Development
- Gender and Development

The Policy Analysis and Capacity Enhancement Unit has a dual mandate. The first is to serve as a think-tank and provide a platform for the public discourse of critical social issues. The second is to pursue time-limited, multi-year analyses into specific priority areas, namely poverty reduction, employment, quality education, HIV and AIDS, and service delivery. The work of the Unit is centred upon the various crossroads between these policy issues and heuristic parameters drawn from the National Research and Development (R&D) Strategy.

The centres have been established to illustrate research findings by implementing interventions. The first four centres are:

- Centre for Africa’s Social Progress
- Centre for Education Quality Improvement
- Centre for Poverty, Employment and Growth
- Centre for Service Delivery
The HSRC track record

Over the last few years, the HSRC has undertaken a rich and varied array of research investigations, averaging 250 projects at any given time. Some of the largest projects include:

- The third *South African National Household Survey of HIV Prevalence, Incidence, Behaviour and Communication*, will be completed in 2009. This is a follow-up of the 2002 and 2005 surveys which generated data from a representative sample of the total South African population. The 2005 findings suggested that the HIV prevalence had levelled off at 10.5% for the general population (excluding children younger than two); that new infections continue to increase, with the annual HIV incidence rate now at 2.7%; and that there is a significant increase in condom use and voluntary counselling and testing. These findings will permit an enhanced understanding of the South African HIV epidemic, and the reinvigoration of approaches to behavioural modification campaigns and other programme design and planning initiatives.

- The African Union commissioned the HSRC to prepare a status of youth report for Africa and to draft the Pan-African Youth Charter, which was adopted at the Summit of AU Heads of State in July 2006. The HSRC is continuing this work in South Africa through the Youth Policy Initiative, working with the major role players in government and the youth sector, to highlight key challenges facing young people; debate the nature of these challenges and possible solutions; and to discuss ways of addressing them.

- Major work has been done in the policy arena on employment and economic growth. The Employment Scenarios project is providing critical insights on how best to address unemployment, ensure growth and reduce poverty. Some of these insights include the role of the public service in the labour market, the required scale of public works to meet the Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative for South Africa’s employment targets, the constraints on manufacturers’ employment growth, and the need to be more forceful in expanding different types of service industries.

- The Centre for Science, Technology and Innovation (CeSTII), conducts national research and experimental development surveys for the Department of Science and Technology, which measure inputs into R&D activities in the country by government, state-owned companies, private business and other enterprises. The Centre has also developed indicators of South Africa’s system of innovation that provide the basis for forward planning of financial and human resource inputs by the DST.
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Organisational structure

HSRC Board

CEO

Office of the CEO

Support Services

Centres

Cross Cutters

Policy Analysis and Capacity Enhancement

Policy Analysis

Capacity Development

Gender and Development

Centre for Africa’s Social Progress

SAHARA

Knowledge Systems

Research Programmes

Child, Youth Family and Social Development

Democracy and Governance

Education, Science and Skills Development

Social Aspects of HIV/AIDS and Health

Centre for Education Quality Improvement

Centre for Poverty, Employment and Growth

Centre for Service Delivery
HSRC governance and management

The HSRC is governed by a board who appoints the chief executive officer (CEO). The Minister of Science and Technology appoints the governing board, of which the CEO is a member ex officio. The board is constituted with due regard to ethnic and gender diversity, and to the intellectual mix necessary to render the board a well-functioning body.

The CEO and executive director of support services are responsible for the day-to-day management of the HSRC, while the executive directors head the research programme, cross-cutting units and centres with the assistance of deputy executive directors, directors and unit heads.

**Professor Jakes Gerwel (Chair)**
DLit et Phil, Vrije Universiteit te Brussel.

_Expertise:_ education, literature and business transformation.

**Dr Olive Shisana (CEO)**
ScD, Johns Hopkins University.

_Expertise:_ public health professional with extensive research, management, policy development, fundraising and networking skills.

**Ms Phumelele Ntombela-Nzimande**
BA (Hons), University of Natal.

_Expertise:_ communications, health and gender issues.

**Mr Max Sisulu**
MPA, Harvard University, USA. MSc Moscow, Russia.

_Expertise:_ public administration, political economy and development studies.
Mr Enver Motala

MPhil, University of Warwick, UK.

*Expertise:* policy development, tertiary education and law.

Ms Nomboniso Gasa

BA, University of the Western Cape.

*Expertise:* gender policy, development processes and political transition.

Professor Edward Webster

PhD, University of the Witwatersrand.

*Expertise:* workplace sociology, democratic transitions.

Dr Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela

PhD, University of Cape Town.

*Expertise:* cultural process, trauma and HIV/AIDS, inter-group behaviour and violence.

Mr Sipho Pityana

MSc, University of London.

*Expertise:* sociology and political science, public administration, international relations, development finance.

Professor Wally Morrow

PhD, University of London.

*Expertise:* education and education policy.
Social science that enhances human potential and advances the rights of vulnerable populations
The Child, Youth, Family and Social Development (CYFSD) research programme aims to promote human and social development through the production of high quality applied research that addresses challenges arising from social inequality, poverty, violence, HIV/AIDS and other causes of ill-health, suffering, and loss of human potential. Our interdisciplinary approach contributes knowledge and evidence to inform the design, implementation and evaluation of policies and programmes to achieve a better life for all South Africans.

The programme researches aspects of the life course, from infancy to old age, with an emphasis on understanding how contexts, policies and politics shape and distribute life chances. Throughout the life cycle, people learn, interact and develop within families, social and cultural groups, schools, workplaces, communities, and the economic, political and social orders. Our research focuses on individuals, groups and institutions relating to children, youth, families, and vulnerable populations, including older individuals and people with disabilities.

Our main focus areas are:

- Early childhood studies focus on the economic, educational, psychological and social data that demonstrate the importance of early childhood to both personal and national development.
- Youth development studies the resources and assets of youth, including their demographic presence, capacity to cope with rapid change, their openness to the future, as well as the challenges facing them.
- Family studies consider families as the fundamental building block for positive human development and the principle safety net for people facing chronic and acute challenges.
- HIV/AIDS studies, with a focus on understanding the psychosocial, behavioural and contextual issues of HIV and AIDS that form the basis for the evaluation of best practice interventions for the most vulnerable children, caregivers, families and community-based groups.
- Social inclusion addresses contextual factors that lead to and exacerbate social exclusion, such as homelessness and disability.
- CYFSD develops monitoring and evaluation systems, indicators and costing methods to improve the evidence base of interventions, and assesses programme and policy outcomes for children, youth, families and vulnerable populations.

While the programme conducts most of its research in South Africa, it extends its work through an extensive network of long-standing national, regional and international collaborators.

The work of the programme is supported by various local, regional and international partners including local and foreign government departments, foundations and civil society organisations, continental-wide bodies, UN organisations and international funding agencies.

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Working to promote democratic governance, human rights, justice and peace
Democracy and Governance

Democracy and Governance shares a vision of a just, democratic, stable and prosperous South Africa and African continent, based on the principles of equality, equity and justice. Its mission is to promote high quality, applied and theoretical research to contribute to and influence public debates, development and policy agendas at all levels.

Our nearly 30-strong team of researchers and fellows operate from three offices based in Cape Town, Durban and Pretoria.

The programme has a multidisciplinary profile anchored on five thematic research areas:

- Crime, violence and social cohesion
- Identity, citizenship and equity
- Rights, democracy and development
- State capacity and social transformation
- South Africa, Africa and the world

The programme has forged research networks with provincial and national civil society organisations and has collaborated with a wide variety of government departments and partnerships with universities involving collaborative research, training and joint research chairs.

Its strong Africa focus is designed to foster long-term linkages and networking in research and capacity building with African institutions, including research exchange, joint projects and publications, fellowships and training.

Relationships with pan-African social science institutions include the Council for Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA), the Organisation for Social Science Research in Eastern and Southern Africa (OSSREA) and a wide array of regional and national universities and think-tanks. It also works with regional and continental organisations, including the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC), the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD) and the African Union.

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Research that skills the nation
Education, Science and Skills Development

Education and Skills Development promote individual, social and economic development. They are key to growth and the exercise of citizenship. Science is central to the knowledge society and to a functioning innovation system.

The research focus of ESSD spans three major social domains:

- Education: Primary, secondary and tertiary education with, quality, relevance and equity in education as focal points.
- The world of work: Labour markets, skills and human resource development, seeking to address the key imperatives of improved access to skills acquisition, raising employment opportunities and sustaining economic growth.
- Science and innovation studies: Researches the link between technology, innovation and economic development.

Thematic Areas

Education
- Languages and Literacy
- Science, Mathematics and Technology Education
- Curriculum Development and Analysis
- Teachers, Teaching and Teacher Education
- Finance, Governance, Management and Administration
- Educational Assessment, Analysis and Evaluation
- Technical and Vocational Education and Training
- Higher Education

World of Work
- Analysis of Skills and Training
- Employment Equity
- Occupations and professions
- Youth unemployment
- Impact of HIV/AIDS

Science and Innovation Studies
- Firm learning and technological upgrading
- University-industry linkages
- Regional innovation systems

ESSD has built strong collaborations and partnerships with national and international organisations across the public and private sector, increasingly also in other developing countries. Through these networks, the programme has completed successful research projects for among others, the European Union, Royal Netherlands Embassy, International Development Research Centre (IDRC), Irish Aid, Carnegie Corporation, Shuttleworth Foundation, the National Advisory Council on Innovation (NACI) and national and provincial government departments.

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Research to inform HIV/AIDS prevention, care and impact mitigation
Social Aspects of HIV/AIDS and Health

South Africa is undergoing an epidemiological transition in which communicable diseases are major causes of ill-health and death. These include HIV, tuberculosis, and diarrhoea co-exist with chronic diseases of lifestyle such as heart disease, obesity, and diabetes. Most health challenges faced by South Africa cannot be addressed by medical interventions alone, but also need to be addressed through social, behavioural, and community-level interventions.

To address priority health issues, the Social Aspects of HIV/AIDS and Health programme undertakes relevant research on HIV and other public health challenges facing South Africa to help prevent disease and to promote improvements in health. SAHA also undertakes surveys and reviews to collect strategic information of relevance to policy formulation and disease surveillance.

The programme has offices in Pretoria and Cape Town, and satellite offices in Port Elizabeth and Mthatha. It employs a multidisciplinary team of researchers drawn from a variety of backgrounds including health sciences (medicine or nursing), public health, epidemiology, biostatistics, psychology, anthropology, and health policy. Researchers use a variety of qualitative and quantitative methods in their work. SAHA researchers are grouped into three units:

1. Epidemiology, strategic research, and health policy;
2. Behavioural and social aspects of HIV and AIDS;
3. Social aspects of ageing and health.

Researchers collaborate across units within SAHA, and with researchers and stakeholders from other HSRC programmes and outside organisations. Current areas of research include:

- Surveillance of HIV incidence, prevalence, and risk factors for HIV infection among the general population and sub-populations at risk (e.g. men who have sex with men);
- Intervention research aimed at promoting risk reduction and healthy behaviour among HIV-negative people at risk, as well as those already infected with HIV (positive prevention);
- Strategic research on health policy and health programmes;
- Research on ageing and health.

In addition to research, SAHA undertakes programme strengthening activities (for example related to the prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV), and engages actively with government and other stakeholders on health policy development, particularly in relation to HIV prevention, treatment and care, and impact mitigation.

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Centres

Centre for Education Quality Improvement

Improving the quality of education is a critical priority for South Africa to ensure that all citizens acquire the necessary skills and competencies required for economic development and poverty alleviation.

To address this need, the HSRC established the Centre for Education Quality Improvement with the aim of supporting the government and other key role players (teachers, principals, parents, education officials, non-governmental organisations, and the donor community) in enhancing evidence-based decision-making on policy, with the aim of promoting quality education for all. The centre specifically focuses on improving learning in South African classrooms by adopting a systems-based approach to:

- advance knowledge through high-quality research and critical scholarship;
- engage in evidence-informed policy dialogue among different stakeholders so as to share and disseminate information and ideas about good practice;
- facilitate the exchange of local and international experts and decision makers.

Currently the centre is working with the Department of Education to implement an integrated and effective assessment system in African classrooms. This research is aimed at developing and piloting assessment tools and strategies to provide relevant and timely information to all role players at the different levels of the system to promote excellence in learning.

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Promoting excellence in learning for all
Centre for Poverty, Employment and Growth

It is estimated that at least 25% of the South African labour force is unemployed. Unemployment at this level is a major contributor to unacceptable levels of poverty and inequality, which has led the government to set a target to halve poverty and unemployment in this country by 2014.

The HSRC supports this undertaking and has established the Centre for Poverty, Employment and Growth to identify clear, evidenced-based ‘scenarios’ and strategies for unemployment reduction and employment creation, thereby contributing to the strategic imperative of national economic growth that benefits all.

To do this, we strive to:

- Develop a set of possible scenarios outlining South Africa’s economic and social structure, should the government’s unemployment targets be met.
- Define the policy implications of each scenario and compare these to the current employment and growth path. These are then interrogated and the results used to evaluate feasibility and inform policy development that will enable the country to reach these targets.
- Create an awareness of the trade-offs associated with each scenario.
- Develop a shared vision for policy makers and stakeholders that would help to reach agreement on a set of acceptable trade-offs required to achieve the employment targets.

The scenarios’ process engages high level South African decision makers from government, business and organised labour in an on-going roundtable dialogue.

Policy-oriented research underpins these evidence-based scenarios. The areas of research include macroeconomic policy, labour markets and social protection, industrial policy, government employment programmes as well as political economy questions. These link into practical policy decision-making processes.

To enable broader civil society engagement, the centre has established the Employment Policy Network (www.employment-policy.net). The aim is to build and support

Innovative employment strategies

internet-based communities of practice, providing the best available global information on aspects of employment policy. The network will aim at a global audience, although it will initially have a focus on building African networks.

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Centre for Service Delivery

Post-apartheid policy in South Africa has focused on the effective and efficient delivery of services to the majority - particularly rural African inhabitants - who have historically been deprived of basic essential services such as water and sanitation, housing, electricity and health facilities. Scientific research towards understanding and explaining the dominant trends in service delivery provision for human development is critical, as is analysing and generating practical solutions to problems of planning and administration.

In formulating a set of strategies - through a series of 'demonstration' projects - to help mitigate the service delivery problems in South Africa, the centre works to fulfill the following key objectives:

- to conduct scientific research into the nature of and key trends in South Africa’s system of service delivery (leading and lagging regions, access to services by the poorest, sequencing of different services, etc);
- to undertake action research to diagnose and address service delivery challenges;
- to undertake local case studies in which various approaches to improving service delivery are assessed, modelled and alternatives considered through a number of pilot interventions; and
- to provide practical conclusions and solutions to the continuing problems of achieving universal access, sustainable services and quality services.

Working in multi-disciplinary teams and using a systems approach, the centre will test multiple service delivery interventions in a series of localised pilot studies at 'demonstration sites', making possible evidence-based determinations of what works and what does not. Recommendations from the localised case studies will relate to, for instance, how inter-governmental relations need to be structured to optimise implementation; how budgets need to operate; how capacity development can be achieved and enhanced; and how the users (also called 'clients' or 'citizens') need to be understood and mobilised to optimise service planning and delivery.

The centre follows an 'implemented-oriented' partnership research approach in which the central research team works closely with multi-stakeholder reference groups and implementation networks. The work of the centre raises the prospects of partnerships with locally-based research institutions, as well as research agencies in other parts of Africa.

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Cross-cutting units

Policy Analysis and Capacity Enhancement (PACE)

The Policy Analysis and Capacity Enhancement (PACE) programme consists of three units that cut across all other programmes in the HSRC. These are the Policy Analysis Unit, the Gender and Development Unit and the Capacity Development Unit.

Creative solutions for policy implementation

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Capacity Development

Capacity Development is responsible for implementing HSRC-wide capacity development programmes for staff, researcher trainees (MA and PhD interns), and post-doctoral fellows.

It is also responsible for strengthening research collaborations and ex-change programmes with appropriate organisations in South Africa and on the rest of the African continent. The unit is continually developing its own research capacity and deepening the pool of researchers and scientists available to undertake essential research into the social and human sciences in South Africa and further afield.

Policy Analysis

The unit, which is funded by the national Department of Science and Technology, facilitates the generation of policy recommendations based on research evidence and policy dialogues. It focuses on five national social policy priority areas, namely quality education, employment, poverty reduction, service delivery, and HIV and AIDS.

The unit serves as a think tank and forum for the deliberation and analysis of public policy on the most critical issues affecting the lives of people in Africa. It conducts systematic evaluation of policies and suggests alternative means of achieving social goals. It also analyses existing or prospective policies with the intention of suggesting alternative ways of improving the population’s social welfare.

The intention is that the unit ultimately serves as a forum for intellectual dialogue among academics and researchers from various parts of the African continent and brings together diverse stakeholders, including policy-makers, programme planners, researchers, non-governmental organisations, community groups, donors and multi-national agencies to participate in the process of policy scrutiny in critical areas of social development.

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Gender and Development

Gender and Development is responsible for advancing the conceptual and methodological framework for the HSRC’s research in gender and development, and for undertaking specific research projects.

It also facilitates and reinforces gender mainstreaming across all programmes within the HSRC, and networks with a wide range of partners to advance gender equity.

Gender equity is the process, gender equality is the result and gender mainstreaming is the strategic path

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Social Aspects of HIV/AIDS Research Alliance (SAHARA)

The Social Aspects of HIV/AIDS Research Alliance (SAHARA) is an Africa-wide network, coordinated by the HSRC. Through this alliance, SAHARA seeks a greater understanding of the epidemic in the hope of contributing to a reduction in the number of new HIV infections, and, ultimately, to a reversal of the spread of HIV/AIDS. Its mission is to bring together key partners (civil society, donor and international organisations, researchers, policy makers, and people living with HIV and AIDS) to influence policy and responses through the production and dissemination of evidence-based research on the social aspects of HIV/AIDS.

The HIV epidemic impacts all aspects of social development, including education and skills training, poverty alleviation, nation building, and rural and urban development. SAHARA serves as a tool for expressing the strategic focus of the HSRC towards Africa in the area of HIV/AIDS, thereby extending the frontiers of HSRC research programmes beyond the borders of South Africa into sub-Saharan Africa.

The network conducts multi-site, multi-country research projects in Africa, with the explicit aim of generating new social science evidence for prevention, care and impact mitigation.

Since its inception in 2002, SAHARA has hosted four research conferences, attended by representatives from more than 40 African countries, and several workshops, seminars and colloquia. Its regional offices in Cape Town (for southern Africa), Dakar, Senegal (for East and Central Africa), and Kisumu, Kenya (for West Africa) coordinate SAHARA’s networks and projects in more than 20 sub-Saharan African countries.

Its website (www.sahara.org.za) and accredited international scientific journal (SAHARA J) serve as strategic portals for disseminating the results of evidence-based research on the social aspects of HIV/AIDS. The website is recognised as one of the primary sources of information on HIV/AIDS in Africa.

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Knowledge Systems

The Knowledge Systems unit of the HSRC conducts primary and secondary research on socio-economic and governance issues, and on the national system of innovation. The unit facilitates evidence-based decision-making by users of such research.

The unit works both with external research users and the research programmes of the HSRC, while also building complementary expertise across Africa.

The key focus areas of the unit include:

- design and implementation of large-scale surveys;
- analysis of the resulting quantitative and qualitative data;
- indicator development and maintenance;
- production and submission of official science and technology statistics;
- data hosting, dissemination and support to users;
- training and development of our staff, peers and user community;
- policy development;
- promotion of social scientific research and capacity building in South Africa and the African continent.

Harness organisational information to do new things

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