

# Review

PUBLICATION OF THE HUMAN SCIENCES RESEARCH COUNCIL

VOL. 21 | NO. 2 | JUNE 2023

Antimicrobial  
resistance and  
gender

PAGES 18–19

The power of  
social histories

PAGES 10–13

Supporting  
backyard rental  
housing

PAGES 4–5

Addressing youth  
unemployment

PAGES 22–25

AI: the digital  
mirror

PAGES 20–21



science & innovation

Department:  
Science and Innovation  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



HSRC  
Human Sciences  
Research Council

# THIS

# ISSUE

Editor: Andrea Teagle  
Correspondence: For feedback and questions, email [aoosthuizen@hsrc.ac.za](mailto:aoosthuizen@hsrc.ac.za)  
Pretoria: Private Bag X41, Pretoria, South Africa 0001  
Tel: +27 (0)12 302 2000  
Fax: +27 (0)12 302 2001  
Cape Town: Private Bag X9182, Cape Town, South Africa 8000  
Tel: +27 (0)21 466 8000  
Fax: +27 (0)21 466 8001  
Durban: Private Bag X07, Dalbridge, South Africa 4014  
Tel: +27 (0)31 242 5400  
Fax: +27 (0)31 242 5401  
Production: The *HSRC Review* is produced by the HSRC's Impact Centre  
Layout and design: Ilze Visagie

- 4** Small-scale rental housing: an impact story
- 6** The Langa Bicycle Hub: mobilising transformation through community-based research
- 10** The relevance of social history projects: the Wentworth study
- 14** Choosing life or life choices? Abortion attitudes in South Africa
- 18** Co-creating a gender toolkit to amplify the impact of antimicrobial resistance research
- 20** AI: the digital mirror
- 22** Needing experience for a job yet a job for experience: evaluating a government STEM internship programme
- 26** The role of career guidance in young people's futures
- 28** HSRC Publishing

**Cover:** *The use of antibiotics to promote growth and prevent disease in healthy animals contributes to the emergence of antimicrobial resistance.*

**Photo:** [\*International Development Research Centre\*](#)

# EDITOR'S NOTE

By Andrea Teagle

In a time of soaring unemployment, deepening inequality, and mounting dissatisfaction with service delivery, how can we identify interventions to address deep-rooted social challenges? At the HSRC, our goal is to produce research that ultimately impacts society in a meaningful way. In this edition, we highlight research that has demonstrated tangible community outcomes or influenced policy decisions, or could contribute to social change.

Backyard rental developments in urban informal settlements are responding to the national housing shortage. Andreas Scheba and Ivan Turok outline how their research has begun to shift the regulatory environment to support this innovative trend, with the aim of empowering homeowners to build safer structures and viable businesses.

Addressing social problems requires a deep understanding of their nature, as Gregory Houston and colleagues write in a piece about a social histories project in Wentworth, Durban. The project showcases how the stories of individuals can cast new light on the story of a place and the events that shaped it. Diana Sanchez and her team write about an HSRC sister project in Langa, Cape Town, and how community-based research can transform public spaces – through supporting initiatives like a local bicycle hub.

Gender has a significant impact on health outcomes, writes Ingrid Lynch, particularly in low- and middle-income country (LMIC) settings. She and her colleagues have created tools to help LMIC researchers in the field of antimicrobial resistance incorporate gender consideration in their work, so that women can benefit equally from health interventions. Drawing from an [annual national survey](#), Ben Roberts and colleagues delve into South Africans' changing attitudes towards abortion and ways to protect the sexual and reproductive health rights of women and girls.

Despite a national skills shortage, many young people struggle to find jobs. Andrea Juan examines the successes of a government job-placing programme for science graduates, while Zimingonaphakade Sigenu outlines how career guidance can help learners in rural communities make smart career decisions.

Lastly, Michael Gastrow reflects on the profound implications of the new wave of artificial intelligence for humanity and our local research agenda.

We hope that this *Review* edition sparks your curiosity and inspires you to consider the role of research in shaping our society.

*The Review Team*

# Small-scale rental housing: an impact story

*The growth of small-scale rental housing – especially in South Africa’s larger cities – offers enormous opportunities despite its informal and, in many cases, unauthorised character. Through years of research, policy engagement and strategic partnering, HSRC researchers Andreas Scheba and Ivan Turok have contributed to a turnaround in public policy towards the sector. Organisations that were once hostile or neutral are now allies. By **Andreas Scheba** and **Ivan Turok***



Backyard rental housing, like this unit in Delft South in Cape Town, can provide relatively affordable accommodation nearer to economic hubs. Photo: Ivan Turok

Small-scale rental housing addresses some of the country’s biggest development challenges through delivering affordable rental accommodation, stimulating local economic development and employment, and promoting social transformation. Homeowners, many of whom once received a government-[subsidised](#) house, and entrepreneurial micro-developers are investing millions of rand in constructing higher-quality rental flats in their backyards or across entire properties. This is taking place without any direct government support. In fact, until recently, all spheres of government have largely neglected this phenomenon, thus inadvertently contributing to its largely informal, unauthorised nature and associated drawbacks.

A [soon-to-be-published](#) study in Delft South (Cape Town) and Thiteng (Ekurhuleni), to which we contributed, gives some indication of the scale of informality. Of all the small-scale rental flats in the two areas, 94% and 92% respectively are non-compliant with land-use management (planning) regulations. However, the research also shows that the vast majority are of good quality and do not pose any major risks to residents and neighbours. Exceptions exist, of course, and these need urgent attention. Additionally, unmanaged rapid densification puts pressure on basic infrastructure, community facilities and the local social fabric.

We have carefully documented the dynamics, challenges and opportunities of this country-wide trend, arguing for a more positive and developmental approach to governance that works with informality rather than against it. Through evidence-based research, consistent policy engagements and strategic partnerships, we have contributed to changing public perceptions of the sector, and to recent national and local policy initiatives. Our influence stems from long-standing involvement and the power of external collaboration.

## **A series of research engagements**

We have researched and [written](#) extensively about backyard and [small-scale rental housing](#) over the past decade, producing a body of evidence that is widely read in South Africa. We began with unfunded, curiosity-driven research on census data that revealed the significance of backyard housing, a topic that had remained largely overlooked by the academic community.

Subsequently, we conducted a series of modestly funded but strategically positioned research projects supported by local, national and international organisations. These included National Treasury's Cities Support Programme, the Western Cape Department of Human Settlements, the British Academy and Cape Town-based NGO Development Action Group (DAG). Our findings have been disseminated via project reports, journal articles, *HSRC Review* pieces, newspaper articles, radio interviews and conference papers. Some of these [outputs](#) are highly cited and downloaded, while others are periodically referred to by important role players in academic and public fora. We have also regularly engaged stakeholders by organising HSRC webinars and local policy forums, or as invited members of external workshops.

### Power of collaboration

In 2021/22, we collaborated with DAG to investigate the main barriers, regulatory reforms, financial incentives and public support measures required to grow and formalise small-scale rental housing. The [report](#) we produced was, in a way, ground-breaking because of its compelling insights and arguments.

We discovered that following the official land-use rules, planning rules and building regulations would more than double the cost of developing a block of rental units because of the inappropriate, onerous and time-consuming nature of these approval systems. As a result, most developers either don't apply for planning and building plan approvals, or they give up partway through the process. The report has since been used by the local municipality to help streamline and simplify some of its regulatory processes, and to discuss better local support mechanisms for homeowners and developers (through local housing support centres, for example).

Through cooperation with DAG, municipal officials and private enterprises, we have built a strong evidence base (including a detailed regulatory review and cost of compliance analysis), identified key areas for reform, and made pragmatic policy recommendations. The collaboration with DAG has continued and resulted in additional collective outputs, joint conference presentations, and knowledge sharing events with local and national government departments, including the City of Cape Town, City of Ekurhuleni, National Treasury and the Department of Human Settlements.

### Creating a government action agenda

The Cities Support Programme (CSP) of National Treasury has been another important vehicle for achieving impact. Our involvement in the CSP Township Economic Development programme has produced research and technical assistance for the Cities of Cape Town and Ekurhuleni.

We also helped organise and convene a National Symposium on Small-scale Affordable Rental Housing in Midrand in May this year, where 25 presentations were made by different stakeholders involved at national and local level. Approximately 120 delegates from diverse backgrounds and organisations in the public sector, private sector and civil society participated in lively discussions on how to develop

and grow the small-scale rental housing sector. A high level of consensus emerged on the way forward. Officials from National Treasury agreed to pursue an agenda for action within the government and symposium attendees prepared a call for action document.

With this growing momentum, our team is determined to strengthen our relationships with policymakers and other roleplayers to support and transform the sector.

### Building relationships to drive change

Our research on small-scale rental housing offers important lessons for achieving impact. It demonstrates that influencing policy and practice is not a straightforward technical exercise. Instead, impact is incremental and sometimes unpredictable, with occasional setbacks and failures. It stems from years of engagement, building relationships and gaining public credibility through consistent high-quality, relevant research.

Achieving change requires continuous effort and commitment to a field of study, where partnerships based on trust are nurtured. While researchers often long for big research grants lasting for many years, a series of smaller but strategic projects can be equally or even more effective.

Leveraging strategic partnerships is vital for success. Collaborating with civil society organisations that have strong networks across communities, as well as with the public and private sectors, can open up access to information, enrich the research and data analysis, and accelerate dissemination to influential stakeholders. Even the best research won't have an impact if networks with key changemakers are not in place.



A backyard rental construction in Delft South, Cape Town. Photo: Ivan Turok

### Researcher contact:

Dr Andreas Scheba, a senior research specialist in the HSRC's Equitable Education and Economies division, and a senior lecturer at the Centre for Development Support, University of the Free State  
[ascheba@hsrc.ac.za](mailto:ascheba@hsrc.ac.za)

Prof Ivan Turok, a distinguished research fellow in the HSRC's Equitable Education and Economies division, and the DSI/NRF Chair in City-Region Economies at the University of the Free State  
[iturok@hsrc.ac.za](mailto:iturok@hsrc.ac.za)



# **The Langa Bicycle Hub:** mobilising transformation through community- based research

Photo: Sujeeth Potla, [Unsplash](#)

When Mzikhona Mgedle founded the Langa Bicycle Hub in 2020, the goal was simple. He wanted to create a place where people from Langa could learn to cycle and fix their bicycles. As COVID-19 drove innovation, bicycles emerged as the best way to transport food and medicine to bed-ridden residents across the township. A coping mechanism evolved into a new source of informal job creation. **Mzikhona Mgedle, Diana Sanchez-Betancourt, Andrea Teagle and Timothy Stanton** reflect on the potential of collaborative research to improve mobility and public spaces.

Langa is strategically located in the Cape Town metropolitan area. The central position has the potential to enhance mobility and infrastructure of public spaces. Yet, residents still have major mobility challenges. Many of the area's recreational facilities – parks, libraries, cultural centres and sports facilities – are also still dysfunctional. Mobility constraints reinforce inequalities and social injustice, limiting access to employment and economic opportunities. But some are looking to change this.

Mzikhona Mgedle (29), founder of the Langa Bicycle Hub, is one such local change agent. He says several companies and individuals now provide deliveries by bicycle in Langa, which connect supermarkets and informal traders with their

customers. During a 'walk and talk' workshop organised by the bicycle hub and the HSRC, Mgedle explained how, for instance, the local Boxer Supermarket supports the community and also benefits from bicycle deliveries. It created employment for a local woman who is in charge of trolleys and bicycles in the store. The scheme can more than halve the time it takes to deliver groceries to homes.

For many residents, bicycles are both a source of income and a means of transport within and beyond the township. Mgedle and others often travel more than 35km daily, risking traffic accidents and robbery. On one occasion, while attempting to steer clear of muggers, Mgedle was fined R2,000 for cycling on the highway.



The Langa Bicycle Hub has increased access to bicycles in Langa. Photo: Andrea Teagle

### A platform for mobility and public spaces

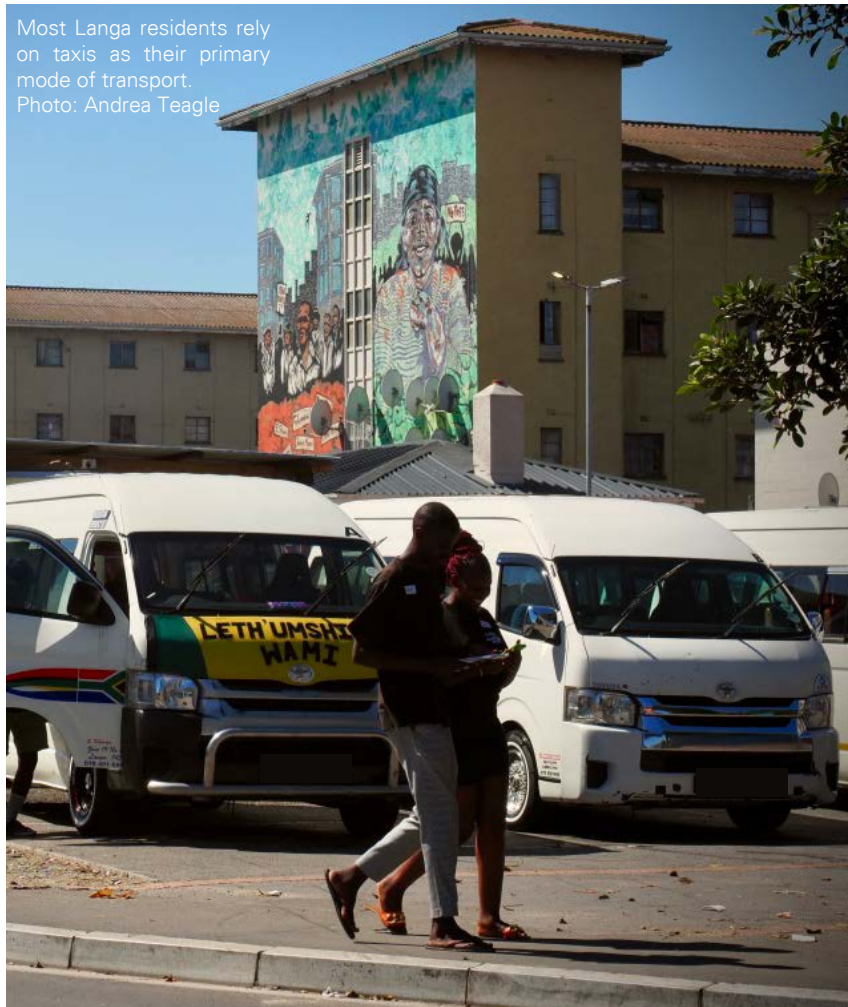
Mobility is closely linked to public spaces. Inefficient transportation systems, dilapidated public infrastructure and a lack of safe spaces to socialise, play or gather in our townships are apartheid legacies that reinforce inequality. The lack of bicycle lanes, walkways and functional social and recreational spaces means that children, particularly, are constantly exposed to danger. Many children need to cross major roads and unsafe streets on their way to school. Improving existing infrastructure and considering “[school walking buses](#)”, which have been successful in other parts of Cape Town, are therefore crucial initiatives.

Mgedle believes that a mobility and public spaces platform, driven by Langa stakeholders, would be a promising mechanism for community improvement, particularly if it were linked to the [Active Mobility Forum](#) created by the City of Cape Town in 2022.

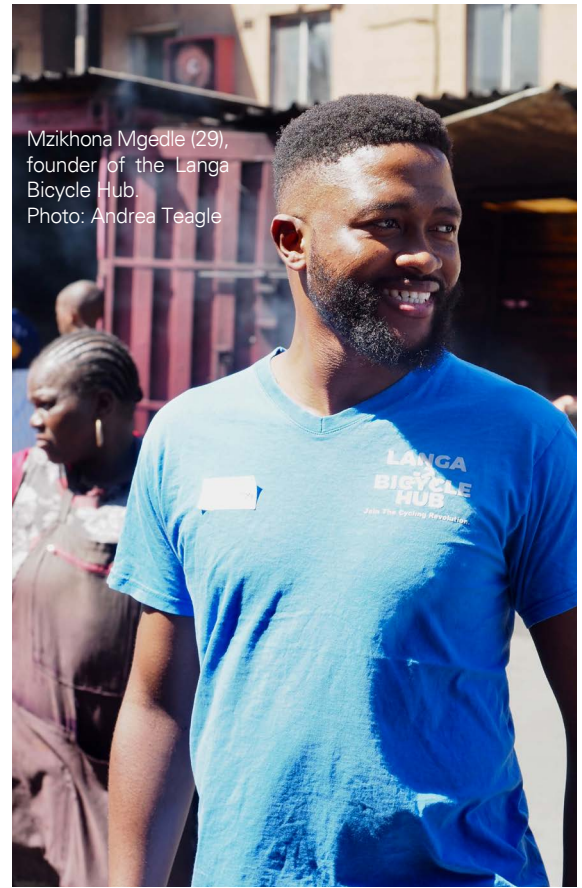
“Activism, local agency, networks and knowledge, provided through research, offer a great opportunity to really transform our township,” Mgedle says.

### Building relationships to address mobility challenges

The mobility work that the HSRC is undertaking with the Langa Bicycle Hub falls under the Langa Turning 100 Project, which we [wrote about](#) in a previous *Review* article. The HSRC and Langa NGO iKhaya have embarked on a series of strategic community-based research activities to document the past and identify current challenges. As Langa moves into its next 100 years, the aim is to build collaborative relationships between HSRC scholars and local activists that enable transformative research.



Most Langa residents rely on taxis as their primary mode of transport.  
Photo: Andrea Teagle



Mzikhona Mgedle (29), founder of the Langa Bicycle Hub.  
Photo: Andrea Teagle

To explore these issues, Mgedle and his team have hosted workshops and walkabouts, reviewed literature on mobility forums in other contexts, and conducted small surveys to understand the mobility experiences of Langa’s most vulnerable residents, such as disabled elders.

Participants included park managers, transport experts, cycling enthusiasts, community activists, researchers and representatives of residents’ organisations working within the sector. Importantly, taxi operators were also included. They are often excluded from these difficult conversations, despite having been the backbone of transport in Langa for decades.

### The power and challenges of community-based research

Prof Tim Stanton, a visiting scholar involved in the project, points out that researchers and their institutions are increasingly committing to [collaborative, equity-focused community development](#) and civic action through active, and often multilateral, community partnerships. By [working collaboratively](#) across differences, partners not only stand to benefit individually but can also – through discovering new ways of being and knowing – produce new value and/or systemic change.



The HSRC's Langa study is a pilot demonstration of the kind of collaborative, impactful scholarship the council wishes to undertake in township communities, Stanton says. A general challenge for community-engaged research is identifying and partnering with relevant community organisations.

Related [challenges](#) include identifying the role and community perception of the research partner, involving residents in the research project, and agreeing who "owns" the project and the data collected. In addition, the research partner needs to avoid being perceived as partisan to any one community group or point of view.

Researchers and their partners in Langa have historically grappled with [unequal power relations](#) and defining the researchers' role. However, local residents and change agents like Mgedle have indicated that this project, although brief, has yielded useful information for Langa's second century of development.

How Langa's future will unfold is in the hands of community actors. A foundation has been laid for continued, collaborative problem-solving and increased social impact. "The future of mobility belongs to all of us if we can imagine it collectively, design it transparently, and execute it inclusively," Mgedle says.



Participants at the Talking Streets Workshop, organised by the Langa Bicycle Hub and the HSRC, on 7 March 2023. Pictured: the HSRC's Diana Sanchez-Betancourt, the MEC for mobility in the Western Cape Ricardo Mackenzie (centre right) and Michael Ndiwalana (right). Photo: Andrea Teagle

*This article is the second of a two-part series by Diana Sanchez-Betancourt, a senior researcher in the HSRC's Developmental, Capable and Ethical State division; Mzikhona Mgedle, the founding director of the Langa Bicycle Hub; Andrea Teagle, a science writer in the HSRC's Impact Centre; and Prof Timothy Stanton, the founding director of Stanford University's Overseas Studies in Cape Town.*

**Researcher contact:** [dsanchez@hsrc.ac.za](mailto:dsanchez@hsrc.ac.za)



Photo: Freepik

# The relevance of social history projects: **the Wentworth study**

*The narratives around Wentworth in Durban tend to focus on its social problems. However, the roots of these challenges are often lost in generalisations. For the Wentworth Social History Project, a team of HSRC researchers conducted interviews with residents to better understand the evolution of this township since the 1960s, and to identify the historical events that continue to shape the community and its residents today. By **Gregory Houston, Heidi van Rooyen, Bronwynne Anderson, Chitja Twala, Darian Smith, Maree Harold, Theresa Saber, Marilyn Couch and Andrea Teagle.***

**“**I don’t believe people fully understand Wentworth. They go with what ... they read in the newspaper,” remarked Mark van Wyk, a former resident. The media often portrays Wentworth, along with similar “coloured” working-class communities, through the lens of its prevalent social ills. Another former resident, Bronwyn Jacobs, stated: “I left a long time ago ... because I wasn’t prepared to settle for the many challenges that shaped our people and shaped Wentworth, such as drugs, alcohol and prostitution”.

These are excerpts from interviews conducted for the Wentworth Social History Project, which documents the experiences of current and past residents. One of the advantages of the life histories approach is the potential to show how the impacts of major societal transformations continue to ripple through communities today.

## **Wentworth today**

Wentworth is a historically “coloured” township in the Durban South Basin. It is characterised by high levels of substance abuse and gang warfare. High levels of poverty account for several other social ills, including widespread gender-based violence, risky sexual behaviour and teenage pregnancy, a high school-dropout rate, and widespread theft and robbery. The life history interviews indicate that these problems have their roots in apartheid-era social engineering, housing developments and transformations in labour patterns.

## **Apartheid social engineering**

Most families that migrated to Wentworth between the early 1960s and early 1980s were forcefully moved there following the apartheid Group Areas Act. Another reason that people settled in the area was the availability of housing and employment opportunities in nearby industries.

Families were drawn from several mixed-race residential areas in Durban. According to resident Alwyn Bonhomme, apartheid social engineering accounted for the location of the coloured residential area and the working-class nature of its population:

*“They developed industries in the Durban South Basin. And this is why Wentworth was created. What was coming up around Wentworth at that time was [the] Motor Assemblies [plant], the carpet factory ... and the refineries. So, you put this coloured area here where you are educating their youth to become the tradesmen.”*

Settlement and ancestry explain both the maintenance or emergence of social bonds in the Wentworth community, and its lines of fracture. For instance, the interviews indicate strong social bonds between the early Wentworth residents with Mauritian ancestry, but friction between the early 1960s settlers and those who migrated from the former Transkei a few years later.

### **Housing development**

Wentworth in the 1960s consisted largely of former military barracks with communal ablution blocks and other former military houses with internal ablution facilities. This created another line of fracture, as families that initially lived in the areas with communal facilities were later “upgraded” to rental housing. Others lived in shack settlements that were originally mixed-race, such as Happy Valley, Tin Town, the Red Sands. Reggie Poultnoy, a resident, explains:

*“There were two types of people. There were the societies, as we used to call them, and the riff-raffs. We were the riff-raffs down [at] the bottom in the Red Sands.”*

The Department of Community Development built houses for private ownership in some parts of Wentworth. From the early 1970s, several phases of flats were developed, accounting for the current [1,148 flats](#) in the township.

By the mid-1980s, Wentworth was a mixed-residential area with pockets of dense flats, rental council housing, and privately-owned houses ranging from two- and three-bedroomed houses in some streets to the ocean-view mansions of Treasure Beach.

Little major housing development has taken place since then. According to Donny Anderson, “The social ills started off with the type of housing they gave us, and bringing people from so many different areas. They put us in flats with no opportunities for recreational activity. We are still all cramped up.” In parts of Wentworth, concentrations of “about 30 or 40 boys of the same age staying in the flats” are fertile grounds for gangs, said Leslie Emmanuel.

### **Labour patterns**

In Wentworth’s early years, most men were artisans, working in the construction sector as carpenters, bricklayers, plasterers or plumbers, and in the engineering sector as welders, boilermakers and fitters. The women mostly worked in clothing factories, and a smaller number in the retail sector. A few adults were teachers and nurses, with job reservation and limited financial resources restricting access to these occupations. Even fewer owned small businesses such as general dealers, cafes, laundromats and barber shops.

Most parents worked in nearby industries. Traditional nuclear families were the norm, with both parents living permanently at home.

The 1970s saw the beginning of the migratory labour system in “coloured” communities, when Sasol oil was developed in Sasolburg in the north of the country. Many fathers and young men sought artisanal work there due to high wages and the lack of educational opportunities. Workers often spent two weeks away from home at a time, returning home for weekends. As a result, many Wentworth families in the late 1970s and 1980s were female-headed with absent fathers. According to resident Beverley Issup:

*“Many men travelled up and down to Sasolburg. The mothers had to bring up these boys. So, they had no role models. And again, they would find comfort with their friends that belonged to gangs. They would get into trouble and their friends would be there for them...”*

### **The emergence and growth of social ills**

The social problems the early community faced were relatively minor compared to those of later periods. Early Wentworth was remembered as a safe community. The first gangs emerged in the late 1960s, but these were largely benign. “The social ills ... included abuse of alcohol and dagga. There were a lot of gangs fighting. But they were fighting over girls. They were not fighting with guns and over drug territory,” said Patricia Dove.

Alcohol abuse was widespread, as was gender-based violence directed at young women and mothers. Teenage pregnancy existed, but not at catastrophic levels.

In the mid-1970s, however, gang-related conflict became more violent, with many deaths resulting from gang wars between school-going and unemployed youths wielding knives and machetes (bush-knives). Several interviewees, such as Donny Anderson, ascribe this to an insider-outsider mentality among youth from different parts of the township:

*“It was territorial war. If you stayed in the Drain Rats area, you couldn’t come to this or that soccer ground and you couldn’t go to the Wentworth swimming pool...”*

Social problems mushroomed in the late 1980s and early 1990s, as more and more young people grew up in crowded areas with absent, migrant fathers.

Today, Wentworth is a major source of and market for hard drugs such as “sugars” (a mixture of cocaine and heroin residue). Competition over control of the drug trade has led to widespread, devastating gang violence.

### **Understanding the roots**

Life history interviews provide useful insights into the trajectory of change in individuals’ lives. These changes often reflect transformations in the broader community, allowing us to identify factors that account for the current circumstances in such communities. Developing an understanding of the roots and nature of social challenges is a starting point for discovering solutions to them. By analysing developmental issues, social history projects can help to improve the wellbeing of vulnerable and marginalised groups, build localised research capacity and infrastructure, and foster collaboration, networks and institutional linkages. Such projects can also contribute to building social cohesion and creating safer communities.

**Researcher contacts:** Dr Gregory Houston, a chief research specialist in the HSRC’s Developmental, Capable and Ethical State division and Prof Heidi van Rooyen, the group executive of the HSRC’s Impact Centre  
[ghouston@hsrc.ac.za](mailto:ghouston@hsrc.ac.za)  
[hvanrooyen@hsrc.ac.za](mailto:hvanrooyen@hsrc.ac.za)



*CRUDE: Wentworth Community vs Big Oil*  
documentary image (Wentworth, South Africa).  
Spectators observe a soccer match at a sports  
field next to the Wentworth Engen oil refinery.  
Photo: Greenpeace

# CHOOSING LIFE OR LIFE CHOICES? ABORTION ATTITUDES IN SOUTH AFRICA

*Despite South Africa's liberal abortion legislation, [social stigma undermines](#) the willingness of women to seek safe and legal abortion services. Gaining new perspectives on abortion attitudes will help us find ways to reduce stigma and offer better support to pregnant women in distress. **Drs Ben Roberts, Steven Gordon and Jarè Struwig** examine abortion attitudes over the past two decades based on data from the HSRC's South African Social Attitudes Survey.*

The Choice on Termination of Pregnancy [Act](#) (No 92 of 1996) provides women in South Africa with the reproductive right to safe and legal abortion. However, social stigma remains a barrier, leading some women to opt for unsafe, so-called “backstreet” procedures.

To better understand abortion attitudes, we examined data from the South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) from 2003 to 2021. Conducted annually by the HSRC, the representative survey reaches approximately 3,000 adults aged 16 years and older. We used standard questions on abortion attitudes, originally designed by Prof Alice Rossi for inclusion in large-scale public opinion surveys in the United States in the mid-1960s. These questions have since been used throughout the world, allowing us to compare South Africa with other countries.

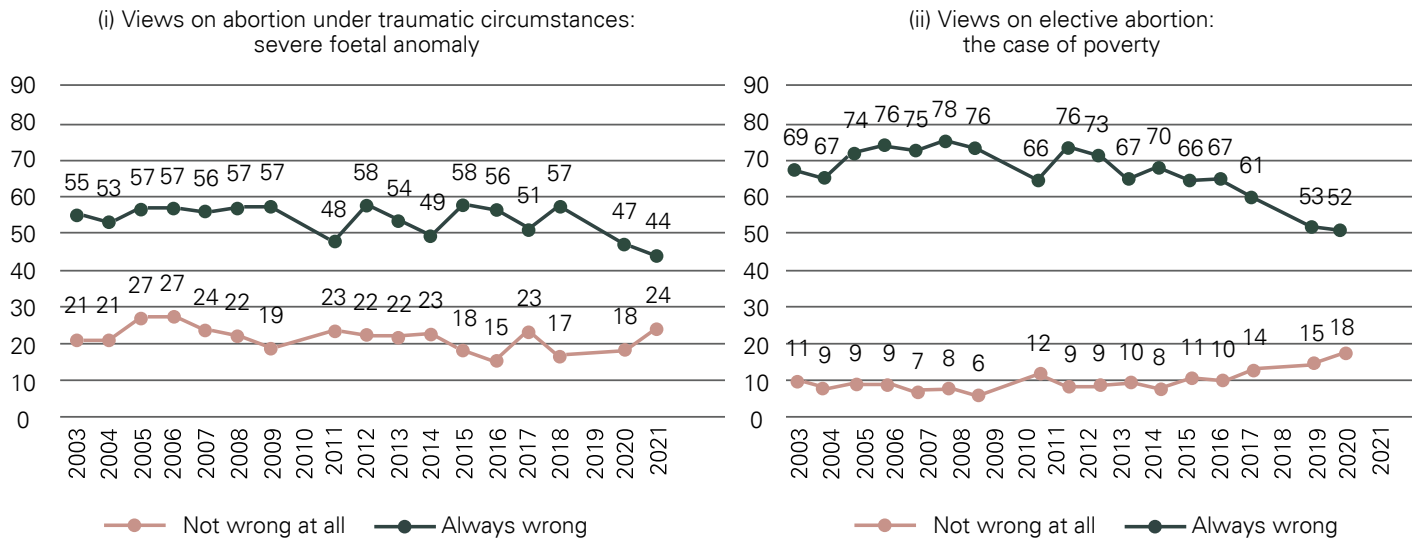
## **Signs of incremental acceptance?**

Respondents were asked the following: “Do you personally think it is wrong or not wrong for a woman to have an abortion ... (i) if there is a strong chance of serious defect in the baby?; (ii) if the family has a low income and cannot afford any more children?”



Photo: Meruyert Gonullu, Pexels

**Figure 1. Changes in the acceptability of abortion under differing circumstances: the cases of (i) severe foetal anomaly and (ii) poverty, 2003–2021 (%)**



Note: The graphs display only two of four response categories, the most accepting and opposing viewpoints. The items were not included in 2010 or 2019. Data are weighted to be nationally representative of adults 16 years and older. Source: HSRC SASAS 2003–2021

Responses to the items are captured using a four-point scale: “always wrong”, “almost always wrong”, “wrong only sometimes”, and “not wrong at all”.

Over the full period, over half (54%) of South Africans on average believed that abortion where the foetus might have serious defects was “always wrong”, while 9% considered it “almost always wrong”, 12% as “wrong only sometimes”, and 22% viewed it as “not wrong at all”. Three percent answered “don’t know”. Figure 1 (i) shows how the perceived acceptability of abortion for foetal anomaly remained relatively constant, with a clearer drop in “always wrong” responses after 2018 (from 57% in 2018 to 44% in 2021). Coupled with an upswing in the “not wrong at all” responses, this may signal weakening opposition to abortion under such circumstances but will require further monitoring.

Figure 1 (ii) shows abortion acceptability if a woman elects to abort due to poverty. On average, about 69% believed that abortion due to material hardship was “always wrong”, while 10% regarded it as “not wrong at all”. A minority (8%) reported that it was “wrong only sometimes” and 10% believed it was “almost always wrong”. Two percent were unsure.

Attitudes on poverty-related elective abortion have changed notably since 2003. By late 2021, only about half of the adult

population felt abortion for financial reasons was “always wrong”, while a significant minority (18%) stated that abortion was “not wrong at all”.

South Africans have been consistently more supportive of abortion in traumatic circumstances, such as a high risk of birth defects in the baby, than for financial concerns. This finding [has also been observed](#) in other countries.

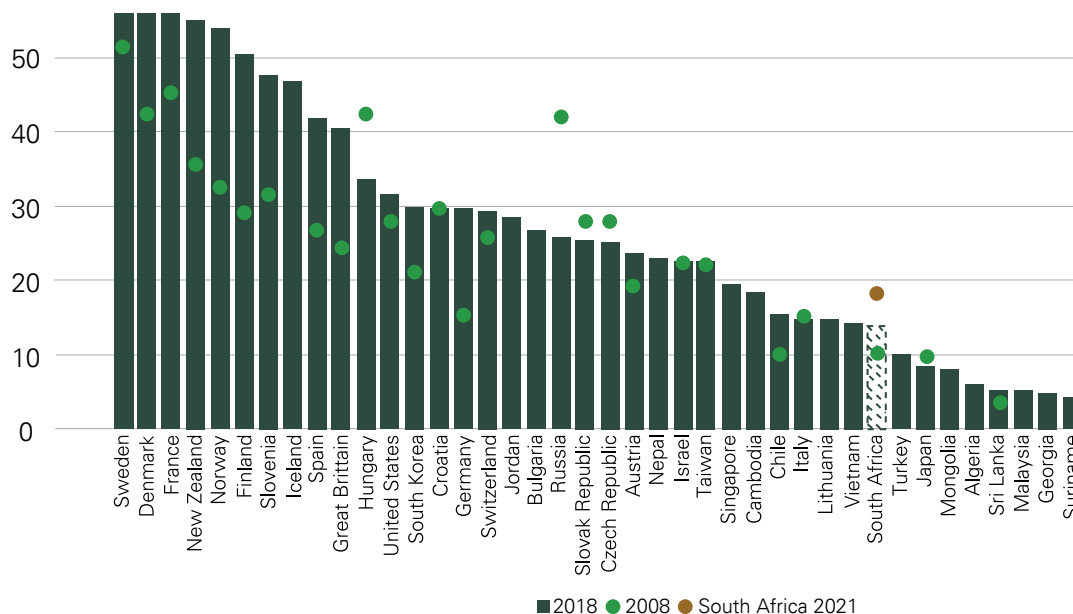
**A world of difference?**

How do South African views on the acceptability of abortion compare to those of other nations? The 2018 round of [the International Social Survey Programme \(ISSP\)](#), conducted in 47 countries, showed remarkable variation in poverty-related abortion acceptability between countries (Figure 2).

Relative to other African countries participating in ISSP 2018, such as Kenya, Ghana, Malawi and Nigeria, South Africa appears more liberal, although the share expressing an accepting view (13%) is low in absolute terms. However, South Africa appears quite conservative when compared with European countries, especially Sweden, Denmark and France. Many countries displayed a growing acceptability towards elective abortion. The increase in those South Africans saying that elective abortion is “not wrong at all” from 13% in 2018 to 18% in 2021 equates to a jump of five places in the country rankings in Figure 2 (assuming other country positions remained unchanged).

Photo: Freepik

**Figure 2. Percentage who stated that it is “not wrong at all” for a woman to have an abortion if the family has a very low income and cannot afford any more children, 2018 (elective abortion)**



Source: International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) Religion module (2008, 2018); HSRC SASAS 2021

**A united nation?**

Is the general shift towards a more accepting abortion attitude widespread or driven by changes among certain groups only? Table 1 presents changes in the share believing that economic reasons for elective abortion are “not wrong at all” based on select socio-demographic characteristics.

We find a significant, general increase in acceptance of abortion among both men and women, with the level of change greater for women.

Among men, the largest increase in acceptance was among older age groups. In contrast, younger women showed the largest increase in acceptability. Attitudinal change was much slower for young men.

Men with no secondary education experienced the greatest change (a rise of 10 percentage points). For women, individuals with a matric-level education underwent the fastest rate of change (an increase of 15 percentage points).

**Table 1. Percentages stating that elective abortion in the case of poverty is “not wrong at all”, by selected attributes, 2016 and 2021**

	Male			Female		
	2016	2021	Change	2016	2021	Change
All	12%	16%	+4%	10%	21%	+11%
Age group						
16–24	18%	19%	+1%	12%	23%	+10%
25–34	12%	14%	+2%	11%	28%	+17%
35–54	10%	17%	+8%	9%	19%	+9%
55+	5%	10%	+6%	6%	15%	+9%
Education level						
Primary or no formal schooling	3%	13%	+10%	7%	14%	+8%
Incomplete secondary	11%	16%	+5%	8%	16%	+8%
Complete secondary	12%	14%	+2%	12%	27%	+15%
Post-secondary	19%	19%	0%	15%	24%	+8%
Religious identification						
Christian	13%	14%	+1%	11%	18%	+7%
Non-Christian	5%	19%	+14%	4%	29%	+25%
No religion	9%	18%	+9%	8%	28%	+20%

Source: HSRC South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2016 and 2021



More moderate gender differences were found for the acceptability of abortion in the case of foetal anomaly (results not shown), with clear variation by education. For example, 31% of adults with a post-secondary qualification felt getting an abortion under these traumatic circumstances was “not wrong at all”, compared to 16% of adults with primary or no formal schooling. Among adults with limited formal education, women were much more accepting of abortion under traumatic circumstances than their male counterparts.

### **Faith and freedom**

Religion was a noteworthy dividing line. Although Christians were more accepting of abortion than non-Christians and secular adults in 2016, this trend had reversed by 2021, with non-Christians (especially members of the Hindu and Islamic faiths) becoming more accepting. Christian men showed the lowest level of change and non-Christian women the highest. Those who view themselves as strongly religious also showed less support for elective abortion.

Other research using SASAS 2003–2016 abortion attitudes data ([Mosley et al., 2020](#)) found that attitudes towards sexuality and gender roles are significantly associated with attitudes to abortion. For instance, those who opposed premarital sex and were critical of working mothers were more negative towards abortion. The SASAS 2021 results confirmed that these associations remain unchanged.

### **Need for a varied approach**

Negative attitudes towards abortion remain common 25 years after the legalisation of abortion in South Africa. However, acceptance is increasing, especially for elective abortion due to poverty, a trend shared with other countries. These changes in values are widespread, but vary along gender, age and educational lines. More negative attitudes towards abortion were also associated with religious identity and religiosity, as well as traditional views on sexuality and gender roles.

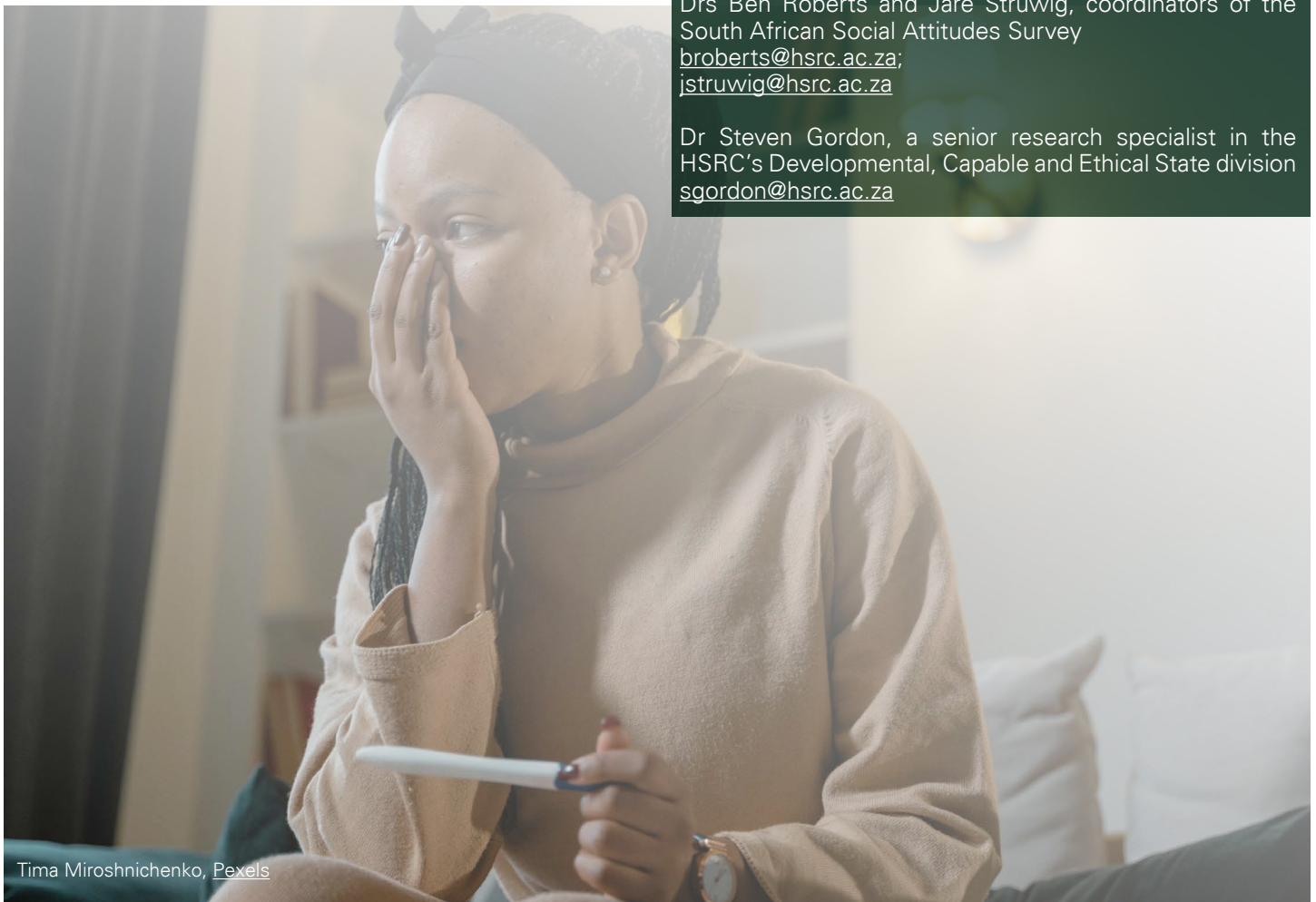
These results point to the need for a varied approach to protecting and promoting women’s sexual and reproductive health rights. This includes: providing access to educational and awareness-raising programmes; improving access to healthcare services; engaging with religious and traditional leaders; advocating for legal protection; and supporting organisations that promote sexual and reproductive health rights.

More nuanced and routine representative social attitudes surveying in the country should examine ongoing changes in norms and attitudes pertaining to sexual and reproductive health issues. The findings can help inform targeted interventions to tackle persistent social stigma around abortion.

#### **Researcher contacts:**

Drs Ben Roberts and Jarè Struwig, coordinators of the South African Social Attitudes Survey  
[broberts@hsrc.ac.za](mailto:broberts@hsrc.ac.za);  
[jstruwig@hsrc.ac.za](mailto:jstruwig@hsrc.ac.za)

Dr Steven Gordon, a senior research specialist in the HSRC’s Developmental, Capable and Ethical State division  
[sgordon@hsrc.ac.za](mailto:sgordon@hsrc.ac.za)



Tima Miroshnichenko, Pexels

# Co-creating a gender toolkit to amplify the impact of antimicrobial resistance research

*Antimicrobial resistance (AMR) contributed to over 4.95 million deaths in 2019 – more deaths than those related to HIV and malaria combined. Unequal gender norms and power relations create different exposure risks to AMR, and influence who is able to access and benefit from preventative measures. However, the evidence base to inform this is still lacking and AMR studies are often gender blind. Better research evidence on the interplay between AMR and gender can guide relevant, impactful and sustainable mitigation strategies. In a first-of-its-kind project, a team led by the HSRC is collaborating with researchers to create tools to integrate gender considerations across the AMR research cycle. By **Ingrid Lynch***

**A**ntimicrobial resistance (AMR) has become a major global concern, with a devastating impact on people's health and livelihoods. Antimicrobial medicine has transformed healthcare by providing effective treatment for once deadly infectious diseases, and enabling medical breakthroughs in organ transplants and cancer treatment. However, the emergence of antimicrobial resistance in response to drug-selective pressure has jeopardised gains made against infectious diseases such as HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis.

Drug-resistant bacterial infections are a leading cause of death. The World Health Organization (WHO) recognises AMR, primarily driven by the inappropriate use and overuse of antimicrobials, as one of humanity's 10 major global health challenges. Plants and animals are also affected by AMR, causing the agricultural sector, including subsistence farmers, to sustain production losses and damaged livelihoods, which in turn jeopardises food security. AMR has a greater impact on low and middle-income countries (LMICs) and is widening the health gap between developing countries and the developed world. AMR is further complicated by gender and other socio-economic inequities. However, AMR research that considers the impact of gender remains limited.

## **Why gender matters**

As the 2013–2016 Ebola virus epidemic in West Africa and the global SARS-CoV-2 pandemic demonstrated, women and girls are disproportionately affected by infectious disease outbreaks. A 2022 study published in *Nature Microbiology* that examined the gender impact of such health crises in Africa found women were significantly more vulnerable to indirect health, social and economic consequences.

The burden of infectious diseases and AMR is disproportionately greater in less developed countries, where women also have less access to healthcare. Gender often intersects with marginalisation due to other socio-behavioural factors, such as socio-economic status, disability and age, to impact individuals in distinct ways. The WHO recommends adopting an intersectional gender lens to better understand the complex, overlapping ways social identities shape the progression and treatment of infectious diseases. This helps avoid a one-size-fits-all approach in research, policy and programmes, instead shedding light on the interplay of AMR, gender and other socio-behavioural factors, and how these are shaped by structural conditions such as economic and other inequalities.

While gender equality is recognised as a priority in the health and development agenda, limited research has explored how gender influences AMR, particularly in LMICs where social, structural and systematic challenges are contributing to the growing burden. Consequently, there is a lack of resources for AMR researchers in LMICs to draw on when integrating a gender lens into their studies.

## **A participatory approach to co-creating a gender toolkit**

The Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), in partnership with Jive Media Africa and Mahidol Oxford Tropical Medicine Research Unit (MORU) in Thailand, is developing a practical toolkit to empower AMR researchers to integrate gender considerations into their research. The team has crafted a participatory process with end-users, particularly AMR researchers in LMIC settings. Co-development ensures that the toolkit is tailored to specific contextual challenges.

Researchers are also more likely to adopt and champion tools they have played a role in developing, leading to increased utilisation and impact.

The team hosted a series of expert consultation workshops from December 2022 to February 2023 with researchers in sub-Saharan Africa and Southeast Asia – the two regions with the highest AMR burden – where AMR researchers shared their experiences of applying a gender lens in their projects. By delving into these experiences, the workshops generated valuable insights into the kinds of tools researchers find helpful.

The consultations emphasised the importance of providing accessible ways for researchers to identify how, for example, gender norms and power relations might hamper the uptake of research innovations. The relevance for projects that appear gender-neutral, such as livestock vaccine development to counter overuse of antimicrobials, may not always be obvious. A participant shared how a vaccine delivery intervention that targets small-scale farmers – a sector with high participation by women in LMICs – might face implementation challenges if research does not explore constraints on women’s access to resources and decision-making power. A tool such as a simple gender analysis framework can strengthen researchers’ ability to meaningfully explore gender considerations.

### Refining the toolkit

Next, the team collaborated with global experts in AMR, gender, and intersectional frameworks to refine the emerging toolkit. Through online facilitated activities, participants offered ideas for shifting attitudes and norms around gender in AMR research, and ultimately nurturing more inclusive research practices, at each step of the research and innovation cycle. Participants also generated ideas about practical and relevant tools that can be applied across research disciplines and subject areas. AMR research covers a wide range of interconnected domains, including animal, human, and environmental health, and involves diverse research settings. The co-development process helped cut through this complexity, offering clear and practical entry points for researchers unfamiliar with gender theory and methodologies.

The toolkit will be launched mid-year. Ultimately, equipping AMR researchers with user-friendly tools to integrate gender considerations in their research enhances the quality and robustness of research findings and promotes equity and inclusivity. This, in turn, contributes to more effective strategies for addressing AMR and its social implications, leading to tangible positive outcomes.

Researcher contact: Ingrid Lynch, [ilync@hsrc.ac.za](mailto:ilync@hsrc.ac.za)

*The project is jointly supported by the International Centre for Antimicrobial Resistance Solutions (ICARS) and Canada’s International Development Research Centre (IDRC), and implemented by the HSRC in partnership with MORU and Jive Media Africa. The team is led by Dr Ingrid Lynch, the Principal Investigator (PI), and Dr Konosoang Sobane (co-PI) from the HSRC, along with Dr Bhensri Naemiratch from MORU (co-PI).*



Photo: [International Development Research Centre](#)

# AI: the digital mirror

*A new generation of artificial intelligence (AI) requires a new generation of policy-orientated research. While research agendas continue to tackle the thorny problems of previous-generation AI, recent advances in generative AI raise a new cohort of questions, ranging from the pragmatic to the philosophical. The HSRC's **Dr Michael Gastrow** reflects on the research agenda created by this new wave of AI.*

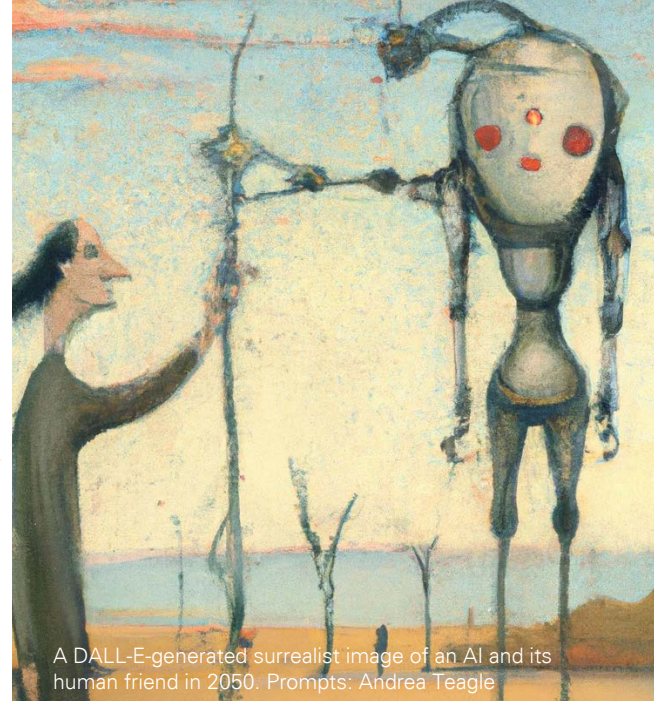
Some revolutions happen quietly at first. In 2017, in a journal little known to social scientists or humanities scholars, a team of Google AI specialists published a paper titled '[Attention is all you need](#)'. It introduced the transformer architecture, which revolutionised the performance of artificial intelligence (AI) algorithms and set in motion a shift towards a new generation of AIs, Generative Pre-trained Transformers (GPTs). Unlike older AIs, which served primarily as ranking functions (what show you might watch, the products you may buy, or which stocks might go up, for example), generative AI can produce novel text, images, sound, or video. The new AIs are 'trained' to better [align](#) their outputs with human values and interests.

Enabled by large [investments](#) in computing power and data scale, researchers at OpenAI, Google, and other technology leaders reached an inflection point beyond which AI was finally able to converse with humans in natural language. A cautious research and development process ensued, which took account of the serious risks inherent in powerful AI. Early commercial applications explored niche-use cases, for example, the 2021 release of DALL-E, which produces images from text prompts, and GitHub Copilot, which produces code from text prompts.

The technology exploded into public consciousness with the release of ChatGPT in late 2022, which applies the technology directly to text-based conversation with AI. This in turn led to a hype bubble. Science fiction nerds collectively shifted Artificial General Intelligence (AGI) to the non-fiction shelf, the investment world scrambled to monetise this breakthrough, and governments around the globe tried to catch up with the [regulatory imperatives](#) that the new technology creates.

## What we should ask about AI

The most immediate questions are about benefit and risk. AI offers exciting new ways to learn, yet undermines traditional [education](#) systems. AI offers radical improvements in [labour](#) productivity, yet may lead to inequality, unemployment and upheaval. AI offers powerful new [coding tools](#), yet



A DALL-E-generated surrealist image of an AI and its human friend in 2050. Prompts: Andrea Teagle

also creates new [cyber threats](#). AI offers remarkable new communication opportunities, yet can be used to [mislead](#) and manipulate. The impact is so broad that it is hard to imagine a sector that will be unaffected.

Some of the risk scenarios extend all the way to doomsday, speculating on the non-zero chance that AI could [destroy humanity](#). However, unlike generations of science fiction movies, it would not be AI that destroys humanity, but rather humans that weaponise AI to do the job. The thought of authoritarian and malicious actors using AI for harm is, indeed, terrifying. Underlying all this is a shift in paradigm in which we let go of the notion of AI challenging humans for supremacy to embrace the idea that AI amplifies human capabilities and powers – and that in the end we will be faced with a scaled-up version of ourselves, both terrible and beautiful. AI does not give us anywhere to hide from ourselves: it is fundamentally an expression of humanity itself, of our collective ability to create machines in our own image.

The [governance](#) of AI is thus a pragmatic question of harnessing benefits and mitigating risks, as well as an [existential](#) question about the future of humanity. It is critical that social scientists and humanities scholars understand how the technology works, and that we develop scenarios for the technology's evolution and socio-economic impact.

The race to develop governance frameworks through legislation, regulation, and policy must be informed by sound research, including research that is grounded in the [African context](#), and that reflects South Africa's developmental imperatives.

## What AI asks of us

We also need to acknowledge that the mirror of AI asks questions of us, too. It asks questions of us as creative beings: if an artwork is created by a machine, based on text prompts from a human, and drawing on a silicon brain trained on the public internet, where does the [creative](#) spark lie? Is the resulting work an artefact of human culture

or cyborg culture? AI asks questions of us as conscious beings: human-like behaviour in machines is uncanny and, at the very least, raises questions about [consciousness](#) that philosophers have long explored only in theory, and can now test in practice. AI asks questions of us as humans: what would ultimately be left after machines take over much of our cognitive labour? What would we do? And, consequently, who would we be?

In this torrent of questions, it's important not to get carried away by the current. The [limitations](#) of generative AI are becoming increasingly apparent, and the counter-revolution has already begun. High-profile calls for a [moratorium on](#)

[AI development](#) have entered the public discourse. Some people feel more comfortable doing their own thinking, rather than outsourcing parts of it to a machine with tentacles around the globe. AI-generated content remains imperfect, and can be incorrect and biased. The evident use of proprietary data for training raises questions of intellectual property rights, which are currently being tested in the [legal arena](#). The initial hype of GPT has died down to an understanding that machines are obviously capable of comprehending language, and that our future is one in which we can converse with our fellow humans, or choose to interact with our simulacrum. It's likely that our children will take this for granted.

**Researcher contact:** Dr Michael Gastrow, a director of the Science in Society unit in the HSRC's Impact Centre  
[mgastrow@hsrc.ac.za](mailto:mgastrow@hsrc.ac.za)



A DALL-E-generated image of a futuristic African city.  
Prompts: Andrea Teagle

# Needing experience for a job yet a job for experience:

## evaluating a government STEM internship programme

*They can't land a job without experience but won't gain any experience without a job. This is the devastating realisation of many science graduates who venture into the labour market. The Department of Science and Innovation's National Youth Service (NYS) programme attempts to bridge this divide by providing workplace experience to people with tertiary qualifications in science, technology and engineering. The HSRC evaluates this programme annually and recently published a 10-year commemorative NYS [report](#). **Andrea Juan** spoke to the Review.*

**M**any science graduates face hopelessness and disillusionment after investing years of their lives and significant financial resources to obtain a degree. Instead of doors opening, they are unemployed or underemployed. In addition, those from disadvantaged backgrounds have no networks or other resources to fall back on.

The irony is that South Africa experiences skills shortages, especially in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). Government programmes such as the National Youth Service (NYS) have attempted to assist unemployed STEM graduates by providing workplace experience aligned with their qualifications.

However, for these interventions to have a significant impact, the programmes must be evaluated so they can be improved over time.

### **HSRC response**

Commissioned by the Department of Science and Innovation (DSI), the HSRC has helped to evaluate the NYS programme's success by conducting an annual tracking study of participants since 2012.

"As Africa's largest dedicated social science and humanities research agency, the HSRC is well placed to conduct such evaluations," says Andrea Juan, a senior research specialist in the HSRC's Equitable Education and Economies research division.

"Our annual evaluation of the programme helps the DSI to continuously assess its effectiveness and quality."

Based on data collected from 1,321 participants, the HSRC recently compiled a 10-year commemorative [report](#) on the NYS programme. Researchers contacted participants during their first year in the programme and then for two subsequent years. The report summarises participant profiles, what they gained from the programme, their employment outcomes and how host institutions benefited. The researchers also conducted in-depth qualitative interviews with some of the original NYS programme participants.

### **Participant profile: are we reaching those most in need?**

A demographic profile of participants helps the DSI ensure that the programme benefits those most in need.



Photo: Pexels

Most of the young people in the programme were black and female, about a quarter (26%) had completed a diploma and 74% had a bachelor's degree or higher qualification. The majority had graduated in the areas of biology, chemistry, engineering and environmental sciences. However, despite their STEM qualifications, which are listed as scarce skills in South Africa, many were unable to find employment. According to the report, 59% were unemployed, 8% underemployed, 3% working and 30% studying. As 41% of respondents were not unemployed prior to joining the programme, it is evident that the NYS is seen as a way for graduates to access the labour market in any form.

### Barriers to finding work

Most of the respondents (63%) indicated that they applied to the NYS programme because they could not find suitable employment due to a lack of work experience. Almost a third also said that there were no suitable job opportunities where they lived. Gaining work experience can be a particular obstacle for individuals whose social and economic positions do not expose them to even casual work opportunities and networks. The NYS programme is designed to overcome these obstacles.

### Linked to their studies?

Graduates have been placed at 125 host institutions across the country, including science centres, schools, observatories, zoos and research councils.

The programme aimed to place participants in workplaces where their duties would link to their tertiary qualifications. However, only 18% reported a direct link, 57% an indirect link and 25% said there was no link between their area of studies and the NYS workplace experience.

Initially, participants were recruited for two-year periods with host institutions; however, this was reduced to one year. Some of the participants felt that one year was not enough for people to develop specific interests.

### Skills gained

Science communication, interpersonal skills and the ability to work in teams were among the skills that respondents said they gained, while their technical and STEM-related skills were the least improved. The researchers commented that the NYS programme needs to focus more on the latter if they want to assist participants in transitioning into a STEM work environment. Despite this, 71% of respondents said their participation in the programme improved their employability. A further 12% said their employability was 'enhanced', but not related to their subject knowledge.

A number of respondents with qualifications in microbiology, biotechnology and environmental science were hosted in science communication positions where they learned about the importance of science promotion, public engagement, administration skills, workshop facilitation, and writing presentations, reports and proposals.

### Pathways out of NYS

The researchers collected information from 601 participants on their development pathways after the NYS programme. Almost half (46%) were employed, 18% were studying and 10% were employed and studying. Twenty-six percent were unemployed. Around two-thirds of the employed had found jobs in STEM-related fields in line with their chosen career paths (Figure 1). Most were employed by the private sector, the government, non-profit organisations, parastatals and educational institutions. More than half were moderately to highly satisfied with their jobs.

### The way forward

The NYS serves as a mechanism through which STEM graduates can make a living and not be lost to the National System of Innovation. As 56% of respondents found employment after participating in the programme, we can argue these STEM graduates were better equipped for their future careers, and more employable. The programme thus allows individuals with little social capital to access labour market networks. Also, placing graduates at science centres and schools where they participated in science communication activities boosted public awareness of science and enhanced the capacity of the science centres.

The researchers recommend that the NYS programme be expanded in terms of the number of participants and that the university criteria be expanded to include those with technical and vocational education and training (TVET) qualifications. Most participants were hosted at government-funded science centres and public schools. The report recommends that the host institutions be expanded to include state-owned enterprises and more private sector organisations, possibly by tapping into the network of host organisations from the [Youth Employment Service \(YES\)](#) programme. YES enables organisations to enhance their B-BBEE levels by providing jobs for young black people, but not necessarily graduates.

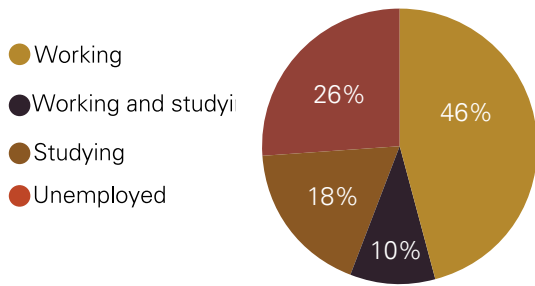
Another option is to work with the Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) responsible for managing and creating learnerships, internships, unit-based skills programmes and apprenticeships. A wider network of hosts may provide better matches between NYS participant qualifications and skills to be gained from workplace experiences.

The study highlights the problem of science graduate unemployment, says Juan. "These graduates were sold the idea that a science qualification would be valued in the labour market, but they could not find jobs. This shows how educational qualifications are not enough in terms of the capital that potential employers want. Work experience and networks are just as important."

Using the feedback from the NYS participants, this HSRC research has identified areas for improvement also summarised in a [policy brief](#). The findings were shared with the DSI, NYS programme developers and host organisations.



Pathways of the NYS (2008-2016; N=601)



“By implementing the suggested changes, the quality of the programme will continue to improve over time, increasing the employability of the participants,” says Juan.

So far, based on the HSRC findings over the years, the NYS programme has been enhanced by broadening the type of host institutions, adding “soft skills” capacity development workshops and mentoring, and by expanding the programme for all graduates (not just STEM). For long-term impact, Juan would like to see the NYS model used by all government departments and shared with other African governments.

Respondents who were employed after exiting the NYS (2008-2016)

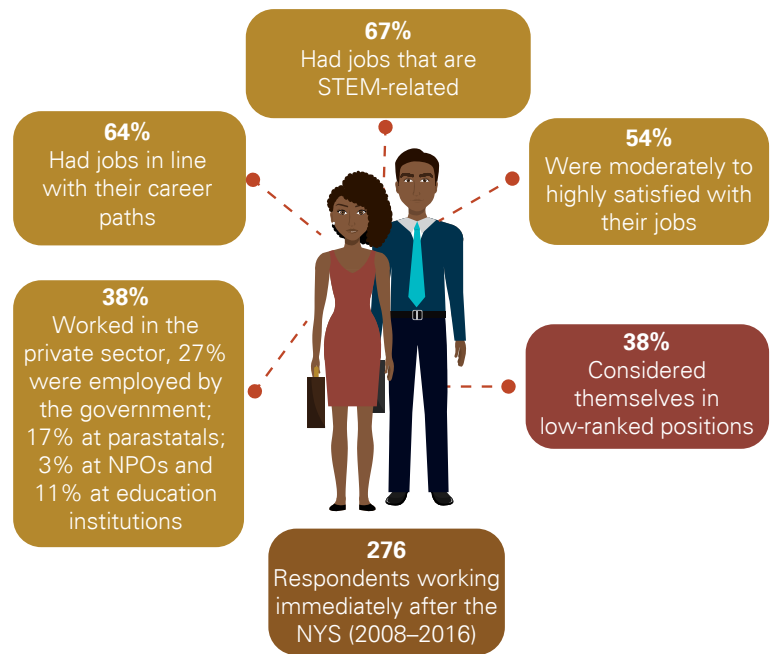


Figure 1. Pathways out of the NYS programme

**Research contact:** Andrea Juan, a senior research specialist in the HSRC’s Equitable Education and Economies research division  
[ajuan@hsrc.ac.za](mailto:ajuan@hsrc.ac.za)



Photo: Mikael Blomkvist, Pexels

# The role of career guidance in young people's futures

*In January, the HSRC's **Zimingtonaphakade Sigenu** interviewed past students of public secondary schools in Engcobo, a small rural town in the Eastern Cape. The fieldwork, which was part of The Imprint of Education study, highlighted concerns about the poor quality of career counselling in rural schools. Sigenu argues that learners with insufficient exposure to relevant career guidance are at risk of making ill-informed educational and career choices. Without an adequate awareness of their intellectual abilities, current opportunities, and the structural challenges to employment or livelihoods, the challenges of transitioning to post-school education and the world of work become insurmountable.*

Statistics about learner throughput and [performance](#) in international tests suggest public basic education in South Africa is in a dire state. Schools [in rural towns and villages are often the worst affected](#). Recent HSRC fieldwork in Engcobo, a small rural town in the Eastern Cape, highlighted a less studied problem in basic education: the lack or poor quality of career guidance in public schools.

Career guidance is part of the Life Orientation (LO) subject area as stipulated by the [National Curriculum Policy Statement \(CAPS\)](#). It helps learners reflect on their strengths, weaknesses, interests, ambitions and abilities to better understand which forms of post-school training and professions they are best suited for. [Research](#) shows that many young people from historically disadvantaged areas lack access to trained career guidance counsellors or other means to seek career guidance privately. In addition, career guidance in LO is [limited in its effectiveness](#) because educators lack adequate training and capacity to teach the subject optimally and holistically. This is unfortunate because [research indicates](#) that the lack of career guidance for underprivileged groups and in secondary schools can infringe on skills development, complicate or lengthen the transition to post-school education and training, and limit livelihood prospects.

## **"I feel stuck"**

Interviews revealed limited self-awareness among young people. Participants expressed that this had affected their choices of school subjects and post-school study options. Borrowing from [Margie Eckroth-Bucher](#), [self-awareness](#) is conceptualised as a process of understanding one's identity, thoughts, motivations and behaviour, as well as examining one's beliefs, interests, strengths and limitations. Being [self-aware](#) is important for effective learning, educationally and experientially, and for decision-making.

One young woman revealed how both a lack of knowledge and having no-one to help align her abilities, passions and aspirations had contributed to her inability to decide upon her next step after passing matric:

*"Regarding studying further, I don't know what I would study ... I don't know what I am passionate about; I don't think I have any talents. I actually cannot remember anyone asking me about my talents or what I am passionate about ... even in school. I don't remember thinking about things I am interested in that can help me decide how I want my future to look. All I know is that I can do household chores and I want to be rich, but that is not a good combination ... I feel stuck."*

This is not an isolated case in a rural town like Engcobo. Several young people expressed their experiences of confusion and frustration when it came to making post-schooling decisions due to a lack of knowledge about themselves and what studies or careers they would like to pursue.

## **"I do not think I was ready"**

Young people may enrol in post-school education or choose careers based on perceived social and economic benefits without a realistic understanding of their aptitudes and interests. They can find themselves on ill-suited career paths due to the perception that difficult subjects, such as the natural sciences, will increase their chances of getting into university. This was the case for one young man interviewed in Engcobo:

*"I passed my matric with average marks and low maths and physics scores. Because I had passed, I was encouraged to study further. I applied and was accepted for electrical engineering at a TVET college in Cape Town. I had a very hard time during the first year. I failed each and every module. This made me very sad, heartbroken. I felt dumb for a long time. I also had the fear that I would amount to nothing in life. It's only been a short while since I experienced that, and I see that I should have been more realistic about my next steps after Grade 12 because I do not think I was ready for tertiary studies."*

After three years and some reflection, he enrolled at his former school to redo Grade 12. The time, monetary and psychosocial costs could have been prevented if career guidance had been provided earlier.

## Finding solutions

Providing impactful career guidance in Engcobo schools requires a multi-stakeholder approach. Local government, in collaboration with NGOs, needs to implement specialised training for LO educators to enable them to provide guidance, counselling, and specialised learner support. Schools need to recruit teaching staff able to deal with the specific career guidance issues of a country with high levels of youth and general unemployment. These teachers must be continuously supported and monitored to ensure good outcomes for learners. In the long run, the Department of Basic Education needs to place dedicated career counsellors at all public schools.

The model used by the [Leap Science and Maths Schools](#) in their [Future Leaders Program](#) is a good example of the type of training framework needed for LO educators. It is a multi-dimensional training programme for educators that provides experiential training, mentoring and professional development, particularly for LO educators, so that teaching can respond to contextual conditions.

Engcobo, as an under-resourced community, also offers opportunities for NGOs that want to drive change in the area of youth livelihoods. Many young people are economically inactive, and others are in low-wage employment. There is a need for engagement, public dialogue and mentorship to support young people to develop self-awareness and a thorough understanding of post-school education and training opportunities. These initiatives should also help young people to better understand the world of work and develop skills and pathways that can improve their collective social mobility.

The [Refracted Economies Taxonomy](#) framework, created by the HSRC's Prof Sharlene Swartz and Dr Krish Chetty, could be used to benefit individuals who are economically inactive or in low-wage employment. The framework lists all forms of work along a spectrum, illustrating the multiple ways that livelihoods might emerge, the ways in which occupations can overlap and the ways an individual's career can progress from one level to the next with specific skills development, work experience and education. The dissemination of this model could help young people map pathways towards existing opportunities and develop skills that can support professional progression.

### Researcher contact:

Zimigonaphakade Sigenu, a Young African Research Fellow in the HSRC's Equitable Education and Economies division  
[zsigenu@hsrc.ac.za](mailto:zsigenu@hsrc.ac.za)

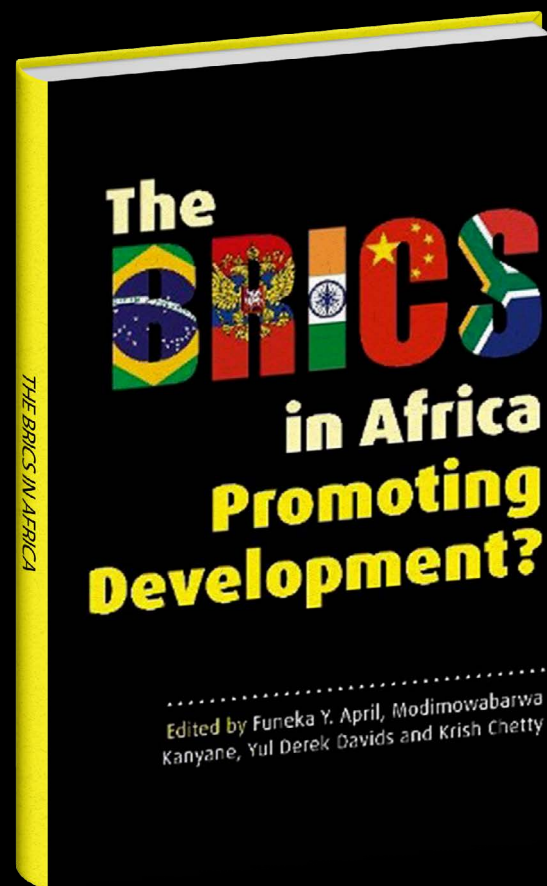
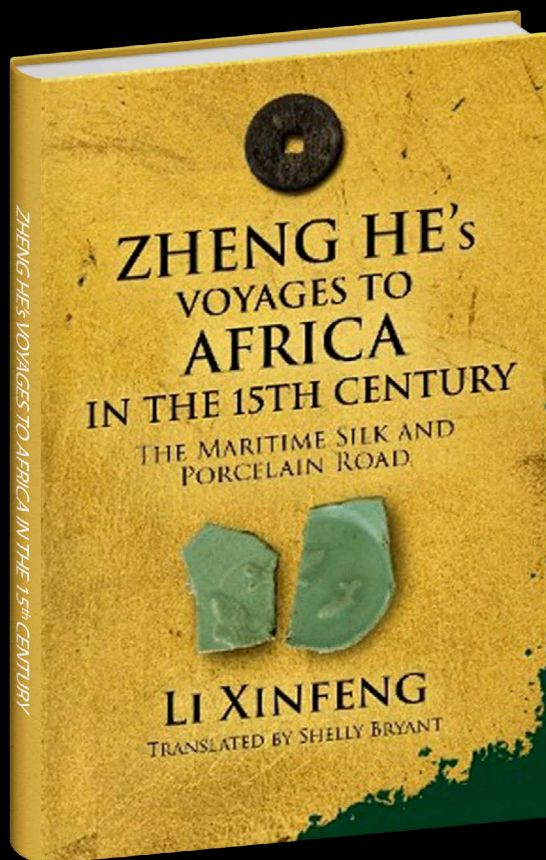


Photo: Oladimeji Ajegbile, Pexels

# HSRC PUBLISHING

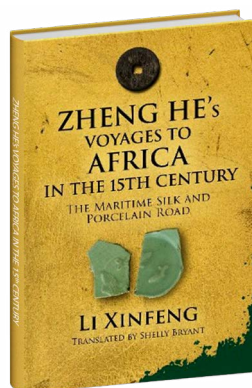


*Taking African research to the world*



HSRC Publishing titles are available from leading booksellers nationally and from the sales agent, Blue Weaver, at [orders@blueweaver.co.za](mailto:orders@blueweaver.co.za)

## Zheng He's Voyages to Africa in the 15th Century The Maritime Silk and Porcelain Road



Price **R325**

Editor: Li Xinfeng  
ISBN (soft cover): 978-0-7983-0538-9  
Format: 240mm x 168mm  
Extent: 390 pp

### ABOUT THE BOOK

Zheng He, a great Chinese navigator and messenger of peace, expanded the Maritime Silk Road, which connected China with the rest of the world more than 600 years ago. Zheng He and his fleet visited four countries and peoples along the coast of East Africa during his seven epic voyages, laying the groundwork for later friendship and cooperation between Africa and China. The journey was a manifestation of traditional Chinese philosophy, which values harmony.

Readers can expect an in-depth and multi-faceted account of Zheng He's voyages to Africa, from the impact and significance of his arrival on the continent to the relationships he formed with African people.

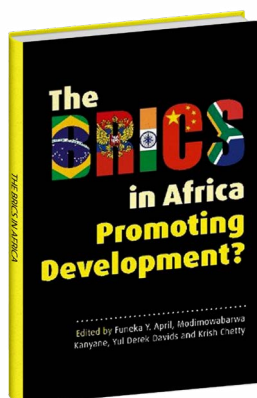
### CONTACT:

[skhan@hsrc.ac.za](mailto:skhan@hsrc.ac.za)



## Taking African research to the world

## The BRICS in Africa Promoting Development?



Price **R295**

Editors: Funeka Y. April, Barwa Kanyane, Yul Derek Davids & Krish Chetty  
ISBN (soft cover): 978-0-7969-2637-1  
Format: 168mm x 240mm  
Extent: 450 pp

### ABOUT THE BOOK

The BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) nations have become a strong engine for South-South cooperation. The most significant outcome of the emergence of the BRICS bloc is the shift it has made in the global balance of power. In the past decade, commercial and strategic engagements between BRICS and Africa have accelerated. The BRICS countries constitute Africa's largest trading partners and new investors. This cooperation has nourished Africa's economic emergence and elevated the continent's global position.

The authors seek to determine the impact of BRICS-Africa cooperation and partnerships, mainly through the New Industrial Revolution, financial technologies, infrastructure, economic growth and development in health. The book also critiques the relevance of the BRICS New Development Bank in the post-COVID-19 era, examines governance and accountability mechanisms, and explores strategies that address gender developmental disparities and inequalities in BRICS and Africa.

Humanity's quest for perpetual peace and common prosperity is at the heart of the BRICS agenda and long-term vision. This important study makes a significant intellectual contribution to the realisation of that vision. This book is essential reading for all scholars, researchers and policymakers who are interested in multilateralism, the BRICS, and the peaceful and constructive transformation of the global system. It is hoped that readers will be inspired, motivated and challenged to contribute to the BRICS debate, going forward.

### CONTACT:

[skhan@hsrc.ac.za](mailto:skhan@hsrc.ac.za)