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the importance of land ownership,
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Cover: Johannesburg city viewed from a rooftop.

Photo: [Thomas Bennie on Unsplash](#)

EDITOR'S NOTE

By Antoinette Oosthuizen

Insecure land tenure continues to be a challenge for black farmers in South Africa. For some women, overcoming the legacy of apartheid restrictions may be further complicated by a customary system that only allows access to land via male heads of households. Growing their enterprises often requires building or upgrading built infrastructure. But what happens to that investment if the lease or land use agreement ends?

In this edition of the *Review*, Sabelo Mpsi advocates for greater policy intervention to bring an end to gender-based discrimination in land ownership and rights. This is based on discussions with young female small-scale farmers during ethnographic fieldwork in KwaZulu-Natal. [Previous research](#) has shown that female land ownership has significantly increased crop diversity and has improved households' probability of food security.

On a related topic and based on a research project by the HSRC and UK partners, Henrice Altink and Tim Hart describe how supporting urban farmers around Johannesburg could enhance the metropole's food security and contribute to job creation.

At a recent HSRC forum on informal sector innovation held in Philippi, Cape Town, speakers emphasised the need to recognise informal businesses as a fundamental feature of South Africa's cities. We report on how HSRC researchers have been working with informal sector stakeholders to refine an evidence-based toolkit that aims to assist informal businesses in becoming sustainable.

Touching on spatial matters, we revisit the launch of the [Spatial Economic Activity Data: South Africa](#) (SEAD-SA) initiative, and look at economic data at the level of neighbourhoods, cities and municipalities that are now available to inform policy and planning for the first time.

In an article about an HSRC webinar, we discuss the impact of generative artificial intelligence tools in South Africa, with a focus on employment, equality, and ethical considerations. Staying true to the theme, we produced the article with the assistance of ChatGPT.

Thierry Luescher spoke to the *Review* about an HSRC research report on the state of transformation in South Africa's public universities. Researchers who studied the 2018 and 2019 annual reports of 26 public universities in South Africa speak about the need for "deep transformation", which requires more than only achieving a demographically representative student and staff body.

We also look at the HSRC's Gender and Inclusivity Project with a focus on how researchers and representatives from science granting councils in Africa collaborate to increase the number of women in research and to have women's voices heard in the setting and monitoring of research agendas. This is because societal challenges that research is supposed to address often affect women disproportionately.

Finally, Gary Pienaar writes about the HSRC's response to a call from the government's National Anti-Corruption Advisory Council for submissions on how to strengthen South Africa's Political Party Funding Act 6 of 2018. This comes at the back of the Zondo Commission's recommendation to strengthen legislation to criminalise the making of donations to political parties in exchange for public tender contracts.

We look forward to hearing your feedback.

The Review team



Photo: Thomas Bennie on Unsplash

Spatial economic data **to transform policy and planning in South Africa**

*South Africa is the most unequal country in the world, with uneven concentrations of wealth and income reflecting the spatial legacy of apartheid. Yet, a lack of granular data about spatial economic activity has hampered accountability and co-ordination in the government about the what and where of local jobs and investment. With the launch of the [Spatial Economic Activity Data: South Africa](#) (SEAD-SA) initiative, economic data at the level of neighbourhoods, cities and municipalities are now available to inform policy and planning for the first time. At the launch in June, representatives from academia, the national government, public agencies and city governments gathered to discuss the implications of this ground-breaking initiative. By **Andrea Teagle***

On 19 June, South Africa reached a milestone in economic planning with the official [launch](#) of the [Spatial Economic Activity Data: South Africa](#) (SEAD-SA) initiative. Until now, local governments were designing policies without spatial economic data at the level of municipalities, cities and neighbourhoods. Created by mining tax and other administrative records, SEAD-SA is the culmination of a collaboration between the HSRC, the national treasury and others.

The data for the metropolitan municipalities, which were internally released in 2021, have already begun to inform planning at the city level. “Having access to SARS [South African Revenue Service] administrative data has been invaluable for us,” said Siseko Mbandezi of the City of Cape Town at the launch. “It has informed our IDP [Integrated Development Plan] and has been used for special planning and sector support initiatives.” The mayor of eThekweni Municipality, Mxolisi Kaunda, reiterated the sentiment. “SEAD-SA... is an incredible game changer [for the metro],” he said.

The open-access database also covers South Africa’s 205 local municipalities and contains an array of economic indicators for jobs and firms. These can be evaluated by industry/sector, wage levels, gender, youth and age, export status and firm size. Importantly, the database – currently populated with data from 2013/14 to 2021/22 – can be updated with each tax year.

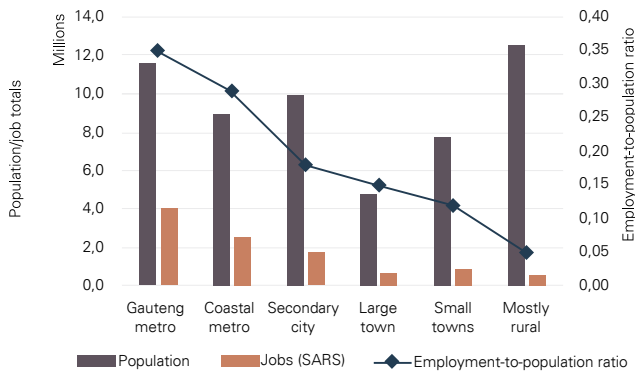
“Our inequalities are fundamentally rooted in space,” explained the HSRC’s Justin Visagie, the principal investigator of the project. Spatial apartheid’s legacy can be traced in the contours of our cities. But he added that cities are also sites of innovation and development – and these positive trends are also visible in spatial data. Policy planning thus requires a spatial lens to address inequalities and to identify opportunities for inclusive growth and development.

In her opening address, HSRC CEO Sarah Mosoetsa said the data will provide insights into important economic questions, such as where jobs are concentrated, which industries are creating them and which are shedding them. She added that such information is important for decision-making at the national, city and municipal levels.

Economic powerhouses

“Almost two-thirds of South Africa’s formal jobs are located in the six largest metros,” said the Minister of Finance Enoch Godongwana during his keynote address at the launch event. This is one of many key policy insights from the data, published in the [Cities Economic Outlook 2023](#) – an HSRC report that accompanied the release of the data (Figure 1). “Metros are the powerhouses of the economy and should be the focus of public spending,” Godongwana said, adding that it is now possible to track the economic outcomes of public sector investments.

Figure 1. Population and employment size, 2019/20



Source: Nell, A. and Visagie, J. 2023. *Spatial Tax Panel 2014–2022: version 3*

Notes: Population size is for all ages; Gauteng metros include Johannesburg, Ekurhuleni and Tshwane; the coastal metros include Cape Town, eThekweni and Nelson Mandela Bay; and Buffalo City and Mangaung were classified as secondary cities

The [raw data](#) that form the backbone of SEAD-SA are available in a user-friendly [Spatial Tax Web Interface or portal](#), which is aimed at government officials, investors, businesses and members of the general public (Figure 2). The portal makes it simple and easy to explore and download spatial tax data. For instance, the dashboards feature explores key themes of economic growth, industry diagnostics and equitable economies, including more than 16 interactive charts (Figure 3).

Figure 2. The SEAD-SA web portal where spatial tax data can be explored and downloaded



Figure 3. The SEAD-SA dashboards feature more than 16 interactive charts



Visagie presented the portal and showed how the data reveal important insights into the specialisation of each of South Africa’s metros. Each has a particular range of assets, infrastructure, institutions and stakeholders, he said. Acknowledging what is special about each metro allows for a more devolved approach to national industrial and economic policy, which builds on the strengths of every metro. These local features can be decisive in determining economic outcomes.

Data on the concentration of jobs and growth reveal that Johannesburg is a financial stronghold with high-paying jobs driven by this sector. Ekurhuleni’s new jobs are mainly driven by administrative services while eThekweni is a manufacturing and logistics hub. By understanding the particular strengths of our cities, governments can design policy that optimises those complementary strengths. The national economy is hamstrung if only some regions manage to grow, Visagie said.

“If the government doesn’t recognise the diversity of urban economies, [and] it applies standardised national industrial policies to the whole country, the impact is going to be inevitably different,” emphasised the HSRC’s Ivan Turok, a strategic lead in the SEAD-SA initiative.

Municipal officials can use the data to inform targeted public spending and to highlight opportunities for private sector investment and job creation. The City of Cape Town (CoCT) and eThekweni are early adopters of the database, and have begun to incorporate insights from the data into their planning processes.

Photo: Thomas Bennie on Unsplash

“Being able to identify even the smallest sub-industries that are experiencing fast job growth means that we can confidently inform investors, through agencies like Westgrow, of areas of comparative advantage in our economy,” said CoCT Councillor Siseko Mbandezi.

Zamo Gwala from the South African Local Government Association (SALGA) underscored that the body of data is only useful insofar as officials have the capacity and willingness to engage with it. He said that the data would help SALGA to accurately compile its Municipal Investment Competitiveness Index, which ranks municipalities in terms of their attractiveness for investors.

Early impact

“Local government is the sphere of government closest to the people,” said the Minister of Cooperative Governance, Thembi Nkandimeng. She indicated that the availability of credible data would allow for more attention to be paid to the performance of our municipalities, regions and local economies.

“Through this innovation, we have been able to demonstrate that citizens no longer have to be passive recipients of government services, but they can play an active role in how these services are delivered...,” said eThekweni Mayor Mxolisi Kaunda.

According to Kaunda, eThekweni Metropolitan Municipality has integrated the economic data across sectors such as economic development, human settlement, and audit risk and assurance of trading services. He said the municipality is sharing the body of data on multiple platforms to ensure that officials are actively making use of it.

The City of Cape Town has similarly incorporated the database into its strategic planning. “Knowing where people work, as opposed to where they live, for instance, is critical to the city’s ability to model movement patterns and thereby plan effectively for infrastructure provision,” Mbandezi said. “This is important when thinking about extending bus rapid transit systems like Cape Town’s MyCiTi bus.”

The beginnings of big data

Risenga Maluleke, statistician-general of Statistics South Africa (Stats SA), observed that the integrated data add to what he called “the national system of statistics”, which goes beyond the conventional survey-driven outputs of Stats SA. The integrated database will be a critical management tool for local governments, he said. “But particularly, it’s feeding into what we call big data.”

The database can be expanded to include other spatial data – such as crime data – that users can overlay over the economic data to gain a deeper understanding of South Africa’s economy. “What we know is that issues around local economic development are intertwined with many other issues,” said KgomoTso Tolamo of the [South African Cities Network](#).

Harnessing the full potential of big data in the context of spatial economic data will require more work going forward. “Among other issues that we’ll need to tease out going forward is artificial intelligence to provide insight,” Maluleke said. “Insightful data will give us the information that responds to user needs [and] and user demands.”

SEAD-SA is currently led by the HSRC and the National Treasury: Cities Support Programme and Economic Policy Unit. Other partners include the South African Revenue Service (SARS), the United Nations University World Institute for Development Economics Research (UNU-WIDER), Statistics South Africa, metropolitan municipalities, the Department of Trade, Industry and Competition (the dtic), the South African Local Government Association (SALGA), the South African Cities Network (SACN), the UK’s Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, the Swiss State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO) and the University of the Free State (UFS).

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Watch the SEAD-SA launch [here](#).

Explore South Africa’s tax data [here](#).



A South African woman crossing a digital bridge covered in Ndebele Art. Source: PlaygroundAI.com

Navigating the impacts of generative AI in South Africa: challenges, opportunities and ethics

*In April, the HSRC hosted a webinar to discuss the impact of generative artificial intelligence tools in South Africa, with a focus on employment, equality, and ethical considerations. This article, produced with the assistance of ChatGPT (which summarised the recorded webinar transcript), presents a comprehensive analysis of the webinar's key points and insights. By **Krish Chetty, Nothando Ntshayintshayi and Prof. Sharlene Swartz***

Like many other countries, South Africa is grappling with the digital divide, which has created inequalities in access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities. The rapid advancement of artificial intelligence (AI) technologies has the potential to either bridge or exacerbate these inequalities. In a society marked by stark resource disparities, the use of AI technologies could further widen the gap between the haves and the have-nots, particularly in respect of employment and access to essential services. On 12 April 2023, the HSRC hosted a webinar that explored the potential impact of generative AI on South Africa, with a focus on the opportunities and challenges it presents and the ethical considerations that must be addressed.

Employment

The webinar brought attention to the increasing role of AI in the workplace and its potential impact on employment opportunities across various sectors. AI-driven tools, such as ChatGPT, are becoming increasingly adept at performing tasks that have traditionally been reserved for human workers, including writing code, diagnosing vulnerabilities in software systems, and even generating creative content. As AI technologies advance, they are expected to automate certain tasks performed by knowledge workers such as programmers, lawyers, and therapists, which raises concerns about job displacement and the need for workers to adapt to new roles.

The panellists discussed the potential of AI to automate routine tasks and to shift the focus of human workers towards more complex, creative and decision-making roles. They emphasised the importance of developing educational and training programmes that prepare individuals for an AI-driven workforce and enable workers to transition into new roles as AI technologies evolve.

The discussion also touched on the potential for AI to create new job opportunities by spurring innovation and driving economic growth in areas such as AI research, development, and maintenance. In this context, it is crucial to ensure that South Africa's workforce is prepared to take advantage of these emerging opportunities and that access to education and training be equitable and inclusive.

Lastly, the panellists highlighted the importance of fostering collaboration between the government, industry, academia and civil society to develop policies and strategies that address the challenges of AI and to harness the potential benefits of AI for the workforce.

Equality

The issue of equality was also emphasised during the webinar, as panellists discussed the potential implications of AI technologies in some respects exacerbating the digital divide and in other respects bridging the digital divide. Panellists expressed concern about the potential for AI to contribute to unequal access to opportunities, particularly in employment, education and essential services. They emphasised that the benefits of AI should not be limited to a privileged few but should be extended to all members of society, including those in marginalised and underprivileged communities.

The discussion also explored the potential role of AI in supporting social justice and empowerment initiatives. Panellists noted that AI tools could be used to identify and address systemic inequalities, to support evidence-based policymaking and to improve the delivery of public services in areas such as education, healthcare and social welfare. However, they also emphasised the need for transparent and ethical AI systems that respect individual privacy and do not reinforce existing biases and discrimination.

Ethics

Ethical considerations were a prominent topic during the webinar, as panellists discussed the responsible development and deployment of AI technologies in various sectors, including research and education. Recognising the transformative potential of AI, the panellists acknowledged the need for a strong ethical framework to guide the use of these technologies and to ensure that they are harnessed for the benefit of all.

One key ethical issue raised during the discussion was the potential for a lack of transparency and accountability in AI systems. They emphasised the importance of protecting individual privacy and ensuring that AI technologies do not compromise the rights and freedoms of users. This includes developing robust data protection measures and addressing potential biases in AI algorithms that could lead to unfair treatment or discrimination against certain groups or individuals.

In the context of education, the panellists emphasised that AI should support and enhance traditional educational methods rather than replace them and that ethical considerations should be an integral part of designing and deploying AI-driven educational tools and resources.

Finally, the panellists highlighted the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration in addressing the ethical challenges posed by AI technologies. By engaging experts from diverse fields, stakeholders can work together to develop a comprehensive and robust ethical framework that ensures AI is harnessed in a manner that respects human rights, promotes social justice, and contributes to a more equitable and inclusive society.

HSRC AI Project

The HSRC is committed to developing an AI research and development programme that fosters partnerships between researchers, businesses, the government and civil society. The aim is to ensure that AI technologies are developed and implemented to address the unique challenges South Africa and the Global South are facing. The participants expressed their interest in collaborating on this initiative and emphasised the importance of data sharing, accessibility and bridging the digital divide to ensure that the benefits of AI are distributed equitably.

The live session led to the development of a brief action plan for the HSRC team, which includes the following initiatives:

- creating a research ChatBot informed by HSRC research outputs to promote public and policymaker engagement;
- developing a government policy ChatBot that identifies policy gaps and inefficiencies in the education sector;
- designing a ChatBot that proposes solutions to reduce the digital gap within local municipalities and that compares their experiences to those of developed countries;
- developing a community-specific ChatBot that utilises local data from social media and community communication platforms; and
- building an AI system that identifies and prevents duplication of research questions in areas such as vaccine hesitancy and disease epidemiology.

These initiatives will drive the HSRC's AI Research and Development Programme forward and achieve a meaningful impact.

Conclusion

As AI technologies advance and reshape various aspects of society, stakeholders must monitor and proactively address the potential consequences. The HSRC webinar on the impact of generative AI in South Africa provided valuable insights and key learnings in areas such as employment, equality and ethics. It also highlighted the potential for AI-driven projects to address the nation's unique challenges. The discussions emphasised the need for a multi-stakeholder approach involving the government, academia, industry and civil society in ensuring that AI technologies are developed and implemented responsibly, ethically, and inclusively.

The HSRC's AI Research and Development Programme presents an opportunity for diverse stakeholders to collaborate and contribute to the responsible development and implementation of AI technologies in South Africa and the Global South. This collaborative approach aims to address the challenges of AI and harness the potential benefits of AI in a manner that promotes equity, inclusivity, and sustainable development while mitigating the risk of harmful consequences.

Researcher contacts:

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AI generated image of two women walking across a bridge. Source: Prompts by Ilze Visagie, Freepik



An onlooker sits nearby as protesters clash with private security during protests over fees at the University of Cape Town in October 2016. Photo: [Ashraf Hendricks/GroundUp](#) (CC BY-ND 4.0)

Report on transformation at SA universities:

It is about more than numbers

*Over the last two decades, repeated incidents of racism and sexism on campuses and the nationwide #FeesMustFall student protests highlighted the ongoing need for transformation in South Africa's universities. **Antoinette Oosthuizen** spoke to **Thierry Luescher** about an HSRC research report on the state of transformation in South Africa's public universities.*

Since the advent of democracy, black students have gained increased access to higher education, but this has happened in a context of significant academic, social and financial challenges. Black students in historically white universities have had to struggle against entrenched institutional cultures of whiteness; students from disadvantaged communities have faced huge financial challenges including recurring problems with the national financial aid system; and female staff and students have been faced with patriarchal attitudes and behaviours. The massification of higher education has also come at great personal costs, with high dropout rates for students.

In 2015 and 2016, a [wave of student protest action](#) under the banner of #FeesMustFall spread across South African university campuses. While protesting financial exclusion, high fees and debts, students also strongly voiced their dissatisfaction with the lack of social and academic transformation. This led to a broader debate, calling for the decolonisation of education in the country. Year after year, sporadic incidences of student protest continued on campuses, including most recently in August 2023 when students protested widely against the dysfunctionality of the national student financial aid scheme.

If universities failed to transform, dropouts and graduate unemployment mounted, and dissatisfaction escalated among young people, it could lead to an 'Arab Spring' scenario with more violent responses, researchers warned in a new HSRC report, [The state of transformation in South Africa's public universities](#).

Transformation oversight: background

In 2008, a ministerial committee was appointed to study discrimination in public higher education institutions with a particular focus on racism. Led by Prof. Crain Soudien, who later became HSRC CEO (2015–2021), the report concluded that incidents of racism and sexism at universities had been pervasive and the pace of redress '[painfully slow](#)'. A key recommendation was that a standing structure be established to monitor transformation in South African higher education. This led to the establishment of the Transformation Oversight Committee (TOC) in 2013.

In 2020, the TOC commissioned the HSRC to investigate the state of transformation in the public higher education system by studying the 2018 and 2019 annual reports of 26 public universities in South Africa. The HSRC published its report, [The state of transformation in South Africa's public universities](#), this year.

Defining transformation

The annual reports revealed that institutions interpreted transformation in different ways. Some focused on demographic equity, viewing an institution as transformed if its staff and student body reflected the demographic composition of society, while others more actively pursued what scholars call “deep transformation”, says the HSRC’s Prof. Thierry Luescher, who has been researching institutional culture transformation since 2001.

Enrolment ratios and staff numbers indicated that black students and particularly black female academics and senior managers continued to be underrepresented, especially at historically advantaged institutions and merged institutions with a historically advantaged university component. However, some historically disadvantaged universities also seemed to have undergone little change in the demographic composition of their academic staff.

“Demographic equity is a necessary but not a sufficient condition to be transformed,” warns Luescher. “Transformation also involves how an institution is governed, whether the culture of operating in an institution is conducive to the diverse staff and student complement that one introduces with equity, and whether the quality of teaching and learning is such that it empowers lecturers to teach well and students to learn well and academically succeed.”

A deeply transformed institution also makes an impact in society with its research and community engagement, allows academic freedom, cultivates public accountability, and contributes to local development as an anchor institution, he says.

Other findings were that many decolonisation projects and processes at universities were still in their initiation or conceptualisation phase or at early stages of implementation. Some universities struggled to integrate information and communication technology effectively in teaching and learning, possibly deepening inequality for some students. Several universities had changed their language policies in response to shifting student demographics; however, some rural, historically disadvantaged universities lacked the resources to implement their language policies, while some urban, historically advantaged institutions lacked commitment by staff to implement theirs.

Categorising institutions

The researchers identified three main kinds of transformation narratives in higher education institutions in South Africa: those of diversity-focused universities, those of developmentally engaged universities and those of contested universities.

“The first two categories of institutions creatively and innovatively engaged with the transformation challenge. They were, on the one hand, compliant with law and policies, but they were also innovative in how they approached becoming fit for internal transformation *and* for contributing to South African society.

“Within those institutions, some were more inward-focused on equity issues (e.g. staff and student demographics) while others tended to be more outwardly focused, talking about the transformation project in terms of local development and relevance.

“But at a third subset of institutions, the concept of a transformation project was clearly contested; in some cases, they were not even compliant with basic laws and policies.

“For example, some institutions did not have functional institutional forums, the statutory governance body that is supposed to have an overview of, provide advice on, and co-ordinate all issues related to institutional transformation. Then there were other institutions where this body operated exactly as it should, where creative, innovative governance happened.”

Creative governance

Good examples of creative governance were seen in the first-year bridging courses that many institutions offered.

“Students come into universities from a broad range of high schools and many may not have had the points to study what they choose immediately. Rather than triaging them in what has been called ‘the revolving door’ – in through the first year and out again, and with that all the hopes and dreams shattered – several universities have started so-called 101 or university 1000 courses, introductory courses on how to operate at university. They tend to be broad, with components of humanities, sciences and a strong skills-development component, which includes academic writing, for example.”

Some institutions have taken this a step further by offering a higher certificate, a full one-year qualification as an access bridge into university.

“Rather than going straight into an extended degree programme where it takes a student four years rather than three to complete a programme – you go on a one-year programme to get a higher certificate first. You get the skills, enculturation and knowledge to go into the degree programme of your choice fully prepared. At one institution they found that those from the certificate stream had an almost 100% pass rate in their degrees.”

These bridging courses are not new or unique but should be properly evaluated for efficacy, mainstreamed and funded, says Luescher. Some examples are 30 to 40 years old and may be ready for systemic implementation in their current form. Institutions and students will benefit from lower dropout rates, faster throughput and less student debt.

Societal relevance and community engagement

Many universities had also increased efforts to integrate their identity and core functions in their local communities. Many had programmes to reach learners from disadvantaged schools and other types of collaboration with local communities and businesses. Some implemented curriculum-driven external engagements through their teaching and learning, and research activities. The researchers noted that service learning should be promoted, not only for its credit-bearing function but also 'as a reflexive approach that could support the broader transformation of students, staff and the university' and to ensure practical skills development, enhanced industry linkages and easier transition into livelihoods for students.

There was, however, a lack of proper co-ordination of community engagement efforts by a central, national structure and a lack of effective mainstreaming of community engagement as an institutional goal. The report recommended establishing staff reward and recognition schemes in support of engagement activities and producing appropriate strategic plans and budgets for them.

Mainstreaming transformation

Efforts to mainstream transformation in all dimensions of higher education – in the core functions of teaching and

learning, research and community engagement, as well as in governance, leadership and management, and in the student and staff experience of higher education – should be co-ordinated and properly resourced, the report recommends.

The 1997 Higher Education Act mandated universities to establish institutional forums to advise university councils on equity and rights issues. However, about a fifth of the annual reports indicated that these forums were not working well. Some transformation-related structures existed outside these institutional forums, but a lack of co-ordination impeded their impact and may have undermined governance by creating confusion about compliance.

The researchers recommended that the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) and the Council on Higher Education (CHE) lead the production of practical policy prescriptions or templates. These could include generic policy templates on key issues, such as inclusivity related to gender and sexual orientation, gender-based violence, and corruption. This would spare individual institutions the effort of creating these policies from scratch, releasing more resources for implementation.

Universities' strategic, annual performance and transformation plans also needed more effective co-ordination and standardisation. Linking these plans to SMART indicators, dashboards and targets, and broadening the existing "council score card" to become a "governance score card" more broadly, would help ensure that policy development and implementation becomes a mainstream operational priority.



Students at Wits University shut down the campus and clash with police during protests over free education in October 2016. Photo: Ihsaan Haffejee/GroundUp (CC BY-ND 4.0)

The report recommends that the 2014 Regulations for Reporting by Public Higher Education Institutions should be revised so that universities can produce more comprehensive, standardised and transformation-focused annual reports. The goal should be that annual reports provide a trustworthy source of transformation-relevant information to the minister of higher education and training, statutory and sectoral bodies, and the universities themselves.

HSRC experts to share the findings

“The methodology required critical analysis of institutions’ self-representation in their annual reports for which we needed a strong team with a unique set of capacities and capabilities,” says Luescher. The HSRC team had expertise in higher education, skills development, community engagement, as well as institutional culture transformation, matters of student and staff experience, student activism and the decolonisation movement. They are also skilled at forming large teams and consortia, comprising various combinations of expertise to work on large or multi-year projects. They worked closely with senior higher education experts, including the former head of the ministerial commission, Prof. Crain Soudien, and the head of the transformation oversight committee, Prof. Andre Keet.

The researchers made an effort to look at the South African university system rather than focusing on individual institutions. The idea was that universities would be able to

use the [report](#) to learn from success stories in the system. The multi-dimensional conception of transformation, which considers equity, quality and societal relevance, will also help institutions to think about their unique efficiencies and inefficiencies, their relations with their local environment, and how they employ research towards social transformation, says Luescher.

Some of the universities have already asked the researchers to present the findings to them. The TOC’s mandate of monitoring transformation at universities and advising the minister has been handed over to the Council on Higher Education, and the researchers have presented the report’s findings to it. The findings were also shared at Universities South Africa’s seminar series on higher education, leadership and management.

Research team: Prof. Thierry Luescher is the strategic lead of research into equitable education and an NRF-rated researcher on matters of student experience in the HSRC’s Equitable Education and Economies division. Dr Sam Fongwa at CODESRIA has a PhD in higher education and is a recognised and highly published researcher on all matters of community engagement. Dr Thelma Oppelt is a specialist in higher education teaching and learning. Dr Bongiwe Mncwango has researched skills development and staff satisfaction. Zama Mthombeni has conducted in-depth studies into transformation at the University of KwaZulu-Natal as part of her master’s thesis.

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Further reading:

South African universities fall short of ‘deep transformation’ (*Mail & Guardian*, 30 June 2023)



Wits students protest against financial exclusion in Johannesburg, 10 March 2021. Photo: Masego Mafata/GroundUp

Innovation in informal settings: empowering business owners and changing regulations

In South Africa's major cities, informal settlements are home to one in five residents. And, in 2021, the informal sector accounted for nearly one in three jobs, despite regulatory and other challenges. At a recent HSRC forum on informal sector innovation held in Philippi, Cape Town, speakers emphasised the need to recognise informality as a fundamental feature of our cities. At an accompanying workshop, HSRC researchers worked with informal sector stakeholders to refine a new evidence-based toolkit that aims to assist informal businesses in becoming sustainable.

By **Andrea Teagle**

At a recent forum on informal sector innovation, which took place in Philippi Village, Cape Town, informal business owners from Philippi and its surrounds shared their experiences and the challenges they have been facing.

Calling for developmental by-laws, Rosheda Muller, an informal trader and president of the Informal Economy Development Forum, decried “the draconian by-laws” imposed by the City of Cape Town and other municipalities. An informal clothing manufacturer shared how lost productivity due to load-shedding had meant that she had sometimes had to wake up at 2:00 at night to “try and make up for that shortfall”. Participants also spoke of a lack of physical infrastructure to protect goods from poor weather, limited resources and crime.

Despite such obstacles, informal business owners across the country have found ways to innovate and sustain their enterprises. An HSRC survey conducted in Sweetwaters, KwaZulu-Natal, revealed that 67% of informal business owners engaged in innovation activities to adapt to external conditions and to remain competitive. In a recent [policy brief](#), the HSRC’s Nazeem Mustapha and his colleagues highlight the importance of incremental innovation to an informal

business’s survival. ‘Innovations in the informal sector are a bricolage where resources are constrained, providing practical solutions to everyday problems,’ they write.

At the forum in Philippi, economist Prof. Erika Kraemer-Mbula spoke about how digital technologies – such as social media platforms and mobile device payment technologies – have enhanced the capacity of informal businesses to adapt to new circumstances. To “enhance digital readiness” and uptake of technologies, interaction with formal businesses should be promoted, added Dr Elvis Avenyo, also from the University of Johannesburg.

Through their research with informal business owners, HSRC researchers have identified factors associated with sustainable and innovative informal businesses. Based on these findings, Il-haam Petersen and her research team developed an online toolkit to assist informal traders in becoming sustainable enterprises. In [May 2023](#), the HSRC presented the toolkit to informal sector stakeholders at the Philippi forum. The event also featured a dialogue on how to build capabilities in local informal enterprises, with participation from researchers and policymakers in the fields of development, urban development, innovation, and education and training.



A woman walks past a hair salon in Langa, Cape Town, March 2023.

Photo: Andrea Teagle

The innovation toolkit

With isiXhosa translations provided by the HSRC's Mbongeni Masizya, Il-haam Petersen and colleague Nicole van Rhee de described the purpose of the toolkit and demonstrated how to use one of its tools. Among the participants of the toolkit workshop were clothing and food vendors, car wash service providers, spaza shop owners and an arts-and-crafts training facilitator.

"The tool is for you to understand your business, where you want to be and what steps you want to take. How do you build capacity to be able to become financially viable and sustainable, a company that makes a profit [and] that grows?" Van Rhee de said.

Users begin by completing a questionnaire designed to ascertain their goals and current business capacity. For instance, 'Does your business operate from fixed premises?' 'Would you like it to operate from fixed premises in future?' 'Have you ever received funding?' and 'Would you like to receive funding?' The toolkit then suggests practical, customised steps that business owners can take to build capacity in a particular direction.

While the toolkit provides information about why a business owner might want to formalise – for instance, to access funding – it is not the goal; it is rather a means of becoming sustainable. Petersen emphasised that it was up to the traders to decide whether taking steps towards becoming a formal enterprise made sense for them. During the workshop, the participants also provided valuable feedback, including a suggestion to include more information regarding tax and how it applies to small business owners who earn under a certain amount.

According to Petersen, the HSRC team plans to conduct more engagements with informal sector stakeholders and to further develop the toolkit by incorporating suggestions and feedback. "Once completed, the toolkit will be made available to informal businesses and their support organisations," she added.

Changing mindsets around informality

While the tool focused on factors within the control of informal traders, empowering informal business owners extends beyond building individual capacity. In a separate session at the forum, speakers emphasised the need to shift policy and to change how informality is viewed in the country.

Prof. Edgar Pieterse from UCT's Centre for African Cities argued that we need to start recognising informal settlements as a central part of urban South Africa, and the informal economy as an important part of the economy.

As sub-Saharan Africa becomes increasingly urbanised, most of the growth will be informal.

Yet, informal settlements continue to be viewed as fringe areas that receive little investment. Similarly, the idea that only the formal economy is valid means that informal activities are not only unsupported but are actively penalised. He added that this lies in the DNA level of our policies and regulations.

"There's an assumption that to be developed takes a certain form: that [it] looks like a certain kind of firm, like a certain kind of retail, like a certain way of life, a suburb with modern infrastructure, modern transport and so on. And often there is this gap between that reality and what is really happening on the ground – and that gap speaks to failure of imagination."

He argued that the phenomenon of [smart cities](#) in South Africa and elsewhere in Africa reflected a fixation with modernisation at all costs. Such developments may look impressive on paper but often fail to benefit the majority of the population. They also divert funds from improving conditions in existing townships and inner-city precincts. HSRC research suggests that supporting backyard rental development and allowing for mixed-use areas can spur economic development and improve living conditions in low-income neighbourhoods.

Pieterse argued for precinct-level, integrated and incremental approaches to upgrading informal settlements, with the goal of progressively transforming these areas into sustainable neighbourhoods. He suggested that the confluence of artificial intelligence and new green technologies and knowledge provided a unique opportunity to rethink urban development in a way that centralised informality. However, this would require radical shifts in regulations, planning, and zoning.

"The reason why money gets spent in a certain way, or things get evaluated in a certain way, is...the regulation. So can we build different logics for what we regulate and how it gets regulated?" The Sustainable Livelihoods Foundation's Dr Andrew Charman added that although public spaces such as parks are "critical to the growth of entrepreneurship", in South Africa, these spaces are the "most restricted" and highly regulated spaces.

How can regulation enable new imaginaries for informality and urban development? Stephen Umlaw of the Department of Small Business Development described how the National Informal Business Upliftment Strategy, as an "innovation in policy", was "developed alongside the informal economy" to enable innovation and transformation.

DSI to support innovation-enhancing initiatives

Just as development approaches often neglect informal settlements, formal education is aimed at meeting the needs of the formal economy, said Prof. Lesley Powell of the School of Education at the University of Cape Town.

“Informality has the capacity to channel entrepreneurial energy that creates employment and incomes for large portions of the population...,” she said. Yet, there is limited understanding of the types of support that are needed to nurture entrepreneurship in the informal sector. For instance, traditional entrepreneur training programmes are often targeted at individuals and teach the same set of skills across the board, focusing on generic traits like resilience.

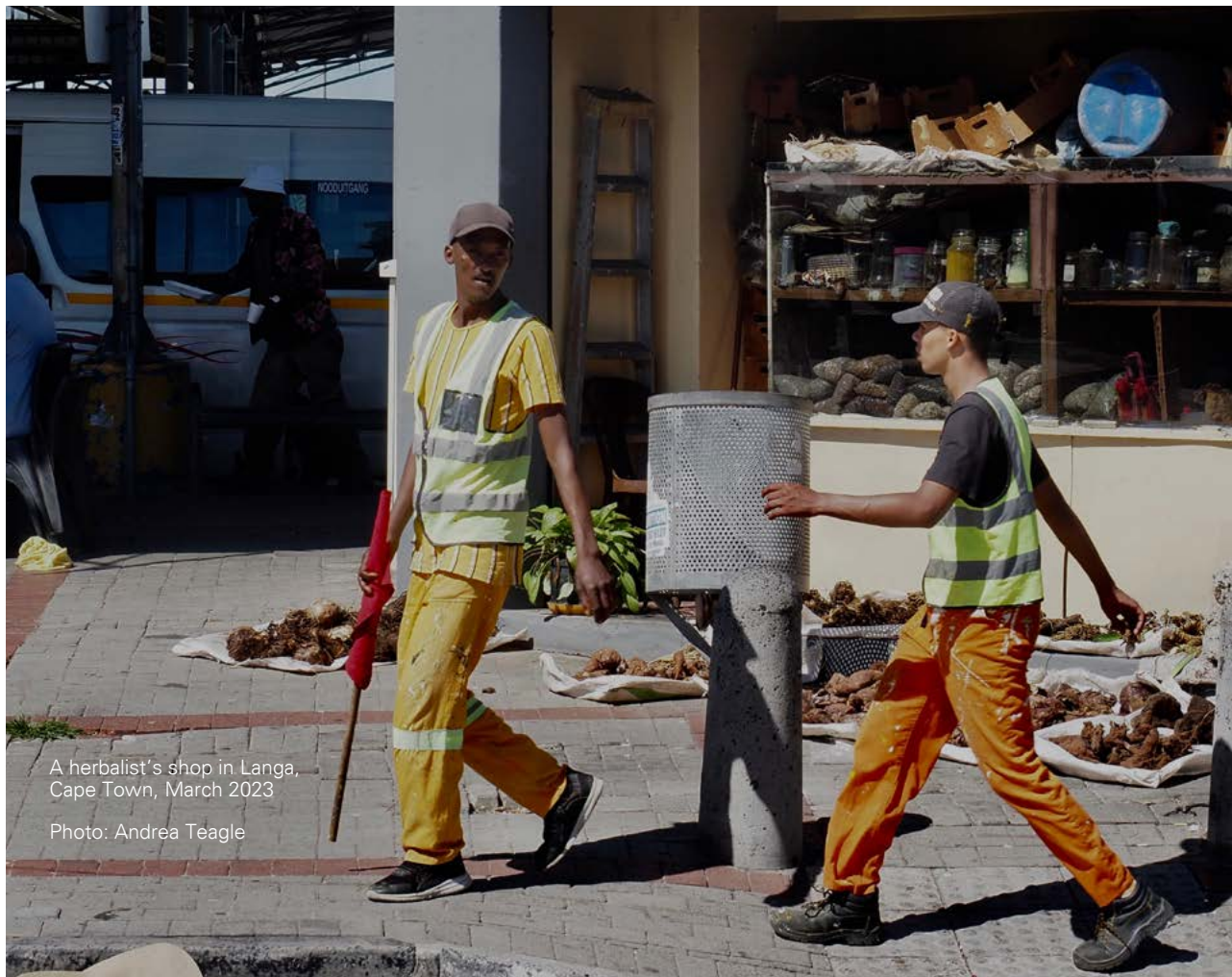
According to Powell, however, in many instances, successful informal businesses in sub-Saharan Africa are run by collectives, like families – and the necessary skills differ by industry. Work by the HSRC’s Adam Cooper has shown that [social connectedness](#) is a powerful ingredient of successful informal sector start-ups in South Africa.

Imraan Patel, a deputy director-general of the Department of Science and Innovation (DSI) said the DSI would support new research on training and support for the informal sector and would facilitate the inclusion of this research in policy discussions. He added that the DSI would work to co-ordinate and enhance existing initiatives aimed at strengthening innovation in the informal sector.

The HSRC hosted the ‘Forum on building capabilities for innovation and learning in South African informal enterprises’ in partnership with the Informal Economy Development Forum and The Safety Lab. You can watch the three-part recordings [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).

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A herbalist's shop in Langa, Cape Town, March 2023

Photo: Andrea Teagle



A female farmer spreading kraal manure on recently ploughed land in Hlokozi, KwaZulu-Natal

Photo: Alan Manson, [Wikimedia Commons](#)

Wathinta Abafazi Wathinta Imbokodo: land ownership policy reforms and sustainable food systems for rural youth

*Gender-inclusive land ownership policy reforms could have a substantial impact on food security, nutrition, and sustainable livelihoods for young people in rural KwaZulu-Natal, writes **Sabelo Mpsi**, who spoke with young female small-scale farmers while conducting ethnographic fieldwork in the province.*

Under customary land tenure systems in rural Southern Africa, many female farmers only have access to farmland through male heads of households, such as their fathers, husbands, sons or brothers. Having insecure land tenure makes it risky for these female farmers to invest in infrastructure and methods to improve their productivity.

According to a report by the Food and Agriculture Organization, having equal access to agricultural resources could increase production on women's farms in developing countries by 20% to 30%. For example, in Peru, South America, female land ownership significantly increased crop diversity and improved households' probability of food security by 20 percentage points, a 2021 study has found.

HSRC fieldwork in KZN

From December 2022 to March 2023, HSRC researcher Sabelo Mpsi conducted ethnographic fieldwork with young female small-scale farmers in rural KwaZulu-Natal. These farmers had post-matric qualifications and were from Ndwedwe in the Ilembe District of the province and Mpophomeni in uMgungundlovu. They had decided to venture into farming as the only available source of livelihood for themselves initially, and, ultimately, their respective communities.

The research was carried out as part of the HSRC's The Imprint of Education (TIE) project, part of which aims to investigate the structural barriers that hinder young people's efforts to generate livelihoods and find fulfilling work.

The findings indicate that gender-inclusive land ownership policy reforms in rural KZN could substantially affect food security, nutrition, and sustainable livelihoods for rural youth by leveraging the potential of the agricultural sector. Such reforms could help to create sustainable food systems and could provide young female farmers with the skills, knowledge, and confidence they need to thrive as agricultural entrepreneurs.

The need for a holistic approach

According to the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform's 2017 land audit report, the majority of agricultural land is owned by white people (72%), followed by coloured (15%), Indian (5%), and African people (4%). The remaining 4% is owned by foreign institutions, trusts, and the government. This inequality has a disproportionate impact on women who live in rural areas. Kimberlé Crenshaw's intersectionality framework is helpful in understanding the circumstances of black women who face overlapping forms of discrimination, not only linked to race and gender, but also to culture, religion, class, and educational attainment.

Although the apartheid regime was abolished in 1994, black communities continue to encounter systemic obstacles in obtaining resources and land, arising from the historical legacies of racially discriminatory policies. This intersects with patriarchal norms and traditions that perpetuate gender inequalities, making it even more difficult for women to own and access land. Finally, the socioeconomic divide also significantly affects rural women, many of whom reside in underdeveloped areas with limited access to resources and support systems.

Dealing with patriarchy

Interviews with young female small-scale farmers indicated that some have made impressive progress in agriculture, but that livelihoods that rely solely on agriculture are fraught with challenges as a result of this discriminatory climate, as one female farmer from Mpophomeni explained:

“When I started my farming business, the lack of available land was the biggest obstacle. Unfortunately, my family didn’t own any land in our area – neither did my father nor my late grandfather, who passed away when I was young. This forced me to ask the Induna for a piece of land. However, his response was dishearteningly discriminatory; he flatly refused, citing my gender as the reason for denial. Determined to challenge this injustice, I asserted that it wasn’t I who needed the land, but my eldest son, who had a keen interest in agriculture and aspired to become a farmer. Slowly, my argument began to resonate with him, ultimately persuading him to relent and grant me a piece of land. With that land, I planted spinach and started with my farming journey.”

After success in her early agricultural endeavours, she expanded her horizons into mixed farming. This involved growing crops like cabbage and raising livestock such as sheep and goats, which compelled her to acquire more land. However, this presented her with further challenges. She recalled a troubling discriminatory incident that ensued:

“I used the profits to buy more land from a male landowner. I was thrilled and planted beans that showed great potential for a good harvest. Unfortunately, my joy was cut short when another elder from the community claimed ownership of the land by destroying my crops and pulling out every last bean. I was really hurt. Seeking justice, I presented all the necessary legal documents proving my rightful ownership to the Induna. Despite my optimism, the case was ruled against me, which made me lose the land and the crops. It was devastating. The Induna tried to appease me by promising to give me another piece of land, but the injustice still weighed heavily on my heart, and to this day I am still waiting for that land.”

Despite the challenges, her perseverance paid off. Her success has had a positive impact on her community, which has allowed her to employ young people and use her entrepreneurial spirit to establish a non-profit organisation. With its principles firmly rooted in her belief that education is a powerful tool to break the cycle of poverty, the organisation provides school uniforms and stationery to ensure that every child has the necessary resources to pursue their education with dignity and pride.

The farmer’s dedication to organic farming practices and producing top-quality crops has caught the eye of major local retailers and, so, has gained traction. By partnering with these companies, she has expanded her business, which emphasises the value of her farm’s offerings. She also maintains a connection with her community by selling her produce directly to her neighbours. This two-pronged approach ensures that her farm’s bounty benefits both those closest to her and the wider community.

Small beginnings

In Ndwedwe, another young female small-scale farmer testified how she began farming by taking over her family’s farms in their yards. However, acquiring additional land to pursue farming as a career proved to be challenging:

“Growing up witnessing my parents depend entirely on agriculture for our sustenance, I also developed a strong belief in it. However, our yard in which we cultivated crops was not enough to fulfil my aspirations of pursuing agriculture as a career, through planting multiple crops such as spinach, ground nuts, and yams. Thus, I requested additional land from the local authorities but encountered difficulties as they refused to provide or sell it to me, citing my gender and my father’s lack of land ownership. This forced me to negotiate a lease from a neighbour who had an unutilised piece of land. But you know how hard it is working with people. It is as though the neighbour no longer wants me to use their land. I am not sure what I am going to do. My only option would be to go to the local authorities and state my case again.”

Subsequently, this female farmer has employed young people and has supplied spaza shops and big retailers in her area with her produce. She has also founded a non-profit organisation called Emseni, which aims to combat poverty by promoting food security and nutrition in the community. Emseni teaches primary school students how to cultivate, cook and take their food home. By using spinach as the primary crop, the organisation also teaches community members of all ages agriculture-specific skills and how to prepare oil and organic food.

Despite facing numerous gender-discriminatory obstacles on their paths, the two female small-scale farmers (from Mpophomeni and Ndwedwe) have established themselves as successful agricultural entrepreneurs. They have created employment opportunities for young people while contributing to food security and creating sustainable rural youth livelihoods. Their achievements highlight the potential of the agricultural sector to improve the livelihoods and wellbeing of young rural women whose welfare is closely linked to that of their dependants and communities.

Importantly, by exposing other young people to agriculture in its most practical form, they demonstrate the possibility of agriculture as a career trajectory and livelihood pathway. They also demonstrate examples of [entrepreneurial self-efficacy, which research has shown is central to creating sustainable rural youth livelihoods](#).

Tackling gender discrimination

These two examples of young female farmers, however, require greater policy intervention to bring about systemic change. To achieve large-scale impact, the Department of Rural Development and Rural Reform in KwaZulu-Natal must address gender-based discrimination in land ownership and rights.

Ensuring land tenure security and access to seeds, equipment and irrigation facilities will empower young female farmers and enable them to invest in their farms and build sustainable agricultural enterprises.

The next crucial action involves collaboration between the government, educational institutions and agricultural experts in the region. Creating a mentorship programme will connect female farmers with experienced agricultural entrepreneurs who are able to offer expert knowledge

about crop selection and market trends. This could also encourage and motivate these young farmers to thrive as agricultural entrepreneurs.

Furthermore, educational institutions should integrate agricultural training into their curricula. This exposure will shatter pejorative stereotypes associated with farming and ignite interest in pursuing agricultural careers among students.

Another vital aspect is to facilitate access to markets and retailers beyond local areas. This expanded market access will enable young female farmers to reach a broader customer base, leading to increased income and growth of their agricultural businesses. Financial assistance is also a critical component. The government should offer targeted grants, low-interest loans or subsidies to young female farmers so they can successfully establish and maintain their agricultural enterprises.

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A smallholder hand-weeding a plot of dry beans using a hoe in Hlokozi, KwaZulu-Natal.
Photo: Alan Manson, [Wikimedia Commons](#)



Rows of mustard spinach (mutshaina), a nutrient-dense leafy vegetable from Venda, known for its strong flavour Photo: HSRC

Feeding the community: urban farming in Johannesburg

*With more than [40%](#) of households in Johannesburg being food insecure, urban agriculture has the potential to significantly enhance the metropole's food security. Urban agriculture could also contribute to job creation, thereby reducing poverty. [Research](#) into the production and consumption of vegetables traditionally consumed by migrants now residing in Johannesburg shows that to fulfil this potential, urban farmers need more support since most of them are farming on infertile soils. **Henrice Altink** and **Tim Hart** write about the findings from a research project by the HSRC and its UK partners.*

There are more than [300 farms](#) in Johannesburg, and new ones are sprouting up across the metropole, including in informal settlements. This type of urban agriculture takes various forms – ranging from backyard and community gardening on land provided by churches and schools to larger-scale individually operated urban farms. It has the potential to significantly contribute to food security in the metropole in various ways.

Researchers from the HSRC, the University of York and the University of Newcastle are looking at the role of traditional food systems in rapid urbanisation as part of an interdisciplinary and collaborative two-year project funded by the British Academy.

Many urban farms in the city [were set up with support](#) from the government, NGOs and other organisations. The Rutegang Agricycling Co-op project, for instance, was set up in 2013 and has received seeds, manure and tools from the Gauteng Department of Agriculture and Rural Development.

A seedling farm in Braamfontein is supported by the [Urban Agriculture Initiative](#), a not-for-profit social enterprise that provides training and other support to grow fresh produce in limited spaces, such as rooftops.

Many urban farms are based on school land or land adjacent to schools. Some farmers have also taken over existing farms that have gone into decline. The farmers are driven largely by the social benefits that the farm can bestow on the local community.

One farmer we interviewed, Joseph, has a farm of approximately 2,000m² with some polytunnels close to the Protea Glen shopping mall. He grows spinach, kale, lettuce and other commonly consumed vegetables but also some leafy vegetables used for traditional food, such as pumpkin leaves, sweet potato leaves, okra leaves, and Venda mustard spinach (*mutshaina*), which are nutrient-dense and, therefore, can help reduce malnutrition.

Like most urban farmers we interviewed, Joseph sells his produce to community members who visit his farm. Since the land is adjacent to a school, the teachers and parents comprise a large proportion of his clientele. Joseph has plans to extend his clientele base by opening a spaza shop to sell his produce and wants to undertake a survey in the neighbourhood to better understand the vegetables that people would like to eat so that he can better meet the community's needs.

Like many of the other urban farmers we interviewed, Joseph is an organic farmer. He grows most of his crops in deep trenches (which improves soil quality) and uses only natural fertilisers and pesticides, most of which he produces on site. Recently, he started a scheme that offered a discount for vegetables to anyone who could bring him a jerrycan of urine. Urine is rich in nitrogen and phosphorus and has for centuries been used across parts of Africa and Asia as a fertiliser for plants. Joseph also has plans to keep rabbits on his farm – not only for manure, like some other urban farmers are doing, but also to improve the community's food security through access to nutrient-rich and affordable rabbit meat. Rabbit farming is growing in South Africa partly because the associated [start-up costs are relatively low and can be recovered within six to eight months](#).

Joseph is providing primary school learners with raised garden beds so they can grow crops to take home to their families. While enhancing their families' food security, the learners acquire key agricultural skills that could help them secure a job in the future or undertake their own cultivation of fresh produce. Joseph also feeds some members of the community directly. Every weekend, he and his wife cook for about 40 people from the local neighbourhood; and during the week, his wife cooks for the workers and some hungry community members. Like a few other farmers in the area, Joseph allows community members to freely pick the leaves of seasonal leafy vegetables (including blackjack and amaranth) that germinate after the first summer rains in the uncultivated

areas of the farm. Some migrants in the area like the leaves of young sweet potato and pumpkin plants, and Joseph allows them to pick these before the crops have matured.

Recommendations

Joseph and other urban farmers in the metropole need more support to scale up their enterprises so they can feed more people in the community and provide more local seasonal jobs. They need:

- **Land:** Many urban farmers we interviewed found it difficult to access land, did not hold a secure tenancy and cultivated land with poor soil. Joseph has an agreement with the school that he can use the land for 15 years. He is also starting to convert a former dump site into deep-trenched raised beds for the school children. However, there are large tracts of unused public and privately owned land in Johannesburg that could be used for more urban farms.
- **Water:** Urban farmers need access to a reliable supply of water. Many urban farmers we spoke to struggled to irrigate their land because of load-shedding.
- **Financial support:** Many urban farms in the metropole are largely driven by social benefits. Support to buy seeds, tools and other agri-inputs would enable them to balance their books.
- **Training:** Many of the farmers we interviewed had received training in agriculture. Some had a degree in agricultural sciences, while others had undergone training provided by NGOs. However, all of them would benefit from support from extension services, such as training in organic soil revitalisation, management and [climate-smart agriculture](#).
- **Market access:** Our research shows a demand among rural and African migrants, who are among the poorest in Johannesburg, for vegetables such as pumpkin leaves and chomolia (African kale), which are not widely sold in the city. Most urban farmers only grow produce that is commonly sold and eaten, such as spinach, kale, cabbage and tomatoes. Many traditionally consumed leafy vegetables can easily be grown locally, and there is a market for them. Joseph, for instance, sells rape, African nightshade (*managu*), chomolia and okra leaves to migrants from Zimbabwe and Mozambique. To supply the migrant market for traditional leafy vegetables, farmers need to link up with the traders of these vegetables, while migrants need to be made aware of where these vegetables can be purchased – directly from the farms or traders. Unfortunately, some desired traditionally consumed vegetables cannot be produced in South Africa because of the climate, but migrants have found alternatives to some of these.

- **Other support:** Urban farms need more appropriately trained staff to scale up their activities. The Rutegang Agricycling Co-op employs student interns from the George Tabor Campus of the South West Gauteng TVET college. However, most of the farms we visited used untrained individuals, and the farmer has to provide the training. Joseph had recently been offered a worker through a government learnership scheme, but he declined the offer because he would have had to spend much of his time instructing the person, since they lacked the skills, and seemingly also interest, in organic production specific to urban needs.

In his review of urban agriculture in Cape Town, [Tinashe Paul Kanosvamaha \(2019\)](#) has presented the formation of farmers' associations, which currently only exist at the national and provincial level, as an essential strategy to enable urban farmers to ensure that extension services and other relevant bodies meet their specific needs. Urban farmers in Johannesburg already come together in various groups.

Several of our interviewees, for instance, have attended the monthly farmers' lab organised by [Izindaba Zokudla](#), which teaches farmers practical organic techniques, such as land revitalisation and optimal cropping, while others benefited from seed-swapping groups. These groups can form the basis for forming a farmers' association that, alongside the support mentioned above, can help them improve food security in their locality.



A waste site earmarked for agricultural rehabilitation
Photo: HSRC

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Blackjack and swiss chard growing wild after the first summer rains Photo: HSRC



Illustration: [Freepik](#)

Strengthening gender and inclusivity in science grant-making councils will generate more impactful research

*Science, technology and innovation drive economic development, solving societal problems in areas such as education, housing and healthcare. Often, these challenges disproportionately affect women. Yet, female researchers are underrepresented in the fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics. The HSRC's Gender and Inclusivity Project is dedicated to advancing gender transformation in research. By **Antoinette Oosthuizen, Ingrid Lynch, Lorenza Fluks, Nazeema Isaacs and Heidi van Rooyen***

Worldwide, only about a third of researchers are women. While gender parity has been achieved in life sciences in many countries, only 28% of tertiary graduates in engineering and 40% in computer sciences are women, according to the [2021 Unesco Science Report](#). In the field of artificial intelligence, only 22% of professionals are women. Ironically, these fields drive the Fourth Industrial Revolution but are also characterised by a skills shortage. The report shows that wide [variations](#) exist in the representation of women in research at national and regional levels.

“Addressing gender disparities is not only a question of rights and justice but is crucial to producing more inclusive teams in organisations, higher-quality research, and greater relevance and impact of research and innovation – for women and society broadly,” explains Ingrid Lynch, co-principal investigator of the HSRC’s Gender and Inclusivity Project.

The HSRC’s response

Over the last three years, the HSRC partnered with the [Science Granting Councils Initiative \(SGCI\)](#), a multilateral initiative established in 2015 to strengthen the institutional capacities of public science funding agencies in sub-Saharan Africa. Science granting councils (SGCs) play a central role in national innovation systems. They lead decisions on research funding, thereby stimulating research design and content and contributing to the setting and monitoring of national research agendas. To increase the number of women in research, SGCs need to be on board. The HSRC has led the SGCI Gender and Inclusivity Project in partnership with the international feminist organisation, Gender at Work, the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa, and Jive Media Africa to address this issue. Participating SGCs are based in Botswana, Burkina Faso, Côte d’Ivoire, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Senegal, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.



Dr Lorenza Fluks, a senior research specialist in the HSRC's Impact Centre, at the Gender Equality and Inclusivity Workshop in July 2023. Photo: Jive Media Africa

Implementation approach

The SGCI Gender and Inclusivity Project ran from September 2020 to February 2023, with 13 SGCs responding to a collective learning question: What will it take for SGCs to more fully develop and implement policy commitments in respect to gender and inclusivity? Implementation was framed by a participatory orientation, adaptability to the process, and peer learning with the goal of enabling SGCs to take ownership and develop context-responsive and wide-ranging gender equality and inclusivity actions.

The participation of councils took place through two parallel streams. The first entailed a unique peer-learning methodology – Gender Action Learning (GAL) – developed by Gender at Work and underpinned by a customised, participatory process of co-creating strategies focused on individual and structural change.

The GAL methodology focuses on changing organisational cultures instead of merely developing more policies or adding more women to the workforce. Instead of traditional training or teaching a set curriculum to increase knowledge of a topic, action learning happens with people from the same social system, engaged in problem-solving and experimentation.

The second stream took the form of a Targeted Technical Assistance (TTA) process that supported councils not in the GAL cohort to implement a gender equality and inclusivity strengthening activity in their grant-making cycle. The TTA adaptation was introduced due to limited human resources in smaller councils that did not allow for the time-intensive nature of GAL participation. The TTA involved focused, strategic support for strengthening gender equality and inclusivity in the context of councils' current activities and needs.

During the GAL and TTA processes, the councils' change teams identified priority areas for intervention that are relevant to their contexts, shaped their questions for learning and took ownership of the change process from the outset.

One of the GAL workshops focused on organisational diagnostic reflection and sharing experiences through storytelling. The programme included in-depth reflection on the history, culture and programmes of each council, with a view to exploring and developing ideas for change experiments or projects that could create more gender-inclusive approaches inside and outside their councils.

Follow-up workshops and online activities brought together participating councils to encourage peer learning, share analytical tools, and enable teams to tweak their change plans or experiments. Each team was supported by a Gender at Work facilitator or HSRC team member who supported them with resources and helped them with troubleshooting any challenges.

Progress

Participants gained an enhanced understanding of what it will take to advance gender equality and inclusivity in their councils and in the fields of science, technology and innovation in Africa. They were better equipped to work towards improving organisational culture and policies to support gender transformation.

"In the beginning, council members were reluctant to take up opportunities for engaging on gender and inclusivity when invited by the SGCI. Many had little understanding of what it meant for their councils and the work they supported", said Heidi van Rooyen, the project's principal investigator.

"They have learned that gender extends beyond social roles and cultural factors that influence how men and women and other groups can participate in science. Councils now have a better understanding of marginalisation and exclusion hampering progress in reaching countries' gender development goals.

"The shift happened at the heart level... this becomes a key catalyser of change and progress in the next phase of the study," explains Van Rooyen.

To further support co-learning, councils partnered with Jive Media Africa to produce a video series in which they share their experiences, challenges and highlights of driving transformation in their organisations (see links below).



The Jive Media team interviewed members of science granting councils at the HSRC's Gender Equality and Inclusivity Workshop in July 2023.
Photo: Jive Media Africa

Positive feedback

Gift Kadzamira, Director of Documentation and Information Systems for the National Commission for Science and Technology in Malawi and change team member [described](#) her involvement in the project as "enlightening and rewarding", highlighting in particular the value of the GAL peer learning approach. "One doesn't feel like one is on the receiving end; there's no expert-learner type of relationship. We were always sharing ideas and learning from one another in such a way that you feel part of the process; you are also teaching the others."

Kadzamira was frank about the challenges she encountered when introducing this work in her organisation.

"For people to accept that [gender policy] took a lot of raising of awareness of the issues and their importance... Another challenge was to ensure members of staff were able to incorporate the issues championed by the new policy into their day-to-day work, and to find a budget for them in the context of a number of competing demands – financial and otherwise."

Nsama Chilumbu Mataka and Mupande Nambala from the National Science and Technology Council in Zambia [spoke about a gender and inclusivity workshop](#) the change team hosted at their council, which included senior management. The workshop produced a palpable shift in awareness and appreciation of the work of the change team, members of whom are now being consulted by senior management in the drafting of funding proposals. "That gives you the feeling that we may not yet be there, but I think we are getting somewhere."

Pathways to impact

The ultimate goal is to increase diversity among research teams that would lead to more innovative research outcomes, to ensure women and underrepresented minorities have more equitable access to resources, funding and training and to encourage engagement with gender and inclusivity issues in science policy and decision-making. Diverse and inclusive research teams will ensure we conduct research that addresses the needs of all members of society, not just a few. Diverse, equitable and inclusive science will encourage wider use and uptake of our research and will result in greater impact. The researchers believe the grant-making cycle is a key tool in advancing gender equality and inclusivity in research and that it will help to institutionalise the changes that councils brought about throughout the project. The team recently secured funding from the SGCI for the next three-year project period, where they will collaborate with councils to develop, implement and evaluate a policy framework for integrating gender equality and inclusivity into the grant-making cycle. Such a policy framework will provide regionally harmonised strategic direction for gender-responsive grant-making and will include an accompanying set of best-practice implementation tools that each council can adapt to its individual socio-economic, institutional and regulatory contexts.

*Dr Dikabo Mogopodi (centre) from the Botswana Academy of Science with Dirce Madeira (right) and Manecas Alferes (left) from the National Research Fund in Mozambique at the HSRC's Gender Equality and Inclusivity Workshop in July 2023.
Photo: Jive Media Africa*



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Video links: [Playlist of council reflection videos on the HSRC's YouTube channel](#)
Read more about the Gender Equality and Inclusivity Project and subscribe to receive our e-newsletter [here](#).



Illustration: [Freepik](#)

NO
CAPTURED



Thousands march under the banner of COSATU (Congress of South African Trade Unions) in Johannesburg calling for an end to state capture in September 2017.

Photo: Ihsaan Haffejee/GroundUp(CC BY-ND 4.0)



The HSRC responds to a call to strengthen the Political Party Funding Act



The HSRC has responded to a call from the government's National Anti-Corruption Advisory Council for submissions on how to strengthen South Africa's Political Party Funding Act 6 of 2018. This comes at the back of the Zondo Commission's recommendation to strengthen legislation to criminalise the making of donations to political parties in exchange for public tender contracts. **Gary Pienaar** reports.

In September 2022, President Cyril Ramaphosa established the National Anti-Corruption Advisory Council (NACAC) to monitor the government's national anti-corruption strategy and to advise how to strengthen the country's anti-corruption architecture. The council's duties also include monitoring the implementation of the recommendations of the Judicial Commission of Inquiry into Allegations of State Capture, Corruption and Fraud in the Public Sector including Organs of State, also known as the Zondo Commission or the State Capture Commission.

One of the Commission's recommendations was that South Africa's Political Party Funding Act 6 of 2018 (PPFA) be amended to criminalise the making of donations to political parties in exchange for public tender contracts. The NACAC invited comments on this recommendation, the adequacy of disclosure thresholds and donations caps, and gaps in the Act that need to be amended in order to prevent and combat corruption.

The HSRC responded to NACAC's call for submissions on strengthening the PPFA. The organisation based its submissions on its own research and the findings from two studies commissioned by the Department of Home Affairs and the Electoral Commission (IEC). The two studies focused on the initial implementation and impacts of the PPFA and were completed in 2022 and early 2023, respectively.

Criminalisation

The proposed criminalisation of donations to political parties to influence the award of a tender is superfluous, experts

from the HSRC's Developmental, Capable and Ethical State research division argue. It duplicates the effect of section 13 of the Prevention and Combating of Corrupt Activities Act, 2004 (PRECCA), which already prohibits the direct or indirect giving, and receiving, of any "gratification" to induce someone to award a tender to a particular person. This provision adequately includes donations to political parties. Nevertheless, it may be helpful to incorporate it by reference in the PPFA, to emphasise the prohibition and the offence in the context of political finance.

Thresholds and caps

The PPFA requires political parties and corporate donors to disclose to the IEC cumulative annual donations exceeding the threshold of R100,000 per year. The PPFA and Regulations impose annual limits or caps on donations from any single donor:

- (a) *Limit on donations*: R15 million per year
- (b) *Limit on donations from a foreign entity*: R5 million per year.

Impact of the PPFA on political parties

The IEC, political scientists, civil society organisations (CSOs) and political parties welcomed the implementation of the PPFA in April 2021. The PPFA is seen as supporting the Constitution's values of openness, transparency and accountability, the constitutional right to information, and strengthening multi-party democracy. One political party acknowledged that the PPFA's requirements had spurred it to implement comprehensive systems of tracking income and accounting for expenditure, which benefited the party's internal democratic accountability.

Despite broad consensus in favour of these constitutional values as a critical rationale for disclosure requirements and donation caps, some argue that they discourage private funding of political parties and that they constrain parties' ability to conduct legitimate political activities.

Larger political parties claim that the PPFA's disclosure requirements have dramatically decreased their private donation income. The veracity of these claims is difficult to assess, since parties didn't disclose the value of private funding prior to the Act's implementation.

Importantly, the PPFA's effect on parties' income isn't uniformly negative. Smaller represented parties' income from public funding has increased due to changes in the allocation formula. The PPFA replaced the Public Funding of Represented Political Parties Act 1997, in which the formula was 90% proportional and 10% equitable. The PPFA's formula is two-thirds proportional and one-third equitable, realising wider sharing of public funding to promote multiparty democracy as one of the Act's objectives.

There is tension between the democratic principles of openness and transparency, and the right to information, and the risks associated with the right to privacy of donors, should they wish to remain anonymous. In deeply divided contemporary South Africa, there is a well-founded apprehension of negative commercial, career or personal consequences as a result of disclosure. This is evident in the State Capture Commission's findings concerning the manipulation of public procurement processes.

Many stakeholders view the PPFA as a compromise, having urged Parliament to adopt more stringent criteria in the form of lower thresholds and caps. The PPFA's current standards were adopted by political parties in Parliament when they passed the legislation. It would be unacceptable for political parties to shift the balance in their favour so soon after its delayed implementation in 2021, given the highly unusual context in its first year. During the November 2021 local government elections, South Africa was enduring lockdowns and the socio-economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Donors are also generally less interested in supporting representatives in local government structures.

Several experts highlighted that complete information isn't yet available concerning the PPFA's first year of implementation. The IEC must first receive political parties' audited annual financial statements and satisfy itself as to their acceptability. Even if satisfied with political parties' co-operation and reporting, the Act is silent on how much of that information the IEC will publish. Furthermore, the PPFA has not yet been "field-tested" throughout a full

election cycle that includes a general election when higher levels of fundraising are achieved.

The PPFA and corruption

Stakeholders value the Act's aim of limiting undue influence by sectoral and private interests on a political party's electoral agenda and policy platform, and its representatives' choices and conduct when in power. Political parties have an interest in maximising their resources and electoral impact, although a direct correlation is difficult to establish – fundraising success and electoral impact are also affected by parties' reputation among donors and voters. Political parties also have a responsibility to uphold and promote constitutional values and principles.

Hasty amendments to new and largely untested legislation, in response to unsubstantiated claims by political parties concerning reduced income trends, would be unwise, especially if that entails weakening the PPFA's transparency standards that already represent a difficult compromise.

Some key gaps

Independents

An obvious gap in the PPFA concerns independent public representatives (IPRs) after the [Electoral Amendment Act 1 of 2023](#) provided for their participation in national and provincial elections. Once political parties secure a seat in a legislature, they become entitled to public funding from the IEC, but this is not yet available to elected IPRs. They should be subject to the PPFA's obligations and should share in its benefits.

Independent candidates' associations, political parties and others agreed that the PPFA should provide for equivalent and equitable regulation of independents. However, the way in which independents are ultimately included in the electoral system, with any changes ([currently the subject of litigation](#)), is an essential consideration prior to amending the PPFA.

Prohibited donations

Political parties may not accept donations from foreign governments or agencies but can accept donations from foreign persons and entities, capped at R5 million per year, for "training or skills development of a member of a political party" or "policy development by a political party".

The PPFA doesn't define these terms, which may be sufficiently vague as to permit foreign "study tours" that amount to foreign holidays.

The PPFA also doesn't define "foreign entity". Presumably, it includes a company, trust, foundation, etc., with its primary base or headquarters outside South Africa. If an

entity is headquartered elsewhere in the world, but has a presence in South Africa, is the local office a foreign entity? When may a party or IPR accept such a donation? How thoroughly should they interrogate a potential donation before accepting it? Is it reasonable to expect a small party or IPR with limited resources to do so?

Beneficial ownership

South Africa currently has no transparent, publicly accessible register of beneficial ownership (control) of juristic entities – especially private or unlisted companies. The Companies and Intellectual Property Commission (CIPC) holds only the details of directors in companies registered with the CIPC. This information can be used to identify multiple directorships, but it is insufficient to enable a party, IPR or the IEC to ascertain whether a director exercises effective control of other juristic entities, particularly through shareholdings. It is also unclear whether relevant shareholder information is readily and publicly available without charge through [Strate](#), South Africa’s principal central securities depository responsible for safekeeping the legal, digital record of securities ownership.

This information gap enables “related party” transactions, as it is almost impossible for a party, IPR or an under-resourced IEC to identify who its ultimate or beneficial owner is. Cross-shareholding is readily possible, and interests can be held in offshore shell companies, or in subsidiaries via complex holding company structures.

This enables a holding company, a subsidiary, and a shell company with the same owner to make supposedly separate donations, thereby evading thresholds and caps.

Investment vehicles

Are political parties’ investment vehicles separate entities, or are they part of a political party as envisaged in the definition of “political party” in the Electoral Act because their primary objective is to (contribute to) contesting elections? While a political party may not accept a donation from an organ of state or a state-owned enterprise, the PPFA doesn’t restrict the simple circumvention of this prohibition by a party’s investment vehicle doing business with the state and then making a donation to the party.

The value of evidence-based debate

The two studies highlight the need for evidence-based debates concerning the factors that influence private funding of political parties and how these factors may affect our democracy. As the multi-stakeholder body tasked with advising the government on how to improve South Africa’s efforts to prevent and combat corruption, and especially a repeat of the state capture, the NACAC deserves the support of all South Africans. When organs of state have commissioned studies that provide essential evidence that can assist efforts to make our society more equitable and inclusive, it is incumbent on research institutions, including the HSRC, to share those findings and associated insights.

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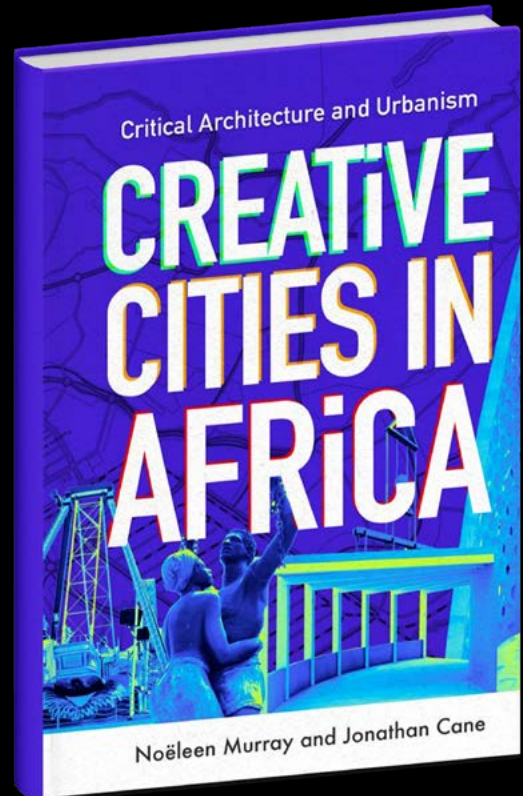
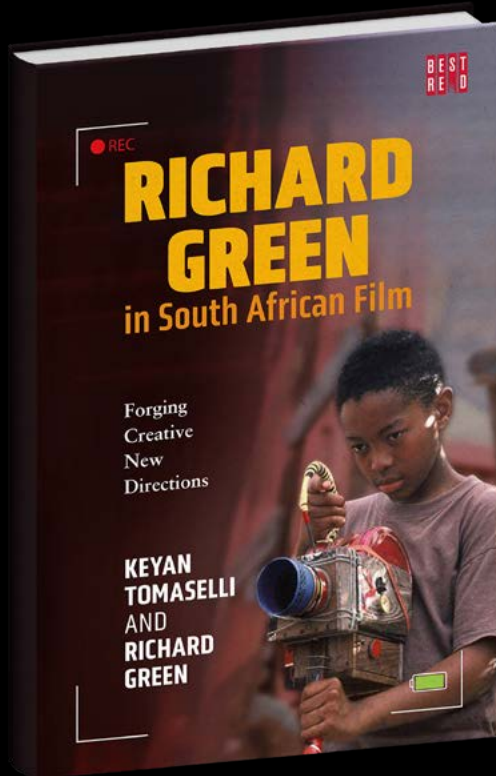


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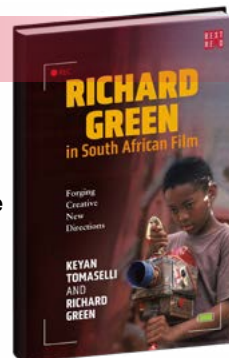
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Books you have to read

Richard Green in South African Film

Forging Creative New Directions



Authors: Keyan Tomaselli and Richard Green
 ISBN (soft cover): 978-1-928246-60-2
 Format: 216 mm x 138 mm
 Extent: 296 pp

Price
R395

ABOUT THE BOOK

Richard Green in South African Film, as told by Richard Green and Keyan Tomaselli, largely recounts the lifetime experience of Richard Green, a veteran international film and TV producer.

“This book combines so much useful material in film studies. It is a must-have for students, directors, historians, theorists, stakeholders, audiences, government agencies and more. Straddling theory, history, critique, ethnography and industry, it challenges common perceptions of the South African film industry and calls for a review of the agency of political transition across all cultural industries. The book’s strength is drawn from the industry and academic experience of the authors – a rare find. If one must choose just one book about South African cinema, for introductory or advanced scholarship, this one would be it.” **Dr Addamms Mututa, video maker, University of Johannesburg**

“This is an important deep dive into the field of film studies. It is the complete history packaged into a single monograph that makes it so important. From the rise of pay TV during the 80s to new directions and questions faced by the field of film studies, Tomaselli and Green’s offering generates much-needed conversations.”

Siyasanga M Tyali, Deputy Chair: Film and Publication Board, Professor and Chair of the University of South Africa’s Department of Communication Science

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Taking African research to the world

Creative Cities in Africa

Critical Architecture and Urbanism



Editors: Noëleen Murray and Jonathan Cane
 ISBN (soft cover): 978-0-7969-2648-7
 Format: 168mm x 240mm
 Extent: 272 pp

Price
R395

ABOUT THE BOOK

Creative Cities in Africa examines how the built environment and its complex relationship to aesthetics, art and design were part of the historical processes of city building or city transformation. Through decolonial struggles and independence, and after high modernism and the search for African authentic identity, “creativity” was employed to build and shape cities that needed to respond to challenges of the day. Architects, landscapers, craftspeople, musicians, artists, designers, curators, restorers and model-makers from Africa and Europe were involved in imaging, structuring and shaping African cities.

How did politicians, planners and power brokers deploy notions of creativity across the history of African cities from colonialism onwards, and how did their plans correspond to the practices of creative practitioners in “contemporary” art, gallery design, curatorial practice, heritage management, music, public sculpture and public art, decorative programmes and ecological design? In thinking through dream maps of the unbuilt, unplanned and “informal” architectures and aesthetic, exhibitions, as well as speculative and Afrofuturist propositions, the volume brings together a variety of creative writing in a scholarly frame about the African city.

The volume draws together planners, artists, architects, historians, literary and visual scholars from across the continent and the globe into debate on architecture and urbanism in Africa. The voices brought together, ranging from internationally renowned figures to emerging scholars, provide analysis of African cities: Ville Fantôme, Johannesburg, Lubumbashi, Dakar, Nairobi, Douala, Dalaba, Durban, and Maputo.

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