



The European Commission's joint Research Centre Technology and Democracy:

Understanding the influence of online technologies on political behaviour and decision-making

8 December 2023 || 9:00-10:30
Diamond Auditorium

Ms Bongiwe Moni

Head: Capacity Development & Internships, Human Sciences Research Council

Ms Bongiwe Moni holds a Masters degree in Business Administration from the Cape Peninsula University of Technology, an Honours degree in Business Administration, majoring in Public Administration and Public Policy, from the University of Western Cape, as well as a degree in Business Administration, majoring in Public Administration, from the University of the Western Cape. She is in her first year of study towards a Doctor of Philosophy degree (PhD) in Community Development at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. As the Head for Capacity Development & Internships she oversees interventions that address youth and graduate unemployment. Her research interests are focused on youth access to the labour market, unemployment, poverty and inequality, skills development and youth pathways/trajectories post-schooling as well as issues of moral regeneration, ethics and good governance.

Ms Laura Smillie

Project Leader of the European Commission's Enlightenment 2.0 research programme

The Enlightenment 2.0 programme is identifying the drivers of political decision-making - exploring the extent to which facts, values, social relations and the online environment affect political behaviour and decision-making. Her forthcoming work is on Trustworthy Public Communications. Her work at the science/policy interface has helped ensure that EU initiatives including the Digital Services Act and the Strengthened Code on Disinformation are founded on the best possible evidence. Prior to joining the Commission in 2017, Laura has worked as a research institute director, as well as for profit and not-for-profit sectors. In 2010, she was appointed the Senior Communications Adviser and Deputy Director of Communications to the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA). Laura has developed and published a model for optimising the communication of scientific risk and uncertainty; she is also the founder and former Chair of the Crisis & Risk Communications Working Group of the European Association of Communication Directors.

Dr Palesa Sekhejana

Strategic Partnerships, Human Sciences Research Council

Dr. Sekhejana is currently the Executive Head (interim) of the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), leading an Africa Focus research division - Africa Institute of South Africa (AISA). Dr Sekhejana continues to be the Director for Strategic Partnerships with a special focus on African relations for delivering on continental strategies. She is the current Chairperson of the Science for Africa Foundation's Africa Fellowship Program for POSSIBLE-AFRICA (Preparing Outstanding Social Science Investigators to Benefit Lives and Environments in Africa). Previously a Research Specialist at Africa Institute of South Africa within HSRC conducting research in health sciences, innovation, biomedical technology developments, and policy-relevant thematic areas in various African countries. Dr. Palesa Sekhejana holds a health sciences Doctoral degree in Biomedical Technology, and specialised in Biophotonics, with advanced training from the University of Illinois (USA). She serves on the research ethics committee with a special focus on biomedical-oriented studies. Additionally, she is the chairperson of Gauteng's Technical Committee War Room on Crime and Law Enforcement. Recently appointed to UNESCO's natural sciences committee, and she is a research associate at the University of Johannesburg in the Applied Sciences Research Unit, Faculty of Sciences. Dr Sekhejana is a former member of ECOSOCC of the African Union on Women and Gender Cluster. Her interests are in health and sciences research and innovations, women, and youth. Amongst her recent co-authored publications are South Africa's Vaccine Production Potential: Towards an Intra-BRICS Vaccine Production Framework as well as The Gauteng Province Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) 2019 Grade 9 Results.



Prof Christopher Isike

Professor of African Politics and International Relations and Head, Department of Political Sciences, University of Pretoria.

Prof Isike is also the Director of the African Centre for the Study of the United States, University of Pretoria (ACSUS-UP). He serves as the current President of the African Association of Political Science (AAPS), and member of the Board of Directors of Global Development Network (GDN). Professor Isike conducts research from an Africanist lens, and teaches international relations theory, strategic and security studies, and security theory at the University of Pretoria. His research interests include African soft power politics, women, peace and conflict studies, women and political representation in Africa, rethinking state formation in Africa, politics in a digital era and African immigration to South Africa. A C2 rated researcher by the NRF, Professor Isike has over 80 publications in top national and international peer-reviewed journals including chapters in books published by reputable publishing houses globally. He is Editor-in-Chief of Africa's foremost political science journal, *Politikon: South African Journal of Political Studies* (2020 to 2024), and has been Editor of *Ubuntu: Journal of Conflict and Social Transformation* since 2017. Professor Isike also serves on the editorial board of several reputable international journals, such as *International Political Science Review*, *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, and the *African Journal of Political Science*. He is on the editorial team of *Territory, Politics, Governance and Strategic Review for Southern Africa*. Professor Isike consults for the UNFPA, UNICEF, UN Women and the KwaZulu-Natal provincial government on gender equality and women empowerment issues in South Africa. He is a Social Cohesion Advocate of South Africa appointed by the Minister of Sports, Arts and Culture (2020 – 2024).

Mr Langa Zulu

Chief Creative Officer, AlgoAtWork Robotics Academy

Mr Zulu is a visionary in the realm of digital strategy and social entrepreneurship, serving as the Chief Creative Officer at AlgoAtWork Robotics Academy. With a legacy that spans more than ten years, he has co-founded influential enterprises such as AlgorhythmLAB and AlgoAtWork Robotics Academy, with the aim of advancing technological education and pioneering initiatives in coding and robotics among South African youth. In his distinguished career, Langa has been a stalwart advocate for economic empowerment. His tenure as a host of business and lifestyle shows at Icora FM saw him raising the profile of community stories that make a difference. He extended his influence in the medias the producer and presenter of The Next BillionaireTV Show, casting a spotlight on enterprising innovators. Appointed as the KZN 4IR Commissioner, Langa has embarked on a five-year mission to develop an inclusive strategy for the Fourth Industrial Revolution, to elevate KZN's sectors through innovation, and to lead research that catalyzes 4IR advancements within the region. His approach is integrative, focusing on infrastructure development, skills training tailored to 4IR, and the empowerment of entrepreneurs and SMMEs to leverage digital economy opportunities.

