

Human Sciences Research Council

Developmental, Capable and Ethical State

Newsletter

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Thoughts from the *Divisional Executive*

We have drifted into quarter three of the financial year as the HSRC continues to deliver excellent social science that makes a difference. Working for the public good, we aim to reach out to stakeholders in national, provincial and local government, and civil society sectors.

A question we all have in the back of our minds is how to engage with the private sector. I believe that our solid reputation and credibility could open doors to expand our income streams, and adopt research-driven approaches to support the rule of law, democracy and constitutionalism.

The second quarter saw us meet 77% of our targets as the Developmental, Capable and Ethical State (DCES) and we will continue to work towards exceeding these targets. However, it is not only this that is important: we also must focus on the impact of our research, projects, publications, policy briefs and official engagements.

As we move towards a new HSRC strategic plan for 2025 to 2030 our focus will increasingly align with the UN Sustainable Development Goals, the National Development Plan, and Africa Agenda 2063. The new Medium Term Development Plan will also guide our work, as well as the priorities of the seventh parliament under the Government of National Unity (it's a GNU!).

Our divisional review has ended with many commendations (yay!) and some difficult choices to make. We will have to engage with this in the next few months.

2025 will be a big year for South Africa as we host the G20 under the banner of Solidarity, Equality and Sustainability. It is a huge responsibility with enormous potential for growth in the global arena and strengthened South-South relations. This year Brazil W20 – an official engagement group of the G20 – focused on the Care Economy; Entrepreneurship; Women in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics; Gender-Based Violence and Femicide, and Climate Justice. Through engaging with the G20 Sherpa Track thematic working groups, we hope that some of our recommendations are taken up by G20 leaders in their declaration later this year.

From local to global, we work towards the common good and within a framework of ethics. This is our promise and our pledge.

Well done to our dedicated and passionate leaders and the competent administrative team!

Teamwork is dreamwork.

Professor Narnia Bohler-Muller

Developmental, Capable and Ethical State research division
Human Sciences Research Council



Celebrating a legacy of dedication and compassion

Farewell to

We bid farewell to Dr Yazini April, the dedicated coordinator for the BRICS Centre at DCES. She is a remarkable woman whose zeal, compassion and dedication have left an indelible mark on all who know her.

Known not only for her passion and professionalism but also for her flair as a fashionista, Yazini's love for bold clothes and signature hats has added a colourful touch to our workplace.

More than just a brilliant professional with integrity, Yazini is known for her warmth and humility. She always goes the extra mile for her colleagues, creating a supportive and welcoming environment for those around her.

Yazini is also a prayer warrior and a union representative at AISA (Embassy House), where she has been dedicated to fair representation and a champion in giving others a voice.



Dr Yazini April



Up close and personal

Dr Moeketsi Bernard Hlalele

Dr Moeketsi Bernard Hlalele is a remarkable individual whose journey from humble beginnings to becoming a passionate researcher is inspiring. Born in South Africa and raised between Lesotho and the Free State, Dr Hlalele's path was shaped by perseverance, a deep commitment to education and a love for agriculture. Now, as a recent addition to the HSRC team, he brings with him a wealth of experience and a vision for advancing impactful research.

Tell us about your upbringing.

I grew up between Lesotho and the Free State, raised by a second family with two siblings. Life was tough, especially after my father was retrenched from the mines in the West Deep Levels near Fochville and Carltonville.

I attended Lifateng Primary School and later, Mount Tabor High School. My early school years were a struggle, particularly because of the difficulty in affording school fees. Thankfully, an NGO from the UK, the Save the Children Fund, stepped in and supported me through my education until I reached university. Initially, I disliked school due to the poverty we endured, including the lack of proper clothing and uniforms. My mother often had to force me to attend school, sometimes resorting to physical discipline. I eventually came to enjoy school, taking ownership of my education, and this journey carried me all the way to earning my PhD.

Who has been your strongest influence?

Mr David Kiwanuka, the principal at Mount Tabor, took me under his wing, treating me like his own son during my time there.

What led you to your career?

The socio-economic circumstances around me had a significant impact. Many of my peers either got pregnant or went to traditional initiation schools. Witnessing this drove me to stay focused on my education and career path, without looking back.

What was your first impression of the HSRC?

I have always admired the HSRC, a prestigious organisation deeply involved in research, which was an area I grew to love during my time as a senior lecturer at university. I'm particularly grateful for the hybrid work system, which allows me to be productive from the comfort of my home while maintaining flexibility.

What's the best or worst thing that has happened since you started working here?

The worst thing was having my laptop stolen from my apartment shortly after I arrived. It dampened my spirits and made me feel as though I was failing, despite the situation being beyond my control.

What do you wish other people knew about the HSRC?

I wish more people recognised the vital role that research plays in shaping policy decisions. The HSRC is at the heart of this process.

What do your family and friends think about your work here?

My daughter, Sebatso Hlalele, who is in Grade 10, is particularly curious about my work. Her interest in research has grown and she now aspires to become a researcher herself.

How would your friends describe you?

They would likely describe me as someone who is passionate about research, and deeply committed to academic work.

What might surprise someone to know about you?

People might be surprised to learn that I despise discrimination of any kind, whether based on race or tribe.

What are your proudest career accomplishments?

That would be successfully coordinating a R56-million Services SETA project across seven provinces in South Africa while working at the Central University of Technology in the Free State. This large-scale project involved



various stakeholders and impacted numerous communities by providing essential training and skills development. Managing such a complex project included overseeing its implementation and ensuring it met its objectives. This was a significant achievement that demonstrated my ability to lead, manage resources effectively, and deliver on strategic initiatives at a national level.

What projects or initiatives are you most excited to be part of at HSRC?

One impactful project is the Climate-Resilient Heritage Protection initiative currently being proposed. This focuses on developing emergency conservation and rehabilitation measures for vulnerable cultural heritage sites in Africa.

Another initiative that excites me is the vulnerability assessment for indoor environmental quality on the health and wellbeing of vulnerable populations in low-resource settings in South Africa. This project addresses a critical public health issue by assessing how poor indoor environments affect the health of individuals in underserved communities. Understanding and mitigating these risks is essential in improving overall wellbeing, particularly for vulnerable populations.

Furthermore, I am proud to have contributed to the Development of a Climate Change Jurisdiction Vulnerability Index in South Africa, a project that has been completed. This index is a vital tool for assessing climate vulnerability across different jurisdictions in the country, helping policymakers make informed decisions on resource allocation and climate resilience strategies. It indicates the importance of evidence-based planning in addressing the challenges of climate change at local and national levels.

What would you tell someone thinking about being a researcher?

Research is fundamental to progress. Without research, there is no development. It is a field that shapes the future. Research is more than just uncovering new information; it is about driving meaningful change and contributing to the betterment of society.

If you were not a researcher, what would your life be like?

If I weren't a researcher, I would likely be farming pigs and chickens. Agriculture is a passion of mine, and much of my research focuses on advising farms on the impact of climate change on agriculture.

What do you do when you are not working?

When I'm not working, I enjoy cooking, tending to my farm and spending time playing with my children.

What is your message to aspiring researchers?

To aspiring researchers, my message is simple: remain curious, resilient, and passionate about your work. The research journey is rarely straightforward so expect challenges, setbacks, and moments of doubt –these experiences shape you and make your discoveries more valuable.

Never underestimate the importance of collaboration. While the process of gathering data and analysing findings can often feel solitary, the most impactful research is born from a network of diverse ideas and perspectives. Seek out mentors, engage with peers and always be open to learning from others in your field.

In the world of research, risk management is essential. No research project is without risks but managing them thoughtfully will allow you to navigate obstacles effectively and stay on course.

Also, remember that your research should aim to address real-world problems. Whether you are working in climate change, public health, education, or any other field, always ask yourself how your work can positively impact people's lives. Keep an eye on the bigger picture and strive to make your research actionable and relevant.

Finally, embrace the evolving nature of knowledge. Be prepared to revise, refine and rethink your ideas as new data and insights emerge. Stay committed to rigorous methodology but remain open to innovative approaches and interdisciplinary thinking. Above all, let your passion drive your persistence, and never lose sight of the purpose behind your work.

Dr Hlalele's son
Kamohelo and daughter
Sebatatso



Congratulations!

Dr Samela Shalom Mtyingizane

We would like to congratulate DCES Research Trainee Dr Samela Shalom Mtyingizane on obtaining her Doctor of Philosophy degree. Below is an edited version of the abstract from her thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the School of Built Environment and Development Studies at the University of KwaZulu-Natal.



Dr Mtyingizane and her parents

BEYOND THE #FALL: A POST-DEVELOPMENT APPROACH TO TRANSFORMING EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICA

This doctoral thesis focuses on the concept of decolonisation and what it means for education.

Since the end of colonial rule and the establishment of democracy in 1994, South Africa has launched various programmes aimed at addressing the effects of colonialism and apartheid in its education system. Despite these efforts, Black students in universities have called for better access to quality education and greater representation in academic settings through movements like #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall. However, apart from demand for decolonising educational institutions, there has been little in-depth research into what decolonisation means for education outside of universities.

This study uses ideas from post-development scholarship to investigate the meaning and experiences of decolonisation among high school learners, teachers, and school administrators. It also looks at how the public in South Africa understands decolonisation, through national surveys.

Responses from adults at the household level were mainly quantitative, and the analysis looked at various factors such as age, race, gender and education level to understand public perceptions of decolonisation in education.

The findings revealed a low level of awareness about the term “decolonisation”, including among Grade 12 learners who took part in the study. Notably, when the term was first mentioned to respondents, it was not translated into their local language, which was a barrier to understanding the concept. After discussing the topic further, some participants were able to articulate their views on what decolonisation of education means and how it could be achieved. Before this, however, most struggled to suggest any measures for improvement.

Spotlight on



Diana Sanchez
Betancourt

Ms Diana Sanchez Betancourt, a Chief Researcher within the Impact and Research Development division at DCES, brings a wealth of international experience and a deep passion for transformative research to her work. Originally from Colombia, Diana's academic and professional journey has taken her across continents, giving her a rich understanding of diverse disciplines and research approaches.

Diana's academic credentials include a Master's degree in Social Sciences from the Department of Peace and Conflict at Uppsala University in Sweden, and a bachelor's degree in Finances, Government and International Relations from Universidad Externado in Colombia. She was an exchange student at the University of Calgary, Canada, and has taken part in numerous fellowships and short courses through prestigious organisations such as APISA, CLACSO, and ISSC.

Before joining the HSRC, she worked for the Colombian government, monitoring collaborative mechanisms aimed at supporting Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and populations in conflict zones. She also served as a researcher for the Swedish NGO Diakonia's Regional Office for Southern Africa.

While at the HSRC, Diana has managed, and contributed to, projects on urbanisation, governance transformation, social accountability, socio-economic development and participatory action research.

Career highlights include serving as the thematic leader of the citizen engagement governance work stream for National Treasury's Cities Support Programme; coordinating fieldwork for the South Africa-Brazil comparative project under the Safer and Inclusive Cities programme, and facilitating learning alliances on Citizen Oversight and Human Rights for the Evidence and Lessons from Latin America Programme (ELLA).

Diana's work in socio-economic transformation also includes research on BEE, SMMEs, and corporate social responsibility in South Africa.

In 2014, she was recognised as one of the "100 Colombians around the world", honouring her professional journey and impact.

Beyond her academic contributions, Diana's passion for community engagement is reflected in her role as a co-founder and board member of Open Streets Cape Town, an urban NGO.

Her body of work includes numerous research articles, conference presentations and book chapters, as well as directing multimedia outputs to make research accessible to broader audiences.

Diana's dedication to fostering inclusive, sustainable change through research is an inspiration to those who work alongside her and the communities she serves.



Meet



Gerrit Mnguni

Ms Gerrit D Mnguni, also known as Gerrie, is the Business Development Technical Support Officer for the DCES division.

He served in the HSRC Business Development and International Liaison unit from 2015 till 2020, where he served as the Funding Search and Support Officer.

Gerrie holds a Diploma in Marketing from Varsity College, and has completed programmes in Social Entrepreneurship with GIBS, and a Higher Certificate in Management

from the Foundation for Professional Development.

His background is the non-profit organisation, where he has been dedicated to supporting underserved communities. He has served in various levels of administration within the NGO sector, with over 15 years of experience.

Gerrie has led numerous successful initiatives that have significantly improved community welfare.

Highlights from the past quarter

HSRC study explores local voices in 30 years of South African democracy

South Africa has celebrated the 30th anniversary of its democracy in 2024, reflecting on the progress and challenges faced by the nation. In this spirit, the HSRC commissioned and undertook a groundbreaking study, Democracy@30, in partnership with the QwaQwa Campus of the University of the Free State.

This research documented the voices and experiences of ordinary South Africans, giving them an opportunity to share how democracy had impacted their lives over the past three decades.

The findings were shared during a two-day public dialogue held on 27 and 28 September 2024 at the QwaQwa Campus, with open discussion on the successes, shortcomings and future aspirations of South Africa's democracy.

Democracy@30 aimed to connect historical memories with current experiences, offering a comprehensive narrative of the country's democratic evolution. As the country reflects on its journey, the study explored the daily realities of citizens and their outlook for the future. Its objectives were:

- To celebrate and reflect on the 30 years of South African democracy with a particular focus on local communities.
- To explore and document how the lives of ordinary people have changed, for better or worse, in the last 30 years.
- To provide a platform for local communities to take stock of progress made, and to reflect on what the next 30 years need to look like to achieve the promised "better life for all".

Conducted between November 2023 and March 2024, the study is a vital reminder that while much has been achieved in three decades, there is still work to be done to ensure that the promises of democracy reach all South Africans.

Focusing on local voices, the study celebrates strides made and underscores challenges that persist. The reflections from this research remind us that democracy is an ongoing journey — one that requires continued commitment, introspection and collective effort to achieve the vision of a more inclusive and equitable society for all.



W20 Summit RIO DE JANERIO, BRAZIL



At the recent W20 Brazil Summit held in Rio de Janeiro from 28 September to 2 October 2024, women from 19 G20 countries and the EU came together to discuss and negotiate key recommendations for G20 leaders on women's economic empowerment. The event culminated in the W20 2024 Communiqué, which was handed over to Ministers Anielle Franco, Maria Helena Guarezzi and Brazilian Sous sherpa Felipe Hess.



DCES Divisional Executive Prof Narnia Bohler-Muller led the W20 South Africa Delegation at the W20 Summit, and also was co-chair of the climate justice working group.



South Africa will host G20 and its engagement groups in 2025 under the theme Solidarity, Equality and Sustainability. W20 will be celebrating its tenth year of existence.

#W20 #GenderEquality



BRICS Research Centre

Staff attend seminar in China



Official handover of the certificate with, from left, translator Li Chanchan, Administration and Management Institute director Liu Jinping, Clement Nchabeleng, and Administration and Management Institute and Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs Vice President Mo Dan

Participants from Afghanistan, Egypt, Nigeria, South Africa and Türkiye

DCES PhD trainee Clement Nchabeleng attended the Seminar on Rural Reform and Land System for Belt and Road Countries Africa in Beijing, China from 11 to 24 July 2024.

The seminar was facilitated by the Administration and Management Institute, which is directly affiliated with the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs. The seminar attracted participants from Afghanistan, Egypt, Nigeria, South Africa and Türkiye.

Clement, who does work for BRICS Research Centre and Sustainable Human Security units, is a PhD student on Public Policy at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. His research focuses on South Africa's land reform and the quest for poverty alleviation, drawing lessons from China's land reform experiences. As part of the seminar, Clement delivered a presentation which outlined where South African comes from, its current state, and possible destination on the question of land.

The seminar consisted of lectures, site visits, discussions, field trips and more. Lectures by experts and professors from the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, China Agricultural University and other institutions included, but were not limited to:

- Overview of China's natural environment, history, culture and socio-economic development.
- China's agricultural and rural reform, including its origin and achievements.
- Land management and sustainable agricultural development, including exploring how to promote the sustainable use of agricultural resources through effective land management.

The seminar arranged field trips to Qingdao city and Weifang city of Shandong province, to understand the practice of rural reform and land system development in Shandong Province. Delegates interacted with local agricultural officials and could develop opportunities for cooperation in the future. Participants also visited tourist attractions, giving them first-hand experience of Chinese history, culture and people.

CLIMATE CHANGE

DCES paper on Climate Change presented at Disaster Reduction Conference

DCES PhD trainee Noncedo Maphosho, from the Sustainable Human Security unit, attended the sixth biennial Southern Africa Society for Disaster Reduction (SASDiR) International Conference in Mauritius from 21 to 23 August 2024.

Noncedo presented a paper, titled "Building resilience against climate change disasters through indigenous knowledge systems in South African communities", inspired by her exposure to climate change projects since joining the HSRC. The conference was facilitated by the University of Mauritius and partners including the North West University and University College London.



The conference also enabled Noncedo to establish international networks as she interacted with delegates from Mauritius, Seychelles, Botswana, the UK, Japan, Malawi, Namibia and South Africa. Delegates were able to take an exclusive technical tour and excursion to see the landscape of the island, and meet its people.

As an emerging researcher, Noncedo found the conference invaluable. In addition to attending presentations, she attended workshops and grew her understanding of how other countries dealt with disaster risk reduction. She expressed her gratitude to those at the HSRC who made the opportunity possible, and said she looked forward to "raising the HSRC flag high" again in the future.



IEC: Thought Leadership Breakfast



DCES senior research specialist in Democracy and Citizenship, Prof Joleen Steyn Kotze (second from right) presented at the IEC's Thought Leadership Breakfast on 5 September in Gqeberha.



DCES SASAS Research in the Presidential Climate Commission Report

The Presidential Climate Commission (PCC) launched the [State of Climate Action in South Africa](#) report on 25 July. The report includes a chapter on the SASAS 2023 attitudes towards climate change and the Just Transition that the PCC commissioned. Dr Jare Struwig, Dr Thobeka Zondi and Dr Benjamin Roberts helped prepare the chapter.

The report can be downloaded at this [link](#).



Integrating indigenous knowledge into horizon scanning

Dr Wilfred Lunga, in collaboration with Prof Ranjan Datta from Canada, has co-authored an insightful article on the importance of integrating indigenous knowledge systems into foresight and horizon-scanning practices. Their work highlights how local perspectives can enrich global efforts to anticipate and prepare for future challenges. This approach not only broadens the scope of foresight but also ensures that diverse cultural insights are considered in shaping sustainable futures.

Read more about their groundbreaking research, [Broader Horizons: Local Knowledge in Foresight Practices](#) [here](#).

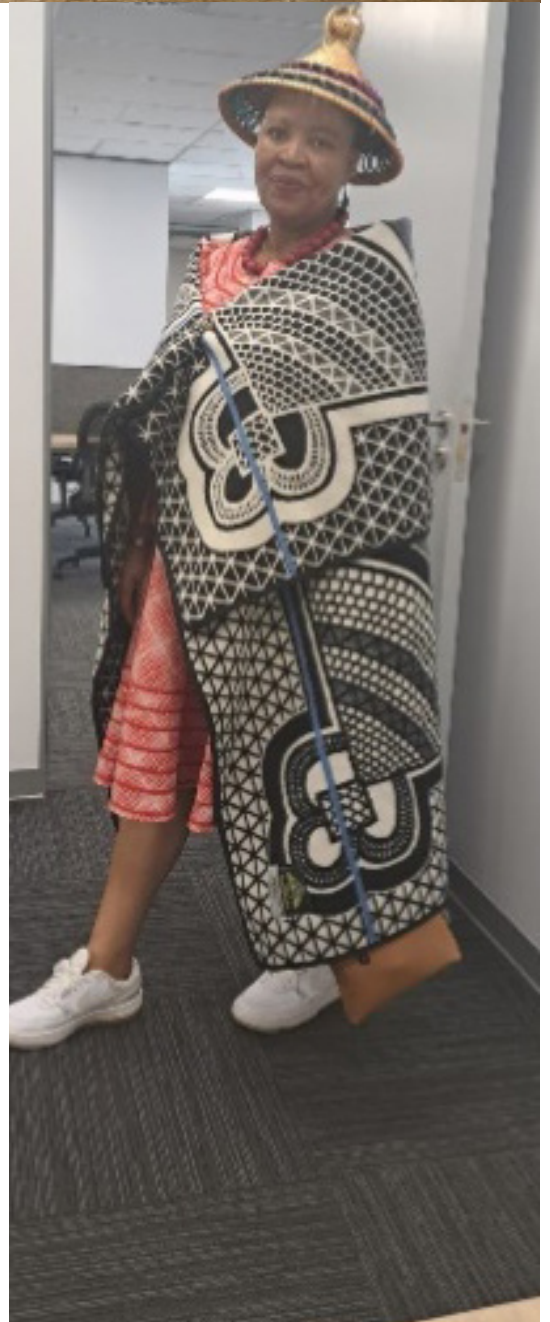
Celebrating our cultural heritage


Expressing our diversity through food, music and dance




The HSRC hosted a vibrant Heritage Day celebration for its staff under the theme, "Celebrating Our Cultural Heritage". The event was a beautiful showcase of the rich cultural diversity within the organisation, with staff members proudly wearing traditional attire representing various cultures. The celebration featured traditional foods, reflecting and sharing the culinary heritage of different communities. Lively music and dance created an atmosphere of unity and cultural pride as staff came together to honour their heritage.







DCES External Review 2024



The DCES External Review 2024 took place from 19 to 21 August as part of the HSRC's commitment to good governance. Every five years this independent evaluation plays a critical role in shaping the strategic direction of DCES and the institution. Aligned with the broader institutional review and the upcoming five-year strategic plan, this review has two parts: a comprehensive self-evaluation and an expert panel assessment.

This review provided an in-depth evaluation of DCES progress, examining research output, alignment with HSRC's mandate, and influence on national and regional priorities. Additionally, the panel assessed leadership effectiveness, capacity development, gender equity and the division's ability to secure external funding. With input from staff, external stakeholders and collaborators, the review will offer constructive feedback to guide future DCES activities and objectives, while considering the impact of the 2020 realignment and evolving thematic priorities.

Newsflash: Climate Change and Futures Conference 2025

In October and November 2025, the DCES division, in partnership with the National Commission on Research, Science and Technology (NCRST) in Namibia, will host a Climate Change and Futures Conference in Windhoek, Namibia. This event aims to bring together diverse stakeholders engaged in climate-change risk analysis, management, governance, indigenous science, and communication, focusing on Africa's unique challenges and solutions.

The conference will be a platform for researchers, academics, practitioners, policymakers, NGOs, industry leaders and vulnerable communities to engage in meaningful discussions on the future of climate risk, strategies for mitigation and adaptation, and effective hazard communication. The HSRC, as an interdisciplinary research organisation, remains committed to addressing emerging issues in disaster risk management and policy, promoting research that impacts both society and government.

The key objectives of the conference are:

- To foster collaboration between stakeholders in South Africa, the SADC region, and the broader African continent.
- To drive the development of innovative methodologies for climate risk analysis.
- To promote the practical application of research in climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies.
- To explore and showcase indigenous knowledge systems in addressing climate challenges.

Climate change is increasingly recognised as one of the most pressing global challenges of our time, aggravated by the impacts of ongoing globalisation. Its adverse effects are particularly severe in Sub-Saharan and Southern as these regions face multiple, interconnected challenges. These include:

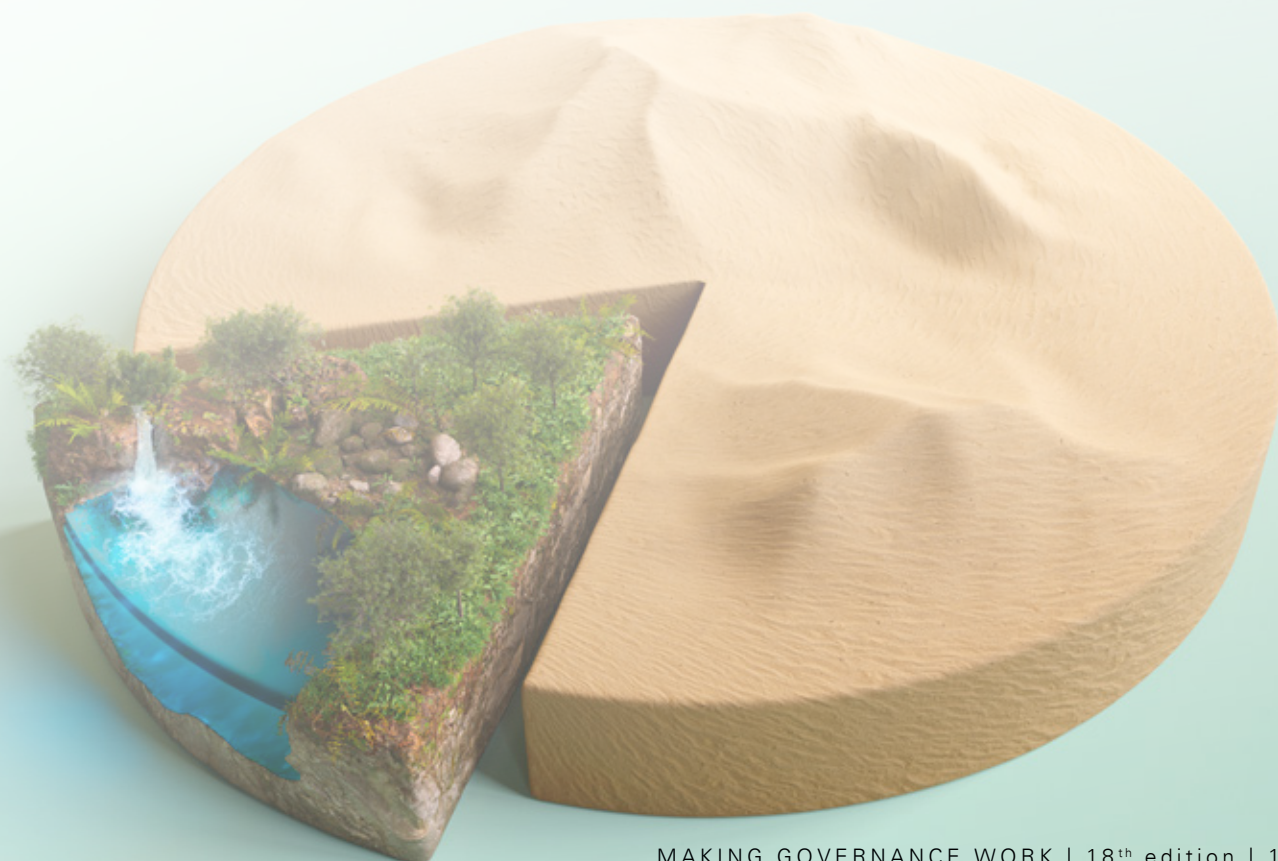
- Rising temperatures causing heatwaves that negatively affect agriculture, water resources, and human health.
- Erratic rainfall patterns that lead to droughts and floods, disrupting food security and agricultural productivity.
- Worsening water scarcity, affecting agricultural, domestic use and hydropower.
- Increasingly frequent extreme weather events like cyclones and heavy rainfall, resulting in loss of life, displacement and infrastructure damage.
- Coastal vulnerabilities from rising sea levels, leading to erosion, land loss, and saltwater intrusion.
- Health risks, including the spread of vector-borne diseases and heat-related illnesses.
- Loss of biodiversity, disrupting ecosystems and human well-being.

Reports such as the IPCC Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5°C and AfDB's African Economic Outlook highlight these critical challenges and suggest solutions, but global efforts to address climate change remain inadequate. This conference seeks to bridge that gap, particularly for Sub-Saharan Africa.

As a leading research institution, the HSRC plays a vital role in generating actionable insights, offering policy recommendations, and building partnerships to tackle climate change. This conference aligns with South Africa's National Development Plan (NDP) and HSRC's mission to eliminate poverty, reduce inequality and foster an inclusive economy.

The event will also support the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by promoting peaceful and inclusive societies, access to justice and accountable, effective institutions.

Stay tuned for announcements on the 2025 theme, key partners and further details as we prepare for this pivotal event!





Thanks for reading!

I hope what you read is interesting and informative. This newsletter can only tell so much, so if you would like to partner with us, comment or ask for more information, please feel free to contact me:

isekaledi@hsrc.ac.za

Or just complain about the weather. That's cool, too.
Until next quarter, many thanks!

Previous editions: <http://www.hsrc.ac.za/en/departments/dces/dces-newsletters>

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