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THIS ISSUE

Cover: A photo collage by Antonio Erasmus

EDITOR'S NOTE

by **Antoinette Oosthuizen**, editor

More than a year since the arrival of SARS-CoV-2 in South Africa, almost all of us know someone who has been infected with the virus or taken by the COVID-19 disease it causes.

Since the start of 2021, the issue of vaccination has dominated news about the pandemic. Results from new clinical trials showed that some vaccines were not sufficiently effective against 501Y.V2, a new variant of the virus, principally responsible for the December 2020 infection peak in South Africa.

Faced with complex scientific concepts, a deluge of online misinformation and disinformation and the memory of some questionable early lockdown regulations, people's willingness to trust scientists and the government has been tested.

Realising that people's attitudes towards vaccines would be key to successful vaccine drives this year, researchers from the HSRC and University of Johannesburg focused on this matter in Round 3 of the UJ-HSRC COVID-19 Democracy Survey, which was conducted during the December infection peak. We feature some of the survey findings in this edition of the *HSRC Review*. Asked if they would take a vaccine if offered, just more than two-thirds of respondents indicated they were willing, but 16% were not. The researchers called for targeted vaccine literacy campaigns.

In the meantime, South Africa's vaccine scientists and the department of health have embarked on remarkably open communication efforts to convey the scientific evidence. Some veteran health journalists, many of whom had worked during the era of HIV/Aids denial two decades ago, have also helped to get the facts out.

In this edition, HSRC science communicator Kim Trollip writes about the value of effective and well-targeted messages. She shares some practical tips on communicating research and highlights the importance of telling stories through the perspectives of people who are living through them.

Since March last year, HSRC researchers have been working on a variety of COVID-19 projects. In line with the organisation's mandate to inform policy, our researchers have collated much of this work in the form of policy briefs. Some of the key recommendations are highlighted in an article by Dr Konosoang Sobane and her colleagues.

Also, as at many other institutions, HSRC staff have been working from home for more than a year now. It was a learning curve, which prompted the organisation to host the '*Working from anywhere: Views, evidence, experiences and recommendations*' symposium in January 2021. Krish Chetty and Shirin Motala report on some of the discussions that took place. Interesting issues included the responsibility of organisations to ensure the health and safety of remote workers, the importance of technology, how to preserve workplace culture, and the extent to which a remote-work policy will become a negotiation tool to attract top talent globally.

We would like to hear your thoughts on these and other articles. Please feel free to contact us on the email addresses provided.

Antoinette

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VACCINE NATION?

Potential acceptance of a COVID-19 vaccine in South Africa

As South Africa geared up for its national COVID-19 vaccine rollout, concerns were expressed about the extent to which the adult public would voluntarily take it. In response, a recent survey by the University of Johannesburg and the HSRC examined patterns of vaccine acceptance and hesitancy. The results are encouraging in part, but show that we need a large-scale vaccine education campaign to address lingering concerns and call for more scientifically-backed information among a sizable minority. By *Narnia Bohler-Muller, Ben Roberts, Carin Runciman, Kate Alexander* and *Ngqapheli Mchunu*

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to inflict appreciable burdens of morbidity and mortality on South African society, while also causing extreme social and economic disruption. In response, ensuring an effective large-scale and equitable rollout of a COVID-19 vaccine(s) has become a pressing issue. It has given rise to significant debate and vaccine activism, but it has also raised concerns about potential public hesitancy to having the COVID-19 vaccine administered.

This issue was examined in Round 3 of the UJ-HSRC COVID-19 Democracy Survey conducted from 29 December 2020 to 6 January 2021. Responses from 10 618 completed questionnaires were weighted by race, age and education, so that findings were broadly representative of South Africa's adult population.

Two-thirds favour vaccines

The key question asked of survey respondents was: 'If a COVID-19 vaccine became available to you, would you take it?' Two-thirds (67%) responded affirmatively, with 52% stating that they would definitely take the vaccine, and

a further 14% saying they would probably take it (Figure 1). In contrast, 18% maintained that they would not get vaccinated (12% definitely not, and 6% probably not), with a further 15% voicing uncertainty.

Figure 1. Willingness to take COVID-19 vaccine if it becomes available (%)
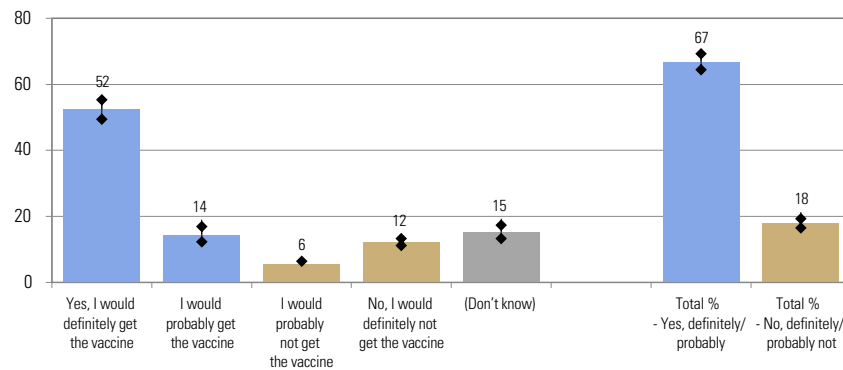
With the Department of Health estimating that at least 67% of South Africa's population needs to be vaccinated to attain population (or 'herd') immunity, these results are encouraging. However, with a third of adults unconvinced, more public education is required to ensure a smooth roll-out of vaccines.

An unequal acceptance: Differences in willingness to take the COVID-19 vaccine

In terms of sociodemographic patterns of acceptance, men were marginally more inclined than women to be willing to accept a COVID-19 vaccine (69% versus 65%). Persons aged 55 and older were more likely to favour vaccination than 18-24-year-olds (74% versus 63%). Attitudes to taking a COVID-19 vaccine also varied by race. White adults tend to be less accepting of vaccines than black African adults (56% versus 69%), as well as Indian (68%) and coloured (63%) adults. Education matters too. Generally, those with less than a matric-level education were more open to receiving a vaccine (72%) than either those who have completed matric (62%) or have tertiary education (59%). Those who self-identified as poor displayed a greater tendency towards vaccination than those regarding themselves as non-poor (74% versus 67%).

Figure 2. Vaccine acceptance by select political and other views (%)
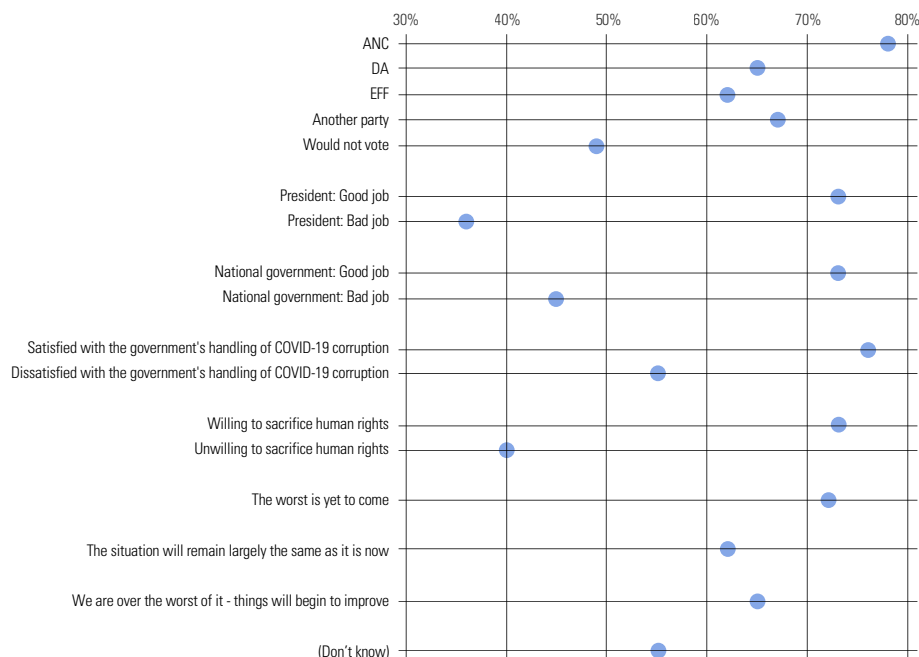
At Khayelitsha Hospital in Cape Town, South Africa, on 17 February 2021, South African President Cyril Ramaphosa receives his vaccination against the virus that causes COVID-19.
Photo: *Jeffrey Abrahams/GroundUp*

Several other factors beyond demographics were examined, some of which had a substantial bearing on vaccine acceptance. Interestingly, having had a household member infected with COVID-19 did not produce a large increase in willingness to take a vaccine, nor did one's perceived likelihood of contracting the virus in coming months. Some political variables, however, showed a distinct association with vaccine acceptance (Figure 2). ANC supporters were significantly more likely to demonstrate a willingness to vaccinate (78%) than supporters of the DA (65%), EFF (62%), and other political parties (67%). Among those who said they would not vote, backing for vaccination was only 48%.

Disillusionment also plays a role. Those expressing discontent with the handling of the country's COVID-19 crisis by President Cyril Ramaphosa and the national government were less favourable towards vaccination than those offering positive approval ratings. Only 36% of those stating that the president was doing a bad job were willing to take the vaccine, compared to 73% of those stating that he was doing a good job. Similarly, only 45% of those rating the national government's COVID-19 response poorly were in favour of vaccination. There was also a 21-percentage point difference in vaccine acceptance depending on whether one was satisfied or dissatisfied with the government's handling of COVID-19-related corruption (76% versus 55%). These results speak to the significance of leadership in shaping attitudes around vaccinations.

Willingness to sacrifice certain human rights to help prevent the spread of the virus also mattered. Those who were pro-sacrifice were more partial to vaccination than those opposed to temporarily sacrificing rights (73% versus 40%). In addition, those who believed that the pandemic was likely to make South Africans more united and supportive of each other were somewhat more accepting of vaccination than those believing the pandemic would promote suspicion and distrust (76% versus 66%). Such patterns may reflect perceptions regarding the collective societal contribution of vaccination to potentially beating the pandemic and saving lives.

Finally, those fearing that the worst of the pandemic was yet to come were slightly more likely to express acceptance of a COVID-19 vaccine (72%) than those who felt the situation would stay the same (62%) or that we were over the worst (65%). They were considerably more accepting than those voicing uncertainty about the future outlook (55%).

Self-reported explanations for vaccine acceptance and hesitancy

Respondents were also asked to explain, in their own words, why they would or would not get the vaccine. We coded and analysed a random sub-sample of 1 960 responses taken from the main sample.

Figure 3. Self-reported explanations for vaccine acceptance (%)

Protect self	29%
Protect others	25%
Qualified support	16%
Prevention	15%
Trust in science and/or government	2%
Other	13%
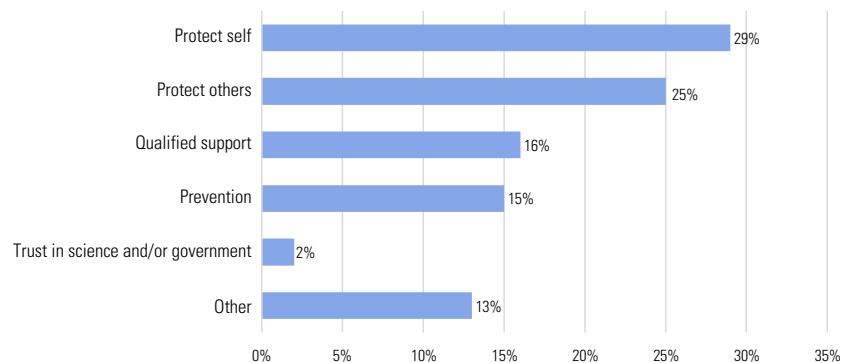
Source: UJ/HSRC COVID-19 Democracy Survey, Round 3 (29 Dec–6 Jan)

The most common explanations for vaccine acceptance (Figure 3) were the desire to protect oneself (29% mentioned this), as well as to protect others (25%). Among those who indicated they would 'definitely' or 'probably' take the vaccine, 16% expressed doubts or concerns in the follow-up open-ended question. This highlights that, even among some of those willing to take the vaccine, there are still questions or concerns. The fact that they ultimately favoured vaccine acceptance suggests that the perceived benefits outweigh the reservations for those giving qualified support to the vaccine. Prevention was the fourth most common explanation for vaccine acceptance. Here, people explained th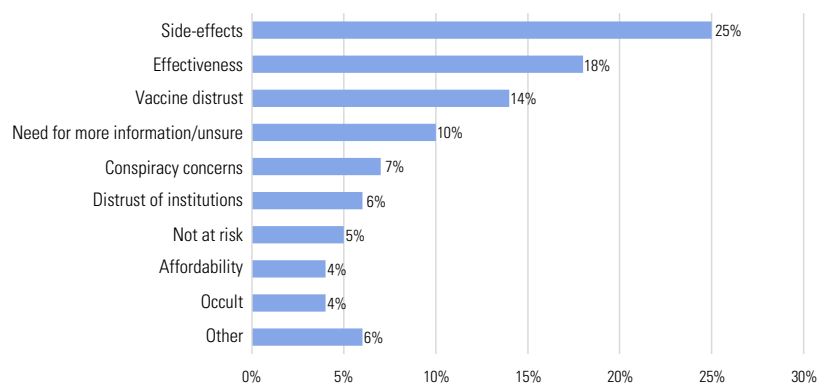emselves using general statements such as *'prevention is better than cure'*. A relatively small share (2%) explained vaccine acceptance in relation to trust in government or science.

The dominant explanation for non-acceptance was concern about possible side-effects (25%). Effectiveness was the second most cited concern (18%), reflecting unease about the extent of medical testing or overall safety of the vaccine. A general lack of trust in the vaccine accounted for 14% of responses. A wider distrust of government, international agencies or 'Big Pharma' was referred to in 6% of non-acceptance responses. Needing more information or a general statement of being unsure accounted for 10% of the explanations. This explanation was particularly important among those who said they 'don't know' if they would take the vaccine. A small share (5%) attributed their hesitancy to a view that they were not at risk of the virus. For some, this was because they believed that strict adherence to public health protocols, such as social distancing or mask wearing, was sufficient. Others believed that they were healthy enough to fight infections. Concerns about vaccine affordability were raised by a small minority (4%).

Figure 4. Self-reported explanations for vaccine hesitancy and uncertainty (%)

Side-effects	25%
Effectiveness	18%
Vaccine distrust	14%
Need for more information/unsure	10%
Conspiracy concerns	7%
Distrust of institutions	6%
Not at risk	5%
Affordability	4%
Occult	4%
Other	6%

Source: UJ/HSRC COVID-19 Democracy Survey, Round 3 (29 Dec–6 Jan)

Explanations relating to conspiracy theories (responses that either expressed doubt in the existence of COVID-19 or attributed the virus or vaccine to powerful groups or interests) accounted for only a small proportion of non-acceptances (7%). Similarly, only 4% of the explanations provided reasons relating to the occult. Both reasons have received significant media attention. While they are not unimportant, our findings demonstrate that most explanations for vaccine non-acceptance are driven by legitimate concerns about safety and effectiveness.

At Khayelitsha Hospital in Cape Town, South Africa, on 17 February 2021, Health Minister Zweli Mkhize receives his vaccination against the virus that causes COVID-19.
Photo: *Jeffrey Abrahams/GroundUp*

Sister Zoliswa Gidi-Dyosi, a registered nurse and midwife, was the first recipient of the COVID-19 vaccine at Khayelitsha Hospital in Cape Town, South Africa, on 17 February 2021.
Photo: *Jeffrey Abrahams/GroundUp*

Conclusion

Our survey of attitudes towards COVID-19 vaccination showed that about two-thirds of the population definitely or probably wanted the vaccine. However, despite ample evidence of the safety and efficacy of vaccines, about a third of the population was still sceptical about vaccination, with greater hesitancy among better-educated people and those who were disillusioned with the government and its handling of the pandemic until then. For adults who accepted the need for vaccination, the main justifications were about protecting oneself and others. For those not, as yet, willing to accept the vaccine, including those unsure about whether to get it, the key issues were about side-effects and effectiveness, with some people expressing broader distrust in the vaccine. People wanted more information. Only a small minority were swayed by concerns about conspiracies and the occult.

We are not yet at a point where willingness to take a COVID-19 vaccine would lead to population or 'herd' immunity. There is more work to do. Public education in the form of targeted vaccine literacy campaigns will be required to provide factual information where it is presently lacking. The government, civil society, the media, and influential political, faith and cultural leaders can all play a part. Such campaigning will need to take people's explanations for their hesitancy and opposition seriously.

Our research shows campaigns should be directed at people with legitimate worries about the possibility of COVID-19 having an adverse impact on their health. With a majority already convinced that vaccines will be good for themselves and for society, there are powerful positive messages that can also be conveyed. Through such efforts, it is hoped that the ill-informed and the reticent will be sufficiently convinced to reconsider their views.

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Data were collected in the online multilingual UJ/HSRC COVID-19 Democracy Lockdown Survey from all willing respondents in South Africa aged 18 or over. The survey was administered using the #datafree Moya Messenger App on the #datafree biNu platform, or alternatively using data via https://hsrc.datafree.co/r/ujhsrc.

This article is a synthesis of these two articles published in *Daily Maverick* in January 2021:

A hesitant nation? Survey shows potential acceptance of a COVID-19 vaccine in South Africa – 24 January 2021

SA survey sheds some light on what lies behind coronavirus vaccine hesitancy – 27 January 2021

HSRC experts recommend improved psychosocial support in South Africa's schools. **Photo:** Ashraf Hendricks/GroundUp

The importance of policy briefs in supporting engagements between researchers and policymakers

The COVID-19 pandemic is not only a public health challenge – it is a broad, complex, and dynamic social and human challenge. The HSRC, as South Africa's public social science research institute, has undertaken a wide range of research projects exploring the social and human dynamics of the pandemic, both to increase our knowledge and to inform public policy. By *Konosoang Sobane, Michael Gastrow* and *Antoinette Oosthuizen*

The rapid spread of SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, has caught many countries unprepared. Early in 2020, it became apparent that the policy response to the pandemic should not only be informed by medical science, but also by the human and social sciences. Issues of perception, behaviour, communication, economic change, unemployment, human development, education, safety and security, and psychosocial challenges, among others, all require the insights of the human and social sciences for the formation of appropriate policy.

Following a year of multi-disciplinary research into the pandemic and its social dynamics, the HSRC is publishing a set of policy briefs capturing key insights and policy recommendations.

Schools: providing psychosocial support

Improving psychosocial support in SA schools during and after COVID-19 as part of a recovery plan evaluates the adequacy of existing psychosocial strategies of the Department of Basic Education's pandemic recovery plan. The HSRC's Fabian Arends and colleagues synthesised research on psychosocial support in schools and identified a policy gap in psychosocial and well-being programming in school settings. Current health-related policies focus mostly on treatment and prevention and less on psychosocial health and well-being. The brief recommends a review of existing national policies to include psychosocial health and well-being support for learners, teachers, and non-teaching staff who have been

directly or indirectly affected by COVID-19. The brief also recommends decentralised psychosocial support programmes that include district officials. Psychosocial support specialists can assist principals and administrators and train teachers to deal with learning recovery and learners' mental-health and psychosocial needs.

Funerals: the sociocultural challenge

Death, dignity and distress in the rural Eastern Cape under COVID-19, compiled by the HSRC's Prof Leslie Bank and colleagues, explores how the coronavirus outbreak and the responses by the South African government affected local funeral and burial practices of rural communities in the Eastern Cape. Their research

established that the implementation of the new rules and regulations pertaining to funerals and the handling of COVID-19 corpses was causing great cultural harm. This led to widespread strategic resistance to these rules among local communities.

The brief recommends that the government facilitates greater involvement of local communities in deciding how best to combat the virus. Broader public education efforts should be led by senior government officials. Well-resourced train-the-trainer programmes should inform people in their own language, in their own places, and through channels that they understand and respect.

Funeral practices need to conform to COVID-19 regulations, but in a way that does not infringe on sociocultural practices. For example, family members should be permitted to view and communicate with the body at the mortuary and again at home.

Consideration should be given to interring bodies in shrouds in a way that leaves the face visible.

Food security

COVID-19 pandemic and the food security and nutrition nexus: Implications for vulnerable urban households in South Africa finds that the effects of the COVID-19 lockdown have been exacerbated by rising poverty and unemployment, especially in urban households. The HSRC's Blessing Masamba and colleagues warn that reduced access to food, combined with isolation, results in limited intake of vitamins, minerals, protein, fatty acids and other food supplements. This poses a risk to vulnerable groups such as children, the elderly and those with chronic diseases. The researchers recommend the scaling up of social protection programmes in urban households. They propose that the government develops a National Pandemic

Contingency Plan that incorporates food, water and medication to deal with future pandemics and extreme climate events, such as droughts and flooding.

Human rights and inclusivity

COVID-19 and human rights limitations: Taking public opinion into account, authored by the HSRC's Prof Narnia Bohler-Muller and colleagues, suggests that participatory, inclusive and adaptive processes will be essential to maintain support of, and adherence to, regulations. The stringent lockdown in South Africa severely limited people's human rights, including their freedom of movement, association, assembly, trade and education. Maintaining trust and compliance will require openness, transparency and inclusive forms of decision making; effective communication about why certain regulations are necessary and rational; and spaces for individuals,

Residents of Tafelsig in Mitchells Plain protest for food parcels during the COVID-19 lockdown in April 2020.
Photo: Ashraf Hendricks/GroundUp

communities and stakeholders to provide feedback and share views.

Regulations should also be of limited duration, evidence based, and reviewable. The researchers warn that blanket bans – such as that imposed on tobacco products – are arguably ineffective and deeply polarising, to the extent that it reduces confidence in the government's handling of the pandemic and pro-sacrifice orientations. Since public health emergencies place immense power in the hands of executive leadership, we also need continued independent oversight of government actions affecting rights of rights of society, communities and individuals.

Policy briefs as a pathway to research impact

Government policies need to be evidence based, not only to justify allocating scarce resources to policy interventions, but also to retain public trust and acceptance. During the COVID-19 pandemic, policymakers have had to contend with pandemic-related time constraints and large volumes of research from various sources, some of which did not apply to all country settings.

In these policy briefs, substantial bodies of HSRC research have been synthesised and summarised to be widely disseminated to policymakers and the broader public, providing an important pathway to achieving greater research impact.

The key value of these policy briefs lies in their concise format. Dense research reports are repackaged in an easily accessible language and style to highlight key research activities, findings and recommendations, which can be incorporated into policymaking processes.

The examples in this article highlight ways to improve psychosocial support in schools; how to reduce cultural harm due to COVID-19 regulations during funeral rituals; how to protect vulnerable households during disasters; and they suggest more inclusive consultation on COVID-19 regulations and improved oversight of government actions that may limit human rights.

The recommendations in the policy briefs support a collective understanding of the social dynamics of the pandemic in South Africa, complementing biomedical and other research. Including such human and social science perspectives in policy development will help inform proactive and well-targeted responses during times of crisis and improve public acceptance of policy implementation.

Link to the HSRC's latest policy briefs

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Photo: _Charles Deluvio_, _Unsplash_

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted science, but also reinforced the relevance and credibility thereof, reinstating the paramount importance of facts, as well as science literacy and understanding. The global crisis has demanded of science communicators (science journalists, researchers and communication specialists) heightened effort and a different approach. By _Kim Trollip_

COVID-19,
the science communication clarifier

Researchers in particular are used to communicating certainties. However, when dealing with a novel coronavirus, we can state current knowledge, but should add a caveat in our messaging that additional dimensions may come into play. Due to the danger of the pandemic, ever-changing and sometimes unverified COVID-19 data have been released. Especially in the early months of the pandemic, academia witnessed a significant increase in the release of pre-print journals in an effort to stem the spread of the virus. Some were critical of this haste to release studies, but others believed it was justified to save lives. Nonetheless, it showed the importance for science communicators, when releasing early data, to state in their key messaging that although it provides guidance, the information provided is subject to change.

Science communicators have a responsibility to fill the vacuum left by uncertainty; correct misinformation and debunk disinformation (falsehoods designed to undermine the validity of science); and provide the public with the accurate information they need to make informed decisions about their health and well-being. Equally important is who is 'handed the microphone' to speak and who we quote in our work. Representation can be a matter of life or death. Although the virus does not discriminate, numerous studies in South Africa and around the world have shown that due to societal inequality, black people and vulnerable communities are hardest hit. The need exists to develop structural actions to support the active participation of scientists from marginalised and vulnerable groups in the research, and also in communicating about their work on COVID-19.

> _When scientists do not participate in science communication, the public narratives are shaped without an informed expert voice [and are] instead determined by interpretation, extrapolation, opinion, and misinformation. This can cause real harm in a public health context, exemplified by the anti-vax movement, which has resulted in lowered herd immunity, leading to largely preventable outbreaks of measles in numerous countries._
> – _Dr Ciléin Kearns, artist-physician_

Acknowledging some of the more alarming COVID-19-related utterances made by people in positions of authority in South Africa, and elsewhere, the focus of this article is not on the details of the disinformation. Instead it seeks to define the best way to communicate actual research in a clear and concise manner, while positively influencing behaviour. Leading science communicator Luisa Massarani of Brazil says, "Science communication has been at the heart of the debate about [the] coronavirus worldwide; helping to understand the virus and the disease but also behaviours that can minimise its impact. As such, producing and publishing high-quality research in science communication around COVID-19 is imperative and indeed closely aligned with scientific research of the virus itself." Based on such research to date, science communicators have identified challenges and some surprising opportunities.

Top tips for communicating research during a crisis:
- Preparation is everything. Know your audience, identify your goals (e.g. educate, advocate, raise awareness, build trust, influence policy) and jot down your key messages.
- Avoid jargon and acronyms.
- Ensure consistent messaging to all stakeholders.
- Put complex concepts into simpler terms; this helps demonstrate the importance of your work to a wide range of stakeholders.
- State the obvious, because it's not always obvious to most people.
- If called to speak to the media, compose your response in advance and remain concerned, calm and human.
- Be yourself, be ethical and be accountable. An authentic voice engenders trust and buy-in.
- If you have the gift of storytelling, use it. It is a great way to ensure that the public remembers what you have said.
- Do not emphasise results more than is rightful, because a public that has been disappointed once will be sceptical forever.

Ideally, addressing audiences in their mother tongue ensures greater comprehension and trust. Where possible, allow colleagues who speak the relevant language to honour the engagement. If this is not possible, and you are presenting in English, then ensure that you enunciate carefully and speak clearly.

Communication is adequate if it reaches people with the information that they need in a form that they can use. COVID-19 affects core human values and sparks tensions at the science-society interface. This may be seen as a challenge to science communication, but it could also be an opportunity.

Opportunities presented by a health crisis
- COVID-19 has demanded that science communicators reorientate to become more innovative and agile.
- Dialogues are known to engage the public and effect positive change, as they are interactive and empowering. Dialogue is a unique form of conversation with the potential to bring about genuine social change.
- The pandemic has accelerated digital transformation. In a post-COVID-19 world, the digital space is one of the largest – a modern-day 'agora', where these dialogues can take place.
- Social media can provide effective and efficient ways to communicate your research to an extremely broad audience, and creates new opportunities for opening up dialogue, as well as boosting engagement and deliberation.
- Multiple channels for communication means you reach more people; in addition to online communication, consider radio, television and mobile messaging.
- Storytelling helps listeners understand the essence of complex concepts in meaningful or personal ways. Narratives can be presented as the written word, photos, images or video. Incorporating a cultural context integrates social meaning, legitimacy and local context into scientific messaging.

- Creative formats are capable of engaging the public in behavioural change on a mass scale. Visual storytelling, e.g. comic-based risk communication of the COVID-19 pandemic, has been used successfully around the world.
- Laughing soothes nerves when it is not directed *at* something or someone but enjoyed *with* someone. Science communicators should harness the possibilities of satire and humour in communicating the seriousness of the deadly disease, but with some important checks employed.

A final word on representation
During the pandemic, some of the first people to predict disparities in health outcomes with COVID-19 were black experts. It is incumbent upon researchers to make sure we're telling stories through the perspectives of people who are living through them. An alliance of social movements, the C19 People's Coalition, has been actively seeking to ensure that the South African response to COVID-19 is effective, just and equitable. Their communication efforts have been exemplary in terms of ensuring that facts reach the most vulnerable communities. The #PeoplesVaccine campaign has used social media effectively to spread the call for vaccine equity. Science communicators can learn from such campaigns when speaking about their research.

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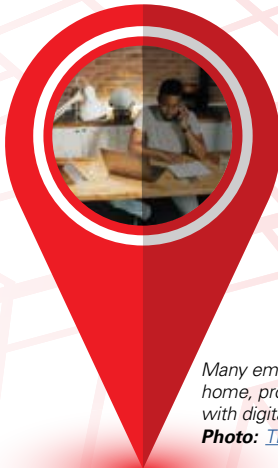
Many employees prefer to work from home, provided that they are equipped with digital technology.
Photo: *Tima Miroshnichenko, Pexels*

WORKING FROM ANYWHERE:
Is South Africa ready?

Lockdown Level 5, introduced in South Africa on 26 March 2020, forced institutions to migrate to remote working. It dramatically changed the way most of the country's institutions had to operate in an instant. A recent symposium, *'Working from anywhere: Views, evidence, experiences and recommendations'* hosted by the HSRC, provided insights and highlighted policy considerations for organisations on adapting to this new way of working.
By *Krish Chetty* and *Shirin Motala*

Experts predict firms allowing work from anywhere will be better positioned to attract top global talent in the future.
Photo: *Ketut Subiyanto, Pexels*

Academics have long advocated for remote working, citing the flexibility benefits for workers and the cost savings for employers. In March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown requirements forced remote work upon South African employers and consequently accelerated our practice of, and thinking about, remote work. At the end of a difficult year, just when many institutions felt comfortable to start easing back into an office routine, a much worse second COVID-19 peak hit the country in December 2020.

The *Working from anywhere* symposium, hosted by the HSRC at the end of January 2021, attracted almost 90 participants who sought to understand what was gained, what was lost and who were most affected by the sudden pivot to remote working. The expected outcome of the symposium was for the insights gained to serve as a stimulus for providing lessons and recommendations on how firms would work now and in the future.

Working from home – Working from anywhere – What's the difference?

Prof Prithwiraj Choudhury of the Harvard Business School, a champion of the working-from-anywhere approach, wrote in the *Harvard Business Review* that remote working emerged in the 1970s, arising from the 1973 OPEC oil embargo. The price of oil rose nearly 300% within six months and had a knock-on effect on commuting costs. In the 2000s, greater accessibility to laptops, tablets and broadband connectivity further boosted the practice of remote working.

At the symposium, Choudhury highlighted the difference between work-from-home and work-from-anywhere practices. Normally, those who are allowed to work from home still need to live near their workplace, splitting their time between the office and home during a work week.
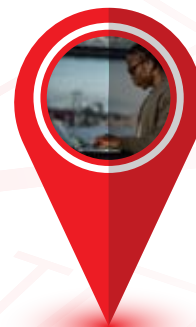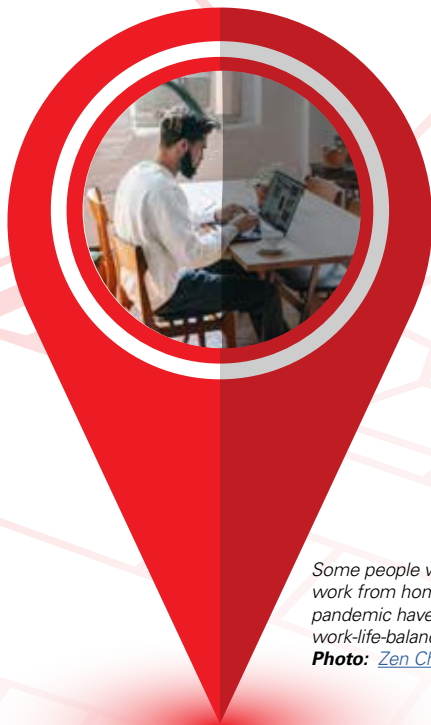
Some people who have been able to work from home during the COVID-19 pandemic have experienced better work-life-balance.
Photo: *Zen Chung, Pexels*

In contrast, institutions with work-from-anywhere policies allow their employees to live in other cities, countries or even time zones.

Allowing work from anywhere enables firms to attract and retain top-tier global talent by offering employees the freedom to move to, or remain in, locations where they have family support or a better quality of life. According to Choudhury, it also means the decision to take a new job is no longer influenced by its potentially disruptive effect on families, such as school relocation, partners also having to find employment in the new location, or even being separated from family.

Digital infrastructure – Essential for migrating to remote working

Since digital infrastructure was essential for remote working, the lockdown presented a challenge to firms in this regard. Krish Chetty, a chief researcher in the HSRC's Inclusive Economic Development

research division, shared findings from the World-Wide Worx (WWW) survey conducted among 400 firms in South Africa. It found that firms agreed on the necessity of developing digital transformation strategies, but that only 37% had produced such a strategy. Firms with such strategies in place before lockdown reported a 70% boost in productivity.

For Themba Mnisi, an IT infrastructure manager at the HSRC, the sudden lockdown meant conducting a rapid vulnerability assessment, which revealed that several employees lacked access to laptops, licensed software tools for collaboration, as well as concerns about risks to security systems and privacy rights. In response and through restructuring budgets, the HSRC procured laptops and software packages, enhanced privacy and security capabilities and provided data bundles for staff.

Such responses were necessary, given that 65% of SA households did

not have Internet access, according to Statistics South Africa's 2018 General Household Survey. Despite the attractiveness of a working-from-anywhere policy, according to the WWW study, 61% of firms did not wish for their employees to continue working remotely once the pandemic ended, although they believed that 40% of their workers would prefer to work from home.

Benefits and success factors of working remotely

The WWW study reported that the benefits for employees working remotely included greater flexibility, more time to spend with children, higher productivity and commuter cost savings. Factors that enabled employees to work remotely included company support, access to the Internet and a non-distracting home environment. A significant benefit for firms was a reduced need for office space and therefore less expenditure on the associated costs of running an office.

Figure 1: Success factors and benefits of remote working

Factor	Percentage
Better digital delegation of tasks	96%
Allowing time with children	94%
Company support	94%
Had connectivity at home	93%
Non-distracting home environment	86%
Good time management skills	82%
Providing flexible hours	63%
Higher outputs while working from home	29%
Lower reported stress levels while working from home	0%
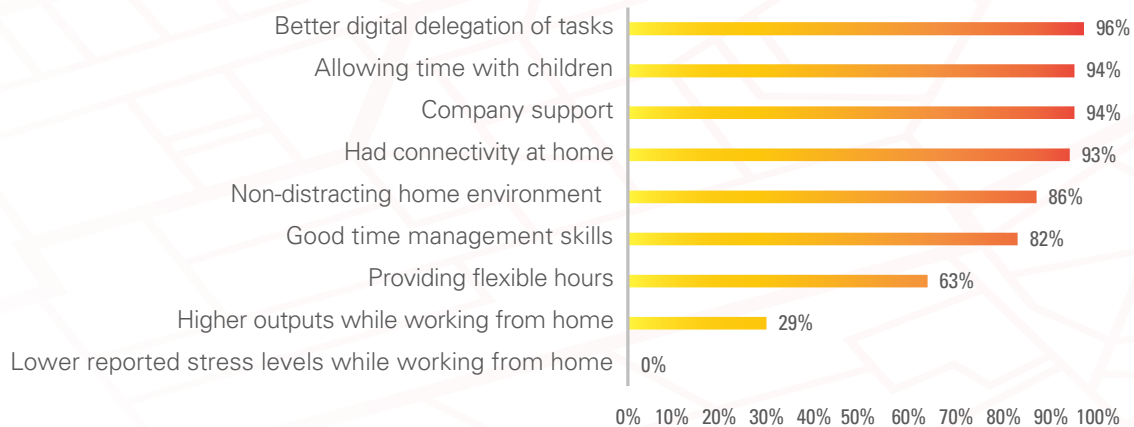
Source: WWW

Remote working challenges for employees

Working remotely comes with its own set of challenges, including longer working hours, long hours spent staring at a screen, lack of a work-life balance and increased stress levels, compounded for those who experienced digital connectivity challenges. METACO's Danny Tuckwood highlighted the *'fatigue from frequency of change'*, which workers experienced alongside limited interpersonal contact and constraints on accessing workspace at home. While some of this stress has rapidly dissipated, it has been replaced by feelings of anxiety in balancing one's productivity and lack of self-care.

Protecting employee rights and promoting well-being

Working from anywhere has legal compliance liabilities and occupational health and safety implications for the employer, as Anton Boswel, from Anton Boswel & Associates, reminded participants, and which employers need to be aware of and address. The legal definition of a 'workplace' is not determined by one's location, and thus employers have to be mindful of and take necessary measures to protect against workplace injuries and harm, even if this occurs while working from home. The pace of change has caught employers on the proverbial back foot, requiring agile measures to protect workers and reduce firm liability.

Developing remote working frameworks and strategies

Developing a Remote Working Framework has been a core priority for the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), and Andile Mabindisa shared the journey and approach adopted towards this accomplishment. Central to the process have been agile worker engagements across all levels and the adoption of a blended approach, comprising remote and onsite working with worker well-being prioritised. Importantly, an assessment of the effectiveness of virtual collaboration tools was required together with an audit of appropriate tools and technologies available to employees. For the effective implementation of the framework, there is a need to produce leaders who understand remote work, imparting these views and behaviours to their staff, the CSIR suggests.

Conclusion

Waiting for the COVID-19 crisis to pass before South African employers decide whether to adopt remote working as a policy, may run the risk of falling productivity levels and investment losses. The lockdown brought into sharp focus the inherent inequalities that workers experienced with remote working, particularly women, workers in elementary occupations, and those in low-income employment. A multi-pronged and well-conceived strategy that recognises workers' unique care needs and embraces digitisation may prepare the employer for the world of working from anywhere and in doing so mitigate inequality.

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BEYOND THE FORMAL ECONOMY:

MEETING YOUNG PEOPLE WHERE THEY'RE AT

Does the notion of the proper job and terms like formal and informal employment make sense in the world today? Are our ways of thinking about work preventing us from supporting young people's livelihoods? At a recent webinar, the HSRC's Adam Cooper and others suggested that education needs to better mirror the nature of work on the ground: fast-paced, responsive, and often made up of several different activities.

By *Andrea Teagle*

Students line up to enter their technical-and-vocational-education-and-training college in Cape Town, South Africa.
Photo: *Andrea Teagle*

A woman crosses the road outside the back of the College of Cape Town, one of South Africa's fifty technical-and-vocational-education-and-training colleges.
***Photo:** Andrea Teagle*

Approximately 5% of young people in African countries are employed in formal employment, according to the [International Labour Organisation](). This and the similarly low rates of formal employment stand in stark contrast to countries in the Global North, where 80% of people are formally employed.

Speaking at a seminar on technical-and-vocational-education-and-training (TVET) colleges in the time of COVID-19, Adam Cooper from the HSRC argued that [the notion of wage labour is of limited use in the 21st century](), particularly for countries in the Global South. While formal employment and wage work is not disappearing, it certainly doesn't represent the dominant way that people in the Global South make a living. In practice, informal and formal employment exist on a spectrum, with some formal companies conducting aspects of their businesses informally. Additionally, Cooper argued that defining 'informal' work by what it isn't – not formal – does not tell us very much about it.

South Africa's informal economy is smaller than those of other African countries. However, South Africa has a strong human economy with social relations and transactions, as well as social grants, helping to compensate for the market. Cooper suggested that, rather than single-mindedly trying to drive down unemployment figures, we need to look at what young people are already doing and support them to do it better.

The education sector should find ways of reinforcing existing trends, agreed webinar participant and retired TVET college principal Khaya Matiso. For example, he said, there is a housing boom taking place in rural areas, where TVET colleges could play a role in upskilling young people to meet the demand for builders, plumbers and electricians. In urban areas, the backyard rental boom presents another opportunity to support emerging contractors and developers.

Skarrel, hustle or work?

"Do young people want jobs?" Cooper asked. "The answer is yes, but also, it depends." He pointed out that young people in South Africa often exit formal employment for valid reasons. One is that the social benefits or protections associated with employment often do not exist in the Global South. Another is the pervasive experience of racism or exploitation by those in low-income jobs, like petrol attendants, supermarket packers and security workers. Many young people choose to exit low-paying formal employment when there is no possibility of it leading to better work and/or social mobility.

"The appeal around leaving low-wage work, [as found] in a lot of ethnographic research, is that people have control over income generation in relation to time…People want this kind of freedom," Cooper said, adding, however, that informal employment should not be romanticised.

'[Mixed livelihoods]()', 'diverse income streams' or '[hustling]()' and, more locally, '*skarrel*' better capture how most young people in the Global South make a living today. These terms reflect the fast pace, uncertainty and the element of waiting that often characterise work opportunities for young people in Africa's cities. Anthropologist James Ferguson writes: 'Africa's fastest-growing cities are increasingly inhabited by people who lack both land and formal-sector jobs and who improvise complex and contingent livelihoods through a combination of petty trade, hustling, casual labour, smuggling, prostitution, begging, theft, seeking help from relatives…'

Supporting people in these settings requires recognising the role of so-called informal work and of informal sources of knowledge.

For example, Cooper said, young people in Johannesburg make a living offering tours of the inner city. To do this, they rely on intimate knowledge of the inner city and townships, and on social capital from schooling and connections with privileged people. Their offerings appeal to some tourists seeking an authentic, local experience. Attempting to formalise work like this would be misguided, as it is informality in the form of a township experience that is being sold.

Locally responsive training programmes

Cooper pointed out that employment in South Africa is closely correlated with race and age, showing that more education is not a magical solution to unemployment. (See Figure 1.)

"White people with matric have a lower unemployment rate than black South Africans with tertiary education. The social factors that shape employment, if we're going to look at it through the lens of employment, are very important mediators of the labour market …"

Figure 1. Unemployment rate for individuals by highest education level and race

The unemployment rate amongst black Africans who have a tertiary education has **increased**. However, the unemployment rate amongst black Africans with a matric has decreased.

THE SOUTH AFRICA I KNOW, THE HOME I UNDERSTAND

Statistics South Africa
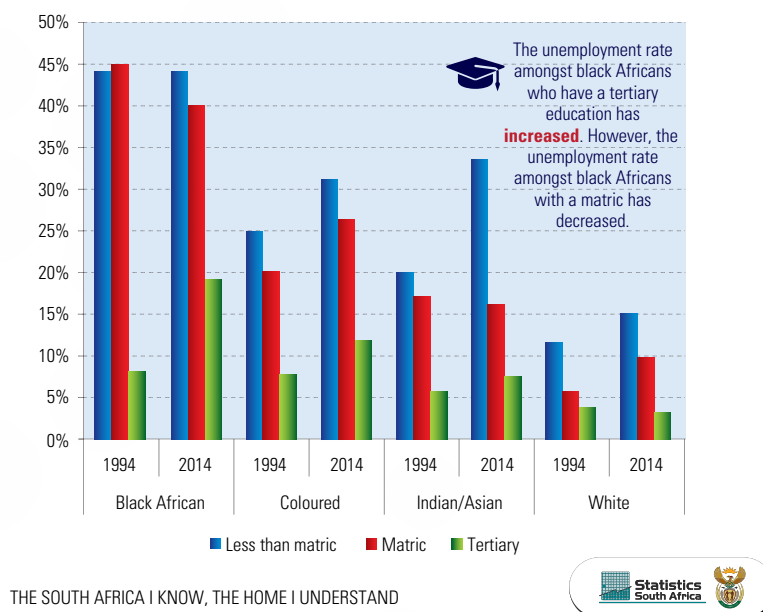
Source: Employment, unemployment, skills and economic growth: An exploration of household survey evidence on skills development and unemployment between 1994 and 2014. Statistics South Africa.

Despite this, Azeem Badroodien, director of the School of Education at the University of Cape Town, noted close links exist between education quality and poverty. However, he added, attempts to level the educational playing field and draw more people into formal employment have not been successful. "At what point do we give up the ideal of equalisation and focus on getting [young people]…into some kind of sustainable living that lifts them out of the challenges they face on a daily basis?"

Cooper emphasised that it does not have to be an *either-or* choice. TVET colleges, non-profit organisations and other stakeholders could complement formal, centralised education with locally responsive programmes, or "tailored solutions to augment informal traders' knowledge". Other initiatives could work alongside education and training to support young people: for example, co-ops present a way to create collective ownership of various initiatives, and share equipment costs between individuals.

Webinar participant Annette Loubser argued that community groups, or so-called communities of trust, were important mechanisms for supporting young people. Entrepreneurship thrives when people are given spaces to explore their ideas and their abilities, she suggested. "It's about creating spaces where people feel they have the right to aspire to and reach certain opportunities."

The RLabs hub in Cape Town, which the *HSRC Review* visited last year, is one such space. The living labs model is premised on the idea of co-learning, where intended beneficiaries of innovations are actively involved in their design and development. RLabs has an additional focus on upskilling young people, offering a three-stage training programme called Believe, Create, Become. RLab programme manager, Teri-Lee Dilgee, explained that, in the first stage, students are supported to expand their aspirations. Some who had initially aspired to be taxi drivers ended up starting their own tech companies.

Part of the role of education lies in undoing internalised messages about who belongs where and who can aspire to what. "There's a deeply damaging sense of a society that continues here [in South Africa]," Cooper said. "Aspirations are important for helping young people to imagine something different."

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Further reading:
A special, upcoming (2021) edition in the journal *Social Dynamics* will focus on young people and work in South Africa, including research by Chris Webb on young people's work experiences in Khayelitsha and work by Hannah Dawson on informal entrepreneurship in urban areas.

SCIENCE FORUM 2020:

Solving global crises requires breaking thought barriers

At the virtual Science Forum 2020, scientists and social scientists discussed ways of addressing the interlinked crises facing humanity today. To create a just future world requires that we challenge the lines we have drawn between groups of people, between academic disciplines, and between humans and nature. By *Andrea Teagle*

Referencing the annual Barrydale puppet parade, Professor Jane Taylor, director of the Laboratory of Kinetic Objects, spoke about how AI entities, like puppets, reflect the selves we project onto them. In this photo, Mr Air, a mechanical puppet built by the Ukwanda Puppetry Arts and Design Company, performs at the Barrydale parade in December 2019.
Photo: *Ashraf Hendricks, GroundUp (CC BY-ND 4.0)*

"HIV doesn't exist in isolation," said epidemiologist Professor Quarraisha Abdool Karim, who, together with Professor Salim Abdool Karim, received the Chilean Strait of Magellan Award at the Science Forum 2020 for her work in the prevention and treatment of HIV.

"I focus a lot on the biotechnologies, but there is an intersectionality with other issues, including gender-based violence, including the access to sexual reproductive health services… [and] to comprehensive sexuality education."

Some of the greatest breakthroughs in HIV research have happened at the intersection of science and social science: for example, female-controlled contraception, and interventions that reflect the experiences of adolescents living with HIV. As writer Professor Lesley Green pointed out at the launch of her recent publication *Rock | Water | Life*, the people on the ground do not experience the impacts of climate change, racism and inequality through the lens of separate disciplines.

The need to break the barriers between and within the sciences and social sciences was a central theme at the Science Forum, co-hosted by the Department of Science and Innovation and the HSRC. The event itself, a virtual undertaking, brought together thinkers of multiple disciplines, across Africa and internationally. It also marked the launch of partnerships committed to open science, including the New South Africa-China cross border incubation programme for start-up enterprises.

Transdisciplinary thinking

Over the course of three days, speakers discussed how the problems facing the world today – such as HIV, COVID-19, climate change and poverty and inequality – can be solved only by forms of thinking that break down categories of study and categories of being. In the words of HSRC CEO Professor

Crain Soudien in his welcoming speech: "This crucial moment that we are in together demands, as we call it, radical reason."

In her keynote address, renowned scholar and first female co-president of the Club of Rome, Dr Mamphela Ramphele, contended that addressing climate change requires a conscious shift away from the mechanistic thought that underlies our extractive attitude towards Earth's resources. She pointed to the value of African knowledge that situates humans in relation to one another and as part of the natural world.

Challenging scholars to form transdisciplinary, pan-African partnerships, she said, "We need to actively challenge the Euro-American dominance and the so-called universality [of Western knowledge]."

Decolonisation

"What was the mission of the first universities established in Africa?" In posing this question, historian and theorist Professor Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni suggested that we can start to understand the problem of decolonisation.

His fellow discussant, leading decolonial scholar Professor Boaventura de Sousa Santos, said universities are at a crossroads. On the one hand, he said, there is pressure from below; from students who recognise that merely increasing black representation in student and staff bodies is not enough. On the other hand, there is top-down pressure from global capitalism.

This session at the Science Forum highlighted the challenge of stepping outside of the Western-European system to critique it through a more objective lens, and to recognise that it does not encompass a complete understanding of the world. "I claim, and I strive, for a college of knowledge," De Sousa Santos said.

Equally, in recognising the validity of other sources of knowledge, we must avoid the trap of turning indigenous knowledge and African scholarship into a shrine of worship, argued Ndlovu-Gatsheni.

"We need to then subject [indigenous knowledge] to the same critical view that we adopt for other knowledge. By doing that, we are actually taking them seriously."

In another panel, Professor Joel Modiri of the University of Pretoria argued that the academic peer-review process was throttling different types of thought.

"White academics reproduce the centrality and false universality of their own perspective, policing the boundaries of the disciplines. This has placed many black academics and postgraduate students in the demeaning and disempowering position of having to reproduce traditions of white scholarship, so as to ... gain employment and academic recognition."

However, De Sousa Santos also noted that inroads had been made in decolonisation, through African scholarship and movements like Rhodes Must Fall. Acknowledging the limited progress made at individual institutions, Ndlovu-Gatsheni argued that universities needed to take a national approach to transformation.

Inequalities reflected in education

At the school level, the HSRC's Dr Adam Cooper observed that education did not automatically amount to social justice. Despite progressive policy, inequality continues to reflect in the South African education system. A contributing factor is the absence of multilingualism in classrooms, suggested fellow speaker and colleague Jaqueline Harvey. In Grade 4, children are expected to make a complete switch from indigenous language instruction to English, with far-reaching repercussions for their confidence, learning and sense of place.

The continued subjugation of indigenous languages – and the internalised message that English (and whiteness) equates to competence and intelligence – is an important part of South Africa's education puzzle. In another panel, the world's foremost cultural theorist, Professor Homi Bhabha, and historian

Professor Premesh Lalu argued that the psychological impacts of the normalised, routine indignities of apartheid continue to ripple through our society.

"[T]here was something particular about the modes through which [petty apartheid] infiltrated everyday life," Lalu said, "and created a psychopathology that has stayed with us for decades after we've laid apartheid to rest."

The future of AI

In a panel on artificial intelligence (AI) futures, speakers discussed the transdisciplinary nature of AI research. To direct technological advancement towards futures that we want, "we need to understand our societies and politics and cultures, our histories and the trajectories that they have set us on", said Dr Stephen Cave, director of the Leverhulme Centre for the Future of Intelligence at the University of Cambridge.

Referencing the annual Barrydale puppet parade, Professor Jane Taylor, director of the Laboratory of Kinetic Objects, spoke about how AI entities, like puppets, reflect the selves we project onto them. In this way, AI research is an opportunity to explore what it means to be human in relation to the rest of the world.

It challenges us to resist the tendency, as humans, or as members of a particular group or gender or discipline, to set ourselves apart and above. In the words of Ramphele, planetary emergencies require that we learn "to embrace the interconnectedness and interdependence of Earth as a living system".

In 1543, the scientist Nicolaus Copernicus discovered that the sun does not revolve around Earth. Now, as then, it may be by moving away from our perceived centrality that we take our next leap in understanding – in this way, ironically, we might reclaim our humanity.

Note: *This article first appeared in Daily Maverick*

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THE FABRIC OF DISSENT:

Public intellectuals who have shaped SA's history

What is a public intellectual? And why do we need them in these 'wicked' times? Launched at the Science Forum South Africa 2020, *The Fabric of Dissent: Public Intellectuals in South Africa* looks at the role of these thinkers in shaping the history of the country. This article by *Antoinette Oosthuizen* is based on the book launch and correspondence with two of the editors.

Globally, countries have consulted their best scientific experts to mitigate the devastating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Yet, many failed as infections continued to surge and economies buckled. This pandemic may be what social scientists call a 'wicked problem': one that involves a complex interplay between a catastrophic health threat and many other social, economic, environmental or political challenges.

Also, as massive vaccine rollouts commenced, it became a case of dog-eat-dog, with superpowers scrambling to secure vaccine stock first and the most vulnerable in society being left behind. Getting through this crisis requires more than traditional academic or expert input, but also the attention of society's most critical minds, people who relate to society, who value equality and justice, and who are not afraid to speak truth to power – a current generation of public intellectuals.

Released in early 2021, *The Fabric of Dissent: Public Intellectuals in South*

Africa features 76 public intellectuals who helped change the course of South Africa's history during turbulent times. Edited by Vasu Reddy, Narnia Bohler-Muller, Gregory Houston, Maxi Schoeman and Heather Thuynsma, the book began its journey to publication long before the COVID-19 pandemic. Yet, it is timely for sensitising the reader about the complexity of the world's wicked problems and the kind of thinkers who may help us find the answers.

What is a wicked problem?

Wicked problems involve complex interactions between social, health, economic, environmental or political challenges. Resolving them requires multidisciplinary interventions by academics, experts, those with practical experience on the ground, and importantly, input from those with a deep understanding of, and empathy with, the most vulnerable in society.

"One could claim that COVID-19 is one such wicked problem because it touches on virtually all aspects of our lives," says Reddy, dean of

the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Pretoria (UP). "It is a public-health problem with deep consequences for physical and social survival and the economy. In South Africa, this is worsened by existing poverty and inequality, which are wicked problems themselves. Along with the interconnected struggles around race, class and gender, these are global challenges," he says.

Who is a public intellectual?

Reddy describes public intellectuals as people who perform intellectual labour in the service of the public. They are deeply engaged, committed and enquiring thinkers who, through their ideas and work, leave deep imprints on society.

"They are dissatisfied with the status quo and are willing to take a stand on issues. Through their life work, public intellectuals expose social evils and wicked problems in the broader service of democracy and humanity ... by speaking out for liberty, equality and justice and prioritising criticism over pure solidarity.

The late singer and civil rights activist Miriam Makeba is one of the cultural public intellectuals featured in The Fabric of Dissent. *Here, she performs at the launch of the International Year against Apartheid at UNESCO's Paris Headquarters on 21 March 1978.* **Photo:** *Dominique Roger, Wikimedia Commons*

"In *The Fabric of Dissent*, we adopted an inclusive definition featuring public intellectuals from diverse communities, not only from universities but from all of society's institutions, creative cultures as well as participants in social, class and political struggles."

Speaking truth to power

The work of the Palestinian cultural critic and literary scholar, Edward Said, informed much of the thinking for the book. "At the heart of Said's views is that the intellectual is someone whose place it is to publicly raise embarrassing questions, to confront dogma, and who cannot easily be corrupted by states and corporations ... someone whose *raison d'être* is to represent those people and issues that are routinely forgotten or swept under the rug," said Reddy at the book launch at the 2020 virtual Science Forum 2020 in December.

"We are in a moment where intellectual activity is at risk of being subsumed by populism, nationalism, fascism, fake news and, very often,

social media. The book values public activity, intellectual activity, and celebrates the role it has played in South Africa. We feature people who challenge convention and who have risked everything in that process. They have confronted the undemocratic, the inhumane that goes counter to truth, equality, kindness and dignity."

Four types of public intellectuals

Bohler-Muller, who heads the HSRC's Developmental, Capable and Ethical State research division, says the process to select the 76 intellectuals was robust. The editors and the contributors come from various disciplines and the book was also peer-reviewed.

The individuals are categorised in four parts – political, cultural, academic and organic public intellectuals – presented as short vignettes with an introduction to each section.

Among the 24 political public intellectuals featured are Nelson Mandela, Oliver Tambo, Walter

Sisulu, Beyers Naudé and Helen Suzman; people whose discovery and advocacy of significant political and social ideas have helped to change the course of history.

Cultural intellectuals are creative artists, including musicians, actors, satirists and stand-up comedians. The 21 people in this section include Nadine Gordimer, Miriam Makeba, Pieter-Dirk Uys and Trevor Noah.

"Academic intellectuals are usually but not always located in a university or science council," says Reddy. "These academics live for more than their academic pursuits. Their insights are about focused discovery and advocacy of significant ideas to intellectually reshape society."

Archie Mafeje, Fatima Meer, Jakes Gerwel and former HSRC CEO, Olive Shisana, are among the 14 academic intellectuals featured.

Solomon Plaatje, Elinor Sisulu and Zackie Achmat count among the 17 organic public intellectuals featured in the fourth part; people who have been instrumental in class struggles
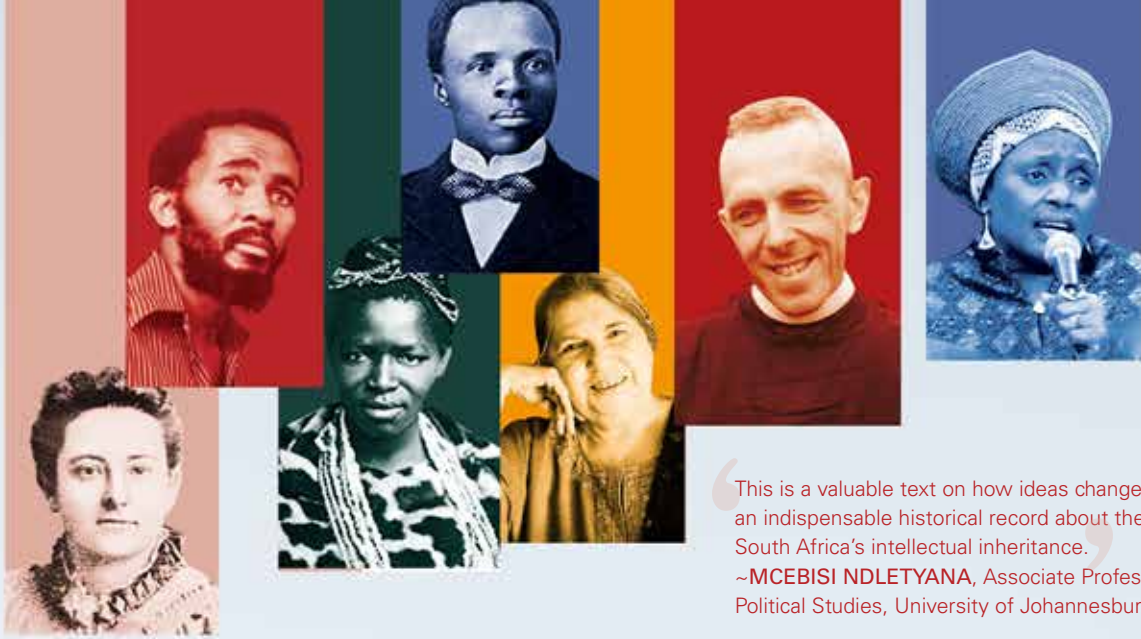
> This is a valuable text on how ideas change society, and an indispensable historical record about the richness of South Africa's intellectual inheritance.
> ~**MCEBISI NDLETYANA**, Associate Professor of Political Studies, University of Johannesburg

> In the context of place and time, dissent comes through not as a negation but as a constructive foundation of society. *The Fabric of Dissent* is an excellent introduction to an understanding of the making of South African society.
> ~**ROMILA THAPAR**, Emeritus Professor, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, author of *Voices of Dissent: An Essay* (2020)

and social movements and who focused on the marginalised and oppressed, says Reddy.

Are we hearing out our public intellectuals in the current crisis?

Public intellectuals enable us to see the world differently by exposing us to alternative ways of seeing and re-envisioning the world, says Reddy. "We should be listening to a range of voices, including those of intellectuals, global leaders, activists and ordinary people who are driven by a sense of obligation to social commitment and civil courage."

At the book launch, Professor William Gumede, an associate professor at the Wits School of Governance, warned against an "ideology" of intellectual conformity, be it to governing or opposition party lines, culture, religion, or fixed political and economic ideas. "Uncritical conformity undermines innovation, intellectual vibrancy and diversity … and, in the long term, undermines development," he said.

Gumede also warned of the corruption of public discourse.

"Increasingly, it seems, to become a public intellectual in this country depends on who shouts the loudest,

who sounds the most radical and is the most extreme." Only those who are seen as like-minded are allowed to express their views in public.

"Honest public intellectuals who can bring new ideas, policy options and leadership, often censor themselves and withdraw from public engagement for fear of being denigrated. This undermines public debate."

Dr Sithembile Mbete from UP's Department of Political Sciences emphasised the importance of including more contemporary figures in future volumes, especially women who have helped to shape the concept of womanhood in post-apartheid South Africa, as well as individuals from the Fallist movement and younger members of political parties, such as the EFF, "to really test the boundaries" of what we define as a public intellectual.

Who should read this?

Reddy and Bohler-Muller believe the book will have a broad public appeal.

"It has relevance to policymakers, scholars, students, interest groups, activists, academic libraries and the general market both in South Africa and globally. It will appeal to readers who have a deep interest

in the formative ideas and legacies of prominent South African public intellectuals," says Reddy.

There have been books and volumes written about public intellectuals before in South Africa, but this is something different and pioneering, adds Bohler-Muller. "We present a 'broad church', which includes public intellectuals from a range of ideologies and perspectives."

"The narratives in the book are inspirational and [will] continue to change the way we perceive ourselves as South African and how we perceive [those] who we consider as other. These are narratives that endure over time and space."

The vignettes for a second volume are ready for peer review and it will cover about 82 public intellectuals, some of them more contemporary and younger. The working title is *Stitching together stories of dissent*.

COVID-19 SURVEY ON PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES:

Enabling better responses to future crises

Tim Hart, senior research manager in the HSRC's Developmental, Capable and Ethical State research division.

The national COVID-19 Survey on Persons with Disabilities in South Africa is due to start in 2021. The HSRC's Tim Hart, one of the study coordinators, answers some questions about the upcoming survey and how it aims to shed light on the socioeconomic, well-being, and human-rights-related experiences of people with disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic.

What gave you the idea for the survey?

In early May 2020, I proposed that the HSRC and the National Council of and for Persons with Disabilities conduct a study that looked specifically at the challenges encountered by persons with disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic. Most of the work arising from COVID-19 surveys in South Africa have largely ignored this group or exclusively focused on support organisations and carers, or specific groups and disability types. Two national surveys – one led by Stellenbosch University (August 2020) and the other by the Ministry of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities (Jan 2021) – have since attempted to fill this gap in understanding. However, there is a need for research that reaches a larger and more representative sample of this population in SA.

Shortly after that, I noticed a call for research proposals from United Kingdom Research and Innovation, and we submitted a joint proposal, with the Institute of Development Studies in the United Kingdom as the lead. The focus of our collaborative study is to include the voices of all persons with disabilities. We want to get a better understanding of their socioeconomic, well-being and human-rights-related experiences during COVID-19 in South Africa.

I imagine that raising awareness might be difficult given the diversity of impairments, especially in South Africa where socioeconomic contexts are also wide-ranging. How do we have an inclusive conversation around disability, and make sure the needs of people with disabilities are not overlooked?

One of the challenges is that those who identify as persons with disabilities are not always a cohesive group. There is a need to engage them in inclusive conversations. We also need to support conversations with those who work and socialise with people with disabilities. Often ignorance, misunderstanding and stereotypes create social rifts and discord.

It is important to remember that people have impairments: society is disabling due to its ignorance about these and their diversity. Society consequently does not realise how it manufactures disabling physical and social environments and creates stereotypes.

Many organisations simply focus on ramps and toilets and think they have ensured reasonable accommodation. However, this is often done by simply altering existing facilities without consulting experts and persons with disabilities.

Furthermore, many interventions that could help to remove disabling factors are also beneficial for those without impairments. For example, subtitles, better lighting and acoustics, clearer speech, and manoeuvrable spaces that accommodate people with wheelchairs etc., benefit many other people as well.

How might persons with disabilities have been differently affected by COVID-19

Everybody has been affected by COVID-19 in some way; losing loved ones, suffering job losses, etc. But, as a vulnerable population with generally poorer access to services, many persons with disabilities will have been more harshly affected. During lockdown, some people with disabilities were unable to obtain necessary services. For example, access to audiologists and optometrists were reportedly restricted during level 5, meaning that hearing aids and spectacles could not be repaired and replaced.

Others could not access public transport to get to private and public hospitals. Similarly, some caregivers were prevented from assisting clients or could not perform their functions suitably due to travel restrictions.

People with severe impairments are likely to have been worse affected, as well as individuals in low-income socioeconomic areas, the unemployed, and those who lost their jobs due to COVID-19 regulations. Women, children and the elderly with impairments may also have felt the effects differently. There have also been reports that people who had applied for temporary disability grants several months before lockdown had these stopped and they had to access the Social Relief of Distress Grant, as reapplications had been suspended.

On a slightly more positive note, COVID-19 has shone a spotlight on just how fractured our society is, and some steps are being taken to address this state of affairs. Whether these good intentions will continue is yet to be seen.

Were people with disabilities included in the state response?

It would seem not specifically and not clearly. The _White Paper on the Rights of Person's with Disability and the related Implementation Matrix_ points out some crucial requirements. However, the regulations did not make particular allowances for persons with disabilities and they were treated much the same as other members of the population, despite their specific needs.

One of the purposes of our research is to explore this issue deeper, including the regulatory and personal experience perspectives.

How will survey participants be reached?

Essentially this will be a snowball sample. Participants will initially be reached using various public, private and civil society stakeholder networks. We would like to get responses from at least 4 000 people with disabilities. Completing the survey and providing us with findings is in their interest.

One of the challenges is that a detailed database of persons with disabilities doesn't exist as organisations interact with different persons with disabilities in different ways, and different legislation has different ways of identifying persons with disabilities. Hence the need for an inclusive snowballing approach.

How might the research inform future responses to crises?

We will analyse participants' reported experiences and look at how this information can be used to advise policy. We will also present the findings at webinars where persons with disabilities will have the opportunity to give us further feedback.

Several local and international organisations have supported research on the experiences of persons with disabilities during COVID-19, and hopefully the government will work with these organisations, and with us, to improve the circumstances of

persons with disabilities in the event of future disasters, and also more generally.

Note: _This national research project is funded by United Kingdom Research and Innovation through the UK Government's Global Challenges Research Fund and the Newton Fund. Partners include the HSRC, the National Council of and for Persons with Disabilities, and the Institute of Development Studies in the United Kingdom._

In May 2020, two men keep their physical distance on a bus in Brisbane, Australia, a country that was spared much of the COVID-19 pandemic at the time. Only the person in the wheelchair is wearing a face mask. **Photo:** _John Robert McPherson, Wikimedia Commons_

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Further reading: _The disabling and enabling effects of COVID-19 by Tim Hart, 3 December 2020._

How South Africa can prepare for a data-driven education system

Blackboard forgotten? Children are working on laptops in this classroom.
Photo: *fauxels*, *Pexels*

Having access to digital technology has become central to efficient teaching and learning in schools, especially since the COVID-19 pandemic forced global school closures. *Mmaki Jantjies* and *Paul Plantinga* consider inequalities and highlight the importance of a data policy for the South African education system in this article that first appeared in *The Conversation*.

There are significant disparities in South Africa's education system. Schools are divided into quintiles, from one to five. The poorest, in quintile one, struggle enormously with a lack of resources and support. They also tend to have poorer educational outcomes. That has a direct effect on university admission and outcomes.

One of the government's attempts to address these inequalities is through technology. This began as early as 2003 with the *Draft White Paper on e-Education*. These and similar policies aim to resource more marginalised schools, universities and colleges with digital tools in a bid to "leapfrog" access to interactive learning content and improved administrative capabilities. COVID-19 lockdowns

have made this approach "imperative…now the only thing we can do", according to the Department of Basic Education.

More and more, data and data-driven tools are emerging as a central feature of this digital response. Developers of these technologies promise a new level of insight and automation that mimics human intelligence. They argue that this will bring greater efficiency and effectiveness to both teaching and learning as well as to administrative processes. They suggest that performance dashboards, automated assessments, chat bots and adaptive learning technologies can mitigate many of the challenges faced by the country's teachers, lecturers, district managers and university administrators.

There's a growing global evidence base to support these kinds of approaches. For instance, teachers in under-resourced schools with large classes could use technology to gather individualised data. With this, they could develop more personalised learning experiences for pupils based on their strengths and weaknesses.

Data form the backbone of these tools. The growth of machine learning and other intelligent applications has been stimulated by the increased collection and availability of data. Such data underlie the kinds of adaptive applications and emerging technologies that are proposed for use in the education system.

We collaborated on a guide that examines how South Africa can ensure its data policy and governance takes some of the lessons and concerns from previous education technology implementations into account. It also considers the practical steps needed for this to happen. The guide is part of a series curated by the HSRC's Policy Action Network project.

Here are some of the issues a data policy for South Africa's education system should consider.

Technology impact

Experience shows that simply providing technology to teachers or students has a limited effect on educational outcomes. The benefits of online, assisted learning and behavioural interventions also vary depending on how technology is used, and in what context. This is highlighted in working papers that review the effectiveness of educational technology globally and in developing countries.

In South Africa, questions about effectiveness are amplified. That's because of concerns about unequal Internet access. Cost-effectiveness and teacher perceptions are also issues.

Data management

A key issue centres on how data are collected, shared and used. Personal information must be kept private. Education institutions need to comply with the Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA), which comes into force effect later in 2021.

Another question relates to the sharing and reuse of education data across the wider spectrum. This ranges from the content of books and journal articles to administrative data, such as student enrolments and graduations. Sharing or publishing this data in a responsible way can stimulate the development of many creative and useful applications. But data sharing intersects with evolving copyright laws and debates around ownership and reuse. These will have implications for data-driven innovation in the sector.

A third point is to reckon with well-documented concerns about bias embedded in existing data that are being used in decision-support applications. If this isn't dealt with, data-driven applications may reinforce historical prejudices and practices related to education.

A holistic policy response

South Africa doesn't have to reinvent the wheel to deal with these issues. Other countries are exploring policy approaches that could guide or inform a local approach. For instance, a governmental think tank in India developed a national artificial intelligence (AI) strategy. This points to various examples of how the country can use AI technologies to support education. Importantly, however, it also suggests replicating the UK's Centre for Data Ethics and Innovation to ensure ethical and safe use of data.

Echoing this approach, a report commissioned by the Australian National Department of Education outlines how critical it is that the application of AI should accord with human rights.

There are also existing resources in South Africa. These include the recently released 4th Industrial Revolution (4IR) report and recommendations from a 2019 Department of Higher Education and Training discussion on 4IR implications. POPIA and related legislation provide guidance on how data should be published, used and handled, including for automated decision-making.

These resources recognise that a variety of underlying issues need to be addressed to benefit from data-driven innovation, such as connectivity and processing capacity. AI-powered systems are resource-intensive. Any introduction of data services will require a supportive digital infrastructure plan that addresses performance, security and inclusion.

Another priority is skills. There are existing guidelines to support teachers using digital technologies. These guidelines recognise the interdependent nature of content, ways of teaching and technology. Additional training and updated guidelines will be needed to address the role and use of data, probably starting with a broad data literacy programme.

But more will be needed. Technology policy, adoption and spending in education often involves more than one ministry. This makes early engagement and communication important.

Specific policies will have to be updated or developed to guide the use and implementation of data, machine learning and the wider spectrum of automated decision-making tools. These should govern how data are collected, handled and shared to balance relevant transparency, privacy and ethics principles and laws. Educators, policymakers, researchers and innovators in the sector all need to get involved.

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Informal backyard housing development at a CROSSROADS

Townships in Gauteng and the Western Cape are abuzz with construction activity as homeowners respond to the need for housing by building and upgrading backyard rental units. This trend has the potential to improve living standards in townships and make cities more compact, integrated and efficient. A recent gathering of public- and private-sector representatives agreed that the government needs to support individuals by simplifying the building process and drawing investment into townships and informal settlements.
By Andrea Teagle

*Xoliswa Sidinile outside her property in Khayelitsha, Cape Town, December 2020. **Photo:** Andrea Teagle*

When Xoliswa Sidinile (40) left the Eastern Cape for Cape Town in 1998, she could only afford a simple shack. In 2015, she and her husband received an RDP house in Khayelitsha. Like many others in the area, she built a shack in the back yard. Today, that shack has been replaced by a smart, two-storey block of flats. Sidinile's story tracks the changing nature of backyard housing rental in South African townships.

Informal rental housing is an integral part of the housing landscape in South Africa, a product of historical spatial segregation and urbanisation. In the 1990s, two-storey rental units were unheard of and most landlords only received enough rent to cover their costs – what the HSRC's Andreas Scheba and Ivan Turok termed

subsistence letting. The formal housing market, rather than reducing informal renting, ironically augmented it, as many RDP owners began to rent out backyard space in what has become a particularly South African phenomenon.

In the last few years, this market has boomed, with backyard rental dwellings becoming the dominant type of informal rental housing. While shacks are still most common, many homeowners like Sidinile are upgrading their units, contributing to improved living conditions in some areas.

"Higher-quality backyard renting is emerging in places like Delft [also a Cape Town township] because of the growing demand from young black professionals and white-collar workers," write Scheba and Turok. These individuals are seeking to be closer to jobs, or to transport networks, and often don't intend to stay in the flats permanently.

Speakers at a recent HSRC webinar on backyard rental outlined how, with enough set-ups like Sidinile's, neighbourhoods and cities can start to function differently. Development creates jobs and enhances skills.

Second-floor flats can clear the ground-level spaces for commercial activity, turning main streets into economic hubs. As Turok writes, building upwards rather than outwards is necessary to realise the promise of urban density. Transport, schools and clinics become more viable. This is the backyard real estate story with a happy ending.

There is, however, another all-too-familiar end to this story, one that is characterised by ramshackle buildings and overcrowded conditions, failing infrastructure, and no access to basic services. At the webinar, the City of Cape Town's Charles Rudman, executive director of the Spatial Planning and Environment Portfolio Committee, noted how in Dunoon, another township on the outskirts of Cape Town, a laissez-faire approach has resulted in raw sewage in the streets, structural instability and an increased risk for fires. A downward spiral like this can result from municipal ambivalence and neglect of intensive backyard renting.

Streamlining regulations

Rudman, who previously worked for the Khayelitsha planning office, reported that an analysis undertaken

by the City of Cape Town showed that between 2011 and 2018, enterprising households and small-scale developers in Khayelitsha built about 7 000 micro-rental units on 9 000 properties. Significantly, almost half of these (40%) were brick-and-mortar dwellings. Extrapolated across Khayelitsha, this amounts to an estimated 24 000 additional units.

However, as Rudman and other webinar presenters noted, the trend was happening not because of, but despite the government. "Official indifference to informal rental housing ... means the potential negative externalities (health and safety risks, unfair landlord-tenant relations, overloaded public infrastructure) can be neglected," Turok and Scheba write.

Speaking at the webinar, Scheba said, "We need to create a more appropriate regulatory environment, more streamlined administrative processes, and a strong enforcement capacity on the ground to support those bottom-up activities, which, until now, have largely been informal."

Some steps have been taken in this direction. According to Rudman, Cape Town's mayoral committee

has approved measures to enable property owners to develop small-scale accommodation. These include an agreement to amend the zoning in certain areas to eliminate the need for planning permission, and to create pre-approved, off-the-shelf building plans for homeowners to choose from. Small-scale builders would also be exempt from having to pay building-plan fees and the approval of small-scale building plans would be prioritised.

The committee had also agreed to establish a list of accredited registered credit providers. Funding public infrastructure would require further discussion, Rudman said.

In Gauteng, meanwhile, the draft Gauteng Township Economic Development bill aims to streamline bylaws that regulate commercial activity, and to allow for the designation of precincts and township high streets, said Jak Koseff, a representative of the Office of the Premier, Gauteng Provincial Government. (The same bill, however, is undermined by clauses that infringe on the rights of foreign migrants to participate in township economies.)

A precinct-based approach

One of the challenges of harnessing the potential of the backyard development trend is how to provide additional water and bulk infrastructure to cope with the growing population.

The speakers agreed that taking a forward-thinking, precinct-based approach to development would support access to electricity, water and other basic services. Such an approach could incorporate off-grid, micro-grid and micro-sanitation infrastructure that municipalities could buy from independent suppliers. Zama Mgwatyu of the Development Action Group suggested that the national government could assist municipalities by providing a municipal infrastructure grant. He also noted that traditional banks had shown little appetite to finance the sector.

Koseff argued that the private sector would enter the space if it had the option to invest in a portfolio of backyard upgrades, rather than individual developments. "[Banks] want to provide wholesale funding, possibly through instruments like our

township Economic Development Fund. But really, ultimately it doesn't matter who does the agglomeration, but agglomeration is needed ... to diversify the risk."

According to Koseff, Gauteng had partnered with Indlu, a mobile application that helps tenants find, pay for and manage their monthly rentals, to finance backyard development in certain areas of Gauteng. "Developing a precinct like Thembisa or large-scale sets of interlocking precincts in Alexandra, Soweto, etc. in Gauteng, is going to provide an opportunity to battle-test some of that regulatory reform."

Suggesting that Cape Town first focus on amending zoning in areas where development is already taking place, Rudman observed: "Sometimes you need to sell an approach to politicians."

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Dense housing in Khayelitsha, Cape Town
Photo: Johnny Miller

EMPOWERING
BACKYARD SHACK OWNERS

Innovative financing initiatives are seeking to provide more inclusive credit to entrepreneurial homeowners. Partnering with social enterprise Bitprop, Xoliswa Sidinile (40) went from an RDP homeowner to a subsistence landlord with a goal to expand her properties. Her story illustrates how, by helping individuals navigate the regulatory landscape and access finance, the state and the private sector can contribute to a positive development trend and better living conditions in South Africa's townships.
By *Andrea Teagle*

Many people in Xoliswa Sidinile's neighbourhood in Khayelitsha rent out backyard shacks. The going rate is R600 per month plus electricity, or R500 if backyarders construct the shacks themselves, Sidinile says.
Photo: *Andrea Teagle*

Music followed Xoliswa Sidinile as she strode out of her front door, a black and brown dog at her side. It was a warm December afternoon, and her teenage son was home for the school holidays. Behind the house rose a new, two-storey rental unit, painted the same rose pink as the main house. The windows were open and washing hung on a line outside to dry. One of Sidinile's tenants appeared in her doorway, and Sidinile waved.

"I didn't have funds to build the flats," recalled Sidinile, who is a domestic worker in Cape Town. According to research by the HSRC's Andreas Scheba and Ivan Turok, prospects for upgrading backyard shacks are limited for many low-income homeowners, despite widespread recognition of the benefits of more durable structures. Some can borrow money. Others, like Sidinile's neighbour, simply rent out shacks. According to Sidinile, shacks can be rented for R600 a month, plus electricity.

Upgrading these structures to solid, decent rental units requires state support to ensure more sustainable housing and better township environments.

"We need to look at more inclusive financing mechanisms that widen the net for homeowners and developers who want to engage and build better rental accommodation," said Scheba at a backyard real estate webinar in December. "Ideally, those financing options need to be low cost and low risk, and also come with technical and management support to assist homeowners and developers to, for example, meet basic compliance requirements, and formalise and ensure basic health and safety."

When Sidinile expressed interest in building backyard flats, her employer put her in contact with Bitprop co-founder Claire du Trevou. Cape Town-based Bitprop is one of the few private initiatives filling the financing and expertise gap in backyard real estate. (Others include Isiduli, TM Group and After 12.)

Bitprop's business model grants credit based on the earning potential of land, rather than on the income of developers, explained Du Trevou at the webinar. The enterprise manages the process on behalf of homeowners, from drawing up building plans, getting building approval, and subsequently managing the cashflow. To date, the start-up has

built 34 flats across 6 properties, with a plan to upscale.

Unlocking capital in land

In addition to widening the net of who can access finance, this type of model also benefits homeowners by transferring some of the risk to the financer. Because Bitprop makes its money by deducting part of the rental over a fixed period, it has a direct incentive to ensure that the homeowners are successful in finding tenants and maintaining good working relations.

"What we're piloting at the moment is [that] the capital amount is taken over by a financial institution, like a bank ... and it becomes a traditional home loan with the homeowner and then the homeowner settles with Britpop," Du Trevou said.

Once Sidinile had been approved, she and Bitprop agreed to divide the new building into three small units, because Sidinile reasoned they would be easier to rent out. It was the right decision: although the rates are still high for Khayelitsha (R2 100 each), Bitprop and Sidinile quickly found tenants through social media advertising.

Xoliswa Sidinile and her dog outside her ground-floor backyard rental flat in Khayelitsha, Cape Town, December 2020.
Photo: *Andrea Teagle*

"Even now, there are people coming and asking [if the flats are available]," Sidinile said. Studies in other parts of the country reflect this experience. In their research conducted in Delft South and Masiphumelele in Cape Town, Scheba and Turok found that all participants quickly rented out space. The commercialisation of backyard units reflects and contributes to improved socioeconomic conditions, they write.

Navigating building regulations

In the absence of this kind of support, navigating regulations is challenging. Also speaking at the webinar, the City of Cape Town's Charles Rudman, from the Spatial Planning and Environment Portfolio Committee, said there was a need for extensive public and community education around the National Building Regulations, and the value-add of abiding by regulations. Zama Mgwatyu of the not-for-profit Development Action Group noted a backlog in title deeds from the government's side. He also suggested that the role of the National Home Builders Registration Council (NHBRC) be redefined. "The regulations laid out by the NHBRC are not supportive of this particular sector."

Jak Koseff, from the Office of the Premier, Gauteng Provincial Government, stressed that officials needed to be repositioned as sources of guidance and assistance on the ground. "The district planning office must be seen as a support hub to assist and facilitate small-scale development."

The state also has a role to play in supporting the development chain, from local builders and hardware suppliers to emerging property agents. "Some of the developers are not coming from the built environment field. How do we make sure that we capacitate them so that they can better understand the sector?" Mgwatyu challenged.

Emerging developers should be encouraged to organise themselves into a collective to engage constructively with the state, he said.

Top-down meets bottom-up

Koseff argued that while the trend had to be supported from the bottom-up, development was hitting a ceiling of bylaws. The state needed to be the enabling platform that brought together different stakeholders to drive a precinct-based approach.

"We need to be able to work with the local planning district around zoning regulations," Du Trevou asserted. "How do we start to look at mixed-use zoning, so that these spaces, especially along main roads within Khayelitsha, become activated edges rather than ... having dead, blank walls along some of our major transport routes?"

While the private sector and the government think about precinct-level approaches, entrepreneurs like Sidinile quietly continue to drive the trend. For the first two years, Sidinile receives only 25% of the rent from her backyard unit – the rest goes to Bitprop. This increases to half over the next three years, then 75% until, after 10 years, she will have paid back the capital.

Was partnering with Bitprop to build the unit worth it? Definitely, Sidinile said. In fact, she's thinking about saving up to eventually build another block of flats elsewhere to rent out. "In the end, [the unit] is going to be mine. I lived in a shack for I don't know how many years," she laughed. "Ten years is nothing."

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South Africa needs a single
ANTI-CORRUPTION
unit and real-time monitoring
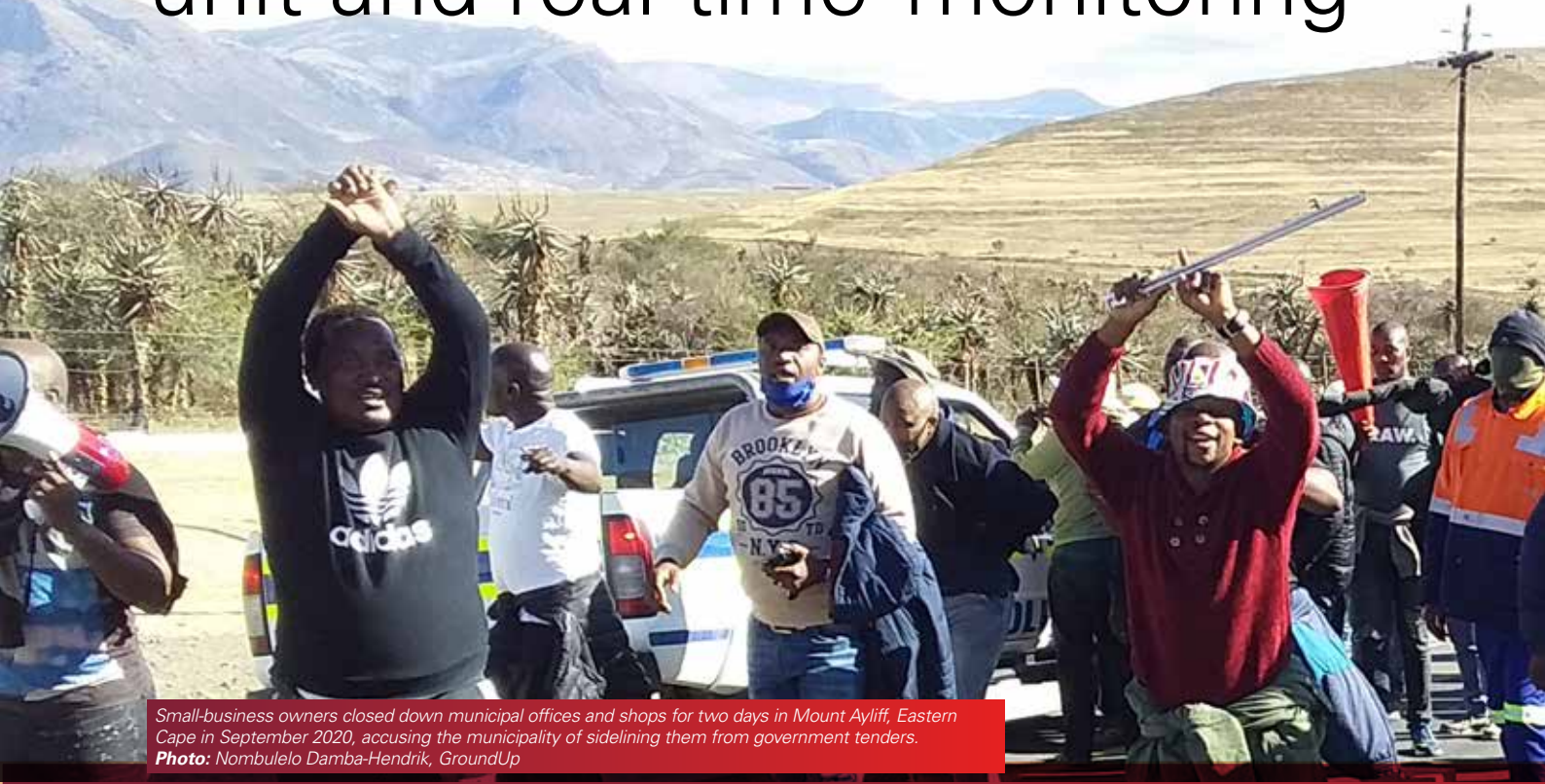
Small-business owners closed down municipal offices and shops for two days in Mount Ayliff, Eastern Cape in September 2020, accusing the municipality of sidelining them from government tenders.
Photo: *Nombulelo Damba-Hendrik, GroundUp*

Small-to-medium enterprises are an engine for economic growth in developing countries. They are, however, also disproportionately affected by state corruption. At a recent webinar co-hosted by the HSRC, delegates from the South Korean embassy and the Hankuk University of Foreign Studies shared lessons from their thriving SME sector and related the country's experiences in tackling corruption. Local researchers explored possible parallel solutions to corrupt procurement processes in South Africa. By *Andrea Teagle*

Small-to-medium enterprises (SMEs) are an important part of South Africa's economy, contributing between 20% and 34% of the country's GDP.

"But it's not all positive news," warned Professor Sope Williams-Elegbe from the University of Stellenbosch during the webinar on SME growth and corruption. "Research illustrates that, based on South Africa's GDP per capita, we should have three times the number of SMEs that we actually have at present. So we have a low rate of establishment and also a very low rate of survival."

Conversely, South Korea's growing economy is fuelled by SMEs, which reportedly comprise 99% of enterprises and account for 89% of employment. However, like South

Africa, South Korea has faced high levels of state corruption, Dr Jong-dae Park, ambassador of the Republic of Korea to South Africa, noted in his keynote address.

South Africa and South Korea both rank high on the global Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index (70th and 39th respectively out of 180 countries). South Korea has recorded a slight decline in public

perceptions of corruption over the past decade, Park said, although the score has increased over the past year.

State corruption impacts SMEs disproportionately by driving them out of procurement markets, Williams-Elegbe added. A 2017 study conducted in Kumasi Metropolis in Ghana, for example, found that a one percentage point increase in corruption was associated with a 36% decline in SME growth, measured by sales and employment.

Park recommended understanding the root causes of corruption as a starting point for addressing it. A survey conducted in South Korea revealed that the majority of Koreans (53.4% of the general public) viewed

their society as corrupt. The most commonly-cited cause of corruption was 'culture'. The culture is one of kinship, Park said, wherein people of the same groups tend to look out for each other.

Similarly, Williams-Elegbe identified kinship and tribal structures, which were intentionally stoked during apartheid "to put pressure on Africans to support their own", as a driver of state corruption in South Africa. At the root of corruption, she contended, was the fact that our governance models still mirror the inherently exploitative and extractive structures of a colonial government.

Overlap and loopholes
Led by law specialist Adv Gary Pienaar, the HSRC and the Open

Democracy Advice Centre undertook a scoping study on infrastructure corruption in South Africa, commissioned by the Infrastructure Transparency Initiative (CoST). The study, which involved research of public data, reports and interviews, found that corruption has massive ripple effects on business, the government and citizens.

The research revealed that the health of state-owned enterprises (SOEs) deteriorated in recent years, despite legislative reforms to tackle corruption. According to the auditor-general report of 2017-2018, more than half of public entities engaged in uncompetitive and unfair procurement processes, Pienaar said. The result was a loss of R28.4 billion by SOEs.

"Most often the poor performance [of SOEs] that was reported had been the result of inadequate controls, monitoring and oversight," Pienaar said, referring to findings of the 2016-2017 auditor-general report.

The CoST study revealed some unintended consequences of legislation intended to redress inequalities. For example, the Preferential Procurement Policy Framework, intended to favour local labour for construction projects, is being undermined by "business forums", Pienaar said. These groups, essentially a business mafia, use force or threats against small contractors, who are coerced to pay "protection money" to ensure they are able to complete their projects. One black owner of an SME reported that, after refusing to pay a bribe demanded by an official, the number and value of his public contracts with government departments in his province declined markedly.

In response, South Africa has introduced extensive anti-corruption legislation, some of which is promising. In 2018, for example, the Public Audit Amendment Act (2018) extended the powers of the auditor-general to enforce recommendations for remedial action and recover misappropriated money. "An individual responsible, including an official, can be held accountable to return those funds, which is a significant additional weapon in the arsenal of the auditor-general," Pienaar said.

However, Pienaar warned, too many anti-corruption agencies and departments with anti-corruption mandates lead to confusion, overlaps and loopholes that people can exploit, with anti-corruption efforts, such as the COVID-19 anti-corruption task team, becoming exercises in coordinating multiple moving parts. "There has been a long, ongoing call for a single independent anti-corruption agency in South Africa, much like South Korea has developed," said Pienaar.

The South Korean agency, the Anti-Corruption and Civil Rights Commission, is in charge of ensuring implementation of the commitments set out in the United Nations Convention against Corruption, which Korea endorsed and ratified in 2003, Professor Jaehoon Lee of Hankuk University of Foreign Studies said. Additionally, in 2016, the Four Corruption Vaccine project was launched as a real-time monitor of procurement processes.

Possibly South Africa's biggest weakness in its public procurement processes is that there is no transactional disclosure of financial interests, Pienaar noted. According to reports published by the Public Service Commission (PSC), public servants increasingly adhere to the required annual disclosure of their financial interests that may lead to a conflict of interests. However, neither the PSC nor any other oversight body currently undertakes any oversight or monitoring to ensure that public officials declare their financial interests in a given procurement process.

Lee emphasised that technology also has a role in combatting corruption, through making procurement transparent. Online e-procurement systems enable anybody and everybody to access information about a particular procurement process. While South Africa has an online e-Tender portal run by the National Treasury, Pienaar said, it is not kept up to date and not all relevant information is disclosed on the portal.

Capacity building

Williams-Elegbe noted that the public sector suffered a general lack of capacity, with roots in South Africa's poor education system. "So we have a lot of incompetence that looks like corruption."

Pienaar agreed, explaining that the lack of capacity starts at the project-design phase of procurement, through the supply chain management process and into project management, where, too often, private companies would be paid for work not done. In other instances, contractors are not paid on time due to concerns about possible corruption, negatively affecting the cash flow of SMEs.

Positively, the new Public Administration Management Act aims to build state capacity in terms

of navigating complex procurement processes, and in understanding, managing and avoiding conflicts of interest.

Drawing from South Korea's experiences, Park recommended that South Africa shift its focus from financial capital and natural resources, and develop its human and social capital. He said that cultivating a public "developmental mindset", which focused on productivity and performance, had been key to South Korea's economic transformation.

"Our country and society place huge value on work ethics, and to a large extent [this] can be considered as corporate ethics in governance as well."

On the policy front, from the 1960s onwards, South Korea encouraged productivity by offering companies financial incentives based on output. This lead to a virtuous cycle of reward and performance, ultimately fuelling

economic development, Park said. The relative contribution of SMEs to South Korea's economic growth increased in the 1980s with the introduction of additional research and development subsidy programmes for small enterprises.

Finally, Park recommended that South Africa prioritise stringent accountability throughout the public and private spheres. He argued that citizens should hold the government to account, while also taking responsibility for their own performance.

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Small-to-medium enterprises are disproportionately affected by state corruption.
Photo: *Jopwell, Pexels*

Access to nutrition information helps people to make better food choices.
**Photo:** *Jack Sparrow, Pexels*

Photo: @NappyStock

Access to nutrition information via information and communication technologies such as mobile phones, television, radio and the Internet may encourage people to eat more fruit and vegetables.
Photo: *Andrea Piacquadio, Pexels*

Sharing information through television and mobile devices can help **improve the consumption of fruit and vegetables**

A healthy diet is crucial to building a strong immune system, but how do we encourage people to eat better? Looking at data from the 2018 General Household Survey, HSRC researchers investigated the extent to which access to mobile phones, radios, televisions and the Internet leads to improved consumption of fruit and vegetables. By *Mudzunga Neluheni, Sikhulumile Sinyolo* and *Catherine Ndinda*

Eating more fruit and vegetables is beneficial to health and reduces the chances of diet-related non-communicable diseases. However, the levels of fruit and vegetable consumption in South Africa are generally low. Our analysis of the 2018 General Household Survey indicated that only 26% of the respondents consumed fruit and vegetables at least five times a day, which is the minimum level recommended by the World Health Organization (Fig 1). On average, households consumed fruit and vegetables 3.46 times per day, which is 31% below the WHO's recommended 5 times a day. This low consumption is likely to have worsened during the COVID-19 lockdown period, as online news reports indicated that many households 'panic bought' more foodstuff with long-term shelf life, before and during the early phase of lockdown in South Africa.

Figure 1. Frequency of fruit and vegetable consumption in South Africa, 2018

Number of times fruit and vegetables consumed in past 24 hours
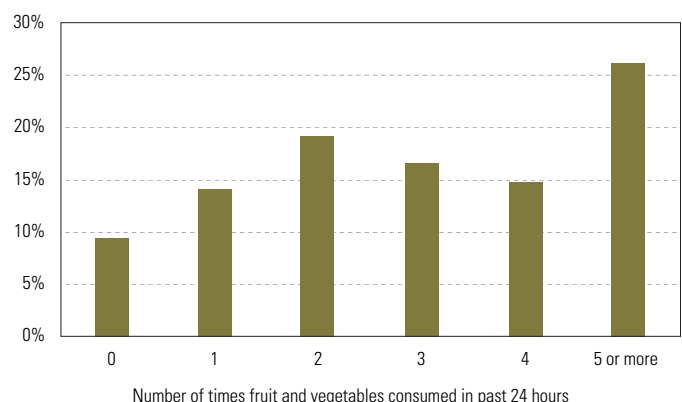
Besides the availability of fruit and vegetables, the lack of awareness and knowledge about their significance for peoples' health are cited as some of the key factors contributing to low consumption. As a result, the South African government has taken initiatives to increase health and nutrition awareness and to promote healthy behaviours through household visits and facilitating community dialogues. While these approaches may be effective, they do not reach enough people and are too expensive to scale up. The interventions outlined in South Africa's health and nutrition strategic documents, therefore, also include the use of mass media communication technologies including radio, television, and online and print media to improve nutrition education and awareness, with the intention of reaching large audiences. In recent years, there has also been a focus on the use of social media and web-based applications. However, it is not clear whether this approach has achieved much success. We used the 2018 General Household Survey to investigate the extent to which access to mobile phones, radios, televisions and the Internet leads to improved consumption of fruit and vegetables.

There are two main pathways through which information and communication technologies such as mobile phones, television, radio and the Internet can lead to increased consumption of healthy diets. Firstly, households who own or have access to communication technologies are expected to have easier access to nutrition information. Access to information is expected to increase nutrition knowledge and awareness, leading to behavioural changes and improved dietary practices. Secondly, the ownership of communication technologies improves coordination and reduces the costs of transacting. For example, access to the Internet, or a mobile phone, allows a household to search easily for information that relates to the availability, location, and prices of fruit and vegetables, or any other commodity the household is interested in, instead of incurring transport costs driving to the market, only to find that the commodity is perhaps not available. The reduction in costs incurred by households leads to increased net savings, which they can spend on fruit and vegetables.

Findings

Table 1 compares the number of times fruit and vegetables were consumed in households with access to mobile phones, radio, television and the Internet to households without these technologies. It shows that households with access to the four information and communication technologies, consumed fruit and vegetables more frequently than households with no access to these technologies. Further econometric analysis, which controlled for confounders, also found that access to any of the four information and communication technologies was associated with an increased frequency of fruit and vegetable consumption, and higher chances that a household would consume the minimum recommended levels. In other words, usage and access to information and communication technologies expand the possibility of changing diet patterns that favour an increased frequency in fruit and vegetable consumption among the population.

Table 1. Frequency of fruit and vegetable consumption and access to information and communication technologies

	Household has access	Household does not have access
	Frequency of fruit and vegetable consumption per day	
Mobile phones	3.51	2.21
Radio	3.77	3.12
Television	3.64	2.61
Internet	3.75	2.93

However, the types of information and communication technology had different effects on consumption. Our further analysis found that television had a higher effect on the consumption of fruit and vegetables than the other three technological modes. This suggests that video messaging is more effective than audio or texts when it comes to the promotion of healthy diets. The effectiveness of television in promoting the consumption of fruit and vegetables was more pronounced for fruit than for vegetables, whereas access to the internet was more strongly associated with increased consumption of vegetables than fruit. The role of mobile phones and radio was largely consistent across the models, suggesting that these two communication technologies can be used equally to promote the consumption of both fruit and vegetables.

Our findings suggest that while sharing nutrition information using any of these communication technologies is likely to improve fruit and vegetable consumption, the extent of the impact depends on the type of communication technology used. Further analysis also showed that demographics and socio-economic factors play an important role in shaping the fruit and vegetable consumption patterns of the people. For example, wealthier and more educated individuals consumed more fruit and vegetables than poorer households. Interestingly, those located in rural areas consumed fruit and vegetables more frequently than those in urban areas.

Our study concluded that there is scope to disseminate nutrition awareness and education programmes through mobile phones, the Internet, radio and television in South Africa. However, these should be tailored according to different socioeconomic profiles of the population. A one-size-fits-all approach is less likely to succeed.

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The impact of COVID-19 on informal food traders in SA

In 2020, HSRC researchers conducted a rapid assessment of the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on agriculture and the food system in South Africa. *Moyosoore Adetutu Babalola, Bongiwe Mcata* and *Matume Maila* share some findings on the experiences of informal food traders, so-called bakkie traders, cooked/prepared food traders, and fruit and vegetable traders.

Early in 2020, countries the world over started to close borders and restrict trade and movement in desperate attempts to contain SARS-CoV-2, the pandemic virus, which causes the disease COVID-19. In South Africa, HSRC experts warned about the effect on the country's food systems, not only for those who needed access to affordable and nutritious food but also for informal food traders who risked losing their livelihoods.

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations in South Africa and the national Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development contracted the HSRC to undertake specific research activities towards the first phase of an assessment of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on agriculture and the food system in South Africa. The study was conducted during the first wave of the pandemic, from March to October 2020. The purpose was to inform government responses to the pandemic, and to guide policies and actions to minimise disruptions to food supply chains, food trade, food demand, incomes and livelihoods, especially among poor and vulnerable segments of the population.

Disruptions to market activities

The study adopted a mixed-methods approach and used a combination of a desktop review of relevant literature and documents, secondary data analysis, and quantitative (survey) and qualitative (key informant interviews) primary data collection. For primary data collection, a sample of 804 informal food traders' data was collected across South Africa's nine provinces.

Informal food traders are key players in South Africa's food system, operating mainly as stall owners and hawkers and supplying high-density suburbs and informal settlements. Struck by poverty and unemployment, many people turn to this sector for an income, especially in times of crisis.

The first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic and the restrictions to curb its spread in South Africa interrupted many economic activities, resulting in the limited operation of formal and informal activities. The lockdown measures, which restricted the movement of people who did not have special permits, affected the sourcing of food items sold by informal traders. While the food sector was considered essential, there was lack of clarity on whether informal traders would also receive permits, especially during the early weeks of the hard lockdown. In addition, the closure of fresh produce markets due to the high infection rate disrupted the distribution of fruit and vegetables and put a strain on informal food traders who sourced their products from those markets. The survey showed that, on average, the number of times food items were procured per month declined by 33%. However, as the government lifted some of the lockdown regulations, informal traders were better able to acquire products from formal sources and less from other informal traders or farmers.

Reduced demand

Informal food traders were hard hit by a decrease in the number of customers, affecting the demand for the commodities sold. According to the results of the survey, 46% of informal traders experienced a huge drop in customer numbers, while 33% experienced a minor decrease. Overall, 79% of the informal traders experienced a decline in customer numbers. Moreover, the demand for perishable products sold by informal food traders was also affected, as consumers purchased products with a longer shelf life due to the movement ban, as well as fear of the virus. Furthermore, informal food traders reported that the reduction in the quantities bought by consumers per shopping trip resulted in them selling less. Over a quarter of the informal traders reported a big decline in the volumes customers bought per trip, while 40% indicated a small decline. The survey also revealed that during the first wave of the pandemic and amid the national lockdown, most informal traders (62%) experienced

Thabiso Tshepe sells fruit and vegetables at his brother's stand in the Marikana informal settlement in Philippi East.
***Photo:** Masixole Feni, GroundUp*

increased operating costs, with 33% reporting a steep rise. As a result, some increased the prices of their traded food items. In some instances, the price increase was mainly driven by dwindling local supplies and increasing local demand.

COVID-19 disruptions to livelihood

The numerous disruptions to the marketing activities of informal food traders resulted in many people losing their sources of livelihood. These disruptions were marked by revenue loss and food wastage due to reduced market participation. A huge proportion (71%) of informal food traders had to give away stock, while about 67% of them reported stock going to waste due to a lack of customers and failing to trade. This implied that many traders and their households became vulnerable to poverty and food insecurity, thus increasing the demand for food relief assistance.

Moreover, officials from NGOs observed an increase in the number of vulnerable individuals and households that required food relief mechanisms such as food aid, food vouchers and grants, i.e. money, since the start of the hard lockdown. The NGOs reported that these vulnerable beneficiaries were different from those whom they had normally catered for before the pandemic and lockdown. Many of the new beneficiaries were those whose livelihoods had been seriously compromised, including street vendors (informal food traders).

Conclusion and recommendations

The COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown restrictions revealed weaknesses in South Africa's agro-food system, especially for the informal food trade sector, given the vital role it plays within South African communities. Informal food traders should receive better support so that the sector can become sustainable. In this way, South

Africa's food sector could be more responsive and better able to survive future uncertainties, especially at grassroots level where the sector is dominated by informal food traders.

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Further reading:
* Projecting the likely impact of COVID-19 on food and nutrition security in South Africa – *HSRC Review*, April 2020
* Tackling hunger and malnutrition: It's about coordination, empowerment and sustainability – *HSRC Review*, November 2020
* Food for all: The need to measure healthy eating in SA – *HSRC Review*, June 2019

Policy brief: *Stronger policy coordination for better food and nutrition security outcomes*

BEING ALHIV AND STAYING ALIVE:

What do we know about adolescents living with HIV in South Africa?

As we approach the fourth decade of the HIV epidemic, gaps remain in understanding the health, behaviour and lived experiences of adolescents living with HIV in South Africa. *Inbarani Naidoo*, *Alicia North*, *Musawenkosi Mabaso* and *Nompumelelo Zungu* report key findings from a recently completed research study that explored the context and lived experiences of adolescents aged 10–19 years living with HIV in South Africa.

Many adolescents are infected with HIV before their fifteenth birthday.
Photo: Ron Lach, Pexels

Approximately 1.7 million adolescents aged 10–19 years are living with HIV in the world, the majority of them in sub-Saharan Africa. In addition, South Africa ranks as the highest HIV-burdened country in the world. New infections continue to occur, particularly among older adolescents. The pool of adolescents living with HIV (ALHIV) is not diminishing over time. South Africa needs to intensify prevention programmes from early adolescence to mitigate the later risk for HIV acquisition.

Adolescents acquire HIV through two main routes; mother-to-child transmission (perinatal) or through sexual transmission. When compared with adults living with HIV, ALHIV are less likely to know their HIV status or to access antiretroviral therapy (ART). Even after being initiated to ART, many are lost to follow-up and struggle with adherence.

The key findings presented below are based on data collected from the South African National HIV Prevalence, Incidence, Behaviour and Communication Surveys, which were conducted from 2005 to 2017. The methods used in these surveys rendered the findings generalisable to the whole population. We focused on describing who the ALHIV were (demographics); the number of HIV infections among adolescents (HIV prevalence); the number of new infections among adolescents (HIV incidence); their HIV-related risk behaviours; and knowledge and misconceptions about HIV.

HIV prevalence highest among older teenage girls

In South Africa, HIV testing of children is not routine and many asymptomatic children with HIV remain undiagnosed. Moreover, their parents or caregivers have to provide consent for them to be tested if they are 12 years or younger. Even during adolescence, the rationale for testing would mainly be determined by exposure to potential sexual transmission or, for females, during pregnancy.

Our research found that HIV prevalence among adolescents in the 10–19-year age group declined from 3.6% in 2005 to 3.0% in 2012, but increased to 3.7% in 2017. That means 360 582 adolescents aged 10–19 years were living with HIV in South Africa in 2017. This substantial number, coupled with the proportion of ALHIV who did not know their HIV status, points to a need for a provider-initiated HIV testing campaign targeted at children and adolescents, especially those born to HIV-positive mothers or who were exposed to HIV sexually. This can promote early diagnosis and referral for treatment.

Figure 1. HIV prevalence among adolescents aged 10–19 years, South Africa 2005–2017
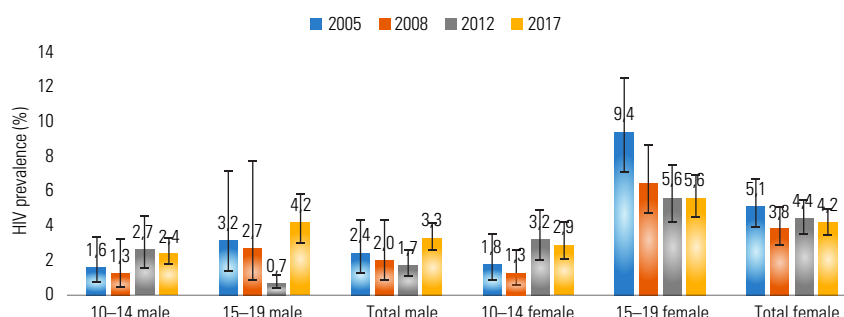
Our calculation of HIV prevalence among adolescents revealed differences by age and gender (Figure 1). A total of 136 913 were 10–14 years old while 223 669 were 15–19 years old. Among all ALHIV aged 10–19 years, 202 923 were female and 157 659 were male. Females aged 15–19 years had the highest HIV prevalence compared to other age groups and also had the most HIV infections throughout all survey years.

Half of ALHIV not yet on treatment

Less than two-thirds of HIV-positive adolescents (62.3%) aged 10–19 years knew their status, which means that nearly 4 in 10 adolescents with HIV indicated that they did not know their status. Similarly, only about two-thirds (65.4%) of ALHIV who knew their HIV status were on ART. Among ALHIV on ART, 78.1% had viral suppression. This suggests that nearly half of ALHIV (49%) were not receiving treatment and were at risk of transmitting HIV to others.

Who are the ALHIV in South Africa?

In the 2017 survey, 8 741 adolescents provided a sample for HIV testing. Nearly all ALHIV (95.4%) were black African. The majority of adolescents aged 15–19 years were in school (86.7%) or unemployed (94.2%). A total of 3.6% of female ALHIV said they were married. Figure 2 shows the distribution of ALHIV by province.

Figure 2. Map showing proportion (%) of ALHIV aged 10–19 years by province, South Africa, 2017
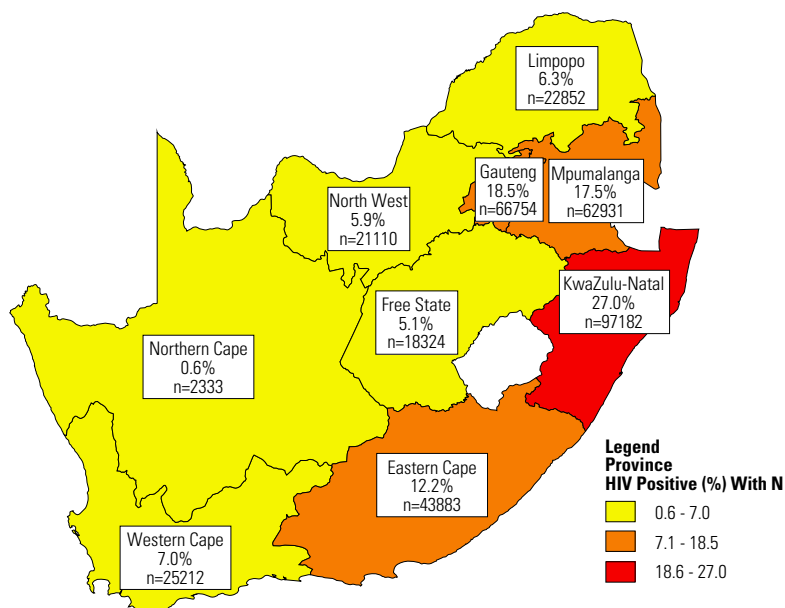
Most ALHIV aged 10–19 years (53.2%) lived in urban or rural informal areas (42.5%) and 4.3% on farms. The majority of ALHIV lived in KwaZulu-Natal, an estimated 27.0% (n=97 182). This was followed by Gauteng with 18.5% (n=66 754) and the Eastern Cape with 17.5% (n=43 883). The Northern Cape had the lowest proportion of ALHIV (0.6%).

New infections continue among adolescents

Figure 3 shows the incidence rate among adolescents. Overall, the incidence rate (the number of new infections estimated using mathematical models) declined from 0.50% in 2012 to 0.39% in 2017. However, among older adolescents (aged 15–19 years), the incidence remained comparable at 0.87% in 2012 and 0.82% in 2017. The rate of new infections will continue to contribute to HIV prevalence in this age group. To better understand the underlying reasons for this, we analysed high-risk sexual behaviours.

Figure 3: Incidence rates among 10–19-year-old adolescents and 15–19-year-old adolescents
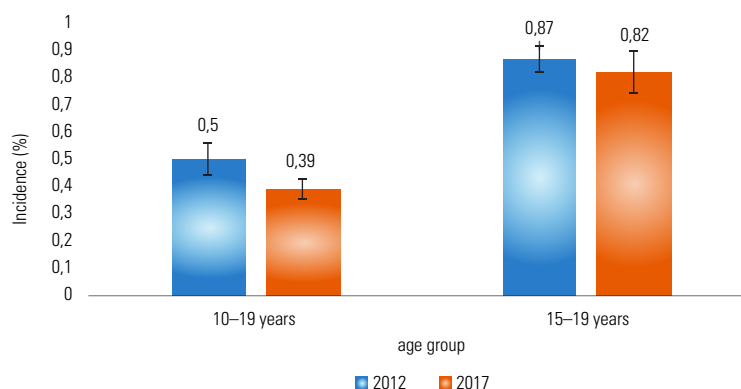

NB: Incidence data were insufficient for reliable estimates by sex and for younger adolescents aged 10–14 years.

Increase in high-risk sexual behaviours

We analysed risk behaviours and relationship practices that are associated with increased risk of contracting HIV among females. These risk behaviours included: ever having had sex; having had sex in the past year; early sexual debut (before age 15 years); multiple (two or more) sexual partners; age-disparate sex (having a most recent partner who was five years or more older than themselves); and condom use at last sexual encounter.

Figure 4. HIV risk behaviours among female adolescents aged 15–19, South Africa, 2005–2017
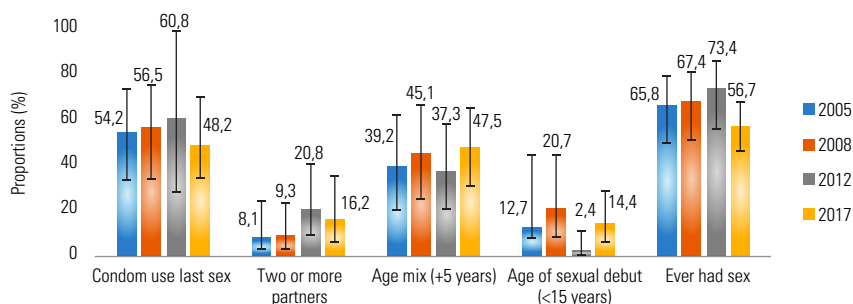
The analysis showed an increase in high-risk sexual behaviours from 2005 to 2017. Early sexual debut rose from 12.7% to 14.4%; having an age-disparate relationship rose from 39.2% to 47.5%; and having multiple sexual partners doubled from 8.1% to 16.2%. Furthermore, using a condom at last sexual encounter declined from 54.2% to 48.2%. Most concerning was that young female ALHIV aged 15–19 years had higher levels of engaging in risky sexual behaviours, compared to their HIV-negative peers.

Knowledge levels and rejection of myths were also measured using standardised HIV-knowledge questions. We found that knowledge about HIV was generally low. However, knowledge was higher among ALHIV aged 15–19 years compared to those aged 12–14 years.

Key messages

Prevention of new infections

Our analyses of ALHIV aged 10–14 and ALHIV of 15–19 years as separate groups highlighted that new infections, particularly among older adolescents, did not decline much between 2012 and 2017. The vulnerability of young females remains a concern. The key social drivers for adolescent infection were high-risk sexual behaviours including unprotected sex, being sexually active before 15 years of age, and age-disparate relationships.

We recommend specific interventions for adolescents of 10–14 years of age to reduce their risk of being infected in late adolescence and to manage living with HIV if they were infected from birth. To reduce new infections among all adolescents, both transmission routes must remain on the agenda in the public-health response to containing the epidemic in the general population. For ALHIV, 'positive prevention' means increasing the number of adolescents who access ART and have the correct knowledge about how they could reduce onward transmission through the use of condoms, by accessing ART, and adhering to ART regimes to achieve viral suppression.

Need for adolescent- and family-friendly support services

There is still a need for focused work to understand how young men and women are socialised in different contexts in South Africa with a special focus on gender-specific risk and behaviour. Programmes focused on HIV prevention need to be intensified to substantially reduce the number of new infections among adolescents.

Gaps exist with regards to entry to care and support for adolescents. Interventions are required that recognise the contextual factors that challenge the health and well-being of ALHIV, and therefore need to include their immediate family, working together with health-care workers. Schools should furthermore be better used as spaces for intervention. Both adolescents and guardians must be included in routine provider-initiated testing and counselling and guardians need to be assisted in the disclosure process to improve early diagnosis and ART adherence. For adolescents to achieve positive sexual-health outcomes, adolescent-friendly sexual and reproductive health services and support need to be scaled up urgently.

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The Fabric of Dissent
Public intellectuals in South Africa

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Cover design:	Lauren Gormley
Pub month and year:	January 2021
ISBN (soft cover):	978-1-928246-40-4
Format:	176mm x 250mm
Extent:	488pp

Price **R450**

ABOUT THE BOOK

Who or what is a public intellectual and how are they created? What is the role of the public intellectual in social, cultural, political and academic contexts? What are the kinds of questions they raise? What compels intellectuals to put forward their ideas?

The Fabric of Dissent: Public Intellectuals in South Africa is a pioneering volume, representing a rich tapestry of South Africans who were able to rise beyond narrow formulations of identity into a larger sense of what it means to be human. Each brief portrait provides readers with an opportunity to consider the context, influences and unique tensions that shaped the people assembled here. In its entirety, the book showcases an astonishing array of achievements and bears testimony to the deep imprint of these public intellectuals. As South Africans continue to grapple with their past, present and future, it is clear that the insights of these remarkable people into reimagining an inclusive society continue to be relevant today.

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Hack with a Grenade
An editor's backstories of SA news

BEST RED

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Cover design:	Malick Abarder
Cover illustration:	Dayaan Abarder
Pub month and year:	November 2020
ISBN (soft cover):	978-1-928246-38-1
Format:	210mm x 148mm
Extent:	192pp

Price **R250**

ABOUT THE BOOK

Hack with a Grenade: An Editor's Backstories of SA News is a newspaper editor's perspective on the characters that shape South Africa's psyche. The author, Gasant Abarder, is a journalist who worked in print, radio and television newsrooms in both Cape Town and Johannesburg for 21 years. Along the way, he encountered homeless people, reformed prison gangsters, struggle heroes, artists and sports personalities. In *Hack with a Grenade*, Abarder uses the stories of these characters to provide social commentary on issues like religion, prejudice and injustice – all with a healthy dose of humour. It is a book about journalism but also about South African life. It is also a social commentary that begins to strip away our prejudices as South Africans and to shine a light on our common humanity.

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