



HSRC
Human Sciences
Research Council

REVIEW

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SPECIAL EDITION

Special Edition: World Social Science Forum 2015

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POSSIBLE?
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A just world: social science pledges its commitment

Inspired by this experience, we, the participants of the 2015 World Social Science Forum ... believe that together, bolstered by our social science knowledge, skill and power, we will contribute to end injustice and inequality globally, regionally and locally, as well as in our own work and home spaces.'

With these words expressed in the format of a declaration, the World Social Science Forum 2015 (WSSF2015) concluded its four-day meeting in Durban, held from 13 to 16 September 2015.

The WSSF is a global event of the International Social Science Council (ISSC) that takes place every third year. This event was organised by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) of South Africa together with the Dakar-based Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA), with the former HSRC CEO, Professor Olive Shisana, acting as the conference chair.

In this special WSSF2015 edition, we cover a wide variety of topics in no specific order, but all addressing the conference theme, *Transforming global relations for a just world*, in one way or another. And as the WSSF2015 declaration states, 'the forum brought together leading thinkers and policy makers from around the globe with the objective of furthering collective understandings of inequalities for the purpose of addressing injustice'. In this edition you will read about the trends, magnitude, nature, causes, manifestations and drivers of inequalities and injustices.

The declaration includes 10 commitments made by leaders of social science institutions, among others, to pursue research on 'reliable and multi-dimensional indicators on inequalities and injustices'; to produce evidence to highlight issues requiring urgent attention and action, such as gender disparities and the integration of youth in work places, and to support efforts to achieve 'legally binding and universal agreement' avoiding dangerous human interference with the climate system.

The full text of the WSSF2015 declaration is available on www.wssf2015.org/declaration.html.

On a lighter note, academic conferences seldom feature prominently in social media, but in this case, social scientists took up the challenge and at around 11h30 on Sunday, 13 September 2015, #WSSF2015 hit the third spot on Twitter in South Africa.

Another novelty of the conference was the WSSF app (mobile application), which served as a paperless instrument that attendees could upload onto smart devices, such as cellphones and tablets, allowing them to have the most up-to-date conference information and content in their pockets.

The copy for this special WSSF edition of *HSRC Review* was written and compiled by the media team at WSSF2015 with the help of a few friends, such as four eager young University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) media students; national radio station, SAfm, which set up a live broadcast on the site; and Vuyo Madanda of the SABC Research Unit, who helped to make these broadcasts possible.

The media team, in alphabetical order, were Nazareen Abraham, Julian Jacobs, Morgan Morris, Mandi Smallhorn, Kim Trollip, Lynne Smit, Simon Smit and Ina van der Linde.

The copy for this special WSSF edition of *HSRC Review* was written and compiled by the media team at WSSF2015 with the help of a few friends, such as four eager young University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) media students, Buthele, Nosipho, Sibongile and Siyanda; national radio station, SAfm, which set up a live broadcast on the site; and Vuyo Madanda of the SABC Research Unit, who helped to make these broadcasts possible.

We hope you enjoy the read.

The Editor



Opening talks set the scene at the WSSF2015



From left: Ms Nada Al-Nashif, assistant director-general for social and human sciences at the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO); Desmond D'Sa, chair of both the Wentworth Development Forum and the South Durban Community Environmental Alliance and winner of the 2014 Goldman Environmental Prize in 2014; South African Minister of Science and Technology, Ms Naledi Pandor and Prof. Alberto Martinelli, Political Science and Sociology, University of Milan and president of the International Social Science Council.

The social sciences matter in every facet of human existence. This was the message from Naledi Pandor, South Africa's Minister of Science and Technology, at the opening session of the 2015 World Social Science Forum (WSSF2015) on 13 September 2015.

'Rousing' would perhaps be the most apt way to describe the opening ceremony.

It wasn't just the reflection through song, poetry, singing and dance on the troubles facing the modern world, as performed by the Flatfoot Dance Company, which also called on the ancestral spirits to watch over the WSSF2015 proceedings. The six opening speakers also, and in quick succession, stirring provided the context for delegates at the Durban International Convention Centre within which they would explore the conference theme, *Transforming global relations for a just world*.

Conference chairperson, Professor Olive Shisana, unpacked the global challenges spawned by inequality, particularly in South Africa. Professor Alberto Martinelli, president of the International Social Science Council (ISSC), detailed how the 2015 conference theme continued the focus of the themes of the past two fora. Dr Ebrima Sall, executive secretary of co-host, the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA), outlined the task facing social scientists in Africa to question and overhaul orthodoxies.

An impassioned Desmond D'sa, chairperson of both the Wentworth Development Forum and the South Durban

Community Environmental Alliance, delivered a fiery address on the need for social scientists to 'speak the truth' about climate change.

Nada Al-Nashif, assistant director-general for social and human sciences at the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), explained that WSSF2015 served as a useful foreword to the UN Sustainable Development Summit taking place from 25 to 27 September 2015 in New York, where representatives would draw up and debate a post-2015 development agenda.

Minister Pandor emphasised that local social scientists had made important contributions to issues such as identity, gender and indigenous knowledge, and that there were many more fields – related to global inequality – in which they could be instrumental. Social science has helped South Africa to understand, monitor and reflect upon the transformation of a racist society into one that seeks to be inclusive, non-racist and non-sexist. 'It is this field of knowledge generation that has alerted South Africa to the complexity of change from oppression to freedom.'

The global knowledge economy demands a strong research and innovation capacity, is dependent on new forms of knowledge production and dissemination, and requires research contexts that are network enabled, Pandor maintained. 'We must create this innovation architecture if we are to have justice in knowledge distribution and knowledge creation.' ■

#WSSF2015 trends on Twitter SA

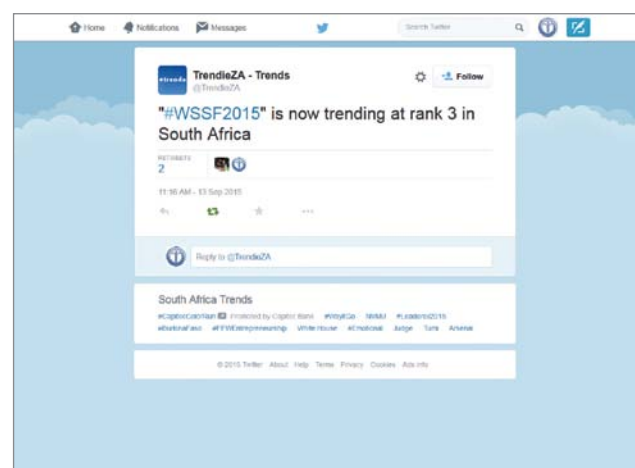
It's a rare occasion when an academic conference trends on Twitter. But this is exactly what happened when the world's social scientists gathered in Durban for the WSSF2015, and the hashtag #WSSF2015 hovered around third position in the South African twittersphere.

'Trending' describes the most popular topics being discussed on the Twitter microblogging platform. At around 11h30 on Sunday, 13 September 2015, #WSSF2015 hit the third spot on Twitter in South Africa.



It is common for many Twitter users to tweet about the same topics at the same time. Twitter users commonly use hashtags to participate in trending topics. To use a hashtag, users include the name of the topic after the hash (#) symbol within a tweet.

Twitter operates an algorithm to determine which topics are the most discussed among Twitter users at any given time. The most popular topics are known as trending topics. Significant world events, international sports results, and news about popular celebrities are among the items that commonly trend, but scientific conferences rarely achieve this accolade.



It was significant that during the WSSF2015, the other newsworthy trending topics that the forum competed against on Twitter included #Flabba, about the death of rapper Nkululeko 'Flabba' Habedi; international boxing match-up #MayweatherBerto; the beatification of South African hero #BenedictDaswa by the Pope; and a #solareclipse.

The last time an HSRC-related event trended on Twitter was in April 2014 when the South African National HIV Prevalence, Incidence and Behaviour Survey Report was released and our twitter handle @HSRCza trended at number two for most of the day.

What was significant about #WSSF2015 trending was the diversity of voices contributing to the discussion on Twitter. The media, academics, activists, HSRC staff, the South African Department of Science and Technology and the International Social Science Council all used their Twitter accounts to drum up the conversation. ■

Here are some highlights from the discussions:

ISSC WorldSocialScience @ISSCWorld Following

Knowledge gaps: where are tipping points on inequality? South African protests may be example [#WSSF2015](#) | [@JohnGaventa](#)

RETWEETS 5

11:56 AM - 15 Sep 2015

Reply to [@ISSCWorld](#) [@JohnGaventa](#)

Lebogang Sebako @LebogangSebako · Sep 15
[@ISSCWorld](#) [@HSRCza](#) [@JohnGaventa](#) True. It has been raised that more than 50% of our youth drop out from basic education or they do not finish

T&F Africa @TandF_Africa Follow

Ebrima Sall decries the inequality in knowledge production on the Africa continent. (The [#AfrSSPub](#) session at 4pm discusses this) [#WSSF2015](#)

9:39 AM - 13 Sep 2015

9 2

TrendieZA - Trends @TrendieZA Follow

"Trending South Africa: 11:22 AM SAST"

1. [#BenedictDaswa](#)
2. [#HappyBirthdayNiall](#)
3. Deso
4. [#WSSF2015](#)
5. [#MayweatherBerto](#)
6. [#SolarEclipse](#)

RETWEET 1

11:22 AM - 13 Sep 2015

Reply to [@TrendieZA](#)

jjacs45 @jjacs45 Follow

[#BringBackSocialSciences](#) is a rallying call at the opening of the [@WSSF2015](#) [@HSRCza](#) [@CODESRIA](#) [@ISSCWorld](#) speak out says community activist.

9:51 AM - 13 Sep 2015

3 3

Ronesh Dhawraj @ronesh 14 Sep

Really loving the app created esp for the [#WSSF2015](#) Ground-breaking stuff! We should do a story on it [@WSSF2015](#) [@HSRCza](#) [@ivdlina](#)

Suraya Dadoo @Suraya_Dadoo Follow

[@ronesh](#) [@WSSF2015](#) [@HSRCza](#) Not to mention that [#WSSF2015](#) trended at No. 1 for last 2 days! How many "academic" conferences can claim that?

9:33 AM - 15 Sep 2015

1 3

Sibusiso Nkomo @SibusisoNkomo Follow

[@pregsgovender](#) - Economists like religious figures have created their own mythology and have taught politicians... (1/2) [#WSSF2015](#)

11:26 AM - 16 Sep 2015

1 1

ISSC WorldSocialScience @ISSCWorld Follow

"You can't solve the problem of poverty without looking at wealth in South Africa." Pregaluxmi Govender [#WSSF2015](#)

11:29 AM - 16 Sep 2015

3 1

ISSC WorldSocialScience @ISSCWorld Follow

"Within our own community, feminist colleagues have already proven the benefits of interdisciplinary research." Dzodzi Tsikata [#WSSF2015](#)

12:04 PM - 16 Sep 2015

2 1

Mariëtte Enslin @m_enslin Follow

Sall: Good partnerships, eg [@CODESRIA](#) & [@HSRCza](#) help reduce knowledge divides, inequality [#WSSF2015](#)

9:40 AM - 13 Sep 2015

6 4

The world has to unlearn old lessons

Knowledge is power, the ever-popular expression goes. But if that adage was assumed to be about the consumption of knowledge, then the speakers discussing narratives from Africa about knowledge, power and space at the WSSF2015 – all of whom hailed from the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), South Africa – were more concerned with the production of power. But therein too lies power, Dr Sagie Narsiah of the university's School of Social Sciences told delegates.

'Global challenges – inequality, poverty and environmental ruination – are informed by various epistemologies, embedding various power, social, cultural and economic relations,' he explained.

Nowhere was that more true than in African universities still subjected to the influence of colonial-era scholarship traditions in the transfer of epistemologies, values and methodologies, argued Professor Nhlanhla Mkhize, of UKZN's School of Applied Human Sciences.

There was an urgent need to engage and upend this power relation, said Mkhize. 'As far as knowledge production is concerned, this calls for an epistemological deconstruction and reconstruction aimed at recognising the totality of all knowledges in society.'

Similarly overlooked were the power relations in elite interviews – in her case, interviews with powerful political figures, argued Dr Suzanne Francis of UKZN's School of Politics. In these increasingly popular research tools, in which the power shifts from interviewer to interviewee, the focus of scholarship in the social sciences had been on logistics, on the hows of conducting the interview. But there was a need for greater



Dr Mvuselelo Ngcoya



Prof. Sarah Bracking

self-reflection about this tool, Francis insisted. 'Political science methods still neglect the politics and the ethics of the process of knowledge production through the interview method.'

Issues such as climate change, poverty reduction and food sovereignty had also become ideological battlegrounds, Dr Mvuselelo Ngcoya and Professor Sarah Bracking of UKZN's School of Development Studies illustrated in their joint presentation.

Ngcoya touched on how the burden of combatting climate change had shifted from the rich to the poor. This was even embedded in the financial tools that had been developed to finance climate change solutions, added Bracking.

The Green Climate Fund, for example, includes a section that suggests that some 300 million subsistence farmers need to give up their livelihoods as their activities are deemed nonviable or not contributing to climate change mitigation.

'This suggestion would entail suppressing equal rights in favour of biopolitics, where African rural people are surplus to requirements or in the way,' Ngcoya said. ■

The problem with academia

There is something very obviously wrong when 21 years into South Africa's democracy, only 16% of university students are black – up a paltry seven percent since 1994. And only 16% of black students finish a university degree in three years, compared to 44% of white students.

These figures were quoted by the Human Sciences Research Council's (HSRC) Professor Sharlene Swartz at the WSSF2015 session introducing a panel of scholars that is engaging with the HSRC in qualitative research aimed at assessing the conditions and experiences driving this problem.

The research involves following 80 students at eight universities across South Africa over five years, interviewing them in-depth once a year and engaging with them in other ways, including through a Facebook page.

In the third year of the research, 'some are finishing their degrees, some have dropped out, and some have taken



Ms Emma Arogundade



Dr Alude Mahali



Mr Stanley Molefi

a year off and then re-enrolled at a different institution,' explained Swartz.

There are obvious – but often silent, unsurfaced and unacknowledged – practical issues that many students face. 'Financial stress is pervasive,' said doctoral student Stanley Molefi. His peer, Emma Arogundade, also working toward her PhD, told of one student who regularly skipped weeks of university studies because he was unable to afford the transport, and walked five hours to print out and hand in an assignment. >>

A major stumbling block, as Dr Alude Mahali of the HSRC pointed out in her presentation, was language. Students were often enrolled at institutions where teaching happened in a language that was not their mother tongue.

While Afrikaans had again become a field of contestation recently, for many students English (which parents often thought of as the 'language of the world') was not much more inclusive. One student said she was lucky to have

had good English instruction at school, because a friend of hers had been taught English in Xhosa. As a result, her friend had to form sentences in her head before speaking 'to make sure that it makes sense' – an obvious impediment to academic success when the university takes English as the norm.

Dr Mahali said that English – and accent – had become 'social currency' in South Africa. ■

Why social science matters

Ten percent of South Africa's population gets 80% of the country's income – we know that thanks to researchers in non-governmental organisations such as Oxfam, Judge Navi Pillay told delegates on the opening day of the WSSF2015. Such knowledge is empowering for civil society and policy makers, as they address issues of inequality and injustice.

Judge Pillay, the first black woman judge of the High Court of South Africa and the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights from 2008 to 2014, this year became the 16th Commissioner of the International Commission Against the Death Penalty.

Science and grassroots researchers have a critical role to play in informing policy and shaping the response of countries and governments to events. 'When a crisis comes along, governments look to social scientists for the why,' said Pillay. The social sciences have a keener eye to the realities of most societies than their governments do. Pillay pointed out that when, as UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, she visited countries, it was like seeing 'two worlds': a flourishing world as seen by the government, and the real world as

experienced by many citizens and observed by scientists and researchers working at the local level.

Pillay spoke on a panel chaired by Nick Perkins, director of SciDev, alongside development economist, Professor Thandika Mkandawire, who is based at the London School of Economics where he holds the chair in African Development. African countries have no formal support for social sciences from their governments. Mkandawire made a call for social sciences to be empowered by funding, resources and support – with no strings attached. 'Science serves society better when it is focused on seeking to understand society,' he said. If it is commissioned for short-term instrumental purposes, it tends to be of less value.

'Social sciences can cast light on things – but it can also mystify,' Mkandawire noted. ■



Judge Navi Pillay

Is another world possible?

Not unless we know what drives inequality. Inequality is not a given, a result of natural forces at play, said Professor Jayati Ghosh in the plenary session that kicked off the second day of the WSSF2015.

Economics professor and executive secretary of the International Development Economics Associates (IDEAs), Ghosh was speaking on a panel with Dr Jomo Kwame Sundaram, the Malaysian economist who is assistant director-general and co-ordinator for economic and social development with the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations, and Dr Leith Mullings, Distinguished Professor of Anthropology at City University New York.

Sundaram dissected the history of inequality and noted that where people lived in the world (for example, America versus Asia) was a stronger indicator of their level of equality than



Professor Jayati Ghosh



Dr Jomo Kwame Sundaram

their class: 'Geography trumps class,' she said (then chuckled, 'I'd better not use the word "trump"!'). This provides some insight into why migration remains an ongoing phenomenon worldwide. >>

When it came to unpacking the why of inequality, Ghosh outlined three major global drivers.

The globalisation of finance, she said, had a number of consequences, not least of them increased fragility and exposure to economic cycles. 'It creates the urge to fiscal austerity, not only in countries in downswings; belt-tightening is also seen as necessary in economies in surplus,' she said. Globalised finance also increased wage inequality: 'At the bottom end, wages are stagnant or falling, but rising very, very sharply at the top end.'

There was an obsession with exports that had resulted from the intensification of globalisation, she noted, a quest for economic stimulus from outside the country. This was a major contributor to the 'race to the bottom', as countries became

more competitive with each other and calls increased for greater labour flexibility (and other factors that deepened inequalities).

The nature of global trade agreements, Ghosh said, had become 'less and less about trade and more about other aspects' that saw production processes 'liberalised' – this was where developing countries suffered, as their comparative advantage lay in labour and the conditions for production.

Finally, the focus on controlling knowledge in the form of intellectual property rights had huge implications for development, as had the corporatisation of the media: 'There are concerns about the way knowledge is increasingly corralled into support of power.'

Given these global drivers of inequality, the fundamental requirement was for a transformative vision. ■

Plenty to be done to create a just world

Maybe the speakers addressing the *Is a just world possible?* session on the opening day of the WSSF2015 didn't all strictly suggest an answer, but they certainly painted a picture of what had to be fixed.

In starting the session – sponsored by the International Union of Psychological Science – Professor Thomas Reuter of the Asia Institute at the University of Melbourne, Australia, made a bold suggestion. He proposed a 'new spirit of compassion' as the principle that would underlie the building of 'not a new world order for a few, but a new world for all'.

'We must ask of our leaders that they work hard to dispel fear in the face of crisis,' Reuter said, 'and to work tirelessly to instill in us all the trust and compassion needed to shape our shared histories.'

Professor Elisa Reis, professor of political sociology at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, pondered 'the usefulness' of social scientists in creating that 'just world'. Among other things, she said they needed to redefine concepts such as the nation state, and also chronicle the changing relationship between humans and nature.

Professor Ruth Fincher of the University of Melbourne, Australia, reflected on the session title from a geographer's perspective: 'The question is an interesting one conceptually and empirically – how can one make a judgement that the whole world is just or unjust?' she noted. 'In contemporary geography, the world is rarely conceived as a unitary place or a common social enterprise.'

Presenting in relay fashion, regular South African collaborators Professor Ashwin Desai of the University of Johannesburg and Professor Patrick Bond of the University of KwaZulu-Natal posed a few questions of their own – particularly about BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) as an association.

Of interest to them – as expressed in some recent publications – was whether BRICS was anti-imperialist, as was often suggested, or sub-imperialist, seen perhaps in its exploitation of other developing nations and in the perhaps unseemly collaborations among each other.

Desai argued that in Africa, every road that had been taken in the continent's various histories had essentially brought its people to the same place – neoliberalism. ■

Breathing new life into an old discussion

Dr Jomo Kwame Sundaram, a keynote speaker at the WSSF2015, recalls his early days as a researcher on inequality in 1980s' Malaysia.

Some of the first data on income inequality was appearing at the time. Alongside others, he – with degrees from Yale and Harvard under his belt – was trying to explore uncharted waters in the not-so-straightforward study of inequality in his home nation.

If poverty was the dominant narrative at the time, inequality

was the poor, shunned cousin. So there was little interest in or funding for their efforts to introduce inequality into prevailing discussions on ethnicity and, on a broader canvas, even on the development studies landscape. >>



Dr Jomo Kwame Sundaram

As in South Africa and elsewhere, the established academic practice in multi-ethnic Malaysia – where policies have favoured the majority *Bumiputera* (indigenous Malay) population since the 1970s – was to focus almost exclusively on ethnicity or race, says Sundaram, now assistant director-general and co-ordinator for economic and social development at the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

'Poverty was seen as a phenomenon that could be dealt with without addressing inequality,' Sundaram explains. 'In fact, some were arguing that growing inequalities were inevitable, and, in fact, desirable as a means to provide incentives for investments needed for economic growth.'

These days, inequality is stealing many more mainstream headlines. That, Sundaram notes, is in part to do with the fallout from the downturn in the global economy. Many governments had, on counsel, bailed out their teetering banking sectors, only to be urged to adopt austerity measures in response to the fast growing public debt, as epitomised now by the troubles in Greece. Social protection spending was especially targeted for cuts.

Meanwhile, billionaires – and the ostentatious lifestyles of some – continue to surface everywhere, throwing an uneasy spotlight on growing class inequalities. In addition, there has been growing interest in other forms of inequality, be it based

on gender, ethnicity, or between rural and urban communities.

More recently, fêted books – *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* by Thomas Piketty, *The Price of Inequality*, by Nobel laureate Joseph Stiglitz and *Inequality: What can be done?* by Anthony Atkinson – have also raised the public profile of the new inequality discourse.

'The narrative has changed, but I do not know for how long,' says Sundaram.

For him, the WSSF2015 meant inequality could be tackled from a range of perspectives, all gathered under the same roof.

Take for instance the discussions on affirmative action in South Africa, where parallels are more often drawn with Malaysia than any other country, even though India has had such corrective policies in place for more than a century for its 'scheduled tribes' and 'scheduled castes', which include the Dalits or so-called 'untouchables'. Many other developing and developed countries also have similar policies, such as the policy legacy of the US civil rights movement of the 1960s.

'Even though there are elements that are universal,' concludes Sundaram, 'the fact that the contexts are always different often means that the implications can be very, very different.'

Those waters he could only begin to chart in the 1980s may well still be navigated. ■

Successes and failures in policy and implementation



From left: Dr Mathieu Denis; Dr Michael Woolcock; Minister of Science and Technology Naledi Pandor, with Mr Humberto E. González, research director in the Private Secretariat for National Policies (SPPN), Presidency of the Republic of Nicaragua during the MOST panel session.

Most governments' policies on development for sectors such as education and healthcare were often clear, noble and well-informed; however the binding constraint on realising those policies was weak implementation systems.

So said Dr Michael Woolcock, a lead researcher in social development at the World Bank, Harvard lecturer and member of the scientific committee of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) Management of Social Transformations (MOST) programme.

He participated in a ministerial and research session on the contribution of social science within the UN's post-2015 development agenda at the WSSF2015.

The main panel gathered ministers and high-level

representatives from Argentina, Ecuador, Kenya, Malaysia, Nicaragua, Oman and South Africa, and heads of regional and global social science organisations. In a marathon five-and-a-half-hour session, the panel discussed challenges and policy responses to achieving a more just world, with a focus on key issues in the post-2015 development agenda.

The next frontier in development research

For Woolcock, the 'frontier issue' for development was using research evidence to improve implementation and the capability of governments to deliver on those policies. It was here that research evidence could shape development outcomes, particularly as it pertained to justice and attaining the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). >>



As with all complex problems, the quality of implementation of policies and the outcomes varied widely. ‘Documenting, exploring, explaining and learning from this variation is where research evidence can have the highest impact,’ he explained.

Woolcock said generating useable, high-quality evidence to inform development challenges was the next frontier in development research and practice. ‘It is most pressing of all in the field of justice, where the stakes are so high, the pressures so great, the complexity so “wicked”, and the knowledge required so idiosyncratic. Building a more just world certainly requires evidence to inform “better policies” but even more important is cultivating evidence that improves the quality of implementation for all.’

Countries emerging from serious conflict would not be able to meet the 2015 Millennium Development Goals.

Humanity-focused strategies

Betty Tola, Ecuador’s Minister of Economic and Social Inclusion, spoke in detail about how her country had succeeded in reducing inequality by moving away from neo-liberal marketing strategies to a humanity-focused strategy through high social investment; tax reforms towards better equity; the redistribution of wealth through social programmes; the generation of capacities and reduction of wage gaps, and the integration between economic and social policies.

This had resulted in a decrease in the number of people living in poverty between 2006 and 2014 by 16.2 percentage points and those in extreme poverty by 7.2 percentage points. In 2006, the percentage of people who did not attend superior education for economic reasons was 45%. In 2014 that number dropped to 26%.

Dr Ebrima Sall, executive secretary of the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA), indicated that in Africa, countries emerging from serious conflict would not be able to meet the 2015 Millennium Development Goals, which expired this year

and would be replaced by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the post-2015 development agenda. ‘We are not just looking at successes, but also analysing how we achieve success, whether it is sustainable and whether there are new trends of exclusion emerging.’

It no longer makes sense ... to disentangle global environmental change from other social, political and cultural problems.

Unique moment in time

Seteney Shami, executive director of the Arab Council for Social Sciences, gave a graphic description of the implosion of the Arab region and the Syrian crises (inequality the key driver behind the Arab uprisings) while Dr Mathieu Denis, executive director of the International Social Science Council (ISSC), illustrated how the current confluence of critical problems happening on a global scale made this moment in time totally unique.

‘It no longer makes sense, from a scientific point of view and from a political point of view, to disentangle global environmental change from other social, political and cultural problems, including poverty, inequality, discontent and corruption.’

Denis said these were not disconnected problems that competed for our attention. ‘They do not occur in discrete autonomous systems rooted in the physical environment on the one hand and society on the other. They are part of a single, hyper complex social-ecological system where the environmental, political, social, cultural, economic and psychological dimensions of our existence meet and merge.’

It is crucial to understand and tackle these interactions that are so similar to the views informing the post-2015 development agenda, which has major implications for the design processes of policies and for the way in which researchers produce knowledge that should inform such policy-making design. ■



Key driver behind the Arab uprisings

Protesters wear t-shirts forming the sentence 'we've had enough criminality, corruption and sectarianism'. Source: www.hurriyetdailynews.com.

The democratic spaces that opened up through massive uprisings across the Arab region have been firmly closed down, either by increasing state authoritarianism and internal repression, or in other cases a spiralling down into tragic civil wars, recounted Seteney Shami, executive director of the Arab Council for Social Sciences (ACSS).

Shami participated in the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) Management of Social Transformations (MOST) session at the WSSF2015. This session focused on the contribution of social science within the UN's post-2015 development agenda.

She said 10 of the 22 countries of the League of Arab States were in a state of turmoil.

The language of the [Arab] uprisings was similar: bread, jobs, democracy, civil state, freedom, an end to corruption and a call for dignity.

Disintegration of a region

The issue of unequal development within states and the unequal distribution of resources between cities and rural areas clearly contributed to the progression of the Arab uprisings that broke out in late 2010.

'While international and national attention has been riveted by the scenes of hundreds of thousands of protestors congregating in central spaces of capital cities, the sparks that led to these massive mobilisations are in almost every case rural and provincial,' Shami said. The 'language' of the uprisings had been remarkably similar across the Arab region: bread, jobs, democracy, civil state, freedom, an end to corruption and a call for dignity.

She reflected on the latest development in the Arab uprisings that is occurring in Lebanon. The protests, characterised by the slogan 'you stink', started in July this year when garbage collection halted as a result of bickering among leading politicians who, it turned out, had major interests in the private company that is contracted by the government to collect garbage.

'The last demonstration before I left Beirut to come to this conference drew thousands of protestors in front of the parliament building to protest the inability of the political elite to reach a solution.

'On that day, the unprecedented heatwave that has held the region in its grip over the past month with temperatures soaring up to 40 °C, was compounded by a strange sandstorm that lasted more than three days,' Shami said, finding Durban 'a breath of fresh air'.

Migrant crisis

Another aspect of the implosion of the Arab region was the millions of people who had been flung out of their homes and lives by the multiple conflicts, which is being referred to as 'the refugee/migrant crisis in Europe' – 'the worst since WWII'. >>

While she applauded the generous responses by the people of Europe opposing their governments' policies, Shami quoted figures of the top five countries hosting refugees in order of magnitude, each hosting more than one million refugees, namely Pakistan, Lebanon, Iran, Turkey and Jordan. Lebanon, a country with a population of 4.5 million people, hosts 1.1 million refugees.

A lack of strong research communities left the door open for analysis to drift into easy simplistic explanations.

Social scientists

Decades of clamping down on universities, research and free speech in the Arab region meant there were not necessarily cadres of researchers ready to step into the breach and come up with analyses and explanations that would feed into policy.

This lack of strong research communities left the door open for analysis to drift into easy simplistic explanations, Shami said, such as Islam, hatred of the West and fundamentalism being the causes of all the problems. She concluded that the region required, among many other priorities, 'a reconstruction of intellectual life, a recreation of spaces for establishing scientific community, and dialogue and critical reflection. For this, national, regional and global solidarity and collaboration is essential'. ■



Does South Africa protest too much?

In May 2015, South African Minister of Police, Nathi Nhleko, announced that the South African Police Service's (SAPS) public order policing (POP) unit had been called out to some 14 740 incidents related to service delivery protests during 2014/2015, more than double the 7 209 it had to contend with in 2007/2008.

Dr Carin Runciman from the University of Johannesburg, South Africa, told delegates at the WSSF2015 that research she had undertaken in collaboration with colleagues Professor Peter Alexander and Boitumelo Maruping, painted a very different picture. She demonstrated that at least half of those incidents were not protests at all, despite the impression created by the minister.

Scouring the SAPS's Incident Registration Information System (IRIS) – only recently made available – Runciman and her

colleagues learnt that a high proportion of the incidents recorded in IRIS were in fact recreational, religious and cultural events.

They suggested that the confusion around incidents and protests was created to wring more funding from the state coffers.

Where evidence of protest could be found, the results highlighted that these were not limited to urban areas, notwithstanding the picture painted in the media. But while proposing ways that IRIS could be refined, the researchers confirmed that the number of protests was rising in South Africa.

'We argue that rising inequality and its impact on the quality of post-apartheid democracy is a key underlying cause of protest,' Runciman said. 'This is unsurprising given that a recent report by Statistics South Africa (StatsSA) noted that more than half the population (54%) live on less than R779 per person per month.' ■

Unforeseen consequences of war

I am currently involved in a project on gender-based violence and the war in Ukraine,' said Ganna Gerasymenko from the Institute for Demography and Social Studies, National Academy of Sciences, Ukraine. 'There has been a huge increase in incidence. It may take years, maybe decades, for things to settle down once the war is over.'

She was talking just before presenting her WSSF2015 paper *Gender aspects of income inequality: a case of Ukraine*. A patriarchal society that was weakened during the Soviet years had starkly reasserted itself, explained Gerasymenko, a demographer whose job is to provide useable aggregation of data and analysis for policy makers and ministers in her country.

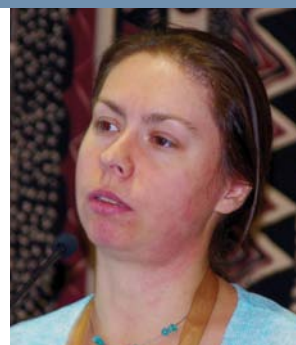
The inequality between men and women was glaring in the graphs she presented: women on average earned 75% of what men earned in the Ukraine and they were at greater risk of poverty. There was a 'gender segregation' in occupations both horizontally and vertically – that is, some occupations were clearly dominated by women, while the higher echelons of status, such as managers and CEOs, were male dominated.

Interestingly, the stereotypes that underpinned this state of affairs were well established. Gerasymenko noted that,

when asked if women should be prepared to cut down on their paid work for the sake of their families, 17.8% of Ukrainian women agreed – nearly three times higher than British women at 6% and much higher than Danish women at just 1.9%.

The sharp swing from a Soviet sensibility in which all women had to hold jobs and equality was a policy goal, said Gerasymenko, may have been a reaction to this austere ideological approach – when the USSR crumbled, women sought to reclaim their traditional 'feminine' roles. This had led to a rebound of the darker side of tradition: patriarchal stereotypes that, ultimately, had resulted in greater poverty for Ukraine's women – and the gender-based violence that had emerged during the recent war.

Although Ukraine had made some strides through enacting gender rights-related legislation, mending this situation was 'impossible to achieve through legislation,' said Gerasymenko. 'It has to be through information and teaching, starting even at school level.' ■



Dr Ganna Gerasymenko

Brazil, the World Cup and protest actions

Despite digital technologies increasingly enabling social protests, poorer communities in Brazil do not have access to the internet and have not been able to use this powerful medium to mobilise against inequality.

'The voices of poor people may take a few more years to emerge through technologies that are now being used for economic involvement and political response by the middle classes,' Brazilian Minister of Strategic Affairs, Dr Marcelo Neri, told delegates at the WSSF2015.

Dr Neri highlighted changing patterns of inequality faced by the poor as they tried to remain relevant contributing citizens. 'By the end of 2014, Brazil had its lowest employment rate ever registered. But in the last six months, the employment rate is back to what it was six years ago. This is politically very problematic.'

Exploring the link between demonstrations or protest actions and the economic status of people, Dr Neri said research had shown that protests against the building of stadiums during the FIFA Soccer World Cup in Brazil, for example, were by the employed, rather than the unemployed.

In the context of significant reductions in income inequality, for Neri, this was an indication that poorer communities found it more difficult to organise themselves and to contribute to the national voice against issues affecting them. The working classes, on the other hand, were able to use technology to organise themselves for protest action against various challenges faced in the Brazilian context. ■



Dr Marcelo Neri, Minister for Strategic Affairs in Brazil, has participated in the design and implementation of minimum wages in Brazil, and in the setting of social goals in units of the federation.



Pushing the human race forward

The challenges of giving effect to the themes that emerged during the WSSF2015 were thrust under the spotlight at the plenary session on the last day of the conference.

Chaired by Professor Elisa Reis of the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, the presentations focused on themes ranging from Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and global activism to the inequalities represented in literature and the arts.

Vuyiseka Dubula of Sonke Gender Justice, South Africa, presented an impassioned critique of local and global activism and the disadvantages to activism that resulted from a reliance on donors and technology to build sustainable and credible movements.

Her presentation started with tackling the issue of donor funding having a direct impact on the output of activist organisations. Key questions included 'who funds the research?' and 'who determines the research produced?'

'Donor money has played a big role in saving lives but at the same time, has pit civil society groups against each other in the developing world. Non-compliance can be a big disadvantage. Finance from international donors goes to organisations that have created an appropriate institutional face,' Dubula explained.

She continued her critique by casting an uncomplimentary eye over the belief that technology was an essential catalyst for local activism.

'People are demanding their voices be heard, as social movements that use new media may not be adequately representing their interests,' she said. 'But technology is also not the ultimate connector for highlighting issues of affected groups. There is almost an elitist or misguided agenda in pursuing activism through online methods.'

Mike van Graan, executive director of the African Arts Institute, South Africa, provided an interesting analysis of inequalities through storytelling from the Global North and the Global South.

He cited numerous examples of how provocative images could be used to explore topics around refugees, gender rights, civil society movements and protest action. His other local examples included the Voorkamer Fees (Front Room Festival) that happens in the Western Cape every year. He said this was a telling local example of how people thought to be on the fringes of effecting change through their environment, were actually central to the process.

Professor Asuncion Lera St. Claire, DNV GL Strategic Research and Innovation, Norway, wrapped up the discussion with her thoughts on the concept of scientific correctness weighed against the reality of multi-stakeholder involvement in policy and decision making. She talked about the erroneous method of 'boxing the private sector, economy, and economic actors in impractical separate compartments'. >>

The Voorkamer Fees was a telling local example of how people thought to be on the fringes of effecting change through their environment, were actually central to the process.

'We need a lot more investigation into issues of climate change than what we have now,' she said. 'We remain dislocated from the rest of society. Science is organised to remain separate from society. We need to work towards a continual framing of the problem with science workers and the people who are directly affected by the problems we are studying.'

The panel ultimately agreed that agents of change were needed to build influential communities of action, and that science and policy needed to engage appropriately to address glaring inequalities within a shorter time frame. ■

Bringing culture to the inequality debate

The cultural aspects of development, democracy and human rights in Africa are just as important as the core concepts around which these features are based.

In many African cultures, for instance, women play a subordinate role; how, in the context of a contemporary society that seeks to empower women, do we address the cultural issues that disempower women?

This is the sentiment of WSSF 2015 plenary speaker Mike van Graan, executive director of the African Arts Institute (AFI), which aims to study, understand and implement such cultural aspects within society.

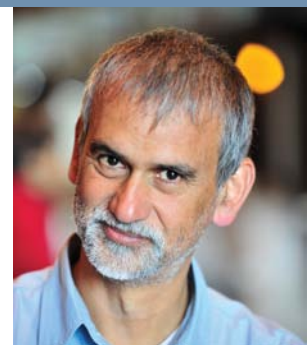
'Everyone speaks of development and its importance across the continent, about the challenges and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), but very few times do you hear talk of the cultural dimension that impacts on development or that could explain why certain goals are not being met,' Van Graan says.

It's an area that demands plenty of interrogation. There's a need to talk about the conflict that arises when local cultural practices clash with values that are being imposed, the latter often plugged as being more progressive. These values are cultural constructs in their own rights, notes Van Graan, premised as they are on particular cultural values. 'Sometimes conflicts emerge out of competing value systems, out of competing cultural paradigms,' he says. 'And culture often becomes the terrain within which conflicts find expression.'

Opportunities for arts and culture, right?

Two reports by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), in 2008 and 2010, argued that the creative and cultural sectors successfully weathered the storm triggered by the global economic collapse around that time. But that only applied to the likes of Australia, Canada and parts of Europe, it would appear. Africa's contribution to this sector, by contrast, stood at little more than 1%. Conventional wisdom would have it that investment is required in these industries in Africa. The South African

government seems eager to do just that; in its Revised White Paper on Arts, Culture and Heritage of 2013, for instance, the state committed itself to 'maximise the developmental socioeconomic opportunities that exist within the cultural and creative industries.'



Mr Mike van Graan

The real issue

Van Graan and others are taking issue with this theory, however. The problem, they say, is that Africa has enjoyed some of the world's best economic growth numbers over the past decade and a bit. At the same time, inequality in countries like South Africa and Angola (the latter racking up average annual GDP growth of 11.1% between 2001 and 2010) has hit record highs. 'It shows that the problem is not with economic growth, but with wealth distribution,' says Van Graan. 'It shows that there are other cultural problems that we have to deal with.' Among these, clearly, is the distribution of economic growth, rather than economic growth per se.

Inequality and culture: creating access

It's easy to put a face to inequality in the arts and culture space, Van Graan notes. In South Africa, there's still a clear lack of access to resources, skills, markets – even cultural spaces like theatres, music and movies.

'In Cape Town, 20 years after democracy, there's been almost no infrastructure development in the townships to improve equity regarding access,' he notes. 'The Freedom Charter is quite clear: "The doors of learning and culture shall be opened." That places a responsibility on the government to provide access to infrastructure, resources and skills – for people to enjoy and practise and celebrate that right.' ■

The scales of climate justice need rebalancing



Dr Tahseen Jafry of the Glasgow Caledonian University in Scotland interviews Malawian subsistence farmers, Alex Chimuti and Ruth Mwenye.

Alex Chimuti and Ruth Mwenye literally bring a refreshingly hands-on perspective to the sometimes dry academic theories on climate change and climate justice.

Both are subsistence farmers in Malawi and at the session on achieving climate justice, held on day two of the WSSF2015, they recounted just what climate change meant for them. They spoke of floods followed by droughts, of changes in seasonal patterns, and of soaring temperatures (sudden increases from 36 °C to a blistering 48 °C, reported Mwenye.) They also spoke of having to dig deep holes for precious drops of water, and of livelihoods put at risk or, sometimes, lost. 'I saw it with my own eyes; it was very painful,' said Chimuti.

Their experiences put a human face to climate change, said facilitator, Dr Tahseen Jafry of the Glasgow Caledonian University in Scotland (perhaps the only country in the world to have set up such an initiative). Rampant consumerism in some corners of the world and other factors have spawned dire consequences for others – 125 million more people threatened by hunger, for instance.

'A hunger that is not much different than a hunger for goods and services, but it is felt by the poorest and most

vulnerable people on our planet most acutely,' said Jafry. 'This is an injustice; a climate injustice.'

It was a situation that demanded a different take on climate change, added Dr Blessings Chinsinga of the Centre for Social Research at the University of Malawi. 'We need to put on a climate justice lens,' he said, 'that is going to generate new insights on how we can begin to deal with the question of climate change and justice.'

And as happened so often, it was women who bore much of the burden of climate change, argued Lilian Zimba of the University of Lusaka in Zambia, a country once flush with water. Now, as rivers ran dry and remaining water sources were unfit for consumption, women had to walk long distances and join long queues for water, and young girls were taken out of school. Many were aware of their rights to water, but 'they are not able to push the government to provide that water', Zimba noted.

International organisations and agreements – including the upcoming 2015 Paris climate conference or COP21 – offered little hope, said Fred Kossam of the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Management in Malawi. 'The success of that conference will depend on, among other things, how it will address the question of equity.' ■

Planning the pace of change in education

Poverty, inequality, systemic issues and absence of psycho-social services in the systems are just some of the key factors that are obstacles on the road to increasing the pace of change in South Africa.

These were some of the findings that came out of the panel discussion *Planning the pace of change in education systems* at the WSSF2015.

The South African example was presented in the context of improving African education systems. South Africa's Basic Education Minister, Angie Motshekga, opened the panel discussion and was joined by National Education Collaboration Trust CEO, Godwin Khoza; Professor Servaas van der Berg of the University of Stellenbosch, South Africa; and Professor Crain Soudien, the newly appointed CEO of the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) of South Africa.

Minister Motshekga began by outlining the improvements made in the South African education system since the dawn of democracy in 1994. The government had identified those groups that could not afford education, and had set out to redress the situation by subsidising the education of underprivileged children.

The last few years had seen some improvements but, according to the minister, 'pace does not match with capacity'.

'The systemic issues resulting from a lack of proper assessments, ongoing remedial work, adequately capacitated educators, the strengthening of accountability and improving management at schools are being addressed on an ongoing basis to catalyse a quicker rate of change,' she said.

Another critical issue in what the minister termed

'abnormal' family structures was child-headed households. 'When a child becomes an orphan, the child becomes a responsibility of the state. Are we doing enough for these children?' she asked.

'Why do learners fail and why are there inefficiencies in the system?' were the two questions Godwin Khoza asked as he introduced the National Education Collaboration Trust's efforts in helping push the pace of change in education.

He explained that the answer to glaring flaws in the system and weak learner output lay in how elements of schooling were organised. Khoza described the elements that were needed as 'a shift from teachers to teaching', which included using teaching time more effectively.

Also important were the dynamics of interaction between teachers, learners and learning material, and experiential professional development. These components, combined in a successful delivery method, would positively impact teaching behaviours and cultures, he believed.

Khoza said the South African education system should be applauded for its positive developments and successes, including a move to 'integrate a relevant curriculum that engenders democratic values and improving sustainable quality assessment or evaluation.' ■



Minister Angie Motshekga





Flame of hope for South Africa's energy crisis

We don't want technologies to take the place of people. Leadership, education and successful integration of technologies combined with transparent ongoing conversations among the leading stakeholders is a potential roadmap to South Africa's energy crisis.'

This was the core sentiment of the debate around managing South Africa's energy crisis through transformative sustainable change, which was explored in a critical panel discussion at the WSSF2015.

The session was sponsored by the Private Engagement Task of the Climate Technology Centre and Network (CTCN), part of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Technology Mechanism.

The panel represented an important gathering of social and natural scientists, government institutions and business interests comprising representatives from the National Business Initiative of South Africa, South Africa's Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), the South African Local Government Association (SALGA), eThekweni Municipality (Durban, South Africa) and the South African Department of Science and Technology (DST).

Professor Asuncion Lera St. Clair, senior principal scientist at the Strategic Research and Innovation Unit of DNV GL, Norway, led the discussion by looking at how these sectors could collaborate for transformative sustainable change, how the energy crisis could be solved in an equitable manner for all, and how the energy crisis was opening up opportunities for more marginalised sectors of society.

The CTCN hopes to provide a central local capacity building unit that hosts a network of 140 national designated entities (NDEs) around the globe, and that acts as the connector between stakeholders to address challenges faced in the energy crisis. DST's CTCN head, Roman Henry, said the CTCN was a direct answer to providing opportunities for more 'indigent communities'.

Susanna Godenhardt of the energy office at the eThekweni Municipality reported that 15% of the city's local GDP was

spent on energy, which meant the government institution fell just behind Kazakhstan and UK in energy intensity. She further explained that policy development was based on existing agreements with power parastatal Eskom. 'Municipalities fund the electrical grid through markups on electricity we buy cheaply from Eskom. Many municipalities are hesitant to promote the sector of renewable energy as they will lose money.'

SALGA's Telly Chauke explained that the organisation's role was to negotiate policy on behalf of municipalities to participate in the distribution and maintenance chain of electricity.

'Our response to collaboration for transformative change is through our partnership with Eskom. SALGA, through this partnership, has identified payment difficulties that municipalities face, including revenue collection and maintenance of municipal grids,' he explained.

A major challenge highlighted by SALGA was the crippling legislation that hindered adoption of new technologies and further innovation. Chauke explained that technology opportunities existed in municipalities, 'but by the time the planning and financial cycles end off in three years, only the feasibility has been completed and the chance for innovation has passed'.

The challenge lies in education. Municipalities don't have the capacity to run energy education programmes, but if consumers are empowered, they can help effect change in the system monopolised by Eskom by understanding how to conserve energy and how to produce their own alternative energy using methods like solar and biofuels. Consumers can also learn how to become independent energy providers.

An opportunity exists for South Africa to use CTCN for renewable energy education services while still working with Eskom. This is an opportunity to bring institutions together.

There is also a need to raise awareness of opportunities that CTCN brings to its member countries.

Eskom was not present at the panel discussion having cancelled on the day. ■

The haves and the have nots still contesting in SA

It is accepted that South Africa falls among the globe's most unequal countries, but as speakers at the WSSF2015's *Inequalities in post-apartheid South Africa* session pointed out, there's still a lot of debate to be had.

Take the research on inter-generational wealth flows and their role in perpetuating inequality, conducted by Professor Monde Makiwane of the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) of South Africa. Forecasts for such wealth flows were not encouraging, said Makiwane, as they suggested today's black youth, in particular, would be as dependent on the state as the older generation was today.

'The point is, if we don't do anything about this model, even in future generations the gap between the rich and the poor, instead of closing over time, will never close,' Makiwane explained.

Professor Vusi Gumede of the Thabo Mbeki African Leadership Institute, South Africa, stirred things up as he looked at racial and political inequalities in the country. It was a contentious area, Gumede suggested, especially as there were those who argued that class concerns, based on inter-group inequality, had overtaken racial concerns in importance. But the numbers suggested otherwise, he insisted; white South Africans still earned as much as six times more than black South Africans.

'It seems to me that we need a new consensus as society to address the problems and the challenges that we face.'



Ms Jane Mbithi



Dr Monde Makiwane



Dr Yul Derek Davids

Dr Yul Derek Davids, also of the HSRC, echoed some of those sentiments when he reported on studies he was conducting on perceptions of wellbeing in South Africa. His research showed that new patterns were being reinforced. Those who resided in urban formal areas had a high living standards measure (LSM), were better educated and were more satisfied with life in South Africa.

'The economic perceptions of people still say that there are still huge divides,' he pointed out.

Things were equally contentious in the area of micro-credit, explained Jane Mbithi, a doctoral candidate at the University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa. Presenting her master's work – on whether or not micro-credit improved the lives of women borrowers in Cape Town's Khayelitsha township – she reported that findings would suggest it had for some, but not for others. Other factors – gender issues within communities, for instance – also impacted on women's success or failure.

'Development demands a multi-pronged strategy,' Mbithi concluded. ■

Govender calls social sciences to action

Preys Govender started the Wangari Maathai Lecture at the WSSF2015 with a clip from *Dirt! The Movie*, a documentary that explores the relationship between humans and soil.

In the clip, Maathai – the late Kenyan environmental and political activist in whose honour the lecture was established – recounts the story of a brave hummingbird that singlehandedly attempts to put out a forest fire. Mocked by the other animals who simply stare transfixed at the flames, the hummingbird tells them it's simply doing the best it can. 'And that, to me,' says Maathai in the film, 'is what all of us should do.'

That was the call to arms that Govender, deputy chairperson of the South African Human Rights Commission, echoed in her lecture on the closing day of the forum.

There was much to be done, said Govender, listing

a catalogue of individuals, organisations, systems and nations that were contributing to poverty and inequality. And it was often women, especially African women, who bore the 'combined brunt of poverty, inequality and violence from the state, in workplaces, communities and in homes.'

Govender urged the forum delegates to question the many 'gods', 'priests' and 'myths' of economic models and principles, among other things, that had thus far gone unquestioned.

There was a major challenge ahead for the social sciences and all those attending the conference, said Govender, who further urged delegates to pool their expertise and knowledge to address these major global problems.

'The role that social scientists can play is potentially huge.' ■

Planning ahead for future megacities



Ms Cathy Sutherland and Prof. Brij Maharaj, both from the University of KwaZulu-Natal and Prof. Ivan Turok of the HSRC, explored urban policy in a changing African landscape.

Descriptions of the urban sprawl forecast for Africa over the next decades are eerily reminiscent of the megacities of the famed Judge Dredd comics – hundreds of millions crammed into crime-ridden and under-serviced sectors, with the obligatory class divisions.

Going by presentations at the *Urban policy in the Global South: challenges and prospects* session on day three of the WSSF2015, the creators of Dredd's dystopian Mega-City One weren't too far off. Take the 'mega housing projects' in the pipeline for Gauteng, for instance; the 15 000-unit human settlements will herald 'a new era in human settlements developments', according to a Gauteng government press release.

But according to Professor Ivan Turok of the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), South Africa, these scattered developments were merely intended to placate voters ahead of 2016 municipal elections. More worryingly, they flew in the face of 'less popular' but more established and thought through plans to integrate cities.

'The parallel agendas we have, I think, are damaging and divisive,' Turok said. 'We need to reconcile and align these agendas.'

Sometimes, however, the die had been cast, such as in the case of 'mega events' like the 2010 FIFA World Cup,

argued Professor Brij Maharaj of the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), South Africa. Costs quickly escalated and cities were left with, as in the instance of the football event, white elephant stadiums that continued to drain city coffers. There was a social price to pay for these spectacles, often touted as valuable marketing and investment-attracting opportunities for countries.

'There's a national consensus that the costs of these stadiums result in the diversion of funds from more urgent priorities,' said Maharaj.

Taking a more theoretical slant, Catherine Sutherland of UKZN explained how she and colleagues had borrowed from a vast body of international and local scholarship to define the city of Durban – best described as an African 'post-metropolis', i.e. a more complex evolution of a modern metropolis.

Durban, she summarised, could be defined within six discourses – from an exceptionalist and dialectical city to an adaptive and experimental city. This exercise had very real implications for urban policy and practice, Sutherland said. 'The first critical thing is you have to understand the context of Durban. We don't know how to move forward and plan this future city because we don't quite understand our context yet.' ■

'Palavering' to settle xenophobia?

Could 'palavering', a concept to describe negotiations or discussions within communities to resolve disputes in traditional cultures of West Africa, be a solution for broader conflict resolution?

It should be apparent to all that violent approaches to resolving disputes do not work, Michael Neocosmos of Rhodes University, South Africa, told delegates during the WSSF2015 session *Decolonisation, peace and security*. The patent inability of African states to resolve popular contradictions had led to vocal calls for foreign intervention, with consequences that were often too ghastly to contemplate.

'It is not simply a question of state-deployed violence but also of popular violence (i.e. of an ethnic or xenophobic kind). For instance, in Nigeria, the state's insistence on addressing the Boko Haram phenomenon militarily has predictably backfired completely, leading to the kidnapping of teenage children,' he said. The only popular response on offer seemed to be a moral one of 'free our girls', without an alternative political solution.

Neocosmos explained palavering presupposed a desire for unity within communities. This was not conflict solution, but a technique studied at universities and applied in other situations. It required commitment to engage in political or social activities, and involved arguing with the purpose to reach successful solutions.

'This is not a method of resolving antagonisms between enemies. This is a method of political and social healing. It is not politics referring to state power, forcing people to talk to each other against their will, but a way to organise people within communities, within themselves.'

He added that palavering rejected violence and concentrated on talking, making it an extremely long process. 'If we have to find a way around violence, we have to understand that talking over time will take long. This is a form of resistance to coercion that market profits impose on us with regard to time, but we have to understand that the idea of time itself has to be rethought.' ■



Youth with disabilities at greater risk than most

Report after report highlights the growing crisis of youth unemployment around the world. One Harvard report describes it as ‘among the greatest security and development challenges today [that] has resulted in the underemployment, inequality and marginalisation of youth.’

Even more concerning are the troubles faced by youth with disabilities. For good reason, they are considered one of the most marginalised groups in society, says Madri Engelbrecht, director of Altitude Supported Employment, a South African consultancy dedicated to facilitating work opportunities for people with disabilities.

As things stand, less than 80 000 out of an estimated eight million people with disabilities in South Africa – i.e. less than 1% of the group – are employed in the formal sector. ‘There’s a strong correlation between poverty and disability, and with access to employment remaining limited for people with disabilities, they find themselves trapped in a downward spiral of deprivation,’ says Engelbrecht.

In her talk at the WSSF2015, she outlined her study – conducted at Stellenbosch University, South Africa – on three programmes in the Western Cape that sought to create employment opportunities for youth with disabilities.

Rather than just focus on the numbers, Engelbrecht explored the success (and failure) of these programmes and their contributions to occupational justice. ‘Occupational justice,’ she said, ‘acknowledges that people are occupational beings, with the right to autonomously participate in meaningful, health-giving occupations of their choice.’ ■



Adapting to the impact of our species

What does it mean to be human and how can we think about ourselves differently in this place? This was the core of the WSSF2015 presentation by Dr Rika Preiser of the University of Cape Town, South Africa, who looked at the impact of the Anthropocene – the change on our environment due to human influence.

The presentation reported on continuing research from a South African project sponsored by Future Earth.

Future Earth is a 10-year international research initiative that will develop the knowledge for responding effectively to the risks and opportunities of global environmental change. Its goal is to support transformation towards global sustainability in the coming decades.

Dr Preiser’s work attempts to navigate the Anthropocene through technological engagement. The Anthropocene is often represented in popular literature as leading to an ‘apocalypse moment’ or the idea that humans are doomed to fail.

Dr Preiser’s research focuses instead on how humans can design a successful future through technology and rationality.

‘Pockets of future are lying in the present and are found through experiments, as they are there long before radical change occurs,’ she said

In the same session, Professor Arinam Banerjee from Delhi’s Ambedkar University shared his research that showed that estimates of hunger had changed due to changes in population.

It was not yet time to celebrate the decline in the incidence of hunger, he said, especially as 60% of world global hunger incidence was located in developing countries.

According to Dr Banerjee, food prices and persistence of hunger were affected by the use of grains and land resources for biofuels or renewable energy. Another factor was speculation in commodity markets. This, he added, reinforced the unequal structure of the global economy. ■

Policies need scrutiny



Professor Pundy Pillay (second from right) of the Wits School of Governance makes a point at the WSSF2015 session on comparative policies, which also featured (from left) Professor Jimi Adesina of the University of South Africa, Dr Teresa Cunha of the Centre for Social Studies at Portugal's University of Coimbra and facilitator Doaa Hammoudeh of the Arab Council for the Social Sciences in Lebanon.

French Nobel Prize-winning author, journalist and philosopher, Albert Camus, once said, 'by definition, a government has no conscience. Sometimes it has a policy, but nothing more'. Whether those policies mattered, however, was the contention of presenters at a session on comparative policies at the WSSF2015. This was especially the case when those policies were – in theory, at least – designed to reduce inequality and poverty.

And there was plenty of poverty and inequality in Africa, insisted Professor Pundy Pillay of the University of the Witwatersrand's Wits School of Governance, South Africa. Running through the admittedly flawed indicators of poverty, inequality and human development, Pillay laid out the worrying nature and scale of the continent's troubles, despite the much-lauded growth in Africa over the past 10 to 15 years.

'The important point is that growth is not inclusive,' Pillay said. Solving this, he argued, would require drastic policy measures, including increased investment in education and health, improved tax collection and a reassessment of the role of the state.

Taking a more optimistic view, Dr Teresa Cunha of the Centre for Social Studies at the University of Coimbra,

Portugal, explored the policy lessons that could be learnt from two initiatives that sought to improve the lot of women: Univens, a co-operative of seamstresses in the working-class area of Sarandi in Brazil, and an educational centre in the Ihnarrime region in Mozambique.

She discussed the policy lessons against the backdrop of the question posed by post-colonial theorist Gayatri Spivak of whether the subaltern – defined in post-colonial theory as those who are socially, politically and geographically marginalised by a hegemonic power – had a voice. In addition to issues of voice, Dr Cunha employed the term 'sobriety', which she defined as 'a distribution policy that optimises abundance for all'.

In assessing the initiatives, Professor Jimi Adesina, who holds the research chair in social policy at the University of South Africa, took a similarly theoretical approach in his talk. His interest, however, was to explore the ethical concerns of policies – particularly those around social assistance – that sought to address poverty and inequality.

He called for a multidimensional 'alternative ethical mooring' that, by shifting the policy landscape, would, among other things, be founded on a link between economic policy and social policy. ■

Hope for the future



Dr Sharlene Swartz and Mr Ben Roberts (insert), from the HSRC, who organised the youth session.

If it's going to be, it's up to me.' This was a powerful message that emerged from a session at the WSSF2015.

The session was a youth round table on *Attitudes to social inequality*, chaired by Professor Sharlene Swartz and Ben Roberts of the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), South Africa, and funded by the South African Department of Science and Technology (DST).

The session, which opened and closed with a poem by slam poet Sanam Sitaram, brought together five young people from Ogwini Technical Comprehensive High School in the nearby township of Umlazi, six young students from the University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, and six youthful scientists working for the HSRC, to discuss what inequality meant to them, how they had experienced it, and to suggest possible solutions.

Professor Swartz said, 'If this is the future, we're in good hands!' as she wrapped up the session. She noted that she'd seen a real shift in the youth in the last decade; these young people were not sitting around waiting for someone to help them, they were expressing activist sentiments, and many were already engaged in community-based organisations – not least the learners. Almost all the school children were part of Junior Rangers, a local recycling initiative.

Although many of the young people present were in positions of relative privilege, all had experienced or seen the impact of inequalities; many placed inequality in one form or another at the top of their list of concerns about the future.

Although many of the young people present were in positions of relative privilege, all had experienced or seen the impact of inequalities; many placed inequality in one form or another at the top of their list of concerns about the future.

Other major concerns were corruption frittering away precious state resources that should be used for development; capitalism, which 'creates winners and losers'; high unemployment, especially among youth, but also 'the quality of the jobs we create'; and uneven access to sanitation and other key resources, which create disparities between people.

One young scientist said that the fact that so many people were dissatisfied with the status quo was cause for hope: 'They want a better life, and that can galvanise them into action'. Another said the session itself was a reason to hope: 'The fact that we are talking now means we know what the problems are – we can look for solutions'. ■

Youth: problem or possibility?

Too often, the youth is seen and portrayed as a problem and not as potential, said sociologist Tina Osezua from Obafemi Awolowa University, Nigeria, during a round table discussion on the representation of youth in the Global South and theories built around them.

Osezua joined a distinguished panel of fellow sociologists and one environmental scientist at the WSSF 2015.

Chaired by Professor Sharlene Swartz of the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), South Africa, the panel also featured Ragi Bashonga of the HSRC, Ariane de Lannoy from the University of Cape Town, South Africa, her colleague Paballo Chauke, and an audience composed of youth scholars, who robustly engaged in the discussion.

It was a discussion with an interesting purpose. Professor Swartz opened by noting there was an 'absence of southern theory that recognises the complex contexts of southern youth'.

The Global South was a very broad and ill-defined category – a concept which became the subject of a brief flurry of discussion in itself – but it was, said Professor Swartz, 'a colonised site of spectacular data' that too often was exported to the Global North to be turned into theories there.

The idea behind a round table discussion was to make a start in addressing this situation. We as Africans, South Americans and others needed to create our own theories that had specific relevance and applicability to the nuances in individual countries, said one member of the audience, a scientist from Argentina.



Dr Tina Osezua from Obafemi Awolowa University with colleague Dr E Matthew.

One step that Global South scientists needed to consider to make this a reality, said Bashonga, was to 'place ourselves in African universities and do not succumb to the brain drain'.

Another suggestion was to enable scientists to develop and pursue research by possibly creating a journal based in the Global South.

And there was consensus that it would be good to step away from the 'problematisation' of youth, and look at what there was to learn from them too.

We could celebrate their resilience in adversity, noted Osezua; we could see them as 'agents and strategists within their own contexts – and map what those contexts are,' volunteered De Lannoy; and we could move away from 'seeing the youth as needing salvation and look at how they are creating salvation for themselves,' said Bashonga. ■



Political affiliation can be thicker than water

In many ways the eThekweni Municipality has been a jewel in Durban's crown, winning a string of awards for its management, developments and innovations.

It had also made substantial inroads into meeting its water delivery backlogs, even picking up UN and Stockholm Industry accolades. But beneath the surface, the picture wasn't always so rosy, said Associate Professor Mary Galvin of the Department of Anthropology and Development Studies at the University of Johannesburg, South Africa, in her presentation, *Of water and stones: citizens' attempts to access water in South Africa's liberal democracy*, on the opening day of the WSSF2015.

Looking at four townships in the municipality, Galvin unpacked the troubles communities faced in accessing water, and pointed out the political rivalries and infighting that dictated who got water and who didn't.

This marred citizens' experiences of democracy, Galvin noted. For one thing, the councillor system of participatory democracy wasn't working as intended. In response, some communities protested while others just opted out of any real participation.

'At the local level there's a disjuncture and disconnect, an emptiness – I'm using the term "empty democracy," she explained. 'In many ways it goes back to the perception that we cannot have a democracy that people recognise on the ground without meeting socioeconomic rights.' ■



Empowering women in the unions

'Why is there no female heading up the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU)?' asked Zuziwe Khuzwayo, a researcher from South Africa's Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), who looked at the role of women in the South African Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers Union (SACCAWU).

During her two-year qualitative study on the roles of women in SACCAWU, she found that once women were empowered, they became active in driving social change within the union, even though traditionally unions were male dominated. Her study found that patriarchy still existed.

'Women are often classified as nurturers and not participants in affecting real change in the lives of workers,'

she said. 'But once women union members of SACCAWU felt they belonged and that they could contribute to union affairs, it improved the way they saw themselves within the union.'

Khuzwayo spent two years with SACCAWU, a COSATU affiliate, and witnessed first-hand how women union members developed their own gender interests and influenced union policy.

Her study is significant in that 'it showcases that having a specific strategic gender policy can achieve gender equality in the workplace'. She said 58% of women were shop stewards today, compared to 45% in 2004.

'As a result of SACCAWU's success, COSATU has asked the union to review and update its existing gender policy,' Khuzwayo said. ■



Lessons on ageing from China

The more children a woman had, the longer she could live.

This was the conclusion of a research project by Professor Chyong-fang Ko of the Institute of European and American Studies, China. The project aimed to establish whether there were gender gaps related to life expectancy and to understand whether these gaps were caused by social or biological reasons.

The research findings, which were presented during the *Inequality in health by gender* session at the WSSF2015, also indicated that married women were likely to live longer than single women. Professor Ko said that people who were religious could also live longer because of the peace of mind their faith provided.

However, even though life expectancy was increasing in some areas, the elderly experienced health challenges.

Witness Chirinda, a representative of the South African Medical Research Council (SAMRC), said the World Health Organization's (WHO) Study on global AGEing and adult health (SAGE) was the first survey on the health and functional status of the elderly to be carried out in middle income countries. The survey included China, South Africa, Russia, India, Mexico and Ghana.

One interesting finding was that China had the highest disability-free life expectancy, and India had the lowest disability-free life expectancy.

One interesting finding was that China had the highest disability-free life expectancy, and India had the lowest disability-free life expectancy. Chirinda said his research findings indicated that most of those aged 50 years and older had severe health challenges.

There was consensus that programmes should be implemented to encourage wise health decisions for the next generation and ensure healthy ageing from an early age.

The research presented in the session underscored the importance of studying life expectancy, regarded as a trigger to the transition to sustained income growth. ■

A photograph showing two indigenous people from behind, walking away through a field of tall, dry grass. They are wearing traditional clothing made of animal skin. The person on the right is carrying a large animal skin bag on their back. The background shows a line of trees under a clear sky.

Development: what do indigenous peoples really want?

The dam, the mine, the factory: do ethnic minorities and indigenous peoples, who are often the custodians of land where ‘development’ is planned, really want the concomitant degradation of land and water?

This was the focus of a fascinating discussion by four anthropologists at a session of the WSSF2015.

The presentation, *Original inequality: poverty alleviation in western ethnic regions of China* by Professor Zhang Jijao, an anthropologist from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, triggered the discussion by the panel and chair.

Jijao revealed how development was shifting from the original four sites along the east coast of China (such as the Pearl River Delta, which recently overtook Tokyo as the world’s largest megacity) and being guided into very impoverished central and western provinces – also home to some of China’s little-known ethnic minorities, whose culture and lifeways could well become casualties of development.

Dr Faye Harrison of the University of Illinois, USA; Professor Subhadra Channa of the University of Delhi, India; and chair, Professor Thomas Reuter from the

University of Melbourne, Australia, engaged the audience in a vigorous discussion during which Professor Reuter explained how indigenous peoples in Borneo had told his graduate students they ‘couldn’t wait’ for the mines and plantations to come to their areas.

‘They can’t wait to leave and go to Jakarta; they buy into the idea of the consumerist culture they see on their TV screens.’

Not all of them, of course; indigenous and ethnic communities are not homogenous, as Dr Harrison pointed out: ‘There is a danger of a new essentialisation of indigenous people’. All people in a given group will not necessarily have the same response to the threat or possibility inherent in development.

Unfortunately, backlash often follows: when they experience the realities of development, people very often respond with ‘armed groups and massacres’, directed in many cases at migrant labour, themselves victims of displacement and exploitation.

There was a need, Professor Channa asserted, for a level of awareness among indigenous peoples that would enable them to make their own authentic responses to this and other situations that affected them. ■

The power and the weakness of Big Data



There was a misconception that Big Data was about the size of data, said Professor Hallvard Fossheim of the University of Bergen, Norway. 'It is not. Big Data is a combination of data that is too massive to work with on its own and we have to use technology, a specific mindset and methods to work with it.'

Fossheim and others are members of an expert group set up by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Global Science Forum to formulate international acceptable ethical guidelines for research in the social sciences that make use of such data. They participated in the WSSF2015 session *Big Data: challenges for the social sciences*.

The wide variety and diversity of such information require social scientists to rethink their research methods, to pay careful attention to the ethical issues that may arise, and to develop the skills and knowledge required to use such resources to address issues in relation to inequalities in social and economic positions.

Big Data has to do with, among others, the Internet of Things. According to www.wired.com, 'the Internet of Things revolves around increased machine-to-machine communication; it's built on cloud computing and networks of data-gathering sensors; it's mobile, virtual and connects instantaneously.'

Of concern was what people did with the data, said Professor Peter Elias from the University of Warwick, United Kingdom. On the positive side, the mass of information coming from social media offered the possibility of studying social processes as they unfurled

at the level of populations, which could serve as an alternative to traditional surveys.

Big Data could also be used as an apparatus of surveillance and influence, added Peter Muhlberger from the US National Science Foundation. 'The highest per capita use of cellphones is in the developing world. A company can collect information on cellphone use in Africa, for example, which can determine how people use cellphones and [they can then] adapt their marketing strategy accordingly.'

Imagine what information could be gained from social media. According to www.statista.com, Facebook had 1.49 billion registered accounts in August 2015; microblogging network Twitter had more than 316 million monthly active accounts; and blogging service Tumblr had more than 230 million active blog users on its site.

When using Facebook data, it could have a mass effect, said Muhlberger. 'The implications are not only issues of privacy, but potential discrimination through inferences ... If you can make inferences about someone's wellbeing, it could lead to discrimination against the individual,' He proposed possible solutions: people should have a right to opt in or opt out of how their data could be used, combined with strong public watchdogs.

Dr Christa van Zyl of the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) of South Africa said the integrity and inherent trust in research was crucial. 'Maybe in future we must not look at specific information, but transparency of how data has been use, rather than preventing specific types of use. There is a need for data management plans to form part of research planning and design.' ■

Critical barriers to maternal health

'M'ore than a third of unnecessary maternal deaths are due to lack of access to healthcare,' Amnesty International South Africa researcher, Louise Carmody, told delegates at the WSSF2015.

She was presenting qualitative research involving personal interviews over 18 months of fieldwork. Researchers were able to interview not only the women themselves, but also healthcare workers (although, in an aside that is emblematic of the problems, Carmody noted that they interviewed no doctors at all – because there were none in these KwaZulu-Natal and Mpumalanga clinics).

A number of critical barriers to maternal healthcare were identified in the report, titled *The struggle for maternal health*. One of the most important was that women and girls often avoided or delayed getting antenatal care because of a lack of privacy and a lack of confidence in the confidentiality of their information.

Carmody illustrated this graphically with a picture of a crowded clinic: the doors and windows in the little pink building were wide open, and the inability to maintain privacy was obvious. This was especially worrying for women living with HIV. HIV-positive women had two vials of blood taken instead of one; if this was done in the open,

other patients in the crowd could learn their status through this 'subtle sign', said Carmody.

Other barriers to maternal healthcare included the dearth of information about sexual and reproductive health. She noted that what was on offer was often 'biological' information such as explanations of menstruation, while what women often needed was information about their reproductive and healthcare rights.

And then, of course, there was the issue of access. To get to the clinic in far-flung rural areas (where some 40% of the South African population lives) usually meant a long journey that could cost a woman as much as R30. And if she went into labour, she could wait hours by the side of the road for an ambulance to arrive.

Carmody described how one young woman delivered her baby in a sugarcane field and 'cut' the umbilical cord with her teeth. She issued a call for women and girls to be able to exercise their right to access healthcare. ■



Ms Louise Carmody



WSSF goes digital with its first-ever mobile app

By Ronesh Dhawraj

The WSSF2015 may have ended on Wednesday, 16 September 2015, but conversations around the event will still be in circulation for months to come, thanks mainly to the WSSF application that served as a paperless public relations instrument during the four-day gathering of academics, researchers and knowledge-seekers.

Although bulky documents were distributed with accreditation packs, these were also made available electronically via the event's website (<http://www.wssf2015.org/>), but more importantly via the WSSF app, accessible on most smart devices including phones and tablets.

South Africa's Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) contracted the Johannesburg-based digital event marketing company on behalf of the WSSF. According to Soz Theofrastos, a systems developer with Hybridity, the creation of the WSSF app is not the first in South Africa, but the HSRC is certainly one of the 'early adopters' of the technology.

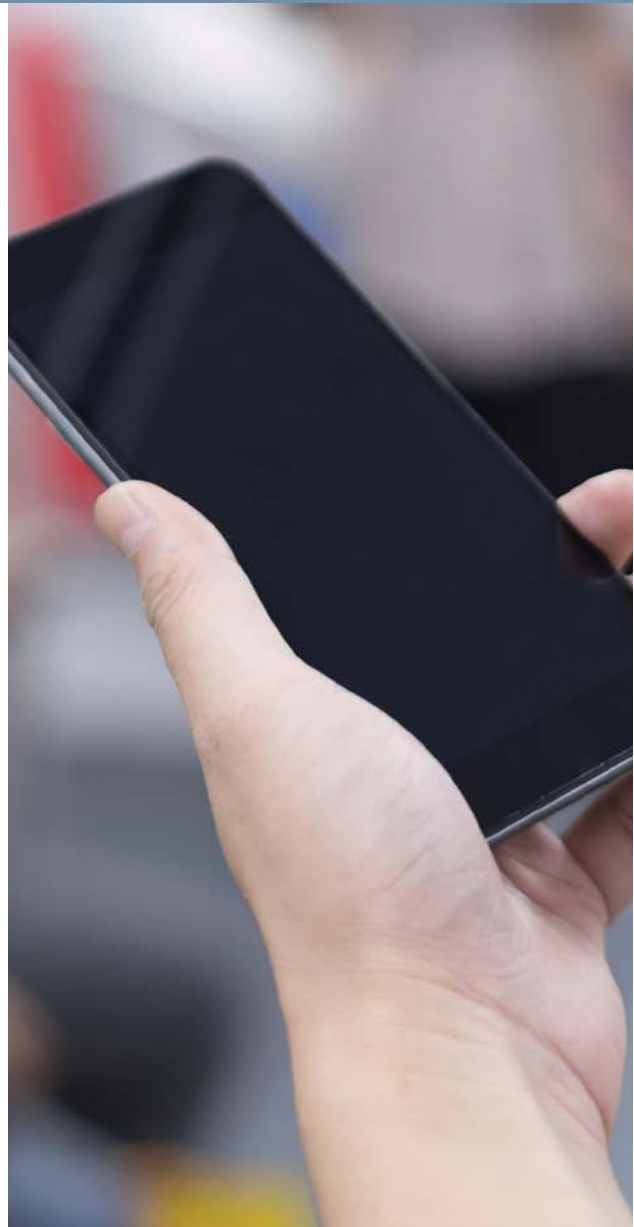
'We've been in the apps business for a few years. Initially it was very difficult to convince clients to drop print and go digital. The industry in South Africa has come quite far over the last four years, but I think there is still lots of opportunity. The WSSF is one of the first clients to specifically ask for an app. There is a strong move in the local industry to keep up with our North American and European counterparts, and I'm increasingly having conversations with clients about developing apps for them,' says Theofrastos.

Given that mobile phones are never too far out of reach, the WSSF app literally put the most up-to-date event information in the hands of each delegate. Apart from connecting attendees to the event agenda and providing supporting content and tools, the true magic happened when people used the app to connect to other like-minded people, as the app facilitated networking among delegates long before they arrived at conference events.

Pieter Swart of Conference Consultancy South Africa, the company contracted to organise and manage the WSSF2015, says international delegates to such conferences expect access to digital platforms.

'The last thing these delegates want is to carry lots of heavy information in their bags. They would rather buy an African trinket to take home to their family, opting to download the documents via a conference website later,' Swart explains.

He adds that the international norm is that delegates expect free Wi-Fi at conference venues, because roaming data charges can run into hundreds of US dollars. A highly sought-after aspect of the WSSF app was that it was always up to date.



'Unlike traditional printed event booklets, we were able to make instant changes to agendas, times and speakers, which were then updated on the app in real-time. This was quick, cost effective and seamless,' Theofrastos notes.

According to Theofrastos, the most popular features used during the WSSF2015 were 'My schedule' followed by 'My event', which allowed users to select a session and add it to the personal calendar on their device. Speaker profiles were also very popular, as delegates were able to get more information on their favourite speakers as well as ascertain at which other sessions they would be speaking. ■

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