



THE CEO

MESSAGE FROM

## Understanding and addressing social development challenges through research

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The HSRC Act of 2008 sets as one of the objects of the HSRC “to respond to the needs of vulnerable and marginalised groups in society by researching and analysing developmental problems, thereby contributing to the improvement of the quality of their lives.”

Accordingly, during the 2009/10 financial year, the HSRC continued to conduct research into the leading developmental challenges facing South Africa, the mother continent, and the rest of the world. Altogether, there are about 160 research projects underway on themes relating to social development. The knowledge generated from this work promotes better understanding of these challenges, enables the formulation of evidence-based strategies to redress them, and informs related public policy. In this message, I would like to share some of the areas targeted for research by the HSRC, as well as research highlights during, and in the run-up to, the year in review.

HIV/AIDS is universally acknowledged as a massive peril to the health of the population and to socioeconomic development in South Africa, the African continent and the world, and its containment is identified as a global threat among the Millennium Development Goals. Over the years, the HSRC has acquired a national and international reputation for its research in this area. The HSRC’s *South African National HIV Prevalence, Incidence, Behaviour and Communication Survey*, conducted triennially to track the epidemic and investigate social and

behavioural practices and attitudes, has become a prime reference source for researchers, policy-makers and practitioners in the region and around the world. On 9 June 2009, the HSRC officially unveiled the results of the third survey in a handover ceremony to the minister of health.

This survey disclosed some hopeful signs as well as some cautions. It indicated an overall decline in HIV incidence in the teenage population of 15-19 years in 2008, and a decline in prevalence among adults aged 15-49 between 2002 and 2008 in Gauteng, Northern Cape and the Free State, with the largest decline of 7.9 percentage points in the Western Cape. Young people reported increased condom use from 57% in 2002 to 87% in 2008 among young males, and from 46% to 73% among young females. However, intergenerational sex showed a substantial increase among female teenagers aged 15-19, which exposed them to a group of older males with a higher HIV prevalence. HIV prevention knowledge had declined among the population 15-49 years, from 64.4% in 2005 to 44.8% in 2008. However, HIV/AIDS research at the HSRC, which has included collaborative projects with other countries in the region, is not restricted to the surveys. It encompasses a wide range of issues such as policy formulation; orphans and vulnerable children; the impact of HIV/AIDS on professions; intervention effectiveness; and social protection against stigma.

It is common cause that education is fundamental to development.

There is consensus as well that education in South Africa is in trouble. The department of education (as it was then) previously conceded that “there is considerable evidence that the quality of education in South African schools is worryingly low relative to what South Africa spends on schooling.” In her recent budget speech the minister of basic education, Angie Motshekga, agreed with the conclusion by the ministerial committee on national education evaluation and development unit (NEEDU) that “there was an indisputable crisis in education, and that it needed to be resolved.”

Government has therefore ranked education as one of the national priorities, and the HSRC has quite rightly made education one of its primary research areas. Its researchers are often appointed to do research for the education department, and are consulted by education authorities from time to time. Some of the themes that have been the subject of study by the HSRC include educator supply and demand, teacher workload and teacher education. Among other things, the HSRC researchers found that national data did not reveal the extent of actual teacher shortages in key learning areas. Researchers have also looked at the impact of policies and politics on education. For example, they found that the incorporation of teacher training colleges into universities had not yet consolidated into a coherent system and that the policy needed further review. Researchers have also looked at factors underpinning success and failure in secondary school education, and identified the impediments and possible solutions. The question of equity of access to the various levels of education has also been investigated. It was HSRC researchers that drew the attention of education authorities to the imperative of early literacy achievements for learners to be successful in their later educational or employment careers. It was therefore of particular interest to hear President Jacob Zuma declare in his 2009 State of the Nation address that, “From this year onwards, all grade 3, 6 and 9 students will write literacy and numeracy tests that are independently moderated.”

There is a close link between education or lack of it on the one hand, and poverty and unemployment on the other. The knowledge society of today demands a literate and numerate workforce that is equipped with appropriate skills for the modern economy. For this reason basic education; skills training; labour law reforms; and economic development and growth are regarded by the HSRC as key areas of inquiry to develop strategies to promote employment and

reduce poverty. Working with the department of labour, HSRC researchers have conducted an analysis on the complexities of attaining alignment between skills training strategies and micro-economic priorities. They have performed ground-breaking analyses of the impact of post-apartheid labour legislation, and published reports and scholarly papers on this and other aspects of the world of work that have served to inform policy and implementation.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has identified the long-standing issue of unemployment as one of the biggest challenges to economic growth in South Africa, along with poverty, large wealth disparities and a high incidence of HIV/AIDS. Poverty and joblessness reflect, in part, our economic landscape. South Africa has a two-tiered economy: a financial and industrial sector rivalling that of developed countries, alongside a large informal sector with characteristics typical of developing countries. South Africa has huge disparities in wealth and income, and arguably the highest Gini coefficient in the world.

The HSRC has therefore devoted much of its attention and energies to issues of employment, economic growth and socioeconomic equity. The HSRC devised employment scenarios designed to anticipate needs of the economy and identify areas requiring enhanced coherence and alignment. These then served as working documents in brainstorming workshops and roundtable meetings, bringing together government, business and labour, and have received sufficient recognition to find their way onto government websites. Other studies have focused on policies and interventions relating to rural poverty, food security and social exclusion.

HIV/AIDS, poverty, food insecurity, unemployment, lack of access to good education, and homelessness all have a direct bearing – in a relentless vicious cycle – on family dysfunction, the lot of children and youth, crime and other social ills. The HSRC research programme on child, youth, family and social development is dedicated to investigating the role of these disparate influences, and to seeking possible interventions to mitigate their impact. It looks at the life course, from infancy to old age, with an emphasis on understanding how contexts, policies and politics shape and distribute life chances. The HSRC has conducted large-scale research on interventions and services in early childhood development (ECD). The research showed that the ECD years represented a critical platform for all future human development, and that increased investment in ECD services was a critical intervention.

Other studies have looked at the role of fatherhood generally, and of teenage fatherhood in particular, in disadvantaged communities; youth, alcohol and sex; teenage pregnancy; and child labour.

Social development cannot flourish in the South African context in the absence of strong and effective democratic institutions and practices. Scholars have stressed the link between democracy and the social and economic empowerment of its citizens; a citizenry that sees no qualitative improvement in the social and material conditions in the lives of its members soon loses interest in democratic rituals such as elections, and discontent and rebelliousness begin to emerge.

South Africa is a constitutional democracy with a strong human rights bias that aspires to be a developmental state, and the HSRC supports this aspiration by conducting research that evaluates legislation, policies and administration of the government in terms of its ability to reduce inequalities, deliver services to all its communities, and combat crime for a safer environment for its citizens. It looks at issues of citizenship, ethical standards in public life, and race and gender equity. It analyses the functioning of party politics and electoral systems, and assesses the extent to which processes of governance reflect a democratic ethos. It engages in public policy analysis, and informs policy making through solicited advice, and unsolicited counsel through workshops and policy briefs.

But the HSRC is not just an inward-looking organisation whose activities and influence are restricted to South Africa. For one thing, HSRC researchers regularly conduct collaborative research with their counterparts nationally, regionally and internationally. The HSRC has an international reputation as a member of the global community of academic research organisations, and HSRC research is published in peer-reviewed, internationally-rated scholarly journals, and is used and cited by other researchers around the globe. HSRC researchers are frequent speakers at global conferences, play host to international conferences here at home, and are frequent visiting scientists at universities abroad. Research output in terms of published articles per scientist rivals that of leading institutions in this country, and has increased steadily from year to year. The HSRC has a vibrant capacity development programme to train young scientists, and hosts and trains masters and doctoral students as a means to contribute to the national pool of researchers.

South Africa has just emerged from a most successful and internationally acclaimed FIFA World Cup extravaganza, the preparation for which saw unprecedented co-operation within government, and between government, business and civil society. The event was as spectacularly successful as it was historic, although the true winners may have been the vuvuzela, whose sales soared around the world, and the uncanny octopus now said to be worth a fortune. The event demonstrated that South Africans can achieve anything they wish, including the translation of social science research into action, if they put their minds to it and resolve to work together with a common purpose.

To conclude, I would like to commend all the HSRC staff for their loyalty, skill and selfless dedication without which the HSRC would be a lesser organisation. To them goes the credit for the remarkable record of achievements by the council. I thank minister Naledi Pandor and the department of science and technology for their unflagging support and co-operation; the HSRC council led by Professor Gerwel, and the board led by Phumelele Nzimande, for providing outstanding leadership; and the HSRC clients without whose funding many of the HSRC projects would not have seen the light of day.