

# Informing policies critical to social upliftment

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Guided by its vision to serve as an independent knowledge hub, the HSRC has conducted more than 200 research projects over the past year. We have prioritised our research to focus on poverty reduction strategies, growing the economy, job creation, education quality improvement, service delivery acceleration, crime reduction, youth development, HIV and AIDS control, and understanding our system of innovation. As a result, we have ensured that 93% of our projects are conducted for the benefit of the public.

Ensuring that these priorities are addressed while allowing scientists to innovate is a challenge we believe was well managed. Our researchers were able to contribute to many government policy initiatives that aim to improve the quality of lives of South Africans while at the same time producing high-level research that generates new knowledge. This Annual Report has many examples of studies that aim to inform or revise government policies. The researchers used both longitudinal research methods and randomised control trials to test new interventions, which when successful can inform the development of new government and NGO implemented programmes. Such research was done in the areas of HIV prevention and quality of education.

Much research was undertaken in collaboration with our partners, forming networks of stakeholders who are likely to implement the recommendations arising from the research. Not only did our researchers not work in silos; they also shared and learned with their peers inside and outside of South Africa. Our effort to work with our fellow Africans on the continent was maintained with 31% of our research projects – with a budget of R1 million or more – being done collaboratively with researchers in other parts of the continent. Our nascent Africa-research fellowship programme, coupled with our distinguished research fellowship programme and the vibrant seminar series, became vehicles through which learning and sharing occurred over and above the regular research projects. The HSRC's participation in activities of the International Social Science Council

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and UNESCO's Social Transformation Programme are some of the examples that show our ability to share and learn beyond Africa's borders.

The HSRC was able to do much of this work while continuing to change its demographic profile and altering its approach to conducting research. The 484 HSRC staff members, of whom 406 are permanent (i.e. appointed on indefinite contracts, or for periods of one year or longer), come from a diverse pool of research, technical support and administrative backgrounds. Over the last year, the HSRC has further consolidated its position as a predominantly black African organisation, with 60% being African, and 78% black (including African, coloured and Indian). For the first time in the history of the HSRC, we have managed to reach our target for black senior researchers: the current figure stands at 57%. In terms of gender composition, the majority of staff is female, at 60%. However, it remains hard to retain staff because they are often attracted to more permanent, higher-paying positions outside the HSRC. Although we try to benchmark our salaries, ours are not always competitive because of continual salary increases in other organisations.

We also continue to 'grow our own timber'. In the past year 81 research trainees (20% of our staff) were studying for their Master's or PhD degrees at various universities, while learning by doing at the HSRC. However, it remains a challenge for us to conduct research while training a new group of researchers for the HSRC, other science councils, NGOs, the business sector, universities and government. We have tried to recruit more post-doctoral candidates, but fell slightly off target, attracting only 10 of the 12 required. These post-doctoral trainees are expected to assist in developing the Master's and PhD trainees.

In addition, our senior researchers have spent much time assisting junior researchers to learn the ropes of publishing scientific articles in peer-reviewed journals. It is heartening to see that the HSRC has managed to exceed the target of 0,50 of peer-reviewed journals per junior researcher by reaching 0,67. A few researchers have a much higher frequency of publishing than others. This year's top four achievers in internationally peer-reviewed journals were Professor Karl Peltzer (11), Professor Linda Richter (8), Professor Leickness Simbayi (7) and Mr Sean Jooste (4). We take this opportunity to congratulate them.

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The HSRC has continued to make a significant contribution to African social science and humanities scholarship through publishing. In a recent study by the Stellenbosch Centre for Research on Science and Technology (CREST),

the HSRC Press consistently featured among the top five publishers of scholarly books. Of equal importance is the role the HSRC Press has played in raising the profile of African scholarship. In the CREST study, international scholarly book publishers were estimated to have a citation factor of 12, with their local counterparts averaging six. The HSRC Press was estimated to have a citation factor of 11,49.

In addition, the HSRC Press held over 40 launches and exhibits, locally and abroad, to showcase the organisation's publishing output. This promotion of the physical book was augmented by an electronic reach, that now covers 189 countries, and generates traffic of over 500 000 per year to the HSRC Press website. Through the HSRC Press and publication in internationally accredited journals, South African social scientists, including social scientists at the HSRC, are contributing significantly to scholarly output and visibility of African social science and humanities.

Financially, this year the HSRC has obtained more income than ever before. This is partly because the Department of Science and Technology (DST) contributed



MoU with Tshwane University of Technology

MoU with Stellenbosch University

50% of the HSRC budget, in line with the shareholder's agreement, and partly because donor organisations and funders contributed sufficiently for the HSRC to do 200 research projects, convene roundtables, seminars, workshops and conferences. The strategy for seeking multi-year funding is proving to be useful in sustaining the organisation. More than half (55,4%) of all the grants awarded to the HSRC were to be used over at least three years, a significant improvement over the previous financial year. We missed the target for extra-parliamentary grants by 1,5%, raising 59,5% of our research budget externally. Managing a portfolio of more than a quarter of a billion rand in income, while ensuring the funds are well administered, the assets safe-guarded and the debts collected, is not easy. It is for this reason that we are pleased that for the eighth consecutive year the HSRC has shown prudent management of resources, and attainment of unqualified audit status.

Much of this work would not have been achieved without the support of the Council, led by Professor Jakes Gerwel. After a successful programme to transform the HSRC into a productive and relevant organisation, the Council's term of office is coming to an end. Their presence will be sorely missed by all of us who have worked with them. Some members have opted to continue and we look forward to working with them in the new Council. The support of Minister of Science and Technology, Mosibudi Mangena, Deputy Minister, Derek Hanekom, and Director-General, Phil Mjwara, and the DST staff is much appreciated. The HSRC executive management and staff have all contributed to the success of the organisation. For this I am grateful and give thanks.



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