

# Striving towards innovation and renewal

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The HSRC is a national public entity, ultimately accountable to the democratically elected Parliament and the people of South Africa. As governing body of the HSRC, Council is not only concerned with what the HSRC achieves, but also with how it conducts its business. Council has once again had the privilege of working with a management team – consisting of the chief executive officer (CEO) and senior researchers and administrators – who are willing to embrace new challenges of research and transformation, but remain grounded in core values such as independence, integrity and innovation; non-discrimination and non-partisanship; diligence, responsiveness and collaboration.

In its Business Plan for the year under review, the HSRC undertook to strive for the achievement of a set of explicit strategic priorities and objectives with defined measurable outcomes. This Annual Report presents a review and synopsis of the organisation's endeavours towards the achievement of these goals. Elsewhere in this Report, Council provides a detailed account of progress that has been made with regard to the implementation of the 2007/08 Business Plan. In this brief message, I wish to draw attention to some research trends in the work of the HSRC with which Council has been particularly pleased, and confine myself to developments in respect of three of the HSRC's stated goals, which are to:

- consolidate and strengthen the HSRC's public-purpose activities;
- contribute to prioritised policy issues of national importance; and
- strengthen research collaboration and network activities in partnership with institutions and individuals in other parts of Africa.

Public purpose, as described in the HSRC Bill, includes the objective 'to inform the effective making and monitoring of policy, the evaluation of its implementation, and public debate through the effective dissemination of the results of research'. The HSRC has initiated multi-stakeholder forums including government representatives to ponder and make recommendations regarding the formulation of policy relative to critical social issues such as crime, the risks of a culture of dependency consequent upon government grants, and high university drop-out rates. These recommendations – closely linked to government policy-making – will be published on a regular basis in the form of *Policy Briefs*.

Council is particularly delighted to see that publications of the HSRC reflect a depth and continuity in its work, alongside innovation and renewal. Titles in the best-selling list of the HSRC Press include the 2008 *HRD Review* – a worthy follow-up to the 2003 edition, which served as reference to scholars and decision-makers alike; as well as the 2007 edition of the *State of the Nation* book, now

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already a regular contribution to debates on current and emerging issues of national importance. Other books featured in the list of best-sellers represent a range of issues relevant to the social sciences and humanities and to the world in which we live – titles such as *Monitoring Child Well-Being* and *Baba: Men and Fatherhood in South Africa*, suitable for consultation by educators, policy-makers, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and other stakeholders committed to the well-being of children and families in South Africa; thought-provoking studies on *Human Rights in African Prisons*, *The Land Question in South Africa*, and *Local Government, Gender and Integrated Development Planning* providing evidence-based information to lay persons, development activists, policy-makers and academics; and studies dealing with development and our history, such as *Learning to Teach in South Africa*, *Postgraduate Student Retention and Success*, and the slim and insightful volume on *African Intellectuals in 19th and early 20th Century South Africa*.

Council applauds the HSRC for further extending its emphasis from research that generates data, to research that supports and promotes the rational implementation of policy as exemplified by the HSRC-sponsored August 2007 workshop attended by government, Parliament and labour on the topic 'Arriving at solutions for policy implementation' at which a variety of issues of national priority were deliberated. The HSRC is playing a key role to support the South African National AIDS Council by undertaking and promoting research to inform, and monitor progress with, the implementation of the National AIDS Strategy. Similarly, the colloquium on the future of the health system – a highly-vexed problem in our country – held in July 2007 and designed to chart possible future options constitutes another example of the HSRC's contribution to the shaping of important public policy.

The Annual Report highlights the HSRC's collaboration with institutions and researchers elsewhere in Africa in line with its undertakings in the Business Plan. In this regard, the publication – in collaboration with CODESRIA (headquartered in Dakar, Senegal) – by the HSRC Press of the magnificent volume on the ancient and historic manuscripts uncovered in the Mali desert under the title of *The Meanings of Timbuktu* constitutes a significant milestone. Contrary to the popular misconception that African scholarship and written history only began with the appearance of European colonialism, the Timbuktu manuscripts, written in the Arabic language and in African languages written in the Arabic script, are examples of a documented heritage of pre-colonial African intellectualism that extended from North Africa, across West Africa and down the East African Coast. South Africa is an important actor in the preservation of the Timbuktu documents, and it is fitting that the HSRC has in some way been involved with the project.

This is probably the last Annual Report to be published under the auspices of my Council. In line with requirements of the HSRC Act, a new governing body will be constituted to replace the present Council. I take this opportunity to thank my fellow Council members with whom it has been a rare privilege to serve. I commend them for their years of immense contribution in Council and its committees, and for their loyalty and dedication to the HSRC cause. Thanks to their leadership and guidance, the HSRC has grown in stature and many other respects to become a highly effective research organisation, and a source of knowledge and information for rational policy-making, and for informed interventions in social upliftment. I am also grateful to the President and CEO along with the entire HSRC staff for supporting and facilitating the work of Council.

Finally, my deepest gratitude goes to Minister of Science and Technology, Mosibudi Mangena, and his senior staff for their unflinching co-operation and support.