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Divisional Executive

## Developmental, Capable and Ethical State

**Developmental, Capable and Ethical State (DCES) is one of three research divisions of the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC). Serving South Africa for more than 50 years, the HSRC is the largest research institute in Africa focusing on the social sciences and humanities. It produces and disseminates knowledge that contributes to policy options and programmes on poverty alleviation, solutions to reduce inequality, and innovations for employment creation. More than just a research generator, the HSRC's divisions and centres work towards research use for policy and impact. Collaborations and partnerships are mission critical and include local, regional and international public, private and community entities.**

### **DCES RESEARCH INTERVENTIONS** aim to answer:

- How to strengthen democracy through transparent governance, accountable leadership and reinvigorated public participation/civic engagement; and
- How to ensure sustainable development through peace, human and social security.

Agenda 2063 of the African Union, seeking to establish peace, security and integration on the continent, as well as the Sustainable Development Goals and South Africa's National Development Plan inform the work of the DCES division. The division's research, implementation and advocacy support serves to build a capable, ethical and developmental state, as well as strengthen social cohesion, and create safe, inclusive and resilient communities.

### **Our work**

Knowledge gained through the DCES' work contributes to more sustainable peacebuilding and strengthens participatory democracy, enabling better accountability and citizenship where people are at the centre of governance, and socio-economic and environmental rights are promoted and protected.

- *Everybody who lives in South Africa is affected by the laws and policies of the state. For successful democracy, everyone must participate, typically by having their voices heard in elections. To some extent, our participatory system has collapsed because, especially at local government level, the process is highly politicised so that often only one party dominates at a voting station, resulting in discomfort among citizens to participate in decision-making as part of our constitutional framework. New ways of hearing those voices must be explored, making use of technological advances and understanding people's perceptions.*

## Focus areas

### Peace and sustainable security (PaSS)

Insecurities from climate change, environmental crises, hunger and food shortages, pandemics, recurring energy and water shortages, and the changing nature of employment affect sustainable development. Social protection is necessary to address human and social vulnerabilities. For example, the National Health Insurance is a transformative health financing reform seeking to address social injustices due to limited and inequitable access to inclusive and quality health services by the majority of South Africans. These injustices must be fully understood and evidence-based interventions generated. PaSS provides insight into the nature of these challenges and ways of responding to them more effectively. **Research themes** include economic and political security; climate change; food, water and energy security; and social protection.

### Democracy, governance and citizenship (DGC)

This programme works with government, oversight bodies and civil society to improve and strengthen participatory democracy through research and implementation support, advocating for the adoption of a values-based approach to development, with a focus on developmental local government and accountable leadership. It views the interface between governance, leadership and citizenship as a nexus for policy-relevant and impactful research. **Research themes** include electoral research; social cohesion and citizenship; local governance; and democracy and constitutionalism.

### BRICS Research Centre

The BRICS research work strategically links PaSS and DGC through addressing critical issues of economic growth and development; peace, security and international relations; social justice; sustainable development and quality of life; political and economic governance; and knowledge and innovation. This includes research collaborations with BRICS member states, governments, the private sector and civil society stakeholders. **Research themes** include BRICS and multilateralism, South-South relations, sustainability and governance, and the right to development.



### TO READ

The latest edition of the State of the Nation.

*The Developmental, Capable and Ethical State division is committed to the constitutional state and the health of democracy in South Africa, and all the various elements that go with that. We are passionate about providing evidence to help guide and inform policy and provide implementation support as a trusted and engaged research partner in the National System of Innovation.*

*~ Prof. Narnia Bohler Muller,  
Divisional Executive*

## Project snapshots

- The DCES has several research projects in the pipeline. Once completed, these are made available in the public domain and to government stakeholders as policy briefs. Significant work is done with the Independent Electoral Commission, for example the voter preparation and satisfaction surveys for every national and municipal election.
- Internally, the division collaborates with the Impact Centre on issues around local government and social media, and with AISA on the HSRC-wide food security project, among others.
- Working with the African Union Development Agency and the South Korean Embassy, one project looks at the differences in development between South Africa and South Korea; much work is also done with the BRIC countries.
- Two flagship projects are the annual South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) and the biennial State of the Nation (SON) publication.
  - SASAS is a nationally representative survey that has been conducted since 2003. It provides a unique, long-term account of the speed and direction of change in the underlying public perceptions, values and social fabric of modern South Africa. As such, it is a notable tool for monitoring evolving social, economic and political values among South Africans, but also demonstrates promising utility as an anticipatory, or predictive mechanism that can inform decision- and policymaking processes. The 2021 survey will also explore citizens' attitudes towards National Health Insurance.
  - The SON, published since 2003, is double-blind peer reviewed publication focusing on relevant topics of national interest. The 2018 edition focused on *Poverty and Inequality: Diagnosis, Prognosis and Responses*, and the next edition's theme is *Ethics and Politics of South Africa's Struggle against Poverty and Inequality*. This volume deals with the political economy of inclusion/exclusion; the electoral system; women and land; leadership and accountability; normative approaches to delivery; minimum wage; taxation; socio-economic rights; identity and wellbeing; culture and transformation; and the international context.