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Divisional Executive

Inclusive Economic Development

Inclusive Economic Development (IED) 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.

The IED division undertakes research to transform educational outcomes and increase economic participation. It recognises that education and the economy have long been linked, and thus conducts research in both areas, sometimes discretely, many times overlapping, and through a multidisciplinary lens. We research ways to understand educational performance and improve learning for those who have had unequal starting points, and interrogate the social, spatial and structural obstacles to economic participation to bring about the gains and growth South Africa needs.

Our work

Informed by the National Development Plan (NDP), IED focusses on inclusive growth in the economy and increasing employment opportunities (NDP Chapter 3) and on improving education, innovation and training (NDP Chapter 9). With regard to the Medium-Term Strategic Framework it addresses Priority 2 – Economic Transformation and Job Creation and Priority 3 – Education and Skills.

ASSESSMENTS of the effectiveness of government programmes in maths and science education, skills development, land, housing and economic development; **PARTICIPATION** of young people in accessing dignified and decent work; the **TRANSFORMATION** of higher education; and **INNOVATION** that allows for wider access to services, and supports food security form a large part of IED's work.

- *Too often a focus on growth alone leaves many behind and unable to participate in creating sustainable livelihoods. Instead by focusing on other drivers of development, including access to basic needs such as housing and shelter, and the acquisition and application of relevant skills, the serious linkages between the division's two areas of work – inclusive education and economic participation – are becoming apparent.*

Focus areas

Changing economies

The economy changes all the time, for better or worse. Economic change affects peoples' livelihoods and living standards. Research in this strategic area seeks to understand the forces that drive temporary fluctuations in the economy, and the bigger longer-term shifts in economic structures, social relations, and spatial distribution of economic opportunities. A focus of our research is on innovation and how to change the economy so that it produces better outcomes for all people, including the role of the state in enacting economic policies that foster wider participation among the vulnerable and marginalised.

Education and livelihoods

Education is central to human actualisation and greatly impacts on young people's life outcomes and the kind of societies in which we live. Our research engages with the planning, quality, governance, effectiveness, transformation, transitions and outcomes of education at all stages. It is currently focussed on the unequal contexts of learning, assessment of achievement, the acquisition of relevant life and livelihood-ready skills in the context of changing technologies, and the future of work for youth in South Africa, Africa, and in the Global South.

Project snapshots

- Funded by the Department of Basic Education, the *Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study* monitors the quality of South African schooling by assessing learner achievement in these subjects. It provides rich data on the variable contexts of learning in schools, and allows researchers to recommend evidence-based interventions to enhance young people's schooling outcomes.
- Commissioned by the Mastercard Foundation, *The Imprint of Education*, investigates the impact of university education on first generation graduates – both their career trajectories and their contributions to family, community and society. This five-year-long study includes a longitudinal tracer study that maps obstacles and enablers to young lives as they embark on meaningful lives and livelihoods, including what kinds of leaders, institutions and organisations are needed to ensure an African continent fit for the future.
- A series of *Macroeconomic Policy Dialogues* that include a focus on stimulus packages, sustainable debt, structural transformation of the economy and the relationship between current macroeconomic policy choices and industrial policy and labour market policy, are underway.
- In partnership with the University of the Free State, IED hosts the *DSI/NRF South Africa Research Chair in City-Region Economies*. Cities are platforms for progress because they make people and firms more productive, create positive value and facilitate learning and creativity. The DSI/NRF Chair seeks to understand the determinants of urban economic prosperity and the obstacles faced to improve policy.
- Working with local government and municipalities, the Local Innovation Advancement Tools study devises, tests and shares fit-for-purpose decision mechanisms to enable municipalities to fulfil their mandates in delivering basic services (access to water, sanitation, electricity and recreational facilities), and to promote inclusive economic development.
- Building on the work done in the foundational *Labour Market Intelligence Programme*, research in the area of skills development and sustainable livelihoods, focusses on understanding the transformative structures, processes and policies that allow for equitable access to employment, including the role of an integrated social protection system (especially for youth and women) and the contribution of the sector education and training authorities in doing so.
- Funded by the Department of Higher Education and Training, the *State of Transformation* study makes recommendations for policy shifts in higher education following recent calls for decolonising and deracialising education.
- The Wellcome Trust-funded Climate adaptation and sustainable rural health outcomes in southern Africa project is a multi-year project that aims to evaluate the nutritional and psychosocial health outcomes of high frequency, high impact and widespread climate adaptation actions in rural southern Africa. The project team works with universities and state agencies leading climate change and food and nutrition security interventions in Zimbabwe.

● *Key in our mandate is to offer evidence-informed recommendations for policy shifts and programmatic innovations. We continually bring together experts in government, civil society and academia to find new ways forward in topics of crucial importance – so all can benefit – for example, reimagining technical and vocational education, embracing and applying the technologies of the fourth industrial revolution. Given our current context, it is of the highest importance that our research helps to change educational trajectories and outcomes, encourages agency and empowers people in communities with strategies for economic participation – and does all three things at the same time.*

● ~ Prof. Sharlene Swartz, Divisional Executive