

# NSTF

National Science & Technology Forum



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science, technology  
& innovation

Department:  
Science, Technology and Innovation  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



SAASTA

South African Agency for Science  
and Technology Advancement



HSRC

Human Sciences  
Research Council



National Science and  
Technology Forum

## Public relationship with science conference

**Date: 26-27 March 2025**

**Venue: Birchwood Hotel and OR Tambo Conference Centre**

**Speakers and Discussion Leaders: Biographies**

26 March (Day 1): 09:10-09:45

***Presentation of the full 2022 SAPRS Survey report***



**Dr Vijay Reddy** worked as a high school science and mathematics teacher, a researcher in non-governmental organisations, a university lecturer, and spent 20 years at the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) as a researcher as well as executive director of the Education and Skills Development Research Programme.

She completed her undergraduate studies in chemistry and mathematics, at the University of Durban-Westville. She subsequently studied at US and UK universities. Her doctoral dissertation was entitled: *Life Histories of Black South African Scientist: Academic Success in an Unequal Society*.

At the HSRC the three major areas of her research were in large-scale achievement studies, skills planning and public understanding of science. She co-ordinated the South African component of the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) for 20 years. She led the multi-year Labour Market Intelligence Partnership Project (LMIP) to support the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) to establish the Skills Planning Mechanism for the post-school sector. She researched the science-society interface since 2008, publishing on this topic and supporting the Department of Science, Technology and Innovation (DSTI) to institute a periodic survey to measure how the public viewed science. She led the first comprehensive survey on the South African Public Relationship with Science. Dr Reddy has published several journal articles, book chapters, peer reviewed monographs and research reports. She has presented at many local and international conferences, including several keynote addresses.

26 March (Day 1): 10:00-10:30

***Theme: Interest in and knowledge of science and technology and the environment***



**Dr Nqobile Xaba** is a researcher at the Mapungubwe Institute for Strategic Reflection (MISTRA) in the Knowledge Economy and Scientific Advancement faculty. Her work focuses on the just energy transition in South Africa (SA), mineral resource beneficiation and the broader climate change issues. Prior to joining MISTRA, she was a chemistry lecturer at Tshwane University of Technology (TUT). She previously worked as researcher at the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) for half a decade in the energy materials group. Her research works focused on energy conversion and storage technologies (fuel cells and rechargeable batteries). She holds a BSc degree in pure and applied chemistry (cum laude) from the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), and BSc honours degree in chemistry, an MSc degree in chemical engineering science from the University of North-West (NWU), and a PhD in chemistry from the University of the Western Cape (UWC). She is an alumna of the 72<sup>nd</sup> Lindau Nobel Laureate meeting.

Dr Xaba's current work includes conducting research on SA's implementation for a just transition framework in SA, and beneficiation of SA's minerals for the energy transition. She works with diverse teams in the African continent and globally, researching Africa's energy needs in the context of an evolving climate landscape and the socio-economic implications for SA's energy transition. She has published her work in renowned scientific journal articles, has contributed book chapters and opinion editorial articles in leading South African publications. She is the co-editor and contributing author to the MISTRA volume, *A Just Transition to a Low Carbon Future in SA*.

Dr Xaba holds a senior research fellow appointment with the Foundation for Renewable Energy and Environment, and at the University of Johannesburg (UJ). She is also an advisory board member of Enzi-ljaye Africa Initiative.

26 March (Day 1): 12:00-12:30

**Promise and reservation attitudes towards modern and traditional science and technology**



**Prof Susan Booysen** is emeritus professor at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits), Johannesburg, and independent research consultant. She has extensive experience as political analyst and media commentator, especially in the fields of South African politics and political economy. She is the author of, among others, a trilogy of books on South Africa's African National Congress (ANC) – *The ANC and the Regeneration of Political Power* (2011), *Dominance and Decline: The ANC in the time of Zuma* (2015), and *Precarious Power: Compliance and discontent under Ramaphosa's ANC* (2021). Among her three edited volumes are *Marriages of Inconvenience: The politics of coalitions in SA* (2021) and *FeesMustFall: Student revolt, decolonisation and governance in SA* (2016). She has published widely in scholarly journals and contributed chapters to multiple books. Her PhD is from the University of Johannesburg (UJ). In 2021 she received the Life Achievement Award of the South African Association of Political Studies (SAAPS).

26 March (Day 1): 12:30-13:00

***Theme: Trust in science and confidence in science institutions***



**Dr Komane 'Lebs' Mphahlele's** academic qualifications include: D.Ed. (University of South African (Unisa)), M.Ed. (University of the Witwatersrand (Wits)), B.Ed., U.E.D. and B.Sc.in Biochemistry (Hons) (University of the North (UNIN)) and B.Sc. in Chemistry and Biochemistry (University of Fort Hare). His Certificates of Competence are Mentoring and Coaching, Assessor, Sign Language and Advanced Project Management (ETDP-PSETA).

His teaching career covered: Physical Science, Biology and Mathematics Teacher at High School and Chemistry Tutor in the College of Science at Wits.

His appointments in the Public Service covered: Chief Education Specialist at the former Department of Education (DoE), Director and Acting Chief Director in the Department of Science and Technology (DST) (now known as DSTI), Director at the former Public Administration Leadership and Management Academy (PALAMA) and the National School of Government (NSG) as well as the Deputy Director General at the Limpopo Department of Education (LDOE).

His non-governmental organisation (NGO) experience included consultancy work as well as an appointment as Commissioning Editor in the Newspaper Education Supplement (NES) Division of SACHED (South African Council for Higher Education). His responsibilities in the latter covered editing Newspaper Education Supplement Materials that were published in the following daily and weekend Newspapers: New Nation, Star, Sowetan and City Press.

His Ministerial appointments were: National Curriculum Coordinator of SYSTEM (Students and Youth into Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics), three Ministerial Project Committees to design National Curriculum Statements for the Schooling System, Board Memberships of the FEST (Foundation

for Education, Science and Technology) and HSRP (Historic Schools Restoration Project). In recognition of his excellent contributions to society, Dr Mphahlele received the following awards and rewards:

1. the NSTF (National Science and Technology Forum) Awards Scroll of Honour as runner-up of the category for an “Individual: Activities other than research and innovation”,
2. the PSTF’s (Public Sector Trainers Forum) “Training Design and Development’s Award”,
3. the Men’s Health Best Man Award (Runner-up trophy),
4. the Joint Education Trust Research Scholarship, and
5. the Chinese Academy of Governance Certificate.

He is well published. Some of his publications include chapters in books, journal articles, newspaper articles, as well as presentations in conference proceedings. He also self-published two of his own autobiographies. These include: *Ngwamorei* and *Humaneistic Learnings from My Six Decades Long Journey*. His latest autobiography entitled *My Humaneistic Codes: Keys to Unlock my Afrikan Future* will be published by Empore Publishers in 2025.

Dr Mphahlele is currently retired and is appointed by the following institutions: Research Associate at the University of Limpopo (UL), Independent Trustee by the Limpopo Province Education Development Trust, Chairpersonships of Mafori family Trust/Mafori Legacy Project and Limpopo Pensioners Association.

27 March (Day 2): 09:15-09:45

***Access to and trust in science and technology information***



**Dr Mamokgethi Phakeng** is a renowned academic-turned-businesswoman with over two decades of executive experience in higher education in South Africa. She has progressed through every stage of the academic ladder, from tutor to lecturer, senior lecturer, associate professor, and full professor. On the administrative front, she has held key executive positions, including Executive Dean, Deputy Vice-Chancellor twice, and ultimately, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Cape Town (UCT), the top university on the African continent, before taking early retirement at the end of March 2023. On the governance front, she has served on the Councils of the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits), the University of South Africa (Unisa), UCT and University of the People in the United States and currently sits on the

Advisory Boards of two international institutions: Woxsen University in India and the German University of Digital Science. Dr Phakeng holds a doctoral degree (PhD) in Mathematics Education from Wits University and has been granted two honorary doctorates: a Doctor of Science from the University of Bristol in the United Kingdom in 2019 and a Doctor of Education from the University of Ottawa in Canada in 2022. Her contributions to research and community engagement have garnered numerous accolades, including the Order of the Baobab (Silver) bestowed upon her by the President of South Africa in April 2016.

In addition, CEO magazine recognised her as the most influential female academic in Africa, and in 2020, Forbes featured her in its inaugural list of the 50 Most Powerful and Influential Women in Africa. In September 2022, she became the inaugural recipient of the Africa Education Medal, an award presented by T4 Education and HP Global to recognise the work of changemakers transforming education in Africa. In 2023, she was presented the Regional Lifetime Achievement in STEM Award by Women In Tech Africa, and in later that year, Women In Tech Global honoured her with the Global Lifetime Achievement in STEM Award Winner at a Summit held in Dubai, UAE. In 2024, she was presented the Transformational Leadership Award at the Pan African Leadership Summit held in Egypt.

Kgethi, as she is commonly known, has been a member of the FirstRand Foundation, an honorary member of the Association for Mathematics Education of South Africa, and a Fellow of the Academy of Science of South Africa, The African Academy of Sciences, and The World Academy of Sciences. She has served on numerous boards, including the Geneva Science and Diplomacy Anticipator, the Oprah Winfrey Leadership Academy for Girls, the South African Student Solidarity Foundation for Education (SASSFE), and the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR). She made history by becoming the first female President of Convocation at Wits University, and the first woman President of the Association for Mathematics Education of South Africa. She was the founding Chairperson of the Board of the South African Mathematics Foundation, and served as a member of the executive committee of the International Group for the Psychology of Mathematics Education.

Deputy Mother, as she is affectionately referred to by youth across the African continent, is also a philanthropist with a strong passion for young people and education. In 2004, she founded the Adopt-A-learner Foundation, dedicated to providing financial and educational support to students from underprivileged areas. Notably, when assuming her role as Vice-Chancellor, she declined an inauguration ceremony held in her honor and instead directed the allocated funds toward alleviating the outstanding debts of over 100 students who had completed their studies but were unable to graduate due to financial constraints. Since then, she donated 20% of her monthly salary and 100% of proceeds from her public speaking engagements to scholarship funds administered by UCT. She established this Fund in her personal capacity to support financially disadvantaged students, particularly women, registered for postgraduate studies at UCT.

Following her early retirement, she was appointed by President Cyril Ramaphosa to serve on the Presidential Advisory Council on National Orders. She has become an accomplished businesswoman, with interests in media, agriculture (farming and retail), and consulting. As a renowned speaker, she has given over 120 keynotes since her retirement. Outside her professional life, she is a mother, sister and daughter with an extremely adventurous spirit. In 2023, she summited Mount Kilimanjaro in Tanzania, the highest mountain in Africa and the highest single free-standing mountain above sea level in the world.

27 March (Day 2): 09:45-10:15

**Views of pride, promise and priorities in the system of innovation**



**Dr Lindile L. Ndabeni (Khathula)** is a former academic. He is trained in Applied Linguistics, History, Development Planning and Economic Geography. His specialties include, Innovation-driven local economic development; Rural-Urban Linkages; and Inter-relationships between local resources and local systems of industrial development. His observations include the inter-relationships between the three missions of universities- namely teaching, research, and community engagement, and their impact on local and regional economies. He is a former Member of the panel of experts that produced the Integrated Urban Development Framework; Former speaker and panelist: BRICS Urbanization Forum, July 2023, Former non-executive director, board member and chairperson of the Ntinga O.R. Tambo Development Agency. Currently, he is a shareholder representative at MeyAgri, an agro-processing company that manufactures chicken feed.



27 March (Day 2): 11:55-12:30

**Science engagement- activities and behaviours**



**Prof Catherine Sutherland** is an urban geographer who specialises in environmental, water and climate governance, with a focus on informal settlements and peri-urban areas in Durban. The theory and practice of local environmental change, urban governance, state–citizen relations and social transformation, and how they shape urban sustainability in cities in the South, are of particular interest in her work. She has worked on disaster risk reduction and climate adaptation at the local and provincial government scale in KwaZulu-Natal. She is an academic in the School of Built Environment and Development Studies at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), a Research Associate in [Water, Sanitation and Hygiene \(WASH\) Research and Development \(R&D\) Centre](#), UKZN, and teaches modules on sustainability, environment and development and environmental governance.