

Human Sciences Research Council

Technology does not enter an empty society – HSRC CEO calls for humanities to shape digital future, not just explain it

Kempton Park, Tuesday, 15 September 2026 – The Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) Annual Conference 2026 officially opened today, under the theme, *The age of digitality and the future of society: Rethinking knowledge, ethics, and the role of the humanities and social sciences*.

Delivering her opening address, the HSRC CEO, Prof Sarah Mosoetsa, said the humanities and social sciences must be at the centre of South Africa's digital transformation journey, not on its margins.

She stated that technology does not enter an empty society. It enters societies with histories, institutions and existing distributions of power and opportunity. “For South Africa, that means digital transformation encounters a society still characterised by profound inequality,” she said.

It encounters differences in access to infrastructure, education and economic opportunity. It encounters our linguistic and cultural diversity. And it encounters the unfinished historical questions of whose knowledge is valued and whose knowledge is marginalised.

This is why the Humanities and Social Sciences cannot arrive at the end of technological development simply to explain its social consequences. They must be present when the questions are being formulated and when the choices are being made.

The CEO's remarks set the tone for the two-day conference, which brings together researchers, policymakers and practitioners to interrogate how digital innovation intersects with inequality, indigenous knowledge systems, health systems and social inclusion.

The conference was also addressed by the Chairperson of the HSRC Board, Prof Xoliswa Mtose. In her address, Prof Mtose said digitality is not solely technical, it is a way of living. She said the question of digitality bears on governance, equity, culture and social cohesion. “In short these questions underpin the scholarship that the HSRC is here to cocreate and nurture.”

The HSRC Annual Conference is one of South Africa's largest and most influential social science conferences. Each year the conference is organised around a pressing societal theme. The 2026 edition is held under the theme, *The age of digitality and the future of society*.

The conference will culminate on Wednesday, 16 September 2026, with a closing address by the Honourable Minister of Science, Technology and Innovation, Prof Blade Nzimande.

For more information about the conference, speakers and the programme, please visit:

<https://annual-conference.hsrc.ac.za/>

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YouTube Link:

HSRC Annual Conference 2026: The Age of Digitality and the Future of Society_D2

<https://youtube.com/live/aD8IXV1WfsY?feature=share>

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Notes to the editor

About the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC)

Established in 1968, the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) is South Africa's statutory research agency and the largest dedicated social science and humanities research institute on the African continent. The HSRC generates evidence and insights that inform public policy, support development and improve lives. Through high-quality research, strategic partnerships and research capacity development, the Council contributes to evidence-informed decision-making in South Africa, Africa and globally.

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