



# 4<sup>TH</sup> ISIBALO YOUNG AFRICAN STATISTICIANS CONFERENCE NEWSLETTER



1 August 2014

"Young African Statisticians Staking Their Claim in Unleashing the Power of Statistics in Exposing and Disposing of Inequality Post-2015"

## A meeting of young and old



Deputy Minister in the Presidency Buti Manamela (right) and Stats Council Chair Ben Mphahlele

The 4th ISIBALO Young African Statisticians Conference (IYASC) was opened by the Deputy Minister in the Presidency, the Honorable Buti Manamela. Young statisticians joined some of the most prestigious statisticians in the world, including current and former heads of several national statistics offices, as the Statistics Symposium on strengthening the South African National Statistics Systems (SANSS) concluded.

The Statistician-General, Mr Pali Lehohla, affectionately known as the SG, took advantage of the platform afforded to him to welcome the Young African Statisticians (YAS).

The SG gave a brief history of the YAS programme, and spoke of the fact that YAS are central to the African development agenda. He spoke to the fact that the YAS had petitioned the Angolan government to ensure that it participated in the 2010 Round of Population and Household censuses.

Political will and facts are what drive transformation. Afro-pessimism is driven by Africans themselves; it is up to Africans, and especially YAS, to rewrite the African narrative. The SG also spoke to the importance of the drive to improve Civil Registration and Vital Statistics on the continent as being central to the post-2015 agenda.

Minister Manamela, the Deputy Minister in the Presidency responsible for Youth Development, spoke to the importance of measuring the impact of the ISIBALO capacity building programme, particularly as it pertains to YAS. He spoke of the importance of ensuring that the challenges are well-articulated, as a lack of understanding will lead to an incorrect diagnosis. He exhorted YAS to educate themselves and their peers on issues hindering development on the continent through the use of scientific research. The impossible can only be achieved through continuous research and discussion at a continental level.

The minister stated that although numbers are looked at as objective, they play an important role in power and knowledge. He asked how the subjective nature of knowledge can be balanced with the objective nature of statistics. Expertise serves only the affluent and powerful while statistics should serve all people. Expertise is imbued with values, and therefore cannot be neutral. Statistics are supposed to remain neutral. Empirical evidence is needed to move forward.

The minister ended his opening address with these words: "Seek no lesser role in society; excellence by young people means the world will be a better place to be in the future. We need to improve ourselves day by day".



The South Africa I know, the home I understand



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**“The YAS programme is building capability to meet the demand for evidence continent-wide. The problem with our current training systems is that they do not address Agenda 2063 of the African Union and the integration agenda. YAS need to be trained not only in the subject matter, but for a pan-African agenda. In this way, YAS as instruments of change will be pan-African in their thinking. The YAS cannot be an island; it must drive the pan-African agenda. YAS must work without boundaries in leading change on the continent.” — Pali Lehohla, ISIBALO capacity building programme sponsor**

# YAS programme bears fruit

**Tracy Daniels** chats with Ms Gloria Mathenge, a Young African Statistician, on how being part of the programme has impacted her life

### So why statistics?

Firstly, I am not a statistician. I am a demographer. The YAS is for all young people involved in any discipline that requires research and statistics, whether that be statistics, demography, economics, etc.

### Ok, so why demography?

I originally wanted to study medicine, but did not qualify. I was accepted for Computer Science and Demography and Public Health, and I chose to do the latter. I thought that I would change course after the first semester, but that did not happen. I discovered that demography was about human beings and their lives, and the science captured me.

### How did you get involved with the YAS programme and how have you benefited from it?

When I was busy with my undergraduate studies at Makerere University in Uganda, one of my fellow students went to South Africa to present a paper at the 1st IYASC. I wanted to know how this had happened, as I also wanted to travel to other countries! He told me about the YAS programme, and when the call for abstracts went out for the 2010 session, he informed me. I chose to write a paper on Civil Registration as it was not well covered in our classes, and I knew that few people would choose to write on the topic, which increased my chances of being chosen. I was right!

I presented my paper at the 2010 session, and had the privilege of meeting the SG, Mr Lehohla. I asked his advice as I wanted to work in South Africa. The SG encouraged my interest in joining the Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) cohort, through which I, along with several other

YAS, was invited to attend a session of the CRVS, organised by the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), in Addis Adaba. I participated in the session, and my voice was noted. I was offered a 3-month internship in Nairobi with UNICEF, in the area of CRVS.

After the internship I decided to conduct my Masters in Public Health with a research focus on Civil Registration. Based on my research, I was invited to present at the 7th African Symposium on Statistical Development (ASSD) in Cape Town in January 2012. At that meeting I again made contact with Raj Mitra (Chief of Demographic and Social Section at the UNECA) and Genevieve Bizuneh (Regional Advisor, CRVS, African Development Bank). I was invited to join the UNECA in 2012. I am doing a research fellowship, with a focus on CRVS.

I have to emphasise that internship does not necessarily equal capacity building. Capacity building happens when an experienced person makes a deliberate commitment to mentor and share their knowledge with a less experienced person. Being a research fellow at the UNECA, and working and learning from Raj and Genevieve has made a huge difference in my life. My confidence and knowledge on the subject has grown immensely. I have been mentored in Pan-Africanism and have increasingly been given opportunities to contribute to the continent's development. I have been guided through my MSc research, which I successfully completed in June 2014.

The YAS has a role to play too; you must be committed to and interested in learning; you must connect with the work and be passionate about it. I would like to see other YAS



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being offered similar opportunities. The numbers don't have to be huge; change can be effected even by a small number of people.

### What is the biggest challenge facing CRVS in Africa?

There is no formalised CRVS training at any institute on the continent. CRVS is cross-cutting in nature – it includes public administration; social sector improvement; good governance; human rights; law and statistics. It requires a multi-dimensional, multi-skilled professional. Currently the only way to acquire these skills is through work experience. Africa needs to be deliberate about creating a CRVS training programme.

### What are your goals as a demographer?

Firstly, learning has not stopped; there is still a long road ahead in terms of academic, professional and personal growth. Speaking as a YAS, I want to be a solid professional in CRVS and serve the continent by contributing to its development.

### Thank you for your time.

I want to say a personal thank you to the SG for his ongoing interest and contribution to my professional development. With the level of support I have received from him, my growth has been inevitable.

## Mainstreaming the YAS

The Young African Statisticians programme (YAS) came under the spotlight at the Statistics Symposium on strengthening the South African National Statistics System (SANSS), held in Pretoria from 29 – 31 July 2014.

Mr Raj Mitra, Chief of Demographic and Social Section at the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), spoke of the importance of mainstreaming the YAS into statistical systems on the African continent.

The post-2015 development agenda brings new challenges to the statistical landscape. Deliberate measures need to be taken to capacitate the statistical community to meet these challenges.

Mr Mitra mentioned that churning statisticians out of university will not meet the needs of official statistics producers. The transition from an academic statistician to one who is able to produce official statistics is key, and this is why the YAS matters.

The Africa Programme on Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems (APAI-CRVS) has embedded capacity building of YAS into its work programme. As one of its programmes it has facilitated the placement of three fellows at the UNECA to work with the regional CRVS secretariat.

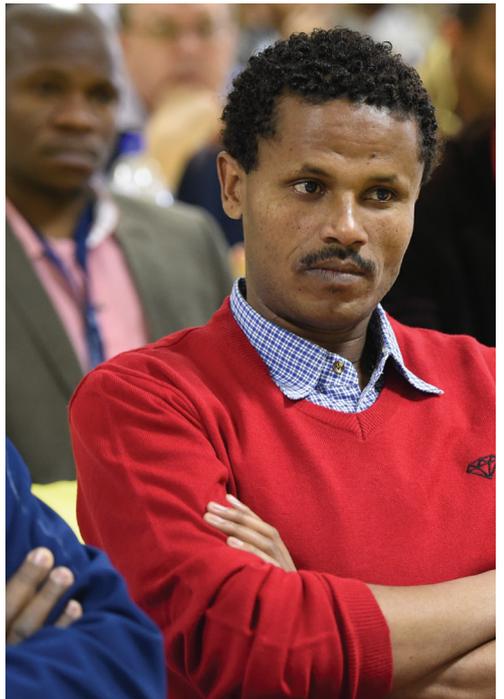
There are a number of challenges that still face the YAS, including the ad hoc approach to engaging YAS; better communication mechanisms need to be established between YAS and national statistical offices (NSOs); and the measurement of the impact of the capacity building programmes. Mr Mitra stated that NSOs need to be more proactive in engaging YAS, and YAS need to be more vocal in demanding their place in the statistical system.

Dr Gene Bizuneh spoke of the importance of mentoring young statisticians, and not simply using them as scribes or to deal with administrative functions. Young statisticians need to be thrown into the deep end and then assisted to swim.

Dr Bizuneh pointed out that CRVS includes public administration; social sector improvement; good governance; human rights; and statistics. YAS do not gain this type of multi-disciplinary, multi-sectoral knowledge from their studies, and it is therefore important that YAS learn the basics in these programmes, to enable YAS to develop their careers in the area in which they are mentored or in another stream, as best suits them.

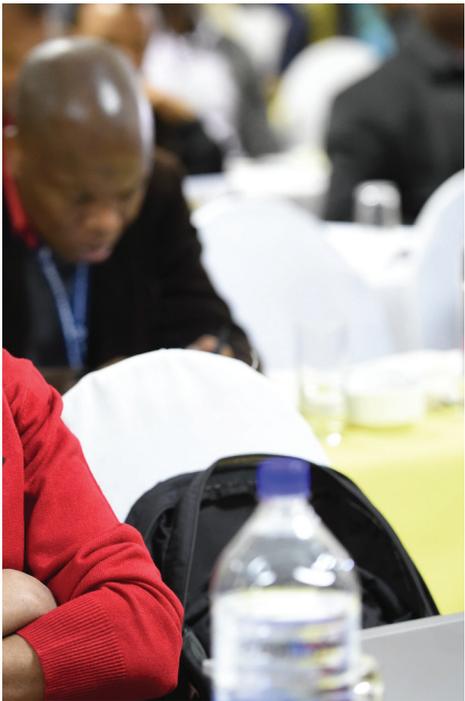
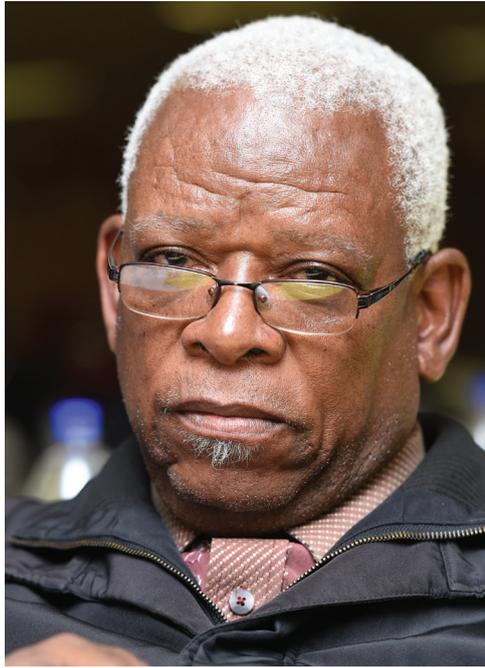


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# Welcome, Ukwemukela, Ulwamkelo, Sondzela, Kamogelo, Kamohelo,

Welcome to South Africa and welcome to Gauteng! South Africa, a country of just over 54 million people, is made up of nine provinces. Gauteng is the smallest of the nine provinces, but is home to the largest share of the population. Around 12,7 million people, or 24% of South Africa's total population, live in Gauteng.

Although you will only visit South Africa and Gauteng for a short time, here is a quick look at things to do while you are here

### National Zoological Gardens of South Africa, Pretoria

The National Zoological Gardens of South Africa is the largest zoo in the country and the only one with national status. An Aquarium and Reptile Park also form part of the Zoo facility in Pretoria. The Aquarium is the largest inland marine aquarium in the country.

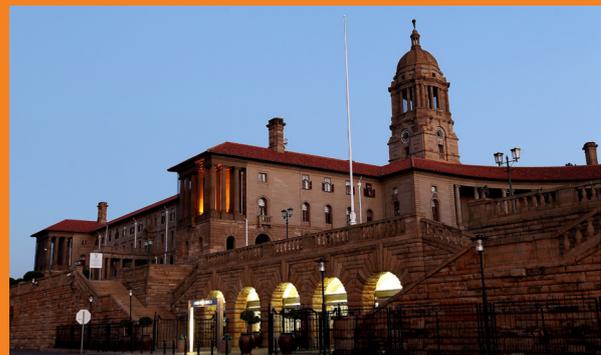


### Freedom Park

Freedom Park is the creation of a memorial that narrates the story of South Africa's pre-colonial, colonial, apartheid, and post-apartheid history and heritage, spanning a period of 3.6 billion years of humanity, to acknowledge those that contributed to the freedom of the country. It is situated on Salvokop in Pretoria and includes a memorial with a list of the names of those killed in the South African Wars, World War I, World War II as well as during the apartheid era

### The Union Buildings

The Union Buildings, located in Pretoria, is the official seat of the South African government and also houses the offices of the president. The Union Buildings is surrounded by immaculately kept gardens and is a South African national heritage site. Construction of the Union Buildings was completed in 1913. In December 2013, following the passing of former President Nelson Mandela, a 9-meter statue of him was erected in the gardens in front of the Union Buildings.





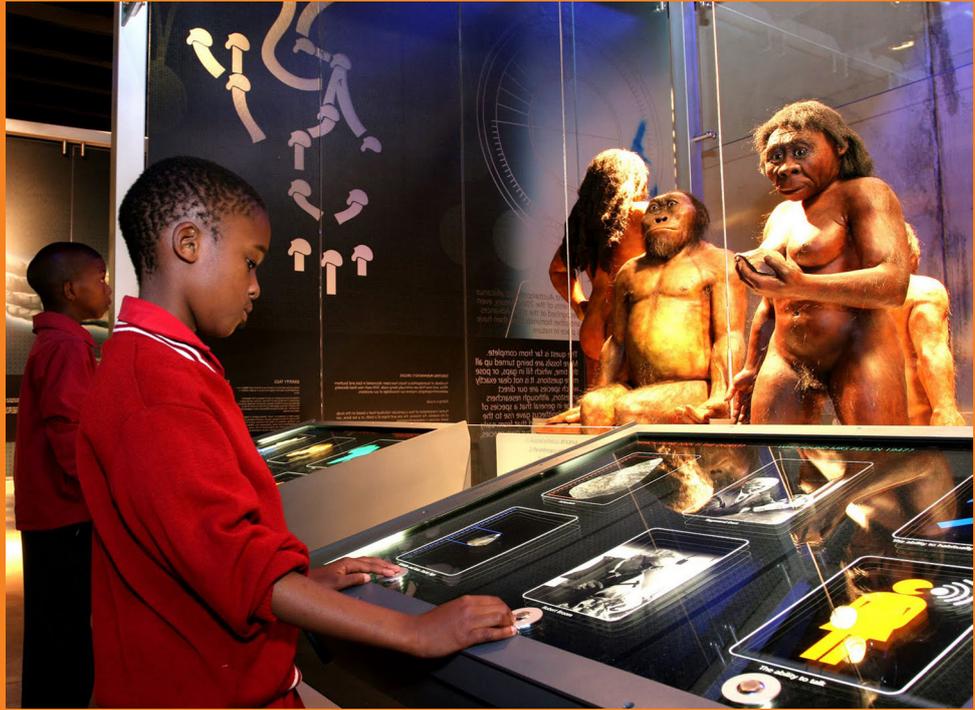
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# Mi amukeriwile, Vho tanganedzwa, Kamogelo, Siyaalemukela, Welkom!

### Cradle of Humankind

The Cradle of Humankind is one of eight World Heritage Sites in South Africa, and the only one in Gauteng. It is widely recognised as the place from which all of humankind originated.

The 47 000-hectare site has unearthed the best evidence of the complex journey which our species has taken to make us what we are – a place of pilgrimage for all humankind. It is not only a place of ongoing scientific discovery into our origins, but also a place of contemplation – a place that allows us to reflect on who we are, where we come from and where we are going to.



### Apartheid Museum

The Apartheid Museum is a museum complex in Johannesburg, dedicated to illustrating apartheid and the 20th century history of South Africa.

The museum opened in 2001 and is acknowledged as the pre-eminent museum in the world dealing with 20th century South Africa, at the heart of which is the apartheid story.

### Rhino and Lion Park

The Rhino and Lion Nature Reserve is set in the heart of the Cradle of Humankind World Heritage Site, west of Johannesburg. This private game park opened in 1985 with just two white rhinos, but today boasts more than 600 animals. The more than 30 species in the reserve include buffalo, lion, white rhino, wild dog, cheetah, hippo, crocodile and more than 20 antelope species.





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# Enthusiastic response to call for papers

The call for papers for the 4th ISIBALO Young African Statisticians Conference solicited an enthusiastic response.

More than 200 papers were submitted from African countries, with Cameroon, Ethiopia and Uganda contributing over half of the papers received.

To evaluate the quality of all submissions, Statistics South Africa set up the Technical Evaluation and Mentoring Team (TEMT), consisting of about 40 experienced subject specialists from around the organisation. Not only was the team responsible for reviewing papers for the conference, but members also filled a mentoring role, providing advice to young statisticians on how to improve their papers so that they can be presented internationally.

Submitted papers – which covered a wide range of topics including agriculture, demography, economic statistics, health and finance – were allocated to TEMT reviewers according to each reviewer's field of expertise.

Various elements of each paper – such as the abstract, introduction, title, literature review, references, etc. – were scored in terms of quality. For example, reviewers would

score a paper's problem statement according to the level of clarity of the problem statement itself, and whether the objectives of the paper had been clearly set out. Other general aspects of each paper were also evaluated, such as whether the paper has made a useful contribution to the field, or whether it had described concepts through the use of clear graphics, diagrams and tables.

The end result of the evaluation process was a final, overall score for each paper, which placed it into one of four groups: bronze, silver, gold and platinum; platinum representing the best papers. Those authors whose papers fell into the bronze, silver and gold groups were provided with advice and suggestions on what they could do to improve their papers. At the end of the evaluation process, 120 papers were selected to be presented at the 4th ISIBALO Young Statisticians Conference.

The coaching and mentoring role of the TEMT to young statisticians did not end once the papers had been evaluated. Team members from the team are at the conference to support those young statisticians who will be presenting, as well as providing advice and feedback on the quality of the presentations.

## Invitation to submit articles to Russian journal "Voprosy Statistiki"

This year marks 95 years of the Russian statistical journal "Voprosy Statistiki", which publishes articles by prominent Russian and foreign economists, famous and young scholars, experts.

The magazine covers essential issues of methodology and organisation of domestic and foreign statistics, development of international statistical standards and their adaptation to Russian conditions. The journal publishes materials describing the socio-economic development of the Russian Federation and its regions, as well as that in the CIS and other foreign countries.

The publication has invited Statistics South Africa's experts to send their articles in English to the Rosstat for publication in the "Voprosy Statistiki" journal.

E-mail articles to: [voprstat@mtu-net.ru](mailto:voprstat@mtu-net.ru), [lubova@gks.ru](mailto:lubova@gks.ru).

## Session themes

- 1) Millennium Development Goals (MDG's) and related Development Frameworks.
- 2) Civil Registration and Vital Statistics.
- 3) Health and well-being.
- 4) Population Projections.
- 5) Population Census Management.
- 6) Economic Statistics.
- 7) National Accounts and International Comparison Programme.
- 8) Finance.
- 9) Statistics and Mathematics Education.
- 10) Demography: Data Methodology, Analysis and Ageing.
- 11) Survey Methodology.
- 12) Climate Change and Atmosphere.
- 13) Agriculture: Food Crisis and Reducing Poverty and Hunger.
- 14) Information and Communication Technology in Statistics.

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