



national treasury

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REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



Public Economics
Winter School 2019

Press release

Exploring a new dawn for budding public-sector economists with GTAC

In excess of 150 budding economists and post-graduate economic students are in the midst of an exciting week of debate and learning, as day three of the five-day annual Public Economics Winter School kicks off at the South African Reserve Bank, in Pretoria. Now in its fourth year the theme of this year's event hosted by the Government Technical Advisory Centre (GTAC) – an entity of the National Treasury – in partnership with Global Affairs Canada, poses the challenge “*A New Dawn: Rebuilding State Capacity*”.

The theme was thoroughly interrogated at the plenary sessions on the first day of the event. “[We] are more distracted than ever, so public officials need to think about designing policies for [people],” said keynote speaker, Professor Avni Shah from the University of Toronto. To create and implement amazing policies, such as enhanced tax compliance, she believes it is necessary to “make it simple and easy for people to make the right choice. Give them guides in creative ways.”

Edward Kieswetter, South African Revenue Service (SARS) Commissioner, meanwhile explained how SARS is rebuilding its trust and capability. “We use a three pillar approach aligned to incentivise tax compliance behaviour: We make people aware of how the process works; try to make it as easy as possible to file a return and make it hard for people who choose not to comply [through] a threat of detection.”

Political analyst, Steven Friedman, emphasized that “everything you do in public service is political. In a democratic society, government is about politics.” He highlighted the importance of accountability, drawing attention to Treasury’s *Vulekamali* (vulekamali.gov.za/), an online portal which makes Budget data available, as an example of such public transparency.

Dr. Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi, former director-general of the Public Service and currently serving on GTAC’s advisory panel, highlighted the *Batho Pele* (people first) programme. “Our focus must be on service,” she said. “Especially, service to poor and marginalised people, women and minorities. People who need the public service because these are people bereft of options.”

Finally, Anne Githuku-Shongwe from UN-Women offered a simple solution to the gender inequality and the flailing South African economy by commenting: “If women had equal access to economic opportunity the economy will grow by \$28 trillion a year.”

The aim of the Winter School is to foster an understanding of public economics, financial analysis and public policy, and to encourage young economists to consider a public sector career. The lectures cover three key focal areas:

- **Taxes, user charges and behavioural change:** with a focus this year on how behavioural economics can influence consumer and producer decisions towards desirable public policy objectives.
- **Education economics and financing:** offers a substantial body of evidence-based data and research, local and international, to ask why South African education outcomes are poor, despite SA spending 6% of its GDP on education.
- **Fiscal policy and fiscal sustainability:** achieving fiscal sustainability in a low-growth environment is currently one of South Africa’s biggest challenges. By exploring the concepts of sustainability, efficiency and fairness, participants are challenged to consider trade-offs and choices facing policy makers.

To find out more about the Winter School programme visit www.gtacwinterschool2019.co.za/index.php/event/ or contact info@gtac.gov.za

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About GTAC

The Government Technical Advisory Centre, or GTAC, is a component of the National Treasury, established to support capacity building in public financial management through providing technical and advisory services to government departments. GTAC’s approach to capacity building draws on partnerships with academia, research institutions, and non-government sector, including business and development institutions. GTAC reports to the Minister of Finance.