

Science Communication in Times of COVID-19 under the Spotlight

Virtual Panel Discussion · 7 October 2021
11:00 – 12:15 Berlin, Pretoria

SPEAKER PROFILES [in order of appearance]



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PROFESSOR DR HIMLA SOODYALL • Welcome

Executive Officer, Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAf)

Professor Himla Soodyall is Executive Officer of the Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAf). She is a Research Professor in Human Genetics at the University of the Witwatersrand and was Principal Medical Scientist at the National Health Laboratory Service. Previously Professor Soodyall has done ground-breaking genetic research into the peoples of sub-Saharan Africa in which her studies have identified some of the oldest DNA found in living people today, adding weight to the theory that modern humans evolved in the area now known as southern Africa.



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DR MARINA KOCH-KRUMREI • Welcome

Head of the International Relations Department, German National Academy of Sciences Leopoldina

Dr Marina Koch-Krumrei is Head of the International Relations Department of the German National Academy of Sciences Leopoldina. Before that, she was Head of Office at different branches of the German Research Foundation (DFG), e.g. Berlin Office and Washington Office. Marina Koch-Krumrei studied Law and completed a PhD in Law at Ludwig-Maximilian-University in Munich.



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REBECCA WINKELS • Moderator

Director of Communications and Strategy, Wissenschaft im Dialog

Rebecca Winkels is a German science communicator and has degrees in biology and science journalism. She has held several positions in science communication: First as online editor and deputy press officer at the Helmholtz Centre for Infection Research in Braunschweig, then as press officer at the headquarters of the Helmholtz Association in Berlin. At Wissenschaft im Dialog, she is the director of strategic communications and project leader of the online platform Wissenschaftskommunikation.de.



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PROFESSOR DR KOLEKA MLISANA

Co-Chairperson of the Ministerial Advisory Committee (MAC) on COVID-19, South Africa

Professor Koleka Mlisana is the Executive Manager: Academic Affairs, Research & Quality Assurance at the National Health Laboratory Service (NHLS), since July 2018. Prior to this she was the HOD: Medical Microbiology at UKZN/IALCH; also served a term as a member of the NHLS Board; and up until recently was a member of the Ministerial Advisory Committee on Antimicrobial Resistance. She has previously been an active HIV/AIDS researcher for over a decade focusing on HIV prevention and pathogenesis, working at the Centre for the AIDS Program of Research in South Africa (CAPRISA), Durban. She has undertaken seminal research which has revealed how the body responds during acute HIV infection. Her current research interests include TB diagnostics, antimicrobial resistance as well as sexually transmitted infections. Amongst other national commitments, Prof Mlisana is the current Co-chair of the COVID-19 Ministerial Advisory Committee (MAC), she recently chaired the Pathology/Laboratory subcommittee of the first established MAC for COVID-19; is a member of the Board of Trustees for the South African National AIDS Council (SANAC) as well as of the Medical and Dental Board of the HPCSA/Medical Scientist Committee. She has nurtured and mentored many young scientists and is passionate about equipping the next generation of leaders and scientists.



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DR VIOLA PRIESEMANN

Group Leader, Max Planck Institute for Dynamics and Self-Organization & Bernstein Center for Computational Neuroscience, Göttingen, Germany

Dr Viola Priesemann is a physicist and neuroscientist and heads a group at the Max Planck Institute for Dynamics and Self-Organization in Göttingen. She studied and worked at the TU Darmstadt, ENS Paris and Caltech, before completing her doctorate at the Max Planck Institute for Brain Research and the University Frankfurt in 2013. Her research foci are spreading processes, self-organization, learning and information processing in living and artificial neural networks. In the context of COVID-19, she investigated response strategies and advised politics. For her public outreach, she received the Communitas Award of the Max Planck Society, and the “Medaille für naturwissenschaftliche Publizistik” of the German Physics Society. Viola Priesemann is member of “Die Junge Akademie” and the Cluster of Excellence “Multiscale Bioimaging”.



Source: bhekisisa.org

MIA MALAN

Founding Editor-in-chief and Executive Director of Bhekisisa – Centre for Health Journalism, South Africa

Mia Malan is the founding editor-in-chief of the Bhekisisa Centre for Health Journalism. She has 25 years of journalism and institution-building experience in legacy media and digital native publications, working in newsrooms and at media development organisations in Johannesburg, Nairobi and Washington, DC. Malan has won over 20 African journalism awards including, most recently, the 2020 Vodacom Journalist Award in the opinion category. She is a former Knight International Journalism fellow of the International Centre for Journalists and a Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism fellow at Oxford University. Malan serves on the council of the South African National Editors’ Forum.



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DR DAVID SCHIEFERDECKER

Principal Researcher of the German Government-funded project “RAPID-COVID: Receiving and Accepting Public Information Despite Polarization – Key to Overcoming COVID-19”, Free University Berlin, Germany

David Schieferdecker is a post-doctoral researcher at the Department for Media and Communication Studies at the Free University Berlin. After receiving his Master’s degree in media and communication, American studies and macro economics at the University Halle-Wittenberg, he pursued his PhD in communication at the University Mannheim. In his PhD, he studied the relationship between media consumption, intergroup contact and prejudice among racialized groups in South Africa. In the last years, he has carried out further research on the interplay between communicative practices and group-based political attitudes - focusing (a) on the question whether media texts can lead citizens to engage in transnational solidarity and (b) for the last two years on polarization around the COVID-19 prevention measures. Always being interested in other people’s businesses, he predominantly works with large-N surveys and qualitative interviews to unravel complexities, curiosity and contradictions in individuals’ thinking and behavior.



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DR MARINA JOUBERT

Senior Science Communication Researcher at the Centre for Research on Evaluation, Science and Technology, Stellenbosch University, South Africa

Dr Marina Joubert is a science communication researcher at Stellenbosch University in South Africa. She promotes pro-active involvement of researchers in open dialogue between science and society, and the development of evidence-based science communication practice. Her research interests focus on how scientists respond to increasing demands for public engagement, and how scientists can be supported to be more successful when they reach out to communities, youth, policymakers and other audiences. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, she joined forces with several research teams around the world to explore how the pandemic affected and influence the relationship between science and society, including its effect on mass media, science journalism and editorial cartoons. In addition to research, her job involves academic teaching and short training courses geared towards effective science communication practice.

[as of 28 September 2021]