Public Attitudes in Contemporary South Africa

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Preface

HSRC Public Opinion Survey

Prospects for consolidating democracy in South Africa, and attempts to address the country's ailing economic fortunes, depend largely on three critical factors: the ability of government to make informed decisions and strategic interventions based on the principles of good governance and sound policy; the willingness and determination of the stakeholder community, including civil society organisations and the private sector, to provide the necessary checks and balances required to maintain and nurture a constitutionally-enshrined democratic dispensation; and the ability of the research community to produce research, either self-generated or commissioned, that provides penetrative and textured accounts of the multi-faceted nature of our society.

The compilation that follows is an illustration of the latter and, firmly rooted in the HSRC's determination to conduct 'social science research that makes a difference', as well as in the organisation's desire to comprehensively align applied social research to user needs, is an attempt to generate debate on matters crucial to the public domain, inform and synergise often competing although complementary discourses on development, and make inroads in a policy arena that is sometimes characterised by too much fluidity and a lack of strategic direction. As such, the account that follows – both as a public snap-shot and a more in-depth analysis of trends and opinions – makes a significant contribution to the critical debate around the challenges to, and prospects for, consolidating democracy in South Africa. It also informs the debate on how to enhance the impetus towards sustained economic growth, and the fundamentals that underpin this.

The compilation also has important tangential implications and policy overtones for the southern African region, and the rest of the African sub-continent at large. Indeed, comparative insight and perspective will begin to grow in importance as efforts to implement the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) get off the ground, and it is recognised that a pivotal

basis for doing this will be through comprehensive and rigorous national public audits on attitudes and trends on key issues.

Public opinion and attitudes often remain the yardstick against which interventions are made. The collection which follows, in synthesising and analysing the results and findings of some key policy areas that have been investigated, will provide all stakeholders in South Africa with a set of factual information and derivative analytic insights. Such a representation allows for informed choices and decisions to be made, policy dimensions to be investigated further, and research to be commissioned in areas where voids are conspicuous.

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