



PSTF

Public Sector Trainers' Forum

PSTF 24th ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2026

Newsletter



Theme:

Professionalisation-
advancing the
developmental agenda of
the state



school of government

Department:
National School of Government
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

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The PSTF returns with a BANG!

The 2026 Public Service Transformation Forum (PSTF), convened by the National School of Government (NSG), brought together leaders, practitioners and scholars to reflect on the evolving demands of a capable and ethical state. Held under the theme “Building a Professional, Innovative and Citizen-Centred Public Service,” the conference focused on strengthening institutional integrity, accelerating professionalisation and promoting innovation in service delivery.



In his keynote address, Minister for Public Service and Administration Inkosi Mzamo Buthelezi highlighted the urgent need to restore ethical leadership and rebuild public trust in the public sector. The Minister emphasised that professionalisation, strong accountability mechanisms, and digital transformation are essential pillars for a responsive and future-ready state.

His remarks underscored the need for a public service that is agile, principled and committed to improving the lives of citizens.



The Acting Principal of the NSG, Ms Phindile Mkwana, reinforced the School's central role in driving capacity building across the state. Ms Mkwana emphasised that continuous learning, evidence-based decision-making and collaborative networks remain vital for strengthening public sector performance. She further encouraged delegates to apply conference insights to advance professionalisation and institutional resilience.





The programme featured rich discussions on topical matters that include: public sector professionalisation and ethical governance, digital transformation and innovation, public-private sector collaboration, continental and international perspectives and preparing for the future public service. Delegates shared practical experiences and case studies illustrating how improved systems and technology can enhance service delivery outcomes.



Day one of the conference concluded with a gala dinner, offering delegates a fitting opportunity to celebrate excellence in public service. The Deputy Minister for Public Service and Administration, Ms Pinky Kekana, graced the occasion and welcomed the newly appointed PSTF Advisory Committee.

Ms Kekana emphasised both her and the Minister's strong commitment to supporting the Advisory Committee as it leads the next phase of work to advance the state's capacity building agenda.



During the event, the conference proudly acknowledged its sponsors ABSA, Nedbank, Standard Bank, and Travel with Flair - for their invaluable dedication and unwavering support towards capacity building interventions. Their contributions played a significant role in ensuring the success of the conference, enabling the creation of a platform that fosters learning, professional development, and the strengthening of institutional capabilities. The NSG expressed sincere appreciation for the partners whose commitment continues to empower participants and advance the broader goal of public sector excellence.

Plenary



Day One of PSTF



The second day of the Public Sector Trainers Forum brought together leading voices in governance and public administration for a deep dive into the mechanisms driving institutional change across the globe. The discussions, which focused on continental outlooks for capacity building, economic growth, digital transformation, and ethical governance, painted a clear picture: the future of effective governance lies not just in training individuals, but in fixing the systems they operate within.



Speakers, including IIAS President Dr. Raed Mohammed Ben-Shams, Dr. Appiah-Marfo from the Ghana Institute of Management of Public Administration (GIMPA), and Ms. Nthabiseng Makhatha from Statistics South Africa, challenged conventional wisdom on capacity building, offering a blend of strategic foresight and practical, data-driven solutions.



In his opening address, Dr. Raed Mohammed Ben-Shams, President of the International Institute of Administrative Sciences (IIAS), confronted a pervasive issue in public sector development. He noted that while governments invest heavily in training civil servants to improve skills and leadership, the outcomes remain wildly inconsistent.

Dr. Ben-Shams emphasized that talented people often struggle in "broken systems," where outdated processes, rigid rules, and misalignments between strategy, budget, and accountability create insurmountable barriers. To move forward, he proposed that modern governance requires three specific types of intelligence: **cultural**, **complexity**, and **connectivity**. He concluded that the future of public service hinges on shifting focus from "individual heroics" to building supportive, collaborative systems that empower citizens effectively.

Following Dr. Ben-Shams, Dr. Appiah-Marfo from GIMPA expanded on the theme of institutional reform by sharing comparative research on government training across three regions: Eastern Africa, Asia, and Western Africa.



Dr. Appiah-Marfo noted that across Africa, a quiet but determined movement is underway to strengthen institutions and bring services closer to the people. However, he identified a lingering concern: much of the training and support across the continent remains dependent on donor funding. In contrast, he highlighted the trajectories of Asian nations such as Singapore, Malaysia, Japan, and China. “Their public institutions were built on merit, consistency, and relentless investment in digital innovation,”

Dr. Appiah-Marfo explained. He noted that reforms in these nations move swiftly, powered by stable bureaucracies with long-term strategies.



The final thematic session shifted the focus to the technical backbone of effective governance: data. Ms. Nthabiseng Makhatha from Statistics South Africa (Stats SA) delivered a keynote address on the significance of data-driven decision-making,





Her presentation underscored the severity of South Africa's socio-economic challenges through stark statistics regarding population growth, unemployment—especially among the youth—and persistent income disparities. Concluding her address, Ms. Makhatha stressed the dangers of relying on anecdotal evidence in policy-making. “Relying on anecdotal evidence can lead to biased decisions that overlook the needs of vulnerable populations,” she warned, reinforcing the vital role of institutions like Stats SA in providing the evidence necessary for equitable and informed policy.



Day two of the forum concluded with a consensus among the speakers that while training remains a critical component of public sector development, it cannot be viewed in isolation. For African nations to achieve the ambitious goals set forth in frameworks like Agenda 2063, governments must prioritize systemic reform, invest in home-grown leadership models like Ghana's EM3, and build robust data infrastructures that ensure no vulnerable population is left behind by policy.



Key Speakers



Gala Dinner



Gala Dinner





Day Two of PSTF





PSTF 2026



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