



*2025 was the year visions and plans took shape—and then took flight.  
Your dedication powered everything: our team's work, our scholars' impact, and the momentum of this growing community.*

As the year draws to a close, we reflect with gratitude on the journey we have travelled together. In an uncertain world, the dedication of this community to socially engaged scholarship and ethical leadership has been our greatest inspiration. Your generosity in time, creativity, love and support didn't just help scholars—it strengthened communities and made space for ideas that push our region toward justice.

Despite significant challenges, 2025 brought remarkable achievements. We have been inspired by our scholars' academic progress, resilience and deep commitment to serving society, and by the strong, connected network they continue to build.

Our impact continues to grow through collaboration, and we are grateful for the strengthening of our partnerships with universities, government agencies and civil society organisations—relationships that expand our reach and deepen our influence.

In 2026, we will deepen our investment in transformative leadership, expand opportunities for research collaboration, and continue nurturing a community that believes in justice as a shared practice.

We know the work ahead is complex, but every contribution of your time, resources and encouragement fuels our shared determination to build a more just and equitable future. To our supporters, staff, Board and partners: thank you. You are the heart of the Canon Collins Trust.

Wishing you and your loved ones a peaceful, joyful holiday season.  
Thank you for being an essential part of our story.  
We look forward to all we will achieve together in 2026.

With sincere appreciation,

*Ivor Baatjes*



## 2025 at a glance

*What your faith, friendship, time, ideas, creativity and giving made possible in 2025*

- **Funded 20 LLB scholars** at Fort Hare University and the University of the Western Cape.
- **Supported 112 postgraduate scholars** across South Africa, Malawi and the UK.
- **Strengthened our scholars' ideas, networks and leadership** through a vibrant in-person and online events programme (often in partnership with universities and civil society).
- **Sustained a daily online Writing Group**, meeting every weekday. We are in our 4<sup>th</sup> year of offering this platform for solidarity, connection and academic support.
- **Launched two major new initiatives**—the Canon Collins Review and Social Justice Dialogues—to advance engaged scholarship and social justice innovation.
- **Began a groundbreaking leadership and research initiative**, in partnership with the Mastercard Foundation and African Voices Dialogue, designed to spark ethical, collaborative and generative research across our network—already receiving overwhelming scholar interest.

## SPOTLIGHT ON 2025's Conference – Putting Care at the Centre of Social Justice

*Gathering scholars from across the region is not just an academic exercise—  
it is a democratic and relational act that strengthens the collective capacity for change.*

The 2025 Canon Collins Trust Annual Scholars' Conference brought together over 150 scholars, alumni and partners from across Southern Africa.

Centered on the theme **Gathering for Justice, Building Caring Communities**, participants explored how research, activism, and community engagement can strengthen one another to create lasting regional impact.

A highlight of the weekend was the keynote address by Nomzamo Zondo, Executive Director of the Socio-Economic Rights Institute of South Africa.

Her call for honesty, accountability, and care offered a powerful reminder of what it takes to sustain change and of the communities that make this work possible.



### SCHOLAR SPOTLIGHT:

*Gift embodies what it means to lead ethically under pressure.*



#### Gift Siviza

PhD Politics and Governance, University of the Free State

*Gift Siziva is a Zimbabwean human rights activist, with degrees in Political Science and International Relations from the University of Zimbabwe. He holds a post-graduate certificate on leading non-violent movements for social change, from Harvard Kennedy school.*

### EVERY GENERATION MUST DISCOVER ITS **MISSION**: THE JOURNEY OF GIFT SIZIVA

In 2024, Gift was one of sixty Members of Parliament illegally removed from Parliament when they would not support the agenda to extend the sitting president's term of office. So despite being the National Deputy Spokesperson of the Citizens Coalition for Change (CCC) and a Member of Zimbabwe's Parliament, Gift is unable to represent his constituency politically these days.

Instead, he engages in diverse community projects across the wards. At the time of the interview, he had just returned from a funeral. "When the elderly pass away, many do not have funeral policies because of the state of the economy. We assist them with a decent burial."

Far from dampening his enthusiasm, this development work nourishes his sense of purpose. "I'm involved in politics today because I know what it is to live a jobless existence and wake up



to an empty stomach. Whenever I get privileges through different platforms, I remind myself that my privilege is born out of the real grievances and aspirations of ordinary people. We have to fight for an equal society, for a just society where everyone can live better."

Gift's first experience of Zimbabwe's deep inequality began when he came to Harare for the first time as a student at the University of Zimbabwe, age 19. "Our struggle was not just about getting more bones for soup but about accessing quality education." But he quickly learned that the struggles of students for academic freedom were intertwined with much broader struggles. Education opened Gift's eyes to a much wider and deeper solidarity with struggles around the world and throughout history.

"We started reading Steve Biko, Martin Luther King, Mahatma Gandhi. We began to understand that struggles are born out of inspiration, and that as Fanon says, "every generation must discover its mission, must define its role in society."

"As student leaders, we realised that there is no revolution without a revolutionary theory. We became passionate about reading. That's my greatest lesson ... leaders must read, must invest in theory and understanding and be in search of knowledge to answer the questions of the day."

"Since those early years and since getting the Canon Collins scholarship, we have faced many obstacles but also victories. We brought a lot of young people and women into Parliament. **Zimbabweans were losing faith about democracy as a pathway to change government, but when they saw young men and women coming in, they were inspired.**

"Out of 32 cities in the country, our party managed to secure 31 of them and we then deployed female mayors to run those cities. That for us is part of pushing back on authoritarian consolidation in the country through peaceful and democratic means.

"Zimbabwe has suffered for a long time, and poverty has made people to want change by any means necessary or unnecessary. **So those of us who are convinced that democracy is the best form of government must continue to hold the flag higher.**

"With the rise of barbarism and populism, we must stand tall on the possibilities, benefits and advantages of pursuing our politics in democratic and peaceful means.



# CREATIVE COLLABORATIONS

"Sharing spaces with scholars from across Southern Africa highlighted the richness that comes from collaborating with people from diverse contexts and disciplines." **Fadia Gamiieldien**



**Helga Jansen-Daugbjerg**, a CCT PhD Alum and **Ivor Baatjes** presented their paper *Reclaiming Vocational Education as Community Development* at the 2025 **Community Development Conference**, hosted by the University of the Free State.

Their work asks a powerful question: *What if vocational education was never just about jobs, but about justice, community, and democracy?*

They call for reclaiming vocational learning as a practice of social transformation, not merely economic efficiency.



In "*Dissolving dichotomies, connecting into the liminal space through writing*", alumna **Fadia Gamiieldien** and CCT's **Dr Gillian Attwood** explores how the Canon Collins Trust online Writing Group has created a space that softens rigid academic binaries such as expert and novice.

In this in-between space, learning has become a co-created, dynamic process shaped by trust, reciprocity and deep listening.

This illustrates how the right conditions can transform learning spaces into environments where growth and transformation are possible.



A Canon Collins delegation including two science scholars, hosted a session at the Science Forum South Africa called "**Scholarship Pathways Towards Centering Science, Technology and Innovation**". In the audience were delegates from government, academia and industry.

Audience members were bowled over by the Canon Collins Science Scholars' commitment to use their research for public good.

Pictured from left **Ivor Baatjes**, **Catherina Ngongni Kuetezang**, **Reabetswe Maputle**, **Siphokazi Tau** and **Prof Rasigan Maharajh**.

## BUILDING NETWORK LEADERSHIP FOR COLLABORATIVE, GENERATIVE CHANGE



Meaningful change, whether in research, policy, or community contexts, depends on the strength of the systems and relationships that hold people together. In 2025, the Trust deepened its commitment to this insight by launching an initiative to **strengthen network leadership** and **cultivate collaborative, impact-driven research** across the region and the continent.

In partnership with the Mastercard Foundation and African Voices Dialogue, the project introduces **a relational and generative approach to leadership development** for emerging African scholars and researchers.

Rather than positioning leadership as an individual act, the programme supports participants in understanding themselves as part of interconnected systems of people, ideas, and practices. It does this by:

- **Creating reflective dialogical spaces** for honest conversations that support personal and collective transformation.
- **Using generative and relational methodologies** to lay foundations for deeper collaboration.
- **Encouraging cross-disciplinary and cross-country partnerships** that support experimentation, co-creation and shared learning.

By equipping scholars in this way, the project is nurturing the conditions for **long-term systemic change** – shifting research culture and contributing a more connected and resilient African research ecosystem.



*"What made this year so special wasn't only the extraordinary scholars we were privileged to support, but the way they showed up for one another and for the Trust. They poured their time and talent into applications, interviews, and workshops, making this year's Conference our most inspiring yet. Behind them stood a dedicated team and generous, deeply committed funders. Even in a year of tighter resources, this collective spirit reminded us why this work matters—and why it is so rewarding."*

— Eva Lenicka, Scholarships Manager



## Transformative Research

In this section, read about some of the research that is being done by our scholars. Happy reading!



### Using Documentary to Disarm the Culprits of Climate Harm

Janet Solomon, PhD,  
University of Witwatersrand

Powerful groups use language and exploit systems to make oil and gas projects seem safe, modern, or "sustainable," even when they are harmful. Tools like Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) and Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) are supposed to protect nature, but in practice, they can be used to make dangerous projects look acceptable.

They turn real environmental uncertainty into numbers and "manageable risks," which can silence people who disagree and push aside the knowledge of coastal communities.

Using ideas from ecofeminism, decolonial studies, and environmental science, Solomon argues that art can be a powerful way to challenge these systems by revealing the hidden harms and by bringing disparate sectors together.

By rejecting the idea that we need new gas projects and by challenging the public approval of offshore drilling, this work shows how visual storytelling, teamwork, and direct witnessing can create powerful resistance.

It calls for new ideas about energy that are fair, sustainable, and grounded in Indigenous, coastal, and multispecies ways of living with the ocean.



### Empowering communities through environmentally conscious farming practices

Leeroy Rupande, MSc Agriculture  
University of KwaZulu-Natal

With a background in Biotechnology and a strong commitment to circular economy principles, Leeroy Rupande's work focuses on sustainable nutrient management.

He explores innovative ways to use alternative resources—particularly biochar and human urine—to improve soil health, boost crop productivity, and support environmentally responsible farming systems.

His broader goal is to advance agricultural practices that empower communities, strengthen food security, and turn waste into valuable resources.

The need for sustainable soil fertility strategies is especially urgent in regions like KwaZulu-Natal, where sandy, acidic soils and limited resources challenge farmers' ability to maintain productivity. Biochar and human urine have gained global attention for their potential to enhance soil quality, nutrient cycling, and plant growth.

Leeroy's research will examine the use of biochar and urine under KwaZulu-Natal's specific climate and soil conditions. His integrated, context-specific research is essential to identify optimal application strategies and fully understand how low-cost, sustainable inputs can support resilient farming in resource-constrained environments.

# Transformative Research



## Ethical & Inclusive Investment in Africa

Dr Kathleen Mpofu PhD in Law,  
University of the Witwatersrand

The current international investment law system faces a legitimacy crisis because it has largely prioritised investor interests while sidelining the needs of states, communities, and other stakeholders.

Existing reforms are too narrow and fragmented, focusing only on technical fixes rather than addressing the deeper inequalities in how investment decisions are made.

By using a multilevel governance approach, Mpofu proposes a more inclusive system that brings local, national, and international actors into conversation with one another, ensuring that communities affected by foreign investment are not left out of decisions that shape their lives and environments.

Mpofu offers concrete solutions that redistribute power and create space for public interest concerns. These include strengthening states' right to regulate in areas like environmental protection, introducing flexible "framework clauses" that allow national governments to set their own development goals, and requiring investors to use local courts before seeking international remedies.

It also calls for the creation of a multilateral investment court that is more transparent, balanced, and open to participation from civil society and communities.

Together, these reforms build a system where investment can support sustainable development while honouring community voices and ensuring that economic growth does not come at the expense of social and environmental justice.



## Innovative & cost-effective biodiversity conservation

Itumeleng Letlojane, MSc Zoology,  
University of Pretoria

South Africa is home to 137 unique frog species, and 37 of these are threatened with extinction due to habitat loss, agriculture, and mining. Frogs serve as vital early-warning indicators of ecosystem health; their permeable skin absorbs environmental contaminants, making them exceptionally sensitive to pollution and habitat degradation. But they can be extremely difficult to detect, creating significant gaps in our understanding of how their populations are changing over time.

Itumeleng's research compares cutting-edge biodiversity monitoring technologies with traditional survey methods to find the most effective approach for detecting and protecting South Africa's declining amphibian populations:

- **Environmental DNA (eDNA)**  
**metabarcoding** detects species by analysing microscopic traces of genetic material that frogs shed into water through skin cells, waste, and eggs. This allows researchers to identify multiple species from a single water sample;
- **Automated acoustic monitoring**  
continuously captures frog calls throughout the night over extended periods, creating detailed records of when and where species are breeding.

This research will establish practical, cost-effective protocols that conservation organisations can implement across southern Africa, ultimately providing the reliable biodiversity data needed to protect these ecologically important animals as environmental pressures intensify.



# COMING UP IN 2026



*"What has stood out most in 2025 is how people have showed up for one another, sharing experience, expertise, curiosity and encouragement in ways that shaped not only the work we produced, but the kind of community we believe in. This has set a strong foundation for what's ahead in 2026 as we continue to nurture the living infrastructure of the CCT Network – the exchanges, collaborations and friendships that make better things possible."*

**Dr Gillian Atwood, Engagement and Learning Manager**



## Social Justice Dialogues

*An Orientation Programme for Transformative Research Practices*

In 2025, this course was in production and will be ready to launch in 2026.

This course helps scholars to understand how social justice, ethical leadership, and socially engaged scholarship connect and why they matter in real-world contexts.

By the end of the course, scholars will be able to explain these ideas, apply them in practice, and use collaborative research and learning methods to support fairness, responsible leadership, and positive social change.



**Canon Collins Trust**

*Join us in shaping the next chapter of socially engaged scholarship in Southern Africa.*



## Canon Collins Review: The Inaugural Edition

*A Journal on the Theory and Practice of Social Justice in Southern Africa*

The Review is a publication created by Canon Collins Trust scholars to share ideas, research, and real-world practice that advances social justice across the continent – bringing together rigorous theory with practical, change-driven work.

Its purpose is to nurture a community of thinkers and doers who use knowledge, collaboration, and solidarity to confront systemic challenges and champion democracy, justice, equity, and sustainable transformation.

The call for submissions went out in 2025, and the editorial team is now hard at work. Scholars have contributed thoughtful, well-researched essays, and the inaugural edition of the Canon Collins Review is set to launch at the end of April 2026.

