



NITheCS Colloquium

NITheCS
National Institute for
Theoretical and Computational Sciences

Wi-NITheCS WOMEN'S MONTH PANEL DISCUSSION

Women Shaping the Future of Science

PANELLISTS:



Prof Nokwanda Makunga
(Stellenbosch University)



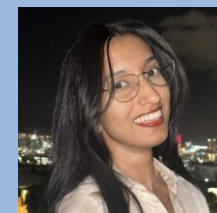
Prof Amanda Weltman
(University of Cape Town)



Dr Yaseera Ismail
(Stellenbosch University)



Dr Chevarra Hansraj
(Stellenbosch University)



Dhiya Dharampal
(Stellenbosch University)

CHAIR:

Monday, 17 August 2026 | 16h00–17h00 SAST

HOW TO ATTEND:

In person (main venue):

- Road House Cinema
(Neelsie)
Stellenbosch University

Watch at satellite venues:

- MITP Boardroom P215,
2nd Floor Physics Building
University of the Witwatersrand
- Seminar Room K310
Physics Building G5
North-West University

Online (live stream)

--- Please note, a recording of the lecture will be published on the NITheCS YouTube channel following the event ---

Join us for an inspiring panel discussion featuring accomplished women in the theoretical and computational sciences. Hear our panellists share their experiences, challenges and insights from their journeys in academia and research, and gain practical advice to navigate a career in science. A Q&A session will encourage questions to explore what it is like to be a woman in STEM, the challenges and opportunities women encounter in their careers, and how to better support and empower women in science. Whether you are a student, researcher, academic or simply interested in creating a more inclusive scientific community, this is an opportunity to listen, learn and contribute to the conversation.

BIOGRAPHIES

Dr Chevarra Hansraj is a lecturer in Applied Mathematics at Stellenbosch University. Her research explores mathematical relativity, astrophysics, black hole geometry and cosmology. A recipient of several fellowships and awards, she serves on the councils of the South African Gravity Society and the South African Mathematical Society and supports young women through the STEM MentHER programme. She is passionate about revealing the beauty and practical value of mathematics.

Prof Amanda Weltman is the SA Research Chair in Physical Cosmology and Director of the High Energy Physics, Cosmology & Astrophysics Theory Group at UCT. Her research investigates Fast Radio Bursts, dark energy, gravity and the evolution of the Universe. After completing her PhD at Columbia University and a postdoctoral fellowship at Cambridge University, she returned to SA to build research capacity in theoretical physics.

Dhiya Dharampal is a Master's student in Theoretical Physics at Stellenbosch University. Her research combines quantum computing, machine learning and medicine, with a focus on medical image classification. She is the founder and coordinator of Wi-NITheCS and a passionate science communicator committed to creating opportunities for women in science and inspiring the next generation.

Dr Yaseera Ismail heads the QuPhotonics Laboratory at Stellenbosch University, where she leads research on quantum optical technologies for secure long-distance communication. Her honours include the TechWomen Emerging Leader Award and recognition among the 2025 Quantum 100. She is a member of the SA Young Academy of Science, VP of the International Commission for Optics and a 2026 South African Women in Science finalist.

Prof Nokwanda 'Nox' Makunga is a Professor of Botany at Stellenbosch University. Her research uses multi-omics and plant-propagation technologies to study medicinal plants, support their conservation and advance the development of quality phytopharmaceuticals. She received the South African Association of Botanists Silver Medal in 2025 and is widely recognised for her science communication.

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<https://bit.ly/45UUm9G>

