

What can we learn from South Africa about human origins?

Dr Mirriam Tawane

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The South African fossil collection is one of the major sources of scientific information for research on the human evolutionary history in Sub-Saharan Africa and worldwide. It is among the world's most requested natural history collection items, attracting an ever-growing stream of scholars, requesting access to original fossils hominins (i.e., our ancestors and relatives) and faunal remains. Technological advancements in the field of Palaeosciences have enabled ground-breaking research to be performed in the most fragile, distorted and incomplete fossil remains. In particular, Dr Mirriam Tawane is developing a project for creating a digital dataset of the palaeontology collection from Ditsong National Museum of Natural History of Pretoria; make available onsite and remotely the digital dataset to researchers and the general public; and print 3D models of casts for research and educational purposes.

Dr Tawane served as a council member for the National Heritage Council d'Afrique du Sud. She has a Bachelor of Science degree, Honours degree and Master of Science degree in Palaeontology, and a PhD degree in Palaeoanthropology from the University of the Witwatersrand. She is the first black South African female palaeoanthropologist and she has been the source of inspiration of many young scientists in South Africa. Dr Tawane is involved in several multi-disciplinary projects in palaeoanthropology and in outreach projects. Besides being the recipient of a National Research Foundation grant for creating a digital database at the museum, she has also developed a project for taking paleosciences to the rural of areas of Taung, where she was born and where the very first fossil hominin specimen was found in Africa.