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Southern African Social Policy Research Institute
Southern African Social Policy Research Insights

Socially perceived necessities in South Africa

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Socially Perceived Necessities Approach (1)

- Takes as its starting point what ordinary people regard as an acceptable standard of living that all South Africans should enjoy in the present day.
- Resonates
 - with the collection of people's political social and economic demands which were reported to the Congress of the People and which fed into the preparation of the 1955 Freedom Charter
 - Consultative approach employed in the development of the constitution



Socially Perceived Necessities Approach (2)

- Approach has been used widely- Australia, Bangladesh, Belgium, Benin, Finland, Germany, Guernsey, Holland, Ireland, Japan, Mali, Sweden, Turkey, the UK, Vietnam and Zimbabwe.
- The South African study is the first to be applied using a *nationally representative* survey in a country which is not categorised as having a 'high' Human Development Index rank.



Challenges

Key challenges arise when involving people in defining the necessities (the SPNs) for an acceptable standard of living in South Africa e.g.

- In the context of such high levels of income poverty, will most people have minimalist views about necessities?
- Given the legacies of colonialism, segregation and apartheid (i.e. stark racial, spatial and wealth inequalities) will we find different ideas of an acceptable standard of living amongst different groups?



Methodology

- The SPN approach uses an indicator approach rather than a budget standards approach
- This means that *indicators* covering a range of possessions, services and activities are defined which can be viewed as ‘necessary’ for an acceptable standard of living
- These indicators are arrived at through a democratic process which uses a series of focus groups followed by a nationally representative survey (SASAS 2006)
- In the survey there is a definition stage – respondents are asked which of a list of items (possessions, services or activities) are necessary for all South Africans to have or have access to enjoy an ‘acceptable’ standard of living
- Once the list of ‘essentials’ is defined then there is, within the survey (or a subsequent survey), a measurement stage. i.e to find out who has the item and if they lack the item whether this is by choice or whether they cannot afford it.



The 48 Focus Groups

- Low, middle and high income people
- Different population groups
- Urban and rural areas including former homelands
- Formal and informal housing areas
- Male and female groups
- Special groups e.g. farm workers, plantation workers and domestic workers
- In six Provinces using nine of the eleven official languages



SASAS 2006 module

- Module attempted to represent the breadth of issues raised in focus groups and a range of probable 'basics' through to probable 'luxuries'.
- Module did not attempt to address issues of quantity and quality and made no assumption about the *provider* of the necessities
- Module had 50 definitional questions: 33 about possessions, 4 about activities, 8 about the neighbourhood, and 5 about relationships with friends and family.



SASAS 2006 findings: the socially perceived necessities

- 36 of the 50 items were defined as essential by more than half the population
- For the 36 items that were defined as essential by 50% or more of the population, the scale reliability coefficient (alpha) was calculated to be 0.9201
- The percentage of the population defining each of the 49 common items as essential in 2005 and 2006 correlates 0.96 (Spearman's rho)



	% of All saying essential
Mains electricity in the house	92
Someone to look after you if you are very ill	91
A house that is strong enough to stand up to the weather e.g. rain, winds etc.	90
Clothing sufficient to keep you warm and dry	89
A place of worship (church/mosque/synagogue) in the local area	87
A fridge	86
Street lighting	85
Ability to pay or contribute to funerals/funeral insurance/burial society	82
Separate bedrooms for adults and children	82
Having an adult from the household at home at all times when children under ten from the household are at home	81
Having police on the streets in the local area	80
Tarred roads close to the house	80
Paid employment for people of working age	79
For parents or other carers to be able to buy complete school uniform for children without hardship	79
A flush toilet in the house	78
People who are sick are able to afford all medicines prescribed by their doctor	77
Someone to talk to if you are feeling upset or depressed	76



Domains or Themes emerging

Using PCA a number of themes emerged - three were particularly prominent:

- **service provision/infrastructure-oriented** (mains electricity, a weather-proof house, street lighting, tarred roads close to the house, and separate bedrooms for adults and children)
- **material possessions** (TV, cell phone, radio, sofa/lounge suite, a special meal at Christmas or equivalent festival and some new clothes)
- **social networks** (someone to talk to if you are feeling upset or depressed, someone to lend you money in an emergency, someone to look after you if you are very ill, having an adult from the household at home at all times when children under ten from the household are at home)



Was there a consensus about the SPNs?

A striking level of agreement between groups e.g. % defining each of the 50 items as essential correlate highly:

- Women & men: 0.98
- Aged 16-24 & aged 25+: 0.97
- Aged 65+ & aged under 65: 0.95
- Equiv. hh income (R847 pcm): 0.92
- Urban & rural: 0.90



Patterns of possession of the SPNs

	All	Black African	Coloured	Indian/ Asian	White
Average number of items defined as necessities (from list of 50 items)	32	31	30	33	34
Average number of socially perceived necessities possessed (from list of 36 items)	22	19	26	31	32



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Median number of SPNs lacked by self-defined poverty status

Self-defined poverty status	Median number of SPNs lacked – enforced	Average per capita monthly income (Rand)	% of the population
Very comfortable	1	3550	7
Reasonably comfortable	3	1523	25
Just getting along	9	763	39
Poor	18	429	23
Very Poor	21	222	6
All	10	1051	100

Source: SASAS 2006



Living Conditions Survey

- The 36 SPNs (from SASAS 2006) were included in the LCS 2008/9
- The LCS asked about possession of the SPNs and reasons for lack
- The LCS also includes detailed information about households and income, enabling us to explore in more depth the relationship between possession of the essential items, and per capita income.