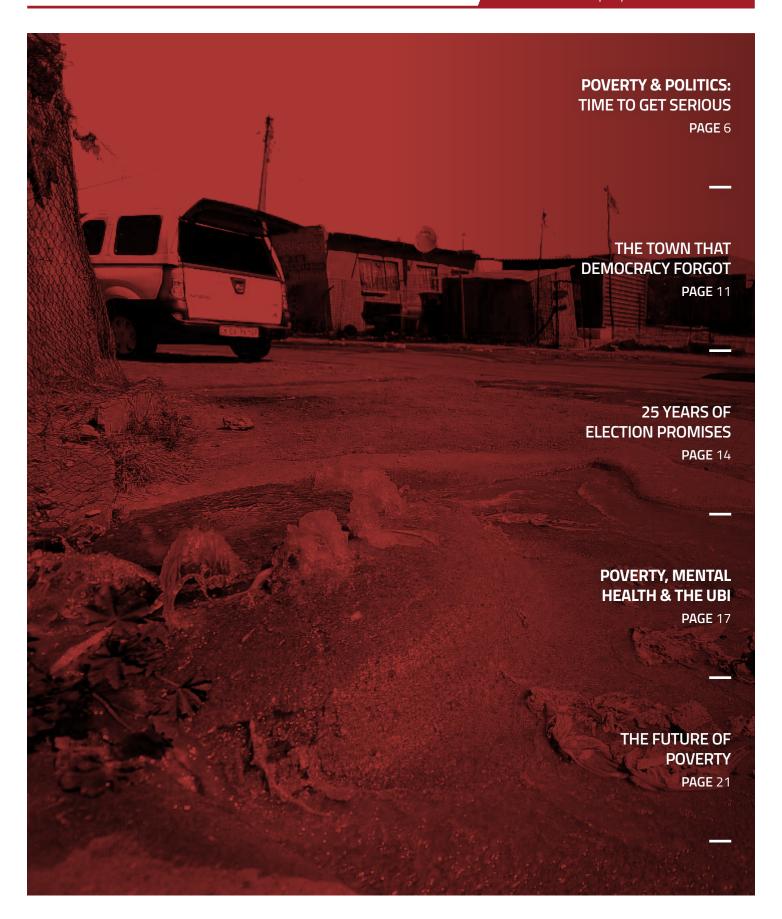
# **SPIItalk**

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## EDITOR'S NOTE

**GERSHWIN** WANNEBURG

### What does the future of poverty look like?

David Francis, Deputy Director of the Southern Centre for Inequality Studies at Wits University, tackles that question in this edition of SPII Talk.

It is quite a sobering proposition to consider. We know all too well the current state of poverty and the worrying trend in recent years, as well as the policy efforts that have been directed at that anathema, but what are the implications for the years and decades to come?

Other articles in this edition cover a variety of aspects of poverty, ranging from hope to despair.

Contributor Bafana Nzimande tells the story of Bekkersdal, a township outside Johannesburg where mines once employed thousands of workers. Today, the mines stand empty and are instead a target for vandals. Meanwhile, local high school students are being taught out of a container despite pleading for years for decent classroom accommodation.

Fortunately, we are not only a land

of woeful tales, despite unrelenting narratives about poor people waiting idly for handouts. On the contrary, many South Africans are defying the odds to overcome their meagre circumstances, as also illustrated by Bafana's storytelling. Bafana has aptly titled these stories 'Dream Starters'. What a thing to even contemplate, a dream, when you are operating from a shack or cleaning garbage bins to earn a living.

Please, take the time to read about a musician who is a bin cleaner by day, or the couple who are selling atchaar to make ends meet and invest in their future.

Hopefully, these individuals inspire other South Africans to seize their own destiny.

In many ways, these contributions tell the story of South Africa in 2019. Through these articles, we are given a snapshot of the personal and political dramas that have gripped our nation over the past 25 years.

The Bekkersdal story also contains the frequent complaint about political indifference in between electoral cycles. Yet our voter turnout remains well above 60%, a figure that stands in sharp contrast to the daily outcries we witness in service delivery protests.

According to Africa Check, more than 17.6 million South Africans voted in the May elections, out of the 26.8 million people who registered. Therefore, the voter turnout amounted to 66%, down from 73.47% in 2014.

No doubt, the general election was one of the biggest events of the past quarter. Rarely had the ruling party faced such a significant challenge. That said, the interest went beyond the result. The real story was the fallout of the election outcome. Broadly speaking, there were two potential scenarios: reform or regress.

SPII research interns Precious Manyisa and Lelona Mxesibe provide the other end of the string to tie together the post-1994 electoral story. In their article, Precious and Lelona provide an overview of previous elections and the policies and promises that were touted in each of the campaigns. These recollections bring to mind the hope, optimism and energy that accompanied our first democratic elections in 1994. It begs the question: does that vitality still exist?

Again, we are familiar with the shortcomings of our policies. The evidence is there for all to see: burning down schools and municipal buildings, barricading roads and burning tyres. The proof is the violent crime that devastates our public and private domains, into the very interior of our homes and our most sacred and intimate spaces.

Many parts of South Africa resemble a conflict zone, littered with the debris of destitution and crime, not to speak of the layers of personal trauma. Consider the 38.5% unemployment rate, and the intractable wastelands represented by our statistics on poverty and inequality.

South Africa's economic growth and inequality levels are comparable to war zones, former deputy finance minister Mcebisi Jonas points out in his book *After Dawn, Hope After State Capture.* He references the Fragile States Index, which places South Africa in the bottom half of the 178 states tracked by the research. South Africa is listed in the "elevated warning" category.

These observations inevitably result in a few conclusions:

Are we a country at war with ourselves?

Policies will not solve our problems.

Do we have the will to resolve them?



# **POVERTY & POLITCS:**TIME TO GET SERIOUS

**ISOBEL** FRYE

President Cyril Ramaphosa's commitment to ensuring no one goes to bed hungry within 10 years is welcome. To begin to rebuild the massive trust deficit that has built up between the state and its citizens, it is crucial not only that this goal is achieved, but that throughout the next years it is seen to be met.

Taken out of context, this is an admirable goal. However, headlining this goal constitutes a sleight of hand in terms of our national development, and one that leaves a bitter taste. What we witnessed was a fundamental downscaling of a goal of the National Development Plan which committed to ensuring that everybody would be lifted above the middle (lower bound) poverty line by 2030.

Now, the government's grand goal is to ensure that no one falls below the lowest poverty line, the food poverty line. It may not have been done with ill-intent, but the shifting of goals without acknowledgement of such a dramatic step appears to contradict the lip service paid to the importance for the nation of addressing poverty and inequality and calls for greater scrutiny of that promise. Understandably, given the economic vulnerabilities of the state, great emphasis was placed on the macro issues of governing. The SOEs, we are told, are

"too big to let fail". While this is true, who is looking after the micro – the well-being of the populace? Is enough being done to reassure the populace that their rights are paramount, rather than just messaging for external national lenders?

The goal of eliminating food poverty, or hunger, is a necessary step towards the state's constitutional obligation to ensure that everybody's inherent right to dignity is met. Hunger does not allow for a decent life. Hunger prevents children from optimal development and learning and prevents adults from being fully productive members of society. It is not a "nice to have" for the realisation of the SONA's full vision, but a basic necessity. Alongside the rights to equality, dignity and life contained in the Constitution, the right to sufficient food is a stand-alone right, contained in Section 27.

Food poverty constitutes the lowest of the three national poverty lines. The latest (2018) food poverty line (FPL) is R547 per person per month. The FPL is "the amount of money that an individual will need to afford the minimum required daily energy intake".

The last Poverty Trends report was released by StatsSA in 2017. According to this report, 25.2% of South Africans fell



below the 2015 FPL level, which meant 13.8 million, or one in four South Africans daily go to bed and wake up hungry.

While the focus of many is rightly on righting the state of economic play, is enough being done to ensure our approach to poverty eradication is receiving the necessary attention too? It does seem as if we are operating in fits and starts, frequently without any progress until challenged by organisations of the poor through the courts.

In April 2019, 12.3 million poor children received the child support grant (CSG) of R420 per child per month. This amount falls short of the basic FPL by R127. We have unacceptably high stunting levels of children under the age of five – 30% for boys and 25% for girls. This is an immediate comment on the adequacy of food available to children. An obvious policy response would be to index the value of the CSG to the FPL, which is one of the strong recommendations handed down to government by the UN Committee on Economic Social and Cultural Rights at the end of 2018.

Working-age people face a much greater challenge in terms of meeting their daily survivalist needs. Despite there being (another) constitutional right to social security, there are no grants available to working-age people between the ages of 18 and 59, as working-age people are meant to provide for themselves through employment.

According to our last employment data, 6.2 million people were officially not employed, with a further 15.8 million working-age people defined out of the unemployment figures by being categorised as "not economically active". This includes three million people who have given up actively looking for work, and 70% of the formally unemployed people

are known as "long-term unemployed" – they have been unemployed for longer than a year. Globally one year is the marker of re-employability.

Poor people older than 60 are able to access a means-tested state old age pension of R1,780 per month. In April 2019, 3.5 million poor older people were in receipt of this monthly pension. While it is set substantially higher than any of the poverty lines, in reality, it is used to support many more poor household members than the eligible pensioner.

Given the structural exclusions of the majority of working-age people from the productive economy, we suggest that the simplest step to meeting our national goal of ending food poverty by 2030 is to provide access to a (means tested) basic income grant. For working-age adults, this does not necessarily have to be rolled out at the FPL level, but can be progressively increased. The economic impact of giving spending money to the poor is globally documented. If we want people to buy local to positively disrupt the current negative economic growth, people need to have access to money.

About 14 years ago, Brazil had a similar inequality and income profile to ours. Under President Lula da Silva, a phenomenal programme known as *Bolsa Familia* was introduced of both conditional and non-conditional cash grants. These interventions fell under the Zero Hunger programme of the state. Each qualifying household that fell below the extreme poverty/food poverty line, was issued with a monthly cash grant that brought it up to the FPL. This dramatically reversed the poverty and inequality levels.

Ramaphosa referred to immediate, medium- and long-term goals. We believe that earmarking the food poverty line should not be the goal of our intervention,

According to our last employment data, 6.2 million people were officially not employed, but a 2030 progress marker towards the attainment of a decent life for all.

In 2018, a decent standard of living level (DSL) was released in South Africa. This work, funded by the department of social development, was the culmination of a number of years' work. The DSL is constructed from national focus groups that captured what people think constitutes an austere but decent standard of life. Drawing on survey data, it enabled us to observe that people who had access to a decent standard of life also shared a median monthly income of R7,043 per person per month.

The same income data showed that just 3%, or 1.7 million people, living in South Africa were able to afford a decent standard of living. The National Development Plan (now back on the table) speaks of the necessity of a consensually developed DSL as the bedrock for social cohesion. It behoves policymakers to be bold enough to use the tools that exist, rather than adopt the veil of developing parallel unambitious and often ambiguous tools which delay any transparent performance or delivery.

Poverty and inequality research abounds in South Africa, but is often fiercely guarded by researchers, or inappropriately disregarded by the very policy makers who claim empirical evidence as being optional to optimal policy development.

We offer concrete steps forward in an attempt to safeguard the realisation of this downgraded poverty goal:

 Establish a coordinating council on poverty and inequality within the Presidency, and bury forever the inappropriately named and ineffective "war rooms" on poverty;

- 2. Map the existing research initiatives on poverty and inequality in South Africa, detailing the recommendations for policy solutions, and use these to map clear targets, and progress markers, indexing these where necessary to national growth;
- Commit to increasing the child support grant in accordance with the food poverty line over the next three fiscal years;
- Progressively increase the age eligibility for income grants to people not covered;
- 5. Institutionalise poverty hearings to be held by every administration to document people's experiences of the impact and trauma caused by living in poverty, ending the silence of marginalisation and shame and exclusion that makes people feel they are to blame for being surplus to macro-economic requirements; and
- 6. Provide StatsSA with sufficient funding to meet its measurement obligations.

South Africa is in a crisis. Given the evidence emerging from the corruption commissions, this is to be expected. We argue that stabilising the macro demands is not sufficient to effect the transformative changes required for a decent life. The soft references in the SONA to Star Trek as we are exhorted to boldly go into our future is more welcome a theme than the "last days" described in the Biblical Acts of the Apostles in which young men see visions and old men dream dreams.

Let us boldly respect the need for the micro policies as well as the macro policies, reassuring all teachers of grammar, and future-proofing our national development.

CRIMILDO MATHE (27)

Street Runner \_\_\_\_

Mathe dropped out of high school in 2009 and moved to Johannesburg to seek employment. With no academic qualifications to his name, the only job he could get was to sell vegetables at train stations for his uncle.

Six years later he used some of his savings to start his own fruit and vegetable stall. He has been surviving on this business since 2015. Mathe keeps adding new items like airtime vouchers, cigarettes and energy drinks.

"I am my own boss and it's the best feeling ever. But this comes with a lot of discipline. Knowing that I have to provide for my girlfriend and my four-year-old daughter is what keeps me focused."



## THE TOWN THAT DEMOCRACY FORGOT

**BAFANA** NZIMANDE

The disbandment of apartheid brought with it new hope and revived energy among many black South Africans.

Soweto in Gauteng is one area that has seriously been transformed from being a dusty dormitory into a modern urban space. The community is also keeping up with the fast-moving pace of technology. Soweto is the first township in the country to be provided with fibre cables for faster internet connection.

Without a doubt, Soweto's contribution in the attainment of a democratic South Africa is well acknowledged and appreciated. But while millions are being pumped into Soweto, other areas are being left in an under-resourced state. Take Bekkersdal, for instance, the former mining community located in the far east of Johannesburg.

Driving from the Joburg inner city to Bekkersdal via the R599 is a peaceful drive. The roads are neatly tarred, have visible markings and functioning road lights. The scenery leading to Bekkersdal on this route is also stunning. On this journey you are guaranteed to spot a few petrol stations and new housing developments that accommodate the black middle class, often labelled black diamonds, even though they are in serious debt.

As you enter Bekkersdal, you are greeted by the site of vandalised gold mine shafts that used to draw thousands of jobseekers to this part of the world back in the late 1960s.

A massive brown brick structure that used to be the mine's hostel is completely stripped of its roofing, windows, doors and everything that resembles copper or steel. Local unemployed youth that are heavily hooked on a drug called nyaope are often blamed for the disappearing items on this site. One steel door frame is said to be worth a day's drug fix for these youngsters who rely on the substance.

The closed shafts are now operated by illegal miners who are also accused of increased crime and gangsterism in Bekkersdal. A few paces away from the shafts, locals have created a dusty soccer field, hoping it will lure youngsters away from negative behaviour.

Not far from the field, piles of garbage are scattered near scores of corrugated zinc shacks that many in Bekkersdal call home.

Retrenched mineworker Jerry Hlatshwayo lives in this part of the world. The 53-year-old from Newcastle in KwaZulu-Natal arrived in Bekkersdal as a rock driller in 1993. He worked in the nearby mine and lived in a one-room shack.

When South Africa elected its first democratic president in 1994, Hlatshwayo stood in the long voting line and marked his X on the ballot paper. At this point he was settling in nicely in Bekkersdal. He also found love. Months after late president Nelson Mandela took office, Hlatshwayo started extending his shack into a four-room structure to make space for his newborn and wife. His family continued to grow and he applied for an RDP house in 1996.

"When you are inside these class containers, you can see rats moving on the floor. When it's raining, water flows inside the classroom." But life started throwing heavy punches at Hlatshwayo from 2004 when the mining company closed its operation. Hlatshwayo was among a long list of people that lost their jobs that year. He has been unemployed since then.

Today he is a father of four children. The shack is no longer big enough for his family. Tap water was only installed in his yard in 2018. All these years he had to quench his thirst from a communal tap. No one has a job in Hlatshwayo's household. Collecting plastic containers for recycling is the main source of survival for this family. "When we voted in 1994 we were promised a lot of things but many of those promises have not been fulfilled. Many of us still live in shacks. We have gravel roads. Many of our young people are on drugs because we don't have sporting facilities and jobs that will keep them busy," said Hlatshwayo. Hlatshwayo says he voted in all the

national and municipal elections, hoping that those elected into positions of power would one day fulfil their promise and develop Bekkersdal.

"A number of people lost their lives for us to get this freedom. That's why I will always vote. But politicians are letting us down. They only remember us when they need our votes," he said.

Bekkersdal was the scene of frequent service delivery protests as early as 2003. Residents often took to the streets to demand houses, electricity and improved infrastructure, among other issues. Former president Thabo Mbeki's administration in 2004 budgeted R1.2 billion for the Bekkersdal Renewal Project. This initiative was designed to address issues raised by residents and provide skills empowerment for locals. A substantial number of RDP houses have been delivered, but the Bekkersdal



Renewal Project has not brought any meaningful change to this community. An increasing number of residents seem to lose interest in the voting system and the promises made by politicians.

The voter turnout in this area that was previously covered by the Westonaria municipality shows a steady decline. In the 2004 national elections, voter turnout was 67.15%. The figure improved to 72.42% in the 2009 elections. But the 2014 stats went down to 68.14%.

Then the Westonaria municipality was merged with the Randfontein municipality on 3 August 2016. This led to the formation of Rand West municipality. Bekkersdal is now under this new municipality. In the 2019 national elections this area had a 66.39% voter turnout. Rand West municipality records clerk Nomfuneko Nzima says voters have been disappointed by poor service delivery and political differences.

"Bekkersdal should be counted as one of the best developed townships in the country but our main challenge is lack of accountability among some of our leaders. R1.2 billion was budgeted for this township but nobody knows what happened to that money, yet Bekkersdal is still a mess," said Nzima.

"The ANC doesn't need their dirty votes," said former Gauteng Premier Nomvula Mokonyane in 2013 while engaging with protesting Bekkersdal residents who were threatening to boycott the elections due to poor service delivery in the area. Bekkersdal's pupils also feel neglected by those in air-conditioned government offices. Nearly 1,300 pupils are currently being taught in dilapidated ship containers at a local high school called Simunye Secondary School.

The school started operating in 1996 and for years the education department has promised to relocate pupils at this school to a safe brick structure. Twenty-three years have passed, pupils are still being fed promises.

"When you are inside these class containers, you can see rats moving on the floor. When it's raining, water flows inside the classroom," said Charles Makwakwa, chairperson of the Congress of South African Students (Cosas) in Bekkersdal.

"We don't have enough desks and chairs. Most classes have broken windows and doors. The situation is risky for everyone at the school. The department is aware of this but has failed to address this challenge," he adds.

Gauteng department of education spokesperson Steve Mabona says the process to eradicate mobile schools is under way and construction of a new Simunye Secondary School will commence in November 2019. Despite these challenges, Simunye Secondary continues to produce decent academic results. For the past three years the school has been hovering above the 60 % grade 12 pass rate. Its highlight was in 2017 when it secured a cool 91% pass rate.

Unfortunately, the results dropped to 71% in 2018. Educators at the school attribute this drop in results to widespread protests led by pupils and parents over services.

For 28-year-old Tumelo Modise democracy has failed his community. "It's great that we got freedom of movement and all the rights, but in all honesty this democracy doesn't work for most of us," he said.

"Jobs and services are only provided to the elite and those closely connected to politicians."

"We don't have enough desks and chairs. Most classes have broken windows and doors. The situation is risky for everyone at the school. The department is aware of this but has failed to address this challenge"

## 1994

### **-** 666

### 2004

### 25 YEARS OF ELECTION PROMISES

#### PRECIOUS MANYISA & LELONA MXESIBE

In democratic South Africa, political parties communicate their guarantees of service through manifestos. Ramukosi defines a manifesto as being a public declaration of promises to gain the trust of voters (2018). The purpose of this article is to give a historical overview of the election promises made since 1994 by the ruling African National Congress (ANC), so that readers may reflect on the progress made thus far.

Some of the election promises under the Mandela administration included:

- The introduction of free healthcare for pregnant women and children
- Reconciliation and advancement of national unity
- School feeding schemes for children in need
- Clean water and electricity to communities who previously did not have
- Generating real economic growth in the country
- Eradication of rural poverty and improving rural infrastructure and
- Decent sanitation and housing development (ANC Manifesto, 1994)

Five years later, Thabo Mbeki unveiled an action plan to deliver services to all South Africans. From housing, to free education, to better governance – the ANC focused on the *realisation* of some of its aspirations (ANC Manifesto, 1999).

The Mbeki administration promised to create more jobs and expand economic opportunities. The goal was to reduce unemployment by a whopping 50% in just 10 years, which unfortunately didn't happen.

In the 2004 manifesto, the ruling party again made bold proclamations of halving unemployment, but this time omitted a timeline to achieve this.

In this manifesto, the ANC again placed great emphasis on 'speeding up' service delivery. Some of the repeat promises included: creating housing on well located land, in order to reduce the number of people who find themselves homeless; and providing competent education, by ensuring that all schools in South Africa have adequate buildings, electricity and proper sanitation (ANC Manifesto, 1999 & 2004).

Combating crime and corruption was also on the ANC's to-do-list, with Mbeki noting that the ANC would have to tackle underlying causes, such as poverty and inequality. The ANC also committed itself to promoting harmony in Africa by strengthening intercontinental ties (ANC Manifesto, 2004)

When Jacob Zuma came into power in 2009, his mandate was to accelerate economic growth. He promoted working in unity in order to achieve the government's objectives. The 2009 ANC manifesto formed its promises in order to address the major challenges faced by South Africa, namely: poverty, unemployment, rural marginalisation, and inequality.

### 2009

2014

<u>6</u>10

The following promises were made by the ANC government in their 2009 manifesto:

- To produce sustainable livelihoods and create decent jobs through the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP)
- The introduction of National Health Insurance (NHI) Phase 1
- To prioritise adequate education and training systems
- To prioritise rural development in order to fight unemployment and
- Building safer communities by reducing corruption and crime

In meeting these objectives, the ANC pledged to "work with local municipalities to ensure better implementation of free basic services to the marginalized and poor by 2014" (ANC manifesto, 2009: 3). Similarly to the 1999 and 2004 themes, the manifesto aimed to tackle issues of poverty, inequality, and unemployment through job creation.

In the same spirit of democracy and of building a developmental state, the Party's 2014 manifesto was drafted as a continuation of what was promised in 2009, where it sought to create an inclusive economy that would: "provide better opportunities, quality healthcare, rural community development, reduction of crime & corruption, job creation and providing adequate training" (ANC Manifesto, 2014: 5). The general mandate was to ensure that basic services were delivered effectively and efficiently in addressing past injustices, promoting economic growth, and alleviating poverty.

A major promise made by the government for the next five-year period was to implement phase 2 of the NHI, with the following key focus areas: passing of the NHI bill, establishment of funding, and making necessary adjustments to the legislation. In relation to this 213 clinics and 43 hospitals were to be built and over 870 health facilities in all 11 districts were to undergo major and minor refurbishments in preparation for the NHI (ANC Manifesto, 2014: 40).

In the current year, the ANC prioritised transformation and tackling poverty, unemployment and inequality. It derived its promises from the National Development Plan, with the aim of achieving economic equality. The ANC government promised to accelerate the annual rate of employment by creating 275,000 jobs per year (2019).

Health and education also emerged as major priorities, including the finalisation of the NHI bill, in order to move to phase 3 of implementation, and focusing on access to quality and free education. The party also pledged to accelerate the land reform process in the next five years and to prioritise the settlement of outstanding land claims.

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### POVERTY, MENTAL HEALTH & THE UBI IN SOUTH AFRICA

#### **SACHA** KNOX

In South Africa we face a deeply distressing situation of enduring, or chronic, poverty and inequality. Inequality should be seen as a mental health problem when "across the globe, data shows a clear link between levels of equality in particular countries and their rates of mental health problems including anxiety, depression and psychosis" (Murali & Oyebode, 2004 in Psychologists for Social Change, 2017).

The same may be said in relation to poverty: when the South African Stress and Health (SASH) study undertook research in Khayelitsha and Mfuleni, an important finding was that depression is clearly associated with earning below R2000 a month (Furlong, 2016). In fact, income is "widely considered to be the most important social determinant of health (SDH), as it interacts with, and influences a number of other SDH pathways" (Ruckert et. al., 2017: 3). Persons with insecure income can experience "elevated risk of morbidity and stress" (Ruckert et. al., 2017: 4) and there is "ample evidence across countries" that insecurity surrounding income "has adverse effects on people's physical and mental health" (Haag & Rohregger, 2019: viii).

The application of this to South Africa is disturbing. The current reality of South Africa as the most unequal country in the world, with exceedingly high levels of people living below the food survival poverty line, and with no

social assistance to those between 18 and 59 years old, is a difficult one to comprehend in its fullness. In addition, the majority of citizens have already had to endure generations of traumatic racism, violence, and discrimination. It is also a country characterised by severe neglect by the public health care system of those suffering with mental health problems. The dehumanising facts of the latter surfaced to public attention during the Life Esidimeni tragedy, in which 143 patients died from neglect. Sadly, this tragedy forms only the tip of the iceberg: "all over the country, and especially in rural areas, mental health care users have little or no access to the services they need, resulting in the same devastating effects on individuals and families... the Life Esidimeni tragedy is not an aberration: it simply places in the spotlight what is happening everywhere" (Rural Mental Health Campaign, 2017).

So, what we see in South Africa is a disturbing trend, where those living in deprivation may have the highest needs for mental health care services but, inversely, the least access to them. As the SASH study established, 75% of people living with mental health issues will never receive the care they need (Furlong, 2016).

If we take mental health in South Africa seriously, which we clearly need to do, then it is imperative to ask how we can effectively address poverty and inequality as causal or, at the very least, exacerbating roots for mental health problems. This entails that potential solutions to poverty and inequality should not increase stigmatisation and should not be ableist in nature.

Something we know is that austerity is bad for health, including mental health. As 442 psychotherapists, counsellors, and academics highlighted in a letter to The Guardian in 2015; austerity has adverse psychological effects (Haag & Rohregger, 2019: 8). Not only does austerity directly detrimentally affect mental health, but it then further removes access to potential support services. This is in direct contradiction to the observation that "while fiscal consolidation and shrinking budgets are likely to stay with us for some time, policy makers need to consider the impact of austerity measures on the most vulnerable in our society, including people living with mental disorders" (Rural Mental Health Campaign, 2017).

"many commentators have tended to de-emphasise the government's obligation towards the poor and the unemployed, placing on the latter the main responsibility for their own uplift"

> Unfortunately, in post-apartheid South Africa, political liberation has been at odds with policies of economic liberalisation, which have dampened expectations for redistribution and increased access to opportunities and services. South Africa's macroeconomic orientation is "based on containing social claims in the interest of fiscal discipline" and so, "many commentators have tended to de-emphasise the government's obligation towards the poor and the unemployed, placing on the latter the main responsibility for their own uplift" (Barchiesi, 2007).

> In the context of massive, intractable

unemployment- further worsened by a landscape of precarious, casual, and informal employment at poverty wages-an exclusive reliance on "individual initiative and labour market activation" not only reproduces inequality and deprivation (Barchiesi, 2007) but is also classist, ableist, and unrealistic.

The trend for waged labour to define hierarchies of citizenship and rights clearly needs to be challenged in a context where only a shrinking minority have access to stable wage jobs of a decent standard (Barchiesi, 2007). A powerful challenge to this paradigm may be found in a Universal Basic Income (UBI). Essential in relation to the argument thus far; a UBI is a progressive avenue for social security that minimises dependence on the labour market.

A UBI refers to an unconditional income granted to citizens "irrespective of work criteria or a means test" (Ruckert, et. al., 2017). In order for a UBI to create significant structural changes and to have demonstrably positive psychological impacts, the minimum income guaranteed would need to be set at a level high enough for basic needs to be met without requiring formal employment (Ikebe in; Psychologists for Social Change, 2017). It should also be targeted downwards, with the "clear goal of reducing poverty and inequality by increasing income of the most marginalised groups of society" (Ruckert, et. al., 2017).

UBI is perceived as having a positive impact on the underlying drivers of equity, including "empowerment, participation, democratisation and equal opportunities for all, through fairer redistribution of resources, and social justice" (Patemann, 2004; Wright, 2006; Haag, 2011a, 2017b; Goodhart et al., 2012; Sloman, 2017; Ruckert, Huynh & Labonte, 2018 in; Haag & Rohregger, 2019).

Several experiments have examined the impacts of providing a basic income to individuals and findings have included: "improved physical and mental health and a reduction in hospital admissions; reduced stigmatisation of those on low incomes... and increased life satisfaction and happiness" (Psychologists for Social Change, 2017).

The positive mental health benefits of a UBI are potentially wide ranging, with evidence from previous experiments indicating the "potential for UBI to increase all five psychological indicators of a healthy society: agency, security, connection, meaning and (Psychologists for Social Change, 2017). As one example, in an unconditional cash transfer experiment in Malawi, school children "were approximately 38% less likely to suffer psychological distress than the control group" (Ruckert at. Al. 2017: 4). In fact, basic income stability can be seen as "both crises-preventative and health constitutive" (Haag & Rohregger, 2019: ix) and "one of the most straightforward ways to reduce the incidence of mental ill-health and emotional distress would be to ensure that everyone has enough money for a basic standard of living" (Psychologists for Social Change, 2017).

A UBI could create fundamental shifts of power and "deconstruct the idea that employment and jobs are the only ways out of poverty and inequality" (Callebert, 2016, in Psychologists for Social Change, 2017). Instead, a UBI would distribute wealth "independently of people's ability to produce value for employers," "weakening the connection thus between ability to work and the right to a reasonable quality of life" (ibid.); an undoubtedly important shift from the perspectives of mental health and antiableism, and an absolutely essential one in ensuring that people are no longer made superfluous to misplaced macroeconomic concerns but rather, are able to heal and to flourish.



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## THE FUTURE OF POVERTY

### **DAVID FRANCIS**

South Africa is characterised by deep poverty and persistent inequality. While the country has made some progress in reducing poverty in the post-apartheid period, it has been much less successful in tackling resource inequalities. There are, of course, important differences between poverty and inequality, which have implications for how we tackle them. Poverty is characterised by an essential lack of a particular thing (Soudien, Reddy, & Woolard, 2019), while inequality is a relational phenomenon, and power is therefore a central force in the production and reproduction of inequality. This is an important distinction, because the relief of poverty can often be achieved without tackling the power relations that sustain inequality, and inequality itself can then support the reproduction of poverty.

The recognition of how interrelated these phenomena are is embodied in the diagnosis of South Africa's triple challenge of poverty, inequality and unemployment by policy makers and politicians. But while political and policy rhetoric centres on these challenges, South Africa's success in addressing them has been very uneven. The country has made some important progress in addressing poverty, but it has been far less successful in tackling inequality and unemployment (Statistics South Africa, 2017).

Our income inequality remains the highest in the world, and our unemployment rate has risen consistently in the last decade, and is now approaching 30%. In terms of poverty, the situation is complicated, too. Between 2011 and 2015, something disturbing happened; for the first time in post-apartheid South Africa, poverty rates started to increase. In a 2017 report by Statistics South Africa, the most-recent poverty statistics showed that despite a decline in poverty between 2006 and 2011, poverty levels had once again risen by 2015, to the point where 30.4 million South Africans were living in poverty.

Against this rather bleak picture, what can we say about the future of poverty and poverty alleviation in South Africa? The intention to address the triple challenge remains at the heart of the government's business, as highlighted in the State of the Nation address in June 2019. But economic policy is worryingly thin on the detail of how this will be accomplished, or how the power relations that underpin poverty and inequality will be addressed.

Recently, there has been one heartening development, and that is the adoption and implementation of a national minimum wage as of 1 January 2019. Given the extent of low pay in South Africa, the minimum wage could raise the incomes of almost half of all working people (Valodia et al., 2016) which will, perhaps, arrest the growing poverty rates and will tackle inequality between working people, too.

Wages are also about power, and the minimum wage is a structural intervention that is intended to improve the bargaining power of low-paid workers (Francis & Valodia, 2018). It is, of course, too early to see if the minimum wage has had its desired impact — we will have to wait several years to have a better picture of its effects.

It is hard to feel optimistic about the future prospects for poverty alleviation in South Africa. Unemployment — the lack of access to income through work — remains one of the main causes of poverty in South Africa, and there is little to suggest that we have the political will or the policy levers to meaningfully transform the labour market.

The implementation of the National Development Plan is proceeding at a glacial pace, and while political rhetoric nods towards the triple challenge, political action remains diverted elsewhere. We will need to wait for the next round of poverty statistics to better understand whether the growth in poverty from 2011 continues.

Regardless of whether or not poverty is growing, that half the country continues to live in poverty is unacceptable and addressing this requires far more radical action to alter the power relations in the labour market and in broader society.

Goran Therborn makes a useful distinction between vital, existential and resource inequality. Vital inequality relates to life expectancy, health etc.; existential inequality is inequality in the experience of personhood (discrimination and oppression) and resource inequality includes the more typical measures of income and wealth. (Therborn, 2013; 2018).

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