

# Decent Standard of Living Colloquium

OUTCOME REPORT

# 2021

“Critical reflection on the Socially Perceived Necessities (SPNs) in attaining a Decent Standard of Living (DSL): Launch of the 2021 Post COVID Report on what constitutes a Decent Standard of Living (DSL) in South Africa.”



**DECENT  
STANDARD  
OF LIVING**

# DSL

#decentstandardofliving

*Ubomu obunesidima ngoku!*



*There is a crucial link that exists between the right to a decent standard of life and the right to DIGNITY.*

The right to dignity is an inalienable right guaranteed in Section 10 of the South African Constitution.

## TOWARDS A DECENT LIFE FOR ALL

*Ubomu obunesidima ngoku!*  
*'a life of dignity now!'*



DECENT  
STANDARD  
OF LIVING

DSL

*Ubomu obunesidima ngoku!*

#decentstandardofliving

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DECENT  
STANDARD  
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**DSL**

Ubomu obunesidima ngoku!

#decentstandardofliving

# ABBREVIATIONS



<b>DSD</b>	Department of Social Development
<b>DSL</b>	Decent Standard of Living
<b>DSLII</b>	Decent Standard of Living Index
<b>FES</b>	Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung
<b>LRS</b>	Labour Research Service
<b>NDP</b>	National Development Plan
<b>SASPRI</b>	Southern African Social Policy Research Institute
<b>SDGs</b>	Sustainable Development Goals
<b>SPII</b>	Studies in Poverty and Inequality Institute
<b>SRD</b>	Social Relief of Distress Grant
<b>SPNs</b>	Socially Perceived Necessities
<b>StatsSA</b>	Statistics South Africa
<b>UN ICESCR</b>	United Nations International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights
<b>WITS</b>	Witwatersrand University

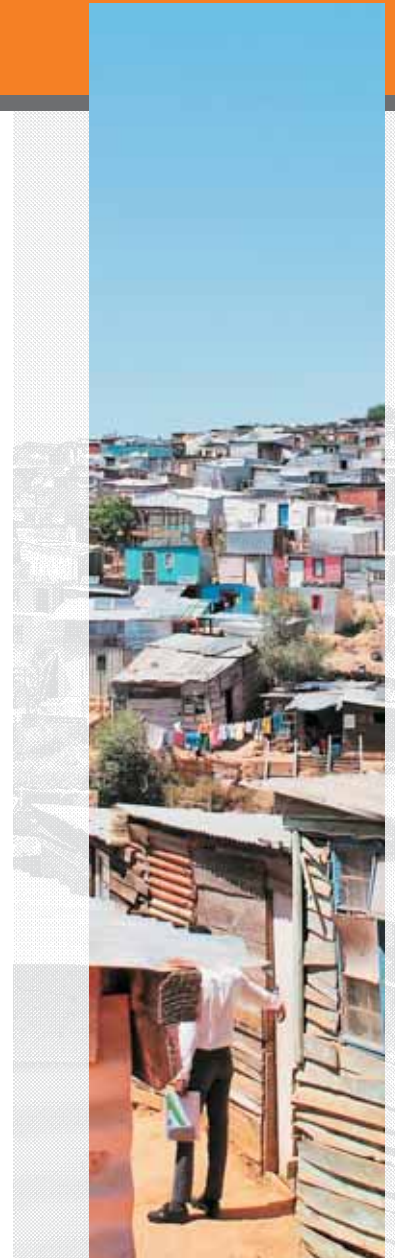
# INTRODUCTION

November 2018 saw the commencement of a research programme that would reframe the way that South Africans look at life. This research, into what ordinary people think constitutes a decent standard of life in South Africa, was a first of its kind - in a country typically focused on conditions of minimalist, absolute poverty, and destitution.

The relevance and importance of such research are therefore vital in the monitoring of the extension of the progressive realisation of a decent quality of life for all citizens and not merely a select few. The research was conducted via a collaborative partnership between the Studies in Poverty and Inequality Institute (SPII), the Southern Africa Social Policy Research Institute (SASPRI), and the Labour Research Service (LRS). It is with the dedicated financial support, provided by the auspices of a funding facility between the Department of Social Development (DSD) and Witwatersrand University, that this research was conducted.<sup>1</sup>

The 2021 Colloquium, which took place after years of research into the intricacies of a decent quality of life, is to present the 2021 updated list of Socially Perceived Necessities (SPNs).<sup>2</sup> SPNs are the backbone of the research, illustrating what South Africans consider necessary living conditions and/or possessions needed to live a decent life. This research in particular hoped to identify the change in SPNs brought on by the Covid-19 pandemic, testing any shifts in people's priorities by a disruption to everyday life.

The 2021 study conducted over 900 telephonic interviews in five South African languages, across five provinces - a commendable feat that would not have been possible without the support of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). The diverse range of provinces namely, Gauteng, Western Cape, KwaZulu-Natal, Eastern Cape and Free State and languages (namely English, isiZulu, isiXhosa, Sesotho and Afrikaans) ensured that the data produced would be indicative of the spread of SPNs evident across our vibrant land. As set out below, the usual methodology of focus group studies had to be scrupulously adapted to accommodate the Covid-19 lockdown protocols.



1 All research and previous Colloquia reports can be found on the website [www.dslnow.net](http://www.dslnow.net)

2 The socially perceived necessities or 'consensual' approach to defining and measuring poverty is based on an assumption that it is possible to obtain a collective view from society on the necessities for an acceptable standard of living.



## What is a Decent Standard of Living?

In a country plagued with such high levels of poverty and hunger as South Africa, the exploration of what constitutes a decent standard of life was a unique and necessary topic. One cannot aim for more South Africans to achieve a decent standard of life if one does not know what exactly that looks like. For example, to pursue a goal, one must consider what exactly the realisation of such a goal may look like. This research, therefore, identifies what constitutes a decent life that is worth striving for. Research into a DSL is the first step to ensure that every person in the country is afforded a life of dignity.

In saying this, however, it is important to note that the DSL measure, produced by this research has been created to act as a complementary set of data to the existing money-metric minimalist poverty line measures and not a replacement. This groundbreaking research builds on several earlier studies involving quantitative research into socially perceived necessities and various standards of life. It was the research conducted in 2018, for example, that found the correlation between possession of all SPNs and the median monthly income of R7 043, per person, - that this was the amount needed to live a decent standard of life. This amount was the median per capita household income of people who had a full set of 21 indicative items (SPNs) that were regarded by the majority of the first round of participants, as essential for an acceptable standard of living in the country. The SPNs include a wide range of provisions ranging from material possessions and social networks to local neighbourhood features, thus indicating that access to strong community institutions is regarded, by South Africans, as necessary as basic physical needs. The DSL provides a people-centred measure of the cost of living. It provides a people-driven approach based on proxy indicators identified by ordinary people as being important to them to live a life of decency in South Africa.

## Why is the Decent Standard of Living important?

The right to a life of dignity is prescribed within section 10 of the South African Constitution. Whilst the state is obliged, by the highest law in the land, to ensure people's right to dignity is realised, one need not look far to see a lack of actualisation in the lives of most South Africans.

The South African government's obligation to the pursuit of a DSL for all is prescribed in the country's commitment to the UN International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) that guarantees the right to an Adequate Standard of Living for all people - evident in Article 11 of the Covenant.

The final recommendations and observations of the UN Committee, handed down in November 2018, therefore prescribe that South Africa needs to develop, adopt, and annually update such a standard to ensure and measure the progressive realisation of this standard of living amongst all South Africans.

Henceforth, developing a standard to reflect what it is to live in a dignified manner is, therefore, essential to enable policymakers to design policies that are conducive to the progressive realisation of this standard. Such an aspirational standard has also been set out as fundamental in the 2030 National Development Plan (NDP) adopted by government in 2012 that commits to a multifaceted DSL.

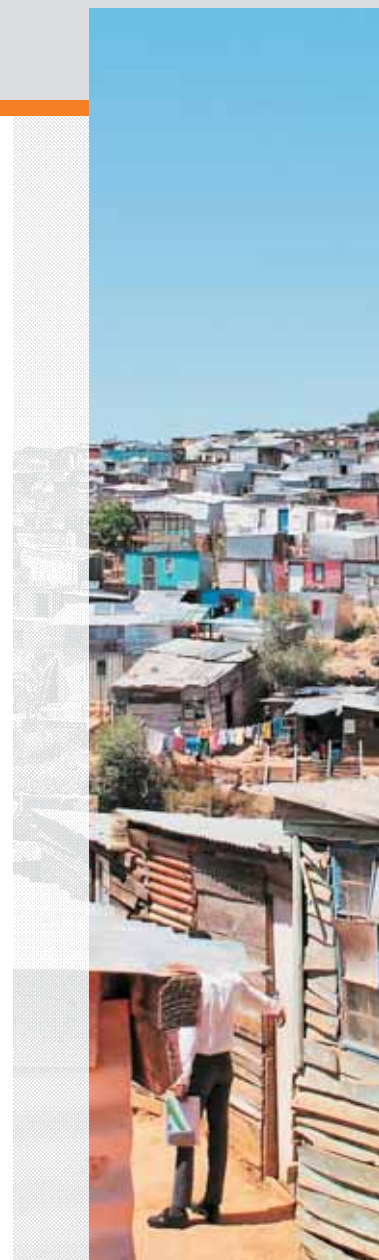
### Why the DSL?

The DSL offers more than a series of thresholds around which we can measure how many people are below/above the food poverty line. The DSL offers us ideas on how to move households towards a socially agreed decent standard of living. The DSL also speaks to what people feel would afford them a life of dignity, unlike existing poverty measures, the DSL provides an avenue for us to know how many people have attained the SPNs. While aspirational, the DSL can be used as a measure for the state to commit itself to attain progressively using its maximum available resources (MAR) as outlined in the ICESCR.

### 2021 DSL Annual Colloquium

On 30 September 2021, various scholars, government officials, stakeholders, civil society, and citizens joined a virtual webinar entitled *“2021 DSL Annual Colloquium a “Critical Reflection on the Socially Perceived Necessities (SPNs) in attaining a Decent Standard of Living (DSL): Launch of the 2021 Post Covid report on what constitutes a Decent Standard of Living (DSL) in South Africa.”* The webinar launched new research findings which specifically aimed to identify the change in SPNs brought on by the Covid-19 pandemic, demonstrating the shift in people’s priorities by a disruption to everyday life. Over 91 people registered for the Colloquium funded by The Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES).

This report begins by providing the two opening addresses delivered by Minister of Social Development, Lindiwe Zulu, and United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) Representative in the Republic of South Africa, Christine Muhigana. Two expert panels discussion followed entitled 2020 DSL research findings and Solutions and Actions to help more people obtain a DSL that sought to 1) present the research findings from data collected from the field and 2) explore options on how we can work towards ensuring everyone is afforded a DSL. Finally, the last panel reflected on a way forward for future research.



# 3

## PANEL OF PRESENTERS

Ms Isobel Frye, Ms Uta Dirksen, Mr Langa Zita, Minister Lindiwe Zulu, Ms Christine Muhigana, Dr Nqobile Zulu, Dr Helen Barnes, Ms Mastoera Sadan, Dr Kefiloe Masiteng, Professor Michael Noble and Mr Trenton Elsley.

### Ms Isobel Frye



Ms Isobel Frye is the founding Director of Studies in Poverty and Inequality Institute (SPII) in Johannesburg. She worked as a director at a commercial law practice before moving to work as the Black Sash National Advocacy Manager. From there she moved to work as a senior researcher at NALEDI, the research service organisation of the trade union federation COSATU, before starting SPII.

SPII undertakes both primary and secondary research into poverty and social exclusions, and policy analysis in the field of anti-poverty policies, inequalities, socio-economic and constitutional rights and social protection.

Isobel serves on the Academy of Science of South Africa Standing Committee on Science for the Reduction of Poverty and Inequality. She has served on the Boards of a variety of national and regional bodies.

She serves on a global strategic advisory body for a leading ecumenical development agency. Isobel is a former member of the UIF Board, and is a current representative of Community Constituency at NEDLAC.

She is an active contributor to print and broadcast media on policy issues on poverty, inequality and socio-economic rights. She is co-producer of a Podcast series REWIRED! with acclaimed financial journalist Duma Gqubule focusing on topical social, economic and Covid Build Back policy debates.

Isobel is also a well-respected advocate for a universal basic income grant, a position that she has actively campaigned for since 2002.

Isobel was appointed as one of the first National Minimum Wage Commissioners by the Minister of Labour in January 2019.

### Ms Uta Dirksen



Ms Uta Dirksen is a development economist and director of Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung in South Africa.

She joined FES in 2004, where she started working as a Desk Officer for West Africa and then as Resident Representative in Cotonou, Benin, heading the West African Trade Union Project. After some years in the

Department of Western Europe in Berlin she took over as Director of the Regional Trade Union Project in Latin America based in Montevideo, Uruguay.

A recent focus of her work has been the impact of digitalization on working conditions and trade union organization in the global South.

### Mr Langa Zita



Mr Langa Zita has been an activist of the democratic movement since 1980. He was active in the student and youth movement linked to the United Democratic Front. He was recruited to the ANC and SACP underground in 1986. He is a former Member of Parliament and a former Director General. He served in the Central Committee of the South African Communist Party from 1998

to 2002. He has co-edited a book on the future of Socialism in the 21st century and has published in the leading progressive journals in South Africa and abroad. He works for the ANC in the Gauteng Province as Secretary for Political Education and Training. He is the founder and Executive Chair of the Institute for Popular Alternatives.



## Minister Lindiwe Zulu

Minister Lindiwe Zulu is the Minister of Social Development in South Africa.

She is a member of the National Executive Committee (NEC) and the chairperson for the African National Congress's Subcommittee on International Relations.

Minister Zulu was educated in Swaziland whereupon she joined the ANC after the 1976 student uprising. In exile, Minister Zulu lived in Morogoro in Tanzania where she was offered a scholarship to study journalism in Russia. She obtained a Master's degree in journalism.

After her studies in Moscow, she joined the liberation army Umkhonto we Sizwe. Once her military training was complete, Minister Zulu joined the PAN African Women's Organisation (PAWO) in Angola where she was appointed as the co-ordinator of the communications committee.

She has held several communication positions. In 1989, she was appointed the Head of Communication in the ANC's department of Religious Affairs. Minister Zulu also served at the Head of Communication in the ANC's Uganda office.

In 1991 she returned to South Africa and became the Head of Communication in the ANC Women's League. Minister Zulu was elected to the ANC's team of spokespersons for South Africa's first democratic elections in 1994.

After the elections, she was elected a member of the Gauteng Legislature and was appointed Deputy Speaker of the Gauteng Legislature in 1995. Four years later, Minister Zulu was appointed the Special Advisor to the Minister of Foreign Affairs. In 2001, she was appointed Chief Director for Western and Central Africa.

In 2003, she left government to join the private sector where she served as the Executive Head of Government and International Relations at Vodacom group, a mobile phone services company based in South Africa.

In 2004 she became the South African Ambassador to Brazil. She was elected to the ANC National Executive Committee first in 2007 and again in 2009, Minister Zulu was elected to Parliament as a Member of Parliament representing the African National Congress. After 2009, Minister Zulu was appointed Special Advisor to the President of South Africa on International Relations.

In 2014, Minister Zulu was appointed as the Minister of Small Business Development.

In 2019, she was appointed as the Minister of Social Development. Minister Zulu is particularly interested in issues relating to the promotion and protection of the rights of vulnerable groups, women, children, youth, and people with disabilities amongst others.





## Ms Christine Muhigana

Ms Christine Muhigana took up her duties as UNICEF Representative in the Republic of South Africa on 3 September 2020.

Prior to her appointment to this position, she was the UNICEF Representative in the Central African Republic (CAR) for three years, from April 2017 to July 2020. During her tenure, she led the UNICEF team in increasing the immunization coverage, school enrolment, protection of children and treatment of severe malnutrition, through building systems and responding to humanitarian shocks.

Prior to her appointment to CAR, between October 2013 and April 2017, Ms Muhigana was UNICEF Deputy Regional Director for the West and Central Africa region (WCAR), based in Dakar, Senegal. In this capacity, she provided leadership and strategic guidance to the country offices in the region in the development and implementation of UNICEF country programmes.

Between May 2008 and October 2013, she served as Deputy Secretary of the UNICEF Executive Board, based in New York, USA. There, she provided coordination and guidance to the Board, ensuring decisions were strategic and contributed to advancing the overall child rights agenda.

During this period, from July to August 2013, she served as Acting UNICEF Representative in Cameroon, where she played a leading role in the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the country

programme, including in the response to the food crisis in the North and Far North regions.

From February 2007 to May 2008, she was a Strategic Planning Specialist in the United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office, based in New York, USA. In this role, she served as the Permanent Coordinator for Burundi, including by assisting the Burundi configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission in developing and implementing an integrated peacebuilding strategy.

Ms Muhigana started her career with the United Nations in 1988 and has more than 30 years of experience in the United Nations. She has worked in positions of progressively higher responsibilities in the areas of strategic planning, partnership building and gender equality in Mauritania, Côte d'Ivoire, Senegal, Cape Verde and at UN/UNICEF Headquarters.

For several years, she was a senior facilitator and resource person for the development of United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks (UNDAFs) and led such exercises in Afghanistan, Cape Verde, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire and Uganda.

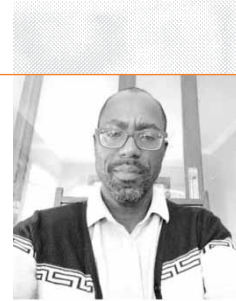
Ms Muhigana holds a Master's degree in Political Science and International Relations as well as a Master's degree in Maritime and Air Law from the Université Libre de Bruxelles (Belgium). She is a Rwandan national and is married to Dr Eric Mercier.

## Dr Nqobile Zulu

Dr Nqobile Zulu (PhD in Development Studies, Wits University) is the Research Manager at SPII since January 2021. He has broad research interests that revolve around socio-economic justice, gender and human rights. His experience extends to working with youth in tertiary institutions (Wits and University of Johannesburg in the Sociology and Development Studies departments respectively), lecturing, training and facilitation. In community advocacy, Dr Zulu has worked on the economic empowerment of rural youth living with disability. Nqobile's research work has produced reports on social cohesion, transformation, agrarian reform and the interface it brings to rural communities, gender issues and development perspectives among other projects. Apart from presenting seminar papers locally, Nqobile has presented sole authored conference papers in Botswana, Rwanda, Thailand and the US. He has

successfully supervised post graduate students on a wide range of topics including water provision, housing and homelessness, education and the South African curriculum, food security, land reform including the theory and practice of participatory governance. He is an external examiner for Witwatersrand University, UNISA, UKZN, and the University of Zululand.

Nqobile was the lead researcher on a Social Justice project that investigated the dynamics of Reconciliation, Healing and Social Cohesion as mechanisms that support restorative justice for victims of genocide and state repression. He is currently overseeing the research projects undertaken at SPII, implementing the Monitoring Evaluation and Learning (MEAL) system for the organization, and supporting the Director in projects and programme review planning.



## Dr Helen Barnes

Director and Senior Research Fellow at Southern African Social Policy Research Insights, undertaking research to develop the evidence base for social policy interventions in South and Southern Africa. Research interests include both tax-benefit

microsimulation and the measurement of poverty and deprivation, with a particular focus on child poverty and the socially perceived necessities approach to measuring a decent standard of living.





### Mr Brenton van Vrede

Mr Brenton Van Vrede is the Chief Director for Social Assistance at the National Department of Social Development in the Republic of South Africa. The Social Assistance budget for the country is approximately R190 billion per year and accounts for more than 12% of total government expenditure and around 3.5% of the country's GDP.

Mr Van Vrede started his career in the National Government of South Africa in 2004 when he joined the National Treasury as a

health analyst. In 2006 he became the budget director for the National Department of Social Development and in 2011 he joined the National Department of Social Development to focus on and pursue his interest in Social Security.

In 1996 Mr Van Vrede completed a Bachelor's degree in pharmacy; in 2004 a MBA in the field of health care and in 2015 a Master's in Management in the field of Social Security. He currently lives in the city of Pretoria with his wife Madelane and their three children.



### Ms Mastoera Sadan

Ms Mastoera Sadan has worked at a senior management level in the national government of South Africa for the past seventeen years. Currently she is the Convenor of the Work Stream that deals with human development in the National Planning Commission Secretariat, Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME) in the Presidency. Until 2018 she was the

Programme Manager of the Programme to Support Pro-poor Policy Development (PSPPD II) in the DPME. She successfully managed this research and capacity building Programme over an eleven-year period from 2007 - 2018. She also managed the National Income Dynamics Study (NIDS), South Africa's national household panel study from 2006 - 2018.



### Dr Kefiloe Masiteng

Dr Kefiloe Masiteng is the Deputy Secretary for National Planning in the Presidency of South Africa. She was the Deputy Director General at Statistics South Africa responsible for Population and Social Statistics, household surveys and Censuses. Previously she was Chief Director in the Presidency Policy Coordination and Advisory Services: PCAS responsible for Governance and Administration. She conceptualized the Government-wide Monitoring and Evaluation System. She also worked in the departments of Housing and Health responsible for Monitoring and Evaluation.

#### EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND

- PhD: Doctor of Philosophy. WITS University, 2016.
- The Africa Leadership Initiative/ South Africa, 2010-12, and founded a

community and Youth leadership project Camp La Thuso in 2012.

- Incomplete Senior Executive Programme, WITS and Harvard University, 2002
- Master's in Public Health. University of Pretoria, SA (Fellowship with University of North Carolina), 2000-2002.
- Summer Institute for Monitoring and Evaluation of Population, Health and Nutrition Programmes. University of North Carolina, 1999.
- Certificate of attendance on Epidemiology. WITS UNIVERSITY, 1998
- Bsc Honours. WITS University South Africa, 1997.
- BSc. WITS University South Africa, 1996.

PASSION: Working with children, youth and women.

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### Professor Michael Noble

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Professor Michael Noble CBE is a Director of SASPRI. He is Emeritus Professor of Social Policy at the University of Oxford in the UK, Emeritus Fellow of Green Templeton College at the University of Oxford. He is a Research Affiliate, Centre for Microsimulation and Policy Analysis, at the University of Essex.

His main research interests are in poverty, deprivation, inequality, tax policy and social security policy particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. He specialises in quantitative research methods and tax-benefit microsimulation and is committed to evidence-informed policy making.



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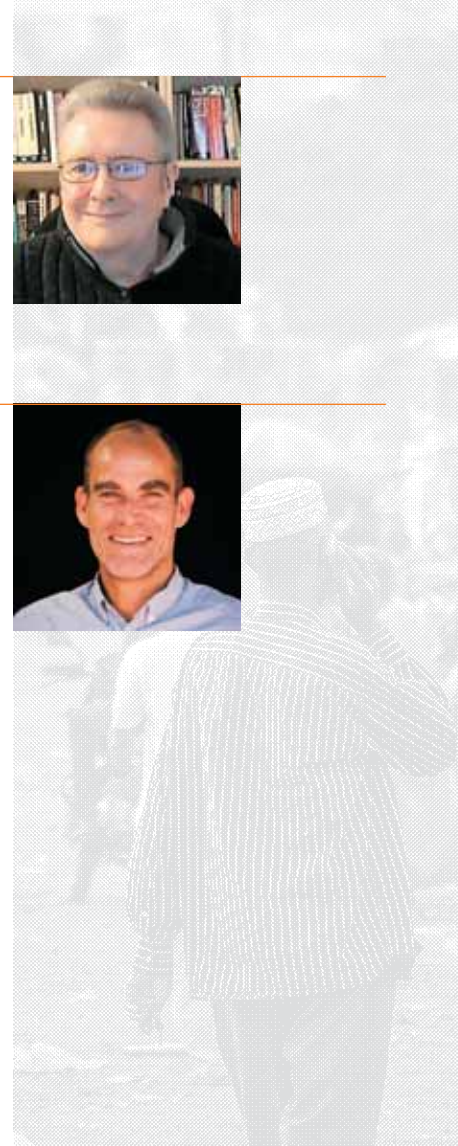
### Mr Trenton Elsley

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Mr Trenton Elsley is the Executive Director of the Labour Research Service (LRS).

The LRS is a membership-based, non-profit labour support organisation. Trenton's

interests include democracy, civil society, the politics of trade union organisation and representation, the world of work and multinational companies.



# FACILITATORS

Mr Nkululeko Majozi and Ms Lindi-K Khumalo

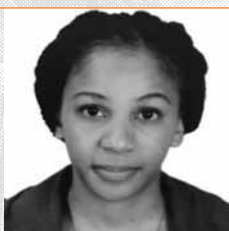


## Mr Nkululekp Majozi

Mr Nkululeko Majozi is a Social Security Researcher at SPII responsible for driving SPII's research into social protection, particularly social security and basic income. His focus is on advancing knowledge on progressive realization of social security, and also participating in research to support social justice advocacy and campaigning initiatives, both locally and globally.

Prior to joining SPII, Nkululeko worked as a Doctoral Researcher in the Office of the

Executive Director at the Africa Institute in South Africa (AISA), in the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), where his work entails providing research and evidence-based policy advice on a range of public affairs issues to African governments and multilateral organisations operating in Africa. He has also served as the Assistant Editor of Africa Insight, AISA's well-renowned international scientific journal.



## Ms Lindi-K Khumalo

Ms Lindi-K Khumalo is a Researcher at SPII. She is responsible for driving SPII's research into social protection particularly social security and decent standard of living. Prior to joining SPII, Lindi-K worked as a Researcher for a political risk consultancy company- where she was tasked with researching and analysing political, socio-economic, and peace and security issues on the African continent.

Prior, she worked as a Junior Political Officer at the African Union Commission (AUC) in the Department of Political Affairs (DPA). She has a Master's Degree in Human Rights from the Centre for Human Rights in Pretoria, South Africa and a BA in Psychology and Women Studies from Wartburg College, USA.

# KEYNOTE ADDRESS 1:

Minister Lindiwe Zulu

Minister of Social Development in South Africa

*Remarks by Minister of Social Development in South Africa, Minister Lindiwe Zulu.*

Good afternoon to you all. It is my pleasure to be joining you today. I was excited to receive the invitation to attend this Annual Colloquium particularly because this year you are launching the ***Post-Covid Report on what Constitutes a Decent Standard of Living in South Africa***.

Not only do we look forward to the Report, but we enthusiastically count on the rigour of the findings and lessons-learned for the purposes of improving programme responsiveness and intervention implementation by, in particular, the Department and its entities - SASSA and the NDA as well as the South African Council for Social Service Professionals - and for the benefit of synchronising our whole-of-society shock responses.

As you are aware, and speaking about decent standards of living, Covid-19 has helped to uncover the pretences that lie under the veil of indecencies such as:

- a. hunger, unemployment, poverty and inequalities;
- b. the violent nature of our society (specifically illustrated in gender-based and children-targeted violence as well as the recent re-surfacing of our historical and collective psyche and trauma in the looting incidents are among unfortunate instances of this); and
- c. our collective readiness and capabilities to respond to common threats in safeguarding our people, national interests and all of humanity.

Therefore, we are best advised to heed the caution that the advent of Covid-19 may be the best test to humanity's conviction to develop and sustain working resilience systems. This is particularly important in view of the growing precariousness, insecurities posed unto life and livelihoods, and the normalisation of unbearable exceptionalism. Practically, the question is: in view of the looming impact of climate change on the lives of ordinary people, is all of society ready to protect each and every one of us against this novel shock in living memory?

I am hopeful that the findings of this Report will draw the Department, government and all of society - under the intelligent and dynamic people-public-private-civic-academic-multilateral partnerships framework - closer to what works in our context as a society.





The Social Development Sector continues to learn from the introduction and implementation of top-up grants as well as the Covid-19 Social Relief of Distress (SRD) grant to vulnerable and unemployed adult populations. Likewise, in response to the advent of Covid-19, our food relief and food security efforts were expanded through partnerships for the benefit of households. Given our socio-economic circumstances, these interventions were and have remained necessary towards ensuring that some very important relief is provided to our people.

Following the very unfortunate, social violent unrests of July 2021, government extended access to the Covid-19 SRD grant to March 2022. When doing so, we allowed for caregivers to independently apply for the grant. The inclusion of caregivers in this grant is intentionally designed to effect gender fairness in the grant's eligibility criteria and benefit. Therefore, we are resolute in dealing with the taken-for-granted measures whose net effect is the exclusion of women and vulnerable populations.

The government of the African National Congress, and in particular the Sixth Administration of our democracy, firmly believes that everyone deserves a decent standard of living throughout her/his life: from-cradle-to-grave. This is the reason for the existence of the Department of Social Development.

**As the Report correctly points out, issues of food, water, electricity, sanitation, housing, education and healthcare are central to what people need to have a decent quality of life.**

To these, let me add: Towards realising decent lives, we ought to undo the violent legacy of colonial-apartheid that we forcefully inherited. This legacy continues to inflict our individual and collective psyche. Hence, the adverse reinforcements between the historical, material, psychological and our future prospects have to be undermined with all that we have at our disposal. Henceforth, this partnership must commit to a social life that is free of anxiety, fear, panic, trust deficit, uneasiness and insecurity among our people (and all of us).

The Department of Social Development has consistently been involved in the pain-staking work that underlie the generation of this Report. We have been involved in this work because we strongly and consciously believe that there is a need to have wider discussions and be open to new and innovative ideas and frameworks that will challenge the orthodox framework. Doing so will purposively direct policy development and legislative interventions in the social policy space. Therefore, from time-to-time, and in order to remain relevant, Socially Perceived Necessities (SPNs), need to continuously be reviewed.



We re-affirm that everyone has the right to dignity, and as a society we collectively must thrive to move with speed towards the realisation of the National Development Plan and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Many among our people have expressed the fact that in one way or the other, the Covid-19 SRD grant has laid a good foundation for the implementation of a longer-term income support mechanism - the basic income grant (BIG) - as part of continuing the sustainability of their livelihoods. Some have said, the BIG discussion must address the questions of affordability. Of course, we welcome these discussions.

- A number of officials from Social Development Sector are connected to this session, and, through them, we will have the opportunity to deliberate the outcomes of this Colloquium.
- Beyond today's presentations, I trust that the Colloquium will result in engaging outcomes.
- In conclusion, allow me to thank you for this great opportunity and I wish you fruitful deliberations and, from this Colloquium, I am looking forward to implementable outcomes that will meaningfully move our society forward.



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## KEYNOTE ADDRESS 2:

Ms Christine Muhigana  
UNICEF Country Representative



*Remarks by the Country Representative of United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) South Africa, Ms Christine Muhigana.*

Thank you for the kind invitation to participate in this meeting. UNICEF appreciates the opportunity to dialogue with our valued partners and to help move the dial, in collaboration with government and social partners, on the poverty and inequality challenge in South Africa. It gives us great hope that government, civil society, and academia can come together and jointly address the challenges the country faces in 2021. This is what makes South Africa such a frontrunner on the continent and in the world in its ability to find solutions, not in silos, but through honest and frank discussions among all social partners.

Minister Zulu, we are encouraged by your principled stance on social protection for the most vulnerable in South Africa, and we assure you of our continued support as the country navigates its way through the health pandemic and the associated social and economic challenges.

As many of you will know, UNICEF has always been interested in expanding the frontiers of our understanding of child poverty. The partnership with Statistics South Africa on the Multiple Overlapping Deprivation Analysis (or MODA) is testament to our continued conviction that poverty challenges must be confronted head-on and that we need to gather the best possible data to enhance our diagnoses and prognoses for children and all other vulnerable groups.

So, when we were invited to offer a small hand in the development of this socially perceived necessities index, a complete fit between the objectives of this coalition and our own goals came into being. This allowed us to extend the multidimensional poverty work we do across the spectrum of social partners in South Africa, and thus fulfil an important mission of the government of the Republic of South Africa in its quest to promote social cohesion.

**We are not here because this is an optional exercise: we are here because what the Decent Standard of Living coalition does and tries to achieve is central to the aims of UNICEF.**

It is only die-hard pessimists among us that will not be able to recognise the great achievements the country has made since the formal end of apartheid in 1994. These include:

- Undoing the unequal funding of educational services and unifying what was a fragmented system of education in South Africa.
- Putting into place the building blocks for the most advanced social protection system on the continent.
- Achieving spectacular real per capita gains in the funding of social services, especially after 2000.
- Maintaining funding for key social services and local government in the wake of the 2009 global economic crisis.
- Achieving unheard-of gains in enabling mass access to basic services such as water, sanitation, and electricity.
- Consistently contributing to building new social and economic infrastructure in health, schools, and public infrastructure.
- Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, benchmarking social grant pay-outs to the prevailing inflation rate.

While the gains are undeniable, the depth and severity of the challenge means more work is needed to finally turn the page on the country's ugly apartheid past. The very same energy that drove the country to achieve so much after 1994 is now needed to address the ravages of Covid-19 and its social and economic impact.

For us in the United Nations, multidimensional poverty approaches recognise the reality that in addition to income poverty, human beings live in real social settings and develop a refined and immediate understanding of what makes them "poor." Such measures cannot be easily quantified and require careful thinking to uncover the depths and severity of lived subjective experiences. As UNICEF, we were always strong on probing that subjective element, albeit through our field visits, our case studies, and the rightful attention devoted to children's social and economic rights. The Sustainable Development Goal 1, which aims to end poverty in all its forms, gives explicit recognition to the importance of multidimensional approaches.

We believe the debate is no longer whether we should contrast income poverty with multidimensional poverty, but the challenge is always to improve the quality of our measurements so that our tools are commensurate with the lived experiences of real human beings. It is of little use to produce data and research that do not speak to what people experience and live through daily.





This is also one of the main reasons why we are so excited to be associated with this initiative. To have a tool that does not accept or impose an external norm and rather zoom in on what ordinary people consider socially perceived necessities, brings us one step closer to tools that matter for ordinary people. This does not detract from our human rights focus but reinforces it.

Furthermore, we are grateful that the Decent Standard of Living coalition has not neglected our own key constituency, namely children. Through careful disaggregated analyses, the socially perceived necessities index gives us a glimpse into the lives of households that have children in them. This cements the overall relevance of the tool in the advocacy work we do.

Another dimension that needs to be foregrounded is the issue of encouraging the use of multidimensional poverty tools in the planning and work of social sector departments. While the effort to produce these tools is commendable, we should also spend more time advocating for their use and integration in government planning and budgets. This must also draw attention to the need for the country to continue to generate the highest possible quality data to undertake regular and consistent poverty and inequality analyses. This effort today serves to remind us of our joint responsibilities in helping to achieve that goal.

Ladies and gentlemen, we trust that your reflections today will truly move the dial on understanding and acting upon the poverty challenge we have before us. We are in no doubt that everyone gathered here is committed to achieve the goal of a South Africa free of poverty as the great Nelson Mandela so fervently campaigned for.

We stand ready to help and support where we can.

# PANEL ONE: The Importance of Multidimensional Poverty Measures

This section of the Colloquium presented the research findings:

## **SPEAKER 1: Dr Nqobile Zulu, SPII Research Manager**

Dr Zulu started his presentation by providing a brief overview of the 2021 DSL survey's methodology.

### **2021 METHODOLOGY:**

- 920 computer aided telephone interviews were conducted (approx. 20 mins)
- Fieldwork: conducted in 5 South African languages: English, isiZulu, isiXhosa, Sesotho and Afrikaans
- 5 provinces: Gauteng, Western Cape, KwaZulu-Natal, Eastern Cape and Free State
- Respondents were drawn from urban, peri-urban and rural areas

Dr Zulu then went on to speak to the aspirational nature of the socially perceived necessities (SPNs). He linked the SPNs to the collection of 17 interlinked Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). He said that despite the aspirational nature of the SPNs, they speak to the DSL as a quality of life desired by the majority of the population in South Africa.

Referencing SDG Goal 1 and SDG 10: no poverty and reduced inequalities, Dr Zulu lamented on how South Africa is a deeply unequal society, with half of its population living below the poverty line. To drive this point home, he illustrated how the July 2021 riots were a stark reminder of this harsh reality. He stated that despite these inequalities, high unemployment rate, and high levels of poverty, most South Africans are clear on what the bare minimum needed is, to achieve a decent life.

In closing, he said that he hoped that the results of the study would 1) inform policy formation in the fight against poverty, and 2) that stakeholders from all spheres will focus efforts on bridging the gap between the haves and have-nots.

**“South Africa needs focused investment, particularly in communities that are left on the periphery to enable greater cohesion and equality.”**





## **SPEAKER 2: Dr Helen Barnes, Director and Senior Research Fellow at Southern African Social Policy Research Insights (SASPRI)**

Dr Barnes presented on the refreshed SPNs. She explained how in June 2021, BDRC Africa conducted a telephone survey to obtain attitudinal information about the things that people need to have a decent standard of living in present-day South Africa. Respondents were randomly selected from a South African consumer database list provided by List SA using a quota-controlled sample designed to be representative of the South African population in terms of gender, age, ethnicity, income and urban/rural dwelling.

In total, 921 quantitative interviews were completed. Respondents were asked whether each of the 50 items is essential for everyone to have to enjoy an acceptable standard of living in South Africa today.

The usual way of determining whether an item should be regarded as an SPN is to look at the majority view that is any item defined as essential by 50% or more of the study population.

These items covered material possessions, activities, neighbourhood facilities and relationships with friends and family. The three possible answers were 'essential', 'desirable' or 'neither'. See *Table 1*:

ITEM	% responding essential in 2021 (unweighted)	% responding essential in 2021 (weighted)	% responding essential in 2006
People who are sick are able to afford all medicines prescribed by their doctor	83.50	82.96	77
Having police on the streets in the local area	82.30	81.69	80
Separate bedrooms for adults and children	80.89	81.55	82
A neighbourhood without rubbish/refuse/garbage in the streets	81.54	80.35	75

ITEM	% responding essential in 2021 (unweighted)	% responding essential in 2021 (weighted)	% responding essential in 2006
Mains electricity in the house	93.05	92.42	92
Someone to look after you if you are very ill	90.66	91.54	91
A house that is strong enough to stand up to the weather, e.g. rain, winds etc.	92.07	90.95	90
Street lighting	90.99	90.55	85
A fridge	90.01	90.05	86
Clothing sufficient to keep your warm and dry	90.01	89.05	89
For parents or other carers to be able to buy complete school uniform for children without hardship	83.39	84.06	79
A flush toilet in the house	85.34	83.62	78
Paid employment for people of working age	84.15	83.52	79
Somewhere for children to play safely outside of the house	82.30	83.06	72
A cell phone	79.80	82.96	63
People who are sick are able to afford all medicines	83.50	82.96	77
Having an adult from the household at home at all times when children under 10 from the household are at home	78.94	79.91	81
A fence or wall around the property	80.02	79.78	74





Someone to transport you in a vehicle if you needed to travel in an emergency	80.24	79.38	74
Burglar bars in the house	79.15	79.21	62
Ability to pay or contribute to funerals/funeral insurance/burial society	74.70	77.88	82
Being able to visit friends and family in hospital and other institutions	74.16	75.52	73
Tarred roads close to the house	75.35	74.78	80
Regular savings for emergencies	74.70	77.86	82
A place of worship (church/mosque/synagogue) in the local area	72.42	71.48	87
A large supermarket in the local area	69.92	71.34	75
A bath or shower in the house	73.94	70.45	62
Someone to talk to if you are feeling upset or depressed	67.75	69.24	76
<b>TWO THIRDS THRESHOLD (27 respondents)</b>			
A neighbourhood without smoke or smog in the air	63.95	63.68	69
Television/TV	59.50	63.58	69
Someone to lend you money in an emergency	51.36	55.29	66
A sofa/lounge suite	51.57	54.63	54
Meat or fish or vegetarian equivalent every day	53.31	54.49	62
A radio	49.51	52.71	74



## 50% THRESHOLD

A lock-up garage for vehicles	49.84	51.07	43
A car	50.81	48.75	49
A garden	44.30	48.65	51
Washing machine	47.88	45.83	44
Some new (not second-hand or handed-down) clothes	44.52	45.61	55
A burglar alarm system for the house	43.54	44.10	38
A smart phone	38.87	41.81	/
An armed response service for the house	36.48	37.65	28
Special meal at Christmas or equivalent festival	32.90	34.28	56
A computer in the home	32.79	33.69	26
A small amount of money to spend on yourself, not on your family, each week	28.66	30.84	42
For parents or other carers to be able to afford toys for children to play with	28.88	30.80	39
Having enough money to give presents on special occasions such as birthdays, weddings, funerals	27.14	29.70	41
A family take-away or bring-home meal once a month	27.47	29.14	34
Satellite television/DSTV	23.56	26.06	19
A holiday away from home for one week a year, not visiting relatives	22.69	24.52	37
A DVD player	12.70	13.91	27

*Note: For the 2021 survey, landline was dropped and smart phone was added.*





Dr Barnes said that for the DSL analysis, based on the responses to the 2006 survey, a more stringent threshold was used to determine the SPNs: any item regarded as essential by two thirds or more of respondents. This resulted in 27 SPNs, which is the same number as in 2021. However, the list of SPNs is not quite the same: cell phones, burglar bars and bath or showers in the house joined the list of SPNs in 2021, while a neighbourhood without smoke or smog, television and radio dropped out. She stated that different groups defined 33-35 items as essential, mostly SPNs.

The SPNs most often not defined as essential are someone to lend you money in an emergency, lock-up garage for vehicles, and radio. The items defined as essential include a car, garden, and washing machine.

In concluding her presentation, Dr Barnes concluded that the list of SPNs, whether using a 50% or two-thirds threshold has remained quite stable over time and that there has been a high level of agreement about the SPNs across different sections of society.

## PANEL TWO: Solutions and Actions to Help More People Obtain a Decent Standard of Living

### **SPEAKER 1: Mr Brenton van Vrede, Chief Director for Social Assistance at the National Department of Social Development (DSD)**

Mr van Vrede's presentation linked the DSL to the South African government's commitment and responsibilities as a signatory to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its concomitant SDGs. Highlighting the special relevance of SDGs 1 (End poverty in all its forms by 2030) and SDG 10 (Reduced inequality within and between countries by 2030) to the attainment of a DSL for everyone.

**“Social and economic policies need to be seen as working together to attain a DSL for everyone. They are complimentary not tradeoffs!”**

He noted that social policy and social protection need to be seen as means to provide the support that reduces vulnerability, alleviates and ultimately prevents poverty, and empowers individuals, families, and communities.

In his presentation, he argued that poverty and inequality are rooted in the labour market, and suggested that social protection should be used to close the gap left by the labour market. He noted that the South African democratic government is making strides to provide social protection efforts for South Africans through social assistance cash grants (for children, the aged and people with disabilities, social relief [including disasters] as well as access to free basic services (shelter, water, sanitation and energy), free education (including nutrition and transport), and free primary health care, etc.

Mr van Vrede then went on to discuss the debate around the Basic Income Grant (BIG) as an integral element of a DSL. He addressed the issue of a BIG being implemented as a universal or means-tested grant. **According to Mr van Vrede, the biggest key to answering this question is how fast South Africa wants to implement the BIG? In response to this, he argued that a universal BIG would be the fastest route as it is likely to reach everyone in a matter of months and that this is demonstrated by SASSA's ability to reach over five million people in less than three months with the Social Relief of Distress (SRD) grant.**

In closing, Mr van Vrede emphasised that South Africa cannot afford to have a repeat of the July unrests and to prevent that, the country needs an urgent social dialogue to discuss its imperatives regarding the issue of poverty eradication vis-à-vis the need to provide South Africans with an adequate or decent standard of living.





## **SPEAKER 2: Ms Mastoera Sadan, Convenor of the Enhancing the Quality of Life Work Stream in the National Planning Commission Secretariat (DPME)**

Ms Mastoera Sadan commenced her presentation by **noting the significant contribution of the DSL to the discourse on poverty and inequality, which is usually narrowly focused on income and jobs. She highlighted how the DSL was founded on the concept of defining a decent life, which she characterised as non-minimalist.**

Ms Sadan highlighted how the National Development Plan's (NDP) makes a firm commitment to achieving a minimum standard of living which can be progressively realised through a multi-pronged strategy. She argued that the DSL's approach to holistically defining living standards is consistent with the capabilities approach advanced by the National Planning Commission Secretariat (NPC). The approach focuses on the key capabilities that individuals need to live the life they desire.

Sadan highlighted the work done by the NPC around the adoption of a social floor for South Africa aimed at achieving the SDGs by 2030. She defined a Social Floor as a multipronged strategy recommended to ensure that no household lives below this floor.

**"A social floor aims to define the elements of a social minimum or social floor which together provide a standard of living below which no one should fall below."**

In closing, Ms Sadan went on to consider some of the policy implications of the updated 2021 SPNs, including the importance of having a cell phone, living in a neighbourhood without smoke or smog in the air, and a safe space for children to play outside the home.

### **SPEAKER 3: Dr Kefiloe Masiteng, Deputy Secretary for National Planning in the Presidency of South Africa**

Dr Masiteng's presentation linked the work of the DSL to the government's efforts to provide everyone in South Africa with a decent standard of living through the NDP. This meant that the broad objectives of the NDP are to reduce poverty and inequality, whilst tackling unemployment also lies at the heart of meeting these two objectives.

She referenced the objective of meeting the NDP's goals by 2030. In the remaining 9 years ahead thus there should be a reduction in the number of households who live with a monthly income below R419 per person from 39% to zero, and there should be a reduction in inequality as measured by the Gini coefficient from 0.69 to 0.60.

At the core of the NDP, as at the core of the DSL, is the aim to ensure the achievement of a decent standard of living for all South Africans by 2030.

**"There needs to be a closer collaboration from all sectors of society to ensure that everyone achieves a DSL. Sustainable development and a decent standard of living can surely not be achieved by the government alone."**

**Dr Masiteng proposed that at the heart of this thinking is the determination, exploration, and conversation on the Basic Income Grant (BIG). She argued that this conversation needs attention, factual supporting evidence, and clear propositions for a model and an approach that will stand the test of time and be a model for sustainable development in the long term. Echoing the views of Mr van Vrede, Dr Masiteng also argued that employment and job creation remains at the heart of getting people to a decent standard of living.**

This includes efforts from SMMEs, economic inclusion as well as township economies efforts for better lives of the 80% of the population living in these environments that need to be transformed from what the apartheid regime had engineered them to be. It remains critical to change the structure of the economy to succeed.

Dr Masiteng lauded the work done on the SPNs. She noted that the research is a complementary source of information keeping the discourse on poverty and inequality reduction alive. Noting that the qualitative research and information in these deliberations bring the answers from the perceptions and allows the debate to be based on how the people themselves envisage changes in their lives whilst also providing answers to how it can be done.

Dr Masiteng concluded her remarks by reiterating the importance of collaboration and partnerships by all to attain a decent standard of life for all in South Africa.



## PANEL THREE: Necessary Future Engagements



The 2020/2021 DSL research builds off of previous research and provides a rich source for future analysis. The continuous historic level of collaboration between SPII, SASPRI, LRS, DSD, FES, and UNICEF points to the growing interest by various actors in society to break ground on research that can speak to socially perceived necessities of citizens and push the needle forward. A summary of suggested ways of taking the research forward is provided below:

1. The **SPNs have been refreshed**, but the rest of the analysis needs to be updated.
2. A **second survey needs to be carried** out to measure possession of the 34 SPNs (another telephone survey in absence of new LCS or similar) and including a household income question that is more in line with those included in Statistics South Africa's (Stats SA) surveys, which would enable the DSL analysis to be carried out.
3. Per capita median income of those possessing the 21 SPNs was calculated (R5 993 in April 2015). **Necessary to develop a method to upgrade this income amount each year** - special subset of the Consumer Price Index (CPI), referred to as the Decent Standard of Living Index (DSL).
4. **DSL cannot be upgraded** in the same way in subsequent years without information on expenditure patterns
5. SPII should make it clear that the analysis shows the incomes **associated with** the possession of SPNs. **The analysis does not show what it costs to acquire the SPNs.**
6. We need to have **conversations involving policy-makers, social actors, and policy experts** to explore the possibilities for socio-economic policy interventions that promote the acquisition of the SPNs by South African households.



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