

***The Relationship between Quality of Life, Education, and  
Poverty & Inequality in South Africa: The Capability  
Approach as an Alternative Analytical Framework***

Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Magister Artium in the  
Department of Religion and Theology at the University of the Western Cape.

By

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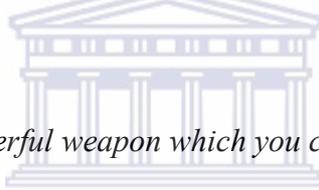


*“Massive poverty and obscene inequality are such terrible scourges of our times – times in which the world boasts breath-taking advances in science, technology, industry, and wealth accumulation – that they have to rank alongside slavery and apartheid as social evils.”*

- Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela

*“Equality has an organ: free and compulsory education. The right to the alphabet, we must begin by that. The primary school obligatory for everyone, the higher school offered to everyone, such is the law. From identical schools spring an equal society. Yes, education!”*

- Victor Hugo, Les Misérables



*“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.”*

- Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela

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*“Education is a human right with immense power to transform. On its foundation rest the cornerstone of freedom, democracy, and sustainable human development.”*

- Kofi Annan

*“Educating all of our children must be one of our most urgent priorities. We all know that education, more than anything else, improves our chances of building better lives.”*

- Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela

*“We, the people of South Africa, Recognise the injustices of our past; Honour those who suffered for justice and freedom in our land; Respect those who have worked to build and develop our country; and Believe that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, united in our diversity. We therefore, through our freely elected representatives, adopt this Constitution as the supreme law of the Republic so as to – Heal the divisions of the past and establish a society based on democratic values, social justice, and fundamental human rights; Lay the foundations for a democratic and open society in which government is based on the will of the people and every citizen is equally protected by law; Improve the quality of life of all citizens and free the potential of each person; and Build a united and democratic South Africa able to take its rightful place as a sovereign state in the family of nations. May God protect our people. Nkosi Sikelel’ iAfrika. Morena boloka setjhaba sa heso. God seën Suid-Afrika. God bless South Africa. Mudzimu fhatutshedza Afrika. Hosi katekisa Afrika.”*

- Preamble of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996

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## Key Words

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The Capability Approach; Quality of Life; Education; Poverty; Socio-Economic Inequality; South Africa; Human Capital Theory; Human Development Theory; Constitutional Democracy; Social Justice

## Abstract

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In this thesis I present – from the perspective of the capability approach and within the context of South Africa – a conceptual analysis of the relationship between quality of life, education, poverty and inequality. The role of education within the South African context is of particular importance.

The capability approach, which was pioneered by economist-philosopher Amartya Sen and significantly further developed by philosopher Martha Nussbaum and a growing number of other scholars across the humanities and social sciences, is a theoretical framework for the assessment and comparison of quality of life and social justice.

The argument is made that when inquiring about the prosperity of a nation or region in the world, traditional economic approaches – such as gross domestic product (GDP), which is the most commonly used indicator of economic activity – are not, by themselves, accurate or adequate. When assessing individuals and societies' quality of life and sense of well-being, we need to know not only about their levels of income, wealth, or consumption; but also about the opportunities they have, or do not have, to choose and to act.

The capability approach provides a more comprehensive conceptualisation of quality of life, because it takes into account broader and more encompassing measures of well-being. Conceptualising quality of life from the perspective of the capability approach, makes it clear that large numbers, if not the vast majority, of people experience many forms of unfreedom that impedes their development (i.e. their freedom to choose), and prevents them from leading lives they consider valuable and worthwhile. Many people lack capabilities.

The capability approach asserts that the expansion of the real freedoms that people enjoy (i.e. what people are effectively able to be and to do) is both the primary end and the principle

means of development. Expansion of freedom equates to enhanced individual agency as a result of an increase in capabilities. Furthermore, individual agency is central to addressing various deprivations (both individual and societal).

However, capabilities and individual agency are inescapably qualified and constrained or enhanced by the socio-economic and political opportunities that are available or unavailable. Thus, development (the expansion of the real freedoms that people enjoy) requires the removal of major sources of unfreedom (which limit or diminish people's spheres of freedom and choice), such as poverty.

Poverty is unfreedoms of various sorts that impedes development. It is the lack of freedom or the inability to achieve even minimally satisfactory living conditions. In South Africa, poverty – which is directly linked with the political economy of inequality – affects the lives and constrains the freedom of the majority.

South Africa is burdened with obvious and high levels of poverty. This, to a large extent, is the result of the injustices and legacy of colonialism, segregation, and apartheid. Despite South Africa being recognised as a middle-income country, most people in South Africa live in conditions typical of a low-income country. South Africa, after twenty years of constitutional democracy, is characterised not only by high levels of poverty, but also pronounced socio-economic inequality. Poverty and socio-economic inequality – the gap between the wealthy and the poor, the privileged and the disadvantaged, the haves and the have-nots – in South Africa are obvious, stark, and unsettling.

If individual agency is central to addressing various deprivations (both individual and societal), and if development requires the removal of unfreedoms; then education (which serves to promote and enhance capabilities) goes hand in hand with development, i.e. expanding the choices and opportunities that people have.

Education is a global priority and an internationally recognised basic human right. Education – understood in its narrow, technical sense of institutionalised teaching and learning in relation to a curriculum – has both intrinsic and instrumental value, and is considered to be a prerequisite for eliminating poverty and reducing socio-economic inequality, since it broadens the scope of employment possibilities and the probability of earning a higher income.

It is bemoaned that the state of South Africa's education system constitutes a national crisis. The discourse concerning education in South Africa is characterised by crises rhetoric. This, in itself, is not new as this has been an on-going refrain in South African public discourse before and since the advent of democracy in South Africa in 1994. However, what is new is the developing consensus on what constitutes the causes and features of this crisis.

The crisis encompasses the primary and secondary public schooling system. South Africa's primary and secondary public schools are not performing their basic task – to create an educated citizenry as the basis for economic and human development. This failure of the primary and secondary public schooling system paradoxically makes education (which is central to addressing various unfreedoms) a source of unfreedom.

In this thesis, I make the argument that the substandard quality of education available to the poor, “black” – and particularly “African”<sup>1</sup> – majority in the primary and secondary public schooling system in South Africa entrenches, perpetuates, and exacerbates poverty and socio-economic inequality. In addition, I make the assertion that the purpose of education extends beyond the narrow, although important, confines of the labour market and economic growth. Education also has a crucial role to play in producing citizens who are competent, responsible, engaged, active, and effective. I thus investigate whether and how education should be (re)conceptualised in and for constitutional democratic South Africa.

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<sup>1</sup> The writer of this thesis neither believes in the scientific existence of “race”, nor condones the use of racial classifications. However, for the purpose of this thesis, racial classification is a useful means by which to demarcate. The term “black” is used to denote South Africans other than “white” (i.e. “African”/“black African”, “coloured” and “Indian”/“Asians”), while the term “African” or “black African” is used to denote “blacks” other than “coloureds” and “Indians”/“Asians”.

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

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### Context

South Africa became a democracy in 1994. After twenty years of democracy, South Africa, understandably, continues to grapple with the socio-economic legacy of apartheid. The socio-economic legacy of apartheid is an unavoidable reality in present-day, constitutional democratic South Africa. South Africa is characterised by two distinct social problems: obvious, stark, and unsettlingly high levels of poverty and socio-economic inequality.

Woolard (2002: 6-7) provides a brief explanation of the link between apartheid and the poverty and inequality that exist in constitutional democratic South Africa: The apartheid government's policies of segregation and discrimination left a legacy of poverty, socio-economic inequality, and low economic growth. The apartheid system was heavily biased towards providing healthcare, education, and housing services to the "white" minority, while the "black" majority were systematically denied opportunities to accumulate human and physical capital. Labour market policies protected the interests and position of the "white" minority through active policies such as job reservation; while inferior education, influx control, and the Group Areas Act ensured that other race groups could not compete. The apartheid government also unequally distributed resources (including land, mining rights, and access to capital), and, as a result, large sectors of the population were marginalised to menial and poorly paid sectors of the labour market. With regard to education, the apartheid government invested heavily in state education for "white" children in the 1950s and 1960s. As a consequence of this investment, "white" workers were able to secure the skills that enabled them, in the 1970s and 1980s, to command high incomes even after policies such as job reservation had been abolished. The apartheid government's restrictive socio-economic practices prevented a large proportion of South Africa's population from achieving vertical mobility within the labour market. This resulted in a skewed income distribution that was reinforced by an unequal distribution of skills and training.

Addressing the poverty that affects the everyday lives of a substantial portion of its citizens is an on-going challenge in South Africa, while the extreme inequality – in access to

constitutionally protected rights, opportunity, income, and capabilities – that exists in South Africa means that one observes deprivation, impoverishment, hunger, and overcrowding alongside affluence and privilege. Many people live in underdeveloped areas in which they lack access to basic amenities. They experience inadequate living conditions which rob them of dignity and diminish their freedom; while others live in privileged circumstances and possess the wherewithal to participate in society. Affluence and destitution literally reside side-by-side; poverty resides amid plenty.

## **Motivation**

Ethics is both an integral and unavoidable feature of daily life. It permeates every sphere of human existence. People do not confine themselves to making merely descriptive observations about human and non-human existence and interactions. Day-to-day human and non-human life is prescriptively and normatively assessed. People express ideas pertaining to how things should be or ought to be. Aspects of everyday life are evaluated as good or bad, better or worse, and right or wrong. When we ask questions about how we should live (as individuals and as a society), we are asking questions about ethics: what we *ought* to do, and not just what we actually do (Baggini 2012: 4-5).

Ethics asks basic questions about the “good life”, and about what is better or worse (MacKinnon 2004: 3). It determines what we consider to be permissible or impermissible, admirable or contemptible, responsible or irresponsible, good or bad, and right or wrong; it determines our conception of when things are going well and when things are going badly; it determines our conception of what is due to us, as well as what is due from us, as we interact and engage with others (Baggini 2012: 113; Robinson 2012: 9; Blackburn 2001: 1). Baggini (2012: 114) notes that “thinking ethically is radically and importantly different to thinking morally, even though both usually end up delivering a similar set of prescriptions”.

While morality concerns codes of behaviour (the actions we need to do or avoid, or the rules we need to follow) in relation to our relationship with other people and the environment, and in order to do right by them; ethics is about what it means for a person to live a “good life” in a broader sense, it concerns ideas regarding how we ought to live and what we need to do in order to flourish (Baggini 2012: 113).

Concerning the “good life”, Baggini (2012: 111; 114), argues: “When we think of ‘good’ in relation to human life, we often think of doing well: what it means for your life to be good for you...But in addition to doing well, we also have the sense that we ought to do right. It matters not only that your life feels good, but that you do good. A good life in this sense is honest, altruistic, and caring...To set aside thought for others and to live purely for what provides material and hedonic advantage is to live as a cunning animal, not as a wise person. That is why many judge that it really is ‘better to die as men than live as beasts’.”

In *The Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle sets out to discover the “good life” for human beings, i.e. the life of happiness. Aristotle claimed that happiness was the highest human good, but the word he described this state of well-being not as happiness but as *eudaimonia* (Baggini 2012: 113). *Eudaimonia* is usually translated as flourishing or living and doing well. Most, if not all, people will agree that a flourishing life comprises social trust and respect; good relations with family and friends; satisfying work; leisure; avoiding escapable morbidity and premature death; living in safe and clean environments; having political and civic freedoms; having adequate shelter; being able to read, write, count, and reason; being well-nourished; being able to participate in the life of one’s community or society, and so forth.

South Africa, despite all its breath-taking beauty, diverse culture, and potential, often feels like a difficult country to live in. Although some flourish, many struggle. An article written by Lydia Polgreen and published in *The New York Times*<sup>2</sup> provides an overview of some of the darker aspects of life in present-day South Africa: South Africa’s primary and secondary public schools in townships and rural areas are a shambles. Hunger and disease continue to affect the lives of the poorest. Unemployment levels are persistently high. South Africa is one of the most income unequal countries in the world, and thus the misery is not equally shared. Although a small, wealthy “black” elite has emerged since South Africa became a democracy in 1994, millions more remain in poverty.

Poverty and socio-economic inequality are serious social problems in, though not unique to, South Africa. Many people are not able to pursue the “good life” as a result of the destitution to which they are consigned. As a privileged citizen of South Africa - i.e. someone who has both access to basic constitutionally protected rights, and the wherewithal to participate in society (and pursue the “good life”), that a large portion of people in South Africa do not have – and as someone who considers the “good life” to be a valuable and worthwhile

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<sup>2</sup> The article was published online by *The New York Times* on 14 October 2012.

pursuit, I deem the unequal nature of South African society to be morally unjust and not conducive to the attainment of the “good life”, for both the individual and society. The unequal nature of South Africa is socially corrosive and not conducive to nation-building. I consider this side-by-side existence of great wealth and abject poverty to be unjust. This has prompted my interest in undertaking this research project which focuses on poverty, inequality, and – on a broader level – social justice.

## Significance

South Africa, which held its first democratic election in 1994, has been a constitutional democracy for twenty years. Despite the fact that progress has been made in addressing colonialism and apartheid’s legacy of destitution, poverty and socio-economic inequality remain huge challenges. An article published by *The Economist*<sup>3</sup> states that: “The starkest measure of South Africa’s failure (since the dawn of constitutional democracy in 1994) is the yawning gap between rich and poor. Under apartheid, such inequality was by design. Since apartheid came to an end, a tiny “black” elite has accrued great fortunes. But that has only widened the wealth gap. South Africa’s Gini coefficient – the best-known measure of inequality, in which 0 is the most equal and 1 the least – was 0.63 in 2009. In 1993 it was 0.59...South Africa is one of the most unequal countries in the world.”

Education, the organ of equality<sup>4</sup>, has a critical role to play in addressing South Africa’s development challenges. Education is considered a prerequisite for eliminating poverty and reducing socio-economic inequality since it broadens the scope of employment possibilities and increases the probability of earning a higher income. Education is the most effective, sustainable, and long-term solution to South Africa’s triple scourge of poverty, socio-economic inequality, and unemployment. Educating young people is critical for the future health, growth, and development of any society.

However, it is frequently bemoaned that the state of South Africa’s education system in general – and the primary and secondary public schooling system in particular – constitutes a

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<sup>3</sup> The article was published online by *The Economist* on 20 October 2012.

<sup>4</sup> This is a reference to the quotation on page iii. This quotation is an extract from Victor Hugo’s book, *Les Misérables*.

national crisis. The phrase “poor quality” is often used to describe the failings of South Africa’s education system (i.e. the primary and secondary public schooling system).

The article published in *The Economist*<sup>5</sup> also asserts that South Africa’s persistent socio-economic inequality is in part a consequence of the government’s ineffectiveness and inefficiency with regard to the education of young South Africans, particularly “black” ones. The quality of education provided to the majority of citizens, who are poor and “black”, is of substandard quality. The short-term and long-term consequences of this crisis in education extend beyond the narrow, although important, confines of the labour market and economic growth.

In this thesis, I seek to both engage in and contribute to the debate concerning South Africa’s primary and secondary public schooling system by analysing the current state of, the outcomes produced by, and the purposes of education in and for constitutional democratic South Africa.

## Research Questions



In this thesis, I endeavour to find answers to the following questions:

1. To what extent can quality of life be more adequately and accurately assessed by utilising the capability approach as opposed to solely relying on traditional economic approaches?
2. Given that for the majority of poor, “black” learners in South Africa the standard of education – in the primary and secondary public schooling system – is of low-quality, why and to what extent can it be said that low-quality education entrenches, perpetuates, and exacerbates poverty and socio-economic inequality?
3. How should education in South Africa be (re)conceptualised if it has a dual role to play in addressing South Africa’s key development challenges (i.e. poverty and socio-economic inequality) and equipping citizens for active, engaged, and effective citizenship within a constitutionally democratic framework by enhancing individual agency by promoting the development of capabilities?

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<sup>5</sup> Refer to footnote 2.

## Research Aims

This investigation has three aims:

1. To attain an understanding of how quality of life can be more adequately and accurately assessed by utilising the capability approach.
2. To examine – within the South African context – the relationship between low-quality education in the primary and secondary public schooling system and poverty and socio-economic inequality.
3. To (re)conceptualise the role of education in and for constitutional democratic South Africa.

## Research Hypotheses

In this thesis, I expect to find that:

1. Quality of life can be assessed with greater adequacy and accuracy by utilising the capability approach, since the capability approach provides broader and more encompassing measures of well-being.
2. Low-quality education in the primary and secondary public schooling system entrenches, perpetuates, and exacerbates poverty and socio-economic inequality.
3. Instead of conceptualisation education solely as a means of producing human capital for the labour market, education should be (re)conceptualised as a means of enhancing individual agency by promoting the development of capabilities, and thereby equipping people for active, engaged, and effective citizenship in a constitutionally democratic society.

## Research Method

This study is one of *conceptual analysis*, supported by a literature survey. The “route of conceptual analysis” is “scantly pursued” (Friedl, De Vos, & Fouché 2002: 435).

The field of conceptual research with reference to other research areas represents, to some extent, uncharted territory (Friedl *et al.* 2002: 435). I thus take time here to briefly explain, based on the work of the abovementioned authors, what conceptual research entails.

Friedl *et al.* (2002: 437) state that the conceptual researcher's task is one of *generalisation*. They further argue that it is only by means of generalisation that the (conceptual) knowledge gained in the process of research becomes useful to other scientists and practitioners encountering the same concept in a different context or situation. It is the conceptual researcher's task to glean generic truths about the concept from its context, and through generalising these truths, open them up for further scientific discussion and practical application (Friedl *et al.* 2002: 442).

Friedl *et al.* (2002: 438-442) present the process of conceptual research as comprising three stages:

- **Extraction**

Extraction refers to the observation of the use of a concept in order to ascertain its practical application and functioning within its context.

- **Definition**

This phase is only completed at the end of the research process, i.e. once the phase of analysis has also been completed. Definition takes place after the concept has been closely observed, using certain research methods, and the findings interpreted. The definition is aimed at answering the research question(s) initially formulated by the researcher, but is also constantly checked against the results of the observation of the concept.

- **Analysis**

This phase involves the formulation of general principles related to the concept under scrutiny, and aims to make the results of the specific research project available to further scientific discussion and application in concrete life situations.

The concepts studied in this thesis are: quality of life, education, and poverty and inequality. I examine the relationship between these three concepts, and specifically examine the relationship between low-quality education – in the primary and secondary public schooling

system – and poverty and socio-economic inequality within the South African context. In addition to this, I investigate whether and how education should be (re)conceptualised in and for constitutional democratic South Africa.

This task is accomplished by means of a survey and analysis of the relevant literature. The sources of some of the literature that is particularly relevant to this thesis include include Amartya Sen (1987; 1992; 1999; 2010); Martha Nussbaum (2008; 2010; 2011); Martha Nussbaum and Amartya Sen (1993); Joseph E. Stiglitz, Amartya Sen, and Jean-Paul Fitoussi (2010); Sabina Alkire (2008); the National Planning Commission (2011a; 2011b; 2011c; 2011d); Lorella Terzi (2007); Elaine Unterhalter (2009); Melanie Walker and Elaine Unterhalter (2007); Madako Saito (2003); the Department of Basic Education (2011b; 2011c; 2012a; 2012b); Graeme Bloch (2009; 2010); Nicholas Spaull (2013); Servaas van der Berg, Cobus Burger, Ronelle Burger, Mia de Vos, Gideon du Rand, Martin Gustafsson, Eldridge Moses, Debra Shepard, Nicholas Spaull, Stephan Taylor, Hendrik van Broekhuizen, and Dieter van Fintel (2011); the Centre for Development and Enterprise (2010); and Sampie Terreblanche (2002).<sup>6</sup>



## Chapter Outline

Chapter 1, which follows the brief overview provided by the abstract and to a lesser extent the ten key words, presents a detailed introduction to this thesis. The context informing this thesis is described, the motivation for undertaking this research explained, and the significance of this work pondered. The research questions, aims, and hypotheses are presented; and the research method outlined.

Chapter 2 provides an elucidation of the capability approach. This includes an explanation of the central concepts of the capability approach – namely functionings, capabilities, and agency. This clarification is necessary as the key concepts studied in this thesis – namely quality of life, education, and poverty and inequality – are conceptualised primarily from the perspective of the capability approach.

Chapter 3 provides a conceptualisation of the concept of quality of life. Three common approaches used to measure quality of life are explained and their shortcomings highlighted.

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<sup>6</sup> See “Bibliography”.

These approaches are the GDP approach, the utilitarian approach, and resource-based approaches. Finally, quality of life is conceptualised using the freedom-based capability approach.

Chapter 4 comprises Section A and Section B. In Section A, the concept of education is conceptualised from the perspective of the capability approach. The implications of the key concepts of the capability approach – functionings, capability, and agency – for educational theory, policy, and practice are examined. In Section B, the state of South Africa’s primary and secondary public schooling system is described and discussed.

Chapter 5 comprises Sections A, B, and C. In Section A, the concepts of poverty and inequality are broadly conceptualised. In Section B, the concept of poverty is conceptualised from the perspective of the capability approach. In Section C, the nature of poverty and socio-economic inequality in South Africa is examined.

Chapter 6 comprises Section A and Section B. In Section A, the relationship – within the South African context – between low-quality education in the primary and secondary public schooling system and poverty and socio-economic inequality is analysed. In Section B, the question of whether and how education should be (re)conceptualised and (re)structured in and for constitutional democratic South African society is considered.

Chapter 7 is the concluding chapter. The basic arguments (and the subsequent conclusions) made in this thesis are reviewed, and the implications thereof discussed.

# Chapter 2

## The Capability Approach

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The capability approach provides a framework for defining and assessing human well-being. The capability approach, argues Saito (2003: 19), provides “the most comprehensive framework for conceptualising well-being”. It has made a remarkable contribution to the humanities and social sciences (Flores-Crespo 2007: 45).

The capability approach was pioneered by Nobel Laureate, economist-philosopher Amartya Sen and has been significantly further developed by philosopher Martha Nussbaum as well as a growing number of other scholars across the humanities and social sciences (Robeyns 2005: 94). It has generated remarkable interest amongst both researchers and policy-makers (Alkire, Qizilbash, & Comim 2008: 1; Robeyns 2005: 93).

Saito (2003: 18-19) provides the following account of how Amartya Sen developed the capability approach: From the 1970s, Sen and his associates began to critique mainstream welfare economics and utilitarianism. They also extended and amended a framework traditionally used in micro-economics to describe how individuals obtain income and well-being. Sen first introduced the concept of “capability” in his seminal paper *Equality of What*<sup>7</sup>. He criticised the argument that the assessment of equality should be based merely on information about people’s sense of happiness or desire fulfilment, or on their command of primary goods. In Sen’s earliest challenges to utilitarian economics, he adopted the “basic needs” perspective. The “basic needs” perspective places emphasis on the notion that people have to meet fundamental needs to achieve well-being. For example, people need food in order to avoid starvation, and shelter and clothing in order to lead a recognisable human life. The “basic needs” approach adopted by Sen emphasised that per capita income is not an adequate indication of a person’s well-being. Furthermore, it makes the claim that everyone should have access to the goods and services required to satisfy their basic needs. Sen’s approach focused more on people and less on commodities. Articulated differently, Sen paid attention to what people were able to do, rather than to what people could buy with their

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<sup>7</sup> Sen (1980)

income. He focused on what is of intrinsic value in life, rather than on the goods that provide instrumental value or utility.

## **What Is The Capability Approach?**

Any substantive theory of ethics and political philosophy, particularly any theory of justice, must choose an informational base, i.e. it must decide which aspects of the world we ought to concentrate on with regard to judging a society and assessing justice and injustice (Sen 2010: 231). Furthermore, it is particularly important that it have a view concerning how an individual's overall advantage or disadvantage is to be assessed. For example, utilitarianism, pioneered by Jeremy Bentham, focuses on individual happiness or pleasure (or some other interpretation of individual "utility") as the best way of judging how advantaged or disadvantaged people are. Another approach, evaluates people's advantage or disadvantage in terms of their wealth, income, or resources. These alternatives illustrate the differences between the utility-based approach and the resource-based approach.

The choice of the space in which to evaluate equality determines what equality we prioritise (Walker & Unterhalter 2007: 3). Sen (1999: 74) argues that the appropriate space for many evaluative purposes is neither that of utilities, nor that of primary goods, but rather that of human capabilities, i.e. what people are able to be and to do.

The capability approach can be defined as "an approach to comparative quality-of-life assessment and to theorising about basic social justice" (Nussbaum 2011: 18). Although it is not a complete or comprehensive theory of justice, the capability approach "does deal with questions of the balance between freedom and equality that has characterised work on social justice since the late eighteenth century" (Walker & Unterhalter 2007: 3). The freedom-based capability approach, in contrast with the utility-based approach or the resource-based approach, assesses individual advantage or disadvantage in terms of a person's capability to do things she has reason to value; thus, an individual's advantage, in terms of opportunity, is judged to be lower than that of another if that individual has less capability – i.e. less real opportunity – to achieve those things that she has reason to value (Sen 2010: 232).

The capability approach is based on the premise that when making comparisons between societies and making assessments about their basic decency or justice, the key question to ask is (Nussbaum 2011: 18): *What is each person able to be and to do?*

In assessing the quality and well-being of our lives, “we have reason to be interested not only in the kind of lives we manage to lead, but also in the freedom that we actually have to choose between different styles and ways of living” (Sen 2010: 227). The main idea of the capability approach is that social arrangements should endeavour to expand people’s capabilities, i.e. their freedom to promote or achieve valuable beings and doings (Sen 1992: 5). This idea of freedom “respects our being free to determine what we want, what we value, and ultimately what we decide to choose” (Sen 2010: 232).

Sen (2010: 228) argues that freedom is valuable because:

1. More freedom provides one with more *opportunity* to pursue one’s objectives, i.e. those things that we consider valuable. The opportunity aspect of freedom is concerned with one’s ability to achieve what one values, i.e. to decide to live as one would like to and to pursue the ends that one may want to achieve.
2. The *process* of choice is itself considered important. One does not want to be coerced into a particular state of being or doing as a result of constraints imposed upon one by others.

Sen (2010: 229-230) uses the example of a person, named Kim, who decides on Sunday that he would rather stay at home than go out and do something active, to distinguish between the “opportunity aspect” and the “process aspect” of freedom:

- In scenario A, Kim manages to do exactly what he wants. In this scenario, neither the opportunity nor the process aspect of Kim’s freedom has been violated as he has both the opportunity to consider the various alternatives that are available and then the freedom to choose to stay at home.
- In scenario B, a group of strong-armed thugs interrupts Kim’s life by dragging him out of his home and dumping him in a large gutter. In this scenario, Kim’s freedom is adversely affected as he cannot do what he would like to do (i.e. to stay at home), and his freedom to choose for himself has been taken away. Thus, both the opportunity and the process aspect of Kim’s freedom have been violated.

- In scenario C, the thugs restrain Kim by commanding, and threatening severe punishment if disobeyed, that he not leave his house. In this scenario, the process aspect of Kim's freedom has been violated as his freedom to choose is taken away. He is coerced, by the threat of being severely punished, into doing what he initially intended to do (i.e. to stay at home). However, the opportunity aspect of Kim's freedom is, to some extent, also violated in this scenario as he did not have the opportunity to choose freely (without coercion) to stay at home.

Nussbaum (2011: 18-19) argues that the essential features of the capability approach are:

- It considers *each person as an end*. It asks about the opportunities available to each person, not just about the total or average well-being.
- It is *focused on choice or freedom*. It asserts that the crucial good societies should be promoting for their people is a set of opportunities, or substantial freedoms, which people then may or may not choose to exercise. It thus commits itself to respect people's powers of self-definition.
- It is resolutely *pluralist about value*. It holds that the capability achievements that are central for people differ both in quality and quantity; that capability achievements cannot – without distortion – be reduced to a single numerical scale; and that a fundamental part of understanding and producing capability achievements is understanding the specific nature of each.
- It is *concerned with entrenched social injustice and inequality*. It is especially concerned with capability failures that are the result of discrimination or marginalisation. It ascribes an urgent *task to government and public policy* to improve its citizens' quality of life (i.e. enhance their capabilities).

The capability approach is a wide-ranging theoretical framework utilised in a wide range of fields – most prominently in welfare economics, political philosophy, social politics, and development studies – for the conceptualisation and evaluation of individual well-being and social arrangements in any particular society or context (Robeyns 2005: 94; Walker & Unterhalter 2007: 3). Sen (1993: 30) explains that the capability approach differs from other approaches utilising other informational spaces, such as, personal utility (focusing on pleasures, happiness, or desire fulfilment), absolute or relative opulence (focusing on

commodity bundles, real income, or real wealth), assessments of negative freedoms (focusing on procedural fulfilment of libertarian rights and rules of non-interference), comparisons of means of freedom (such as focusing on the holdings of the “primary goods”, as in the Rawlsian theory of justice), and comparisons of resource holdings as a basis of just equality (as in Dworkin’s criterion of “equality of resources”).

The capability approach broadens the informational basis used in normative evaluations (Alkire *et al.* 2008: 3). When social arrangements are evaluated by a criterion of justice and consideration of equalities, it is people’s capabilities that must inform the evaluation rather than the informational spaces used by utility-based or resource-based evaluative approaches (Walker & Unterhalter 2007: 4). “The focus of the capability approach”, notes Sen (2010: 235), “is thus not just on what a person actually ends up doing, but also on what she is in fact able to do, whether or not she chooses to make use of that opportunity.”

Sen (1993: 49) also emphasises the “plurality of purposes for which the capability approach can have relevance”. It can be utilised to address various social problems such as development, well-being and poverty, liberty and freedom, gender bias and inequalities, as well as justice and social ethics (Robeyns 2000: 3-4). It is an approach that assesses people’s quality of life – which refers to how well people are doing – in that it directs us to examine people’s lives in the context of their actual material and social milieu (Nussbaum 2000: 70-71). This idea of plurality and non-reducibility is a key element of the capability approach (Nussbaum 2011: 18).

## **Central Concepts of the Capability Approach**

The central concepts of the capability approach are: functionings, capabilities, and agency.

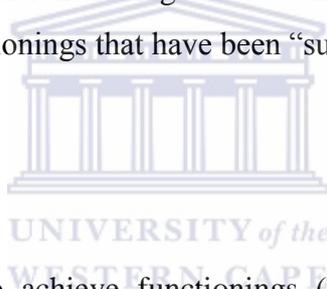
### Functionings

Functionings represent parts of the state of a person, i.e. the various things that a person manages to be or to do in life (Sen 1999: 31). Functionings are the “various things a person may value being and doing” (Sen 1999: 75). They are the valuable states and activities that constitute people’s well-being, i.e. they are aspects of human fulfilment.

Functionings vary from such elementary states and activities as being adequately nourished, being well-sheltered, being in good health, avoiding escapable morbidity and premature mortality, et cetera; to more complex states and activities such as being happy, having self-respect, being socially integrated, and so forth (Sen 1992: 32). Although all functionings are valuable, individuals may differ in the value they assign to different functionings.

Functionings are the “active realisation of one or more capabilities”, i.e. they are “beings and doings that are the outgrowths or realisation of capabilities” (Nussbaum 2011: 24-25). They are related to goods and incomes, but describe what a person is able to be and do with these (Alkire & Deneulin 2009: 22). For example, when one’s basic need for food (i.e. a commodity) is met, one enjoys the functioning of being well-nourished.

Alkire (2005: 120) distinguishes between potential functionings and achieved: Potential functionings refer to what it is feasible for a person to be or do, whereas achieved functionings refer to the particular functionings or outcomes a person enjoys at a particular moment – i.e. the particular functionings that have been “successfully pursued and realised”.



### Capabilities

Capabilities are the potential to achieve functionings (Walker & Unterhalter 2007: 4). Examples of capabilities include being literate or having books or newspapers to read. The capability of an individual reflects the alternative combinations of functionings (beings and doings) that that person can feasibly achieve in the real world, and from which he or she can choose one collection (Sen 1992: 40; Sen 1993: 31). Capabilities are therefore a type of freedom. Sen refers to this type of freedom as “substantial freedoms”, i.e. a set of (usually interrelated) opportunities to choose and to act (Nussbaum 2011: 20). “The sense of ‘freedom’ used here”, notes Saito (2003: 21), “should be understood in the positive rather than the negative sense – that is, in terms of ‘freedom to’, rather than ‘freedom from’”.

Capabilities represent the real freedom or opportunities a person enjoys to lead the kind of life that individual has reason to value (Sen 1999: 75). Capabilities “are not just abilities residing inside of a person but also the freedoms or opportunities created by a combination of personal abilities and the political, social, and economic environment” (Nussbaum 2011: 20).

Sen defines “basic capabilities” as a subset of all capabilities: basic capabilities are “a relatively small number of centrally important beings and doings that are crucial to well-being” (Sen 1992: 44).<sup>8</sup> Alkire (2002: 163) defines basic capability as follows: “A basic capability is a capability to enjoy a functioning that is defined at a general level and refers to a basic need, in other words a *capability to meet a basic need* (a capability to avoid malnourishment, a capability to be educated, and so on). The set of basic capabilities might be thought of as capabilities to meet basic human needs.”

Examples of basic capabilities include the capability to be well-nourished and well-sheltered; the capability to escape avoidable morbidity and premature mortality; the capability to be educated and in good health’ and the capability to be able to participate in social interactions without shame (Terzi 2007: 25).<sup>9</sup>

While functionings refer to what a person *values* being and doing, capabilities refer to what a person is *effectively* able to be and to do. Capabilities are “real opportunities to functionings” (Robeyns 2008: 84). The notion of capability is, in essence, one of freedom – the range of options a person has in deciding what kind of life to lead (Drèze & Sen 1995: 11).

In the same way that a person with a great deal of money can buy many different things, a person with many capabilities could enjoy many different states and activities as well as pursue different life paths. It is for this reason that the capability set – which comprises all the capabilities that a person possesses – has been compared to a budget set (Sen 1992: 40): “Just as the so-called ‘budget set’ in the commodity space represents a person’s freedom to buy

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<sup>8</sup> Nussbaum’s understanding of basic capabilities is different to that of Sen’s. Nussbaum (2011: 24) defines basic capabilities as the “innate faculties of the person that make later development and training possible”: They are a person’s innate powers that may or may not be nurtured. Nussbaum makes clear that her conceptualisation of basic capabilities does not advocate that people’s political and social entitlements should be proportional to their innate intelligence or skill (i.e. a meritocratic approach whereby more innately intelligent or skilled people receive better treatment). Rather, she insists that the political goal for all human beings in a nation ought to be the same: everyone should get above a certain threshold of combined capability (i.e. people who require more help to achieve the minimal threshold of combined capability receive the help they require). This minimal threshold of combined capability should not be coerced functioning, but should be a substantial freedom to choose and to act. This, according to Nussbaum, is the essence of what it means to treat all people with equal respect.

<sup>9</sup> Sen neither identifies nor defends a specific list of basic capabilities. However, he does mention some basic freedoms, which are considered to be fundamentally important to human well-being.

commodity bundles, the ‘capability set’ in the functioning space reflects an individual’s freedom to choose from possible livings.”

The capability approach requires that, in judging well-being, we evaluate both the functionings and the real freedom or opportunities that people have available to choose and to achieve what they value, because assessing only functionings or outcomes provides too little and even misleading information regarding how well people are doing (Walker & Unterhalter 2007: 4-5). In contrasting capabilities with functionings, it should be remembered that “capability means opportunity to select”, thus “the notion of *freedom to choose* is built into the notion of capability” (Nussbaum 2011: 25). The notion of capability captures both achievements (achieved functionings) and unchosen alternatives (Alkire 2008: 5).

Sen (1999: 75) employs the following example to illustrate some of these ideas: An affluent person who chooses to fast may have the same functioning achievement in terms of eating or nourishment as a destitute person who is forced to starve. The affluent person, however, has a different capability set in comparison to the destitute person, since the affluent person can choose to eat and to be well-nourished in a way that the destitute person cannot. The affluent (fasting) person could eat but chooses not to, whereas the destitute (starving) person would eat if given the opportunity to do so.

Another example illustrating this idea is advanced by Walker & Unterhalter (2007: 4-5): Two young women each obtain a degree in English Literature at the same English university. The one comes from a middle-class, reasonably affluent background and a good school. She wished to experience university before working in her father’s business as a trainee manager. An outstanding degree was therefore not required. Nevertheless, she coped well with the academic demands of her course since she was well prepared by her school. She enjoyed the challenges involved in contesting ideas in seminars. The other young woman comes from a working-class background and a struggling inner city state school. Despite possessing significant academic ability, she struggled to fit in and to make friends among her middle-class peers at university. She had not been well prepared by her school for the requirements of higher education. Debating ideas in class undermined her confidence, and made her anxious and unwilling to express an opinion. She, nonetheless, worked hard as she was desperate to achieve excellent grades. However, her lack of confidence resulted in her blaming herself for her struggles and made her reluctant to approach tutors for assistance with

work. Both young women achieved the second-class passes; but although they both achieved the same functionings, their capability sets are vastly different.

### Agency

A person's capability set represents that individual's freedom to achieve well-being and agency. People are understood to be active participants in development, and not passive spectators or recipients. Agency connotes a dignified and responsible human being (i.e. someone who is an end in herself or himself) who shapes her or his own life in light of goals that are valued – these goals that might or might not make increase an individual's happiness or comfort, but are established through reasoned reflection – rather than simply being shaped by external forces or told how and what to think by these external forces (Walker & Unterhalter 2007: 5-6).

An agent, i.e. someone with agency, is “someone who acts and brings about changes”; while a person without agency is someone who is coerced, oppressed, or passive (Sen 1999: 19). People are not confined to solely achieve functionings relevant to their own and immediate well-being, but can – and typically do – also have goals and values other than the pursuit of their own and immediate well-being (Sen 1992: 56). Agency expands the horizon of concern beyond the concerns of a person's own well-being, to include concerns such as helping others, animals, and the environment. A person's agency achievement refers to the realisation of goals and values that that person has reason to pursue irrespective of whether or not they are related to personal well-being.

Sen (1992: 56-57) also makes a distinction, corresponding to the distinction between agency achievement and well-being achievement, between a person's “agency freedom” and “well-being freedom”: Agency freedom is “one's freedom to bring about the achievements one values and which one attempts to produce”, while well-being freedom is “one's freedom to achieve those things that are constitutive of one's well-being”. It is a person's well-being freedom that is best reflected by that person's capability set.

Sen (1992: 57) emphasises that the well-being aspect and the agency aspect, while distinguishable and separate, are thoroughly interdependent: Agency is a key dimension of human well-being. The pursuit of well-being can be one of the agent's most important goals.

At the same time, the failure to achieve goals not related to the agent's individual well-being can result in her or his diminished well-being.

### **Martha Nussbaum: Internal Capabilities, Combined Capabilities, and the Central Capabilities**

People, typically, do not assess their quality of life by use of a single criterion. Thus, Nussbaum (2011: 18), "in order to emphasise that the most important elements of people's quality of life are plural and qualitatively distinct: health, bodily integrity, education, and other aspects of individuals lives cannot be reduced to a single metric without distortion", uses the term "Capabilities Approach" as opposed to "Capability Approach".

Nussbaum (2011: 17; 18) prefers the term "Capabilities Approach" to the term "Human Development Approach" – which is historically associated with the Human Development Report Office of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and its annual Human Development Reports (which use the notion of capabilities as a comparative measure rather than as a basis for normative political theory) – because it takes into consideration the capabilities of, and provides a fine basis for a theory of justice and entitlement for, both non-human animals and human beings.

A person's characteristics (i.e. personality traits; intelligence and emotional aptitudes; states of bodily fitness and health; internalised learning; competence in perception and movement) are highly relevant to her "combined capabilities" (Nussbaum 2011: 21). Nussbaum refers to these individual characteristics or states of the person (which are not fixed, but are fluid and dynamic) as *internal capabilities*.

Internal capabilities are traits and abilities that have been trained or developed traits and, in most cases, are developed in interaction with the familial, political, and socio-economic environment (Nussbaum 2011: 21). Furthermore, it is the responsibility of a society that seeks to promote the most important human capabilities, to support and promote the development of internal capabilities. Establishing a system of education is one of the ways through which the development of internal capabilities is achieved.

Capability is the substantive freedom to achieve alternative functioning combinations. Nussbaum, in an effort to make the complexity of capabilities clear, refers to these “substantial freedoms” as *combined capabilities* (Nussbaum 2011: 20-21).

Combined capabilities comprise of the opportunities a person has to choose and to act in her specific socio-economic and political environment. They are defined as internal capabilities plus the socio-economic and political conditions in which functioning can actually be chosen (Nussbaum 2011: 22). It is, therefore, not conceptually possible to think of a society producing combined capabilities without producing internal capabilities.

Nussbaum (2011: 23) admits that the distinction between internal capabilities and combined capabilities is not strongly demarcated, since people usually acquire an internal capability by some kind of functioning, and may lose it in the absence of the opportunity to function. However, she argues that it is important to make a distinction between internal capabilities and combined capabilities, because the distinction corresponds to two overlapping but distinct tasks of the decent society (Nussbaum 2011: 21-22):

1. A society might do quite well at promoting internal capabilities, and simultaneously not provide people with the combined capabilities (i.e. the socio-economic and political environment) to function in accordance with those capabilities. Thus, a society may educate people so that they are internally capable of free speech on political matters but, in practice, deny them freedom of expression through the repression of speech.
2. The converse is also possible. A society might do well in promoting combined capabilities (i.e. creating the socio-economic and political context for choice in various areas), and simultaneously not promote the internal capabilities required to choose and to act in that socio-economic and political environment. Thus, a person might live in a political and social environment in which she could, in practice, criticise the government, but lack the internally developed ability to think critically or to speak publicly.

Nussbaum (2011: 19) argues that there are (at least) two versions of the capability approach. Nussbaum’s version, which uses the capability framework to construct a theory of basic social justice, adds other notions (i.e. *human dignity*, the *threshold*, and *political liberalism*) in the process. As a theory of fundamental political entitlements, Nussbaum’s version also

employs a list of ten *central capabilities*. Nussbaum argues that it is the task of states to create the conditions in which people are able to pursue a dignified and minimally flourishing life, and that in order to achieve this objective, the state must secure to all citizens a threshold level of these ten central capabilities.

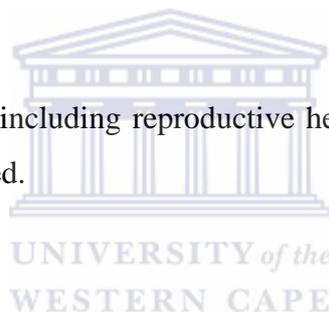
Nussbaum (2011: 32-34) argues that a life worthy of human dignity requires – when one considers the various areas of human life in which people move and act – at a bare minimum, an ample threshold level of these ten central capabilities:

1. Life

Being able to live to the conclusion of a human life of normal length; not dying prematurely, or before one's life is so reduced as to not be worth living.

2. Bodily Health

Being able to have good health, including reproductive health. Being able to be adequately nourished and adequately sheltered.



3. Bodily Integrity

Being able to move unhindered from place to place and having one's bodily boundaries treated as sovereign, i.e. to be secure against violent assault, including sexual assault and domestic violence. Bodily integrity also means having opportunities for sexual satisfaction and having a choice in matters of reproduction.

4. Sense, Imagination, and Thought

Being able to use one's senses; being able to imagine, think, and reason in a truly human way", a way informed and cultivated by an adequate education which includes, but is not limited to, literacy and basic mathematical and scientific training. Being able to use one's imagination and thought in connection with experiencing and producing works and events of one's choice, be it religious, literary, musical, and so forth. Being able to use one's mind in ways that are protected by guarantees of freedom of expression with regard to both political

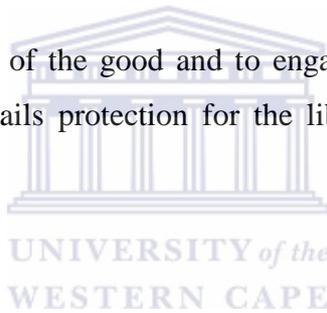
and artistic speech, as well as freedom of religious exercise. Being able to have pleasurable experiences and avoid non-beneficial pain.

#### 5. Emotions

Being able to have attachments to things and people outside ourselves. Being able to love those who love and care for us, to grieve at their absence; in general, to love, to grieve, to experience longing, gratitude, and justified anger. Not having one's emotional development blighted by fear and anxiety. (Supporting this central capability entails supporting forms of human association that can be shown to be crucial in their development.)

#### 6. Practical Reason

Being able to form a conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one's life. (This entails protection for the liberty of conscience and religious observance.)



#### 7. Affiliation

This central capability has two features:

- A. Being able to live with and toward others. Being able to recognise and show concern for other human beings, to engage in various forms of social interaction; to be able to empathise with others. (Protecting this central capability entails protecting institutions that constitute and nourish such forms of affiliation, and also protecting the freedom of assembly and political speech.)
- B. Having the social bases of self-respect and non-humiliation; being able to be treated as a dignified being whose worth is equivalent to that of others. This entails provisions of non-discrimination on the basis of race, sex, sexual orientation, ethnicity, caste, religion, or national origin.

## 8. Other Species

Being able to live with concern for as well as in relation to animals, plants, and the world of nature.

## 9. Play

Being able to laugh, to play, and to enjoy recreational activities.

## 10. Control over One's Environment

This central capability also has two features:

- A. **Political.** Being able to participate effectively in political choices that govern one's life; and having the right of political participation, as well as protections of free speech and freedom of association.
- B. **Material.** Being able to hold property (both land and movable goods), and having property rights on an equal basis with others; having the right to seek employment on an equal basis with others; having freedom from unwarranted search and seizure. In work, being able to work as a human being, exercising practical reason, and entering into meaningful relationships of mutual recognition with other workers.

## **The Capability Approach and Quality of Life**

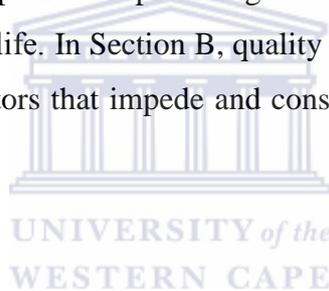
As already mentioned, the capability approach is based on the premise that when assessing the quality of life (i.e. the various factors that encompass well-being) of an individual, group, or society, the key question to ask is: *What is each person able to be and to do?*

The main idea of the capability approach is that social arrangements should endeavour to expand people's capabilities (Sen 1992: 5). Capabilities are the actual opportunities a person has available to her to lead the kind of life that she has reason to value (Sen 1999: 75). Capabilities are not the ability or potential that a person has, but the actual opportunities that

are the result of a combination of personal ability or potential and the political, social, and economic environment (Nussbaum 2011: 20).

The capability approach assesses an individual or society's quality of life in terms of whether people have the capabilities required to lead lives that they consider valuable and worthwhile. The critical indicator in the assessment of quality of life, from the perspective of the capability approach, is voluntarily pursued and achieved states of being and activities (i.e. functionings).

Quality of life is further discussed in the next chapter, i.e. Chapter 3 (which comprises two sections). In Section A, the manner in which the capability approach differs from traditional approaches, which assess an individual or society's quality of life in terms of economic or material resources, is described. These traditional approaches are limited because they do not take into account human being's multi-dimensionality. As a result of their limitations, these traditional approaches are incapable of providing a comprehensive assessment of an individual or society's quality of life. In Section B, quality of life in present-day South Africa is broadly discussed, and the factors that impede and constrain quality of life in present-day South Africa are explained.



# Chapter 3

## Section A

### Conceptualising Quality of Life

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The demand for roses, in addition to the demand for bread (i.e. the demand for both dignity and wages) seems as perennial as it is elusive (Alkire 2008: 1). Alkire makes this assertion in reference to the film *Bread and Roses*. This film's title originates from a poem,<sup>10</sup> by James Oppenheim, about the strike in the textile industry that occurred in Lawrence, Massachusetts during January-March 1912. In the poem, the female workers who are striking, and who are not solely concerned with remuneration, state: "...Our lives shall not be sweated from birth until life closes; Hearts starve as well as bodies; give us Bread, but give us Roses!... Yes, it is bread we fight for – but we fight for roses, too!"

Quality of life is influenced by this amplitude of aims and tastes, making it as difficult to pursue as it is important. Are levels of income, wealth, or consumption accurate measures of individual or societal well-being, flourishing, and prosperity? Do conventional measures of resources or utility adequately and comprehensively assess people's quality of life?

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<sup>10</sup> "As we come marching, marching in the beauty of the day,  
A million darkened kitchens, a thousand mill lofts gray,  
Are touched with all the radiance that a sudden discloses,  
For the people hear us singing: 'Bread and roses! Bread and roses!'  
As we come marching, marching, we battle too for men,  
For they are women's children, and we mother them again.  
Our lives shall not be wasted from birth until life closes;  
Hearts starve as well as bodies; give us bread but give us roses!  
As we come marching, marching, unnumbered women dead  
Go crying through our singing their ancient cry for bread.  
Small art and love and beauty their drudging spirits knew.  
Yes, it is bread we fight for – but we fight for roses, too!  
As we come marching, marching, we bring the greater days.  
The rising of the women means the rising of the race.  
No more the drudge and idler – ten that toil where one reposes,  
But a sharing of life's glories: Bread and roses! Bread and roses!"

The modern world is characterised by unprecedented opulence as well as remarkable scarcity, destitution, and oppression. The extreme inequalities that exist both in “developed” and “developing” countries or regions in the world mean that one observes deprivation and impoverishment alongside affluence. In spite of the increases in overall opulence, many, if not most, people in the modern world are denied elementary freedoms (Sen 1999: 4). Many people lack capabilities both basic and complex.

According to Sen (1999: 4; 15), people’s lack of capabilities may be directly linked to:

- Economic poverty, which affects people’s ability to achieve sufficient nutrition, to satisfy hunger, to secure remedies for treatable illnesses, to be adequately clothed and sheltered, to enjoy clean water, or to enjoy decent sanitary facilities.
- The lack of public facilities, social care, and effective institutions, which may result in the lack of basic opportunities with regard to healthcare, education, gainful employment, or economic and social security.
- The denial of political liberty and basic civil rights by dictatorial regimes, as well as the forced restrictions on the freedom to participate in the social, political, and economic life of the community.

The external (material as well as cultural) circumstances “affect the inner lives of people: what they hope for, what they love, what they fear, as well as what they are able to do” (Nussbaum 2000: 31).

Walker & Unterhalter (2007: 6) provide further elucidation: Our choices are inexorably shaped by the structure of opportunities available to us. Thus, a disadvantaged group comes to accept its status in the hierarchy as correct even when it involves a denial of freedom and opportunities. Such adapted preferences can limit individual aspirations and hopes for the future. We adjust our hopes and aspirations to our probabilities, even if these are not in our best interests. As a consequence, our agency and well-being are diminished rather than enhanced.

Sen (quoted by Walker & Unterhalter: 2007: 6) captures this idea as well: “The destitute thrown into beggary, the vulnerable landless labourer precariously surviving at the end of subsistence, the over-worked domestic servant working around the clock, the subdued and

subjugated housewife reconciled to her role and her fate, all tend to come to terms with their respective predicaments.”

This reality has to be taken into account when inquiring about people’s quality of life. It has to be considered when determining which criteria are relevant to human flourishing. The sole use of economic metrics such as gross domestic product (GDP) or gross national product (GNP) will not provide a comprehensive enough indication of what people’s quality of life actually is. Greater income, wealth, or consumption does not necessarily translate to an improved quality of life.

Quality of life is a complex concept and is not easy to define, as Nussbaum and Sen (1993: 4) attest: “The search for a universally applicable account of the quality of human life has, on its side, the promise of a greater power to stand up for the lives of those whom tradition has oppressed or marginalized. But it faces the epistemological difficulty of grounding such an account in an adequate way, saying where the norms come from and how they can be known to be the best. It faces, too, the ethical danger of paternalism, for it is obvious that all too often such accounts have been insensitive to much that is of worth and value in the lives of people in other parts of the world and have served as an excuse for not looking very deeply into these lives.”

Alkire (2008: 1) states, based on work done by Sen<sup>11</sup>, that “there are two major challenges in developing an appropriate approach to the evaluation of the standard of living”:

- Firstly, the approach used must be relevant. It must conceptualise quality of life in a manner that captures the richness of the idea.
- Secondly, the approach used must be usable. It must be practical enough to be used for actual quality of life assessments. Relevance requires ambition, whereas usability urges restraint.

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<sup>11</sup> Sen (1987)

## The GDP Approach

GDP per capita is the metric that is most widely-used to measure economic activity or growth. There are international standards for its calculation, and a great deal of thought has been given to its statistical and conceptual bases (Stiglitz, Sen, & Fitoussi 2010: 56).

Dasgupta (2007: 15) explains GDP as follows: A country's GDP is the value of all the final goods that are produced by its residents in a given year. It is a measure of an economy's total output. When a commodity is produced and sold, the price paid for the purchase ends up in someone's pocket. Thus, GDP can also be measured by adding up everyone's incomes, i.e. wages, salaries, interests, profits, and government income. GDP and national income are therefore two sides of the same coin.

Nussbaum (2011: 47-48) makes the following points concerning the GDP approach:

- The GDP approach has its advantages. It is relatively easy to measure, since the monetary value of goods and services makes it possible to compare quantities of different types. It has attractive transparency. Thus, countries cannot distort the data in order to make themselves look better. It measures economic growth, which is an indicator of a nation or region's relative achievement.
- The trickle-down theory, which was as common in the 1980s and 1990s, suggested that the benefits of economic growth would improve the lot of the lot of the poor, even if no direct action were taken in that regard. However, an increase in economic growth does not translate to an improvement in quality of life. Increased GDP does not by its own result in political liberty, better healthcare, or an improvement in the quality of education.

Although GDP primarily measures market production, it has often been treated as though it were a measure of economic well-being (Stiglitz *et al.* 2010: 56). Conflating market production and economic well-being can result in misleading indications regarding how well-off people are and entail incorrect policy decisions (Stiglitz *et al.* 2010: 56).

Nussbaum (2011: 48-50) argues that there are problems with using GDP as a measure of quality of life:

- GDP per capita – even if we are committed to measuring quality of life in monetary terms and using a single average number rather than focusing on distribution – may not be the most appropriate metric. Average household income may be more pertinent to people’s actual living standard. An increase in GDP is not well correlated with an increase in average household income. Economic growth does not necessarily translate to increased purchasing power of the individual. Moreover, GDP – as a gross rather than a net measure – does not account for the depreciation of capital goods.
- The GDP approach does not account for distribution and can assess highly nations that contain enormous inequalities. It does not indicate where the wealth is located, who controls it, and what the lot of the people who do not control it is. The GDP approach fails not only to assess the quality of life of the poor, but also to ask the question: Are there groups within the population – racial, religious, ethnic, or gender groups – that are particularly marginalised and deprived?
- The GDP approach aggregates across component parts of lives. It suggests that a single number or metric will provide an adequate assessment of quality of life, when in reality it does not provide the information required to make such an assessment. Even if all the citizens of a country had the amount of wealth indicated by the GDP average figure, it would not provide information regarding how people are doing in the areas such as political liberties, health, education, environmental quality, employment opportunities, leisure time, et cetera. The GDP approach – by failing to address the issue of distribution, the importance of political freedom, the possible subordination of minorities, and the separate areas of lives that deserve attention – diverts attention from these important matters. Even though GDP might be a good proxy for other capabilities, it is at best only a proxy. It does not provide a comprehensive measure of quality of life. GDP should be treated as a by-product of policies aimed at improving societal well-being and realising the good life.

## The Utilitarian Approach

Nussbaum (2011: 50) notes that the utilitarian approach measures quality of life by making reference to people's self-reported feelings about their lives; it determines either total or average utility, i.e. the satisfaction of preferences. Quality of life, from the perspective of the utilitarian approach, is measured by the level of welfare of the individual, where welfare is defined in terms of the pleasure or desire satisfaction one obtains from using goods or, in broader terms, resources (Șerban-Oprescu 2011: 3).

Nussbaum (2011: 50-56) argues that there are problems with using the utilitarian approach as a measure of quality of life:

- The utilitarian approach, like the GDP approach, aggregates across lives. Although it measures satisfaction rather than wealth it faces a similar problem. It values the average or total utility above individual or minority utility. Thus a nation could have a very high average or total utility if a lot of people are doing well, even while a few suffer greatly. Average or total utility may be achieved at the expense of a smaller section of the population.
- The utilitarian approach, like the GDP approach, aggregates across components of lives. Satisfaction suggests singleness and commensurability, whereas real life is diverse and incommensurable. For example, the satisfaction felt in eating a good meal cannot be compared to the satisfaction felt in raising a child or listening to a beautiful piece of music. Human life, and its quality, comprises satisfactions of many different kinds. These various kinds of satisfactions cannot adequately be measured by a single metric, even if that metric is satisfaction itself. Measuring quality of life solely in terms of satisfaction may not be appropriate (Alkire 2008: 4).
- Preferences and satisfactions are socially malleable. They respond to social conditions. Whether or not people want certain preferences depends on whether society makes it possible for people of their gender, or race, or class to achieve those preferences or goods. They may not, as a result of their social conditions, develop a desire for certain preferences or opportunities that they would have enjoyed using but are denied, and thus report satisfaction with their state. Thus the

utilitarian approach – by defining the social goal in terms of the satisfaction of actual preferences – often reinforces the status quo, which may be unjust.

- The utilitarian approach focuses on satisfaction as a goal. Satisfaction is usually understood as a state or condition that follows activity. Satisfaction is not itself a form of activity. It can even be achieved without an associated activity. For example, feeling satisfied that your favourite sports team has done well although you have done nothing to contribute to the success of that team. Most people prefer a life of choice and activity. The utilitarian approach undervalues freedom. The freedom to choose and to act, which is an end in itself, is not captured by the standard utilitarian position.

## Resource-Based Approaches

Nussbaum (2011: 56-58) makes the following points concerning resource-based approaches:

- Resource-based approaches propose the equal (or more distributively adequate) allocation of basic resources. Wealth and income are understood to be such all-purpose resources, Quality of life is measured by the amount of resources available. The more resources a country has the better it is doing, so long as it divides them equally or (equally enough) among all citizens. Resource-based approaches are egalitarian versions of the GDP approach.
- However, wealth and income are not adequate proxies for what people are able to be and to do. People require different levels of resources if they are to achieve similar levels of functionings. For example, a child needs more protein than an adult to achieve healthy physical functioning. In addition, people also have different abilities to convert resources into functionings. Thus it is not enough for resources to be equally distributed since resources are merely means to attain functionings, and some individuals or groups require more resources than others in order to achieve similar functionings. For example, extra money needs to be spent on people with physical disabilities if they are to be able to move around in society as well as people without physical disabilities.

- Moreover, wealth and income may be bad proxies for functionings such as self-respect, inclusion, and non-humiliation. A society in which wealth and income are both high and fairly distributed may contain groups that are reasonably wealthy but socially excluded. Equalising wealth and income does not eradicate stigma and discrimination.
- A society with high and equal distribution of wealth and income may still lack important features that people consider important for a good quality of life. These include freedom of speech and association, as well as quality healthcare and quality education for all.

Thus, according to Alkire (2008: 3), although indicators of resources such as time, money, or particular resources such as drinking water, electricity, and housing are highly relevant to quality of life measures; resource-based approaches are inadequate measures of people's actual quality of life since they fail to tell us enough about how people are really doing.



### **Beyond Traditional Well-Being Approaches**

Saito (2003: 19) argues that in order to understand Sen's capability approach, it is essential to examine Sen's analysis of the incompleteness of the traditional conceptions of well-being, i.e. the income or commodity approach and the utilitarian approach.

Saito (2003: 19-20) explains Sen's analysis of the incompleteness of assessing well-being using these traditional approaches:

- It has been common to consider economic growth and the expansion of goods and services as constituting the process of economic development, as does the income approach or commodity approach. Sen, in fact, acknowledges the importance of the mutually reinforcing relationship between income or commodities and capabilities. While Sen acknowledges the importance of income or commodities as means by which to enhance capabilities, he also pays great attention to the fact that enhancing capabilities would tend, typically, to expand a person's ability to be more productive and earn higher income and/or acquire more commodities. Although income and commodities can be crucially important, Sen is critical of assessing a person's well-

being in terms of the amount of income or commodities the person owns for the following reasons:

- A person's well-being is not really a matter of how rich that person is, because commodity command is a means to the end (i.e. well-being) and not the end itself.
  - Individuals have different commodity requirements.
  - Differing commodity requirements can be found in different cultures and societies.
  - With regard to wealth and income, more is not necessarily better.
- The utilitarian approach proposes assessing well-being in terms of utility. Sen argues that neither pleasure nor happiness in the classical understanding of utilitarianism, nor the fulfilment of desire in the modern understanding of utilitarianism, is appropriate as a representation of a person's well-being. Sen makes the following criticisms against using the utilitarian approach to assess a person's well-being:
    - The utilitarianism has no interest in the distribution of utilities, since the focus is entirely on the total utility of everyone taken together.
    - With regard to desires, whereas Sen considers some functionings to be intrinsically valuable, the desire-based utilitarian approach considers a functioning to have value only to the extent that it is desired by the person concerned. This point is critically important because the process of a desire is complex. Someone who grew up in penury, poor and undernourished, may have learned to accept a half-empty stomach, and may desire nothing more than what seems realistic. Sen emphasises that since people learn not to desire what they know or believe to be unattainable, they may suffer extreme deprivation without having a strong desire for change.

## **The Capability Approach**

The information required to attain a comprehensive understanding of people's sense of well-being and quality of life is wide-ranging. Some of the important criteria relevant for the measurement and assessment of people's quality of life are: life expectancy, healthcare, medical services, labour (whether it is dignified and rewarding, or grindingly monotonous),

education (not only its accessibility, but also its nature and its quality), political and legal privileges enjoyed by the citizenry, as well as the structuring of family relations and relations between the sexes (Nussbaum & Sen 1993: 1).

The capability approach assesses quality of life in terms of a person's capability to achieve valuable functionings, i.e. an individual's ability to do valuable acts or reach valuable states of being (Sen 1993: 30-31). Thus quality of life is considered in the space of both capability and functioning (Alkire 2008: 6). Sen (1985: 200) argues that since the central feature of well-being is the ability to achieve valuable functionings, the need to identify and to evaluate the important functionings cannot be avoided by looking at something else, such as happiness, desire fulfilment, opulence, or command over primary goods. From the perspective of the capability approach, a high standard of living is one which allows people to enjoy valuable states and activities (Alkire 2008: 5).

Stiglitz *et al.* (2010: 67) discuss what they refer to as the "objective features shaping quality of life". They are aspects of life that determine whether people are actually able to lead the kind of life they value. They highlight that the manner in which societies are structured makes a difference for people's lives, and that their influences are not all captured by conventional measures of economic resources, since quality of life derives from emotional states and these states are not limited to material means (Stiglitz *et al.* 2010: 68; Alkire 2008: 3).

Stiglitz *et al.* (2012: 68-86) discuss eight of these features:

1. Education

Education is traditionally considered important because it makes people employable by equipping them with the competencies and skills that underpin economic production which is necessary for a healthy economy. However, the importance of education for quality of life is independent of its effect on people's earnings and productivity. Education is strongly correlated with people's life-assessments. Better-educated individuals tend to have better health status, lower unemployment, more social connections, and greater engagement in civic and political life. There is consensus that investment in education yields a range of monetary and non-monetary returns that benefit both the individual and the community in which the individual resides.

## 2. Health

Health shapes both the length and the quality of people's lives.

## 3. Personal Activities

The nature of people's personal activities and the manner in which they spend their time – irrespective of the amount of income generated – are important considerations for quality of life assessments. The activities that people choose to engage in have effects on their subjective well-being, both in terms of their hedonic experiences and their evaluative judgements. These activities include working (paid work), commuting, leisure, travelling, reading, having sex, exercise, housework, childcare, playing sports, watching television, spending time with family and friends, praying, sleeping, shopping, walking, talking, eating, and so forth.



## 4. Political Voice and Governance

Political voice is an intrinsically and instrumentally integral dimension of quality of life. The ability to participate as full citizens – to participate in civic and social activities, to protest against what one perceives to be wrong, to dissent without fear and to contribute in the framing of policies – are essential freedoms. Political voice provides a corrective to public policy by ensuring the accountability of public officials and institutions, directing attention to significant deprivations as well as revealing what people need and value. Political voice enhances the prospects of building consensus on key issues and reduces the potential for conflicts. It is beneficial for economic efficacy, social equity, and inclusiveness in public life.

The degree of responsiveness of the political system and the opportunities for political voice depend on institutional features such as the presence of a functioning democracy, universal suffrage, an independent media, and civil society organisations. Key aspects of governance – such as legislative guarantees and the rule of law – are also important. Legislative guarantees include constitutional rights as well as rights provided by general laws that enhance the quality of life of all residents. The way in which laws are structured affect the investment climate in a country and consequently have an impact on market functioning, economic growth, job creation and material welfare. In order to realise their potential, legal guarantees

require effective implementation and substantive justice. This depends on how various institutions (such as the police, the judiciary, and various administrative services) function, whether they are free from corruption, political interference, and social prejudice; and whether they can be held accountable for their decisions.

#### 5. Social Connections

Social connections – which are sometimes described as “social capital” – improves quality of life in various ways. Many of the most enjoyable personal activities involve socialisation and people with more social connections report higher life-evaluations. Social connections have direct and indirect benefits. These benefits extend to people’s health, to the probability of finding a job and to several characteristics of the neighbourhood where people reside.

#### 6. Environmental Connections

Environmental conditions are important for sustainability. Environmental conditions also have an immediate impact on the quality of people’s lives in a variety of ways. They affect human health both directly (through air, water and noise pollution, as well as hazardous substances) and indirectly (through climate change, biodiversity loss, natural disasters that affect the health of ecosystems, and transformations in the carbon and water cycles). People benefit from environmental services such as access to clean water and recreational areas. People values environmental amenities or disamenities, and these valuations affect their actual choices. Environmental conditions may result in climatic variations and natural disasters, such as flooding and drought, which damage both the properties and the lives of the affected populations.

#### 7. Personal Insecurity

Personal insecurity comprises external factors that place the physical integrity of each person at risk and, in extreme cases, result in the death of the person involved. These factors, which affect the quality of people’s lives, include crime, accidents, natural disasters, and climate change.

## 8. Economic Insecurity

Economic insecurity may result from various factors which include unemployment, illness, and old age. Economic insecurity has negative consequences for people's quality of life. The impact of these negative consequences depends on the severity of the shock, its duration, the stigma associated with it, the risk aversion of the individual as well as the financial implications.

Job loss may result in economic insecurity when unemployment is persistent or recurrent, when unemployment benefits are low compared to previous earnings or when workers have to accept substantial cuts in remuneration, hours or both. Unemployment or the fear of unemployment can have negative consequences on the quality of people's lives. It may cause physical and mental illness as well as tensions in family life. The consequences of job insecurity are both immediate (since replacement income is typically lower than what was previously earned) and long-term (as a result of potential losses in wages when the person does not find another job).

Illness has the potential to cause economic insecurity both directly and indirectly. Medical costs for people who have no or only limited health insurance can be devastating; forcing them into debt, to sell their homes and assets, or to forgo treatment at the risk of worse health outcomes in the future.

Old age can imply economic insecurity attributable to doubt, subsequent to withdrawal from the labour market, concerning needs and resources. Two types of risk are particularly important. The first is the risk of inadequate resources during retirement. This may be the result of insufficient future pension payments or to greater needs as a consequence of illness or disability. The second is the risk of volatility in pension disbursements. All retirement-income systems are exposed to some risk. However, the greater role played by the private sector in financing old-age pensions (in the form of both occupational pensions and personal savings) has, in many countries, made it possible to extend the coverage of pension systems, but at the cost of shifting risks from governments and firms towards individuals, and thus increasing their insecurity.

Alkire (2008: 6-7) points out some of the relevant features with regard to using the capability approach to assess quality of life:

- Breadth: All Intrinsically Valued Beings and Doings

The capability approach, instead of focusing solely on material functionings or subjective states, potentially encompasses all achievements of intrinsic importance. Any assessment of quality of life is likely, as a result of focus and feasibility considerations, to a certain extent to have a narrowed scope. The capability approach, however, does not categorically exclude any intrinsically valued achievements.

Any quality of life measure will select certain dimensions or capabilities and exclude others. Thus, there exists no single list of capabilities is uniquely valid. The manner in which capability approach is applied depends on the purpose of the measure, the milieu, the level(s) of the analysis, the data available, the institutions it will guide, and the kind of analyses that the measure will catalyse or inform. The capability approach can be applied in various methods. Although the purpose of the application provides the required definition and limitations to the set of relevant capabilities, the capabilities themselves are not limited to certain dimensions or sectors a priori.

- Applicability: Developed and Developing Countries, Poverty, or Quality of Life

The capability approach allows for considerable diversity with regard to the types of measures that can be pursued. As a result of its conceptual breadth, the capability approach can be used to inform measures of extreme poverty and deprivation, to probe situations of affluence and well-being as well as to investigate inequalities in different spaces. The capability approach can also focus on developed or developing countries or regions, or may seek to identify common variables which could be used for comparisons. Different applications of the capability approach will result in different focal variables and measurement methodologies.

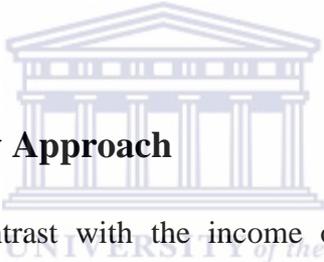
- Amenable to Exploration Using Different Kinds of Data and Analysis

Capabilities can be analysed and represented using a variety of types of data, methodologies, and techniques. Capabilities can be analysed using quantitative, qualitative, participatory as well as subjective data, and using administrative, census, survey and institutional data. Even though a measure might focus on intrinsically valued outcomes, analyses seeks to discover

the connections among different capabilities and to identify high leverage variables which are instrumental to a range of other capabilities.

- Outcome and Process

The capability approach considers human beings to be active agents who direct their own lives and who act as agents whose interests extend beyond themselves to larger social goals and objectives. Freedom and practical reason are therefore central concepts. Certain freedoms are personal process freedoms. These include a person's ability to act according to their values in preference to acting under coercion. Personal process freedoms also comprise systemic process freedoms. Systemic process freedoms comprise freedoms of association, voice and democratic practice. Freedom and practical reason could be integrated into quality of life assessments using these two types of freedoms.



### **The Value of the Capability Approach**

The capability approach, in contrast with the income or commodity approach and the utilitarian approach, assesses quality of life in terms of a person's capability to be and do what she values being and doing. Human beings are multi-dimensional and, consequently, the things they value being and doing are wide-ranging. This multi-dimensionality is well expressed by Nussbaum's list of ten central capabilities.

The income or commodity approach and the utilitarian approach, in assessing quality of life, focus on particular and limited aspects of human well-being. The capability approach, in assessing quality of life, is wide-ranging; and, as a result, allows for a broader – more adequate and accurate – assessment of individual and societal quality of life.

## Section B

### Quality of Life in Constitutional Democratic South Africa

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#### **South Africa's History in a Nutshell<sup>12</sup>**

South Africa, despite all of its breath-taking beauty, diverse culture, and promise, is not an easy country to embrace. Its history is characterised by violence and is stained with racism. Prior to democracy in 1994, South Africa endured three-hundred and fifty years of European colonialism and authoritarian “white” rule. South Africa’s history from the mid-seventeenth to the late twentieth century is an unsavoury tale of intergroup conflict, violence, warfare, and plunder (Terreblanche 2002: 5). This history can be re-examined from the following three perspectives: firstly, the perspective of “white” political and economic domination; secondly, the perspective of land deprivation; and thirdly, the perspective of unfree and exploitative “black” labour (Terreblanche 2002: 6).

Clare (2010: ix-x) notes the following in his abridged account of South Africa’s colonial and apartheid history:

- The Dutch, in 1652, occupied the Cape with the intention of setting up a refreshment station for their ships on the way to the East Indies. The settlement, driven by land-hungry Boers (farmers) careless of the existence of those who were there first, expanded steadily over the subsequent one-hundred and fifty years.
- By the end of the eighteenth century, “whites” and “black Africans” had begun to clash on the eastern frontier, six-hundred miles from Cape Town. Britain then annexed the colony from the Dutch, briefly in 1795 and finally in 1806. Soon afterwards, to escape British rule, the Boers travelled north on their Great Trek, establishing what became known as the independent republics of the Orange Free State and the Transvaal. On the eastern frontier, the British continued the war against the Xhosa, which was to last intermittently for 100 years. They also laid claim to

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<sup>12</sup> A more in-depth account of South Africa’s history of colonialism, segregation, and apartheid is provided in Chapter 5, Section C, titled: “Poverty and Inequality in South Africa”.

Natal, which brought them into conflict with the Zulus, whom they finally defeated in 1879.

- By then, diamonds had been found in Kimberly and gold was soon to be struck in the Transvaal. The independent republics' (Orange Free State and Transvaal) days were inevitably numbered. Britain, having provoked and won the Second Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902), promptly handed the Afrikaners, as they were now called, control of a unified but segregated South Africa.
- They denied the vote to the "black: majority of the population, claimed title to 93 percent of the land and spent most of the twentieth century enforcing "grand apartheid" – total separateness. The Afrikaner's position became untenable once the rest of Africa had shaken off colonialism. They eventually succumbed. In 1994, Nelson Mandela became president after South Africa's first democratic election was won by the African National Congress (ANC).

### **The State of Constitutional Democratic South Africa in a Nutshell**

1994, the year in which democracy was birthed in South Africa, can be regarded as "the biggest turning point in the 350 years of modern South African history" (Terreblanche 2002: 371). Social scientists and social historians, will for many years to come, distinguish between what happened before and after 1994.

According to Statistics South Africa (Stats SA), in October 2011, there were 51 770 560 people in South Africa; 51.3 percent of whom were female and 48.7 percent of whom were male. The average age was 25. By population group the overall population of South Africa is comprised of: 79.2 percent "black African"; 8.9 percent "coloured"; 8.9 percent "white"; 2.5 percent "Indian"/"Asian"; and 0.5 percent "other". The population demographic by province is as follows (from most to least populated): Gauteng: 12 272 263; KwaZulu-Natal: 10 267 300; Eastern Cape: 6 562 053; Western Cape: 5 882 734; Limpopo: 5 404 868; Mpumalanga: 4 039 939; North West: 3 509 953; Free State: 2 745 590; and Northern Cape: 1 145 861 (Stats SA 2012a: 3-5).

Since 1994, much has been done to improve the quality of life of all citizens of South Africa in general, and the poorest and most disadvantaged in particular (National Planning Commission (NPC) 2011b: 6-7):

- Access to primary and secondary education has been expanded and is now at near universal levels. Enrolment in higher education has almost doubled.
- Primary healthcare has been expanded.
- Access to electricity and water has been significantly expanded.
- South Africa's political institutions have been entrenched through credible national, provincial, and municipal elections.
- The economy, which is more diverse today than it was in 1994, has grown. Public revenues have increased. The number of people in employment has risen.
- South Africa has in place several constitutional institutions, a judiciary, a free media, and state institutions supporting democracy, as established in Chapter 9 of its Constitution, including the Public Protector, the Auditor-General, the South African Human Rights Commission, and the Independent Electoral Commission.

In 2012, South Africa's then Minister of Finance, Pravin Gordhan, wrote, in an article published by *Times LIVE*,<sup>13</sup> that social spending – which mostly benefits the poor and includes social grants, free services at public hospitals and clinics, no-fee schools which cater for the poorest 60 percent of learners, as well as free basic services such as housing, water, and electricity – has increased from 49 percent of state expenditure in 2002/03, to 58 percent in the 2012 budget. Furthermore, based on social expenditure in 2012/13, it was estimated that social expenditure translated into a transfer of R3940 per family of four per month.

Yet for many people in South Africa – people who are excluded from the formal economy, live in informal settlements, and depend on social services which are either absent or of very poor quality – the political transition is yet to translate into a better life (NPC 2011b: 7). The challenging task now is to improve the quality of public services, especially education and

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<sup>13</sup> The article was published in print by the *Sunday Times* (a popular South African Sunday newspaper), and by *Times LIVE* (the online home of the *Sunday Times* and a source of the latest news) on 22 April 2012.

healthcare, and more importantly, to shift people out of the welfare net and into employment (Gordhan 2012).

At the opening of the debate on “Reconciliation and Nation Building” in the national assembly in May 1998, Thabo Mbeki, then South Africa’s deputy president, delivered his now well-known *Two Nations* speech. In his address, Mbeki asserted that South Africa contained two nations. He characterised the two nations as follows: “A major component of the issue of reconciliation and nation building is defined by and derives from the material conditions in our society which have divided our country into two nations, the one “black” and the other “white”. We therefore make bold to say that South Africa is a country of two nations. One of these nations is “white”, relatively prosperous, regardless of gender or geographic dispersal. It has ready access to a developed economic, physical, educational, communication, and other infrastructure. This enables it to argue that, except for the persistence of gender discrimination against women, all members of this nation have the possibility to exercise their right to equality, the development opportunities to which the Constitution of ’93 committed our country. The second and larger nation of South Africa is “black” and poor, with the worst affected being women in rural areas, the “black” rural population in general, and the disabled. This nation lives under conditions of a grossly underdeveloped economic, physical, educational, communication, and other infrastructure. It has virtually no possibility to exercise what in reality amounts to a theoretical right to equal opportunity, with that right being equal within this “black” nation only to the extent that it is equally incapable of realisation. This reality of two nations, underwritten by the perpetuation of the racial, gender, and spatial disparities born of a very long period of colonial and apartheid “white” minority domination, constitutes the material base which reinforces the notion that, indeed, we are not one nation, but two nations.”

In his 2012 State of the Nation Address, President Jacob Zuma described post-apartheid South Africa’s most vexing societal and human predicament when he said: “...steady progress has been made in various areas such as health, education, the fight against crime, human settlements, energy, water provision, rural development, and others. However, the triple challenge of unemployment, poverty, and inequality persists, despite the progress made. “Africans”, women, and the youth continue to suffer most from this challenge.”

The roots of South Africa’s high rates of poverty and inequality lies in its history of colonial exploitation and apartheid (NPC 2011b: 10): Decades of racial discrimination – which

entailed denying “black”, and especially “African”, people the right to run business, to access land, to own certain assets, to quality education, to live in well located areas, and to work in certain fields – resulted in social stratification based on skin colour, with social and economic institutions largely reinforcing these inequities.

The NPC, whose mandate is to advise on issues impacting on long-term development in South Africa, identified the following as key strategic long-term objectives for South Africa<sup>14</sup> (NPC 2011a: 19):

- The elimination of poverty.
- The reduction in inequality.

The following nine challenges were identified by the NPC as the foremost challenges hindering efforts to achieve these objectives:

1. Too Few South Africans Are Employed (NPC 2011b 9-13):

Unemployment and underemployment rates in South Africa are extremely high. Many out-of-school young people and adults are unemployed. About two-thirds of the unemployed are under the age of 35. Those in low income households that are employed, typically support many dependants and earn little relative to cost of living. This is a central contributor to widespread poverty. Strict unemployment peaked in 2001 at 31 percent and now hovers at around 25 percent. In addition, broad unemployment, which refers to people who would like to work but have become discouraged, is also a critical challenge, mostly affecting young “black” women who live outside of urban areas.

2. The Quality of Education for Poor, “Black” South Africans is Substandard (NPC 2011b: 13-16):

Since 1994, efforts to improve the quality of education for poor children have largely failed. Apart from a small minority of “black” children who attend former “white” or Model C

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<sup>14</sup> Poverty and inequality in South Africa are discussed in greater depth in Chapter 5, Section C, titled: “Poverty and Inequality in South Africa”.

schools and a small minority of schools performing well in largely “black” areas, the quality of public education remains poor.<sup>15</sup>

3. Poorly Located and Inadequate Infrastructure Limits Social Inclusion and Faster Economic Growth (NPC 2011b: 16-17):

Successful countries typically invest at high rates and are perpetually modernising public infrastructure to suit their economic, settlement, and trade patterns. Yet South Africa has failed to modernise its infrastructure for a generation. Public investment in both new and existing infrastructure falls short of what is required to meet the country’s economic and social needs. South Africa has to expand its infrastructure to cater for mining and other traditional activities while simultaneously investing in the facilities required for a more labour-absorbing, knowledge-intensive economy.

4. Spatial Challenges Continue to Marginalise the Poor (NPC 2011b: 19-20):

Apartheid’s spatial legacy continues to affect the entire country. In general, the poorest people reside in remote rural areas. In cities, the poorest people reside in areas that are far from places of work and economic activity. Many people live in poorly located settlements. This exacerbates the challenges associated with providing infrastructure in support of economic activity. A fundamental concern in urban areas is the failure to coordinate the delivery of household infrastructure as part of a broader process of building vibrant and viable human settlements. The challenges in rural areas are even greater than those in urban areas and raise difficult issues and trade-offs.

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<sup>15</sup> The state of South Africa’s primary and secondary public schooling system, and the lack of quality education it provides to the poor and mainly “black” majority, is specifically discussed in Chapter 4, Section B, titled: “The State of South Africa’s Primary and Secondary Public Schooling System”.

5. South Africa's Growth Path is Highly Resource-Intensive and Unsustainable (NPC 2011b: 17-19):

South Africa's economy and society continue to reflect and reproduce its colonial-induced dependence on natural, and particularly mineral, resources. This is reflected in the location of its cities, the structure of its economy, and in the many dimensions of social fragmentation and exclusion that still characterise the country, including unemployment and low educational and skills levels. Given the challenges and constraints South Africa faces with regard to its natural resources, it is in its interest to seek to build a new development path that is more inclusive and less dependent on the exploitation of non-renewable resources, and that uses renewable resources more sustainably and strategically.

6. The Ailing Public Healthcare System Confronts A Massive Disease Burden (NPC 2011b: 20-22):

South Africa's health outcomes are poor by world standards, and the country faces several epidemics. The increase in the number of total deaths, low life expectancy, and high infant and maternal mortality are evidence of an ailing healthcare system. South Africa's quadruple disease burden impacts all aspects of society.

The first burden is the HIV pandemic; the second is that of injury, both accidental and non-accidental; the third epidemic comprises diseases such as tuberculosis, diarrhoea, and pneumonia, which interact in vicious negative feedback loops with malnutrition and HIV; and the fourth burden of disease is the increasing epidemic of lifestyle diseases associated with relative affluence.

The country's rising disease burden is compounded by the collapsing healthcare system. This collapse is partly attributable to the nature of the disease burden as well as to institutional issues and implementation failures over an extended period of time.

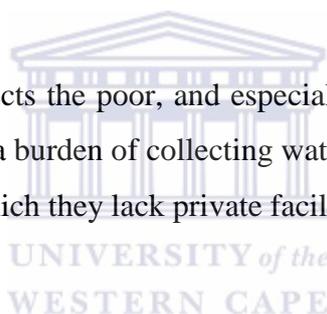
While healthcare financing in South Africa is progressive (comprising general taxation, medical aid contributions, and out-of-pocket payments), healthcare access and outcomes are not progressive and skewed in favour of the wealthiest quintiles that bear lower burdens of disease. The quality of public healthcare, which serves a large majority of the population, is poor. Furthermore, the quality of private care is highly variable.

7. The Performance of Public Services is Uneven and Often of Poor Quality (NPC 2011b: 22-25):

Despite the post-1994 extension of public services such as education, healthcare, social security, infrastructure, and a range of municipal services (which enable people to develop their capabilities, enhancing both their quality of life and their economic opportunities), concerns have been raised about the quality of services and particularly the level of variation in service delivery. In recent years, this has resulted in an increase in the number of service delivery protests.

The uneven performance of the public service is as a result of the interplay between a complex set of factors, which include tensions in the political/administrative interface, the instability of the administrative leadership, the erosion of accountability and authority structures, poor organisational design, inappropriate staffing, skills deficit, and low staff morale.

Poor service delivery mainly affects the poor, and especially women, who are the ones who assume responsibility for the extra burden of collecting water and maintaining communal taps and toilets, in environments in which they lack private facilities.



8. Corruption Undermines State Legitimacy and Service Delivery (NPC 2011b: 25-26):

The misuse of an official position for personal gain (i.e. corruption) occurs in both the public and private sectors. In 2012, the *Mail & Guardian Online*<sup>16</sup> reported Public Protector Thuli Madonsela' warning that South Africa is at a "tipping point" in its battle against "endemic" corruption which has the potential to "distort the economy and derail democracy". She also stated that corruption is the biggest factor undermining trust between the state and citizens, in addition to derailing service delivery.

Corruption also weakens the state's ability to increase social mobility and to overcome inequalities. Although the entire country is negatively affected by corruption, the costs are not borne equally and fall most heavily on the poor through the impact of corruption on the quality and accessibility of public services.

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<sup>16</sup> Article published by the *Mail & Guardian Online* on 3 April 2012.

## 9. South Africa Remains A Divided Society (NPC 2011b: 26-28):

Deep divisions perpetuate a cycle of mistrust and short-termism that make dealing with the key challenges difficult and more complex. Societal divisions impede the formation of consensus required to develop, change, or implement policy; and undermine the ability to define social contracts<sup>17</sup> or compacts.

While race remains a key dividing line, issues such as gender and locality are also important factors that explain differences in opportunity. This division is compounded by inequality as well as the poor performance of some public institutions. The rich are able to purchase private provision of these (healthcare, education, private security).

While significant progress has been made in deracialising the upper end of the income spectrum, poor quality education and high youth unemployment inhibits the broadening of opportunity that is necessary to reduce inequality and heal the divisions of the past. Poverty cannot be eradicated and inequality cannot be reduced without a united citizenry committed to these society-wide and longer-term goals above immediate short-term interests.



### **Education: A Pressing Challenge in South Africa and A Central Capability**

South Africa's history is one of great struggle against injustice, discrimination, exclusion, and oppression. Although freedom from political tyranny has been achieved, the struggle now is for an acceptable quality of life for all citizens of South Africa (Davids & Gaibie 2011: 246). The quality of life of all who live in South Africa is, in various ways and to various extents depending on one's socio-economic status, adversely affected by the various challenges

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<sup>17</sup> A social contract is in essence a response to the question: "Why should the individual obey the state, or the law, or the sovereign?" A social contract theorist bases her model of the state and its legitimacy on the binding effect of a legal contract between civil society and the state. According to both Plato and Aristotle, the state derives the legitimacy of its authority over its citizens from the social contract (Ally 200: 228). Societies that have successfully eradicated poverty over a short period of time have done so using a social compact of some sort that has given governments the legitimacy to implement difficult socio-economic policies which, despite initial hardships, often have a positive long-term effect on the entire nation. An effective social compact will: build and maintain trust among all social partners; create a shared analysis of the problem and a mutual recognition that all stakeholders need to commit to find solutions; define a clear vision of what stakeholders are aiming for, and set manageable objectives; and inspire leaders to accept responsibility and take risks (NPC 2011b: 27).

discussed in this section of this chapter. These challenges serve to impede and constrain people's capabilities and, ultimately, their functionings.

These challenges are interrelated, and cannot be addressed in isolation from each other. However, addressing the current state of education in South Africa, particularly primary and secondary public schooling, is, arguably, South Africa's most urgent and important task. Education plays a crucial role in expanding capabilities and, ultimately, functionings.

Education, notes Nussbaum (2011: 152), has been at the heart of the capability approach since its inception. Education has a particular role to play in relation to capabilities and, by extension, quality of life. Nussbaum argues that education converts "people's existing capacities into developed *internal capabilities* of many kinds" (Nussbaum 2011: 152). This formation, in addition to being valuable in itself and a source of lifelong satisfaction, is pivotal to the development and exercise of many other human capabilities (Unterhalter 2013: 186): It is a significant "fertile functioning"<sup>18</sup> of the highest importance in addressing disadvantage and inequality because it enables other functionings central to dignity, equality, and opportunity.

Education is further discussed in the next chapter, i.e. Chapter 4 (which comprises two sections). In Section A, education is conceptualised and discussed from the perspective of the capability approach. In Section B, the current state of education in South Africa is described.

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<sup>18</sup> This is a term borrowed from the work of Wolff & de-Shalit (2007).

# Chapter 4

## Section A

### Conceptualising Education from the Perspective of the Capability Approach

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As discussed in Chapter 2, the capability approach to human well-being which was pioneered by Amartya Sen, and considered by him to be the most comprehensive framework within which human well-being can be assessed, is a “concentration on freedom to achieve in general and the capabilities to function in particular” (Sen 1995: 266). The core concepts of the capability approach are functionings (i.e. an achievement) and capabilities (i.e. the ability to achieve) (Sen 1987: 36).

Sen (1987: 36) notes the difference between functionings and capabilities as follows: “A functioning is an achievement, whereas a capability is the ability to achieve. Functionings are, in a sense, more directly related to living conditions, since they are different aspects of living conditions. Capabilities, in contrast, are notions of freedom, in the positive sense: what real opportunities you have regarding the life you may lead.”

Education is central to the capability approach. Sen (1992: 44) describes education as one of a “relatively small number of beings and doings that are crucial to well-being”. Flores-Crespo (2007: 46) asserts that education has, historically, been intimately connected to human capabilities: “From Socratic times until our day, an array of voices has lucidly explained how knowledge helps to clear our minds, awaken our consciousness, inform our actions, and enrich our lives.” Education, in its various manifestations, transforms people’s existing capacities into internal capabilities of various kinds; and is crucial in the fight against disadvantage and inequality (Nussbaum 2011: 152).

Unterhalter (2013: 186-187), in her review of Martha Nussbaum’s *Creating Capabilities: The Human Development Approach*, notes that significant contributions have been, and are being, made in the field of study relating to the topic of the capability approach and education: “Over more than 10 years, scholars widely dispersed across Africa, Asia, Australasia, the Americas, the Middle East, and Europe have produced a considerable volume of work on

education and capabilities.<sup>19</sup> This has been written for academic and policy audiences. Some of it is theoretical, contributing both to trying to understand the location of education capabilities and also to how the notion of capability shifts other ideas about rights or justice or aims of education. Some of it is empirical, identifying what learners or teachers consider valuable capabilities and functionings. Some of this writing is linked to professional practice and particular modalities of education associated with curriculum, pedagogy, or programme design. Some of it seeks to expand the outline policy directions sketched in the human development approach to education considering what aspects of education provision could be measured to capture some of the multidimensionality of ideas of well-being. Many studies explicitly engage with Nussbaum's work. This field is large and growing...Some themes in the literature look at the many facets of social diversity and schooling. Using methods of empirical inquiry they draw out how differently situated children and adults around the world express what it is they have reason to value within and about education. This exploration of themes of possibility stands in contrast with a complementary body of work on how capabilities in education are constrained by conditions in schools and universities, and what strategies attempt to overcome those. Working with this sense of capabilities as potentialities, a number of studies look at the ways education works as a capability multiplier. This links with studies of capabilities and professional practice, notably teaching in schools and higher education, considering both the capabilities of teachers and how to teach through capabilities. While much has been learned through engaged empirical study, additional theoretical and conceptual work has been done on how the idea of capabilities expands and supplements the notions of rights to education and social justice in education. The connections between capabilities and primary goods when thinking about education have been explored in connection with discussions of justice and equality. Another body of work looks at capabilities and education in relation to policy discussion. Here the idea of capability has been used to critique an over-economistic notion of quality in education, the limits of gender parity, and to contribute to ideas of more multi-dimensional approaches to measuring education and equality. It can be seen that not only is the idea of capabilities expanding

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<sup>19</sup> In 2003, Madoko Saito first set out to consider what she termed "the unexplored" relationship between Sen's capability approach to well-being and education. Even though Sen, Nussbaum, and Gasper had, in the 1990s, all written about capabilities and education, it was Saito who began a trend for commentators from *within* education to consider the scope of the capability approach for questions about education as theory, practice, and a field of empirical research.

educational inquiry, education is itself a particular creative space for the capabilities approach.”

The work done on the capability approach and education can, according to Unterhalter (2009: 217), be grouped into three categories:

1. Those who have adopted the language of functionings, capabilities, and conversion factors (i.e. how resources are translated into capabilities), and have applied it to education by focusing on the value of education and the processes for evaluating it.
2. Those who have investigated the manner in which the capability approach intersects with other discussions about human rights, equality, and social justice in education, looking closely at particular aspects of education such as curriculum, higher education pedagogy, gender inequality, as well as disability and special educational needs.
3. Those who employ the capability approach to analyse data on children’s or adults’ views of learning, the value of education, and of measurement.

As discussed in chapter 2 of this thesis, Amartya Sen defines basic capabilities as a subset of all capabilities (Sen 1992: 44). Terzi (2007: 25) asserts that the capability to be educated is a basic and fundamental capability since it contributes to the quality of life as well as the formation and expansion of human capabilities. Terzi (2007: 25-35) further asserts that the capability to be educated can be considered a basic capability in two interrelated ways:

1. Education is critically important with regard to people’s well-being. Thus, the absence or lack of this opportunity, broadly understood in terms of real opportunities both for informal learning and for formal schooling, would negatively impact and substantially disadvantage the individual. This is specifically, although not exclusively, the case for children, for whom the absence of education or quality education, both in terms of informal learning and formal schooling, results in disadvantage that proves difficult, and, in some cases, impossible to compensate later in life. A striking example of this need for education is represented by the case of feral children. Studies of feral children (i.e. children who lived in the wild or in cages, and were deprived of any form of learning for a substantial period of their childhood), demonstrate the profound harm caused by the absence of education. In these cases, not only are language and broader communicative functionings substantially harmed, but reasoning and learning functionings are also compromised. The example of feral children highlights the

importance of education for the formation of human capabilities as well as, more generally, appears to confirm the understanding of the capability to be educated as addressing an individual's basic need.

A further aspect of the capability to be educated as an essential requirement relates to its greater context-dependence if compared, for example, to the capability to be well-nourished. The capability to be educated entails, to a greater extent than the capability to be well-nourished, considerations regarding the design of social arrangements, which are more relevant with regard to education than in relation to hunger. Hence, determining the level at which a person is considered well-nourished seems more straightforward than adjudicating the level at which a person is educated. This relates to considerations concerning the complexity of education, which are well captured in the second way in which the capability to be educated can be considered a basic capability.

2. The capability to be educated can be considered a basic capability because it is both fundamental and foundational to the capabilities necessary to achieve well-being, and hence a good life, since it plays a substantial role in the expansion of both other and future capabilities. This is illustrated in the case of learning mathematics. Formally learning mathematics not only expands the individual's various functionings related to mathematical reasoning and problem solving, but also broadens the individual's sets of opportunities and capabilities, with regard to both more complex capabilities and better prospects for opportunities in life. The expansion of capabilities entailed by education extends to choices of occupations as well as certain levels of social and political participation. These considerations result in an understanding of the capability to be educated as a fundamental capability, which includes basic capabilities in terms of those enabling beings and doings that are fundamental in meeting the basic need to be educated, and are equally foundational to both the promotion and expansion of higher, more complex capabilities.

Education has both instrumental (a means to an end) and intrinsic (an end in itself) value. It has instrumental value in that it is a means to other valuable goods, such as better life prospects, career opportunities, and civic participation. In essence, being educated improves one's opportunities in life. Education, and specifically formal schooling, promotes the achievement of important levels of knowledge and skills

acquisition, which play a crucial role in agency and well-being. Education also has intrinsic value, i.e. it is valuable in itself. Being educated, other things being equal, enhances the possibility of appreciating and engaging in a wide range of activities that are rewarding for their own sake. For example, being initiated through education into the appreciation of poetry, or different kinds of music, or aspects of wildlife in natural environments, relates to a personal fulfilment that is not instrumental in improving one's circumstances (better jobs or positions for example), but results in a freer and more fulfilling life. Ultimately, both the instrumental and the intrinsic aspects of education concern the enhancement of freedom, in terms of both well-being and agency freedom.

Terzi further contends that the conception of the capability to be educated as a basic capability highlights how it (i.e. the capability to be educated) constitutes a fundamental entitlement, and why its provision becomes a matter of justice. The capability approach requires focusing on the contribution that the capability to be educated makes to the formation and expansion of human capabilities, and consequently to the contribution it makes to the opportunities people have to lead flourishing lives.

From the perspective of the capability approach, education is a basic capability that enhances freedom and is linked to the expansion of other valuable capabilities (Unterhalter 2009: 214):

- Education fulfils an *instrumental social role*. For example, literacy can foster public debate and dialogue about social and political arrangements.
- Education also has an *instrumental process role* in facilitating our capacity to participate in decision-making processes at the household, community, or national level.
- Education plays *empowering and distributive role* in facilitating the ability of disadvantaged, marginalised, and excluded groups to organise politically since, without education, these groups would be unable to gain access to centres of power and make a case for redistribution to begin with.
- Education has *redistributive* effects between social groups, households, and within families.

- Education has an *interpersonal* impact because people are able to use the benefits of education to help others as well as themselves and can therefore contribute to democratic freedoms and the overall good of society as a whole.

Having the opportunity for education and the development of an education capability expands human freedoms; whereas not having education harms human development as well as choosing and having a full life (Walker & Unterhalter 2007: 8). However, as Flores-Crespo (2007: 60-61) states: “In order to situate education within the capability approach, it is necessary to recognise the simple but important fact that educational process normally occurs within institutions, that knowledge is achieved through written and visual material, that pupils are guided by teachers, and that generally students are educated by having an intense social interaction with others. The school environment, therefore, entails diverse factors that may condition the acquisition of knowledge, the development of reason, and therefore, our present and future human freedoms. Education can certainly contribute to the expansion of capabilities, but, under certain conditions, it can also function with the opposite result.”

Concerning the question of whether the capability approach is applicable to children, Saito (2003: 25-26) notes the following:

- The question of whether the capability approach is applicable to children comes from the notion that lies at the core of the concept of the capability approach, i.e. the notion of capability as freedom: the range of options a person has in deciding what kind of life to lead. Can the well-being of children be discussed in terms of capabilities in the same way as that of adults?
- Few would deny that children require support from parents, teachers, or societies in choosing what is best for their lives. The same argument can be made with regard to education. Despite the fact that neither parents nor the government have a right to complete authority over the education of children, it seems appropriate to say that a child remains in the care of others in the choice of what to learn, so that the child’s interests can be facilitated. Therefore, although functionings (i.e. the things that a person can effectively be and do in life) are important for children, concerning capabilities in children, the matter seems complicated and problematic.
- How can the capability approach be applied to children when they are not mature enough to make decisions by themselves? It is important to bear in mind not only the

freedom that a child has in the present, but also the freedom that the child will have in the future. Adopting extreme position of liberation with regard to a child is irrational and irresponsible. Not making an effort to teach a child anything because one does not know what is good or bad for the child does not lead to an improvement of the child's well-being: allowing children to learn what they wanted in this way might very well restrict the range of possible things which they might choose for their own sake (White 1973: 22). Granting temporary freedom to a child does not always mean that the child will have freedom in future, and similarly, restricting the temporary freedom of a child may well expand the freedom that the child will have in future. It is, therefore, important to consider the freedom of children from a lifelong perspective.

- The capability approach makes two assertions: (1) that the right perspective from which to assess a person's well-being is functionings, and not necessarily mental attitudes such as utilities; and (2) that in assessing from the perspective of functionings, we should not merely consider whether a person is enjoying the preferred alternative, but whether a person actually has the choice of (i.e. the freedom to choose) an alternative. It is the second aspect that is weak for the child, but the first aspect is not. The functioning space (i.e. 1) is still appropriate to think about, even the well-being of the child. The freedom aspect (i.e. 2) is affected, but even the freedom aspect may be important for a child because: (A) a child makes some decisions, like whether he or she is being unhappy, wants milk, and so forth; and (B) a child's future involves the time when the child will actually exercise some freedom.
- It is the freedom that a child will have in the future rather than the present that should be considered when dealing with children. Therefore, as long as a person's capabilities are considered in terms of their life-span, the capability approach seems to be applicable to children. The fact that children require the support of parents, society, or others in choosing which capabilities to exercise will lead us to consider what role education can and should play in the capability approach.

Concerning the education of children, Biggeri (2007: 199), identifies five issues related to children's capabilities:

1. The first issue relates to the fact that children's capabilities are at least partially affected by the capability set and achieved functionings (as well as by the means, i.e.

assets, disposable income, etc.) of their parents or guardians, as a consequence of a cumulative path-dependent process that can involve generations of human beings.

2. The second issue concerns the possibility of converting capabilities into functionings depends also on parents', guardians', and teachers' decisions, which implies that the child's conversion factors are subject to further constraint. Parents or guardians need to respect children's desires and freedoms, while helping children (sometimes against their will) to expand or acquire further capabilities. This is relevant to the education capability as parents and teachers employ methods that are either autonomy supporting or controlling (these two methods are not, however, mutually exclusive). These two approaches can be in conflict since the child is not a passive actor, but an autonomous agent whose autonomy increases with age. Thus, the degree of autonomy is relevant to the process of choice.
3. The third issue is connected to the relationship between different capabilities and functionings. The fact that education is a basic capability with an intrinsic value means that it can be, and usually is, instrumental for other capabilities, i.e. it affects the current and prospective capabilities of a child.
4. The fourth issue concerns the life cycle and the importance of age in defining the relevance of a capability. Accordingly, a careful timing of interventions is required for a child's well-being. This includes different types of education objectives according to the age and maturity of the child.
5. The fifth and final issue concerns the role and potential of children in building-up future society and its constraints. Children, from this perspective, as change agents who, as they grow older, can contribute to shaping future conversion factors.

Saito (2003: 27-29) examines two issues “in order to understand what the role of education should be in the capability approach and what kind of education best implements this approach”:

1. The Expansion of Capabilities

Education plays a role in the expansion of capabilities. The term “expansion” relates to two different, though mutually related, aspects of capabilities. One is the expansion of a child's capacity or ability. Kate, for example, learns how to swim. Education, therefore, enables Kate

to acquire a capability to swim. The other aspect is the expansion in opportunities that a child has as a consequence of education. Lisa, for example, learns mathematics and as a result has a wider range of opportunities available to her to become a mathematician, a physicist, a banker, and so forth. These newly acquired capabilities and opportunities may be ones that Lisa was unaware of, and which were not in her “capability set”, prior to her learning mathematics. She may not even have aimed to acquire those new capability sets when she started learning mathematics. There are many opportunities in our everyday life that we are not aware of, and education can play a role in this regard. Lisa, in this example, learns mathematics and therefore becomes more autonomous in being able to choose her way of life (i.e. become a mathematician or a physicist, etc.). Education enhances a child’s agency or autonomy with regard to creating a new capability set for the child.

Education makes a child autonomous by creating a new capability set for the child. White (1973: 23) argues that “the child must become autonomous, to be sure, on the completion of his education”, in spite of the fact that he does not advocate any necessary commitment to an autonomous way of life. White argues that it is entirely up to the individual to, once autonomy has been achieved, decide whether to stay autonomous or not. In order for the child to be able to make choices in her life, the child needs to become autonomous through education. Education that plays a role in expanding capabilities should be a kind of education that facilitates the attainment of autonomy.

## 2. Teaching Values in Exercising Capabilities

Education plays a role in teaching values in the exercise of capabilities. Since the importance of expanding capabilities through education has been noted, it is important to address the question of which values should govern the exercise of capabilities. For example, it is important to address the question: is it appropriate to enhance any capability?

Sen would respond affirmatively, since capabilities per se are, in his view, always good. However, it is not clear whether this is the case. For example, David has a capability related to physical power. Using this capability to physically assault his wife is neither socially nor morally acceptable. However, Sen would argue that although the outcome may be bad, the capability per se is not bad since David could use this capability to carry heavy things for his wife. Another example is that of James who possesses the capability to kill Philip. It would

be unacceptable for James to kill Philip. However, it would not be appropriate to simply say that the capability is unacceptable or bad. The outcome may be unacceptable, but James' capability to kill Philip could also be used as an act of self-defence if his life were threatened by Philip. Therefore, according to Sen's argument, capabilities per se are non-separable, and bad capabilities per se do not exist. Capabilities can be judged to be good or bad only in their use.

Nussbaum, on the other hand, criticises this aspect of Sen's argument in relation to freedom. She is not satisfied with Sen's idea that "freedom per se is always good, although it can be badly used". She uses the example of the freedom of a motorcycle rider to ride without a helmet. According to Nussbaum, freedom is "neutral and trivial in itself, probably bad in use", rather than "always good" (Nussbaum 2001: 24). If Sen insists that bad capabilities per se do not exist, and that it is rather the way that they are used that are bad, Nussbaum's argument in relation to the concept of freedom also seems to be applicable to the notion of capabilities. Articulated differently, we should say that capabilities are "neutral in themselves, possibly bad in use", rather than "always good".

What role does education play in the exercising of capabilities that are neutral? Scheffler, like Sen, considers capability to be a notion linked to freedom, and defines it as "embracing what comes within the range of a person's effective choice, effort, or decision – what it is in a person's power to do and what, in that sense, he is effectively free to do" (Scheffler 1985: 59). Scheffler (1985: 61) argues that if a person has a capability, "it is within the effective range of his decision whether or not he acquires the feature in question"; to enhance one's capability to perform is to empower oneself to perform. For example, empowering Tim to swim means that if he desires and chooses to swim, he will. However, empowering Tim to swim does not mean that he will choose to swim. Empowering Tim to swim and getting him to value swimming is not the same thing. Empowering "stops short of the promotion of positive valuation of the performance in question; it creates the capability, skill, or power, leaving the matter of valuation, exercise, or decision open" (Scheffler 1985: 61).

Education can play a role in teaching different values to a child. The outcome yielded through one's actions as a consequence of being empowered may not always be considered good. In other words, creating and enhancing capabilities through facilitating empowerment does not involve valuing whether the outcome of the use of a given capability is good or bad. As Scheffler (1985: 61) puts it, capabilities are "so interwoven that such divisions are not, in

general, possible. To keep the learning of poisoning out of his range of decision would also keep the learning of healing out of his range of decision”.

Education should, therefore, play a role in supplementing the enhancement of capabilities while simultaneously paying attention to values. For example, we may want Mary to become a mathematician or an artist, but not a drug addict or a murderer. In order for Mary to become what we would wish for her to be rather than what we do not wish for her to be, it would be necessary to develop her ability to recognise and appreciate in which ways it would be appropriate for her to use the capabilities she acquired and developed through education, and vice versa. The issue of values and attitudes is critical to avoid the abuse of capabilities.

Thus, the kind of education that best embodies the concept of the capability approach seems to be one that enhances people’s freedom and, simultaneously, develops their judgement (i.e. values and attitudes) pertaining to capabilities and the exercise thereof.

Unterhalter (2009: 17) argues that the capability approach, and the distinction it makes between functionings and capabilities, is very useful in education as it provides a useful language with which to articulate both the learning processes and social value of education: The concept of capability stresses the real freedoms a pupil has to make informed choices in order to achieve a life she has reason to value. Capabilities are the real opportunities and options pupils have to strive for certain educational achievements. For example, being literate and numerate or well-regarded as an educated person, being knowledgeable about history, being able to participate in a discussion with other pupils, and being respected by teachers and peers in school are important achievements that the capability approach stresses. Evaluating only functionings or outcomes can provide too little information on how well people are doing. In some cases it may appear that two people have achieved the same functionings, but, behind these equal outcomes, very different stories may in fact be hidden.

Unterhalter (2009: 218) offers an example to illustrate why educational evaluations should take into account individual freedoms and capabilities as much as observed functionings: Imagine two 13-year old girls from Kenya. Both girls participated in an international study of learning achievements and have both failed mathematics. One attended a well-equipped school in Nairobi with qualified and motivated teachers who offered adequate learning support. Despite this, she failed. One of the primary reasons she failed the mathematics examination was her decision to spend less time on preparing for the examination and more time with friends in the drama club and other leisure activities. The other girl attended a

school in Wajir, one of the poorest districts in Kenya, and showed great interest in mathematics and school work generally. Despite this, she failed her examination simply because of the lack of a proper mathematics teacher at her school. Although private lessons after school were available, her parents could not afford this service for all their children. They chose to give priority to their son and required their daughter to perform housework and childcare. She, therefore, had little time to prepare for the mathematics examination.

Unterhalter (2009: 218), by means of the abovementioned example, illustrates how the decision to evaluate educational outcomes in terms of capabilities or functionings results in different conclusions: If one looks only at functionings – in this example, performance in examinations – one sees equal (if regrettable) outcomes. But while the functionings of the two girls are the same, their capabilities are different. The capability approach requires that we do not simply evaluate functionings – the actual achievements – but the real freedom or opportunities that each girl has to choose and achieve what she values. Our evaluation of equality must therefore take account of freedom in opportunities as much as in observed choices.

A person's well-being, from the perspective of the capability approach, must be judged by an assessment of the functionings achieved by that person, as it is this capability to achieve functionings that reflects the person's real opportunities or freedom of choice between possible lifestyles (Sen 1992: 39). With regard to education, from the perspective of the capability approach, it is not enough to simply evaluate educational resources, inputs, and outputs such as number of teachers and teacher quality, teacher to pupil ratio, availability and quality of learning materials, quality of school leadership and management, or years of schooling completed. From the perspective of the capability approach, it is necessary to consider and assess whether pupils are able to actually *convert* educational resources, inputs, and outcomes into capabilities, and subsequently into functionings.

Unterhalter (2009: 218) asserts that: "Using the capability approach as a method to evaluate educational advantage, and equally to identify disadvantage, marginalisation, and exclusion, entails another perspective on public policy in education. It requires that educational policy pay attention to the transition from capabilities to functionings, and to the conversion factors that affect them. From the perspective of the human development and capability approach, educational policy focuses on the freedoms individuals and social groups have to achieve valued functionings (the capability set) and the ways in which conversion works to limit or

expand these capabilities. Conversion might work both internally (with regard to how individuals learn or understand the value of education) and externally (with a bearing on the quality of school provision, the level of teacher knowledge and capacity to put this into practice, forms of discrimination, such as education privileges some learners might have, and so on).”

Capabilities to undertake valued and valuable activities should thus constitute an indispensable and central aspect in the evaluation of educational policy appropriateness and educational inputs and outcomes.

## Challenges

Unterhalter, Vaughan, & Walker (2007: 7) point out that there are numerous challenges concerning the operationalization of the capability approach with regard to education:

- One challenge relates to measurement. To gain an understanding of what are considered to be valuable functionings, individual interviews seem appropriate. However, despite the apparent appropriateness of individual interviews, there are problems evaluating the “real” aspirations of children and young people. How can it be determined if and when a person’s preferences have been modified by the particular social arrangements in which they have been raised? One way to overcome this challenge is to use achieved functionings as proxies for certain educational capabilities. For example, test results can be taken as evidence that a pupil has the capability to function as a knowledgeable learner in a particular subject.
- Another challenge concerns questions relating to how much freedom and capabilities children should have in education. To what extent should the values of children be taken into account in relation to their schooling? For example, a child may say that it is valuable to her to watch television rather than going to school; or that it is important to her to not study mathematics at all. However, in the long-term, these scenarios may have a negative impact on her future capabilities. This highlights one problematic aspect of the capability approach, i.e. the potential for conflict between a person’s freedom and well-being. While adults may choose to forfeit their individual well-being in favour of another valued outcome, balancing children’s current values with

their future freedom and well-being can be a difficult task. If an adult makes decisions about what contributes to the well-being of a child, this may simultaneously ignore other important well-being aspects such as the child's own ideas and choices about what is good for her. However, this tension between freedom and well-being is also dependant on how well-being is defined.<sup>20</sup>

- A further challenge is that the educational process itself imparts values. Thus, while the capability approach requires observing what is valuable to an individual, that person's definition of a valuable functioning may have been determined by her educational experiences. For example, imagine a community in which women are ridiculed and discriminated against if they are not adept at cooking and housework. Without further clarification, the capability approach could hypothetically be used to argue that teaching women domestic skills will provide them with greater capabilities and freedoms.



## **The Value of Conceptualising Education using the Capability Approach**

Conceptualising education from the perspective of the capability approach requires assessing educational inputs and outcomes in terms of capabilities and functionings. The capability approach offers a useful perspective on education by evaluating learning opportunities, processes, and outcomes by considering whether these enable the attainment of valued beings and doings (Unterhalter 2009: 221). The capability approach considers the availability and distribution of valued capabilities in and through education, as well as opportunities to convert capabilities to functionings.

The capability approach assesses educational appropriateness and effectiveness in terms of freedom to promote or achieve valuable beings and doings (Sen 1992: 5). This idea of freedom “respects our being free to determine what we want, what we value, and ultimately what we decide to choose” (Sen 2010: 232).

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<sup>20</sup> In negotiating the concept of “well-being” it is important to note the difference between Amartya Sen, who distinguishes between well-being and agency, and therefore between well-being freedom and agency freedom; and Martha Nussbaum, who uses a broad definition of well-being that encompasses the notion of agency within it.

The capability approach expands the notion of quality education in terms of both inputs and outcomes. From the perspective of the capability approach, quality education, in terms of outcomes, entails more than just teaching children to read, write, and count well. Quality education, from the perspective of the capability approach, entails providing children with the competencies required to both determine what a valuable or worthwhile life is and to pursue it.



## Section B

### The State of South Africa's Primary and Secondary Public Schooling System

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#### **Legacy of Apartheid with regard to Education in a Nutshell**

No analysis of the causes of poverty in South Africa, which is linked to inequality in the political economy, can ignore the consequences of the philosophy and practices of “Christian National Education” as it unfolded over the years (Wilson & Ramphele 1989: 225). Christian National Education embodied the principle of segregated education with the express purpose of making education among “white” and “black” South Africans unequal and thereby keep “black” South Africans trapped in poverty (Abebe & Maxted 2002: 63).

Vally, Chisholm, & Motala (1998: 7) highlight the history of formal education in South Africa: Formal schooling in South Africa has its roots in mission and colonial forms of education. The first school for slaves was established in 1658. Predating apartheid, and through the colonial period, education was designed and structured to both fit “black” people into subordinate positions in the racially structured division of labour and to reproduce this structure.

One of apartheid's greatest crimes was the provision of substandard education to “black” people, which entailed the destruction caused by the National Party government as it attempted crush or straightjacket famous centres of “black” education such as Lovedale, Fort Hare, Healdtown, St Peters, and Adams College (Wilson & Ramphele 1989: 226). In the 1950s, through the implementation of the Bantu education system, schooling for “Africans” was removed from missionary control and placed under the auspices of a state committed to “white” supremacy and the pursuit of its discriminatory policies through education.

Vally, Chisholm, & Motala (1989: 7) assert that the education system designed and implemented by the apartheid government employed categories of “race”, class, gender, and ethnicity to serve and reinforce the political economy of the racial capitalist apartheid system. Furthermore, the founding legislative provisions contained in, inter alia, the Bantu Education Act explicitly linked education for “black” people through to the broader goal of political and

socio-economic domination of all “black” people (Vally, Chisholm, & Motala 1989: 7). Education, for decades, operated under the shadow of the Bantu Education Act of 1953 (Branson & Zuze 2012: 69).

In 1953, H. F. Verwoerd, the then Minister of Native Affairs, made the following statement regarding the impending introduction of the Bantu Education Act (Bloch 2009: 43-44): “There is no room for him (the Bantu) in the European community above the level of certain forms of labour...for that reason it is of no avail for him to receive training which has as its aim absorption in the European community, where he cannot be absorbed. Until now he has been subjected to a school system which drew him away from his own Community and misled him by showing ever, him the green pastures of European society in which he was not allowed to graze.”

Vally, Chisholm, & Motala (1989: 7) note: The expansion of public primary and secondary schooling for “Africans” in the 1960s and 1970s occurred in the context of the development of the Bantustan policy in terms of which “African” political aspirations were to be redirected to artificially economically unviable homelands.<sup>21</sup> It also occurred on the basis of unequal spending on education for children administered under “white”, “Indian”/“Asian”, “coloured”, “black African”, and different Bantustan education departments. However, the expansion of poor quality education in the context of political and economic oppression resulted in the growth of massive resistance in the youth.

The resistance of the youth culminated in the Soweto Uprising on 16 June 1976, a day which irreversibly transformed the political landscape of South Africa. Concerning this well-known day in South Africa, Abebe & Maxted (2002: 69) note the following: “The long day of 16 June also kick-started the first form of countering “white” control of schools: schools were burned down. During the following days fifty Transvaal (now Gauteng) schools were damaged by fire: while street fighting between youths and police demanded a certain minimum town size, arson attacks could and did spread to very small towns. Schools burning became the primary transmitter of the metropolitan unrest to the rural areas, including the homelands. When the schools reopened after the winter holiday on 22 July, the other main form of resistance to Bantu education started with the widespread boycotts of classes. The school boycotts became massive when the police raided schools to capture the leaders of the

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<sup>21</sup> Chapter 5, Section C, titled: “Poverty and inequality in South Africa”, provides a more in-depth account of the establishment and purposes of the Bantustan policy which established these homelands.

Soweto Students Representative Council (SRC). The schools remained empty for the rest of the year (and the following year).” Resistance in education pertaining to the goals, control, and quality of education was a feature throughout the 1980’s (Vally, Chisholm, & Motala 1989: 7).

The growth of private provision of education, note Vally, Chisholm, & Motala (1989: 8), occurred in the 1980s as state schools were either unable or unwilling to admit “black” children: The majority of “black” children who failed their final year of secondary schooling (i.e. Matric) could not be reabsorbed into the system. Furthermore, age restrictions had been imposed on the entry to secondary schools since the early 1980s. As a result, private schools began admitting increasing numbers of “black” children, but prohibitive fees meant that they were restricted to children whose parents could afford the fees. In the 1980s, the number of alternative schools, whose fees and standards varied as widely as their ability to be self-sustaining, increased in an attempt to absorb increasing numbers of children. In 1990, as a result of increasing pressure, “white”-only schools were permitted to admit “black” students under limited conditions which included that the school remained 51 percent “white” and that the ethos and character of the school was maintained.

The number of “African” children who matriculated began to increase dramatically from 1979 onwards (Snyman 2012: 473): This could possibly be explained by the events following the Soweto riots of 1976, which highlighted the glaring inadequacies of the Bantu education system. After the Soweto uprising and the ensuing riots, several suggestions were put forward to reform the Bantu Education Act of 1953. On 29 December 1976, the minister of Bantu education, M. C. Botha, announced several reforms to improve the quality of education for “Africans”. These included that compulsory education was to be phased in from January 1977, and that more adult education centres were to be opened to assist private candidates, including teachers, who wished to improve their qualifications, to prepare for the Junior and Senior Certificate examinations.

As Abebe & Macted (2002: 68) note, these efforts to reform the system failed: These failures were probably inevitable given the fact that Bantu education was unfair and racist. Bantu education was so structured that “white” people generally had innumerable advantages over “black” people in acquiring the requisite skills to obtain jobs at the upper end of the economic scale.

“Black” schools under apartheid education were characterised by: minimal levels of resources, inadequately trained and few staff, poor quality learning materials, shortages of classrooms, and the absence of laboratories and libraries. In addition to these tangible and structural deprivations, schools also inculcated unquestioning conformity, rote learning, autocratic teaching and authoritarian management styles, and antiquated forms of assessment and evaluation (Vally, Chisholm, & Motala 1989: 8).

Welsh (2000: 446-447; 474), with regard to the apartheid government’s approach to education, notes: “One of the most damaging of the (Hans) Strydom government’s proposals was the 1953 Bantu Education Bill, drafted by the Minister for Native Affairs, Dr Hendrik Verwoerd, the Prime Minister’s right-hand man. This was intended to be the knockout blow against the Afrikaner’s greatest enemy, the missionaries. Ever since (Dr Theodorus) van der Kemp and James Read had begun their work among the Hottentots, and John Philip circulated his bitter criticism of the Boers, animosities between English-speaking missionaries, who had established a “black” education system right up to university level which had produced dozens of worryingly talented, mature, and impressive “black” leaders, had permeated Afrikaner society. Ninety percent of all schools were state-aided mission institutions, and they were given the options of handing over to the (apartheid) government or facing financial extinction...Under the new system there was to be an end to this education for leadership and professional studies, and its replacement with a strictly-controlled curriculum more suitable to the requirements of a permanent underclass. Elementary education was to be in whatever Bantu language was spoken by the pupils, and was aimed at producing useful hands: there was to be ‘no place for [the “black”] in the European community above the level of certain forms of labour’. Wherever possible expenditure was curtailed, hours reduced, and parents expected to clean the classrooms, but the number of pupils was indeed increased and nominated school boards were introduced. The education system ‘lost its best and most competent “white” teachers, and for the next decade the quality of education deteriorated considerably’. Although the policy of ‘Bantu education’ had increased the numbers of students considerably, school conditions for “blacks” were miserable...”

## **Education in Constitutional Democratic South Africa**

Education is a universal human right that is high on the agenda of the international commitment. The goal of achieving universal primary education (UPE) has been a priority of the international community since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights affirmed in 1948, that elementary education was to be made free and compulsory for all (UNESCO 2004: 19). UPE is an objective that has been restated on many occasions in international treaties and United Nations conference declarations.<sup>22</sup> Thus, “there is a universal moral imperative for all people, irrespective of citizenship or national legislation, to have opportunities for formal education” (Lake & Pendlebury 2009: 19).

In South Africa, which is a constitutional democracy, the right to education is guaranteed by the Constitution. Section 29[1](a) of the Bill of Rights in the Constitution establishes the “right to basic education” – for both children and adults – as an immediate right that is unqualified by any limitation related to progressive realisation (Constitution 2011: 15). Basic education is compulsory in Grades 1-9, or for children aged 7-15 (Hall 2012: 95). Furthermore, section 29[1](b) of the Constitution provides the right “to further education, which the state, through reasonable measures, must make progressively available and accessible” (Constitution 2011: 16). In other words, children who have completed basic education (i.e. Grades 1-9) also have a right to further education (Grades 10-12), which the state must take reasonable measures to make available (Hall 2012: 95).

Thus, the state is obliged to “pass laws, develop policies, and establish programmes that” – in accordance with Section 7[2] of the Constitution – “respect, protect, promote, and fulfil the rights in the Bill of Rights”, which includes the right to education (Constitution 2011: 7). As a consequence, the right to education is justiciable and the state can be challenged in court if it does not meet its constitutional obligations (Lake & Pendlebury 2009: 19).

The obligation of the state to “respect, protect, promote, and fulfil” the right to basic education imposes a related set duties (Lake & Pendlebury 2009: 22):

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<sup>22</sup> For example: Article 11(3)(a) of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child states that “State Parties to the present Charter shall take all appropriate measures with a view to achieving the full realisation of this right and shall in particular...provide free and compulsory basic education”. Article 28 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child recognises “the right of the child to education” and also obliges the state to “make primary education compulsory and available free to all”.

- “the obligation to respect requires the state to avoid measures that prevent children’s enjoyment of the right to basic education;
- the obligation to protect requires the state to prevent others (for example, parents and caregivers) from interfering with children’s enjoyment of the right to basic education;
- the obligation to promote imposes a duty on the state to encourage educational participation and to make citizens aware of their educational rights; and
- the obligation to fulfil imposes a duty on the state to take positive measures that enable all children to enjoy the right to basic education”.

The South African education system has undergone major policy changes following the first democratic elections in 1994. The Department of Basic Education (DBE) categorises these policy changes according to three broad phases (DBE 2012a: 7): policy formulation; concentrated implementation efforts; and policy reformulation or revision to address challenges identified during the implementation phase.

Since the advent of democracy, in 1994, as a result of an impressive array of laws, regulations, and policies focused on creating a more equitable and accessible public education system, there has been significant amending of the education landscape in South Africa (Branson & Zuze 2012: 69; Lake & Pendlebury 2009: 22; Chisholm 2004: 1; Bloch 2010a: 12; NPC 2011b: 13): Education control has been decentralised, and schools, colleges, technikons, and universities have been opened to all “races”. Apartheid education systems and Bantustan establishments were amalgamated into a single national department<sup>23</sup> responsible for broad policy, and provincial departments responsible for delivery. The SA

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<sup>23</sup> The Department of Education, which oversaw the education and training system of South Africa, was a single department of the South African government until 2009, when it was divided into the Department of Basic Education and the Department of Higher Education and Training. Snyman (2012: 422) outlines the responsibilities of both departments: According to the South African Schools Act of 1996, the Department of Basic Education’s function is to develop, maintain, and support the schooling system through administrative and strategic support, while the management of schools falls under the auspices of the various provincial governments. The Further Education and Training Colleges Amendment Act of 2012 placed public further education and training colleges under the auspices of the Department of Higher Education and Training (such institutions were previously under the auspices of provincial government). The Department of Higher Education and Training is responsible for the appropriation of funds to public higher education and training institutions as well as establishing minimum norms and standards.

Schools Act of 1996 laid the foundation for a non-racial approach to education. Education budgets are designed, in principle, to achieve equitable outcomes as well as to overcome the racial inequalities that characterised apartheid budgeting allocations. In 1994, for every two rand spent on an “African” child, government spent about five rand on a “white” child; whereas today, recurrent per capita spending is higher for “African” children than it is for “white” children.

Other significant educational achievements since 1994 include (Bloch 2010a: 12; Hall 2012: 95): Access to and participation in education has increased significantly. Access to primary and secondary public schooling has improved to near universal enrolment. Amongst children of school-going age (7-17 years) the vast majority (97 percent) attended some form of educational facility in 2010. The participation rate of girls is amongst the highest in the world. Poor pupils and those who cannot afford them are exempted from paying school fees.

South Africa’s education expenditure can be described as respectable for an upper-middle-income country. Education spending has increased greatly since 1995, from R31.1 billion to R165 billion in 2010/11 (Finn, Leibbrandt, & Wenger 2011: 79). The total state expenditure on education in 2012 was projected to be R190 billion. This is set to increase to R215 billion in 2013/14. The largest share of state expenditure, over 17 percent, goes towards funding education programmes; this figure is higher than guesstimates for both developed and developing countries (12 percent and 16 percent respectively) (Branson & Zuze 2012: 70).

However, although education is the highest item of budgetary expenditure in South Africa, and even though per capita expenditure has increased substantially in both nominal and real terms since 1995, state expenditure on schooling as a percentage of the country’s GDP declined from 4.9 percent in 1995 to 4.1 percent in 2009, and education’s share of state expenditure decreased from 22 percent in 1996/97 to 17.7 percent in 2009/10 (Chisholm 2011: 52).

Government policy in the education sector in the first ten years of democracy (1994-2004) was dominated by considerations of equity and access (Taylor, Fleisch, & Shindler 2007: 42). However, the near universal enrolment and high levels of school attendance that have been attained does not say much about the quality of teaching and learning that occurs in primary and secondary public schools (Murambiwa & Hall 2011: 96). The link between access and success is very weak in South Africa’s primary and secondary public schools.

“It follows therefore”, as Professor Jonathan Jansen – an educationalist as well as the Rector and Vice-Chancellor of the University of the Free State – puts it, “that access for whom (equity), access for how long (retention), access to what (curriculum), and access for success (achievement) are much more complicated than often suggested in policy and planning” (Jansen 2009: 8). Furthermore, it had become apparent by the end of this period that, although the structures of apartheid had been largely dismantled, its legacy with regard to vast disparities in quality within the system persisted. It has also become clear that South Africa’s performance in the education sector is very poor in any comparative terms, despite high levels of spending.

Chisholm (2011: 50) cites the DBE<sup>24</sup> itself, when pointing out that despite the “improvements in more equitable spending, relieving poor schools of fee burdens, introducing nutrition, increasing the number of children attending Grade R classes, achieving near-universal enrolment in the compulsory phase of schooling, and dramatically expanding the number of qualified teachers in the system, learning outcomes are still abysmal by any measure”.

The South African education system is complex. Although the legislative framework is comparable to the best in developed countries, the translation of these policies into effective practices remains a major challenge given the contextual challenges: in spite of the impressive progress in education legislation, policy development, curriculum reform, and implementation of new ways of delivering education, challenges remain as educational outcomes across schools are still unequal (DBE 2012a: 7).

It is, argues Alexander (2010: 7), a “patently obvious fact that fundamental mistakes of a conceptual, strategic, and political-pedagogical character were made in the process of transition from apartheid to post-apartheid education during the period 1993-1998 approximately”. Bloch (2010b: 70) argues that since 1994, South Africa lost its focus and direction in education; thus, despite the real achievements and increase in expenditure since 1994, the South African education system in general, and its primary and secondary public schooling system in particular, has a range of complex problems. Most knowledgeable educationalists and practitioners concur that the phrases “*poor quality*” and *in “a state of chronic crisis”* aptly describe South Africa’s education system today (Bloch 2010a: 13; Alexander 2010: 7). The National Planning Commission has concluded that the task of

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<sup>24</sup> Department of Basic Education (2011a)

improving the quality of education available to the majority (in conjunction with the task of increasing employment) ought to be South Africa's highest priority (NPC 2011c: 3-4).

Professor Jonathan Jansen (2011: 10-11) describes the primary and secondary public schooling system as a “crisis of having two school systems in a sea of inequality”; one a small, elite, well-functioning system for the “black” and “white” middle-classes, and the other a massive, dysfunctional, impoverished system (which annually fails hundreds of thousands of pupils) for the majority of poor “black” children. Jansen, according to an article published by one of South Africa's premier online news sources – *Independent Online*<sup>25</sup>, has said that it can no longer be denied (by the state) that there is a crisis in education when it is clear that it only benefits a small percentage of middle-class learners. “Black” rural and poor township schools effectively “form a second system of education”<sup>26</sup> that traps participants behind massive blocks (2010b: 74). The bimodality of South African pupil performance (two distinct groups performing very differently to each other – one underperforming relative to international standards, the other performing at abysmally low levels) is a feature of every nationally representative dataset that exists for South Africa: it is impervious to the grade or subject under assessment or the dataset under analysis; and can be seen as early as Grade 3, and remains unabated until the national school leaving examination (Spaull 2013: 36).

Mamphela Ramphele, academic and former Rector and Vice-Chancellor of the University of Cape Town, has, as reported by the *Mail & Guardian Online*<sup>27</sup>, stated that South Africa's current education system is worse than the “gutter education” the country had under the

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<sup>25</sup> Article published by *Independent Online (IOL)* on 3 October 2012.

<sup>26</sup> Concerning the nature of the two “sub-systems” of education that exists in South Africa, van der Berg, Burger, Burger, de Vos, du Rand, Gustafsson, Moses, Shepard, Spaull, Taylor, van Broekhuizen, & van Fintel (2011: 11) note the following: Many social commentators have used the idea of “two economies” or “two South Africas” to describe the divided nature of various features of present-day South African society. This includes South Africa's education system which can be described as comprising two “sub-systems” whose historical backgrounds and outcomes vary. The majority of children in South African are served by the historically disadvantaged sub-system. This sub-system is still disadvantaged as a result of poverty as well as the educationally detrimental factors associated with it. Children served by this sub-system typically demonstrate low proficiency in literacy and numeracy. The other sub-system is the historically advantaged system, which comprises “white” or former Model-C schools, produces educational outcomes closer to the standards attained in developed countries. This historically advantaged system to primarily serve “white” and “Indian” children, but is increasingly accessed by “black” and “coloured” middle-class children.

<sup>27</sup> Article published by the *Mail & Guardian Online* on 23 March 2012.

apartheid state. Ramphele's assertion that the current education system is worse than the education system under the apartheid state, while articulating the reality of the education crisis, may, however, be inaccurate given what has been achieved in the education system in South Africa since 1994.

Ramphele made this claim while criticising the 70.2 percent (up from 67.8 percent in 2010) pass rate achieved by the school-completing pupils in the 2011 National Senior Certificate (NSC) examination (DBE 2011b: 45).

The NSC is the qualification that is attained after having satisfied the requirements contained in the National Curriculum Statement<sup>28</sup>, and is the apex and embodiment of the twelve years of primary and secondary schooling undertaken by pupils in South Africa (DBE 2012a: 7). The NSC examination is one of the most characteristic features of the South African education system (Spaull 2013: 31): It would be rare to come across a South African citizen who did not know what the Matric examination is, or be able to explain why people think it is important. One of the most important reasons for this almost single-minded focus on the NSC is that it is the only nationally standardised, externally set, and independently moderated examination in the school system (Spaull 2013: 39).

The primary purpose of the NSC is to (DBE 2012a: 7):

1. Equip pupils with knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes that will enable them to participate meaningfully in society.
2. Provide access to higher education.

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<sup>28</sup> The National Curriculum Statement is based on the following principles (DBE 2012a: 8): (1) Social transformation: ensuring that the educational imbalances of the past are redressed, and that equal educational opportunities are provided for all sections of South Africa's population. (2) Active and critical learning: promoting an active and critical approach to learning, rather than rote and uncritical learning of given truths. (3) High knowledge and high skills: the minimum standards of knowledge and skills to be acquired at each grade are specified and set high, as achievable standards in all subjects. (4) Progression: content and context of each grade shows progression from simple to complex. (5) Human rights, inclusivity, social and environmental justice: infusing the principles and practices of social and environmental justice and human rights as defined in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, so as to be sensitive to issues such as poverty, inequality, "race", gender, language, age, and disability. (6) Valuing indigenous knowledge systems: acknowledging the rich history and heritage of South Africa as important contributors to nurturing the values contained in the Constitution. (7) Credibility, quality, and efficiency: providing an education that is comparable in quality, breadth, and depth to those of other countries.

3. Facilitate the transition of pupils from education institutions to the workplace.
4. Provide employers with a sufficient profile of a pupil's competencies.

Snyman (2012: 468) provides the following description of the NSC (which replaced the Senior Certificate examinations in 2008):

- In order to qualify for a NSC, also known as Matric, a pupil must register for a minimum of seven subjects, and provide full evidence of a school-based assessment for each subject. The minimum duration of a NSC is three years, namely Grade 10, Grade 11, and Grade 12.
- In order to qualify for a NSC, a candidate must meet a number of requirements. Candidates must complete the programme requirements for Grade 10, Grade 11, and Grade 12 separately, and also fulfil the assessment standards for each of the three years. Candidates also need to comply with internal assessment requirements for Grade 10, Grade 11, and Grade 12, as well as with the external assessment requirements of Grade 12.
- In the NSC final examination in Grade 12, a candidate needs to achieve 40 percent in three subjects, one of which must be an official language studied as a home language. Candidates must achieve 30 percent in three additional subjects. In the seventh subject, if a candidate fails to obtain more than 30 percent, full evidence of the school-based assessment component must be provided.
- As already mentioned, in order to be awarded a NSC, a candidate must meet all the requirements of the school-based assessment, which comprise 25 percent of the assessment regime. Furthermore, in order to be eligible to be admitted to university for a (Bachelor's) degree, a candidate needs at least a NSC, having achieved 30 percent in the language of instruction.

The prospective student will also need to have achieved 50 percent or more in four subjects selected from a designated subject list for higher education. These subjects are: A Language of Learning and Instruction; Accounting; Agricultural Science; Business Studies; Consumer; Studies; Dramatic Arts; Economics; Engineering Graphics and Design; Geography; History; Information Technology; Life Sciences; Mathematics; Mathematical Literacy; Music; Physical Sciences; Religious Studies; and Visual Arts.

The annual publication of individual-level NSC results in South African newspapers adds greatly to the public awareness and concern with regard to NSC performance. Chief among the statistics reported is the NSC pass rate. The NSC pass rate indicates the proportion of Grade 12 pupils that pass the NSC examination. While many critics have pointed out that the NSC pass requirements are substandard and encourage mediocrity, arguably the more serious problem is wide-spread drop-out prior to Grade 12 and that the number of pupils choosing less demanding NSC examination subjects is increasing<sup>29</sup> (Spaull 2013: 31).

A closer look at the 2012 NSC results supports the above-mentioned, and also reveals that the NSC is failing to equip pupils for life after school. It is evident that the standards set by the NSC are insufficient to prepare pupils for higher education or the world of work (South African Institute of Race Relations 2013: 1-24):

- Unpacking the NSC results reveals that the class of 2012 produced the highest proportion of bachelor passes since the NSC era began in 2008, with 27 percent of candidates obtaining such a pass. This translates to 136 047 pupils who were newly eligible to study for a bachelor's degree at a university (having achieved 30 percent in the language of teaching and learning of the higher education institute in addition to 50 percent or better in four subjects). In total, the class of 2012 produced 364 392 pupils who were eligible to study for degrees, diplomas, and certificates. Despite this, the majority of pupils leaving high school will not proceed to study further at university. Evidence from a selection of nine universities in South Africa suggests that the number of applications for first-year study outnumbers the number of vacancies by 6 to 1 (i.e. 428 581 first-year applications and 76 284 first-year vacancies).
- The results also revealed that the number of pupils taking mathematical literacy instead of mathematics has increased. In total, 291 341 pupils sat for mathematical literacy as opposed to the 226 218 who sat for mathematics. This is a ratio of 1.3 to 1. This ratio has been rising consistently since 2008.

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<sup>29</sup> Given that the calculation of the NSC pass rate does not take into account any information about enrolment or drop-out prior to Grade 12, it is particularly open to abuse and manipulation. Furthermore, since obtaining the NSC can be achieved with a variety of subject combinations (some easier than others), it is also possible to increase the pass rate by encouraging pupils to select easier subjects (Spaull 2013: 31).

- The data also revealed that 46 percent of those who sat for mathematics failed outright and that only 36 percent of pupils who wrote mathematics managed to obtain 40 percent or more. According to the 2011 NSC results, while 30 percent of all pupils who wrote mathematics passed at 40 percent and above, only 18 percent managed to obtain above 50 percent, which is the threshold for a pass at university.
- Similarly, fewer pupils are choosing physical sciences. In 2012, only 179 194 pupils sat for physical sciences, with only 39 percent of them obtaining 40 percent and higher. The 2011 NSC results revealed that, in 2011, only 20 percent of pupils managed to pass at 50 percent and above.
- Data from the Department of Higher Education and Training reveals that of the 236 226 students who enrolled for a 3-year degree in 2009, only 32 655 went on to complete their degree in 2011 (i.e. only 14 percent were able to complete their degree on time).

Ramphela argued that the 2011 NSC results were deceptive as less than 500 000 learners wrote the NSC examination, and that 539 102 learners (who, 12 years prior, were in Grade 1) had disappeared from the system which consigned thousands to a life that promised neither further education or employment. Ramphela's criticisms are supported by Branson & Zuze (2012: 70) who assert that although South Africa has nearly universal enrolment until Grade 9 and the average number of years in education has increased by 50 percent in the past three decades, most of this improvement has been below the secondary school-completion level (i.e. Grade 12/Matric).

In 2012, the NSC pass rate increased by 3.7 percentage points to 73.9 percent (DBE 2012a: 45). Expressed differently, the number of pupils who passed the NSC increased from 348 117 (out of a total of 496 090) in 2011 to 377 829 (out of a total of 511 152) in 2012 (DBE 2012a: 46).

The 2012 NSC pass rate represented an increase of 6.1 percentage points in the three years since 2010, when 67.8 percent of pupils (346 147 out of a total of 537 543) passed the NSC examinations (DBE 2012a: 46). Angie Motshekga, the Minister of Basic Education, claimed that the 2012 NSC results were an indication that the national strategy for improving literacy and numeracy had assisted in improving educational quality. The reality, however, is that an improvement in the number of pupils passing the NSC is merely evidence of an improvement

in educational outcomes. An improvement in educational outcomes is not tantamount to an improvement in educational quality. This is certainly the case in South Africa's primary and secondary public schooling system.

South Africa's literacy and numeracy test scores are low by African and global standards, despite the fact that the South African government spends about 6 percent of its GDP on education (NPC 2011d: 12). South Africa's primary school pupils are struggling with basic literacy and numeracy.

Up until 2011, the NSC was the only standardised national examinations that existed in the South African education. The introduction of the Annual National Assessments (ANAs)<sup>30</sup> was a hallmark achievement for the DBE. The ANAs are a set of nationally standardised assessments for literacy and numeracy in Grades 1-6 and Grade 9. They were administered in February 2011 (testing 2010 content) and September 2012 (testing 2012 content). Since they tested every single pupil from Grades 1-6 and Grade 9, the two ANAs represent the largest data-gathering exercise in South Africa apart from the censuses (Spaull 2013: 14).

ANA 2011 assessed all pupils in public schools who were in Grades 2-7 (effectively Grades 1-6 since testing was based on content taught in 2010). ANA 2012 assessed all pupils in public schools who were in Grades 1-6 and Grade 9.

ANA 2011 results<sup>31</sup> were as follows (DBE 2011c: 20; DBE 2012b: 22-23):

- Grade 1: Literacy – 59 percent; Numeracy – 63 percent
- Grade 2: Literacy – 52 percent; Numeracy – 55 percent

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<sup>30</sup> Introducing the ANAs in 2011 was a landmark achievement for South Africa for which the DBE should be commended (Spaull 2013: 53). The ANAs are one of the most important and needed policy innovations since 1994 (Spaull 2013: 58). The benefits of the ANAs are likely to be large and disproportionately in favour of the poor. However, their current implementation leaves much to be desired: given the manner in which these test are currently implemented – including the formulation, marking, invigilation, and moderation procedures – they cannot be used as a reliable indicator of progress. Spaull (2013: 53; 59) argues that for the ANAs to be a reliable indication of pupil learning-outcomes they should be externally administered and marked by an independent body. For the ANAs to be effective, they must be trustworthy, reliable, and properly utilised. Unless the ANAs are quality-assured in the test-construction phase, as well as independently administered, marked, and moderated, they cannot be regarded as reliable indicators. Furthermore, due to the logistical and financial implications of such an undertaking, it should only be externally evaluated at one grade per year.

<sup>31</sup> National average percentage marks.

- Grade 3: Literacy – 35 percent; Numeracy – 28 percent
- Grade 4: Literacy – 34 percent; Numeracy – 28 percent
- Grade 5: Literacy – 28 percent; Numeracy – 28 percent
- Grade 6: Literacy – 28 percent; Numeracy – 30 percent

ANA 2012<sup>32</sup> results<sup>33</sup> were as follows (DBE 2012b: 22-23):

- Grade 1: Literacy – 58 percent (Home Language); Numeracy – 68 percent
- Grade 2: Literacy – 55 percent (Home Language); Numeracy – 57 percent
- Grade 3: Literacy – 52 percent; Numeracy – 41 percent
- Grade 4: Literacy – 43 percent (Home Language) and 34 percent (First Additional Language); Numeracy – 37 percent
- Grade 5: Literacy – 40 percent (Home Language) and 30 percent (First Additional Language); Numeracy – 30 percent
- Grade 6: Literacy – 43 percent (Home Language) and 36 percent (First Additional Language); Numeracy – 27 percent
- Grade 9: Literacy – 43 percent (Home Language) and 35 percent (First Additional Language); Numeracy – 13 percent

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<sup>32</sup> Spaul (2013: 14-16) cautions that although the ANAs is still in its infancy, and thus a certain amount of problems are to be expected, there are a number of serious concerns with the ANAs, particularly relating to the comparison between ANA 2011 and ANA 2012: The increase, between 2011 and 2012, of 17 percentage points for Grade 3 literacy, from 35 percent to 52 percent, if true would mean that South Africa improved more in one or two years at the Grade 3 level for literacy (0.7 standard deviations) than the fastest improving country did in a seven year period between PIRLS 2001 and PIRLS 2006 (Russia – 0.54 standard deviations). Numerous academics have called the ANA 2012 results into question, including those on the ANA advisory committee. By comparing the results of ANA 2011 and ANA 2012 when they are not comparable, the DBE misrepresented the real changes in the system over this period, and in doing so, undermined its own technical credibility and that of the entire ANA process going forward.

<sup>33</sup> National average percentage marks.

The ANAs not only document and confirm the wide disparity in test scores between schools located in different socio-economic contexts, and progressive deterioration in results from Grades 1 to 6, but also provide insight into what pupils are getting wrong, and consequently, are not learning to do (Chisholm 2011: 50-51): Overall, pupils simply failed to understand what they were being asked, even when they were responding in their home language. They were unable to answer simple grammar questions, including spelling commonly used words, the proper use of prepositions, plural forms, tenses, and opposites. Reading comprehension as well as their ability to write their own text from given prompts was limited. In the numeracy tests, pupils were unable to perform basic numeracy operations, such as subtraction, multiplication, and divisions, involving whole numbers. They also had seriously limited or distorted conceptions of fractions and could not translate a problem asked in words and write it in a way that enabled them to solve the problem.

South Africa's educational outcomes, as shown by several comparative studies, are poorer than many poor countries (NPC 2011d: 12). South Africa has regularly come close to last, even amongst less-developed and less-resourced African countries, in terms of standard scores for literacy, mathematics, and science (Bloch 2010b: 74). The Southern and Eastern African Consortium for Measuring Educational Quality (SACMEQ), the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), and other official tests all indicate South Africa's poor performance relative to other countries, including other southern African countries. For example, South Africa, in both the 2001 TIMSS and the 2006 PIRLS, was placed last of all participating countries; the national average was significantly lower than every other participating country, including, in different studies, Chile, the Philippines, Iran, and a range of other African states (De Kadt 2010: 6).

The World Economic Forum (WEF), in its *Global Competitiveness Report 2011-2012*, ranked South Africa 118<sup>th</sup> out of 142 countries for its primary education enrolment; and 127<sup>th</sup> out of 142 countries for the quality of its primary education (WEF 2011: 323). For the quality of its educational system – which is an indication of how well the education system meets the needs of a competitive economy – South Africa ranked 133<sup>rd</sup> out of 142 countries; and for the quality of Mathematics and Science education, South Africa ranked 138<sup>th</sup> out of 142 countries (WEF 2011: 323). South Africa again fared poorly in the *Global Competitiveness Report 2012-2013*, being ranked 115<sup>th</sup> out of 144 countries for its primary education enrolment; and 132<sup>nd</sup> out of 144 countries for the quality of its primary education (WEF

2012a: 325). For the quality of the educational system, South Africa ranked 140<sup>th</sup> out of 144 countries; and for the quality of Mathematics and Science education, South Africa ranked 143<sup>rd</sup> out of 144 countries (WEF 2012a: 325). In its *Global Information Technology Report 2013*, the WEF again ranked South Africa 140<sup>th</sup> out of 144 countries for the quality of its general education system (WEF 2013: 324); and 143<sup>rd</sup> out of 144 countries for the quality of its Mathematics and Science education (WEF 2013: 325). The quality of South Africa's Mathematics and Science education was ranked last in a survey of 62 countries by the WEF in its *Financial Development Report 2012* (WEF 2012b: 257).

Although the investment in education has resulted in greatly improved access to education in South Africa since the advent of democracy, it has not yet delivered any meaningful improvement in educational outcomes. The objective of broadened access to quality education has not been achieved, despite high levels of resource mobilisation (Finn *et al.* 2011: 79). South Africa's poor performance in both national and international studies of learner achievement indicates that, despite the high financial investment in education, the outcomes leave much to be desired (DBE 2010: 12). Thus, in spite of significant improvements in access to education and an increased education budget, South Africa is lagging behind comparable countries on most educational indicators.

The vast majority of schools are simply failing to produce the outcomes that are their chief objective. According to Bloch (2010b: 72), 60-80 percent of schools in South Africa are considered dysfunctional: these poor educational outcomes impact heavily on poor, rural, and township (predominantly "black") schools whose social functioning are negatively affected by gangsterism, ill-discipline, hunger, and AIDS. Bloch (2010b: 70) makes the point that South Africa stands accused of having failed a generation of young people who "have not received the opportunities they deserve or the possibilities for a better life that education can create".

In a report commissioned by the Centre for Development and Enterprise (CDE), and titled *South Africa's Education Crisis: The quality of education in South Africa 1994-2011*, Nicholas Spaull provides an empirical overview of the quality of education in South Africa since the transition to democracy, and comments on the state of South Africa's education system.

The report's conclusions are chilling (Spaull 2013: 3): "By using a variety of independently conducted assessments of pupil achievement the report shows that – with the exception of a

wealthy minority – most South African pupils cannot read, write, and compute at grade-appropriate levels, with large proportions being functionally illiterate and innumerate. As far as educational outcomes, South Africa has the worst education system of all middle-income countries that participate in cross-national assessments of educational achievement. What is more, we perform worse than many low-income African countries. The annually-reported statistics from the National Senior Certificate (NSC) exam in Grade 12 are particularly misleading since they do not take into account those pupils who never make it to Grade 12. Of 100 pupils that start school, only 50 will make it to Grade 12, 40 will pass, and only 12 will qualify for university. Those 18-24-year-olds who do not acquire some form of post-secondary education are at a distinct economic disadvantage and not only struggle to find full-time employment, but also have one of the highest probabilities of being unemployed for sustained periods of time, if not permanently. While there have been some recent improvement in pupil outcomes, as well as some important policy innovations, the picture that emerges time and again is both dire and consistent: however one chooses to measure learner performance, and at which ever grade one chooses to test, the vast majority of South African pupils are significantly below where they should be in terms of the curriculum, and more generally, have not reached a host of normal numeracy and literacy milestones. As it stands, the South African education system is grossly inefficient, severely underperforming, and egregiously unfair.”

It is “increasingly clear that the weight of evidence supports the conclusion that there is an on-going crisis in South African education, and that the current system is failing the majority of South Africa’s youth” (Spaull 2013: 3).

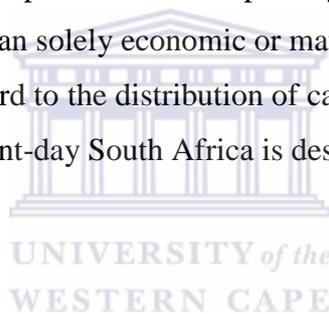
## **Education, Poverty, and Inequality**

As has been shown in Section B of Chapter 4, South Africa’s education system, particularly its primary and secondary public schooling system, provides low-quality education to the majority of the people it serves. The consequences of this, especially when one considers education from the perspective of the capability approach, are wide-ranging.

The National Planning Commission identified the elimination of poverty and the reduction of inequality as key strategic long-term objectives for South Africa. Furthermore, it identified education as a crucial means by which to achieve these objectives. The current state of South

Africa's education system, therefore, adversely affects South Africa's ability to achieve its objectives of eliminating poverty and reducing inequality. These adverse effects extend beyond the labour market and economic growth. The relationship between low-quality education and poverty and inequality is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 6.

However, before discussing the relationship, from the perspective of the capability approach, between low-quality education and poverty and inequality, it is important to discuss poverty and inequality itself. This is the focus of the next chapter, i.e. Chapter 5 (which comprises three sections). In Section A, poverty and inequality are conceptualised from the traditional economic or material perspective. However, the traditional economic or material understanding of poverty and inequality is limited because it does not take into account human being's multi-dimensionality, and the wide-ranging features that comprise human well-being. Thus, in Section B, poverty is conceptualised from the perspective of the capability approach. From the perspective of the capability approach, poverty is understood as capability deprivation rather than solely economic or material deprivation. Thus, inequality refers to the differences with regard to the distribution of capabilities. In Section C, the nature of poverty and inequality in present-day South Africa is described.



# Chapter 5

## Section A

### Conceptualising Poverty and Inequality

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#### Poverty<sup>34</sup>

Poverty is a challenge faced by human beings in every part of the world. It is a particularly prevalent challenge in the developing countries and regions of the world. However, it is also a challenge in the developed countries and regions of the world.

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<sup>34</sup> Poverty by D. H. Lawrence

“The only people I ever heard talk about my Lady Poverty were rich people, or people who imagined themselves rich. Saint Francis himself was a rich and spoiled young man.

Being born among the working people  
I know that poverty is a hard old hag,  
and a monster, when you're pinched for actual necessities.  
And whoever says she isn't, is a liar.

I don't want to be poor, it means I am pinched.  
But neither do I want to be rich.  
When I look at this pine-tree near the sea,  
That grows out of rock, and plumes forth, plumes forth,  
I see it has a natural abundance.

With its roots it has a grand grip on its daily bread,  
and its plumes look like green cups held up to the sun and air  
and full of wine.

I want to be like that, to have a natural abundance  
and plume forth, and be splendid.”

[Malan, R. (1972). *Inscapes: A Collection of Relevant Verse compiled by Robin Malan*. Cape Town: Oxford University Press.]

It is relatively easy for most people to identify human beings suffering as a consequence of poverty since the experience of poverty is eminently public and often embarrassingly so. The immense tragedy of poverty is obvious: lives are blighted, happiness stifled, and creativity destroyed. We see human beings suffering from, and experiencing unfreedoms of various sorts as a result of, poverty in our communities and on television. We read about their plight in newspapers and journals. It is, however, more difficult to arrive at a proper understanding and conceptualisation of poverty (Alcock 1997: 3).

Poverty is, broadly speaking, “pronounced deprivation in well-being” (World Bank 2001: 15). The classic understanding of poverty is that it is a shortage of income. This conventional view links well-being primarily to command over commodities; thus the poor are those who do not have enough income or consumption to place them above some adequate minimum threshold (Haughton & Khandker 2009: 1). According to Ravallion (1994: 3), poverty exists when a person is unable to attain a level of economic well-being deemed necessary to constitute a reasonable minimum by the “standards of the specific society in which the person lives”. This perspective views poverty largely in economic terms.

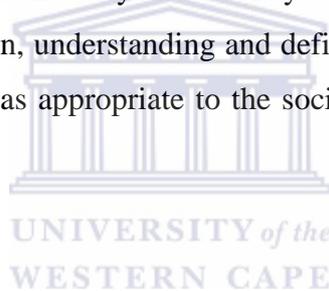
However, conceptualising and defining poverty is not, as may be suggested by the conventional view described above, an easy or simple task. Poverty, according to Woolard (2002: 1), is complex and multi-faceted: It can be correlated with hunger, unemployment, and exploitation. It can be connected with vulnerability to crisis and homelessness. People who are poor are thus vulnerable to adverse circumstances and events that are beyond their control. It would, however, be naïve to ignore the non-material aspects of the experience of poverty; even though many of these issues are clearly related to not having enough money. People who are poor are not concerned exclusively with adequate incomes and consumption. Achieving other goals such as security, independence, and self-respect may be just as important as having the economic means to procure basic goods and services. Poverty entails more than the lack of income and productive resources to ensure sustainable livelihoods. Its manifestations include hunger and malnutrition, limited access to quality education and other basic services, social discrimination and exclusion, as well as the lack of participation in decision-making.

The concept and experience of poverty is at the same time universal and very specific. It is difficult to fully understand poverty in society because experiences of poverty vary both between, and within, places (Bowden 2002: 17). There are various ways in which the concept

of poverty can be conceptualised, understood, and defined. The concept of poverty “tends not to be described in a consistent manner and varies widely according to the actor presenting the definition” (Misturelli & Heffernan 2010: 37). People disagree on what the problem of poverty is and as a consequence the action they wish to encourage or to justify is not at all the same thing (Alcock 1997: 3).

The issue of definition is arguably the issue that lies at the heart of the endeavour to understand poverty because we must first know what poverty is before we can identify where and when it occurs or attempt to measure it, and subsequently begin to do something to alleviate it (Alcock 1997: 67). The Copenhagen Declaration (1995: 42) states, concerning poverty, that: “No uniform solution can be found for global application.”

The manner in which poverty is conceptualised, understood and defined in a society is like a mirror-image of the ideals of that society, because it shows what that society considers to be unacceptable as well as indicates the way that society would like things to be; it is thus essential that the conceptualisation, understanding and definition of the concept of poverty is both theoretically robust as well as appropriate to the society in which it is applied (Noble, Ratcliffe, & Wright 2004: 3).



### **Poverty: A Concept Exclusive to Human Beings**

The concept of poverty is exclusive to human beings. We do not speak of plant poverty or animals suffering from poverty.

Lötter (2007: 1197) uses the example of an elephant in a small zoo to illustrate that poverty is exclusive to human beings: The zoo in this thought experiment has inadequate fiscal resources. The elephant, which has not been provided with adequate food or water for more than three years, is cramped in a smallish cage with no trees, shrubs, or grass. Consequently, the elephant is in poor physical condition and easily susceptible to diseases. It is also psychologically depressed, and communicates its negative emotional state by means of enfeebled body language and mournful sounds. Anyone who sees the elephant quickly realises that it might soon die.

Lötter (2007: 1197) argues that the circumstances and condition of the elephant roughly correspond with those of a human being suffering from and living in severe poverty.

However, we would not describe the elephant as suffering from and living in severe poverty. The elephant would be judged to be suffering from neglect and cruelty. A human being, however, without the minimal necessities to sustain physical health would be described as suffering from absolute poverty. Thus, human beings, in whichever part of the world they live, are deemed to be poor if they do not have adequate economic capacities to ensure access to the food, shelter, clothing, and healthcare required to maintain their physical health.

### **Poverty: A Contested Concept**

Poverty is a contested concept. Arguments over the manner in which poverty should be conceptualised and defined transcend semantics and academic hair-splitting (Noble *et al.* 2004: 2). Poverty is inherently a contested concept because it is inexorably a political concept (Alcock 1997: 3). It relates to the allocation and distribution of resources, and reflects the impact of past and present policy choices. “It is not just a state of affairs; it is an *unacceptable* state of affairs – it implicitly contains the question, what are we going to do about it?” (Alcock 1997: 4).

It is important to understand that poverty is not a simple phenomenon that can be reduced to a single dimension of human life. Alcock (1997: 4) states that poverty “...is a series of contested definitions and complex arguments that overlap and at times contradict each other. It is differently seen as a big phenomenon or a small phenomenon, as a growing issue or a declining issue, as an individual problem or as a social problem. Thus in understanding poverty the task is to understand how these different visions and perceptions overlap, how they interrelate and what the implications of different approaches and definitions are. In a sense we learn that the answer to the question – do you understand poverty? – is: that depends what you mean by poverty.”

Poverty, although a contested problem, remains a problem; and the one thing that there is no disagreement over is that *something* must be done about it (Alcock 1997: 4).

## Poverty: An Evaluative and Prescriptive Concept

People do not confine themselves to making merely descriptive observations about human existence. The day-to-day impact of poverty on people's lives is prescriptively assessed. People make evaluations and express ideas regarding how the lives of human beings ought to be.

Poverty is not only a scientific concept, but also a moral concept which implies and requires action (Alcock 1997: 6). It "carries with it an implication and moral imperative that something should be done about it" (Townsend 1993: 119).

Alcock (1997: 4) asserts that: "We cannot sit on the fence on the poverty problem or suggest that the problem is merely one of academic and political debate, because implicit in the disagreements about the definition of poverty are disagreements too about what should be done in response to it – intrinsic to the notion of poverty itself is the imperative to respond to it. Different definitions require different responses, but all require some response."



### Absolute Poverty

Alcock (1997: 68) notes that absolute poverty and its description as a minimum subsistence level is strongly connected to the late nineteenth century British social reformers Charles Booth<sup>35</sup> and Seebohm Rowntree<sup>36</sup>. Absolute poverty defines poverty that exists independently of a reference group, and is sometimes considered as scientific, objective, and unchanging over time, as well as equally applicable to any society (Noble *et al.* 2004: 3). Rowntree (1901: 86) defined "primary poverty" as: "Families whose total earnings are insufficient to obtain the minimum necessities for the maintenance of physical efficiency".

Absolute poverty "means that a person does not have adequate economic capacities to provide adequate food, clothing, shelter, security, and medical care to maintain their physical health" (Lötter 2007: 1211). Rowntree's definition of poverty referred to those who did not have access to resources to meet their subsistence needs (Alcock 1997: 71).

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<sup>35</sup> Booth (1889)

<sup>36</sup> Rowntree (1901; 1941)

The notion of subsistence poverty is synonymous with the concept of absolute poverty because the literature frequently conflates absolute poverty with its usual subsistence definition (Noble *et al.* 2004: 5). The definition of absolute poverty is associated with attempts to define subsistence, which refers to the minimum needed to sustain life (Alcock 1997: 68). Thus being below the subsistence level is to be experiencing absolute poverty because one does not have enough to live on.

This subsistence level is measured by comparing people's incomes. Bowden (2002: 4) explains that people are considered to be poor if their income is too low to meet basic needs such as food, shelter, healthcare, and education. This low level of income is referred to as the "poverty line". This cut-off poverty line is often defined in terms of having enough income for a specified amount of food.

The amount of money required to meet basic needs varies from place to place. The reality is that what people require to meet their basic needs in life will in practice differ depending on place and time. Different people require different things in different places depending on the context they are situated in. For example, what constitutes adequate shelter depends on the ambient climate and the availability of materials for construction. What constitutes adequate diet depends on the availability of types of food, the ability to cook food and the nature of the work for which sustenance is required (Alcock 1997: 72).

Such differences make it difficult to compare poverty between countries (Bowden 2002: 5). International measures of poverty have therefore been developed as an alternative. The most widely used measure is the international extreme poverty line which has recently been revised from US\$1 per day to US\$1.25 per day (Haughton & Khandker 2009: 45). Anyone living below this is judged to be unable to feed themselves properly. US\$2 per day is the international poverty line considered to be the minimum required to provide food, clothing, and shelter (Green 2008: 8).

## **Relative Poverty**

Poverty, though, is not merely about income. It is also about quality of life, which entails such things as being healthy or being able to read (Bowden 2002: 5). Broader

conceptualisations and understandings of poverty introduce the more complicated concept of relative poverty.

The concept of absolute poverty and the subsistence definitions associated with it is alleged to be objective. However, “even the earliest subsistence definitions can be shown to contain some element of relativity; that is, including some items in their definition of poverty that are not strictly nutritional necessities” (Noble *et al.* 2004: 6). For example, Rowntree departed from a subsistence definition of poverty by including tea in his basic British diet, although tea is of negligible nutritional value (Alcock 1997: 70). Any definition of poverty must to some degree be relative as it has to make allowances for prevailing tastes (Noble *et al.* 2004: 6).

Relative poverty is characterised by defining poverty in relation to the living standards of a reference group; in terms of resources required to participate fully in society, or more narrowly by reference to the national income/expenditure distribution (Noble *et al.* 2004: 3-4).

Relative poverty is a more subjective or social standard in that it explicitly recognises that some element of judgement – based on a comparison between the standard of living of the poor and the standard of living of other members of society who are not poor – is involved in determining poverty levels (Alcock 1997: 69).

Relative poverty “means that although people have adequate economic capacities to provide adequate food, clothing, shelter, security and medical care to maintain their physical health, they cannot participate in any other activities regarded as indicative of being human in that society” (Lötter 2001: 1211).

People are considered poor if their standard of living or quality of life is significantly below normal for the country in which they live (Bowden 2002: 6). Relative poverty prevents people from participating in activities that are customary in the society in which they live (Alcock 1997: 69). People define themselves as deprived relative to others in the context within which they find themselves (Lauer 1995: 201).

A family without a television, for example, would be considered relatively poor if most of the people around them owned a television as they would be missing out on a normal part of their society’s daily culture and enjoyment. However, while access to a television may be of great importance to a family living for example in North America or Europe, it would seem a

minor concern to many of the poorest families in the world who are likely to be more concerned about the quality of their housing.

Relative poverty varies across time, regions, and countries.

## **Inequality**

Concerning inequality, the CDE notes the following (CDE 2010: 5):

- One of the difficulties confronting any debate about inequality is that attitudes to its existence are often informed by a range of political, social, and even philosophical concerns. Since Aristotle, for example, some thinkers have expressed concern that inequality in wealth or income undermines the quality of democratic participation.
- Others have argued that inequality should not be considered undesirable unless it emanates from some injustice. Jean-Jacques Rousseau referred to these injustices as “artifices”, and suggested that they had their roots in feudalism. He thought that society would become more equal if feudalism were abolished. Similarly, libertarians do not consider inequality per se to be a problem. They are solely interested in whether there is “justice in acquisition”, “justice in holding”, and “justice in exchange”. According to this perspective, what matters is equality of opportunity, not the resulting distribution in income, which only reflects inequalities in the distribution of natural ability and application.
- Classical Marxists, by contrast, consider inequality to be a serious problem, but argue that it cannot be resolved under capitalism. Furthermore, they argue that capitalism makes the increasing concentration of wealth inevitable. According to this perspective, inequality is more of an historical inevitability than a moral question.
- In contrast to these more extreme positions, mainstream economic and philosophical approaches to social challenges consider inequality (and poverty) to be important issues that require attention. John Rawls thought that a just society was founded on two principles; namely, maximum liberty, subject to equal liberty for all; and maximising the position of the least well-off. The Rawlsian tradition, while very different from the libertarian tradition, is concerned with poverty, but much less

concerned with inequality as such. According to Rawlsian tradition, high levels of inequality could be justified if it resulted in society's worst-off being as well-off as possible.

## Poverty and Inequality

Poverty is distinct from inequality. Hall & Woolard (2012: 32) distinguish poverty from inequality as follows: Poverty is defined in reference to a poverty line – a person or household is characterised as poor if their income<sup>37</sup> is below this line. Income inequality refers to disparities in income, i.e. the gap between the rich and the poor. Inequality, accordingly, focuses on *relative* deprivation. One can imagine, at one extreme, a society in which everyone is poor yet inequality is low as a result of everyone having approximately the same level of income; at the other extreme, one can imagine a society in which nobody is poor but inequality is high because some people are extremely rich in comparison with others.

Poverty is generally characterised by the inability of individuals, households, or entire communities to command sufficient resources to satisfy a socially acceptable minimum standard of living. While multi-faceted and experienced differently, poverty is considered to comprise (May 2002: 5):

- Alienation from the community. The poor are isolated from the institutions of kinship and community.
- Food insecurity. The inability to provide sufficient or good quality food for the family is considered an outcome of poverty. As are households in which household members, especially children, go hungry or are malnourished.
- Crowded homes. Overcrowded conditions and homes that require maintenance are seen as circumstances that constitute living in poverty.
- The use of basic forms of energy. The poor lack access to safe and efficient sources of energy. In rural communities, the poor, particularly, walk long distances to gather firewood which increases their vulnerability to physical attack and sexual assault.

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<sup>37</sup> Or expenditure or some measure of multiple deprivation.

- A lack of adequately paid, secure jobs. The lack of employment opportunities, low wages, and the lack of job security are major contributing factors to poverty.
- Fragmentation of the family. Many poor households are characterised by absent fathers or children who live apart from their parents. Households may be split over a number of sites as a survival strategy.

Inequality is a broader concept than poverty as it is defined over the entire population, not just for the portion of the population below a certain poverty line (Haughton & Khandker 2009: 103). Inequality exists both within and between different countries and regions. Defining “inequality” requires consensus within the social context on what is meant by equality. “Equality” refers to a state of social organisation that enables or gives equal access to resources and opportunities to all its members (May 2002: 6). Inequality focuses on the distribution of attributes – such as income, wealth, or consumption – across the entire population; and in the context of poverty analysis, requires examination if one believes that the welfare of individuals depends on their economic position relative to others in society (Haughton & Khandker 2009: 3).

Green (2008: 4; 5-6) argues that inequality warrants attention because:

- Inequality wastes talent. The talent of any nation is squandered if groups are discriminated against and excluded. The phenomenon of missing women is an example of this. As a consequence of discrimination against girls and women, the world’s female population is lower than it should be compared with males; discrimination begins even before birth through selective abortion and then continues as female children are neglected with respect to healthcare, nutrition, and education.
- Inequality undermines society and its institutions. In an unequal society, elites find it easier to capture governments and other institutions, and use them to further their own narrow interests, rather than the overall economic good. Inequality undermines social cohesion. Inequality between individuals (vertical inequality) is linked to rises in crime, while inequality between groups (horizontal inequality) increases the likelihood of conflicts that can impede the development of countries for decades.

- Inequality limits the impact of economic growth in reducing poverty. A one percentage point increase in economic growth would benefit people who are poor more in an equal society than in an unequal one.
- Inequality transmits poverty from one generation to the next. The poverty of a mother, for example, can blight the entire lives of her children.

The gap between the rich and the poor within many societies, both in developed and developing countries, has increased (Copenhagen Declaration 1995: 7). “The poverty that exists today”, notes Bowden (2002: 10), “has developed as a result of inequalities and differences built up over time.”

Poverty, though strongly and inextricably linked to, is not the same as inequality. Poverty, according to Alcock (1997: 6; 7), “is not just one aspect of inequality, but the unacceptable extreme of inequality”. Green (2008: 7) refers to poverty as “the human consequence of inequality”. Extreme inequalities in opportunity and life chance have a direct effect on what people can be and do – that is, on human capabilities (UNDP 2005: 51). Measures of poverty provide an indication of the quality of people’s lives as well as their ability to survive and develop, while measures of inequality provide information about the nature of society (Hall & Woolard 2012: 33).

Dorling (2012: 13), with regard to the need for and importance of greater equality, notes the following: Equality matters because human beings are creatures that thrive in societies in which they are treated more as equals than as being greatly unequal in mental ability, sociability, or any other kind of ability. Human beings work best, behave best, play best, and think best when they do not labour under the assumption that some are much better, more deserving, and greatly more able than others. Human beings perform worst, are most atrocious in their conduct, and are most unimaginative in their outlook when they live under the weight of great inequalities – and especially under the illusion that these inequalities are somehow warranted.

## Section B

# Conceptualising Poverty from the Perspective of the Capability Approach

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### Poverty as Capability Deprivation

Poverty, it has already been stated, is a concept that is exclusively applied to human beings. The capability approach frames poverty in terms of human capacity.

The capability approach is not a theory that can *explain* poverty, inequality, or well-being (Robeyns 2005: 94). Instead it provides a tool and a framework within which to *conceptualise* and *evaluate* these phenomena. Analysing poverty from the perspective of the capability approach serves to enhance our understanding of the nature and causes of poverty and deprivation by means of shifting attention away from the *means* to the *ends* that people have reason to value and pursue, and correspondingly, to the *freedoms* people have to achieve these valued ends (Sen 1999: 90).

The capability approach, which gives a central role to the *actual* ability a person has to do the different things that she values doing, shifts the focus of attention from the *means* of living to the *actual opportunities* an individual has (Sen 2010: 253).

In the fictional story, *The Richest Man in Babylon*, Arkad – who is the richest man in Babylon – makes this observation (Classon 1988: 13): “In my youth I looked about me and saw all the good things that were to bring happiness and contentment. And I realised that wealth increased the potency of all these. Wealth is a power. With wealth many things are possible.”

Wealth is not something we value for its own sake. Aristotle (1980: 7) states that “wealth is evidently not the good we are seeking; for it is merely useful and for the sake of something else”. Thus neither income nor wealth is an inadequate means of assessing advantage, nor are they invariably good indicators of what kind of lives we can achieve (Sen 2010: 253).

From the perspective of the capability approach – which “focuses on human lives, and not just on the resources people have, in the form of owning – or having use of – objects of

convenience that a person may possess” – poverty is understood to be a deprivation of capabilities (Sen 2010: 253). Consequently, we have to take into account the overall capabilities people actually enjoy when judging the advantages that different people have compared with each other. People should be judged as being well-off or deprived based not on income or wealth, which are the standard criteria by which human success is measured, but on whether they are able to pursue and lead the kind of life they have reason to value.

Poverty, as has been mentioned previously, can be broadly defined as “pronounced deprivation in well-being” (World Bank 2001: 15). The capability approach asserts that well-being derives from a capability to function in society; thus, poverty arises when people lack key or basic capabilities (Haughton and Khandker 2009: 2).

Poverty is a major source of unfreedom that impedes development, which can be thought of as a process of expanding the basic capabilities that people enjoy, which enables them to lead the kind of life they have reason to value (Sen 1999: 3; 87). Basic capabilities are a subset of all capabilities – the freedoms or real opportunities – to do some basic things that are necessary for survival and to avoid or escape poverty (Robeyns 2005: 101).

Even though it is important to make a conceptual distinction between the idea of poverty as capability insufficiency and that of poverty as lowness of income, it must be remembered that the two perspectives cannot but be related since income is an important means to procuring capabilities (Sen 1999: 90).<sup>38</sup> Sen acknowledges that insufficient income is indeed a strong predisposing condition for an impoverished life. He further notes that defining poverty as a deprivation of capabilities “does not involve any denial of the sensible view that low income is clearly one of the major causes of poverty, since lack of income can be a principle reason for a person’s capability deprivation” (Sen 1999: 87).

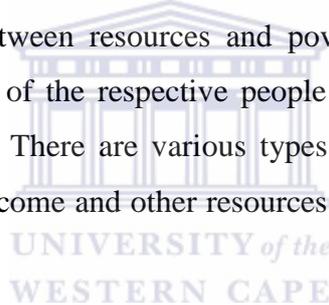
Sen argues in favour of understanding poverty as a deprivation of capabilities rather than as a lack of income. He makes the following arguments in favour of this position (Sen 1999: 87-88):

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<sup>38</sup> This relationship goes both ways. Enhanced capabilities tend to expand an individual’s ability to be more productive and earn a higher income. For example, better education and healthcare not only improve an individual’s quality of life directly; but also increase an individual’s ability to earn a higher income and to escape income poverty (Sen 1999: 90). The enhancement of human capabilities tends to expand productivity and earning power (Sen 1999: 92).

- Poverty can cogently be identified in terms of capability deprivation for the reason that the capability approach focuses on deprivations that are *intrinsically* significant (unlike low income, which is merely *instrumentally* significant).
- There are influences on capability deprivation – and thus on real poverty – *other* than lowness of income (income is not the only instrument in generating capabilities).
- The instrumental relationship between low income and low capability is *variable* between different communities and even between different families and different individuals (the impact of income on capabilities is contingent and conditional).

The opportunities available to people for converting income and other primary goods (i.e. means) into characteristics of good living and into the kind of freedom valued in human life (i.e. valued ends or functionings) differs (Sen 2010: 254). Thus, as mentioned in the third point above, the relationship between resources and poverty is both variable and deeply contingent on the characteristics of the respective people as well as the natural and social environment in which they live. There are various types of contingencies which result in variations in the conversion of income and other resources into the kinds of lives that people can lead.



Sen (2010: 255-256) identifies four important sources of variation:

1. Personal Heterogeneities

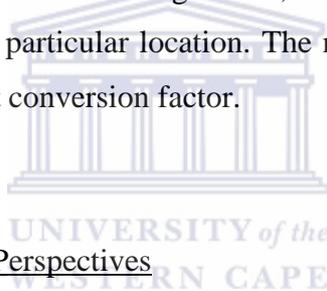
People have different physical characteristics with regard to age, sex, gender and social roles, disability, proneness to illness, and so forth. This makes their needs extremely diverse and it also affects the relationship between income and capability. Age influences the specific needs of the old and the very young. A disabled or an ill person may require more income to do the same elementary things that a fully-abled or healthy person can do with a given level of income. Some disadvantages, such as severe disabilities, may not be entirely correctable even with huge expenditure on treatment or prosthesis.

## 2. Diversities in the Physical Environment

Environmental conditions, including climatic circumstances, such as temperature ranges or flooding, also determine the extent to which income can be converted to valued ends. The environmental conditions need not be unalterable. They could be improved with communal efforts, or worsened by pollution or depletion. However, the environmental conditions of an isolated individual may be a fixed factor in converting income and personal resources into functionings and quality of life.

## 3. Variations in Social Climate

The ability of an individual to convert income and other resources into functionings is also influenced by social conditions. These include public healthcare and epidemiology, public educational arrangements, and the prevalence of or absence of crime and violence in the particular location. The nature of community relationships can also be very important conversion factor.



## 4. Differences in Relational Perspectives

The established patterns of behaviour in a community or society may also substantially vary the amount of income and other resources required to achieve the same elementary functionings. For example, to be able to appear in public without shame may require higher standards of clothing and other visible consumption in a richer community or society than in a poorer one. This also applies to the personal resources required to participate in the life of the community, and, in many contexts, to fulfil the elementary requirements of self-respect. Although this is primarily an inter-societal variation, it influences the relative advantages of two people located in different countries.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> The capability approach reconciles the notions of absolute and relative poverty in the space of capabilities. The capability approach conceives of poverty as absolute in the space of capabilities, and relative in the space of commodities, resources, and income since relative deprivation in commodities, resources, and income can lead to an absolute deprivation in minimum capabilities (Sen 1983: 161). Thus, relative deprivation in terms of income can yield absolute deprivation in terms of capabilities. Being relatively poor in a rich country can be a

The ability of a person to convert income or resources into functionings can also be negatively affected by a “coupling” of disadvantages between different sources of deprivation (Sen 1999: 88; 2010: 256): For example, handicaps – such as illness or disability – reduce an individual’s ability to earn an income or to acquire resources. Furthermore, handicaps make the task of converting income or resources into capability more difficult. An individual who is handicapped may require more income or resources to achieve the same functionings as an individual who is not handicapped. Thus, real poverty (in terms of capability deprivation) may be more intense than what can be deduced from income or resource data.

The distribution of facilities and opportunities within the family raises further complications for the income approach to poverty (Sen 1999: 88-89; 2010: 257): Income accrues to the family through its earning members. If the family income is utilised disproportionately to advance the interests of some family members at the expense of other family members, then the extent of the deprivation of the neglected members may not be adequately reflected by the aggregate value of the family income. For example, boys may be systematically preferred over girls in the family allocation of resources. This sex bias is a substantial issue in many contexts, especially in many countries in Asia and North Africa. The deprivation of girls, or other intra-family divisions, is more readily and more reliably assessed by looking at capability deprivation (in terms of greater mortality, morbidity, undernourishment, medical neglect, and so forth) than by comparing the incomes of different families.

Notwithstanding the crucial role income plays in determining the advantages enjoyed by different people, the relationship between income (and other resources) and individual achievements and freedoms is neither constant nor automatic and irresistible (Sen 1999: 109). Different types of contingencies result in systematic variations in people’s ability to convert income and other resources into distinct functionings. Subsequently, the lifestyle they can enjoy or pursue is affected.

Green (2008: 7) makes the following observations with regard to poverty:

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great capability handicap, even though one’s absolute income may be high by global standards. In a generally opulent country, more income is required to purchase enough commodities to achieve the same social functioning (Sen 2010: 256). The need to participate in the life of the community may induce demands for modern equipment (such as smart phones, iPads, and so forth) in a country where such facilities are more or less universal (unlike what would be required in a less affluent country), and this imposes a strain on a relatively poor person in an affluent country even when that person has a much higher level of income compared with people in less opulent countries (Sen 1999: 89-90).

- Poverty is manifested by the sense of powerlessness, frustration, exhaustion, and exclusion from decision-making, as well as the relative lack of access to public services, the financial system, and other sources of official support that people who are poor experience.
- The many dimensions of poverty reinforce each other. People who are poor are discriminated against, but many people are also poor as a consequence of the discrimination they suffer.
- The reverse of such multi-dimensional poverty is not simply wealth (although income is important), but a broader notion of well-being that encompasses health, physical safety, meaningful work, connection to community, and other non-monetary factors.

Thus, it is in the deprivation of capabilities that poverty actually manifests itself (UNDP 1997: 15): Poverty involves not only the necessities of material well-being, but also the denial of opportunities for living a tolerable life. Life can be prematurely shortened. It can be made painful, difficult, or hazardous. It can be deprived of knowledge and communication. It can be robbed of dignity, confidence, and self-respect. All are aspects of poverty that blight and limit the lives of many in the world today.

## Section C

### Poverty and Inequality in South Africa

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#### **Abridged History and Legacy of Colonialism, Segregation, and Apartheid<sup>40</sup>**

Racial segregation and oppression, began in South Africa in colonial times under Dutch and British rule (1652-1910) as well as under earlier governments of the Union of South Africa (1910-1948), and continued and intensified under apartheid (1948-1994). In most respects, apartheid was a continuation, in more systematic and brutal form, of the segregationist policies of previous governments (Welsh 2000: xxvi).

The National Party (NP) which espoused an ideology of apartheid that brought an even more rigorous and authoritarian approach than the segregationist policies of previous governments of the Union of South Africa, won the general election after the Second World War in 1948 (Welsh 2000: 428-429). The Union of South Africa became the Republic of South Africa in 1961 following a “whites”-only referendum on the issue.

Welsh (2000: 400-401) asserts that: Apartheid curtailed the rights of the “black” majority in South Africa, while maintaining “white” supremacy and Afrikaner minority rule. The NP was determined to maintain “white” dominion, uplift poor Afrikaners, challenge the pre-eminence of English-speaking “white” people in public life, the professions, and business; and abolish the remaining imperial ties. The state became an engine of patronage for Afrikaner employment. The Afrikaner Broederbond – an organisation whose sole aim was to further Afrikaner nationalism in South Africa by maintaining Afrikaner culture, developing and Afrikaner economy, and gaining control of the South African government – coordinated the NP’s programme, ensuring that Afrikaner nationalist interests and policies attained ascendancy throughout civil society.

Apartheid was enforced through legislation by the Afrikaner NP governments of South Africa between 1948 and 1994; the first Nationalists acts sought to establish a completely segregated society (Welsh 2000: 394; 430; 445-446; 449):

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<sup>40</sup> It is impossible to encapsulate in so short a text a history that has unfolded over many centuries. This short text serves only as a restricted overview of the aspects of this history that are relevant to this thesis.

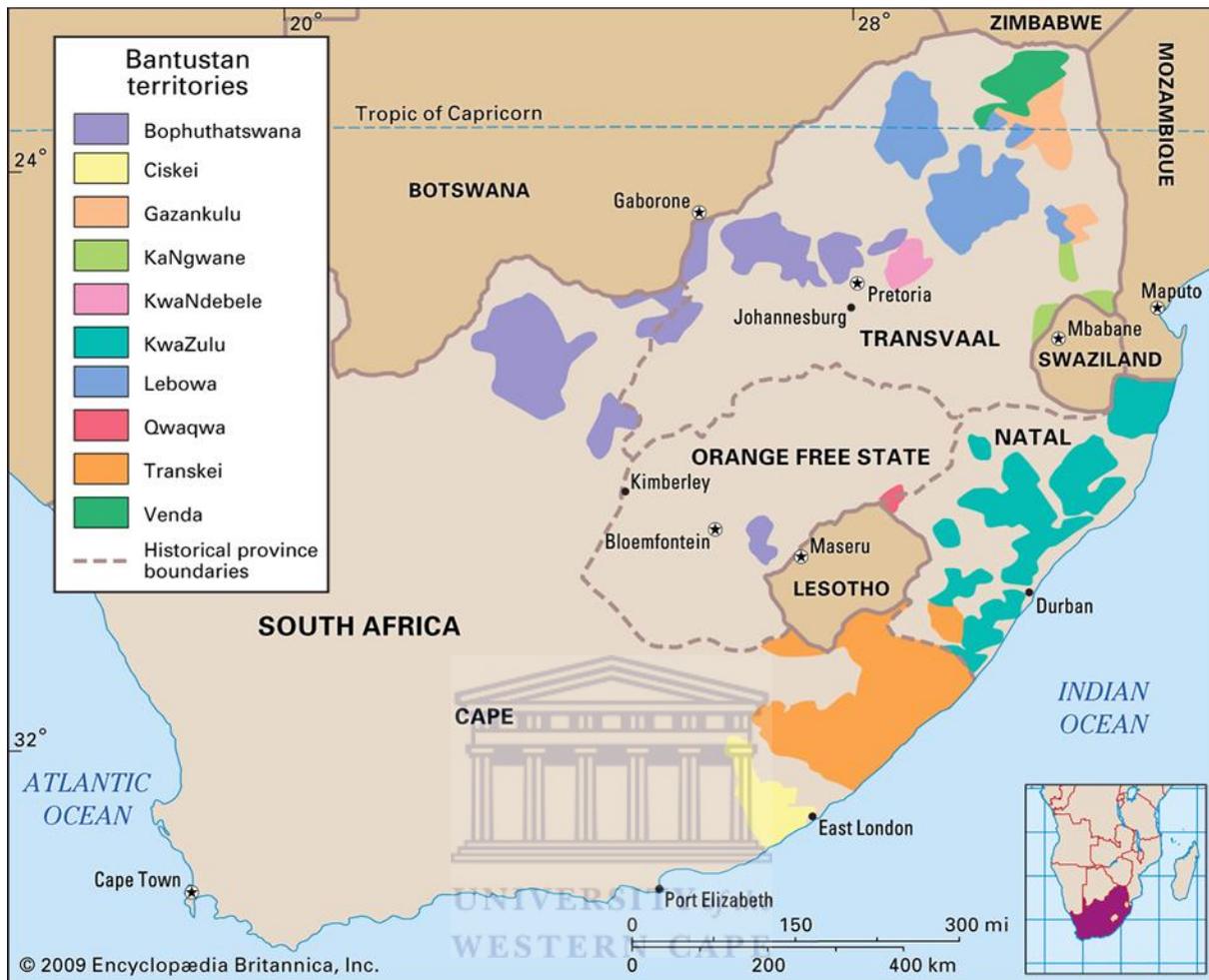
- The Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act of 1949 banned marriages between “whites” and any non-European.
- The Immorality Amendment Act of 1950 made any form of sexual relations between “whites” and others illegal (sexual relations between “whites” and “blacks” had already been prohibited in 1927 by the promulgation of the Immorality Act).
- The Population Registration Act of 1950 was the basic weapon of apartheid. Under this law every person had to be classified in one of the racial categories – “white”, “black”, “coloured”, or “Indian” – and had to carry an identity card indicating the race group to which they belonged. Social and political rights, educational opportunities, and economic status were largely determined by the group to which an individual belonged.
- The Group Areas Act of 1950 extended territorial segregation to allow any area to be nominated for the use only of one race. The Group Areas Act assigned racial groups to different residential areas in a system of urban apartheid.
- The Illegal Squatters Act of 1951 provided the machinery for ejecting surplus natives from urban areas, or indeed from anywhere they were not required or wanted. This law authorised the forcible removal of squatting communities. It allowed the eviction and destruction of homes of squatters by landowners, local authorities, and government officials.
- The Bantu Authorities Act of 1951 was one of the pillars of apartheid. This act was one of the first pieces of legislation introduced to support the apartheid government’s policy of “separate development”. This piece of legislation (succeeding the Native Affairs Act of 1920) created the legal basis for the deportation of “blacks” into designated “homeland reserve areas” and established tribal, regional, and territorial authorities. Tribal authorities were set up and positions were given to Chiefs and Headmen who became responsible for the allocation of land, the welfare and pension system, and development. The traditional leadership of the “African” population had to some extent become representatives of the “white” apartheid government. Uncooperative traditional leaders were faced with harsh penalties and were often deposed.

- The Promotion of Bantu Self-Government Act of 1959 was a piece of legislation promulgated by the apartheid government that allowed for the transformation of the reserves into fully fledged independent Bantustans, also known as homelands. This act was established on the territorial foundations imposed by the 1913 Natives Land Act and the 1936 Native Trust and Land Act. This policy of “separate development” divided the “African” population into artificial ethnic “nations”, each with its own homeland and the prospect of “independence” or “self-governance”, supposedly in keeping with trends elsewhere on the African continent. At the heart of the Bantustan policy lay the convenient assumption that all “black” South Africans belonged to a “nation” – Xhosa, Zulu, Tswana, Sotho, Venda, Swazi, or Tsonga – in which “blacks” would have the opportunity to develop along their own lines, as citizens of their own homelands. The homelands and the ethnic groups for which they were designed were: Transkei (Xhosa), Bophuthatswana (Tswana), Venda (Venda), Ciskei (Xhosa), Gazankulu (Tsonga), KaNgwane (Swazi), KwaNdebele (Ndebele), KwaZulu (Zulu), Lebowa (Northern Sotho or Pedi), and QwaQwa (Southern Sotho). The homelands constituted 13 percent of the land – for approximately 75 percent of the population.<sup>41</sup> The truth was that the rural reserves were thoroughly degraded by overpopulation and soil erosion. The Bantustans were generally poor, with few local employment opportunities available. Forced removals from so-called “white” areas affected approximately 3.5 million people and vast rural slums were created in the homelands, which were essentially being used as dumping grounds.
- The Bantu Homelands Citizenship Act of 1970 declared that all “Africans” were citizens of homelands, rather than of South Africa itself.

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<sup>41</sup> One of the most prominent features of South Africa with regard to poverty and inequality is that the former homelands remain the poorest in the country (CDE 2010: 14): This is because unemployment rates in those areas are much higher than elsewhere. One consequence of the higher concentration of poverty and unemployment in the former homelands is that, if the former homelands are excluded from inequality data, levels of inequality in South Africa are more similar to those in developing countries. This underlies the persistence of the special impact of apartheid.

Illustration 1: Map of the Former Bantustans/Homelands



Terreblanche (2002: 384-391) lists the following as the factors that contributed to poverty and socio-economic inequality in South Africa:<sup>42</sup>

- Land Deprivation and the Deliberate Proletarianisation of the Khoisan and the Different “African” Tribes in Order to Institutionalise Repressive “Black” Labour Systems

The seizure of the ancestral land of the Khoisan and different “African” tribes during Dutch and British colonialism and the hegemony of the English establishment in the period of segregation is a very sensitive cultural issue.

<sup>42</sup> Terreblanche uses the term “black” to denote South Africans other than “white”, and the term “African” to denote “blacks” other than “coloureds” and “Indians”.

The Dutch colonists conquered the Khoisan and seized their land. While the British colonists – equipped with superior military power, and obsessed with expansion and domination – conquered and seized the land of the Xhosa and the Zulu.

The Glen Grey Act of 1894 was a deliberate attempt to turn “African” peasants – who until then had maintained a relatively independent existence on “tribal” as well as “white” land – into an impoverished proletariat. The Land Act of 1913 was the most notorious, and the most successful, measure for impoverishing and proletarianising “Africans”.

Land was not always seized merely for the sake of land. It would be more accurate to assert that in large parts of South Africa, the land wars were more often than not labour wars, i.e. land was seized to gain access to cheap “black” labour.

Colonialism during the Dutch and British periods (1652-1910) severely disrupted and impoverished indigenous population groups. However, the range and penetration of exploitation during the periods of segregation (1910-1948) and apartheid (1948-1994) were, from a social and cultural perspective, undoubtedly more severe, and caused more alienation and poverty. The poorest half of the population was poorer and socially more dislocated in 1994 than in 1950, and probably also more so than in 1900.

- Discriminatory Measures to Protect the “White” (and Predominantly Afrikaner) Proletariat Against Competition From the “Black” Proletariat

Discriminatory practices have been integral part of South African society since the eighteenth century, and were legitimised by the racist ideology of Social Darwinism at the beginning of the twentieth century. The real motivation for discrimination – especially in the labour market – was to protect poor “white” Afrikaners against competition from cheap “black” (and especially “African”) labour.

A multitude of discriminatory laws prevented “Africans” from doing skilled and highly paid jobs. They were paid lower wages even if they were employed in the same job category as “whites”. Furthermore, “blacks” were prevented from joining recognised trade unions, and were therefore deprived of the opportunity to participate

in industrial action and wage negotiations. Discriminatory legislation also deprived “Africans” of the opportunity to acquire skills and undergo professional training. This condemned them low-paid and unskilled work.

While several discriminatory laws were enacted before the NP gained power in 1948, this legislation was considerably extended and intensified during the first thirty years of apartheid, and also applied to “coloureds” and “Indians”.

Although job reservation and discrimination in the labour market were abolished in 1979, unofficial discrimination and cultural barriers still made it difficult for “blacks” to compete with “whites” on an equal footing.

- Official Discrimination in Social Spending on the Four Population Groups (Especially on Education and Training)

Although reliable statistics on social spending on the four statutory population groups during the first half of the twentieth century are not available, there is, however, little doubt that social spending on “blacks” was even lower during the first half than during the second half of the twentieth century.

By the end of apartheid, a large percentage of “Africans” were either unemployed, or employed in low-paying jobs, primarily as a result of low levels of education. The poor in South Africa have been singularly deprived of adequate educational opportunities. Consequently, they have owned very little human capital, while the lack of proper job opportunities compromises the little that they do own.

The cumulative effect of the inadequate opportunities available to “Africans” (and “coloureds” to a lesser extent) to accumulate human capital during the twentieth century has burdened them enormously.

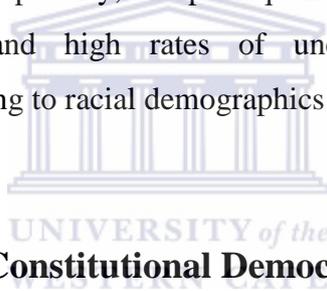
- Stagflation, Unemployment, and the Further Pauperisation of the Poorest Two-Thirds of the Population From 1974 to 1994

The economic crisis from 1974 to 1994 sharply increased unemployment, especially “African” unemployment. Although the most discriminatory and repressive measures

were abolished during the last quarter of the twentieth century, no compensation was paid to the worst victims of systemic exploitation. On the contrary – as a result of structural movements in the South African economy towards greater capital-intensity and post-industrial production from 1960 onwards – a very large part of the unskilled “African” labour force became redundant and structurally unemployed.

By 1975, almost two-thirds of the total population were already so abjectly poor that they had very little material or human capacity to withstand the pauperisation effects of the droughts of the 1980s, growing unemployment, and the socially disruptive effects of the struggle for liberation.

Apartheid legislation and its effects meant that when, in 1994, the first democratically elected government came to power, it inherited a contradictory legacy: on the one hand, the most developed economy in Africa; and on the other hand, major socio-economic challenges (the most serious of which are abject poverty; sharp inequalities in the distribution of income, property, and opportunities; and high rates of unemployment) whose impact is disproportionately skewed according to racial demographics (Terreblanche 2002: 25).



## **Poverty and Inequality in Constitutional Democratic South Africa**

The experience of the majority of South African households, despite the fact that South Africa is an upper middle-income country that has relative wealth, is either one of outright poverty, or of continued vulnerability to becoming poor (May 2000: 2). South Africa, Africa’s largest economy and its only G-20 member, displays strikingly high and persistent inequality and marginalization for an upper middle-income country (World Bank 2012: 15). South Africa’s history of colonialism and (particularly) apartheid remains most visible in its systematic and high levels of both poverty and inequality.

The contradictions are on display mostly along racial lines and spatially demarcated boundaries. Peering past the first-world living conditions of urban South Africa, one easily sees the downcast situation of townships, informal settlements, and former homelands, a large majority of whose residents are unemployed or lack the means to seek a job since they are spatially disconnected from market access and employment opportunities (World Bank 2012: 15).

The specificity of this situation, according to (May 2000: 2), is the consequence of the impact of institutionalised discrimination: “Colonial and Union government policies directed at the extraction of cheap labour were built upon by apartheid legislation. The result was a process of state-driven underdevelopment that encompassed dispossession and exclusion for the majority of South Africans. An important outcome brought about by these policies was the loss of assets, such as land and livestock, and the simultaneous denial of opportunities to develop those assets through limiting access to markets, infrastructure, and education. As such, apartheid, and the legislation and institutions through which it was implemented, operated to produce poverty and extreme inequality.”

Poverty in South Africa is directly linked to the political economy of inequality in a country where wealth and power have, historically, been the preserve of a racially defined minority (Vally, Chisholm, & Motala 1998: 4). “The issue of inequality”, state Hall & Woolard (2012: 32; 33), “is particularly pertinent in South Africa, where inequities in access to resources and capital, opportunities, and services have been structurally entrenched over many decades, and are hard to reverse.”

In an assessment of the changes in poverty and inequality in South Africa between 1995 and 2000, Hoogeveen & Ozler (2006: 59; 87) concluded that: South Africa inherited vast inequalities in education, healthcare, and basic infrastructure such as access to safe water, sanitation, and water. Using a poverty line of R322 (in 2000 prices), at least 58 percent of all South Africans, and 68 percent of the “black African” population, was living in poverty in 1995, while poverty was virtually non-existent for the “white” population. South Africa’s Gini coefficient was 0.56, making it one of the most unequal countries in the world. Consistent with GDP growth, there was little growth in per capita household expenditures during 1995 to 2000. Roughly 60 percent of all South Africans, and two-thirds of the “black African” population, were poor. The depth and severity of poverty increased as a consequence of declining expenditures at the bottom end of the expenditure distribution, while inequality among “black Africans” increased sharply. By 2000, there were approximately 1.8 million more South Africans living on less than \$1/day and 2.3 million living on less than \$2/day.

The continued social and economic exclusion of millions of South African citizens, reflected in the high levels of poverty and inequality, is South Africa’s biggest challenge (NPC 2011b: 7). South Africa’s status as a high middle-income country by virtue of its average national

income per person or GDP per capita does not convey the reality of extreme inequality in income and access to opportunity, or the widespread deep poverty that constrains human development and economic progress (NPC 2011b: 8). Poverty and inequality are reinforced by highly skewed and entrenched patterns of distribution (Finn *et al.* 2011: 72).

The Institute of Justice and Reconciliation (IJR), in its (annual) *2011 Transformation Audit*, makes the following observations regarding poverty and inequality in South Africa (IJR 2011: 70): Since 1994, a lot of progress has been made in the reduction of access and income poverty, through broadened access to basic services and an exponential growth in the extension of social grants and pensions to the most vulnerable citizens. However, longer-term expenditure at current levels on both, but particularly the latter, will be difficult to sustain. Levels of inequality within the broader society, but also within the country's historically defined population groups, have continued to increase. This will be difficult to address in the absence of higher levels of job creation.

The National Planning Commission (NPC 2011d: 2), in its *Human Conditions Diagnostic*, reported that: The manner in which poverty shapes people's lives is multi-dimensional. It is in the lack of opportunities for economically active citizens to earn a wage that poverty in South Africa is most evidently manifested. Income poverty affects individuals and households in ways that are often demeaning and lead to precarious lifestyles. However, the linkages between income poverty and deprivations in healthcare, education and social infrastructure (such as clinics, schools, libraries, and other cultural resources) are direct, with devastating consequences for both individuals and society. Deprivations in healthcare and education are also linked to a lack of access to other assets such as housing, land, social infrastructure, and services such as credit facilities. Without access to quality healthcare, education, and income earning opportunities, the vast majority of the poor wage a daily struggle to simply survive.

South Africa does not have a single official poverty line; US\$2 a day or R524 a month per person is used by government as a rough guide (NPC 2011d: 2). According to the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), approximately 57 percent of individuals in South Africa were living below the poverty line in 2001 (HSRC 2004: 2). The estimated number of these 57 percent by province was as follows: Eastern Cape, 4.6 million (72 percent of population in poverty); Free State, 1.8 million (68 percent of population in poverty); Gauteng, 3.7 million (42 percent of population in poverty); KwaZulu-Natal, 5.7 million (61 percent of population

in poverty); Limpopo, 4.1 million (77 percent of population in poverty); Mpumalanga, 1.8 million (57 percent of population in poverty); North West, 1.9 million (52 percent of population in poverty); Northern Cape, 0.5 million (61 percent of population in poverty); and Western Cape, 1.4 million (32 percent of population in poverty).

According to the NPC (2011d: 2), the overall proportion of people living below the poverty line had declined to 48 percent in 2008. However, this decline in poverty has been relatively small given significant social policy interventions (particularly social assistance grants), a growing economy, and rising per capita income.

The *SA Reconciliation Barometer Survey* is an annual nationally conducted public poll (with a representative sample of South Africans) that has been conducted by the IJR since 2003. Since first conducted in 2003, the survey has asked South Africans what they consider to be the main source of division in South Africa. The gap between rich and poor – or income inequality – has consistently been identified as the country's major fault line.

In 2011, 32 percent of South Africans regarded inequality as the most important source of social division (IJR 2011b: 30). This finding has to be read within the context of the strong overlap of race and poverty. Hofmeyr & Tiscornia (2011: 98) note that while the overlap between race and class cannot be completely separated, it is significant that when offered the opportunity, more South Africans would point to the predominance of class dimensions than they would race dimensions. Furthermore, inequality is an important issue for South Africans because they observe it and its effect on their relationship with other South Africans, and, significantly, regard it as a major obstacle to creating a more inclusive society (Hofmeyr & Tiscornia 2011: 98).

Inequality in South Africa, according to the NPC (2011d: 2-3), is reflected in the following ways:

- In 1995, the poorest 20 percent of people earned an average of R1 010 a year (in 2008 prices), while the richest 20 percent earned an average of R44 336 a year. In 2008, the poorest 20 percent of people earned an average of R1 486 a year, while the richest 20 percent earned an average of R64 565 a year.
- In 1995, the poorest 20 percent of the population earned just 2.3 percent of national income, while the richest 20 percent earned 72 percent. By 2008, these figures had

barely changed. The poorest 20 percent of the population earned 2.2 percent of national income, while the richest 20 percent earned 70 percent.

- In 1995, median per capita expenditure among “Africans” was R333 per month compared to R3 443 per month among “whites”. In 2008, median expenditure per capita for “Africans” was R454 per month, and R5 668 per month for “whites”.
- The Gini coefficient measures the gap between the richest and the poorest (where 0 corresponds with perfect equality, i.e. everyone has the same income; and 1 corresponds with perfect inequality, i.e. one person has all the income and everyone else has zero income). South Africa’s Gini coefficient increased marginally from about 0.64 to 0.68 between 1995 and 2005. South Africa remains one of the world’s most unequal societies.

Terreblanche (2002: 391-400) makes a distinction between different levels or types of racial and class inequalities<sup>43</sup> in South Africa:<sup>44</sup>

- Racial Inequalities in the Share of Income and Per Capita Income of the Different Population Groups

Both the percentage share of each of the four population groups of the total population as well as the percentage share of each of total income remained remarkably constant during the period 1900 to 1970. The relative share of “Africans” and “whites” of population and income during this period can be simplified as follows: while “whites” constituted about 20 percent of the population during these 70 years, they constantly received more than 70 percent of the income, and while “Africans” constituted about 70 percent of the population, they received only about 20 percent of the income.

From 1970 to 1996, the percentage share of “Africans” of the total population increased from 70 percent to 76.5 percent, and their share of the income from 19.5

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<sup>43</sup> Terreblanche (2002: 391) argues that characterising racial inequality and social injustice solely as the “inequalities of apartheid” is an oversimplification, as there are many reasons of a historical, cultural, and demographic nature that can be given for any number of these inequalities. However, he does note that racial inequalities should largely be understood in systemic terms, i.e. in terms of deeply ingrained “white” power and “black” powerlessness.

<sup>44</sup> Terreblanche uses the term “black” to denote South Africans other than “white”, and the term “African” to denote “blacks” other than “coloureds” and “Indians” (Terreblanche 2002: 21).

percent to 35.7 percent' while the share of the total population of "whites" declined from 18 percent to 12.5 percent, and their share of total income also declined from 71 percent to 51.9 percent.

These opposed shifts were significant, and were the result of an equally remarkable shift in the relative bargaining power, since 1970, of "Africans" with regard to that of "whites". However, although the increase in the share of income of "Africans" relative to that of "whites" is meaningful, it is also deceptive as there are very large inequalities in the distribution of per capita income.

- Racial Inequalities in the Distribution of Political, Military, Economic, and Ideological Power and the Ensuing Unequal Power Struggles in South African History

The factors that have contributed most, both directly and indirectly, to the inequalities in income distribution are undoubtedly racism and racial inequality in the distribution of political, economic, and ideological power.

Racism and racial inequality (and the inequality in the distribution of political, economic, and ideological power associated with it) became institutionalised as a result, and over the period, of colonialism, segregation, and apartheid.

- Racial Inequalities in the Distribution of Economic, Entrepreneurial, and Educational Opportunities

One of the most tragic features of South Africa's history is the variety of ways in which "whites" made use of the political and economic power at their disposal to deprive indigenous groups of reasonable opportunities for social, economic, and entrepreneurial advancement. Although indigenous groups were not deprived of all opportunities, the opportunities allocated to them were far fewer and usually far inferior to those available to "whites".

The seizure of the land of indigenous population groups during the extended colonial period was not only a powerful instrument for enriching "whites", but also for

impoverishing indigenous people and deliberately turning them into a dependent and subservient labour force.

Although, in 1936, 13 percent of South Africa's land surface was reserved for "African" occupation, most of this land was communal property, controlled by tribal chiefs; and only a small elite owned private property in the Bantustans. "Africans" living outside the Bantustans were (with a few exceptions) propertyless, and almost completely deprived of the opportunity to own farms, their own dwellings, or other tangible property. For most of the twentieth century almost the entire "African" population was disenfranchised and propertyless, with few citizenship rights.

During the twentieth century, governments throughout the world accepted responsibility for social spending to improve the welfare, healthcare, and education of their populations. In South Africa, per capita social spending on the four statutory population groups was very unequal, and resulted in far more limited opportunities for social and intellectual development for "blacks" in comparison to the opportunities for social and intellectual development that were available to "whites". Consequently, the opportunities for accumulating human capital were also far more limited for "blacks" than for "whites". Discriminatory legislation and practices, and the restrictions placed on the participation of "coloureds", "Asians", and especially "Africans" in skilled, professional, and entrepreneurial activities, further limited the opportunities available to these groups to accumulate human capital.

- The Highly Differentiated Class Structure That Has Emerged Among "Blacks", and the Rise of a "Black" Elite

One of the most remarkable characteristics of the "black African" community until the 1960s was its lack of class differentiation. This was the result of the oppressive measures implemented in accordance with colonial, segregationist, and apartheid policies.

The rise of a "black" elite and the emergence of a highly differentiated class structure in the "black" population groups have been the result of formal and informal power shifts from "white" to "black". The best examples of these power shifts include the

“independence” granted to Bantustans, the unbanning of the liberation movements in 1990, and the transition to majoritarian democracy in 1994.

An important result of the rise of this elite within each of the “African”, “coloured”, and “Indian” population groups is that South Africa’s skewed distribution of income has shifted from a “race”-based to a class-based one.

Poverty and socio-economic inequality in South Africa are linked inextricably to the labour market which is characterised by high levels of unemployment. Unemployment is the major challenge facing the labour market and is considered to be a key contributing factor to many social ills. At the end of 2011, the level of formal unemployment was around 25 percent. The crisis in the labour market is most pronounced amongst young South Africans (aged 15-34), for whom the unemployment level is just over 70 percent (IJR 2011a: 24).

An assessment of the South African labour market cannot ignore the racial and gendered dimensions inherited by apartheid. These racial and gendered dimensions remain intact. In addition, much of the marginal gains that have been made since 2003 have been eroded by the brief recession of 2009 which was caused by the global financial crisis. According to Patel (2011: 30-31):

- There were 624 000 more jobs in the first quarter of 2011 than there were at the corresponding period ten years ago in 2001. This is a growth of 62 000 jobs per annum which, to put it into perspective, amounts to only 10 percent of the number of pupils who wrote the 2010 NSC examinations. Another disconcerting fact is that there were 139 000 fewer women in the labour market in 2011 than in 2001, while the number of men in the labour market increased by 760 000 in the same period.
- Although the period 2001-2008 was characterised by higher employment growth, its benefits have since been eroded by the economic crisis that began in 2008 and impacted in employment in 2009. Employment peaked during the first quarter of 2009 at 13.64 million, but then decreased dramatically to 12.8 million in the first quarter of 2011 – a loss of over 800 000 jobs in one year. By the first quarter of 2011, this figure had increased to 13.1 million, but still remained 500 000 shy of the 2009 figure.
- 360 000 fewer women were employed in the first quarter of 2011 than at the corresponding period in 2009. The comparable figure for men is 140 000. Only 40.6 percent of working-age (i.e. 15-64) South Africans were employed in the first quarter

of 2011. In 2001, the comparable statistic was 45.8 percent. This decrease of 5 percent suggests that the economy is not able to absorb greater numbers than those who annually enter the labour market.

- A demographic breakdown of the labour force reveals that “black Africans” (78.2 percent) constitute the vast majority of employed workers, followed by “white” (9.6 percent), “coloured” (9.3 percent), and “Indian” (2.9 percent) workers. However, as a proportion of the total working-age population, employed “black Africans” trail the other groups by a significant margin. Only 36.2 percent of this group are employed, compared to 49.5 percent of the “coloured”, 52.5 percent of the “Indian” and 63.8 percent of the “white” groups. Furthermore, a much higher percentage of “white” employees, compared to any other racial group, are in skilled positions.

The CDE provides the following 10 insights with regard to poverty and inequality in South Africa (CDE 2010: 35-38):

1. The Depth of Poverty in South Africa is a Major Challenge

However one defines poverty, and whatever measurement tools one uses to assess it, it is clear that millions of South Africans live in absolute poverty. This represents a daunting challenge, one which continues to stunt human potential and limits South Africa’s Development.

2. Poverty Cannot Be Reduced Without High and Sustained Rates of Economic Growth

The empirical evidence – demonstrated by numerous developing countries – shows that high rates of economic growth are an essential precondition for raising millions of people out of poverty. Only economic growth can generate large numbers of new formal jobs. Economic growth also generates the resources that governments can use for improved public services, better schooling, more effective policing, more efficient public transport, and improved urban and rural infrastructure.

### 3. Inequality in South Africa Cannot Be Ignored

South Africa's high levels of inequality are as a consequence of apartheid. They persist in spite of immense efforts by post-apartheid governments to broaden the welfare net and redistribute benefits, rewards, and opportunities. Inequality is a challenge South Africa must address, because of its potential to be politically, economically, and socially destabilising. Since 1994, public spending has increased dramatically (including numerous subsidies to poorer communities and individuals), while new laws and regulations seek to shape outcomes normally left to market mechanisms. However, these efforts have done little to reduce inequality, which may even have increased.

### 4. Reducing Poverty and Addressing Inequality Are Not the Same Thing

A tension sometimes exists between the measures required to lift people out of poverty as quickly as possible, and those that might reduce inequality. International experience suggests that rapid economic growth can actually result in increased inequality in the short-term, even as it creates jobs and lifts large numbers of people out of poverty. By contrast, efforts to address income inequality through public spending often impact negatively on rates of economic growth in both the short-term and long-term.

If redistributive spending diverts and reduces public and private expenditure on the physical, institutional, and other infrastructure essential for higher economic growth, the rate of growth will be lower than it potentially could be. As a result, large-scale poverty may be alleviated more slowly, if at all. In other words, it is not always possible to reduce large-scale poverty while simultaneously using public and private resources for redistribution.

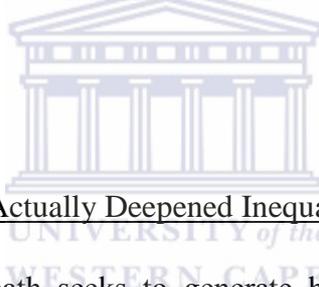
### 5. The South African State is Already Highly Redistributive, More So than Most Other Developing Countries

With approximately more than a quarter of South Africa's population receiving a social grant, in addition to high levels of public expenditure on education, healthcare, and housing, South Africa may well be the most redistributive state in the developing world. Despite this, South Africa remains one of the most unequal societies in the world. How much further redistributive policies can be pushed is a critical question.

## 6. States are Often Not Very Good At Redistributing Income

Given the redistributive efforts of the South African government, their lack of success is striking. Part of the reason for this lack of success is that public spending is often highly inefficient. This inefficiency typically disproportionately impacts those who are poor. It is those who are poor who are most in need of efficient, safe public transport; decent, well-located, well-built housing; good public schools, training facilities, and healthcare.

In addition to this, international experience shows that state-driven redistribution programmes have an important unintended consequence, i.e. the creation of a culture of dependency. South African government officials complain about communities and individuals who wait for government to improve the quality of their lives. The willingness of people to find jobs or self-employment is undermined in a context of hand-outs or grant dependency. This is why many governments elsewhere now introduce term limits to grants, or place conditions on their continuation. This needs to be taken into account when thinking about South Africa's challenges and priorities.



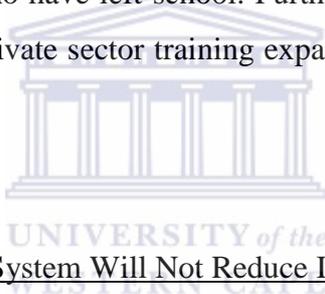
## 7. Too Many Policies Have Actually Deepened Inequality

South Africa's current growth path seeks to generate high-productivity, high-wage jobs. These jobs raise the returns for those with education and skills while excluding those without education and skills. This trend has increased rather than diminished in recent years. Its effects have been compounded by wage settlements, especially in the public sector, which have widened the gap between the employed and the unemployed, while also reducing the resources available to South Africa's government to deliver services to the poor. Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) has also contributed to widening inequality among "black" South Africans. In fact, many policies have helped to ensure that the incomes of "black" people at the top of the income pyramid have risen more quickly than those of people at the bottom of the income pyramid.

#### 8. If South Africa is to Reduce Poverty and Inequality, It Must Improve its Education and Training Systems

A large proportion of South Africa's inequality is explained by inequalities in the accumulation of human capital. Addressing this skewed distribution will require many interventions, the most important among them being improving the performance of schools serving poorer South African communities and individuals. These are South Africa's most inefficient, dysfunctional schools, and their failure traps poorer children in a life of poverty. The next generation needs to acquire and develop the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values that their parents were denied. Fixing its schools is a precondition for improving inter-generational mobility in South Africa. It is also a precondition for ending the injustice by which one's destiny is largely determined by factors beyond one's control.

South Africa also needs to fix its training systems, i.e. effective vocational training systems for those in schools and those who have left school. Further education and training needs to be dramatically improved, and private sector training expanded. These are vital rungs on the ladder of opportunity.



#### 9. Improving the Education System Will Not Reduce Inequality in the Short-Term

Improving the education system, as important as it is, will not significantly change the overall distribution of income in the short-term. There are two reasons for this. First, educational outcomes are strongly influenced by factors outside the classroom. This makes it more difficult for children from poor or disorganised communities to acquire a good education. Second, even if successfully implemented, educational reform will take time to make a meaningful impact on the structure of skills in the labour market. It will take even longer for educational reform to make a meaningful impact on levels of inequality. The obvious reason for this is that new entrants to the labour market comprise only a tiny fraction of the labour force; and while the fortunate few among them who received a good education will be better prepared for better-paying jobs, the millions whose education has been compromised will not be as fortunate.

## 10. More Rapid and More Job-Intensive Growth is South Africa's Best Strategy for Addressing Large-Scale Poverty

If South Africa's economy were to grow more rapidly, it would generate many more jobs. The benefits of a job – almost any formal job – are immense, and are often not sufficiently appreciated.

One of the consequences of long-term unemployment is the declining employability of those who for long periods are without a job. The primary reason for this is that long-term unemployment results in deteriorating human capital. Those who are unemployed for long periods lose the skills and aptitudes required for work. Given the weakness of South Africa's primary and secondary public schooling system, this means that many of those whose education has been compromised have seen their employability decay further because they have not found gainful employment.

It is precisely because the education system is so weak that the only feasible way to increase the employability of those without work is to maximise the number of people who actually get jobs. Pursuing policies that generate job-intensive growth can create powerful self-reinforcing processes, because people who get jobs acquire the knowledge, skills, and aptitudes that workplace experience can provide. This, in turn, makes them more productive and more employable. It is the only sustainable process that enables large numbers of poor, badly educated people to begin to rise out of poverty. Dramatically increased employment is the essence of broad-based empowerment.

### **Poverty and Inequality: A Threat to Social Cohesion in South Africa**

Large-scale poverty and inequality are arguably the most serious and most intractable of apartheid's legacies, and responding correctly to the challenges presented by this reality is vital for South Africa's future (CDE 2010: 4). "A cohesive society", states the Organisation for Economic Development and Cooperation (OECD 2011: 17) in its *Perspectives on Global Development 2012* report, "works towards the well-being of all its members, fights exclusion and marginalisation, creates a sense of belonging, promotes trust, and offers its members the opportunity of upward mobility." A cohesive society reduces inequality between groups and ensures that all citizens – the poor, the middle-earners, and the rich – are socially included.

An equitable distribution of living standards is a central pillar of cohesive societies (OECD 2011: 93).

The elimination of extreme poverty is an important and unfulfilled goal in South Africa (and globally). In addition to eliminating absolute poverty, reducing relative poverty (which is linked to inequality) is particularly important for social cohesion at the bottom of the income distribution (OECD 2011: 99). A crucial difference between absolute poverty and relative poverty is that while economic growth alone can reduce absolute poverty, reducing relative poverty involves reducing inequality in the lower part of the distribution (OECD 2011: 101).

Aristotle considered poverty to be the primary cause of social instability and revolution (Ally 2010: 211). He asserted that the greatest threat to the stability of the state is poverty, because a state in which many people who are poor are excluded from office will necessarily be full of enemies (Ally 2010: 212).

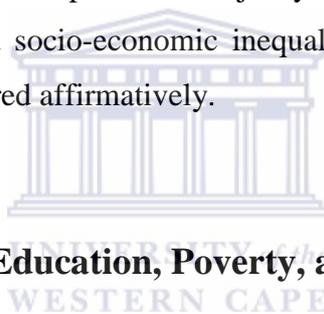
Aristotle argued that poverty is the “parent of revolution and crime” (Ally 2010: 212): He asserted that the violent overthrow of the state is inevitable in a context in which there is no middle-class and the poor outnumber the rich. His recommendation for a state based on an equitable distribution of wealth translates, in practical terms, into a call for the establishment of a strong middle-class to act as a buffer between an extremely wealthy class (an oligarchy), on the one hand, and an extremely poor class (a property-less proletariat), on the other.

South Africa is a country of “two nations”. The one nation is rich and the other is poor. The majority of the poor are “black” in general and “African” in particular. The rich are in general “white”. This phenomenon is gradually changing as a result of a growing “black” middle-class who are becoming part of the rich nation, as well as some “white” people who are becoming part of the poor nation. Poverty and inequality encourages social isolation which ultimately results in people not seeing themselves as part of a common citizenry (NPC 2011b: 27). The general instability that occurs as a result of large-scale deprivation will, ultimately (if not addressed), lead to political instability (Ally 2010: 212).

The CDE (2010: 39-40) asserts that inequality, and the socio-economic exclusion associated with it, poses a threat to social cohesion in South Africa: The argument that South Africa’s high levels of inequality are potentially destabilising, and provide fertile ground for populist politics is a valid one. These dangers are clear and present given South Africa’s past, and the racialised nature of inequality and destitution. There is no question that large-scale discontent

with the status quo is a reality in South Africa. However, the source of this discontent cannot be assumed to be the consequence of high levels of income inequality. This discontent may be as a consequence of people, on a large-scale, feeling excluded from the main currents of socio-economic life in South Africa and opportunities to advance their position in society. This perception, and the consequent sense of alienation and resentment, is exacerbated by the growing evidence of corruption. In other words, it may be the case that discontentment is not as a consequence of the Gini coefficient or the underlying distribution of income per se. Rather, it is the pervasive sense that the unemployed, who have little or no real prospect of employment, have become outsiders who are locked out of the economy. Thus, it may be inaccurate to equate high levels of inequality with high levels of frustration and discontent, and it may be more accurate to consider high levels of unemployment, and the associated lack of opportunity and socio-economic exclusion, as the source of potential political instability.

Given that people who are poor comprise the majority of South Africa's population, the question of whether poverty and socio-economic inequality are a threat to South Africa's political stability has to be answered affirmatively.



### **The Relationship between Education, Poverty, and Inequality**

Poverty and socio-economic inequality threatens social cohesion and the achievement of shared societal goals. Education has crucial role to play in addressing poverty and socio-economic inequality. There exists a two-way relationship between education, on the one hand, and poverty and inequality on the other hand. Poverty and inequality affects educational inputs and outputs; and educational inputs and outputs affects poverty and inequality. The nature and features of the relationship between low-quality education and poverty and inequality will be discussed in the next chapter, i.e. Chapter 6 (which has two sections). In Section A, the relationship between low-quality education and poverty and inequality in the South African context is discussed. In Section B, the intrinsic and instrumental value of education, in the South African context, is considered from the perspective of the human development theory which is underpinned by the capability approach.

## Chapter 6

### Section A

#### The Relationship between Low-Quality Education in the Primary and Secondary Public Schooling System and Poverty and Inequality in South Africa

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The expansion of the real freedoms that people enjoy is both the primary end and the principle means of development (Sen 1999: 36). The expansion of freedom equates to enhanced individual agency, and individual agency is central to addressing various deprivations and expanding capabilities. However, individual agency is inescapably qualified and constrained by the socio-economic and political opportunities that are available. Thus, development (the expansion of freedom) requires the removal of major sources of unfreedom.

For many people in South Africa, poverty is a major source of unfreedom that impedes their development. If individual agency is central to addressing various deprivations, and if development requires the removal of major sources of unfreedom; then education (which is a capability multiplier that serves to expand freedom) goes hand in hand with development, i.e. the expansion of human freedoms.

Education is not only a right in itself, but also enhances people's ability to exercise their other rights and their associated responsibilities. Basic education facilitates access to a wide range of political and socio-economic rights and freedoms established in the Bill of Rights (sections 7-39) in the Constitution. These include, inter alia, the rights to equality and dignity; the right to life; freedom and security of the person; freedom from slavery, servitude, and forced labour; the right to privacy; freedom of religion, belief, and opinion; freedom of expression; freedom of association; freedom of movement and residence; freedom of trade, occupation, and profession; the right to further education; the right to housing; the right to healthcare, food, water, and social security; access to information; and access to courts (Constitution 2011: 7-25).

Through quality education, especially primary and secondary schooling, people are better equipped to appreciate and exercise the full range of their human freedoms and rights (Lake & Pendlebury 2009: 21; Biggeri: 2007: 209 ): Education gives people the freedom to make informed choices and enhances their capability – real opportunity – to lead lives they have reason to value. Education is, in essence, a multiplier. Where the right to education is effectively guaranteed, it enhances the enjoyment of all individual rights and freedoms. Conversely, where the right to education is denied, violated, or disrespected (as is the case concerning low-quality education in the primary and secondary public schooling system in South Africa), it deprives people of their awareness and enjoyment of many other rights and freedoms. Obviously, education serves as a multiplier only if schools are not used – as most of them were during apartheid – to indoctrinate learners or produce a compliant underclass. Furthermore, deficiencies in important capabilities such as education during childhood reduce well-being even in the future (for example, poverty as a deprivation of capabilities) and have larger societal implications.

Education is considered to be a fundamental solution to the challenge of poverty. According to the DBE (2010: 8): Education is a prerequisite for tackling poverty as well as promoting short and long-term economic growth, because when individuals have the opportunity to learn basic life and literacy skills, economies grow faster and poverty rates decline. When people attend school, they are eventually able to earn more money and support their families. The fundamental purpose of education, which includes primary (basic) and secondary (further) public schooling, is to ensure that children acquire the knowledge, skills, and values they require to better their lives and to play a role in building a more humane, equitable, peaceful, and sustainable society.

The DBE (2010: 8) cites the Global Campaign for Education (GCE)<sup>45</sup> when it states:

- No country has achieved continuous and rapid economic growth without at least 40% of its adult population being able to read and write.
- At an individual level, a person's earnings increase by 10% for each year of schooling they receive, translating to a 1% increase in the GDP if good quality education is offered to the entire population.

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<sup>45</sup> Global Campaign for Education (2009; 2010)

“At the time of the transition to democracy,” note van der Berg *et al.* (2011: 3), “a South African education system was envisaged that would foster nation-building, promote democratic values, and provide a pathway out of poverty for the poor.” They continue (Berg *et al.* 2011: 3): “Fundamental reforms to the administrative, governance, and funding of education were required. A unified national department of education was established with considerable responsibility vested at the provincial level. Controversial curriculum reform, now believed to have been an impediment to progress, represented a strong break from previous arrangements and sought to advance inclusive education. Public spending on education was highly unequal on the basis of race in the heyday of apartheid. Reforms to spending began prior to 1994 and public spending has since become increasingly well-targeted to poor children.”

Concerning South Africa’s system of education, Taylor & Yu (2009: 66) write that: “Ultimately, social justice, transformation, and the country’s economic development are dependent on how the education system functions. The extent to which children from disadvantaged backgrounds have a real opportunity to achieve educational outcomes that will enable them to be successful in the labour market indicates whether the school system can be expected to transform existing patterns of inequality or merely reproduce them.”

*Census 2011* (a population census that counted South Africa’s total population, and compiled demographic, social, and economic information about the counted population), reaffirmed that South Africa is marked by stark inequality, particularly inequality in income and education.

As already mentioned in Chapter 3, *Census 2011* results revealed that the South African population increased from 40.5 million people in 1996 to 44.8 million people in 2001, to 51.7 million people in 2011 (Stats SA 2012a: 3). The demographics of South Africa’s population with regard to “race”, is as follows: 79.2 percent “black African”, 8.9 percent “white”, 8.9 percent “coloured”, 2.5 percent “Indian”/“Asian”, and 0.5 percent “other” (Stats SA 2012a: 5).

The overall average annual household income increased from R48 385 in 2001 to R103 204 in 2011 (Stats SA 2012b: 38). The average annual household income for “black African”-headed households increased by 169.1 percent, as opposed to an 88.4 percent increase for “white”-headed households (Stats SA 2012b: 40). The average annual household income for

“Indian”/“Asian”-headed households increased by 145.2 percent, while the average annual household income for “coloured”-headed households increased by 118.1 percent.

The gap between the richest and the poorest members of South African society remains stark in spite of the higher percentage increase in annual household income between 2001 and 2011 for “black African”-headed households in comparison to “white”-headed households. The average annual household income for a “white”-headed household is R365 134, whilst the average annual household income for a “black African”-headed household is R60 613 (Stats SA 2012b: 39-40). In other words, “white”-headed households earn more than six times the average of their “black” counterparts. The average annual household income for “Indian”/“Asian”-headed households is R251 541 and R112 172 for “coloured”-headed households (Stats SA 2012b: 40). This data supports the assessment of van der Berg *et al.* (2011: 3) that despite efforts to transform the structure of the economy, the divide between the haves and have-nots has retained a racial dimension.

With regard to inequality in education, the gap between “white” and “black” remains enormous: only 35.2 percent of “black” people under the age of 20 have obtained (at least) a Matric Certificate; whereas 76 percent of “white” people under the age of 20 have obtained (at least) a Matric Certificate (Stats SA 2012b: 31). Expressed differently, while the ratio of “black” people to “white” people is 7:1, the ratio of “black” people who have obtained Matric to “white” people who have obtained Matric is only 3.2:1.

Branson & Zuze (2012: 69) note that individual and household income is critically determined by success in the labour market. The key drivers of income inequality in South Africa are earnings and unemployment (or underemployment). Van der Berg (2010: 12) notes that it is the labour market that is at the heart of inequality, and central to labour market inequality is the quality of education (van der Berg 2010: 12): Education plays a predominant role in determining who is employed, and how much earnings they receive. Young people who have completed school (i.e. Matric) have an advantage when entering the labour market. However, the quality of primary and secondary public schooling in poor schools results in high drop-out and low school completion rates. Of those learners who do complete school, few are adequately equipped with the necessary skills to succeed in the tertiary education sector. Only a few poor learners obtain the education required to access high income jobs. Thus, inequality is perpetuated and the stark differences in incomes between the rich and the poor are entrenched and exacerbated.

Concerning South Africa's education system, Spaul (2013: 35) notes: "Any discussion of South African education would be patently incomplete without some reference to the high levels of inequality that plague the country and permeate every element of the schooling system. This is nowhere more noticeable than in the educational outcomes, ranging from a very few schools which perform at internationally-comparable levels of achievement, all the way down to a majority of schools which cannot impart even the most basic literacy and numeracy skills to their pupils."

These educational inequalities are strongly associated with the structural socio-economic (and therefore also racial) inequalities in South Africa. They are also evident from the early years, even before entry into primary school. They are exacerbated by a very unequal schooling system and are difficult to reverse (Hall: 2013: 101).

Despite the various educational reforms since 1994, the quality of education in South Africa remains disappointing (van der Berg *et al.* 2011: 3-4):

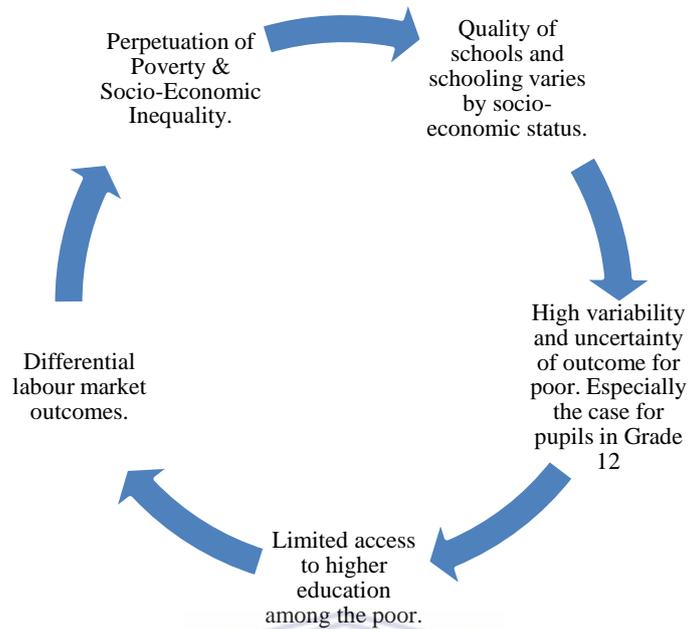
- Surveys indicate that the level of cognitive achievement of the majority of South African pupils is alarmingly low in key learning areas such as reading, mathematics, and science. The Systematic Evaluations undertaken by the Department of Basic Education reveal that the majority of pupils are performing well below the standards required by the curriculum.
- In the Trends International mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) of 2002, South African pupils in Grade 8 achieved the lowest average scores in both mathematics and science out of forty-six countries, including six African countries. More recently, in 2006, and specifically at the public primary schooling level, South Africa came last out of forty countries in the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS). Although the PIRLS sample included some developing countries, it was admittedly biased towards developed countries.
- The Southern and Eastern African Consortium for Monitoring Education Quality (SACMEQ) surveys of 2000 and 2007 (SACMEQ II and III) provide a more meaningful comparison. In SACMEQ II and III, South Africa performed slightly below the average of the other participating countries in Grade 6 reading and mathematics, despite benefiting from better access to resources, more qualified teachers, and lower pupil-to-teacher ratios.

- In addition to being disturbingly low, the cognitive performance of South African pupils is highly unequal. According to SACMEQ III, the reading test score for the richest 20 percent of pupils in Grade 6 was 605, compared to 436 for the poorest 20 percent (the mean across the international sample was set at 500 and the standard deviation at 100). This disparity was repeated in the mathematics test, although the difference was slightly smaller with averages of 583 for the richest 20 percent and 454 for the poorest 20 percent. South Africa's pupils who reside in rural areas fared far worse than their counterparts in most other countries in the sample, as did the poorest quarter of South African pupils in comparison with the other countries in the sample. When ranked by the performance of the poorest 25 percent of pupils, South Africa came 14<sup>th</sup> out of 15 Sub-Saharan countries for Reading, and 12<sup>th</sup> for Mathematics. Thus, when seen in a regional context, South Africa grossly underperforms even though it has more qualified teachers, lower pupil-to-teacher ratios, and better access to resources.

Education is the only viable means by which the poor can gain access to the top end of the labour market, with all of its attendant socio-economic benefits. Yet according to the research undertaken by van der Berg *et al.* (2011) to examine how low-quality education in schools in poor communities entrenches exclusion and marginalisation, “the education system generally produces outcomes that reinforce current patterns of poverty and privilege instead of challenging them” (van der Berg *et al.* 2011: 3). Their research showed that by the age of eight there are already very large gaps in the performance and outcomes of school children in the top 20 percent of the population (top quintile) versus those in the bottom 80 percent (bottom four quintiles). Articulated differently, by an early age there are already stark distinctions between the prospects of children from poorer communities and those from more affluent communities. Inequalities in schooling outcomes manifest via labour market outcomes, perpetuating patterns of income inequality.

## Illustration 2: Link between Low-Quality Education and Poverty and Socio-Economic

Inequality<sup>46</sup>



<sup>46</sup> Van der Berg *et al.* (2011: 4) compare South Africa's educational attainment in a global context, and describe the relationship between low-quality education and the perpetuation of poverty and socio-economic inequality in South Africa as follows: The rate of enrolment and the average years of education achieved by South African individuals have been increasing steadily over the last several decades. Moreover, despite the still large disparities, the interracial achievement gaps have narrowed substantially in this period. Consequently, South Africa fares relatively well in international comparisons of educational achievement, at least up until Grade 11. The rate of Grade 12 completion is relatively low in international comparisons. Improving the rate of Grade 12, i.e. Matric, completion from about 40 percent to 50 percent would place South Africa on a par with Thailand. However, further increases may not be desirable, especially if this would involve lowering the (already low) standard of the NSC. Enrolment in post-school institutions is particularly low in South Africa. Less than 10 percent of South Africans achieve at least 15 years of education (the minimum amount – in years – required to attain a three-year university degree), which is roughly 30 percentage points below the norm for middle-income countries. This amounts to a deficit of about 300 000 students, which could account for the much-discussed skills shortage in the labour market. These attainment trends should be carefully interpreted. The pattern of high achievement up until Grade 11 and low achievement of post-school education could be taken at face value to imply that the challenges in South Africa's education system are mainly restricted to higher levels of education. In contrast, the more probable explanation is as follows: Low-quality education combined with high and lenient grade progression up until Grade 11 means that a standardised assessment, i.e. the NSC, serves to filter a large proportion of weak students out of further achievement. Many of those who do attain the NSC are still not eligible to gain entrance into tertiary institutions. Therefore, low-quality education up until Grade 11 can be regarded as the primary reason for low achievement beyond Grade 11.

Concerning the role of education in the labour market, van der Berg *et al.* (2011: 8) note: “Education plays an important role in determining labour market prospects. Having left school early or having received low-quality education, most children from poor households stand at the back of the job queue and are less likely to obtain stable and lucrative employment. As the most important source of income for the great majority of households is wages, lucrative employment is one of the main ways to escape poverty. Poverty is perpetuated via low educational attainment and low-quality education, resulting in dire labour market prospects, creating a vicious cycle that impedes social mobility.”

“Education improvement”, asserts Bloch (2010b: 75), “can secure the future of South Africa’s and the region’s human capabilities and resources, adding to the range of skills and productive employment, as well as to the good health, empowerment, and participation of citizens in building democracy and development with growth across the region and continent.” Education is the key variable in determining, firstly, whether an individual secures employment and, secondly, the nature of that employment and its remuneration (Finn *et al.* 2011: 76-77). The employment and earnings prospects for those with a Matric qualification remain higher than for those without it and higher still for those with some form of tertiary education qualification (Chisholm 2011: 51).

On the other hand, asserts Bloch (2010b: 73): “In failing to achieve quality delivery, the education system is working for only a small proportion of the learners who access relevant institutions. Lack of quality education dooms the majority to marginalisation and exclusion from schools, universities, and colleges that should provide access to a better life. Education tends to reinforce social and economic marginalisation of the poor and vulnerable in South Africa, and reinforces their survivalist position with few prospects for movement or further development.”

Van der Berg *et al.* (2011: 8; 14) note that: “Income inequality in South Africa is being driven not only by differences in the number of years of education attained, but also, to a large extent, by the quality thereof. Policies that address inequality by intervening in the labour market will have limited success as long as considerable pre-labour market inequalities in the form of significant differences in school quality persist. Substantial

reduction in income inequality will only be possible if pre-labour market inequalities, specifically inequalities in the quality of education, are reduced.<sup>47</sup>

South Africa's underperforming education system is, in itself, a major source of unfreedom. Amongst other things, it is an obstacle to increased employment in a labour market that is strongly skills-biased. South Africa's substandard education system serves to reproduce and reinforce racial and class inequalities in society (Bloch 2010a: 10). South Africa's primary and secondary public schooling system, according to Van der Berg (2005: 62), "is not yet capable of systematically enabling learners to overcome inherited socio-economic disadvantage, and poor schools least so".

Furthermore, according to Van der Berg (2005: 67): The extent to which South African pupils are disadvantaged as a result of their background is exacerbated by marked inequality in outcomes between schools. This large shift in outcomes between the most affluent schools and the rest reflects the fact that a major part of the educational performance disparity in South Africa is between rich schools, on the one hand, and the 80 percent of other schools.

South Africa's economy needs to grow in a way that improves the distribution of incomes if it is to make significant progress in the quest to alleviate poverty and reduce inequality.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Spaul (2013: 58) notes that: The substandard quality of education provided to the majority of South African youth has severe economic consequences for those affected. Furthermore, the economic prospects of the youth seem to be deteriorating over time. The percentage of 18-24 year olds who are not in education, employment, or training (NEET) has increased from 30 percent in 1995 to 45 percent in 2011; while the percentage of 18-24 year olds enrolled in education has, over the same period, decreased from 50 percent to 36 percent. The unemployment rate for the youth has also increased from 36 percent in 1995 to 50 percent in 2011. This is twice the national unemployment rate in 2011. Furthermore, of those unemployed in 2011, more than 70 percent have never been employed before. Disconcertingly, for the youth, obtaining Matric does not markedly increase one's chances of finding employment relative to 18-24 year olds who have not obtained Matric. Rather, the value of Matric lies in accessing opportunities to acquire some form of tertiary education. These opportunities are available to only a small minority.

<sup>48</sup> Van der Berg *et al.* (2011: 14) note that the demand for skills can be expected to grow further as the economy grows: Enhancing skills by means of more and a better quality education is necessary simply to keep up with the increasingly skills-intensive nature of growth. This would allow a larger share of the population to access the top end of the labour market, and to become economic insiders who are able to share fully in the fruits of economic development. But only if this occurs on a massive scale, would most of the poor benefit. As more people start earning high incomes, overall inequality would start declining, though the wage differentials between high-skilled and low-skilled workers would remain large unless the growth of skills exceeds the

Low-quality and unequal education compromises South Africa's ability to grow its economy at the rate required to create jobs and reduce the high rate of unemployment (and underemployment). The cumulative consequence of low-quality education "is that far too many learners are stigmatised as failures, leaving school without literacy and numeracy capabilities, and heading for unemployment and bare survival in a society and global world that thrives on and rewards high-level education and skills, knowledge and innovation" (Chisholm 2011: 51). However, it is unlikely that economic growth alone – without explicit poverty alleviation and inequality reduction strategies – is capable of lifting many South Africans out of poverty and reducing inequality. Low-quality and unequal education also compromises South Africa's ability to alleviate poverty and reduce inequality (since it reproduces poverty, perpetuates inequality, and worsens unemployment), which in turn negatively affects economic growth.

Spaull (2013: 60) describes the nature of the relationship between low-quality education, particularly primary and secondary public schooling, and poverty and socio-economic inequality in South Africa as follows: After twenty years of democratic rule, most "black" children continue to receive an education which condemns them to the underclass of South African society characterised by a status quo of poverty and unemployment. This substandard education does not develop their capabilities or expand their economic opportunities, but instead undermines their sense of self-worth, limits their agency, and denies them dignified employment. In short, poor educational outcomes in the primary and secondary public schooling system reinforces socio-economic inequality and leads to a situation where children inherit the social station of their parents, irrespective of their motivation or ability.

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demand for this type of labour. Only then will the wage differential between skilled and less skilled workers decline. However, the prospects of this occurring in the near future are limited.

## Section B

# (Re)Conceptualising Education in and for Constitutional Democratic South Africa

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The right to education is affirmed by and in numerous international human rights treatise. Across the world, most countries, including South Africa, have enshrined in their national constitutions, a provision for the right to education. Consequently, many more children have access to primary and secondary public schooling than they did at the start of the twenty-first century. However, *access* is not sufficient. The *quality* of education is also crucial.

Low-quality education perpetuates poverty and socio-economic inequality in South Africa (Branson & Zuze 2012: 69). The link between low-quality education and poverty and socio-economic inequality is illustrated by Figure 2 in Chapter 4, Section A.<sup>49</sup> Figure 2 also highlights one of the critical points where interventions in education can contribute towards breaking the cycle of poverty and socio-economic inequality: namely, *equal access to quality education*.

Green (2008: 42) asserts that quality education is emancipatory: It is a path to greater freedom and choice, and opens the door to improved health, earning opportunities, material well-being, and the skills required to transform the quality of life for generations to come. It is a transformative process that respects children's rights, encourages active citizenship, and contributes to building a just and democratic society.

Addressing the importance of quality education, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) states the following (UNESCO 2013: 4): Addressing the crisis with regard to quality education requires us to redefine what the purposes of education systems are. The competencies that teaching and learning promote must reflect and respond to the needs and expectations of individuals, countries, the global population, and the world of work today. They must not only teach basic skills like literacy and numeracy, but should also encourage critical thinking and foster the desire and capacity for lifelong learning that adapts to shifts in local, national, and global dynamics. These diverse learning goals may seem disparate, but are, in fact, synergistic. By encouraging active participation and

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<sup>49</sup> Page 128.

emphasising critical thinking, children's acquisition of literacy and numeracy can be promoted while they simultaneously acquire the knowledge and skills required for the twenty-first century.

What constitutes "quality" in reference to education – particularly the teaching-learning process that occurs in primary and secondary public schooling? How ought we to define what "quality education" or "quality learning"<sup>50</sup> is, and why is it important? The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), in a working paper titled *Defining Quality in Education*, asserts that there exists many definitions of quality in the context of education (which is a complex system embedded in a political, cultural, and economic context), testifying to the complexity and multi-faceted nature of the concept (UNICEF 2000: 4).

UNESCO's *Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2005* alludes to the fact that the different perspectives on and approaches to are grounded in different traditions of educational thought (UNESCO 2004: 19). The debate regarding quality education has been enriched by humanist approaches, behaviourist theory, sociological critiques of education, and challenges to the legacies of colonialism; and, consequently, distinct visions of how the purposes of education should be defined and its objectives should be achieved have been produced (UNESCO 2004: 19).

UNESCO (2004: 19; 29) notes that although a single definition of quality with regard to education does not exist, two elements characterise most attempts to define education's objectives:

- The first identifies pupils' cognitive development as the primary objective of all education systems. The extent to which education systems actually achieve this is an indicator of their quality. While this indicator can be measured relatively easily – at least within individual societies – it is more difficult to determine how to improve the results. Therefore, ways of securing increased quality are neither straightforward nor universal if quality is defined solely in terms of cognitive achievement.

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<sup>50</sup> The distinction between "learning" and "quality learning" is expressed by UNESCO (2013: 1) as follows: "Learning' can be defined as the process by which people acquire knowledge, skills, and attitudes. 'Quality learning' encompasses processes through which people acquire the breadth and depth of knowledge, skills, and attitudes required to fully engage in their communities, express their ideas and talents, and contribute positively to their societies."

- The second concerns the role of education in encouraging and promoting pupils’ “creative and emotional development, in supporting objectives of peace, citizenship, and security; in promoting equality, and in passing global and local cultural values down to future generations.” The achievement of these objectives is much more difficult to assess in comparison with cognitive development. “Common ground is also found in the broadly shared objectives that tend to underpin debates about quality; i.e. respect for individual rights, improved equity of access and of learning outcomes, and increased relevance.”

Although there are numerous and varying definitions of what quality education is, considerable consensus exists pertaining to the basic dimensions of quality education. Quality education includes (UNICEF 2000: 4):

- Pupils who are healthy, well-nourished, ready to participate and learn, and supported in learning by families and communities.
- Environments that are healthy, safe, protective, gender-sensitive, and provide adequate facilities and resources.
- Content that is reflected in relevant curricula and materials for the acquisition of basic knowledge and skills, especially in the areas of literacy, numeracy, and life skills; as well as knowledge in such areas as gender, health, nutrition, HIV/AIDS prevention, and peace.
- Processes through which trained teachers use child-centred teaching approaches in well-managed schools and classrooms, and skilful assessments to facilitate learning and reduce disparities.
- Outcomes that encompass knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes; and are linked to national goals for education and positive participation in society.

According to UNESCO (2004: 28), quality in the teaching-learning process is essential because:

- How well pupils are taught and how much they learn, can have a crucial impact on how long they stay in school and how regularly they attend. Furthermore, whether parents or caregivers send their children to school at all is likely to depend on

assessments they make concerning the quality of teaching and learning provided, and upon whether attending school is worth the time and costs for their children as well as for themselves.

- The instrumental roles of schooling – i.e. helping individuals achieve their own socio-economic and cultural objectives and helping society to be better protected, better served by its leaders, and more equitable in important ways – will be strengthened if education is of higher quality. Schooling helps children to both develop creatively and emotionally, and acquire and develop the knowledge, knowledge, values, and attitudes required for responsible, active, and productive citizenship.

Dr Martin Prew, an education development specialist, in a three-part series of articles published in the *Mail & Guardian*,<sup>51</sup> argues that since it is well-known that educating young people is critical for the future health, growth, and development of any society, it is astounding that schooling (as it is currently conceived – an inappropriate and highly inefficient enterprise) has been allowed to fester in South Africa (and most other countries in sub-Saharan Africa) (Prew 2012a). He argues that schooling requires “reimagining and reforming”.

What might this “reimagining and reforming” entail in South Africa when it is known that providing equal access to quality education is a critical intervention in educational reform? What constitutes quality education in South Africa? What purpose should quality education serve in South Africa given its history of colonialism, segregation, and apartheid; and the high levels of poverty, socio-economic inequality, and unemployment that exist in South Africa, which, predominantly, are the result of this history? In order to re-conceptualise education, particularly primary and secondary public schooling, in and for South Africa, it is necessary to think about what kind of society South Africa is, and what it is striving achieve.

South Africa’s history is marked by deep divisions, racism, and the gross violations of human rights. South Africa’s first democratically elected parliament was convened in 1994. A new Constitution was drafted that was based on a rejection of the unrestrained power of the apartheid regime and a desire to create a state system in which power was both directed and constrained by law (Constitution 2011: xvii).

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<sup>51</sup> Articles published by the *Mail & Guardian*, both in-print and online, on 19 October 2012, 26 October 2012, and 2 November 2012 respectively.

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa – the supreme law of South Africa – is widely regarded as amongst the most progressive constitutions in the world. The Constitution has become the cornerstone of South Africa’s democracy. Since its adoption, the Constitution has shaped South African law, guided the development of democratic institutions, and informed social policy.

The preamble of the Constitution articulates the vision of a united and democratic South Africa whose overarching objectives include healing the divisions of the past and freeing the potential of each person (Constitution 2011: 4). South Africa has enshrined in its Constitution the ideals of improving the quality of life of all its citizens and establishing a society founded on democratic values, social justice, and fundamental human rights (Constitution 2011: 4).

The NPC (2011b: 422) cites James and Hadland<sup>52</sup> when it states that: The Constitution not only established a new South Africa, but also has a transformative function unusual in comparative founding documents. Unlike most constitutions, the South African Constitution does not simply intend to stabilise the country, securing existing patterns and power relationships. Its project is to transform South Africa. In other words, the Constitution demands change...“If each of us chooses to select the value system adopted in our Constitution, we shall be making a brave and bold choice that will enable us to overcome our history and to attain the constitutional vision of a society based on equality, freedom, and dignity.”

The Constitution and its values are important, because it:

- Creates a new South African identity.
- Enables South Africa to overcome its history (of division, racism, and violence) and to attain the constitutional vision of a society founded on equality, freedom, and dignity.
- Enables South Africans, thrown together by history into this shared geographical space, to have a common currency that makes life meaningful, and provides normative principles that ensure ease of life, lived side-by-side.

Nussbaum (2009: 6) makes the distinction between “an education for profit-making and an education for a more inclusive type of citizenship”: This distinction is related to the contrast

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<sup>52</sup> James & Hadland (2002)

between two conceptions of development; namely, the old narrowly understood economic conception of development (i.e. human capital theory), and the richer more inclusive notion of human development (i.e. human development theory).

Education for economic enrichment is concerned with economic growth and individual acquisition, whereas education for human development aims to produce decent and competent world citizens who understand global problems and who possess the practical competence as well as the motivational incentives to do something about those problems (Nussbaum 2008: 10). Education for human development seeks to “promote the enrichment of the student’s own senses, imagination, thought, and practical reason”, as well as “a vision of humanity according to which all human beings are entitled to that kind of development on a basis of equality” (Nussbaum 2008: 10).

Education, notes Nussbaum (2008: 10), plays a crucial role in development: The purpose of education, understood in its narrow, technical sense (i.e. institutionalised teaching and learning in relation to a curriculum), is to provide access to the top end of the labour market and facilitate social mobility. However, the importance of education extends beyond this narrow, technical conception. The critical importance of education is not confined to the essential technical skills of literacy and numeracy.

Education is important because it has a crucial role to play in “developing responsive and active citizens who can play a role in local governance, community development, and other local initiatives” (NPC 2011d: 11). Development, notes Nussbaum (2011: 155-156), requires more than a narrow focus on a limited set of marketable knowledge and skills deemed important for access to the labour market and subsequent economic growth: The skills typically associated with the humanities and the arts – critical thinking; the ability to empathise with others; and a grasp of history and the current political, economic, and social order – are all essential for responsible democratic citizenship, as well as for a wide range of other capabilities that people may or may not choose to exercise later in life.

If South Africa is to realise the vision articulated in the preamble of its Constitution, and successfully create a society that is humane, people-sensitive, dedicated to improving the quality of life of all its citizens, and freeing the potential of each person, then it will need to produce citizens who, according to Nussbaum (2010: 25-26), are able to:

- Think well about political and socio-economic issues affecting the nation by examining, reflecting, arguing, and debating, without deferring to tradition, authority, or the majority.
- Recognise fellow citizens, who may be different in “race”, religion, gender, and sexuality, as people with equal rights who deserve to be treated with dignity and respect; as ends in themselves, not tools to be manipulated for one’s own profit.
- Have concern for the lives of others and to understand what affect various policies will have on the opportunities and experiences of one’s fellow citizens and for the people outside of one’s nation.
- Consider and imagine well a variety of complex issues affecting human life: to think about issues ranging from childhood, adolescence, family relationships, illness, death, and much more in a manner informed by an understanding of the multi-faceted nature of, and influences on, human lives, not just aggregate data.
- With an informed and realistic sense of the possibilities available, critically assess and hold political leaders accountable.
- Think about the well-being of the nation as a whole, and not solely of the well-being of one’s own local group.
- Recognise that one’s own nation is but a part of an integrated and complicated world order in which issues of many kinds require intelligent transnational deliberation for their resolution.

## **Human Capital Theory**

Unterhalter (2009: 208) notes that: “The idea of ‘human capital’ originates from the observation that schooling develops certain qualities in people, and that these qualities enhance economic productivity and economic growth, just as an increase in physical capital or investment does”.

Human capital theory, according to Unterhalter *et al.* (2007: 3), argues that the value of education is its ability to increase private and social rates of return, typically measured in

terms of increased incomes to individuals, families, and societies: Education is an investment that yields economic returns for both the individual and society. Human capital theory concentrates primarily on the instrumental value of education and on individual and collective returns from education (usually assessed in terms of economic growth). It considers education to be instrumental to economic growth. The most obvious and stressed reason for the importance of education, according to the human capital theory, is its link to employment. Education provides people with the necessary productive knowledge and skills that an economy requires. It equips people with the knowledge and skills required to access and enter the labour market.

Weisbrod (1966: 10) argues that education “produces a labour force that is more skilled, more adaptable to the needs of a changing economy, and more likely to develop the imaginative ideas, techniques, and products which are critical to the process of economic expansion and social adaptation to change”. Education “enhances the earnings potential of the poor, both in competing for jobs and earnings and as a source of growth and employment in itself” (Van der Berg 2002:1): Higher skilled individuals are more likely than their lower skilled counterparts to find employment and are also less likely to be dismissed during economic downturns.

Human capital theory, however, invites the criticism that its vision of what people value from education is too narrow (Unterhalter *et al.* 2007: 3): Individuals and societies do not value education solely because it will earn them more money. They may value education because it is pleasant in its own right, allows them to challenge existing power structures, or develops and understanding of and appreciation for non-economic values.

## **Human Development Theory**

From the perspective of the human development theory, the value of an economy does lie in economic growth, but in an economy’s capacity to provide opportunities for human flourishing, i.e. for each human being to live a life she has reason to value and chooses to lead. The human development theory conceptualises education from the perspective of the capability approach. It places the quality of human life, not economic growth, at the centre of its concerns (Unterhalter 2009: 213). This does not mean that concern for human capital

should be neglected as it is alert to the ways in which people acquire and develop marketable knowledge and skills that will enhance their income.

Nevertheless, earning power and economic values are not the only dimensions of human flourishing that are important. The value of education extends beyond equipping individuals with the knowledge and skills required to access the labour market and contribute to economic growth. The human development theory considers, more broadly than the human capital theory, the ways in which education enhances individual freedom and well-being.

The human development theory goes much further than the human capital theory in considering the ways in which education enhances freedom. According to the human development theory, education serves to expand valuable capabilities in the following ways (Unterhalter 2009: 214):

- Education fulfils an *instrumental social role*. For example, literacy can foster public debate and dialogue about socio-political arrangements.
- Education also fulfils an *instrumental process role* in facilitating people's capacity to participate in decision-making processes at the household, community, or national level.
- Education also fulfils an *empowering and distributive role* in facilitating the ability of disadvantaged, marginalised, and excluded groups to organise politically, since, without education, these groups would be unable to gain access to centres of power and make a case for redistribution to begin with.
- Education has *redistributive* effects between and within social groups and households.
- Education has an *interpersonal* impact because people are able to use the benefits of education to help both others and themselves, and can therefore contribute to democratic freedoms and the overall good of society as a whole.

## Amartya Sen on the Human Capital Theory and Human Development Theory

Amartya Sen notes the similarity and distinction between the human capital theory and the human development theory as follows (Sen 1999: 292-297; Unterhalter 2009: 212-213):

- The human capital theory emphasises the agency of human beings – through knowledge, skill, and effort – in augmenting production possibilities. The human development theory emphasises the ability of human beings to lead lives that they consider worthwhile and to enhance the substantive choices available to them. The two perspectives are related since they are both concerned with the role of human beings, and in particular with the actual abilities that human beings achieve and acquire. However, the concept of human capabilities is a more expansive notion than human capital, and promotes aspects of human flourishing that are broader than those associated with merely increasing productivity or economic growth.
- As a result of particular personal characteristics, social background, economic circumstances, and so forth, a person has the ability to be and to do certain things that she has reason to value. The reason for valuation may be *direct* (the functioning involved may directly enrich her life, i.e. being well-nourished or being healthy), or *indirect* (the functioning involved may contribute to further production, or command a price in the market). The human capital theory can be broadly defined to include both types of valuation, but is typically defined primarily in terms of indirect value, i.e. human qualities that can be employed as “capital” in production.
  - For example, if education makes a person more efficient in commodity production, then this is clearly an enhancement of human capital. This can add to the value of production in the economy and also to the income of the educated person. But even with the same level of income, a person may benefit from education through reading, communicating, arguing, being able to choose in a more informed way, being taken more seriously by others, and so forth. The value and benefits of education thus exceed its role as human capital in commodity production. The broader human development theory would record – and value – these additional roles. The human capital theory and the human development theory are thus closely related.

- Despite the fact that the human capital theory and the human development theory are related, there is a crucial difference between them. This difference relates, to some extent, to the distinction between means and end. Acknowledging the role of human qualities in promoting and sustaining economic growth does not equate to articulating *why* economic growth is sought in the first place. If the ultimate goal of development is the expansion of human freedom to live the kinds of lives that people have reason to value, then the role of economic growth in expanding these opportunities has to be integrated into that more foundational understanding of the process of development as the expansion of human capability to lead freer and more worthwhile lives. While economic prosperity enables and assists people to lead freer and more fulfilling lives, so does more (quality) education, (quality) healthcare, and other socio-political factors that causally influence the effective freedoms that people actually enjoy. These socio-political factors must be considered developmental, since they too enable and assist people to lead longer, freer, and more fruitful lives, *in addition* to the role they play in promoting productivity or economic growth or individual incomes.
- In spite of the usefulness of the concept of human capital as a productive resource, it is important to recognise that human beings are significantly more than human capital. After acknowledging the relevance and reach of human capital, it is important to go beyond it. This broadening ought to be additional and cumulative, rather than being an alternative to the human capital theory. It is important to take note of the instrumental role of capability expansion in effecting *social* change (which extends well beyond *economic* change). Capability serves as the means not only to economic production (which is what is emphasised by the human capital theory), but also to social development.

## **Education in and for Constitutional Democratic South Africa**

Modisaotsile (2012: 5), in an article on basic education in South Africa, concludes by reflecting on what education is and what it is for: Education is about much more than children sitting in classrooms, acquiring knowledge and skills that can be objectively tested. Both the inputs to, and the outcomes from, education are far more complex than what is suggested by much of the usual discourse. Educational inputs are usually described in technical terms, i.e.

optimal teacher-to-pupil ratio or the availability of chalk and textbooks. Educational outcomes are typically described in economic terms, i.e. the higher incomes associated with each additional year of schooling. However, because education is first and foremost the vehicle through which societies reproduce themselves, both the inputs and outcomes in an education system may more rightly be thought of as a set of ideas regarding how, and for what purpose, a society is structured and should be structured.

The type of society that South Africa is, and is endeavouring to become, is articulated in its Constitution. The Constitution, which is Rawlsian in character, contains both first-generation rights (i.e. maximum liberty, subject to equal liberty for all), and second generation rights, which includes the right to education (i.e. the maximisation of the position of the least well-off) (CDE 2010: 5). The Constitution – which accepts responsibility for education, housing, healthcare, sufficient food and water, social security, and freedom and security from all forms of violence for all citizens – enjoins the state to provide for its citizens (Maile 2008: 164).

Maile (2008: 164) cites Motala & Pampallis<sup>53</sup> when he states that the provisions of South Africa's Constitution "cannot be understood without an historical analysis contextualising its evolution"; and he cites Oldfield<sup>54</sup> when he argues that "the legacy of apartheid impels the state to act developmentally" (Maile 2008: 163). South Africa's Constitution is an expression of the struggle against apartheid, the need to establish a culture of human rights in the country, the struggle for socio-economic rights, and the intent to universalise the principles of fairness and justice (Maile 2008: 164).

The nature and extent of poverty, socio-economic inequality, and unemployment in constitutional democratic South Africa is largely as a consequence of apartheid. Deprivation, understood narrowly, is equated with absolute lack of income. Yet deprivation is a much broader concept and reality. It should be understood in terms of social justice. Maile (2008: 158-159) cites Preece<sup>55</sup> when he states that a multi-dimensional understanding of deprivation helps to define it as a human condition characterised by a lack of the sustained choices, security, and power necessary for enjoyment of an adequate standard of living and other civil, cultural, economic, political, and social rights.

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<sup>53</sup> Motala & Pampallis (2001)

<sup>54</sup> Oldfield (2001)

<sup>55</sup> Preece (2005)

Poverty, socio-economic inequality, and unemployment are South Africa's most pressing development challenges. Although they are distinct concepts and realities, they are interrelated. Thus, given the multi-faceted nature of poverty, socio-economic inequality, and unemployment; with regard to education in South Africa, it is not a case of adopting an approach to education, particularly primary and secondary public schooling that is solely informed by either the human capital theory or the human development theory. Elements of both theories are required if South Africa is to become the kind of society its Constitution envisions.

With regard to the need for elements of the human capital theory, the CDE argues that rapid economic growth has a proven capacity, and is the only sustainable way, to address poverty, socio-economic inequality, and unemployment in South Africa (CDE 2010: 40): Rapid economic growth will improve the circumstances and quality of people's lives and their families' future opportunities. It is the only approach that will empower the tens of millions of South Africans whose lives are blighted, and whose choices are constrained, by the large-scale poverty and socio-economic inequality that exists in South Africa. In the short-term and medium-term, redistribution cannot do what finding a job can. Redistribution can marginally ameliorate the worst poverty, but it cannot create the sense of self-worth that is the consequence of full participation in society. Thus, to reverse mass poverty and socio-economic exclusion, South Africa must create an inclusive economy as quickly as possible. Achieving this requires high and sustained economic growth, and a massive increase in the number of formal sector jobs.

It is critically important that South Africa's education system, particularly its primary and secondary public schooling system<sup>56</sup>, provides all pupils, irrespective of their socio-economic background, with educational inputs of the highest quality; and subsequently produces

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<sup>56</sup> Primary and secondary public schooling are of particular importance because, as the CDE 2010: 26:-27) puts it: "There are high returns in South Africa in completing secondary and tertiary education, which suggests that the number of students reaching these levels should be increased. However, there are limits to what can be achieved. National policy cannot be directed at providing every South African citizen with a tertiary education. Importantly, focusing too hard on increasing the numbers of people receiving tertiary education by subsidising it can lead to increased inequality. This is because, almost invariably, only a narrow elite benefits from this kind of spending. Thus there has to be complementary focus on ensuring that primary and secondary schooling are good enough to give South Africans better returns on the time spent in those stages of schooling, whether or not they continue their education from there."

educational outcomes of the highest quality. The education system should produce human capital for the labour market, which in turn can transform this human capital into productivity and incomes: those with more human capital are more productive and earn higher incomes (CDE 2010: 21). Pursuing economic growth (i.e. the human capital theory) will pay off in the form of higher levels of national income, much higher employment rates, and the consequent lifting of millions of people out of poverty (CDE 2010: 39).

However, equipping people with the marketable competencies required to gain access to the labour market for the ultimate purpose of individual acquisition and economic growth cannot be the sole purpose of South Africa's education system if it is to truly contribute to the promotion of human development as it is described in South Africa's Constitution. The various features of individual and societal well-being and quality of life are not limited to economic growth. Economic growth will not by itself create a society in which equality, freedom, and dignity for all is a reality. Elements of the human development theory are also required if the vision of South Africa's Constitution is to be achieved.

Nussbaum argues that from the perspective of the human development theory, the purpose of education is to cultivate citizenship. In particular, education should cultivate within citizens three essential capacities (Nussbaum 2008: 15-21; 2010: 47-120):

1. Critical Thinking

Democracy requires citizens who have the ability to think for themselves, rather than deferring to tradition, authority, or the majority. Democracy requires who can reason together about their choices, rather than simple trading claims and counter-claims.

Critical thinking is especially important in heterogeneous societies. Dialogue across heterogeneous boundaries requires citizens who know how to engage in dialogue and deliberation in the first place. This is an ability that will only be learned if citizens have learned to be self-reflective, as well as critical with regard to their values, beliefs, and attitudes.

2. The Ability to See Oneself As A Member of a Heterogeneous Society and World

Competent democratic citizenship requires citizens to be able to recognise that they are members of a heterogeneous society and world. Citizens also need to understand

the history and character of the diverse groups that share their immediate and broader context. While this kind of understanding and knowledge may not guarantee good behaviour, ignorance almost guarantees bad behaviour. Possessing a catalogue of factual knowledge and technical skills, without the ability to assess them and their use, or without the ability to understand how a narrative is assembled from evidence, is dangerous.

Stereotypes and prejudice (and their devastating consequences) abound in the world, and must be combatted by ensuring that citizens learn how to relate to each other. Citizens should understand both the differences that make understanding, dialogue, and collaboration between individuals and groups difficult; and the shared human needs, interests, and aspirations that make understanding, dialogues, and collaboration essential.

### 3. Narrative Imagination

Citizens cannot relate effectively to the complex world around them equipped only with factual knowledge, logic, and technical skills. Thus, narrative imagination – closely related to critical thinking and the ability to see oneself as a member of a heterogeneous society and world, is the third ability required for competent democratic citizenship. Narrative imagination is the ability to empathise. It is the ability to consider and imagine life from the perspective of others.

Learning to see another human being as an end, and not as a means to an end, is an ability that requires cultivation. The moral imagination is prone to become obtuse unless it is energetically refined and cultivated through the development of sympathy and concern. It must be promoted by an education that develops and refines the ability to think about what the outer and inner life of another may be like, while at the same time understanding that one can never fully grasp the outer and inner world of another person.

At the heart of these three capacities is the idea of freedom (Nussbaum 2006: 392): “...the freedom of the child’s mind to engage critically with tradition; the freedom to imagine citizenship in both national and world terms, and to negotiate multiple allegiances with

knowledge and confidence; and the freedom to reach out in the imagination, allowing another person's experience into oneself."

## **Education and Active Citizenship**

Nussbaum asserts that the education of citizens is crucial for democratic societies (Nussbaum 2006: 387). She argues that young citizens, through primary and secondary education, form habits of mind that will be with them throughout their lives (Nussbaum 2006: 387): "They learn to ask questions, or not to ask them; to take what they hear at face value, or to probe more deeply; to imagine a situation of a person different from themselves, or to see a new person as a mere threat to the success of their own projects; to think of themselves as members of a homogeneous group or as members of a nation, and a world, made up of many people and groups, all of whom deserve respect and understanding."

The efficacy of South Africa's education system, in particular its public primary and secondary schooling system, should not be measured solely by whether there is an increase or a decline in the number of pupils who: are literate and numerate; take and pass mathematics and physical science; pass Matric; or pass Matric well enough to be eligible to apply to study at a university. The efficacy of South Africa's education system also crucially depends on whether it produces citizens who are informed, sympathetic, and engaged; and who have minds that are active, competent, and thoughtfully critical in a complex world.

# Chapter 7

## Conclusion

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In this thesis, I sought to find answers to the following questions:

1. To what extent can quality of life be more adequately and accurately assessed by utilising the capability approach as opposed to solely relying on traditional economic approaches?
2. Given that for the majority of poor, “black” learners in South Africa the standard of education – in the primary and secondary public schooling system – is of low-quality, why and to what extent can it be said that low-quality education entrenches, perpetuates, and exacerbates poverty and socio-economic inequality?
3. How should education in South Africa be (re)conceptualised if it has a dual role to play in addressing South Africa’s key development challenges (i.e. poverty and socio-economic inequality) and equipping citizens for active, engaged, and effective citizenship within a constitutionally democratic framework by enhancing individual agency by promoting the development of capabilities?

The purpose of this enquiry was:

1. To attain an understanding of how quality of life can be more adequately and accurately assessed by utilising the capability approach.
2. To examine – within the South African context – the relationship between low-quality education in the primary and secondary public schooling system and poverty and socio-economic inequality.
3. To (re)conceptualise the role of education in and for constitutional democratic South Africa.

Constitutional democratic South Africa faces the challenges of severe poverty, stark socio-economic inequality, and persistently high unemployment. It is marked by disparities of wealth and poverty that are amongst the most extreme in the world. Many people live in informal and underdeveloped settlements, and experience inadequate living conditions in

which they lack access to basic amenities; while others enjoy a comparatively high standard of living.

Divisions between rich and poor, between men and women, between the educated and the uneducated, between the unemployed and the employed, and between urban areas and rural areas are far too sharp. The extreme socio-economic inequality that exists in South Africa means that one observes deprivation, impoverishment, hunger, and overcrowding alongside opulence and privileged circumstances. Affluence and destitution literally reside side-by-side, poverty resides amid plenty. Socio-economic disparities remain vast, and are even growing.

The socio-economic legacy of colonialism, segregation, and apartheid endures after twenty years of democracy. In addition to the legacy of the past, South Africa has to contend with the corruption, nepotism, and inequality of the present (Makgoba 2012: 2).

Any society's most valuable resource is its people, and education is the process by which society invests in the development of its people (DBE 2012a: 1). Thus, the current mainstream focus on education in South Africa is both timely and critically important. Education is central to human flourishing. Education (which is not limited to primary and secondary public schooling, but also includes other formal as well as informal spaces of learning) is crucial to expanding people's range of choices for leading valuable lives (Walker 2012: 331).

The failure to provide adequate education is "a violation of the right to education as it limits economic development and locks countries into cycles of low growth rates, limited employment opportunities, and weak social cohesion" (UNESCO 2013: 1). Yet a good education does more than just provide access to the labour market (UNESCO 2013: 1): Education has the power to transform people and to bring shared values to life. People around the world are connected in an unprecedented nature and to an unprecedented extent. In the face of global pandemics, conflict, climate change, poverty, socio-economic inequality, and economic turmoil, it is patently clear that our lives are inescapably interconnected, and that we will either succeed together or fail together. Education has the power to cultivate in us a vision that sees beyond our immediate interests and geographical location to the world-at-large. It can provide us with a profound and necessary understanding that we are bound together as citizens of the global community, and that our challenges, and the solutions to them, are interconnected.

In South Africa, the right to education is guaranteed by the Constitution. The Constitution enshrines the right to basic education (Constitution 2011: 15-16). This right applies to all citizens of South Africa, supposedly without discrimination. Yet in South Africa, the knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes that pupils are able to acquire and develop in the primary and secondary public schooling system – and thus their ability to (amongst other things) access long-term employment and contribute to economic growth – are disproportionately affected by their socio-economic background.

South Africa's challenge, perhaps its greatest challenge, is to create a public education system, particularly a primary and secondary public schooling system, that provides optimal learning in spite of the socio-economic disadvantages experienced by pupils (van der Berg 2005: 62). "Equity in educational outcomes between population groups", notes van der Berg (2005: 70) with regard to South Africa's education system, "is an important transformational objective, particularly given the long history of educational disparity and its contribution to current socio-economic inequality."

Both Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum emphasise the intrinsic as well the instrumental importance of education. Both Sen and Nussbaum assert that education affects the development and expansion of other capabilities; and that receiving an education that enhances one's education capability expands human freedom, whereas not receiving an education that enhances one's education capability adversely affects human freedom (Walker 2012: 331).

Nussbaum (2006: 388-391) argues that education should cultivate effective competent democratic citizenship, and equip citizens with three crucial capacities:

- The first is the capacity for critical examination of oneself and one's traditions.
- The second is the ability to view oneself not simply as a citizen of a local region or group, but also, and above all, as a human being who is bound to all other human beings by ties of recognition and concern.
- The third capacity, which is closely related to the first two, is the ability to think what it might be like to be in the shoes of a person different from oneself. Nussbaum refers to this third capacity as narrative imagination. It entails the ability to be an intelligent reader of another person's story, and to understand the emotions, wishes, and desires that that person might have.

In constitutional democratic South Africa, the quality of education, provided by the primary and secondary public schooling system, for the “black” majority is of substandard quality. For far too many, education offers little hope of providing access to a better quality of life.

The battle for political freedom was won in 1994, and South Africa is now a constitutional democracy. The new and on-going struggle is the fight for quality education (particularly primary and secondary public schooling) for everyone, especially the disenfranchised. South Africa cannot effectively and sustainably address the development challenges posed by poverty, socio-economic inequality, and unemployment without addressing the deficiencies in its public education system.

Low-quality education entrenches and perpetuates poverty and socio-economic inequality. The urgent task of improving the quality of education, particularly the national crisis that is the primary and secondary public schooling system, ought to be South Africa’s highest priority. This task is not the responsibility of (national and provincial) government alone, although (national and provincial) government has an undoubtedly crucial and primary role to play.

All citizens of South Africa need to accept and share responsibility for improving the education system. Fixing the education system requires active citizenship, not cynicism, blame, and despair. It requires holding both ourselves (as civil society, business, teachers unions, communities, parents, and ordinary citizens) and government accountable.

Accepting and sharing collective responsibility, i.e. being active citizens, might entail: taking initiative by adopting a school and contributing in whatever way possible to the success of that school and its pupils; financially supporting a pupil for a year; lobbying for legislation that would establish minimum norms and standards for education delivery (especially in poorer and rural schools); affording greater value and status to teachers and the teaching profession; setting higher standards for those who want to become teachers and demanding higher standards from those who are teachers; expecting more from pupils (especially those to whom it is communicated that mediocrity is acceptable).

South Africa’s efforts to address poverty, socio-economic inequality, and unemployment will only be achieved through a combination of active (informed, responsible, and engaged) citizenship and an effective government (Green 2008: 12):

- Active citizenship comprises a combination of rights and obligations that link individuals to the government, including paying taxes, obeying laws, and exercising the full range of political, civil, and social rights. Active citizens use the rights guaranteed to them by their Constitution to improve the quality of political or civic life, through involvement in the formal economy or formal politics, or through the sort of collective action that historically has allowed poor and excluded groups to make their voices heard. Active citizenship is important because people working together to determine the course of their own lives, fighting for rights and justice in their own societies, are critical in holding the state, private companies, and others accountable.
- An effective government is one that guarantees security and the rule of law, and can design and implement an effective strategy to ensure inclusive economic growth. An effective government is essential, because no country can prosper without a government that pro-actively manages the development process. An effective government, often known as “developmental state”, must be accountable to its citizens, and must guarantee the rights of its citizens.

South Africa’s ability to achieve this combination of active citizenship and an effective state in order to effectively address its development challenges depends crucially, as has been argued in this thesis, on education.

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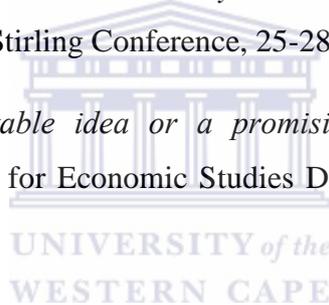
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