



Towards a Decent Standard of Living

6 February 2017



Poverty, Sufficiency and Decency

- **SPII formed in 2006 to attempt to add a civil society voice to academic interrogation of poverty, and to act as a repository of more empirical evidence for civil society anti-poverty campaigns**
- **Was always critical for us to draw decision makers into robust engagements; challenge the rhetoric of all social partners**
- **Eponymous anchor around poverty and inequality, but included Constitutional and SERs as the main tool for transformation and public participation and inclusion of lived realities as part of the empirical evidence bank for optimal prioritisation of resources.**



- South Africa one of the most unequal countries in terms of income and other dimensions globally
- It is also an upper middle income country
- Patterns of accumulation and impoverishment always been politically driven through colonial desire for commodities at low cost, coupled with institutionalised racialised exploitation of resources and people
- Insidious acceptance over generations of the acceptability of the dispossession and dehumanisation of the majority of South Africans including through the continuous reality of state violence to control both the privileged and the dispossessed.

- Overcoming the racialised nature of Apartheid had always received more popular consideration during the Liberation struggles than details of economic systems and transformation
- Influenced by geo-political reality of the cold war and the need for a unified ‘broad church’ between African nationalists, socialists and liberals in the liberation movement
- Analysis of the fault lines within the South African economy existed, but the greater cry was for the capture of state power
- Un/underskilling of black Africans and limited experience of executive- level employment advancement for all black people through job reservation

- Turbulent ingredients for a situation where the majority of South Africans live in intergenerational poverty, with limited assets accumulated and low levels of education and skills
- Spatial apartheid still prevalent in terms of legacy of the Bantustans both in actual and in conceptual realities
- Exceedingly high levels of unemployment and working poverty, as well as inequality
- Crucial legacy of apartheid is the apparent ability to accept this as the norm – replacing invisibility of black South Africans through legal mechanisms with those of economic divisions
- And yet: increasing number of protests, both civil and industrial, with an escalation in the level of force and violence used both by the protestors and the police – but always on the peripheries: in general their existence only affirmed if chosen to be covered by mainstream media

- **So why the quest for a Decent Standard of Living?**
- Given the historic levels of inequality in South Africa, the notion of poverty or lack appears to be an accepted norm, although protests show the opposite
- State anti-poverty interventions influenced by the notion of crisis rather than systemic, hence assistance for the poorest of the poor, as opposed to understanding and attacking the drivers of poverty and inequality and the need for redistribution
- The need – conceptually – to shift from minimalism to sufficiency as the short term goal – the Decent Standard of Living iterised development



- Successfully entrenched in social policy thought to the point of the inclusion – albeit in a very undefined manner- in the National Development Plan 2030 of South Africa
- Of late bolstered through South Africa’s ratification of the UN ICESCR in 2014 with the idea of an adequate standard of living
- BUT, from the aspirational ideological rhetoric to the concrete – how is this to be done?



- Subsequent to this meeting, a further meeting called by the SAHRC was held with specifically identified data experts, including StatsSA, DPME, FHR, SAHRC, DoC
- Through this process, a number of key indicators were selected to provide for the baseline study
- The most desirable prize would be for all of the line departments to provide the data from their own admin data, to be verified by SPII and StatsSA
- Failing which, if it is clear that this data will not be forthcoming timeously, the ratification step will become the default data gathering step



Way Forward

- State:
- Finalise data gathering
- Drafting of the report
- Workshopping of findings with stakeholders
- Submission to Cabinet

- Civil Society:
- Decided to draft shadow report
- Division of task, agreement on areas to highlight

Challenges for Public Participation

- Currently involved a very small circle – how to popularise the ICESCR and the possibilities it presents
- Possible social audits on rights for shadow report?
- Revigorated call for ratification of Optional Protocol
- Consideration of implication of Right to Work and how this can be used to mobilise on poverty, unemployment and a meaningful national minimum wage



- Low levels of economic growth and low domestic demand due to very high levels of poverty and income inequality – the wealth of the top income decile has grown at a phenomenal rate since 1994. Average household income for whites in the 2010 Income and Expenditure Survey was R280 000 per annum, for black households, was R37 000.
- Manufacturing sector shrunk due to deindustrialisation, flooding of cheap imports with the dropping of import tariffs after 1994
- Low skills levels of new entrants into the labour market that restricts innovation and growth of new sectors
- High wage inequalities that traps households into intergenerational poverty