



Theme: Social Cohesion

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Responses of Social Movements

The key focus area for this aspect of the Mandela Initiative is on the responses of social movements and resistance to the persistence and increase of structural inequality and poverty: in short, the focus area will be called “Responses of Social Movements”. This area will explore organised social movements, workplace organisations driven by the rank and file, the contemporary student movement, community-based organisations which confront a range of issues most commonly referred to as “service delivery” as well as locally driven political formations that have the potential to provide radical alternatives to the structural conditions which reproduce inequality and bind the majority of people in this country into a perpetual state of poverty.

The focus area will both undertake in-depth interviews and surveys of a range of social movements, and it will also train and capacitate local activists to undertake research. We will collectively hold regular meetings on a small scale as well as nationally, which bring together various strains of social movements that tend to work in isolation from one other. The project will result in a lengthy report on the findings from this research, and it will also reflect on the various attempts (by both this project and the social movements themselves) at achieving policy change, and also building power from below.

About this brief

This brief was commissioned by the Mandela Initiative to help inform a synthesis report on its work since the 2012 national conference, *Strategies to Overcome Poverty and Inequality*, organised by the University of Cape Town. The MI provides a multi-sectoral platform to investigate and develop strategies to overcome poverty and reduce inequality in South Africa. While the Nelson Mandela Foundation is a key partner, the Initiative has relied on collaborations between academics and researchers, government, business leaders, civil society, the church and unions.

The synthesis report serves as a framework for reporting on the work of the MI at a national gathering on 12 – 14 February 2018 at the University of Cape Town. The MI *Think Tank* has identified the objectives for the gathering as:

- to anchor the contributions of the MI within an analysis of the current South African political and economic context;
- to share the recommendations emanating from the MI-related work streams at a policy/strategic level to advance the goal of eliminating poverty and reducing inequality;
- to critically engage with the potential impact of the recommendations on eliminating structural poverty and inequality; and
- to discuss ways of promoting popular conversations and debate about what needs to be done to eliminate poverty and reduce inequality, beyond the MI.

The synthesis report aims to assist participants to prepare for the national gathering. The report drew on findings from the sectoral research projects of Think Tank members; the MI’s *Action Dialogues*; a report on an MI *Community of Practice workshop* with research chairs from different universities to identify cross-cutting themes emerging from the MI’s *research programme*; and the work programmes of others who have expressed an interest in contributing to the goals of the MI.

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Following the transition to democracy in 1994, the African National Congress (ANC) experienced a honeymoon period, but this did not last long. With the adoption of the neoliberal Growth Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) policies in 1996, historically black township communities soon felt the effects of privatisation when water and electricity cut-offs as well as rising unemployment resulted in a situation in which poverty and inequality arguably became more deep-seated over the last two decades. By the early 2000s, several social movements had emerged in an attempt to bring together communities facing the onslaught of neoliberalism including Anti-Privatisation Forum (APF), the Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee (SECC), the Landless People's Movement (LPM) and the Anti-Eviction Campaign (AEC).

These organisations brought with them anti-capitalist ideologies as well non-political (party) approaches and, perhaps most importantly, they used a combination of disciplined mass meetings, the judiciary as well as direct action to concretely address structural inequalities. However, for a variety of reasons which this focus area will help identify, these movements are presently in a period of abeyance. No major study that we are aware of has sought to uncover the cumulative effect that post-apartheid social movements have had on reversing poverty and inequality in the country.

The focus area will also investigate the latest stage of "new" social movements including the Democratic Left Front (DLF), the United Front (which seeks to bring together workers, communities and students), as well as the Germiston Workers' Advice Office (the latter has formed a social movement consisting primarily of precarious workers). As the hegemony of the ANC continues to crumble, these and other formations build upon traditions that have consistently sought to challenge the effects of neoliberal policies which many social movement members believe are the root cause of poverty and inequality. This focus area builds upon work that has been done by the Centre for Social Change which is continuing its strong tradition of making research and knowledge relevant to ordinary people at the forefront of grassroots movements. By capacitating ordinary citizens who are members of social movements, through workshops and research training, the focus area aims to solidify (with both academics and activists) an approach that will address structural poverty and inequality through the building of movements from below.

Three examples of innovative practices:

1. *Thembelihle Crisis Committee (TCC)*. The informal settlement called Thembelihle is part of Lenasia, which is located in a predominantly Indian suburb southwest of the City of Johannesburg. It consists of over 20,000 members. In mid-2002 the state attempted to evict the people of Thembelihle, but the community resisted. Over the last decade and a half, members of the community have sustained the TCC which continues to fight for basic services under an anti-capitalist, some would say socialist, umbrella. The TCC has been at the forefront of various national social movement formations and it is one of the few struggle-oriented community-organisations in the country that has sustained itself for over decade. The committee is exemplary for other reasons. In 2015, the TCC won "the Most Integrated Community" award for the role that

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it played in preventing xenophobic violence in the area. In addition, after nearly countless marches and demonstrations, the community is finally being earmarked for development (including electricity and housing).

2. *Marikana Support Campaign.* The MSC was founded after the Marikana massacre. Five years after the massacre, it continues to work in direct consultation with the mineworkers who survived the massacre as well as the families (primarily the widows) of the workers who were killed. In seeking justice for mineworkers, it combines fundraising and legal work with mass mobilisation and direct action. The MSC is particularly innovative because it has extended far and wide to an international audience while simultaneously building local initiatives in communities that fight for better living and working conditions. It seeks to hold government and business (Lonmin) not only accountable for the killings of mineworkers, but also for sustaining the structural conditions that reproduce the deplorable living conditions in which mineworkers find themselves despite the fact that they pull platinum out of the ground.
3. *Centre for Social Change.* The CSC is also known as the South African Research Chair in Social Change. The CSC has a tradition, dating back to at least the late 2000s, of conducting research in some of the poorest areas of the country and also engaging in public dialogues with leaders and ordinary residents in these communities. This includes activities related to recent local and national government elections as well as regular workshops and larger public meetings. The CSC is arguably at the forefront in the country of bringing together academics and a wide range of communities and workplaces that seek to address questions of poverty and inequality.

For more information on the Mandela Initiative:

