

Engagement on Strategies to Overcome Inequality in South Africa

1-2 June 2017

Kievietskroon, Pretoria

There is now recognition in South Africa and internationally that dealing with inequality in its many dimensions is a policy priority and a key prong of an inclusive growth strategy. Indeed, given our history, inequality has always been a priority research area in post-apartheid South Africa and the last decade has seen explicit attention being devoted to the policy implications of this work. The National Development Plan recognises that we have not successfully tackled the pervasive inequalities that were inherited in 1994 and that this continues to distort and stifle our national potential. The Plan therefore tables this issue as one in need of urgent policy attention. In parallel, there have been concerted efforts, internationally, to understand and respond to changing global patterns of inequality and the key forces operating within and between countries to generate these patterns.

In South Africa an informally constituted group of researchers and policy makers have been interacting over inequality for the last few years within a number of initiatives¹. These interactions have kept returning to the need to consolidate and systematise our South African learnings on strategies to overcome inequality and to triangulate with similar processes that have been running internationally. The importance of this process has become more pressing over time and with the support of two partners that have supported our work from the outset, the Programme to Support Pro-Poor Policy Development (PSPPD) and the World Institute for Development Economics Research (Wider), a convening Engagement of key South Africans and a select group of international participants has come together for 1 to 2 June 2017.

The motivation is for a smallish, focussed Engagement that:

1. Asks experienced international researchers and policy practitioners to talk in some detail about their framing and practice in promoting and/or implementing strategies to overcome inequality in specific contexts;
2. Turns the focus towards South Africa by asking a similar group of South Africans to do the same; and,
3. Uses these two streams to frame a work programme to hone the key prongs of a South African strategy to overcome inequality by the end of 2017 that is globally informed and locally grounded.

¹ The informal planning committee includes Trevor Manuel, Joel Netshitenze, Kate Philip, Andrew Donaldson, Mastoera Sadan, Murray Leibbrandt. Their work has taken place within the ambit of the Mandela Initiative (<http://www.mandelainitiative.org.za/>) and has included the Research Project on Employment, Income Distribution and Inclusive Growth (REDI3x3) (<http://www.redi3x3.org/>).

Programme

Clearly the success of this programme depends on getting an appropriate set of South African and international participants in the room together. In all of you, we have a set of leading policy researchers and policy practitioners within South Africa and internationally.² We use the language of practitioner intentionally to include both formal policy-makers and civil society groups who have been working with communities in the policy space. Alan Hirsch is leading a process to ensure that some of South Africa's leading NGOs/NPOs working in the policy space are at the table.

A draft programme is attached. The Engagement will run over two days. Our thinking is to spend a day and a half discussing a set of policy dimensions and then to table a session on civil society engagement and the politics of inequality before we move towards the final sessions on honing a work programme through to the end of 2017.

Each country has to address its inequality by using both standard policy instruments as well as approaches that give cognisance to its own legacies. Inequality is multidimensional and, with South Africa's particular history, our dialogue will need to address our legacy by thinking through interventions that address spatial inequality and asset inequality (land, housing, education and health) alongside a focus on tax and expenditure policy, social safety nets and social security, labour market policies, financial market policies and macroeconomic considerations. Our inequality is the result of intersecting cycles of disadvantage that operate across these dimensions. Overcoming South Africa's inequality will require good technical/policy thinking in all of these areas. It will also require a national vision and an engaged citizenry. In recognition of this, we are grateful for the participation from a set of South African civil society organisations who have been working with communities as they engagement with policy processes.

The programme will be finalised with you to make the most of the participants that we have in the room. Thank you very much for agreeing to participate with us in this Engagement. Given our decision to push ahead with this meeting at very short notice, we are deeply grateful for the enthusiastic response that we have received.

Finn Tarp, Murray Leibbrandt and the informal planning committee

² Even amongst those international and national invitees that cannot make it, there is a strong endorsement of this engagement and the process of which it is part. Many are keen to lend their wisdom to this initiative going forward but are not available for the specific engagement.