



M I R A T H O

Rural youth and access to higher education: intersectional conversion factors, poverty and capabilities

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Research team



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- Partnership with Thusanani Foundation (youth-led NGO)
- Consultants: Alberta Spreafico and Enrica Chiappero-Martinetti (University of Pavia) and Charles Shepherd (NMU)
- ESRC-DfID funding, with NRF
- Why 'Miratho'? (www.miratho.com)



Project overview (1)

- Four year project (2016-2020) (ESRC-DFiD and NRF funded)
- Capabilities conceptual framework: Sen: ‘ultimately, the focus has to be on what life we lead and what we can or cannot do, can or cannot be’ (Sen, 1999) –our effective opportunities to be whom we want to be. With freedom to shape our goals and future
- Focus on inclusivity of access to HE and participation by rural and (some) township youth – five university case sites
- Working with 65 students who have been supported (in various ways) into the five case universities by the Thusanani Foundation (TF)
- The 65 students participating in the study mostly come from two rural districts, one in the Eastern Cape (Joe Gqabi) and one in Limpopo (Vhembe).



Project Overview (2)

- Key questions:
 - How do disadvantaged youth from rural and townships schools access, participate in and succeed in higher education, and then move into work?
 - What contextual dimensions (conversion factors) of economic, policy, social and educational conditions enable or inhibit access, participation and success and inclusive learning outcomes (understood as capabilities expansion)?
- Multi-method, longitudinal study: 65 Life histories (longitudinal over 4 years), secondary stats (conversion factors and key indicators), HEMIS stats including one detailed university profiles, student engagement survey for one university, student survey in one university, participatory photovoice projects
- Construction using these multiple data sets of an 'Inclusive capabilities-based HE learning outcomes Index' for one university

Why rural youth?

- According to census 2011, **37.1%** of the South African population live in rural areas
- Yet, **just under 15%** of a given cohort of undergraduate university students come from rural areas (based on detailed analyses of the 2006 and 2007 cohorts)
- National participation (20-24 year olds) rate of 18,4% - but skewed based on population group (race)
 - African (15,4%); Coloured (14,2%), Indian/Asian (48,9%) and white (53.1%)
- Rural youth are particularly under-represented in South African higher education
- Rural areas in South Africa face multi-dimensional deprivations illustrated by secondary data about two rural districts (and the provinces in which they are located).

Material basis of educational wellbeing

Poverty in relation to specificity of HE as social space of investigation	Extreme	Intermediate	Emergent (marginal) middle class
Definition	Basic needs not met	Basic needs met, but loss of human dignity as a result of not being able to engage in typically human activities for normal decent human life (Lotter 2011) OR poor relative to others in the university/society	Not in poverty but status precarious and will be first generation middle class. One or more family members/ siblings have completed HE, at least one parent has a secure job usually with govt. Sufficient disposable income to contribute to student's living and other costs (eg. laptop).
Miratho numbers	11.5%	73.1%	15.4%
Indicative functionings	Not able to afford a place to stay, to wash, or food to eat. Unable to pay university fees. Multi-dimensionally deprived; lack of economic and social freedoms.	Accommodation (may be 'squatting'), and food but some still food insecure. Unable to afford necessary toiletries or good clothing. Cannot always afford travel to Uni. Very limited family financial support. Capability deprivation in some aspects: respect, belonging, full participation in class, worries affect studies etc –social exclusion from range of university activities. But may still be included in human activity of classroom learning.	Access to 'hot knowledge' about HE. More security of income. Own laptop May still be income insecure in relation to payment of University fees Learning with far fewer worries

Contextual dimensions (conversion factors) at provincial and district levels

Demographics (population group, sex, age, language most spoken at home)

Educational outcomes (highest level of education, school quintile, no-fee schools, rating of quality of local public school, importance of education for household standard of living)

Living environment (difficulties faced by municipality, main source of drinking water, distance to main source drinking water, water quality, type of toilet, access to electricity, rating of electricity supply, geyser providing hot water, access to postal service)

Work (employment status, industry, occupation type)

Household income (annual household income, household involved in agriculture)

Access to assets and credit (main dwelling, tenure status, title deed possession, RDP housing, refrigerator, electric/gas stove, washing machine, microwave, motor vehicle, important of asset ownership)

Food security and nutrition (run out of money for food past 12 months, run out of money for food 5 or more days in past month, skipped meal in past 12 months, skipped mean for 5 or more days in past month)

Health (rating of quality of local hospital and clinic, importance of health for standard of living)

Transport (mode of transport to education)

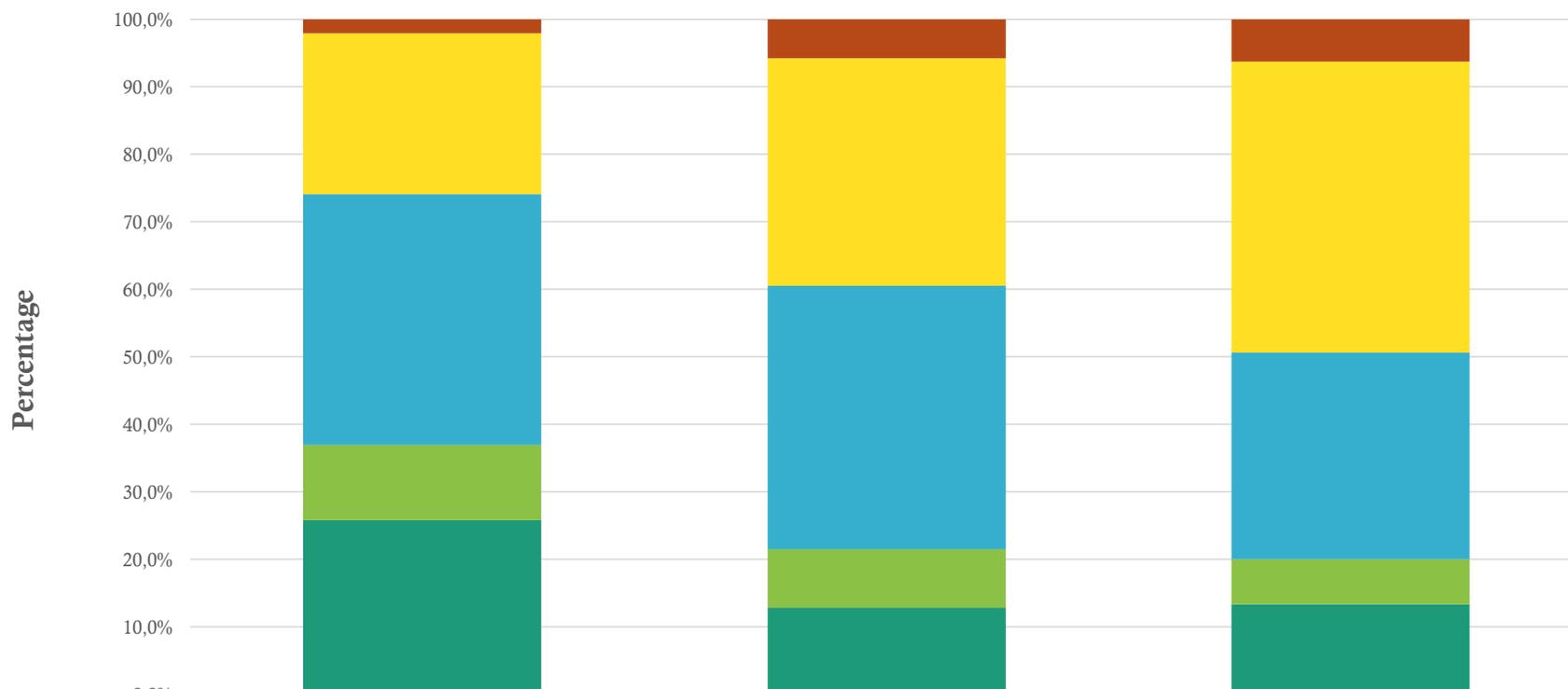
Access to technology (TV, radio, landline, cell phone, tablet, PC, internet, internet café)

Peace and violent/community cohesion (rating of quality of police services, safety during day and night, victim of crime, religious belief)

Income

- In 2015 - 55.5% of people nationally living in poverty (below R647/\$50 per person per month); Limpopo province (72.4%) and Eastern Cape (72.9%)
- Annual household income of R19,200 (\$1500) and below (Census 2011)
 - Nationally: 44.1%
 - Eastern Cape: 54.2% (Joe Gqabi District: 60.6%)
 - Limpopo Province: 55.2% (Vhembe District: 59.1%)
- Cost for one year study and accommodation at Metropolitan University is about R70 000.

Highest education level of youth aged 20-24 (District and National)



	JOE GQABI (EC)	VHEMBE (LP)	NATIONAL
Any tertiary	2,1%	5,8%	6,3%
Matric/matric equivalent	23,8%	33,8%	43,1%
Grade 10/11	37,2%	39,0%	30,5%
Grade 9	11,2%	8,6%	6,7%
Less than Grade 9	25,8%	12,9%	13,3%

Evidence from student lives: Absolute / Extreme Poverty

- Buzwe – 23 years, male student, Diploma Accounting, City University, from rural Eastern Cape, mother completed grade 8, but was always unemployed (has now died), absent father, five siblings, none university, 2 completed school, all unemployed.

“I didn’t know where to go last year but sometimes I really thank God because last year, I didn’t have a place - during the examination of my first semester, I didn’t have a place to stay...I was sleeping at the labs of City University, I was seeking for help, I was seeking for knowledge of the other members of Thusanani but I asked for help. They didn’t help me last year...Last year, one of my friends ... I used to go in the morning and take a shower, at that time I was sleeping in the labs. Since around examination of June last year, but I managed to finish my first year, although it was difficult last year, so since then I was seeking for help but they didn’t from that day. They didn’t pay for the last year of my fees, so I didn’t see my results for the first semester.”

Evidence from student lives: Intermediate/Relative poverty

- Anathi – 21 years, female student, B.Ed, Provincial University, from rural Eastern Cape, mother domestic worker, four siblings, one completed school now unemployed, two still at school, has one cousin who is employed at supermarket

“You know, for my first year, like since I didn't have those expensive clothes, expensive things, you see how people dress on campus and stuff. I would feel so small. I would just sit in the corner and be like no, what am I doing here? I am just fooling with myself. I don't belong here and stuff. It's not actually nice. Even though like it was kind of difficult for me to ask for help, because I see people, I view them as they are different from me. Like, they won't understand even though I ask for help and stuff, so I just do things on my own...

I still feel like that. It hasn't changed. I still feel like that. Whenever we are going to class and then I see these girls talking and stuff and laughing and they talk about something I know, I still find it difficult for me to talk because it's like they are not there and they don't notice me. I don't know what I should improve, or I should improve my wardrobe or what, for them to notice me.”

Evidence from student lives: Emergent Middle Class

- Wanga – 18 years, female student, Mechanical Engineering, Metropolitan University, from rural Limpopo, mother works for Department of Agriculture (fisheries) 5 siblings, all attended college, brother is a teacher.

Gets an allowance of R1000 per month from her mother, and mother also pays rent of R1250 per month (shared flat)

When asked what she uses her allowance for:

“Okay, like I have to buy toiletries, and they cost around R300, all of them, which means I am left with R700, just because now I am self-catering, I have to buy groceries, and it’s around R400. I am left with only R300, and then I have to go to church also, and I spend about R35 per day, if I go like three times in a month, then it’s not enough.”

Poverty and/or capability deprivation to explain ill/well-being of rural students?

- With regard to poverty, CA focuses not on what you have but on what you can do and be; poverty is a lack of overlapping freedoms. Sen urges a redefinition of poverty as capability deprivation, given that low income or lack of wealth are just some of many different ways in which human beings can suffer capability deprivation.
- We are broadly in agreement...but
- Our data is showing that the capability for sufficient-secure financial (material) resources needs to be in place before we consider other capability deprivations

A Philosophical Review of Poverty, Wolff, Lamb and Zur-Szpiro, JRF, 2015

- Poverty as capability deprivation (as argued by Sen and Nussbaum) extends the meaning of poverty beyond its ordinary understanding.
- Lack of capability due to low income → poverty
- High income, but lack of capability due to e.g. discrimination, poor health → (not) poverty?
- Avoid redefining poverty as capability deprivation
- Rather – poverty refers to resource-related deprivation - but this is only one part of possible human deprivation
- While ‘capability theory is an excellent theory of human development, we should resist the attempt to redefine poverty as capability deprivation...the more we emphasize other sources of deprivation, the less important poverty appears to be as central term’ (pg. 26-27)
- For our students – the material basis of educational wellbeing is foundational and has implications for (almost all) other aspects of their education wellbeing.

Emerging...

- Three central capabilities so far:
 1. to be able to access university;
 2. epistemic access/epistemic contribution (recognition as knowers) at university;
 3. to be able to have sufficient and secure financial resources for access into and through HE (even while we recognize that material resources alone do not equate to well-being).
- Two key opportunity structures:
 1. Finances (economic resource-based deprivation) and
 2. Quality of Teaching (school and university).
- Innovative conceptualization of learning outcomes as well-being and agency
- Shaped by multiple constraining conversion factors.

Next steps...



- Ongoing reflection on the conceptual approach informing the index
- Cohort analysis using HEMIS data – statistical picture of enrolment and performance in HE for rural students compared to township and urban students
- Initial drafting and piloting of survey instrument at one university
- Stakeholder consultation (annually from 2018)
- Second round of qualitative interviews and student photo voice activity
- Iterative development of the Index from interviews, student survey, secondary stats, HEMIS.

Thank you