



# **HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AS A PATHWAY TO TRANSFORMED AND PEACEFUL SOCIETIES**

**VERTICAL AND HORIZONTAL TENSIONS  
STRETCHING SOUTH AFRICA'S SOCIAL FABRIC**



**KEY INSIGHTS**



# **HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AS A PATHWAY TO TRANSFORMED AND PEACEFUL SOCIETIES**

**VERTICAL AND HORIZONTAL TENSIONS  
STRETCHING SOUTH AFRICA'S SOCIAL FABRIC**

**KEY INSIGHTS**

*August 2022*

**Jan Hofmeyr and Jaynisha Patel**

A publication by the Inclusive Economies Project

## REFLECTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

After almost three decades of democracy, South Africans find themselves in increasingly precarious material circumstances. Economic deprivation is on the rise once again, pushing millions towards the margins of existential threat. Despite a peaceful political transition in 1994, the unjust nature of South Africa's economy that makes it inaccessible to a growing segment of the population remains entrenched. Persisting inequity in the distribution of wealth and capital have prevented those historically barred from free economic participation from acquiring wealth, trapping millions at the bottom of a class structure which provides little prospect for upward mobility. Access to the stepping stones of human development, such as education, have also been wrought with inequalities of access and quality. For the marginalised, secure employment is the only means to acquire capital, but even the labour market has been constrained by an inequitable economy that leaves most behind.

Presently, unemployment is higher than ever before and threatens to push many in the middle class into poverty. Simultaneously,

increasing poverty and inequality continue to put strain on the wellbeing of the population.

---

For the marginalised, secure employment is the only means to acquire capital, but even the labour market has been constrained by an inequitable economy that leaves most behind

---

Overseeing these worrying developments has been a government that seem to have grown more concerned with its self-preservation than with the greater good of South Africans. Throughout the course of the ANC rule, macroeconomic policy has been subject to frequent alterations influenced by shifts in ideological dominance within the ruling party. These have all failed to create a more equitable economy, despite a decade of strong growth supported by high commodity prices for most of the 2000s. However, the greatest losses for inclusive development were borne from state capture

and state mismanagement that peaked during the tenure of former President Jacob Zuma. Through the length and breadth of the state, factionally aligned officials on the public payroll – from high profile political actors to bureaucratic administrative officials – became complicit in the looting of public funds and assets. This has had a damaging impact on development prospects and service delivery (important for human development), eventually creating trust deficits.

Nationally representative public opinion data shows that both vertical and horizontal trust have been in freefall for more than a decade. In terms of the former, trust between the state and society has continued to plummet since 2011. Between 2011 and 2012, civil action more than tripled and continued to increase in the years thereafter. Horizontal trust has also taken a knock, with South Africans citing race, class and politics as the most divisive facets of South African society (Figure 1). This, alongside the deflated economy and high levels of deprivation among South Africans, has created an intensifying competition over scarce resources. Not only does this force people to live in survival mode; it also heightens tensions between people and exposes parts of the population to capture by populist narratives.

Amid an increasingly bleak economic outlook and growing debt servicing costs that crowd out other spending, the state appears incapable of implementing its Recovery Plan. At the same time, South Africans' patience is running out with a government that is increasingly being forced into austerity. In the medium to long term, this environment, combined with rising interest rates, inflation

and unemployment, could provide fertile ground for populist politics and growing instability. All of this has consequences for peaceful transformation and social cohesion.

## Recommendations

In light of the above, key social stakeholders will increasingly be forced to collaborate in the creation of interventions that reduce human vulnerability. This will not be easy. Amid growing global complexity and uncertainty at the start of the 2020s, a balance must be struck between consistency in the pursuit of long-term goals, on the one hand, and adaptability on the road towards achieving them, on the other. Sustained peace and prosperity in South Africa hinges on such partnerships to find ways to ensure that profit no longer comes at the expense of livelihoods. The persistence of poverty and inequality and the growing competition for access to services and resources can no longer be sustained. In response to this, the following recommendations are made:

- **Prioritise the creation of a professional and independent civil service as a means to insulate the state from the whims of party politics.** This is critical for continuity in the delivering of services to citizens, but also the predictability that is required for domestic and international investment.
- **Strengthen the state's anticipatory capacity amid growing global complexity and uncertainty.** This can take the form of a dedicated strategic foresight unit within the Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME),

which employs futures methodologies, such as scenarios, to guide long-term planning towards the achievement of key human development goals.

- **Strengthen constitutional checks and balances by ensuring that oversight bodies can exercise their respective mandates without fear or favour.** This can be achieved by bolstering the independence of these through transparent appointment processes and sufficient funding commensurate with their mandates
- **Prioritise skills development in areas where labour market mismatches are most prevalent.** This includes collaboration between government and the private sector in the creation of job opportunities. Such public-private partnerships must be founded on a mutual commitment to serve society and progress human development.
- **Prioritise expenditure that creates agency at the community level.** Government funding should be targeted at sustainable outcomes that assist communities to adapt and thrive in all circumstances. This involves shifting the supply of human agency from central state-led programmes to adaptive and innovative community-led programmes. These can often be more cost efficient and easier to manage and monitor, while also creating space for innovative solutions that are too risky to pilot at a national scale.
- **Capacitate communities to mediate and cooperate in spite of growing scarcity.** Teaching these transferable skills can help increase the resilience of society in the face of economic decline, creating potential opportunities for mutually beneficial solutions to shared problems. This is integral to rebuilding a cohesive society.

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

### **Jan** Hofmeyr

Jan is the Head of Research and Policy Programme at the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation.

### **Jaynisha** Patel

Jaynisha is the Project Leader for Inclusive Economies at the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation.

## **ABOUT THE INSTITUTE FOR JUSTICE AND RECONCILIATION**

The Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) was launched in 2000 by officials who worked in the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, with the aim of ensuring that lessons learnt from South Africa's transition from apartheid to democracy are taken into account and utilised in advancing the interests of national reconciliation across Africa. The IJR works with partner organisations across Africa to promote reconciliation and socio-economic justice in countries emerging from conflict or undergoing democratic transition. The IJR is based in Cape Town, South Africa.

For more information, visit <http://www.ijr.org.za>, and for comments or enquiries contact [info@ijr.org.za](mailto:info@ijr.org.za).

Institute for Justice and Reconciliation  
105 Hatfield Street  
Company Gardens  
Cape Town 8001

© 2022 Institute for Justice and Reconciliation. All rights reserved.

