

SARCHi Chair in Higher Education & Human Development Research Programme

Researching well-being, agency and structures of inequalities

Research focus

The Chair leads theoretically-driven and empirically rich research, focusing on human developmentⁱ in the space of higher education.

The three foundations for human development and hence the broad goals for higher education are: to live a healthy and creative life, to be knowledgeable, and to have access to resources needed for a decent standard of living. Many other aspects are important too, especially in helping to create the right conditions for human development, such as environmental sustainability or equality between men and women.

Research therefore looks at how higher education contributes to our understanding of the conditions of possibility for human development and redressable injustices in and through higher education, and how the reproductive effects of higher education can be interrupted. Research investigates how or if people's well-being and agency are expanded towards more social justice in education and society, and how policies and institutions support or get in the way.

Research further aligns with the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)ⁱⁱ, especially Goal 4 'Quality Education,' to link our work to the global development conversation.

Aims

1. To investigate opportunities, structures and in/equalities in and through higher education, and how or if the relationship between higher education and society advances human dignity and social justice.
2. To generate critical knowledge about in/equalities as a contribution to educational and social change.

Objectives

- To understand the contextual conditions of possibility for equalities, well-being (capabilities expansion) and agency in and through higher education.
- To conceptualize and understand how higher education is or might be a 'public good'.
- To generate global South conceptual frames in and for higher education research.
- To build capacity among early career researchers.

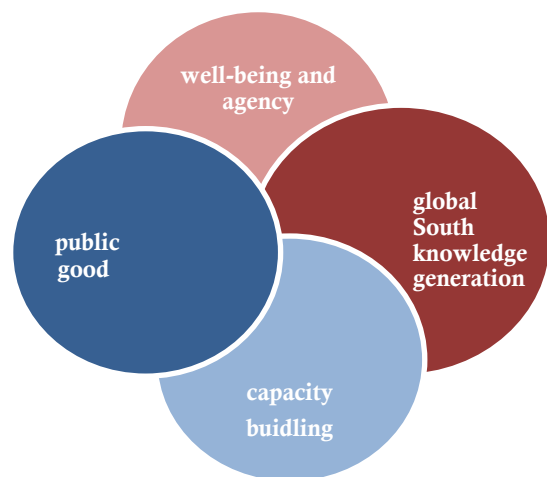


Figure 1: Intersecting objectives

Research themes

There are three intersecting, multi-dimensional themes informing research under the Chair.

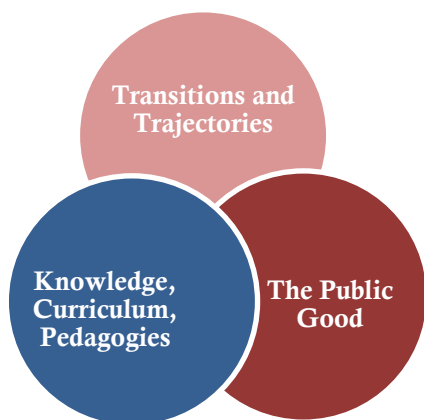


Figure 2: Research areas

Flagship research project

Funded by the ESRC and DfID, the Chair's current flagship project is on 'Inclusive higher education learning outcomes for low income rural and township youth' (2016-2020) (see www.miratho.com)

Knowledge generation

Activities include books, articles, conference papers, policy briefs, and also engagement with social media to reach wider stakeholder audiences.

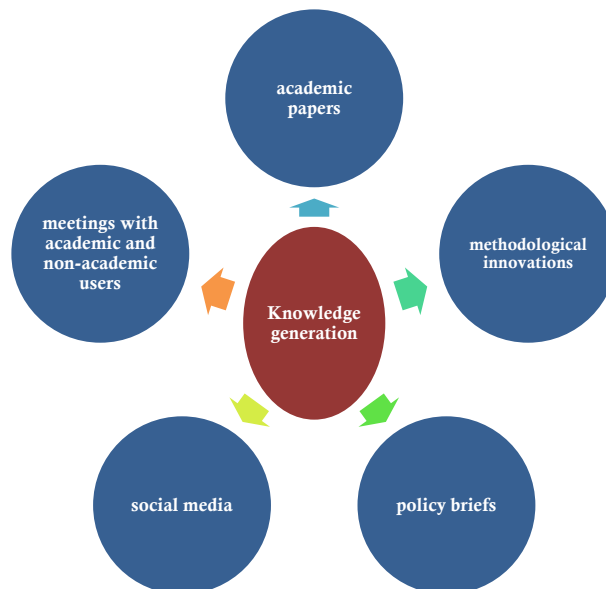


Figure 3: Knowledge generation activities

Contact us

For more information on our research and opportunities to work with us, please contact Professor Melanie Walker (walkermj@ufs.ac.za).

ⁱ Human development grew out of global discussions on the links between economic growth and development during the second half of the 20th Century. By the early 1960s there were increasing calls to challenge GDP: economic growth had emerged as both a leading objective, and indicator, of national progress in many countries, even though GDP was never intended to be used as a measure of wellbeing. In the 1970s and 80s development debates considered using alternative focuses to go beyond GDP, including putting greater emphasis on employment, followed by redistribution with growth, and then whether people had their basic needs met. These ideas helped pave the way for the human development approach, which is about expanding the richness of human life, rather than simply the richness of the economy in which human beings live. It is an approach that is focused on creating fair opportunities and choices for all people to improve the actual lives they lead and value, rather than assuming that economic growth will lead, automatically, to greater opportunities for all. Income growth is an important means to development, rather than an end in itself.

ⁱⁱ SDGs: 1: No Poverty; 2: Zero hunger; 3: Good Health and Well-being; 4: Quality Education; 5: Gender Equality; 6: Clean Water and Sanitation; 7: Affordable and Clean Energy; 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth; 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure; 10: Reduced Inequality; 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities; 12: Responsible Consumption and Production; 13: Climate Action; 14: Life Below Water; 15: Life on Land; 16: Peace and Justice Strong Institutions; 17: Partnerships to achieve the Goal.