



Miratho Research Project 2016-2020

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Global: SDG 4 (17 goals)

GOAL: 'Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all'.

Relevant targets

- 4.3 Equal access to technical/vocational and higher education
- 4.4 Relevant skills for decent work
- 4.5 Gender equality and inclusion
- 4.7 Education for sustainable development and global citizenship



- National: DHET 2016, ‘all students entering the system [should] have a reasonable chance of success and access to powerful knowledge and practices that will enable them to enter the productive economy and improve their life chances and that of their families’.
- Conceptual: The inequality which should bother all decent human beings is the unequal capability to function fully as a human being , the unequal capability to choose a life of dignity and well-being – under prevailing conditions of human technology and human knowledge’. (Goran Therborn)

Why Miratho?

The Tshivenda word 'Miratho' means informal bridges, usually constructed by community members during times of floods or other natural disasters to get across from one village to another. Students who study outside their village may find themselves stranded and unable to go to school. When community members then build Miratho, opportunities are created for these students to access the schools. But, these self-made bridges are unstable and you must be brave to use them. Miratho symbolises the determination to access education even in the face of obstacles, working with others to make progress.

Achieved HE 'learning outcomes' for rural and township youth

- How do low-income young people from rural and townships schools access, participate in, and succeed in higher education, and then move into work? What are the education enablers? What do 'achieved learning outcomes' mean from a capability approach perspective?
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- Consultants: Alberta Spreafico and Enrica Chiappero-Martinetti (University of Pavia), Charles Shepperd (NMU), Anesu Ruswa (UFS), Carmen Martinez (UFS)

Project overview : sketching a line of travel towards wellbeing and agency

- Five university case sites: Country, City, Metropolitan, Rural and Provincial- a mix of HWU, HBU, urban, rural.
- Longitudinal, multi-method
- **Capabilities** conceptual framework, (Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum) in which the focus is on **agency and well-being**. The key concepts are 'capability' meaning freedom and opportunity to be and do what people value and 'functioning' meaning the actual doings and beings that people choose.
- **Conversion** factors intersect to shape opportunities and outcomes; can point to reproductive role of education. They point to intersectional structural and process inequalities, and where redress is demanded in the direction of more justice. Inequalities may compound each other so distribution alone (equal provision) may not be sufficient
- Rather than conceptualising achieved learning outcomes narrowly or in a value-free way as graduate attributes or sets of skills and competencies, our project connects outcomes to social justice by seeing university education as producing graduates whose well-being and agency challenges injustices and uneven opportunities.

Capability Approach (wellbeing and human development)

Functionings and capabilities are the core concepts for human wellbeing: ‘They are the distinctive feature of all capability theories’ (Robeyns).

What a person is able to be and to do (her capabilities or opportunities, her potential beings and doings), and those capabilities she has realized – what she is actually able to choose (her functionings or actual beings and doings).

Capabilities (not resources) is the space for identifying dis/advantage; more capabilities translate into more advantage, and fewer capabilities into disadvantage and deprivation, which may become clustered and corrosive.

Data collected so far

- Two waves of life history data (65 now 64 students), 5 universities, Nvivo codebook written and first two waves of interviews analysed. Third wave under way. Short life history videos scripted and being made.
- Nineteen individual photo-stories, and one common photobook (data comprises training workshops, notes, river of life drawings, interviews, UFS workshop, video materials, two short videos). Also participatory workshops (e.g. vision boards)
- Pilot survey among Miratho students (n=39, being analysed).
- Secondary data sets (HEMIS cohort, rural, township, suburban students)
- StatsSA and Household Survey data by national, provincial (3 provinces: Eastern Cape, Limpopo, Kwa-Zulu Natal) and 3 districts (Joe Qwabi, Vhembe, Harry Gwala) breakdown.

Context

- Rural provinces bear 61 percent of the poverty burden (Moses et al. 2017). CRA, 2018 quality of life score : worst performing province Eastern Cape at 4.9, Kwa-Zulu Natal was 5.4 and Limpopo was 5.0. (national average 5.7)
- In 2015 59.7 percent of the poor were in rural areas. Eastern Cape, KwaZulu- Natal, and Limpopo consistently three poorest provinces between 2006 and 2015. At 59.1 percent, Eastern Cape had the highest poverty rate in 2015; Limpopo was 52.7 percent in 2011. The Eastern Cape also had the highest SAMPI score (see Sulla and Vikhale 2018).
- Van Broekhuizen et al. (2016) learners achieving an average grade of above 50 percent in grade 12 : roughly 40 percent for the Western Cape, less than 20 percent for both Limpopo and the Eastern Cape, both with large rural populations.
- Provincial differences in learners who achieved an average grade 12 grade of 60 percent or above : roughly 21 percent of learners from the Western Cape, only about 6 percent and 7 percent of learners from Limpopo and Eastern Cape did so.
- Western Cape has the highest university access rates, Limpopo and Mpumalanga have the lowest.
- Vast majority of first-time entering students are from urban areas (68%) followed by students from townships (17%) and rural areas (15%).

Secondary data (EMIS, community survey)

Dimensions (with indicators) tabulated by national, province, 3 districts. Still to be integrated with interview data.

- Demographic
- Educational outcomes
- Living environment
- Work
- Household income
- Access to assets and credit
- Food security and nutrition
- Health
- Transport
- Access to technology
- Peace and violence/community cohesion

Life story/history interviews

The life-stories of a group of historically excluded young people: are driven by the prospect of securing better lives; take up opportunities; tackle socio-economic constraints; thereby contributing to change for themselves, their families and their communities.

- **Life stories** : student narrations about past.
- **‘Life histories**: contextualised stories illuminating how individual agency and social structure interact to produces changes in lives and in society.

Data reveal the complex processes of personal transformation and social mobility through higher education.

64 students (59 rural)

- Rural areas have multi-dimensional deprivations. Families with limited tertiary or grade 12; communities in which few/no-one has been to university, many are unemployed and there seems little chance of escaping poverty; and, low quality (uneven), under-resourced school education, which is a legacy of apartheid.
- A conversion trilogy of family, community and school or influential people can structure expectation encouraging the academic effort and self belief necessary for access and passing on variety of information necessary to apply for university:

Hardship at university

Material basis of educational wellbeing is foundational and has implications for (almost all) other aspects of students' education wellbeing. The implication is that there must be a **threshold of resources** for adequate well-being at university.

Acute: basic needs not met

Transient: Basic needs met, but demarcated by reduced human dignity as a result of not being able to engage in typically human activities for normal decent human life while at university (may have a laptop). Debts are growing for some.

Limited/Emergent middle-class- status precarious and will be first generation middle class (e.g. death of a parent may shift family into intermediate poverty). One or more family members/siblings have completed HE, at least one parent has a secure job usually with govt. Sufficient disposable income for living and other costs. As a graduate may feel salary is too low to provide for extended family but material needs shift (e.g. hardship of not being able to afford a car to get to work in rural areas)

Student voices: access and poverty

- Maduva (Country) when she received her grade 12 results and saw that she had qualified for university she was so excited, 'but the problem arose when I told my parents...My father told me "My daughter, I don't have the money"...so it was very bad for me because that was the day I thought everyone will be happy. It was very difficult for me to be happy again. I thought it was the end of my world'.
- Menzi (Provincial), 'we don't have that much of a research towards what is higher education and how can we access higher education. It is easy for those who are already around higher education. I find it is as if higher education has built a wall so that those who are inside should access it much better than those who are outside'.

Student voices: poverty at university

- Tintswalo (Country) ‘In my first year, things turned to hell when I didn’t get a bursary’.
- Lungile (City) ‘Most of the time I usually have one meal. I can wake up and go to school] from eight until six without eating anything. I will eat when I get back to my house. But when I have extra per month I do get myself something at school, like a pie’.
- Lesedi (Rural), ‘at home sometimes I arrive, there is no food, there’s nothing.... They know that I have a bursary which funds me so there is an expectation that I will help out’.
- Human dignity: ‘The University forgets that to attend lectures you must first shower, eat, brush your teeth, etc. You need access to basic toiletries ...Those things are taken lightly [by the University] but they affect students who cannot come up and say these things. This affects participation in classes, where you won’t ask questions in case other students make mocking gestures (that you smell badly, for example)’ (Metro student, workshop notes).
- Khuzani (Provincial), ‘I try to be strong as if nothing is wrong with me but then, it kind of destroys me in a way’.

Access to resources and technology

- Students often cannot afford text books, libraries are not adequate, students photocopy (costs money) and use youtube to teach themselves (if they have wifi data).
- Access to powerpoint slides from lectures is uneven.
- At Rural there are very poor teaching facilities, for example, lecture rooms where the projectors are missing or do not work, lack of computer labs.
- Technology- some don't have their own laptops and must use university facilities: 'I do not own a laptop, so for instance I have to type a ten page assignment and with that ten page assignment I have to type it at campus, and now bear in mind that I still have to wait for the bus for, like, three hours'.
(Sonto, City)

Category	2016	2017	2018
Acute	12	4	2
Transient	47	55	49
Limited/emerging middle class	6	6	9
Total	65	65	60

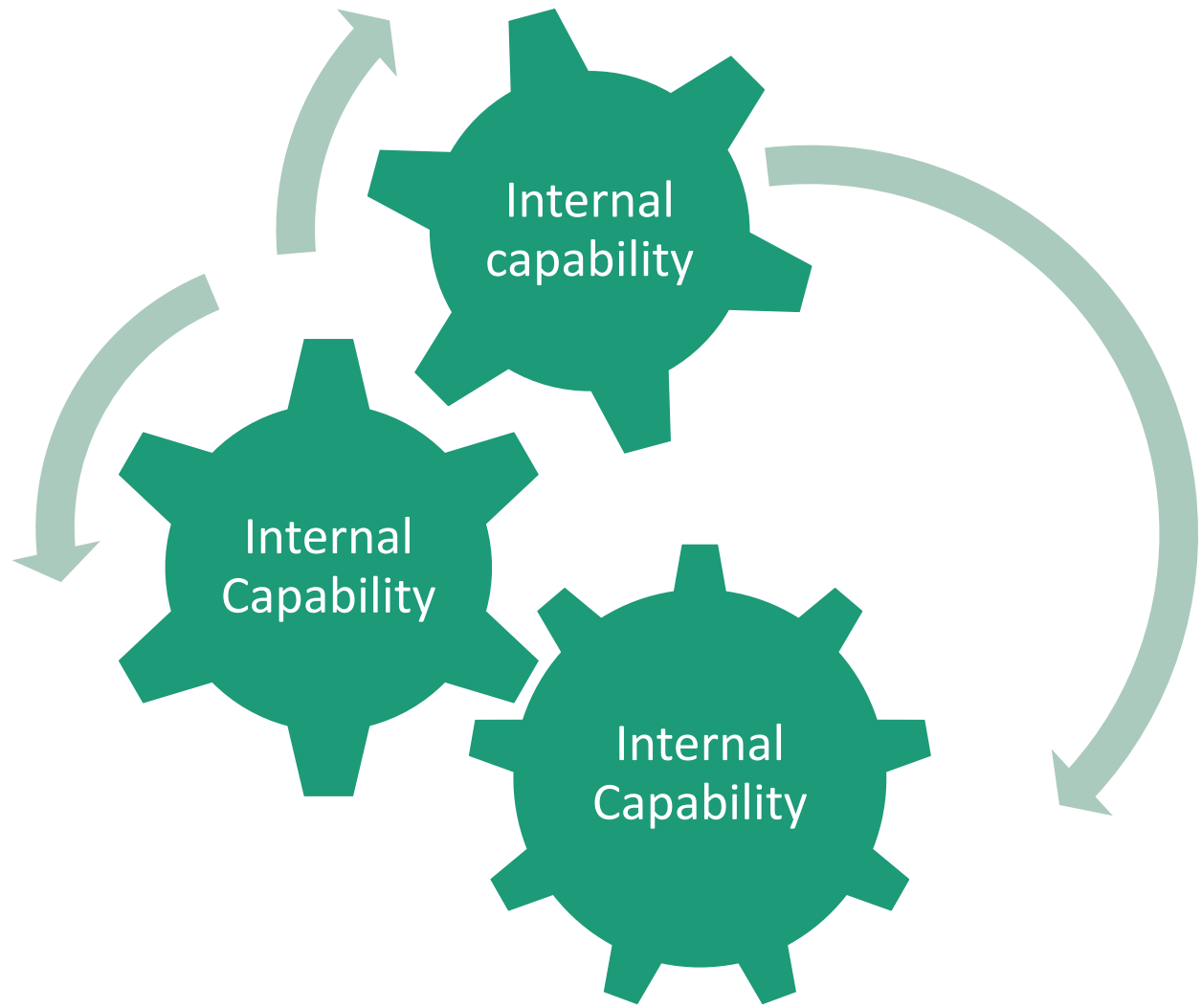
Evidence from student lives: Intermediate/Relative poverty

- 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.”

- Lwazi (Rural): ‘the struggle never ends, especially for a black child, it never ends. You want to think that you’ve gone over that hill, but there’s another one coming’.



Our goal: ‘combined capabilities’

- Persons are social beings, shaped by and involved in structures, processes and relationships in their society -‘combined capabilities’ are of special concern.
- ‘internal capabilities’ are ‘developed states of the person him/herself that are, so far as the person herself is concerned, sufficient conditions for the exercise of the requisite functions’ (Nussbaum).
- internal capability + supportive uptake conditions = a capability can be operationalized
- Claasen (2018) : ‘only the latter are full capabilities, providing us with effective freedom, with the real opportunities to do or be something’.
- **It is combined capabilities that matter for assessments of justice and for students having the freedoms to shape their own lives.**

By November 2017..... we identified two ‘combined capabilities’ to function fully as a human being in the space of higher education

Two intersecting capabilities:

- 1. 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).*
- 2. epistemic access/epistemic contribution (recognition and agency/actions as knowers) at university.*

- Both are complex and imprecise – this is not a weakness.(cf Sen).
- They align with Therborn’s (2013) resource inequality and existential (personhood) inequality.
- They are both *multiplier* capabilities and *fertile* functionings.
- Both are strengthened by solidarity/harmonious relationships/relational ontology.
- The conversion and structural factors that enable *and secure* these two capabilities, for whom, and under what university conditions, merit investigation, debate and change where necessary.

Seven draft multi-dimensional/intersecting combined capabilities (April 2019) [internal plus social uptake conditions]

1. Epistemic contribution
2. Narrative
3. Inclusion
4. Work
5. Ubuntu
6. Navigational reasoning
7. Sufficient resources

Epistemic Contribution: architectonic

- Proposed by Fricker - engages Nussbaum's idea of 10 central human capabilities as necessary for human flourishing and definitive of an international standard of justice. She argues that the capability for epistemic contribution should be one.
- Justification? Fundamental to human flourishing to have the opportunity and freedom to give information and understanding, to be credible knowers and tellers in society (the epistemic counterpart of being able to offer hospitality-a cup of tea).
- Two forms of epistemological injustice: testimonial (not listened to because of who you are); hermeneutical (not having the means to communicate intelligibly to others about structural exclusion eg race, gender, low-income)
- Two forms of epistemic materials: informational (including evidence, doubt, hypothesis, argumentation) interpretational (making sense, alternative ways of seeing).

Power and epistemic contribution

‘No matter the cultural context, the question of who gets to contribute epistemically to shared knowledge and/or shared social understandings that may be sought, canvassed, pooled or otherwise genuinely engaged with in any given practical context is a locus of what we might usefully conceive of as *epistemic relational equality and inequality*’ (Fricker, 2017, emphasis in the original)

So here in/equality is understood to be about the relationships between people, their knowledge-making interactions. The capability for epistemic contribution is frustrated by not appreciating or mistrusting people as knowers and is indicative of wider structures of inequality.

Two ways of thinking about the capability for epistemic contribution

(1) We are exploring what epistemic materials the students bring with them to university – how they already (potentially, actually) function as epistemic contributors.

(2) We look at what universities do and could do to expand opportunities and freedoms for students to make epistemic contributions both at university and, importantly, later as graduate workers and citizens.

Students making epistemic contributions

- The argument here is that our low-income students who have experienced low-quality schooling are often undervalued as knowers and tellers in universities. They are characterised as wholly disadvantaged, possessing no epistemic materials of use to others in that setting.
- However, using Tara Yosso's (2005) critical race theory which develops a 'Model of Cultural Wealth' related to students of colour in the US, we see our students bringing unrecognised and unacknowledged forms of capital which allow them to make epistemic contributions, even where their necessary cultural capital may not have been developed by schools. Yosso's capitals are: aspirational, navigational, social, familial, linguistic, and resistant. Some related to informational epistemic materials
- Borman (2017 'Nothing creates greater vulnerability than not having a voice. Without a voice you have no opinion' - you become invisible and your human rights can be safely ignored. **Proverb: Until lions learn to speak, we will only hear the story from the hunter's perspective.**

Students as agents: poised/want to gain epistemic materials from their disciplines and university life.

- University exposes you to a whole lot of things, it's a different world. I never knew most of the things until I got to university, everything about it gives you life, you feel more alive because you're exposed to so much. (Sonto, City)
- I just want to know as much as possible, though I will not make a living out of these degrees, I just want to know, I am going to university to know, to have an understanding of how the world works.(Thendo, Country)
- University is [...] mind developing. You learn new things there and every day, there are new things that you learn there. Even the place itself, you learn from it. You learn from everything at university. It's a place of learning. (Asanda, Provincial)

Good teaching from students' perspective

- Good teaching is something that has to do with being friendly and committed to student learning, knowing how to explain in such a way that the student will understand and in the best cases requiring them to think critically, giving feedback to improve learning, being approachable during consultation hours.
- She asks us 'Did you guys understand that' and we say 'No, no, we didn't understand that' then she says 'OK, I am going to do recordings, I am going to do videos, then if you don't understand come to me during my consultation hours to ask whatever you want' (Ntando, Provincial)
- 'It's like they're not moving with so called intelligent people, they are working with those who take information slowly so, they are not moving with the fast guys but their pace moves with the slow guys. At the same time, they are not interfering with their syllabus, they do each and everything, they will arrange extra classes, tutorials so, they do everything in their power'. (Olwethu, Rural)

Poor teaching: not making sure students understand

- Just arriving, reading slides, leaving. Rote learning and regurgitation of the textbook, no feedback on assessed work. Not interested in student success.
- ‘It’s standard procedure: a class two times a week, you go there for an hour, a lecturer goes through the slides, you don’t hear anything she is saying’. (Kamohelo, Provincial)
- ‘He almost made me fail sociology, because he reads pamphlets, he's not a person who, if he is lecturing on Karl Marx’s theory of alienation, so yes, he is unable to explain, fully explain it to you, and then he'll go and read what he's going to give you’. (Sabelo, Rural)
- ‘Class is not that productive because the lecturer knows that they have lecture slides of 60 pages. They need to make sure that all those 60 pages, they finish them. So, I think that's what their goal is. So, then they move fast through the material, knowing that they need to finish. This is today's material and it needs to be done by today’. (Phusu, Metro)

The capability for epistemic contribution

- Students are dedicated to gaining epistemic access and make epistemic contributions which is strongly related to their imaginings about a better life for themselves and others. They see failure as personal – no university pedagogic accountability asked for.
- Hard work does not always include critical, questioning independent thinking - makes academic success elusive.
- Pedagogical framings/arrangements can guide the direction of effort. ‘Visible’ pedagogies and good relationships appear to support students’ epistemic access.
- But, as conversion factors, the arrangements for curriculum and pedagogy do not sufficiently or often enough mobilise /harness the students’ will, passion and hard work in ways which secure epistemic access and expand the capability for epistemic contribution. This is a distributive and epistemic injustice because epistemic materials are not being fairly distributed, not all identities are credible, not all experiences are understood.

Narrative Capability

- The effective opportunity to be able to tell my own higher education story. May be foundational to ECC. Elaborated/operationalized in Miratho: photovoice and participatory workshops (e.g. river of life, identity wheel, vision boards etc.)

Participatory research strand: Photovoice

- 4 universities, 19 photostories, exhibition and student panel (one student from each of the 4 unis) held at UFS, agreement on 'common book' (translated) for the public domain, two process videos.
- Individual photo-stories were produced at three four-day workshops in Free State, Limpopo and Gauteng: basic photography training, discussion on theme of exclusion and inclusion; storyboards on which they could base their photographs and narratives; photograph taking (small digital cameras); presented these for feedback, followed by further photograph taking; final day curated and captioned their stories, including a title; book of photostories produced for each province.
- The process and outcomes exhibition powerfully highlighted the importance of enabling the narrative capability of ordinary students as a way of enabling voice, developing confidence, and taking account of their experiences.

Some titles of individual student stories

My long journey towards the power of knowledge

Against all odds

You don't have to go through it alone

My journey of thorns and roses

You can do it!

The path: not for the faint hearted

Realising my potential

The dream is still alive

Seasons throughout my road to success

A life I can't wait for you to know

Thriving through tough times

The untold tales of varsity

The difference between 'here' and 'there' is courage

Common Book, 12 photos:

The bitter truth of success

The Unknown. The excitement of going to university! Then, journeying to a completely unfamiliar place. We do not know what to expect. What will the University be like? What will learning be like? What will it mean to be a university student? **Imali!** Lack of money hinders everything. It stops us from pursuing dreams of a bright future. **Live or Leave.** Financial challenges makes us feel we are being shut out, all doors are locked to us. **Worries and Compromise.** Lack of money means lack of choice and we must opt for poor and cramped living conditions sharing with two, three, four other students, cooking in a small room - just to have a roof over our heads. We do not always have enough to eat or money for transport. **Obstacles in our University Path.** So, our process of learning is hindered. **Academic Failure.** Education is our key to a successful life. It is broken. We are unable to cope with financial challenges and balance our workload. **The Struggle is Real.** Depression follows isolation, money worries, poor academic performance, and thinking negatively. **Then, Adaptation.** The quicker the better. Being introspective and overcoming the differences and being able to fit in as a university student. **The Bowl of Fruit.** Any student can take a piece of fruit. It makes a difference to have the care, support of lecturers and a relationship with them. Sometimes lecturers – but not all or even many - do get involved and help all students succeed academically. **Friendship.** Team work and friends walking together leads to good results, delivering goals so we can settle and progress effectively in this unfamiliar environment. **Thriving through Difficulty.** Though we face ongoing obstacles, we manage to grow regardless of the environment that is not favorable to students like us. There is always an adjustment. **Light at the End.** Our determination and hard work, the support of others, and our family's hopes will bring us into light from darkness.

What students got out of the photovoice project

- INSERT PHOTOVOICE EXHIBITION VIDEO HERE

Capability (normative – points to justice)	Functioning (Contextual, data-driven)
Epistemic contribution	<p>Gaining higher learning/academic knowledge and understanding to achieve HE qualification.</p> <p>Sharing this knowledge with others and being taken seriously in the process</p>
Narrative capability	<p>Telling one’s own story of access, participation and outcomes in higher education.</p> <p>Having the confidence to tell one’s own story to diverse others in diverse situations.</p> <p>Having one’s story listened to, heard, recognized and valued in the university and by policy makers.</p>

Capability	Functioning
Inclusion	<p>Is treated with respect by administrative staff, lecturers and other students</p> <p>Treats other students, lecturers and administrative staff with respect</p> <p>Participates in academic life</p> <p>Participates in social life at the university</p>
Work	<p>Has knowledge and skills that are relevant for employment or self-employment.</p> <p>Knows what is required to apply Is well-prepared to find a graduate level job in the public or private sector and/or being prepared for</p> <p>Is connected to people who can help in finding or securing a job.</p>

Capability	Functionings
Ubuntu	<p>Understands that own well-being is connected to the well-being of other people; shows support, care and concern for the well-being of others, and values this.</p> <p>Has mutually trusting relationships with other people</p> <p>Shares resources with other students who do not have these resources and has others share their resources.</p>
Navigational reasoning [planning my life]	<p>Forms a view of the life s/he want to lead according to her values</p> <p>Imagines future aspirations, and reflects on and on how to achieve her/his aspirations; has a sense of hope about her/his future</p> <p>Is empowered in terms of being able to reflect on and make decisions that shape her/his life</p> <p>Able to be determined, to persevere to face multiple problems with courage</p>

Capability	Functioning
Subsistence [sufficient resources]	<p>Has access to sufficient nourishment, clothing, shelter, transport and basic physical and mental health.</p> <p>Has psychological wellbeing: is not overwhelmed by fear and anxiety over academic work and/or other aspects of life at university.</p> <p>Has physical security: is not constantly stressed or worried about money:</p> <p>Has access to well-being support when needed, and knows where to go for this in the university.</p>

Capability (goal)	Functioning	Indicator (quality and equality)
<p>Navigational reasoning (could be Nussbaum's practical reason) [planning my life]</p>	<p>Forms a view of the life s/he want to lead according to her values Imagines future aspirations, and reflects on and on how to achieve her/his aspirations; has a sense of hope about her/his future Is empowered in terms of being able to reflect on and make decisions that shape her/his life Able to be determined, to</p>	<p>I think about what a good life is for me and what I need to do to achieve it I am able to make my own decisions about my life I know how to make my way through university procedures I am hopeful that I will have a bright future (aspiration) I am able to stay strong and keep focused in the face of challenges</p>

‘Bounded agency’ (Evans) towards goals

- Struggle to belong and students’ academic struggles seems to spur them on to work harder, deepens their resolve and their self-determination to claim the future they want.
- Exercise of (bounded/constrained) agency in pursuit of their valued university-enabled capabilities -narrative of self as persistent, determined, resilient, goal-driven, aspirational, working hard to ensure success in forging better, ‘brighter’ futures and make their families and communities proud.
- Bounded (non-ideal) agency complements CA/combined capabilities: envisages socially situated agency influenced but not determined by the environment, emphasizing internal frames of reference, as well as external conditions (Evans). Agentic beliefs about the future.

Agency towards goals

- Struggle to belong and students' academic struggles seems to spur them on to work harder, deepens their resolve and their self-determination to claim the future they want.
- Exercise of (constrained) agency in pursuit of their valued university-enabled capabilities -narrative of self as persistent, determined, resilient, goal-driven, aspirational, working hard to ensure success in forging better, 'brighter' futures and make their families and communities proud.

Agency

- Any challenge I can stand and overcome (Akhona, Rural)
- I was a very determined student. I was, like: ‘let me try and study my way out of this situation. I’m going to go to university next year, I’m sure of that. And my classmates were: No, man, how could you? Who do you think you are? [...] And I was like: ‘Even though I’m coming from a rural background, I know I’m going to make it. [...] I know I’m going to become something great in life. I have this feeling in me. I trusted my gut. [...] I know that I’m going to become something in life. [...] You know, I’m not a naturally brilliant student, I’m a hard worker. [...] (Khethiwe, City)
- I don’t let things tear me down. If I’m down I pick myself up to do great.(Nyiko, City)
- Most of my friends, we are dedicated. We are those who want to change their families’ backgrounds. So I took it as a challenge that I want to be the first one to go to high school, the first one to go to university, to graduate and to have proper work (Asanda, Provincial)
- I came here so that I can bring about a difference not only in my family but in my community, in our country. I want to bring about change, and I believe that I will bring about that change because I think the reason why I was born in the situation that I experienced maybe the Lord [...] wanted me to experience the lifestyle so that I can tell a story, so that I can be able to motivate others and tell them that no, it’s possible. [...] I mustn’t have an excuse of why I didn’t make it in life (Tiyani, Metropolitan)
- Then I saw that I have great character in myself of fighting spirit (Menzi, Provincial)

Agency: Working with friends

When we are doing group work we correct each other. If I didn't understand this question, I've returned on my own understanding, so the other person will be able to tell me that, 'OK this is wrong, you should have written like this'. And then we also help each other with confidence, because we practice before we present. So they will act like they are audience, so stand in front of them and speak, and then identify my mistakes. (Nyikiwa, City)

Those friends, we are so close, they are so familiar, yes, in our group, we are all friends. We used to contact each and every day, because we have created a group on Whatsapp [...] If someone comes across a difficult challenge, difficult question, he or she can post it on Whatsapp group, so someone will know it, the answer. (Tintswalo, Country)

Tentative findings so far

- Capabilities does offer us a normative and practical justice-focused language to examine and surface inequalities, processes, relationships, outcomes across micro-meso-macro levels. We like its ethical individualism but recognize that it lacks attention to collectives or relational ontologies.
- Access is shaped by income, information, school, family, NGO, own hard work and determination. Universities do not do much/enough for rural and township schools. ['We did not have a clue']
- Participation shaped by income (peace of mind or not, time to completion, ability to focus only on studies), prior schooling experiences of learning (a lot of drill and practice and memorization), uneven quality of teaching and lecturer commitment or access to critical thinking (epistemic access), relationships with approachable lecturers, limited feedback given, not enough tutor support in smaller groups (and not always good), not accessing ECA (sport for some, volunteer work for some) or understanding its value for social capital/networks, friendships and study groups, individual instrumental determination, commitment to family welfare, religion plays a role in most lives, individual hard work, tenacity, not giving up, not holding university to account for quality, reasonable access to computer essential for learning and assignments, student agency not sufficiently mobilized/recognized/valued by university – not seen to bring valuable epistemic materials. Ubuntu values do prevail for these students. Multi-lingualism not really valued.
- Commitments to giving back in some way
- Participatory workshops and PV strand (voice, narrative capability) evoke powerful learning, confidence etc. Bringing students together from different universities was unexpectedly powerful. Different way of enabling, expressing and understanding student lives, experiences and aspirations.

Life stories/histories and social change

- University as a means of escaping poverty -their own, their families and communities and more broadly all people living in unacceptable poverty.
- Commitment to the intergenerational family network.
- Outcomes uncertain (will they graduate, will they get a job), but poised – potentially- for change.

Injustice?

- As subjects, students have a capacity for freedom, but also require a set of basic conditions to make this freedom effective, including equal forms of recognition and access to the material means of life.(Carol Gould). Capabilities can serve as goals for developing higher education institutions that would help fulfil such freedom.
- Universities should develop curriculum and pedagogies that mobilize the considerable agency and determination of low-income rural students in order to foster their range of valued capabilities.
- To fail to do so would constitute an injustice to rural students that would compound the not inconsiderable injustices experienced historically by people in rural areas.

Your students

- What is your view of our capabilities framework? Do our capabilities make sense in your university context and for your students? Do you see potential in participatory research methods? Are there any lessons from Miratho for you, for universities and policy makers?