Introduction & our normative approach

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- Lwazi (Rural University): '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'.

Research team

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- Funding over 4.5 years, ESRC-DfiD plus NRF

The Miratho Project

- Focus on inclusive higher education learning outcomes for rural youth under challenging circumstances.

- We asked how low-income youth from rural and townships schools access, participate in, and succeed in higher education, and then move into work. What contextual dimensions of economic, policy, social, and educational conditions enable or inhibit their access, participation, and success? We used our data to produce a higher education matrix to debate, develop, and evaluate higher education transformations in capability terms.

- We asked how a capabilitarian analysis problematises opportunities, obstacles and outcomes and advances our understanding of what is needed for justice.

- Also, how can we understand the project as a contribution to decolonial methods, practices and thinking?

Data

1) four waves of life history data collected between 2017 and 2020 (66 students in year one, 62 in year two, 60 in year 3 and 58 in year 4- across 5 diverse universities), whatsapp follow-up 2021;

2) work shops on identity and imagined futures;

3) photovoice project: 19 photobooks and one common photobook, with data comprising training workshops, field notes, river of life drawings, interviews, a UFS colloquium, and two short videos);

4) pilot survey among Miratho students and a revised survey at one university;

5) secondary data sets (for conversion factors: national, provincial, district).

Book of the project

- Melanie Walker, Monica McLean, Mikateko Mathebula and Patience Mukwambo, forthcoming late 2020, *Low-Income Students, Human Development and Higher Education in South Africa: Opportunities, obstacles and outcomes.* Stellenbosch: African Minds

- Free to download later this year. Hard copy for a reasonable price.

Problematising 'learning outcomes'

- *Our aim*: 'inclusive learning outcomes' that move towards reduction of multidimensional disadvantages and inequalities
- *The lure of (ubiquitous) learning outcomes*: positive achievements (not time in education); a 'performance-based' approach supporting human capital for economic growth; measurable, comparable information to evaluate the efficiency of systems
- *Problems with learning outcomes*: necessary but not sufficient; emphasis on skills, especially cognitive; ignored if not a measurable performance; association with managerialism.

Examples:
  - Outcomes-based school education in South Africa
  - The OECD Assessment of Learning Outcomes in Higher Education (AHELO) (2010

Our Claim: Reconceptualizing learning outcomes

- University learning outcomes should expand the freedoms that are of value to students from low-income households.

- The complex enablements and constraints in the lives of these students demand a multi-dimensional evaluative framework for judging advantage and disadvantage, equality and inequality

- The capability approach supplies this framework by offering multidimensional key functionings(as learning outcomes) and underlying capabilities.

The capability approach: supporting students' fulfilment, wellbeing and agency

Social justice-facing evaluation of university education equality and quality which linking individual wellbeing, individual agency and socio-economic, political structures and systems.

Capabilities: real **opportunities or freedoms** for people to do what they value and be the kind of person they want to be.

Functionings: '**beings and doings chosen from a capability set ('**the practical realisation of one's chosen way of life' [Walker 2006: 128])- requiring 'internal capability' and 'social uptake conditions' = combined capabilities (Nussbaum 2000).

*Agency: A*n actively choosing subject who mediates structures and whose achievements can be judged in terms of her own values and objectives' (Sen 1999: 19)

Conversion factors: the **degree/freedom** to which a person has the material or non-material resource to convert a capability into a functioning, exposing enablements and constraints in a person's life.

Capabilitarian theorizing, Africa-centred scholarship

- Aligns to decolonial, Africa-centred scholarship: open-endedness, allowing for plurality of knowledges, promoting respect, empathy, equality and solidarity. UNESCO's four key messages: 1) to take active responsibility in the development of the potential of all humans 2) to promote wellbeing and sustainability 3) to draw strength from interculturality and diversity 4) to create and uphold interconnectedness.

Thinking Higher and Beyond, Perspectives on the Futures of Higher Education to 2050 (UNESCO)

To sum up

- Students are agents, actors and carriers of personal biographies negotiating and interacting everyday with multiple, intersecting contextual conditions that present opportunities for being and doing in life.

- Individuals flourish when they are free to choose lives (beings and doings) that express their own values and goals. Inequality is reduced when political, socio-economic or educational arrangements (policies and practices) expand people's opportunities and freedoms to choose.

- Yet, to gain such freedoms people must aspire and struggle against and with others.

Capability-based learning outcomes

Key Functioning (learning outcome)	Underlying Capability
Being an epistemic contributor	Epistemic contribution (architectonic)
Connected to and concerned for the well-being of others	Ubuntu
Planning a good life	Practical reason
Navigating university's/society's culture and systems	Navigation
Telling one's own (higher education) story	Narrative
Managing the stress and worry of university and life challenges	Emotional balance
Being a respected and participating member of the university/society	Inclusion and participation
Employable/academically competent	Future work/study Deals with the stress and worry of challenges