

Low income rural and township youth in South Africa: the centrality of well-being for inclusive higher education learning outcomes

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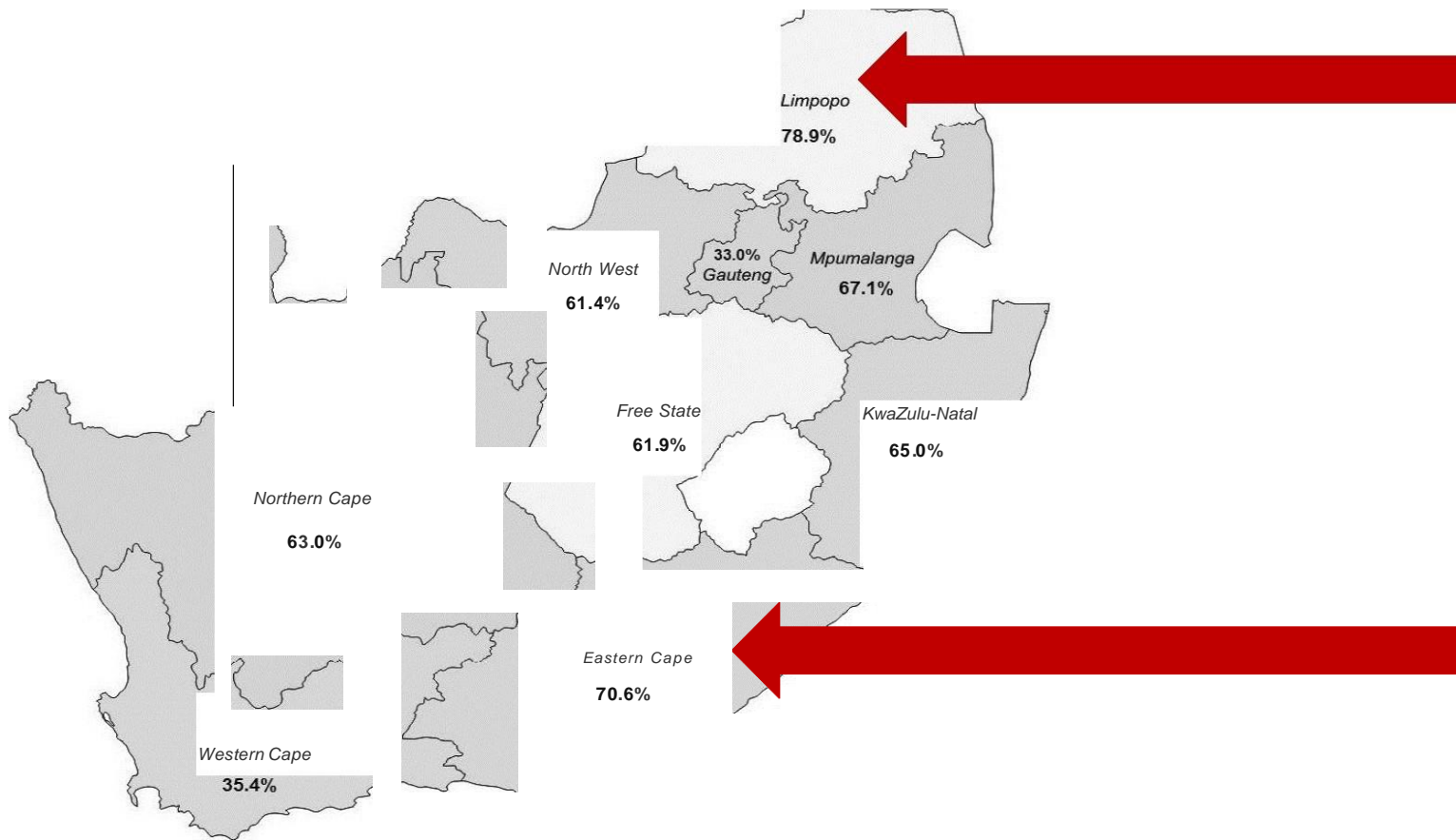
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Framing learning outcomes using the capabilities approach

- Learning outcomes form a good departure point when considering how to formulate learning opportunities and develop resources.
- However, as we start to believe that learning can be precisely defined and measured and that this should form the basis of the design, development, definition and assessment of courses then we are divorcing ourselves from the process and outcomes of real and enriching learning.
- The capability approach is concerned with enlarging people's choices about what they value to be and to do, with concern for economic and non-economic issues, equality of opportunities and the conditions for converting genuine opportunities and choices into well-being.
- Focusing on choices and options allows us to recognise the conscious and deliberative aspects of human agency, but also the way power and society (and universities) may erect barriers to social justice and human flourishing as an end of higher education.

Emerging findings...

- **Three intersecting well-being dimensions** that appear critical for opportunities and the realization of inclusive learning outcomes:

Capabilities	Indicative Functionings
The capability for economic/material well-being	Being adequately nourished, having suitable shelter, heating in the winter, money for tuition fees, transport etc.
The capability for epistemic well-being	Passing courses/getting a degree, getting a degree in the required time or in 3+2 years, acquiring and understanding new knowledge, thinking critically about this knowledge, contributing to discussions in classes and tutorials.
The capability for relational/social well-being (social inclusion)	Being respected and respecting diverse others, forming good friendships for peer learning, team work and leisure, being able to take part in the life of the university (including having adequate clothing), being able to visit family at least once a year, 'social capital', navigational skills, citizenship and concern for others.

Economic dimension of well-being

- What counts as sufficient/adequate/threshold economic capacity for student wellbeing and for achieving inclusive learning outcomes?
- But sufficiency alone does not take us far enough, we also need to take account of how secure (into the future) a student's economic capacities are.
- Our data shows that both lack of sufficient and lack of secure economic capacities places limits on student wellbeing and ultimately on learning.

Indicative snippet

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.” – Anathi.

Epistemic dimension of well-being

- The capability for epistemic contribution is to have the freedom and the capacity to choose to make and to receive contributions as knower, enquirer and teller in society.
- Equality of access to university knowledge or 'epistemological access' is a condition for developing this capability.
- This capability can be denied in two ways: by way of distributive injustice when people do not have access to epistemic goods, such as education; and, discriminatory injustice whereby people's knowledge is not taken as credible or is not understood.

Indicative snippet

- *“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...I think it’s important that they not only teach students how to cram but also teach students how to think, how to come up with your own ideas...what your view is about this, not just, what, according to who.” –Sonto.*

The relational/social dimension of well-being (social inclusion)

- Drawing on an Ubuntu ethic, Hoffman and Metz (2017) argue that we should understand the relationships and interdependence between people as ethically valuable and intuitively valuable.
- Relationality and sharing values matter significantly in forming and securing other capability dimensions.

Indicative snippet

“It doesn’t do us any good to see our fellow brothers and sisters roaming around in the streets. How do we look at them tomorrow when we have succeeded? ... it means that we have to do something as a young generation to keep each other up – as you go up you have to be pulling another brother up, who is [then] going to pull another one. I might not [be able to] give you money today that might change your situation, but if I can give you information that might transform your life forever? ... You cannot tell me that I cannot have time to even assist one other learner with an application to University”. –Rito.

In conclusion...

- Learning outcomes are both cognitive and non-cognitive. More typically they would be located in the epistemic capability, but a multi-dimensional approach sees all three capabilities intersecting and being necessary to each other.
- Learning outcomes will be inclusive when **all** students at least have the three multi-dimensional capabilities up to a sufficient threshold *and* when university arrangements are such that students can convert valued opportunities into achievements (if they also work hard).
- This small number of foundational capabilities are centrally important and would take us a long way towards student well-being. They are part of a good student life and also constitutive of that life.
- At the same time capability expansion should respect each student's agency but also put her/him in the position to develop capabilities and choose functionings that enhance human flourishing.

Thank you

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