

These recommendations resonate with those that emerged from an international consultation held in November 2014 where the HSRC participated in a conference on *Citizens' Participation and Inequality: Beyond 2015*. This international conference brought together approximately 200 civil society representatives in Copenhagen with the objective of taking stock of the post-2015 agenda and the global goals for sustainable development, and with developing recommendations for fostering enhanced citizen participation in the SDGs agenda after 2015.

Equality was at the core of the key recommendations from the conference. A call was made for a strong commitment to tackling inequalities through the post-2015 agenda by addressing inequalities through the lens of CSO participation, specifically:

- Governments and the United Nations should create an enabling environment for the inclusive participation and meaningful engagement of all CSOs and citizens in decision making, implementation, monitoring and accountability, to address the inequality of the realisation of civil and political rights.
- A global participatory monitoring and feedback network

should be formed to ensure input and feedback from all citizens, especially the most marginalised.

- There should be a peer review mechanism to monitor implementation of the SDGs.

The implementation of these proposals would be particularly crucial for engagement and participation in the development processes in the post-2015 agenda. Only by engaging citizens in the formulation, implementation and monitoring of goals and targets will the post-2015 agenda result in equitable sustainable development. ■

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The article reports on a study conducted for the National Development Agency aimed at understanding the relevance and contribution of CSOs in South Africa to the realisation of the MDGs' targets. The full report is available on www.hsrc.ac.za: Civil Society Organisations' engagement in the Millennium Development Goal processes in South Africa.

Hearing the voices of the poor: the state of poverty in three provinces

With a population of approximately 54 million people, Statistics South Africa (2014) reports that about 12 million people live in extreme poverty in South Africa, meaning they survive on R335 per person per month. *Evans Mupela et al* report on a study to profile the state of poverty and its manifestations within communities in South Africa, commissioned by the National Development Agency (NDA).

The study involved a desktop-based assessment of poverty, followed by a participatory element that explored the perceptions of the poor in three of the poorest provinces in South Africa, i.e. Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and Limpopo.

The participatory element, or qualitative aspect, was aimed at understanding poor people's perceptions of the multidimensional nature of poverty. Understanding poor people's perceptions of poverty, rooted in their experiences, is a key component of developing effective poverty-reduction strategies.

The authors selected a small group of people living in poverty, who were beneficiaries of NDA-funded development intervention projects located in the three provinces, namely Vukuzenzele Weaving and the Zamokuphila Piggery Farming Co-operative in the Eastern Cape (EC), Asisukume Msinga Agricultural Co-operative in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) and RASEKO Agricultural Co-operative in Limpopo.

In each of the projects 15 participants were interviewed, representing men, women, youth, older people and a group of people living with disability.

Results

Defining poverty

The majority of the respondents linked poverty to unemployment, lack of income, lack of access to basic services of water and sanitation, shortage of food in the household, and lack of education.

The majority of respondents from KZN and Limpopo defined themselves as poor.

It is worth noting the differences between the ways in which respondents defined their own poverty situation. The majority of respondents from KZN (80%) and Limpopo (73%) defined themselves as poor while only 13% of EC respondents defined themselves as poor. This was despite the fact that the poverty incidences in all three provinces were very similar.

In Limpopo, poverty was perceived largely in relation to lack of basic necessities of water and sanitation, shortage of food, and lack of shelter. EC and KZN respondents predominantly focused their poverty perceptions on the lack of employment opportunities that could assist the household heads to generate income to provide sustenance for the household.

EC and KZN respondents focused their poverty perceptions on the lack of employment opportunities.

Education in relation to poverty

In all three provinces, project participants generally perceived the critical role of education in providing an escape route from poverty, with the commonly held view that access to education increased the chances of finding employment. Adult basic education and training (ABET) was recognised by some of the respondents as playing an important role in advancing education of adults in the communities.

Table 1 shows respondents' perceptions of the levels of education compared to the previous five years.

Table 1: Perceptions of levels of education compared to the previous five years (figures rounded off)

	Eastern Cape	KwaZulu-Natal	Limpopo
More educated	33%	73%	93%
Less educated	44%	7%	7%
No change	22%	20%	0

Household income sources

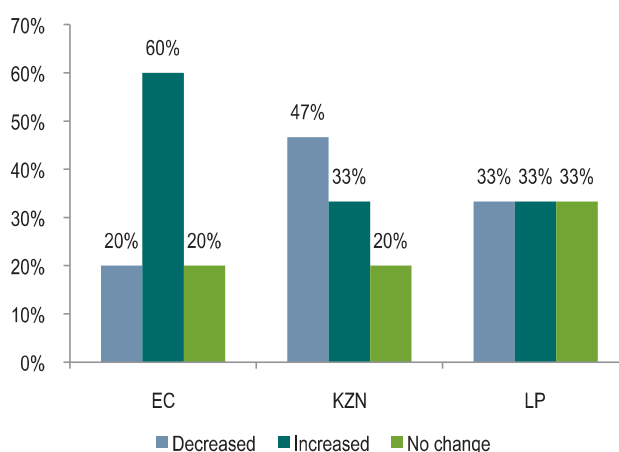
The respondents reported social grants as their main source of income. One fifth of households in the three provinces said they relied mainly on social grants. Employment from project-related work, such as the Expanded Public Works Programme and NDA-funded projects, were also cited as sources of wage income.

Unemployment in relation to poverty

The main types of employment opportunities reported by EC respondents were projects that absorbed unemployed people on a temporary basis and that had low entry-level requirements in terms of education and skills, such as farming, domestic work and the taxi industry.

In KZN and Limpopo, construction work was reported as the main source of employment among formally and informally employed people. The perceptions of change in unemployment levels in each of the three provinces varied. The majority of EC respondents reported unemployment had increased; in KZN the majority believed it had decreased, while in Limpopo respondents reported no perceived change in unemployment levels (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Perceptions of changes in unemployment levels, compared to the previous five years (figures rounded off)



Source: HSRC 2015

Physical health and well being were directly linked to poverty.

Health in relation to poverty

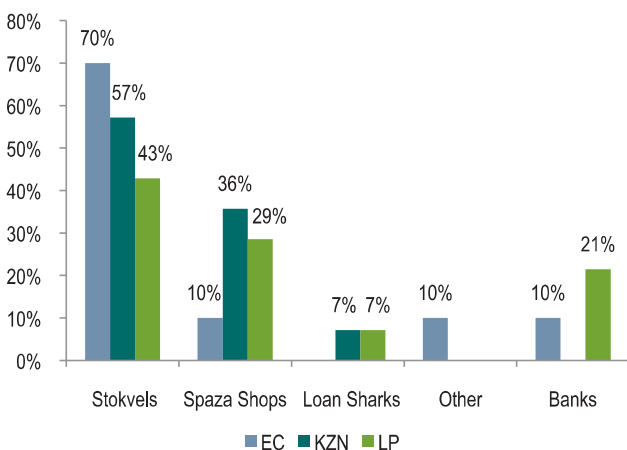
Physical health and well being were directly linked to poverty. Poor people were perceived to be more vulnerable to diseases. Chronic diseases, such as HIV/AIDS and high blood pressure were perceived to be more prevalent in the Eastern Cape. Access to health institutions remained a challenge for all respondents, particularly as they resided in remote rural areas located far from health facilities. Access was described not merely in terms of physical proximity to a healthcare institution, but also in terms of the lack of ambulances to transport a sick person to a health facility. It was also expressed as a lack of medication at these facilities. A very important concern was the devastating effect on the household when the head of household was 'unhealthy'.



Savings and credit in relation to poverty

The difficulty of saving and gaining access to credit were often mentioned as important aspects of poverty. Figure 2 shows that 'stokvels' were more popular in the Eastern Cape, while Spaza shops (an informal retail shop, usually run from home) were the source of credit for poor households in all three provinces. The respondents appeared to rely on this form of credit as an easier means of accessing food and other daily household necessities. Stokvels were favoured because households said they had access to credit and savings without the huge related costs of borrowing on high interest rates.

Figure 2: Most common savings and lending practices



Source: HSRC 2015

Access to land and agriculture services

The majority of the respondents reported that access to land was important as it enabled them to grow their own food. In the Eastern Cape, respondents noted that affordability of land had an effect on poverty as most of them felt that land was too expensive to obtain from traditional councils.

In KwaZulu-Natal, respondents mentioned that laziness of household members and lack of farming inputs affected agricultural production.

In Limpopo, a lack of money and knowledge on how

to acquire land were perceived as the main obstacles to households engaging in subsistence farming. However, a few respondents noted with concern that in instances where households had access to land, it did not automatically translate into productive use of that land.

Poor education or no education at all were perceived to be key determinants of poverty.

Concluding remarks

The overall impression from the study was that poor education or no education at all were perceived to be key determinants of poverty. This was linked to higher levels of unemployment as well. Participants noted the significant development interventions being implemented in South Africa that aim to reduce the poverty burden on poor households, and valued these interventions. These include social grants, public employment programmes, access to health, and other services and job creation initiatives being implemented by the government.

Furthermore, the study concluded that poor communities appeared to benefit most when resources were directly under their control or when they had significant opportunities to shape the manner in which these resources would be expended.

The challenge is for policy makers and community leaders to listen to these voices and implement measures in poor communities that will positively impact perceptions of their own poverty status, which is inextricably linked to their lived experiences of poverty in their neighbourhoods. ■

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