



Great expectations: using the socially perceived necessities approach to measure poverty in South Africa

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Outline

- Historical context of poverty measurement in South Africa
- Great expectations: the evolution of aspirations for 'inclusive' citizenship
- The rationale for the SPN approach in South Africa
- The study methodology
- Overall findings
- Possession and preference
- Enforced lack
- Concluding remarks

Poverty Measurement in the Segregation and Apartheid era

- The Poor White Problem - Carnegie Commission 1932
- The Poverty Datum Line (Batson's Cape Town studies in late 1930s early 1940s)
- Post War derivatives of PDL explicitly for wage fixing
 - Minimum Living Level (UNISA Bureau of Market Research, UNISA)
 - Household Subsistence Level (Institute of Planning Research, UPE)
- 2nd Carnegie Inquiry 1982 - 1984 (Wilson and Rhampele)

Aspirations of Black Majority - Social Rights of Citizenship

- Atlantic Charter and Africans Claims
 - committee to study the Atlantic Charter and draft a bill of rights
 - "Africans' Claims in South Africa" - was unanimously adopted by the ANC annual conference on 16 December 1943
- Freedom Charter (Kliptown 1955)
- Constitution 1996

Preamble

We, the people of South Africa,

Recognise the injustices of our past;

Honour those who suffered for justice and freedom in our land;

Respect those who have worked to build and develop our country; and

Believe that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, united in our diversity.

We therefore, through our freely elected representatives, adopt this Constitution as the supreme law of the Republic so as to

- Heal the divisions of the past and establish a society based on democratic values, social justice and fundamental human rights;
- Lay the foundations for a democratic and open society in which government is based on the will of the people and every citizen is equally protected by law;
- Improve the quality of life of all citizens and free the potential of each person; and
- Build a united and democratic South Africa able to take its rightful place as a sovereign state in the family of nations.

3. Citizenship

1. There is a common South African citizenship.
2. All citizens are
 - a. equally entitled to the rights, privileges and benefits of citizenship; and
 - b. equally subject to the duties and responsibilities of citizenship.

Chapter 2 - Bill of Rights

The text below includes all [amendments](#), up to and including the 16th Amendment to the Constitution ([disclaimer](#)).

Sections

7. [Rights](#)
8. [Application](#)
9. [Equality](#)
10. [Human Dignity](#)
11. [Life](#)
12. [Freedom and Security of the Person](#)
13. [Slavery, Servitude and Forced Labour](#)
14. [Privacy](#)
15. [Freedom of Religion, Belief and Opinion](#)
16. [Freedom of Expression](#)
17. [Assembly, Demonstration, Picket and Petition](#)
18. [Freedom of Association](#)
19. [Political Rights](#)
20. [Citizenship](#)
21. [Freedom of Movement and Residence](#)
22. [Freedom of Trade, Occupation and Profession](#)
23. [Labour Relations](#)
24. [Environment](#)
25. [Property](#)
26. [Housing](#)
27. [Health Care, Food Water and Social Security](#)
28. [Children](#)
29. [Education](#)
30. [Language and Culture](#)
31. [Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities](#)
32. [Access to Information](#)
33. [Just Administrative Action](#)
34. [Access to Courts](#)
35. [Arrested, Detained and Accused Persons](#)
36. [Limitation of Rights](#)
37. [States of Emergency](#)
38. [Enforcement of Rights](#)
39. [Interpretation of Bill of Rights](#)

White Paper on Reconstruction and Development

“At the heart of the Government of National Unity is a commitment to effectively address the problems of poverty and the gross inequality evident in all aspects of South African society” (Preamble)

“eliminate the poverty, low wages and extreme inequalities in wages and wealth generated by the apartheid system, meet basic needs, and thus **ensure that every South African has a decent living standard and economic security**” (3.2.1)

WHITE PAPER ON RECONSTRUCTION AND DEVELOPMENT CAPE TOWN, 15
NOVEMBER 1994

White Paper for Social Welfare

“The goal of developmental social welfare is a humane, peaceful, just and caring society which will uphold welfare rights, facilitate the meeting of basic human needs, release people’s creative energies, help them achieve their aspirations, build human capacity and self-reliance, **and participate fully in all spheres of social, economic and political life**”

WHITE PAPER FOR SOCIAL WELFARE August 1997 Preamble para 1

Persistence of Subsistence (and sub-subsistence)

- The Democratic 1990s persistence of MLL/SLL HSL (deracialised) in studies
- Current Lines:
 - **Food poverty line** = R305 (in March 2009 figures) per person per month. The food poverty line refers to the amount of money that an individual will need to consume the required energy intake defined by MRC.
 - **Lower-bound poverty line** = R416 (in March 2009 figures) per person per month. This refers to the food poverty line (R305) plus the average amount derived from non-food items of households whose total expenditure is equal to the food poverty line.
 - **Upper-bound poverty line** = R577 (in March 2009 figures) per person per month. This refers to the food poverty line (R305) plus the average amount derived from non-food items of households whose total food expenditure is equal to the food poverty line.

Statistics South Africa (2012) *Poverty profile of South Africa: application of the poverty lines on the LCS 2008/2009*, Report No. 03-10-03 (2008/2009), Pretoria: Statistics South Africa.

Table 2.10: Poverty measures from 1993-2008

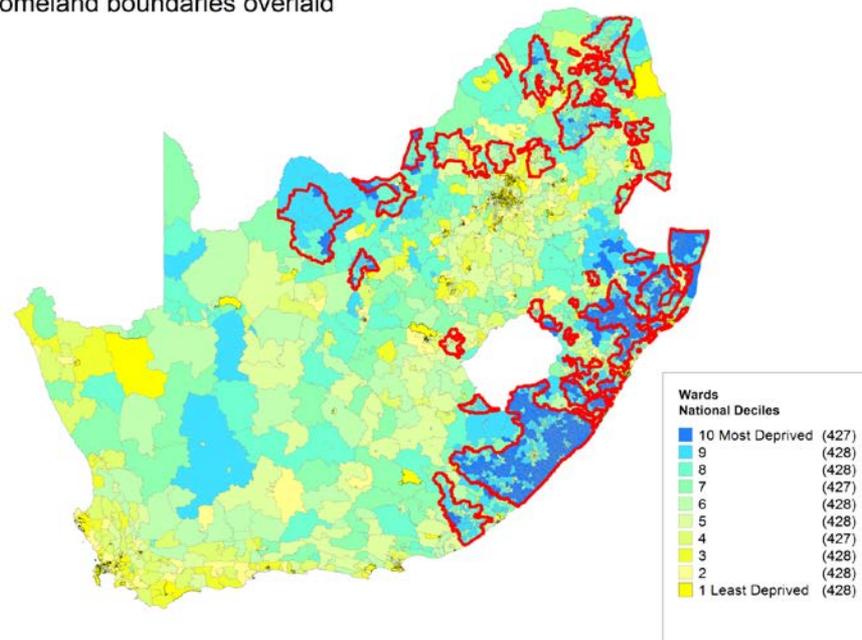
	Population	Poverty line = R949			Poverty line = R515		
		p0	p1	p2	p0	p1	p2
1993	40 147 932	0.72	0.47	0.36	0.56	0.32	0.22
2000	42 357 140	0.71	0.45	0.33	0.54	0.29	0.19
2008	48 687 000	0.70	0.44	0.32	0.54	0.28	0.19

Gini coefficients for per capita income

	1993	2000	2008
Overall	0.66	0.68	0.70

Leibrand et al 2010

Index of Multiple Deprivation 2011 at Ward Level (Published Data)
With former homeland boundaries overlaid



The SPN approach to measuring poverty in South Africa

- Takes as its starting point what ordinary people regard as an acceptable standard of living that all South Africans should enjoy in the present day.
- Follows the tradition of Townsend, Mack and Lansley, Gordon and Pantazis and the many subsequent studies using this approach in the UK and many countries internationally.
- Resonates with struggle history e.g. the collection of people's political social and economic demands which were reported to the Congress of the People and which fed into the preparation of the 1955 Freedom Charter.
- Explores the possibility of a relative, multi-dimensional definition of poverty which is consistent with Constitutional commitments.

Key Questions for the SPN approach in South Africa

Central questions that arise when involving people in the poverty definition process in South Africa include:

- In the context of such high levels of income poverty, will most people have minimalist views about necessities?
- Given the legacies of colonialism, segregation and apartheid (i.e. stark racial, spatial and wealth inequalities) will we find different ideas of an acceptable standard of living amongst different groups?

Methodology

- 48 focus groups asking what people should be able to have/have access to/do in order to have an acceptable standard of living in present-day South Africa
- Pilot survey of definitions in South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2005
- Definition and measurement questions in SASAS 2006 (nationally representative data)
 - to develop a democratic definition of poverty
 - and to measure who has and does not have the socially perceived necessities

SASAS 2006 module

- Module attempted to represent the breadth of issues raised in focus groups (across domains of deprivation) and a range of probable 'basics' through to probable 'luxuries'.
- Module did not attempt to address issues of quantity and quality and made no assumption about the *provider* of the necessities
- Module had 50 definitional questions: 33 about possessions, 4 about activities, 8 about the neighbourhood, and 5 about relationships with friends and family

SASAS 2006 findings: the socially perceived necessities

- 36 of the 50 items were defined as essential by more than half the population
- For the 36 items that were defined as essential by 50% or more of the population, the scale reliability coefficient (alpha) was calculated to be 0.9201
- The percentage of the population defining each of the 49 common items as essential in 2005 and 2006 correlates 0.96 (Spearman's rho)

	% of All saying essential
Mains electricity in the house	92
Someone to look after you if you are very ill	91
A house that is strong enough to stand up to the weather e.g. rain, winds etc.	90
Clothing sufficient to keep you warm and dry	89
A place of worship (church/mosque/synagogue) in the local area	87
A fridge	86
Street lighting	85
Ability to pay or contribute to funerals/funeral insurance/burial society	82
Separate bedrooms for adults and children	82
Having an adult from the household at home at all times when children under ten from the household are at home	81
Having police on the streets in the local area	80
Tarred roads close to the house	80
Paid employment for people of working age	79
For parents or other carers to be able to buy complete school uniform for children without hardship	79
A flush toilet in the house	78
People who are sick are able to afford all medicines prescribed by their doctor	77
Someone to talk to if you are feeling upset or depressed	76

Domains or Themes emerging

- Using PCA a number of themes emerged - three were particularly prominent:
 - **service provision/infrastructure-oriented** (mains electricity, a weather-proof house, street lighting, tarred roads close to the house, and separate bedrooms for adults and children)
 - **material possessions** (TV, cell phone, radio, sofa/lounge suite, a special meal at Christmas or equivalent festival and some new clothes)
 - **social networks** (someone to talk to if you are feeling upset or depressed, someone to lend you money in an emergency, someone to look after you if you are very ill, having an adult from the household at home at all times when children under ten from the household are at home)

Was there a consensus about the necessities?

A striking level of agreement between groups e.g. % defining each of the 50 items as essential correlate highly:

- Women & men: 0.98
- Aged 16-24 & aged 25+: 0.97
- Aged 65+ & aged under 65: 0.95
- Equiv. hh income (R847 pcm): 0.92
- Urban & rural: 0.90

Drilling down

- High-level findings provide *prima facie* evidence that the SPN approach can be applied in a country with a high level of inequality and income poverty.
- Notwithstanding these findings, there are evidently also differences between groups and these may occur for a number of reasons including reference group, cultural differences and personal circumstances.
- We now focus on the extent to which people's preferences are associated with their circumstances.

Influence of context on preferences

- The SPN approach embraces the fact that:
 - ‘the public’s perceptions of necessities reflect the conditions and dependencies of contemporary life – whether these are created by market availability or by developments in social structure and interaction’ (Pantazis *et al.*, 2006: 119)
- Nevertheless it is still useful to explore the extent to which people’s definitions of necessities are influenced by their circumstances (McKay, 2004; Hallerod, 2006).
- We therefore wanted to explore issues such as whether:
 - ‘Life on a low income can depress aspirations, leading some groups to express that they do not want items that, in other circumstances, they might well desire.’ (McKay, 2004: 218).

Preferences and poverty definition and measurement

- The experience of poverty can, in itself, dampen expectations
- This may manifest itself at both the definition and measurement stages
 - Definition – ‘out of my league’ (i.e. answering ‘not essential’ thereby deflating levels of % saying essential for items)
 - Measurement – ‘didn’t want it anyway’ (i.e. answering ‘don’t have, don’t want’ thereby deflating % with enforced lack)
- Yet deciding that people need things other than what they feel (or are willing to say) that they need is problematic and in this context brings with it the danger of imposing ‘expert’ definitions of need

Adaptive preferences and time

- People's expectations about their standards of living may have lowered due to persistent poverty; or risen (e.g. due to political climate, change of reference group, change of economic status), or not changed at all over time.
- Burchardt - a longitudinal study is needed to explore adaptive preferences
- Yet it is possible to explore the issue by identifying situations where people's circumstances may have had an impact on their definitions of socially perceived necessities and therefore where adaptive preferences may exist

Possession and Preference

- Twenty-eight of the thirty-six SPNs are possessed by a smaller percentage of people than the percentage of people defining each item as essential.
- Overall, for forty of the fifty items in the module a higher percentage of people defined the items as essential than possessed them.
- Six of the SPNs (having excluded employment and child related items) are possessed by less than half the respondents.
- Lack predominantly expressed as due to inability to afford the item

TABLE 2. Mean number of SPNs possessed, by monthly per capita income

	All	Above R847 per capita	Below R847 per capita
Mean number of items defined as necessities (from the list of 50 items)	32 (30.9–32.3)	34 (32.9–35.1)	31 (29.8–31.6)
Mean number of socially perceived necessities possessed (from the list of 36 items)	22 (21.0–22.1)	28 (26.7–28.5)	19 (18.7–20.0)

Notes: 95% Confidence intervals shown in brackets. SPN = Socially Perceived Necessity (50% threshold); R847 represents the upper bound poverty line commonly used in South Africa adjusted to 2006 Rands (Wright. 2011a).

Source: SASAS, 2006.

And yet possession still matters ...

TABLE 3. SPNs and possession: the five SPNs with the highest odds ratios

Item (and % of population possessing it)	Odds ratio
Flush toilet (51%)	11.05*** (2.87)
Bath or shower (42%)	10.29*** (2.18)
Meat, fish or vegetarian equiv. (49%)	7.26*** (1.13)
Street lights (51%)	6.26*** (1.24)
Clothing to keep you warm & dry (81%)	5.83*** (1.21)

Notes: Standard errors shown in brackets.

*** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$.

Source: SASAS, 2006.

TABLE 4. Mean and median number of socially perceived necessities lacked and average per capita monthly income by self-defined poverty status (using 50% threshold)

Self-defined poverty status	Mean number of SPNs lacked – enforced	Median number of SPNs lacked – enforced	Average per capita monthly income (Rand)	% of the total population
Wealthy	6 (3.4–8.2)	5	3,024	1
Very comfortable	3 (1.8–3.8)	1	3,550	7
Reasonably comfortable	6 (5.6–7.2)	3	1,523	25
Just getting along	10 (9.3–10.6)	9	763	39
Poor	17 (15.7–18.0)	18	429	23
Very Poor	20 (19.2–21.1)	21	222	6
All	11 (10.2–11.2)	10	1,051	100

Concluding Remarks

- People regard an acceptable standard of living in a multi-dimensional way and the 'essentials' go beyond mere subsistence
- Preferences and Definition: even though possession of an item is strongly associated with people's preferences and in the context of widespread lack there was a high level of agreement across different groups in terms of identification of items as essential.
- Preferences and Measurement: those who lacked the socially perceived necessities mostly reported that this was because they could not afford the item.
- Great Expectations are shared and not undermined by widespread lack and provide an indication of where people set their sights