



Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Conference 2022

Cape Town: Disruption

Workshop 5:

Disrupting the Status Quo:

Out with the primacy of “the economy”, in with “decent work and sustainability”

Host: DST/NRF Research Chair: Creation of Decent Work & Sustainable Livelihood
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Overview:

This workshop invites academics, policy makers and practitioners to engage with the following overarching question: *How can we develop innovative ways in which to see work, and the role of work, employers and employees in society that would enable more sustainable livelihoods?*

Drawing on Albert Einstein’s quote that “we cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them”, we assume that we cannot expect a *new economy* if we rely on input from experts which employ the same lens that they have used up to now. If we want to achieve something truly ‘new’ and more inclusive, we need to draw on new ways of looking at the world.

After a brief overview of the philosophy and work behind the SARChI Chair in Creation of Decent Work and Sustainable Livelihood, the main part of the workshop will consist of facilitated engagement. Participants are invited to discuss what such new perspectives could be in terms of disciplines, theories, models, experiences from practice..., how these could be applied to fundamental challenges related to the link between work, income, choice in life and sustainable livelihood, and in which way they could add value.

We end the workshop by collecting the new directions for research, policy and practice that arise from the discussions, and which could enable work to become an enabler of sustainable livelihood.

Background information:

Out with the primacy of “the economy” in with “decent work and sustainable livelihood”

While the background information below speaks specifically to the South African context the workshop is not limited to South African participants. We expect the discussions to have relevance to a broader context.

Economic growth and job creation have been the chosen path to inclusive prosperity in South Africa since the 1990s. Even before the Covid pandemic hit, this strategy had shown limited success: Poverty in South Africa had increased between 2011 and 2016, and directly affected over half the population even then - and poverty is not restricted to the unemployed.

Low-income earners also get trapped in poverty cycles when they have to rely on loans to cover basic needs or unexpected expenses, for example. Growing the number of jobs without at least equal focus on what these jobs look like can thus be detrimental and result in less sustainable livelihoods.

Low-income employment would not qualify as decent, as decent work is characterised by respect for human dignity, the securing of an adequate livelihood and supporting individuals and their families to fully develop their capacities and talents. Working conditions are not just not-decent for low income workers, however. Expectations of long working hours and prioritising work over family, for example, are common in high-paying jobs, too.

This suggests we need a shift - or at least more nuance - in how we see the link between work, income and inclusive prosperity. In fact, this is what South Africa's Economic Reconstruction and Recovery plan seeks to achieve: It aims to build a new economy and unleash South Africa's true potential.

It presents us with the opportunity to shift from making the primary question "What is it that the **economy** needs?" to "What is it that **humans** need?".

About the South African Research Chair Initiative

The [South African Research Chair Initiative](#) (SARChI) was initiated in 2006 by the then Department of Science and Technology (now Department of Science and Innovation) - with South Africa's National Research Foundation as managing organisation. The programme serves "to attract and retain excellence in research and innovation at South African public universities" in order to develop "high quality postgraduate students and research and innovation outputs". Researchers holding these chairs have an established track-record and are regarded as experts in their fields. Since the launch of the initiative, the NRF has awarded around 250 SARChI Chairs located at the majority of South Africa's public universities. The SARChI Chair in Creation of Decent Work and Sustainable Livelihood was awarded to the University of Cape Town in 2018 and became effective from 2019. It uses principles of organisational psychology to provide an alternative view to that typically provided by economics on how to work towards achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals through work.