

Second Social Justice Summit

Programme Director, Honourable Minister Lamola, our host Prof Thuli Madonsela, speakers of this first session as well as delegates attending virtually today, it is a great honour for us that you are participating in this Second Annual SJ Summit. Thank you for our first session's speakers (including Executive Director of UN Women, Dr Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Archbishop Makgoba and Prof de Villiers for their thoughtful contributions.)

As highlighted by our speakers the impact of COVID-19 makes this summit even more pertinent and important than ever. As a nation we indeed need to reflect, reset, reimagine and rebuild our current positions, policies, support or safety nets as well as our chosen pathway for realising social justice for all. Archbishop Makgoba formulates this well by saying we need to trust ourselves and believe that we can succeed.

Con Court Justice Theron in 2018, wrote in a short contribution "Leadership, **Social Justice** and Transformation – Inspire a Leader" that the rights captured in the Bill of Rights (such as the right to equality, access to health care, education, water and other social services) are the foundation for **social justice** to be achieved. This follows a rights-based approach as "through and because of the delivery of these rights ... social justice can be achieved."

Human rights litigation is therefore an important mechanism for use in achieving social justice. However, litigation is generally lengthy and time consuming as well as expensive. Justice Theron added that more recently in Constitutional Court judgments, "there is a notable shift in public interest litigation to corruption and maladministration". This trend has certainly continued over the last 2 years.

An important point underlined today, is that in order to achieve social justice, "all hands on deck" are required and, due to our limited resources (as well as other challenges such as the impact of climate change), we need to find ways to mobilise large-scale participation, law reform and smart processes using relevant data and accurate analytics. That's also where the M-fund fits in.

Of course, we cannot go about our business as usual. The impact of COVID extends to the health of our nation, our economy, poverty in households (especially female-

headed households) and income inequality, the food security of people, environmental, technological and education challenges.

All of this means that “income inequality increases due to the pandemic, aggravating the already high-income disparities in South Africa, and compromising South Africa’s progress towards attaining targets under the Sustainable Development Goals”. This in turn threatens the already fragile social fabric of our nation.

In their Socio-Economic Impact Assessment of COVID-19 in SA, the UN recommends that: “Policy interventions need to pay specific attention to those persons hurt the most by COVID-19. Broadly, a strategic thrust in interventions is usually targeted towards persons most disadvantaged in terms of poverty, inequality, and sectoral/ production impact.”

The UN also states that “A new dimension ... is that intervention responses mitigating the impact of COVID-19 need to be differentiated by predicted losses.” E.g.

the restructuring package to be directed towards the economic sectors where growth will take place

or

for households, the interventions should be according to household poverty level and its gender dimension as also underlined by the UN as emphasised by Dr Mlambo-Ngcuka.

Why is data relevant? If a microeconomic analysis presents a classification of households in South Africa that goes beyond the basic poor and non-poor to a ranking that factors in the likelihood of falling into or exiting poverty. This classification could divide the poor into two categories, chronic poor and temporary poor, and the middle class into two categories (vulnerable and middle class). The elite class is in the upper class of the distribution.

The UN report, for example, states that “A stimulus package or social protection typically targets businesses and the chronically poor in society. While support to these households is essential, there is then a case for other categories of households that should be protected to at least preserve the poverty levels before COVID-19.”

As the rector indicated “There are many challenges, but at the global level, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set by the United Nations provide a useful outline to frame these as the need to “end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity”.

The most UN Report on COVID's impact also highlights that "in South Africa's Voluntary National Review presented on 17 July 2019 on Sustainable Development Goals, the potential impact of COVID-19 on the achievement of the SDGs is worrying as SA pre-COVID19 indicated experiencing challenges for SDG 4, 8, 10, 13, 16, and 17, and clearly these challenges will be aggravated with COVID-19, which has brought to the forefront, for instance, the challenge of achieving SDG 4 (quality education) and 8 (decent work and economic growth). In particular, because of low internet access, school and workplace closures and not all households having access to essential services I to access educational information and working effectively from home where nature of the work permits.

Over and above this we know that the need for significant funding resources, which was already limited in 2019, will be even worse in 2020 with many different interest groups requesting funding to further the achievement of the respective SDGs.

It is therefore an opportune time to bring together experts from different disciplines to deliberate on how we can ensure that no-one is left behind. I look forward to the contributions in the next session, as well as the parallel session, to hear how everyone participating in this Summit, reimagine our response to achieving social justice for all.