

Press statement: International Day for the Eradication of Poverty, 17 October 2016

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The International Day for the Eradication of Poverty will be observed across the world tomorrow, 17 October. This United Nations day, commemorated since 1993, is devoted to presenting and promoting concrete activities aimed at the eradication of poverty and destitution, which are necessary for building a sustainable future. This is undoubtedly a critical cause to place at the core of all efforts to contribute to South Africa's growth.

The head of the Nelson Mandela Foundation, Sello Hatang, explains: "As our greatest challenge as a country, the need for sustainable broad-based growth is integral for stability and there lies a moral and ethical duty for those with privilege and power to use this to alter the unequal structures of power that underpin our system. In order to do this, our policy and endeavours must be based in fact as the consequences of placing rhetoric and populism before informed decision-making can be disastrous."

The Nelson Mandela Foundation is a strategic partner of the Mandela Initiative, which is a multi-sector platform aimed at generating the necessary evidence and dialogue to inform strategies to overcome not only poverty, but also reduce inequality in South Africa. This is an important goal of the National Development Plan (the country's blueprint for growth and development by 2030) but it requires a nuanced understanding of poverty and why inequalities prevail, says Murray Leibbrandt, the head the Poverty and Inequality Initiative of the University of Cape Town, which is also a Mandela Initiative partner.

"Such an understanding, which is assisted by research by the Mandela Initiative and others like the National Income Dynamics Study, for example, can form the basis of evidence-based policy-making that can help counteract the trends that entrench poverty and inequality."

The Mandela Initiative, which started its work in 2012 under the name "Towards Carnegie3", brings together academics, government, civil society and the private sector to collaborate in various ways with one goal in mind: to think creatively about effective action to realise the poverty and inequality reduction goals of the National Development Plan.

"At the heart of it is to *do differently*. What we have tried has not worked so we need to find a way to do differently", explains Hatang. "It's about creating a national conversation on poverty and inequality that looks to inform policy and develop suggestions for new policy where policy is lacking."

The conversations facilitated by the Mandela Initiative take different forms. To ensure an empirical evidence base with relevance and value for policy-makers, it has seven research programmes which focus on five major areas that are critical to shift poverty and inequality: education, health, social cohesion, rural and urban renewal, and labour issues. The studies are headed by top academics who, with the exception of one, hold Research Chairs awarded by the South African Research Chair Initiative of the Department of Science and Technology and the National Research Foundation.

What makes the Mandela Initiative research approach unique is that it includes the participation of government policy-makers throughout the research process to ensure their input – and consideration and uptake of the findings at the end point.

A participatory approach is also at the core of the initiative’s action dialogues, which bring together experts from different sectors to workshop a particular problem or approach to address poverty and inequality, with a dominant focus on finding sustainable solutions and taking collective action. It is an approach designed to link up the academic evidence base with the “real life” experiences and work of civil society organisations and the private sector, and the policy development and implementation insights from government. In sum, it is a powerful approach to share, learn and act collectively to address the poverty and inequality challenges of South Africa.

Hatang elaborates: “The Mandela Initiative therefore create spaces where active knowledge transfer can take place but also to create safe spaces in which deep content and action dialogues can take place. Instead of existing in silos, the MI allows various spheres to interact and work toward sustainable solutions.”

The National Income Dynamic Study (NIDS), a longitudinal panel study of a nationally representative group of people and households since 2008, indicates that nearly half of the panel members are stuck in poverty, but that a lot of people move into and out of poverty over time. People living in rural areas were more likely to fall into poverty, while women were less likely to transition out of poverty.

As far as inequalities are concerned, the NIDS for example shows that, while today’s generation has much higher levels of education than their parents and grandparents, their occupations and earnings generally match that of their parents closely, particularly at the top and bottom ends of the income distribution. The NIDS tracks and reflects not only income poverty, but multidimensional poverty, which is made up of several factors that constitute deprivation, such as poor health, education and living standards.

END

For more information on the Mandela Initiative, see: <http://www.mandelainitiative.org.za/>

For information on the NIDS findings, see:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC1K9em96NeJ7ju81WaMDEQ>

<http://www.nids.uct.ac.za/nids-data/data-access>

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