



Human Development & Capability Association



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International gathering on strategies to enhance social justice, equality and human development

Over 330 participants from 39 different countries across all continents are gathering in Cape Town this week for an international conference to exchange ideas on promoting human development and expanding human well-being. Held in Africa for the first time, the annual conference of the Human Development and Capability Association (HDCA) is hosted by the University of Cape Town (UCT) in collaboration with the University of the Free State, the University of the Western Cape and the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), and with assistance from the National Research Foundation.

The HDCA is a global community of academics and practitioners in over 70 countries that aims to describe, assess and promote change in the direction of human development and social justice in a globalised world where people's circumstances and values are vastly different and in which inequality is rising within and across countries.

The conference, which runs from 6 – 8 September under the theme "Challenging Inequalities: Human development and social change" will conclude on Friday with a panel discussion by high-profile local and international development experts, including from the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), Oxfam International and South Africa's National Planning Commission, on the relevance of the human development and capability approach for the Sustainable Development Goals.

Prof Murray Leibbrandt, the Pro Vice-Chancellor who leads UCT's Poverty and Inequality Initiative, explains that the human development and capabilities approach insists that the measurement and analysis of the standard of living is not reduced to counting the commodities that people possess but is located in the realities of how they get by and what they are able to do and achieve on a daily basis. "This capabilities lens allows us to assess how societies are doing in enabling their people to exercise their freedom and agency. It can be used to measure the impact of interventions or policies on people's lives and their environment. This conference will challenge us to think more deeply and creatively about strategies to promote a more equitable South Africa and a sustainable and equitable African and global social order."

The human development framework became the leading view of the UNDP since the 1990s and Dr. Selim Jahan, director of the UNDP's Human Development Report Office, will be addressing the conference. Other high-profile speakers include Prof Martha Nussbaum, a Professor of Law and Ethics from the University of Chicago who contributed to the development of the capabilities approach; and Prof Crain Soudien, the Chief Executive Officer of the HSRC.

Conference papers include many examples of how marginalised communities in several countries in the global south are using capabilities and rights-based approaches in exercising their collective agency to imagine, strive for and change their realities. Critical reflections on pioneering state policies on crucial areas for making differences in people's lives – such as public employment, education, food security and economic empowerment – are also presented.

Explains Prof Leibbrandt: "The conference is held at a key and historic moment for South Africa as we face growing challenges to the persistence of structural poverty and inequality. As a new democracy, we have failed to build a new, inclusive society. All of us cannot continue to tolerate the lack of improvement in people's lives. New approaches and new thinking that will radically speed up the pace of social change are sorely needed." Prof Leibbrandt points out that, whilst there is a need across the continent to develop new ways of reducing the number of people affected by extreme poverty, "we also need to understand the texture of our societies that generate this poverty for many while they at the same time enable the continued wealth and privileges for people at the high end."

"Otherwise, we will not understand and deal with the anger and resistance, particularly amongst the youth and more marginalised sections of our societies who are incensed by the stifling lack of progress in redressing inequalities."

END

Note to editors

Representatives from the media are welcome to attend conference sessions.

For more information, contact:

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Conference website: <https://hd-ca.org/conferences/2017-hdca-conference-cape-town-south-africa>

Conference programme: https://hd-ca.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/HDCA-Programme_30-August_FINAL.pdf

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