



Introduction

By Bhaso Ndzendze and Gift Sonqayi | Peer Review

Introduction

When we convened a workshop with several young scholars to work on diverse issues in 2018, we could not have foreseen the accentuation of the crises facing South Africa and the continent. The workstreams included identifying challenges and, more importantly, opportunities in the following areas:

- Economy and unemployment
- Education
- Land reform
- Migration
- The rise of new media and fake news

Since then, we have seen a series of seismic shifts, including the Covid-19 pandemic, the accelerated uptake of Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR)

technologies, and ever-widening unemployment. Alongside these shifts, there have been the continued fees protests in institutions of higher education and the 2021 looting of malls and other commercial and strategic sites. All of these have long-term significance, made more apparent when we consider that they mostly disproportionately impact the youth, even in the short term. When we began this project, the dominant theme was how to reverse stagnation. Today we are speaking of 'recovery' and 'reconstruction'. This shows the degrees to which our country and continent have been afflicted by the many onslaughts of the past few years. These occur at every level and every dimension. From a theoretical standpoint, this eclectic special issue hopes to contribute to the understanding of these challenges. At a practical level, we also hope to have showcased opportunities wherever possible.

Economy

At around 1% a year and not much higher, South Africa's gross domestic product (GDP) growth had reached stagnation and a number of recessions even before the onset of Covid-19 (Stats SA, 2020). By almost all measures, South Africans have been just barely getting by for decades. Economic growth is an urgent and pressing issue – in lieu of which the country could find itself in dire straits. In addition to this, South Africa is one of the most economically divided countries in the world, an issue which is further compounded by the race-class correlation which remains pronounced even after 23 years of political transformation. There are also significant male-female and rural-urban dichotomies. With the then-new administration seeking solutions, the Jobs Summit seemed to *modus operandi* miss the mark and has resulted in very new practical ideas for resolving rampant joblessness. This problem, perhaps the most pressing in the country's socio-economic interface, could in time be the country's Achilles' heel. Three papers in this special issue seek to tackle this concern. In 'Development in South Africa: Bridging the Rural-Urban Gap,' Masenya takes a look at the country's attempts to close the gap between rural and urban development in economic activity generally, and more so in the wake of Covid-19. In 'Alleviating Unemployment in South Africa: Harnessing Comparative Advantage in the Services Sector,' Mzungulu and Ndzendze propose the alleviation of unemployment through the development of a niche in services as a response to the environment created by existing policies. Both these papers provide a rich understanding of the context and seek to draw lessons from other countries. There is also an appreciation of the difficulty in implementing these policies in the wake of the pandemic and '4IR' technologies.

'Intra-African Trade: Prospects and Challenges' by Hollington focuses on the promise and peril of growing intra-continental trade from the currently disappointing levels of 12% (Tayo, 2021). The article reviews the uneven landscape among the regions. It comes to some conclusions regarding non-tariff barriers that policymakers should focus on if the newly introduced continental free trade area is to gain traction and reverse the current state of affairs which is characterised by outward orientation on the part of Africa. It also fleshes out risks and opportunities from

the free trade arrangement, especially for the youth demographic.

Education

Internationally competitive basic and higher education are widely recognised as the critical link to skills attainment and, therefore, economic growth in any given country (Canals, 2017). Yet, in both sectors, the South African education system is in need of considerable review (Presidential Commission on the Fourth Industrial Revolution, 2020). At the primary and secondary levels, there continues to be a lagging behind in terms of: bridging the rural-urban as well as digital divides; improving teacher training; eliminating absenteeism by both learners and teachers; and a strong curriculum that prepares the youth for higher education as well as the workplace. Furthermore, in 2015 and 2016, the country saw a nationwide crisis sparked by a problem whose return continues to be a probability: student uprising in demand of free, quality, and decolonised university education. In 'The State of South African Education: A Critical Exploration of Distributive and Epistemic Injustices,' Sonkqayi asks crucial questions around this sector and makes some fresh observations at philosophical and policy levels.

Land Reform

South Africa stunned the world more than two decades ago by undergoing a peaceful transition from minority to majority rule – an almost unheard-of occurrence among the nations of the continent and the world as a whole. The modern practice of this ancient idea, sometimes referred to as the worst form of government except for all the other ones (Churchill, 1947), is loaded with problems and dilemmas implicative for a country's political and economic landscape. One such problem for South Africa is its 'land question'. How the country succeeds or fails in dealing with it will increasingly impact its social and economic dynamics. For this reason, it has become increasingly politicised. Matseke, in his article 'Land Reform in South Africa,' closely examines developments within the context of the land question, which has seemingly reopened with vigour as of early 2018. The article traces the recent literature and current dynamics and prognosticates

some implications and scenarios for South Africa going forward.

New Media and Fake News

'The Rise of Fake News' by Chirwa and Manyana takes us through the rise and impact of fake news, a phenomenon of immense consequence to every corner of the globe as it touches on the very fabric of how democracies and societies reproduce themselves: information. The phenomenon has become increasingly pronounced in the past five years, catalysed by the ascendance of Donald Trump to the US presidency. This poses a double-edged sword: as more people get access to means of distributing information, so too rises the risk of deliberate manipulation. Sophisticated algorithms seem designed precisely for this purpose. The outcome is political tribalism, as well as fractures along other faultlines. In a context in which truth is disputed, many risks abound, the article argues, and this needs to be mitigated. In this regard, the article offers some prescriptions to curb the proliferation of fake news and the erosion it has already visited upon political discourse.

Migration

'Addressing the Global Migration Crisis' by Nadine Hakizimana takes a look at the global migration crisis, which has had an incalculable impact on millions of lives, stemming from political and economic crises, and which has subsequently spawned numerous crises in other countries. The article takes stock of the severity of the crisis and proposes some measures to mitigate it through a combination of traditional and emerging technologies.

Book Reviews and Interview

The book reviews in this special issue largely dovetail with the themes detailed above. One consists of a book that ponders the future of youth participation in South African politics, while another delves into the nature of borders and their future. Our interview is an in-depth discussion with Ayabonga Cawe, the author of *The Economy on Your Doorstep*, a recently published book that has resonated for the richness with which it depicts and treats the complex nature of the South African economic landscape. The author

fleshes out the themes of his work and his hopes for the country and its young people.

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