

A Transformative Vision Uniting South Africans in a Socio-Economic Justice Consciousness Movement

South Africa needs a new transformative vision for socio-economic justice that has to be driven as a movement uniting people in a collective consciousness and force for change to attain a harmonious, prosperous and ethical society with dignity for all.

A new transformative vision for socio-economic justice must be about economic redress and rebuilding our Human Consciousness in which the political and economic system including the utilisation of state and private sector resources as well as solidarity within and amongst various communities is dedicated in a total way to supporting all our people to uplift and develop themselves individually and collectively. The focus must be on the protection and upliftment of marginalised and vulnerable people in society and on selfless leadership at all levels. This is an ongoing process embracing a moral and ethical standard and elevating and refining human endeavour and character.

This transformative vision can be delivered through a new economic paradigm and socio-economic model to fundamentally overhaul and change the conditions and systems breeding and perpetuating poverty, unemployment, inequality, corruption, violence and especially gender-based violence and a racially and spatially fragmented society.

These challenges continue to plague our country and have reached crisis proportions. They emanate from the colonial and apartheid past, have been perpetuated in the democratic era, and are now further accentuated by the impact of Covid-19. They remain the symptoms of the problem. The root causes lie in unfair and corrupted global and domestic governance and economic systems, unfair utilisation and distribution of resources, and a materialistic and narcissistic social culture.

The new transformative vision and paradigm therefore has to be directed at socio-economic justice and an ethical reset with a mission driven zeal to ensure dignity for all. It has to focus

on the material, moral, ethical and spiritual upliftment of people and their consciousness across all levels of society to become better practicing human beings both for themselves and as drivers for the well-being of society. There has to be a repurposing of the economy and all policies and implementation towards benefiting people in accordance with the aspirations of the Constitution and helping people to uplift themselves especially the most vulnerable in society. All effort has to be on making life fair and easier for people in terms of work and income opportunities, access to services, cost of living and social safety nets.

The stakes are high for our country to succeed in this quest. The post Covid-19 world is going to be very uncertain, more polarised, and taking the current global situation into account where the posture of especially the powerful nations are towards even greater self-interest, South Africans need to chart their own course. A socio-economic justice consciousness movement uniting South Africans has to propel State and Society collectively in unison to chart a tailored South African path to change the fortunes of the people. The cycle of poverty, violence and social fragmentation related with the perpetuation of apartheid spatial geography and psycho-socio patterns as well as with poor governance has to be halted, and a new cycle of prosperity generated.

This is a time for visionary and transformative leadership across state, private sector, labour and civil society that can turn crisis and uncertainty into a golden opportunity to build a harmonious and resilient nation. It requires a new social compact as President Ramaphosa has suggested, but within a transformative socio-economic justice framework and based on the appreciation that the world is now different and how economies, societies and governments operate will and has to change. Government, labour, private sector and civil society have to think and act differently and be prepared to depart from entrenched views, positions and negative conducts. New socio-economic paradigms and models are needed together with a realisation that the rules and framework for a new equitable and inclusive economy within the realm of our control can be designed and made. We need a mind-set change, belief and confidence to co-create a fair system together with the urgency to act.

In addressing the root causes of poverty and high inequality, there are three interlinked levels, that is local, national and global, at which change could happen in tandem and

around which a new vision and new models underpinned by a socio-economic justice framework need to cohere.

Firstly, at the local level communities have to be supported to uplift themselves, drive their own development and become more resilient and self-sustaining. This requires a massive paradigm shift within civil society and communities for themselves to become solution focussed and inventive. It requires active citizenship rather than remaining passive recipients and beneficiaries of services and grants which themselves are not always reaching people in the best possible way. It also requires a concomitant shift in practice in the way the state relates to people and how it implements policies and programmes. The state at national, provincial and local levels has to be insulated from toxic politics and subversion and manipulation of governance processes and systems.

Communities are currently being placed at the mercy of these practices and instead of the state playing a facilitative role by deploying resources into communities in an accountable, consultative and responsive way the complete opposite is happening and, in many cases, resources are not even reaching communities due to maleficence. This is leading to underdevelopment of communities and it is destroying the fabric of communities.

A new socio-economic model can enable community-driven development, stimulate local economies and community production and trade, and infuse alternative and innovative development approaches and practices including Islamic and African socio-economic models centred on ubuntu/solidarity, cooperative economy and financing including interest free micro lending that incentivises people's creativity and industriousness as well as to unlock affordable and decent shelter/home ownership. It has to be crafted around the holistic well-being of individuals, families and communities from a material, ethical and spiritual upliftment perspective, and in context of building social cohesion and solidarity within and between communities on the basis of a South African consciousness. We can have thriving communities across the length and breadth of our country.

Secondly, at a national level the role of the state as a capable, and ethical Developmental State has to be rebuilt and reimagined in a transformative light within a socio-economic

justice framework and a new economic paradigm that shifts emphasis towards well-being of society. This means a complete shift in the approach to economic growth and productivity. Productivity has to be channelled into producing sustainably, ethically and responsibly towards the needs of society especially the basic needs and well-being of the majority of people domestically and globally. The entire financial system has to be re-orientated in an enabling and non-exploitative way to support this objective. The State has to ensure fairness and make sure that the most marginalised and vulnerable are included and uplifted. This would entail stretching redistributive measures to the feasible limits but more importantly to direct resources and enable empowerment and community driven economic development to inclusively grow the economy and bridge the dual nature of economy where one part of the economy is endowed with relatively high skills and access to capital with enabling and sophisticated financial, legal and property transaction systems, and the other part of the economy is characterised by low skills, informality and limited access to financial capital.

The gap between the two poles in South Africa's dual economy is massive as manifested in the employment numbers issued by StatsSA prior to onset of Covid-19. The gap will be even larger taking the impact of Covid-19 into account. Out of the 37,7 million people that fall within the 15-64 working age group, 16,4 million are employed, 10,4 million are unemployed according to the expanded definition (they include despondent job seekers), and 11,9 million are not active. These are mainly students, homemakers, learners, people that are ill or living with disabilities. One third of people that are employed are in the informal sector.

The role and capability of the state has to be geared towards supporting development of the informal/cooperative part of the economy and bridging the dual nature of the South African economy within a conception of the Developmental State as people-centric rather than state-centric and fully absorbed in delivering socio-economic justice as a constructive nation building project. In this conception, the state plays a nuanced, strategic and smart role in regulating markets on the one hand and facilitating the development of markets and empowerment of communities on the other hand especially in areas where the private sector cannot participate without massive subsidies. The hallowing out of state capacity

over the past decade has to be reversed and reconfigured towards a more accountable, targeted and efficient role in the context of a new economic paradigm.

Finally, at the global positioning level there has to be engagement for fairer trade, sharing of technology, and economic policies that can enhance domestic production, beneficiation and exports. The global trade balance is in favour of wealthier nations who maintain unfair import quotas preventing their markets to be open to goods from developing countries. Further, they subsidise their industries heavily whilst expecting developing countries to keep their markets open for cheaper imports. The world trade agreements and pricing systems result in lowering of prices for goods produced by developing countries relative to the prices paid for imports.

The global financial system, currency and exchange rate valuation systems have to be transformed and the morally reprehensible channelling of vast volumes of wealth in tax havens has to be cleansed. Much of this wealth has been siphoned from developing countries. This wealth has to return into global circulation in a way that can support the upliftment of the poor and middle-class around the globe. It has to be undertaken within a retributive framework in favour of developing countries to rebalance development across the globe. The issue of volatility in capital flows and destabilisation due to currency and stock speculation has to be managed to create a better environment for long-term production-oriented capital investment. This in turn is dependent on fixing the overall investment climate in the country through greater policy certainty and rebuilding capability and trust in the implementation systems. And, importantly in the context of a new socio-economic paradigm and model, the well-being of our society and the principles contained in our Constitution must be placed as the key measure for success in our global relations.

The South African value proposition to the world can be repositioned on the basis of the values of our constitution and liberation struggle heritage. Human rights, equality, justice, dignity for all, diversity, non-racism, non-sexism, and a people driven democracy are the ingredients of a unique competitive advantage that can be harnessed to underpin investment, trade, cultural and educational relations and exchange. We can reach back into our liberation inspiration and do justice to the many that sacrificed their lives by elevating

our human consciousness on a moral and ethical basis, uplift our nation and contribute to building a new global consciousness of well-being, upliftment and dignity for all. There has to be a different path and standard carved for global development that enhances global harmony, unity and solidarity.

Through this new transformative vision and ethical socio-economic model operating at local, national and global levels as an elevated human consciousness, South Africa can become a harmonious, equitable and prosperous country where the dignity of everyone is protected and promoted. In whatever small way for our own sake and the rest of the world we can contribute too to global unity, a better world and planet.

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MUSA (Movement for a United South Africa) is a platform for uniting South Africans in advancing socio-economic justice and development

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