1 Introduction
2 Urban Poverty in South Africa
3 Sustainable Development and South Africa’s Commitment to the Concept
4 Is Sustainable Development a Panacea for Urban Poverty Relief in South Africa?
5 Overcoming the Limitations of Sustainable Development in the Context of Poverty Relief
1 Introduction

A pictorial introduction to the phenomenon of urban poverty in South Africa. Lake Michelle/Masiphumelele, Noordhoek, Cape Town.
Introduction continued

Alexandra, Johannesburg.
Urban Poverty in South Africa

- Poverty is clearly associated with urbanisation, across the developing world (Arndt, Davies and Thurlow, 2018, and Cohen, 2006.)

- Urbanisation is typically due to slow economic growth and de-industrialisation. Arndt, Davies and Thurlow, 2018)

- Problems faced by the urban poor: low skills, low wages, unemployment, low social security, poor working conditions, adverse spatial locations, poor infrastructure, social marginalisation, high expenditure on housing, insecurity of tenure, vulnerability to climate change and disasters, exposure to environmental risks, financial insecurity and inability to access credit, exposure to crime (Baker, 2008). (Anomalous situation – urbanisation continues despite the hardships.)

- The result is cities that are neither socially nor economically integrated, and this is self-perpetuating. (Tacoli, Mc Granahan and Satterthwaite, 2015)

- The trajectory of developmental processes in cities must change. (Patel, 2000) (How could this be possible? Land use planning processes and policies? Refurbishment and upgrade programmes? Budget prioritisation to reverse patterns of disadvantage? What can local government do to make a difference?)
3 Sustainable Development and SA’s Commitment to the Concept, in the Context of Poverty Relief

Historical development of the doctrine:

- Millenium Summit 2000 – Millenium Development Goals: many goals are quantitative, eg halve the number of people living on less than $1 per day by 2015. Poverty eradication and sustainable development set as separate goals (as if unrelated?)
Rio + 20 – “The Future We Want” – reiterates previous targets but adds “the green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication”. Article 2 “Poverty eradication is the greatest global challenge facing the world today and is an indispensable requirement for sustainable development.” (Controversial conference – much civil society protest and parallel anti-establishment events. (See Frank “The Future We Don’t Want”.) Main criticism is a lack of innovation and normative content, and a “rubber stamping” of previous conference declarations.)
Sustainable Development and SA’s Commitment to the Concept cont.

- UN Sustainable Development Summit 2015 – “Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” – seventeen sustainable development goals, the first of which is “end poverty, in all its forms, everywhere” – includes sub-goals e.g. the eradication of extreme poverty, now framed as living on less than $1.25 per day.

- Criticism of new goals: threshold for extreme poverty too low (Qian-Qian Man and Xiao-Lin, 2015), the goals have synergies but cannot overcome lock-in effect of historic circumstances (Pradhan et al, 2017), achievability of the goals is questionable (Moyer and Bohl, 2019).
South Africa’s Commitment
- Participated in Rio, but this was at time of political transition negotiations.
- Millenium Summit – post transition – Constitution and NEMA in place.
- Hosted and actively participated in WSSD 2002.
- Reference in Section 24 of the Constitution to sustainable development (undefined).
- Definition of sustainable development in NEMA: no reference to poverty.
- EIA regime in NEMA: case-by-case, no methodology for integration of poverty issues as part of social considerations
- Case law – anecdotal and administrative law based. Fuel Retailers Constitutional Court case does not deal with poverty issues.
Fundamental questions:

- Does the legislative and policy framework and/or the case law support using sustainable development as a tool to effect policy relief?

.... The answer must be no, because of:

- No clear guidelines emanating from the international sustainability discourse on exactly how to address poverty – their broad-brush intent is not helpful
- SA legislative framework on sustainable development, is not framed with poverty alleviation in mind
- SA case law on sustainable development has not yet moved into the space of poverty alleviation
Is Sustainable Development a Panacea for Urban Poverty Relief in SA? continued

Relevant inputs from authors on sustainability:

- Poverty stifles sustainable development. (Rapasta, 2015.)
- Formal equality masks underlying inequality and institutionalized privilege. Inequalities are hidden away by privilege conferred by social institutions. (Moyo, 2014)
- Increasing case studies from developing countries reporting on the failure of sustainable development to achieve synergies between environmental, social and economic issues. (Cobbinah, Erdiaw-Kwasie and Amoatenga, 2015).
- Absence of universal and clear meaning of sustainable development. (Cobbinah et al, 2015)
- There is a strong inverse relationship between poverty and sustainable development (Cobbinah et al, 2015)
- The purpose of sustainable development in developing countries seems to be lost (Cobbinah et al, 2015).
- Metropolitan development creates inherent challenges for sustainability. (Cohen, 2006)
- Sustainability discourse obscures the imperative of self-determination. (D’Souza, 2002)
- Sustainable development theory fails to deal with sociological issues. (Dempsey et al, 2011)
- The theoretical and conceptual frameworks for dealing with sustainable development are inadequate. (Patel, 2000)
- Inherent conflict between the addressing of short term needs and longer term planning by local government. (Patel, 2000)
- Methodology for setting sustainability goals is flawed - set by international agencies and external experts and conceived in terms of physical needs. (Rogerson, 1999)
Overcoming the Limitations of Sustainable Development in the Context of Poverty Relief

- Consider whether sustainable development can fit into and can work within a neoliberal capitalist economy. (Davis, 2016, avers that poverty is entrenched by the exercise of private economic power.)

- Mobilising human agency as an instrument for achieving sustainable development (individuals and legal entities). (Brand, 2011)

- Dealing with poverty as a matter of justice and social equity. (Mc Crudden, 2008, and Dempsey et al, 2011)

- Courts should address issues of poverty and sustainable development more directly. (Kabange, 2014, Rapatsa, 2015 and Liebenberg, 2012)

- Government should adopt a developmental approach in dealing with poverty, “sharpening” rights and addressing material and resource distribution. (Rosa, 2011, and Mc Evoy, 2007)
Overcoming the Limitations of Sustainable Development in the Context of Poverty Relief cont.

- Holding the executive accountable to budget for sustainability. (Pieterse, 2004)
- Translating the norms and values of the Constitution into sustainability principles. (Rapatsa, 2015)
- Reversing the trend to downplay poverty and deal with it as a banal issue. (Wilson and Dugard, 2011)
- Continually broadening the scope of sustainability theory. (Cobbinah et al, 2015)
- Local livelihood solutions. (Cobbinah et al, 2015)
- Integrating spatial justice into sustainability theory. (Nel, 2016)
- Redistributive justice as a means of addressing urban poverty. (Wratten, 1995)