

RESEARCH ARTICLE:

Poverty in South Africa: Drivers of Perpetuation

Olumuyiwa Temitope Faluyi¹ and Adewale Adisa Olutola²

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Abstract

Poverty remains a persistent issue within the socio-political landscapes of Africa. This study explores the income, food, and multidimensional nature of poverty in South Africa. The study found that economic, social, and political factors are not only responsible for poverty, but they perpetuate poverty in South Africa. These factors include weak state institutions, unemployment, service delivery issues, corruption, security challenges and dysfunctional family settings. The study adopted the state fragility theory to demonstrate how weaknesses in state institutions affect their ability to discharge their functions as expected and how they manage the dynamics associated with these expectations. The study utilised the qualitative research method based on literature search from secondary sources. These included journal articles, books, institutional documents, and newspaper articles. Data were descriptively analysed. The study recommends strong state institutions to coordinate stemming the threat these poverty drivers pose to the well-being of South Africans. It also recommends commitment through good values demonstrated by the political class, bureaucracies, and the citizens.

Keywords: *perpetuation; poverty; poverty drivers; South Africa; state institutions*

Introduction

Poverty has remained a threat to the well-being of the human race for several years. The number of people living in extreme poverty dropped from 1.9 billion in 1990 to 836 million in 2015 (The Millennium Development Goals Report, 2015). Moreover, those living on less than \$1.25 per day in developing countries have dropped to 14 per cent in 2015. However, by the end of 2015, poverty had reduced in most regions (The Millennium Development Goals Report, 2015) but that of Sub-Saharan Africa has remained comparatively high considering the average level of poverty in the regions of South Asia, East Asia and the Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean (Global Multidimensional Poverty Index, 2022). South Africa is situated in Sub-Saharan Africa, and it is purported to be one of the economically progressive states in Africa, but this achievement is not commensurate with successfully stemming the tide of poverty. The country grapples with underlying challenges, ranging from poverty to economic inequalities to governance deficiencies. The Global Multidimensional Poverty Index (2022) reported that income and the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) of South Africa are far better than the Sub-Saharan African average. South Africa's scorecard does not exonerate it from the grip of poverty. Issues that are related to poverty range from the country taking a top spot in income inequality in the world, to the drivers of poverty that have the propensity to increase poverty in the country.

Poverty has attracted responses from state actors in South Africa and other countries. Eliminating poverty is one of the aims of South Africa's National Development Plan (NDP) 2030 (National Planning Commission, n.d.) and one of the priority areas of Aspiration One of Agenda 2063 (African Union Commission, 2015). It has attracted global attention such that the United Nations has declared it as one of the pivots of the development goals. Goals one of the Millennium Development Goals (2000 to 2015) and Sustainable Development Goals (2016 to 2030) are to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, and no poverty respectively (The Millennium Development Goals Report, 2015; Global Multidimensional Poverty Index, 2022). An understanding of the causes of poverty and the

¹Tshwane University of Technology, faluyiot@tut.ac.za | <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6328-0447>

²Tshwane University of Technology, olutolaaa@tut.ac.za | <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5844-8797>

multifaceted nature of poverty in South Africa is imperative in creating a good atmosphere to tackle the menace. This study recognises that there are several factors responsible for poverty in South Africa (Campbell *et al.*, 2001; David and Gouws, 2013; Addae-Korankye, 2014; Lephakga, 2016; Bakre and Abdul-Kareem, 2019; Brady, 2019; Spicker, 2020; Shahaboonin *et al.*, 2023). Some of these causes are so dynamic that if the state is not strategic in its approach, poverty will remain a threat to the progress of South Africa, especially if state institutions do not match the dynamics associated with the drivers of poverty. These include weak state institutions, unemployment, infrastructural deficit, corruption, security challenges and dysfunctional family settings. Weak state institutions are the fulcrum of these challenges. The main argument of this study is that if the South African government does not tackle the drivers perpetuating poverty, the scourge may continue to rise in the future.

Several research on poverty, include but not limited to Magnuson and Duncan (2002); Omoniyi (2018); Balasubramanya and Stifel (2020); Cooper (2021); Želinský *et al.* (2022); Nogales and Oldiges (2024) and Herianingrum *et al.* (2024). Scholars (Bhorat *et al.*, 2017; Francis and Webster, 2019; Fransman and Yu, 2019; Salahuddin *et al.*, 2020; Trani *et al.*, 2022; Mahalika *et al.*, 2023) have embarked on the subject of poverty in South Africa. Moreover, the causes of poverty have attracted the attention of scholars. Consequently, views about the causes are the crux of this section. Peculiarities in societies have a direct relationship with the causes of poverty. Therefore, the causes of poverty can be subjective (Filandri *et al.*, 2020). The background of individuals examining the cause of poverty equally matters. What each individual or group attribute as the cause of poverty is subject to racial, religious, regional, age, income and educational differences (Campbell *et al.*, 2001). Scholars have provided different descriptions of the causes of poverty which are not limited to individual factors, societal factors and external factors. Davids and Gouws (2013) provide three perspectives on the causes of poverty. These are individualistic, structural and fatalistic. Individualistic perspectives attribute poverty to the actions and choices of poor individuals (Campbell *et al.*, 2001). In contrast, structural viewpoints attribute poverty to broader societal and economic factors which are external to the individual (Campbell *et al.*, 2001; Spicker, 2020). However, fatalistic factors imply that poverty results from uncontrollable circumstances like destiny and health issues (Davids and Gouws, 2013). Based on a related perspective, Brady (2019) views the causes of poverty from a theoretical perspective. He itemised three broad theories. These are behavioural theories with a focus on individual behaviours as determined by incentives and culture. Nonetheless, structural theories highlight the demographic and labour market standpoints which cause both behaviour and poverty. Political theories contextualised that power and institutions are the bases for policy which causes poverty and moderates the connection between behaviour and poverty.

According to Ajakaiye and Adeyeye (2001), the causes of poverty include low or stagnant economic growth, unsuitable macroeconomic strategies, shortcomings in the labour market leading to minimal job opportunities, diminished productivity, and meagre wages in the informal sector. Additionally, there is a delay in human capital development. Other contributors are deterioration of living conditions acting as structural origins or influencers of poverty, encompassing rising crime rates, environmental decline, downsizing the workforce, diminished real value of social safety nets, and shifts in familial compositions (Ajakaiye and Adeyeye, 2001). An example of change in familial composition is that a family whose breadwinner dies may plunge into poverty.

These causes apply to different countries, but an 'excuse' has been provided regarding former colonies. The current challenges (including poverty) in these territories, especially in Africa, are often attributed to the continent's history of colonisation (Lephakga, 2016; Adjei, 2017). However, it is essential to recognise that Africa is not a lone ranger in this aspect. Numerous nations that were formerly colonised have progressed towards economic prosperity and development. For instance, Singapore and New Zealand, former British colonies, have experienced significant growth (Adjei, 2017). This calls to question the effectiveness of state institutions in Africa. However, it may be argued that the case of South Africa is relatively different because the entities that colonised the country have become part of the country. Hence, the inequality characterised with Whites being the richest and Blacks being the poorest is a challenge that continues to confront the country (Lephakga, 2016; Bhorat *et al.*, 2017; Shahaboonin *et al.*, 2023).

In Africa, factors contributing to poverty encompass issues such as corruption, ineffective governance, restricted employment prospects, inadequate infrastructure, inefficient resource management, unending conflicts and warfare, and unfavourable policies from institutions like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, among other factors (Addae-Korankye, 2014). Adeyeye *et al.* (2023) link poverty in Africa to the dearth of basic human needs. These authors argue that poverty is the primary basis of hunger and malnutrition in Africa, while

hunger and malnutrition aggravate the issue of diseases across the continent. They conclude that with diseases, people in African countries will struggle to make ends meet. Some of these causes of poverty apply to South Africa, and some of the drivers of poverty identified in this study are directly or indirectly associated with these causes of poverty. While this study recognises the historical effects of apartheid on poverty in South Africa, there are additional factors that cause of poverty in South Africa, including the drivers identified in this study. This demonstrates that the state has not fully consolidated its post-1994 measures which were intended to close the gap. We contend that if significant progress has been made to close the racial gap, poverty might have been alleviated. Nonetheless, to accomplish this greatness, it requires South African institutions to be robust or effective. While this study recognises the efforts of these scholars and the measures that have been implemented by successive governments to stem the tide of poverty in South Africa (Francis and Webster, 2019; Salahuddin *et al.*, 2020; Statistics South Africa, 2022; UNDP (United Nations Development Programme), 2022), there is need to explore some drivers of poverty that are not only root causes, but agents of perpetuation in South Africa. The capacity of the South African government to respond to these issues is appropriate in preventing the situation from getting out of control.

Poverty Conceptualised

A universally accepted definition of poverty remains elusive. An individual or household perceived poor in one society may be declared to be living above the poverty line in other societies (Jolliffe and Prydz, 2021). This is because the history, resources, the standard of living, vegetation and topography of societies differ. These disparities might have an effect on how poverty is viewed and assessed in each society. Consequently, various definitions of the concept have emerged. Several analyses adhere to the conventional perspective of poverty as emanating from inadequate income to accessing essential goods and services, while others consider poverty as being influenced, at least in part, by factors such as education, health, life expectancy, child mortality, and more (Ajakaiye and Adeyeye, 2001; Adeosun and Faboya, 2020). Azevedo (n.d.) defines poverty as 'pronounced deprivation in well-being'. The author posits that the poor have inadequate income or consumption to place them above some threshold. Moreover, poverty could be due to the inability of individuals and households to adequately satisfy their consumption needs, and the lack of collective consumption (Omomowo, 2018). Consequently, he defines poverty as an undesirable level of well-being. Nevertheless, he establishes that there is absolute and relative poverty. Absolute poverty has to do with the vital minimum to sustain survival which is usually determined based on food requirements and other essentials, but relative poverty depicts a condition where individuals are considered deprived compared to others (Lok-Dessallien, 1999; Jaiyeola and Bayat, 2020). Therefore, defining poverty is incomplete without exploring how poverty is determined.

There are different ways of determining poverty, but in the context of this study, poverty will be measured using four approaches. These are the income poverty line, food poverty line and the multidimensional approaches of the Human Development Index (HDI) and the MPI. This explains why Chambers (1995: 175) defines poverty as a 'lack of physical necessities, assets and income. It includes, but is more than, being income-poor'. Gweshengwe and Hassan (2020) reveal that poverty exhibits various characteristics. It has its language, it is multidimensional and complex, and can be either individual- or context-specific, as well as absolute or relative. Thus, poverty is a comprehensive phenomenon. Traditionally, poverty has been measured using the dimension of income. This approach assumes that individuals and households are poor because their income or consumption is below a certain threshold. This is typically termed a minimum, social standard of well-being by a population group (Lok-Dessallien, 1999; Ogwuche *et al.*, 2020). This explains why there is an income poverty line in the Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) of US\$ per day. This in turn explains why there is the international income poverty line of US\$1.25 and US\$1.90 per day, but it has increased to US\$2.15 and various national income poverty lines (UNDP, 2022). The advantage of income poverty indicators is that they are expressed in units, while their limitation is that they exclude non-cash and government-provided items like goods and services, and they omit the time required to obtain a commodity (Lok-Dessallien, 1999; Abubakar, 2022). Furthermore, poor people describe their state of poverty to incorporate a lack of education, health, housing, empowerment, employment, and personal security, among others (Alkire and Santos, 2011).

Food is regarded as a major factor in determining the well-being of an individual, hence the existence of the food poverty line. This is closely related to the income poverty line because it is linked with money. The food poverty line is the amount of money necessary for an individual to meet their minimum daily energy intake requirements (Statistics South Africa, 2023). Poverty can also be assessed from a multifaceted perspective. Multidimensional

approaches to poverty have been invented. Hence, the Human Development Reports (HDRs) have been used since the 1990s to measure poverty other than the traditional income-based measure. (Alkire and Santos, 2011). The HDI is a derivative of the HDRs. The former has three dimensions, namely, long and healthy life with life expectancy at birth as an indicator; knowledge with expected years of schooling and mean years of schooling as indicators, and a decent standard of living using the Gross National Income per capita (PPP \$) as the indicator (UNDP, 2018; UNDP, 2022). It is assumed that the higher the HDI value, the better. Whereas in terms of the HDI rank, a lesser figure indicates a better result compared with a higher figure (UNDP, 2024). The HDRs co-exists with applying the MPI which was introduced in 2010 (Alkire and Santos, 2011). Alkire and Foster introduced Alkire-Foster MPI to measure poverty across countries.

The MPI is comparatively simpler in comparison with other extremely statistical approaches. It is also highly flexible because it includes other dimensions and indicators (Fransman and Yu, 2019), hence its global acceptance, with different countries domesticating the MPI. Another advantage of the MPI is that it enables comparisons across countries or regions, including intra-country comparisons between regions, ethnic groups, rural and urban areas, and other key household and community characteristics (Alkire and Santos, 2011; Belanche *et al.*, 2021). However, the other ways of assessing poverty remain relevant. Thus, more than one approach can be merged. The value of the MPI is the product of the headcount and the intensity of poverty. Headcount of poverty means the percentage of people in a population that are poor, while the intensity of poverty refers to the number of dimensions under the MPI, where individuals are deprived (Alkire and Santos, 2011; UNDP, 2022). If the headcount of poverty is the same in two countries but, country A has more intensity in the number of dimensions than country B, then country A is deemed to be poorer (Alkire and Santos, 2011). The Global MPI unit of analysis is the household, but sometimes, it may be an individual-level data (Alkire and Santos, 2011; Belanche *et al.*, 2021). It ranges between 0 and 1, wherein higher values indicate higher multidimensional poverty. The dimensions are further broken into ten indicators. These are health which has nutrition and child mortality as indicators; education with years of schooling and school attendance as indicators; living standards which have cooking fuel, sanitation, drinking water, electricity, and housing and assets as indicators (Global Multidimensional Poverty Index, 2023). The MPI is flexible in relation to incorporating peculiarities in different countries. The national or regional MPIs are based on local realities, needs and available data specific to countries or regions that are most relevant or feasible (Alkire and Santos, 2011). This is necessary because a poor person in one country may not be regarded as such in another country. Also, individuals living in rural areas might be poor because of deprivations in years of schooling, sanitation, cooking fuel, etc., while those living in urban areas may be poor because of deprivations in nutrition and housing, among others (UNDP, 2022). Therefore, the MPI offers distinctive perspectives on poverty conditions, thus revealing their shades across different age brackets, urban and rural settings, and subnational regions.

Perspectives on Poverty in South Africa

There is a plethora of ways to assess poverty, but this study will be restricted to income and food poverty, and the HDI and the MPI. This will be a platform to explore how the country has fared in addressing the issue of poverty over the years. Table 1 provides an outline of the measurements of poverty from 1993 to 2022.

Table 1: Poverty in South Africa from 1993 to 2022

Years	Poverty Description as a Percentage (%) of Population and Other Non-percentage Values
1993	Those below food poverty line at 88.71 (poverty line nominal Rand) per individual per month- 41%
2000	HDI Value- 0.632
2001	National MPI (headcount ratio of poverty)- 17.9% of households National MPI (intensity of poverty)- 43.9% of households
2010	HDI Value- 0.643
2011	HDI Value- 0.651 National MPI (headcount ratio of poverty)- 8% of households National MPI (intensity of poverty)- 42.3% of households
2012	Global MPI- 0.041 Population in multidimensional poverty (headcount)- 10.3% Population in multidimensional poverty (intensity of deprivation)- 39.6% Population below (income) national poverty line- 53.8% (Average) Population below (income) poverty line PPP \$1.25 a day- 9.4% (Average) HDI value- 0.659
2013	Those below food poverty line at R336.18 (poverty line nominal Rand) per individual per month- 43%

	HDI Value- 0.663 HDI Rank- 117
2014	HDI Value- 0.666 HDI Rank- 116 <u>2014/2015</u> Global MPI- 0.032 Population in multidimensional poverty (headcount)- 8.2% Population in multidimensional poverty (intensity of deprivation)- 39.3% Population below (income) national poverty line- 55.5% (Average) Population below (income) poverty line PPP \$1.90 a day- 18.9% (Average)
2015	HDI Value- 0.692
2016	HDI Value- 0.696 HDI Rank- 111 Global MPI- 0.025 Population in multidimensional poverty (headcount)- 6.3% Population in multidimensional poverty (intensity of deprivation)- 39.8% Population below (income) national poverty line- 55.5% (Average) Population below (income) poverty line PPP \$1.90 a day- 18.7% (Average)
2017	HDI value- 0.699
2018	HDI Value- 0.705 HDI Rank- 113
2019	HDI Value- 0.736
2020	HDI value- 0.727 HDI Rank- 102
2021	HDI value- 0.713 HDI Rank- 109 Population below (income) national poverty line- 55.5% (Average) Population below (income) poverty line PPP \$2.15 a day- 20.5% (Average)
2022	HDI value- 0.717 HDI Rank- 110

Sources: Authors from different sources

Food poverty increased in 2013, but this description reflects food poverty without grants. However, when grants are considered, poverty levels were reduced from 33 per cent in 1993 to 25 per cent in 2013 (Van Der Byl, n.d.). The HDI value and rank improved. These suggest an improvement in long and healthy life, knowledge and a decent standard of living. The country's performance concerning the population living below (income) poverty line PPP and the Global MPI are better than the Sub-Sahara African average (UNDP, 2024). Nevertheless, high-income inequality persists in South Africa. Deininger and Squire (1996) submit that inequality based on the Gini coefficient was on average 0.62 between 1960 and 1992. This value relates to the apartheid years. However, the Gini coefficient for South Africa rose from 0.66 in 1993 to 0.70 in 2008 (Leibbrandt *et al.*, 2012), and to 0.69 in 2010 (Bhorat *et al.*, 2017). Nonetheless, the average Gini coefficient in South Africa from 2010 to 2021 was 0.63 (UNDP, 2022). Beside the challenge of inequality, the country has fared relatively well compared to other countries in its economic and geographical groups. However, the inequality along racial lines in the country signifies Blacks still experiencing deep poverty (Shahaboonin *et al.*, 2023). Nevertheless, the achievements are inseparable from some of the measures taken by the government.

The African National Congress-led government rolled out the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) in 1994. The RDP and successive plans provided a structure for economic development to reduce inequality and eliminate poverty (Salahuddin *et al.*, 2020). The government has also introduced the Growth, Employment and Redistribution, the NDP, the Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment programme and social grants, among others. The country also embarked on labour market reforms, productivity improvement and skills development (Francis and Webster, 2019). In relation to the RDP, more attention was given to social spending such as housing, education and healthcare, compared to military expenditure (Francis and Webster, 2019). Thus, the RDP continued to be the bedrock of South Africa's broad social security programme (Francis and Webster, 2019). The proportion of people receiving social grants has steadily increased from 12.8 per cent in 2003 to about 31 per cent from 2017 to 2019, then increased further to 35.7 per cent in 2021 (Statistics South Africa, 2022). This upward trend closely mirrored the increase in households receiving at least one social grant, which grew from 30.8 per cent in 2003 to

45.5 per cent in 2019, and further to 50.6 per cent in 2021 (Statistics South Africa, 2022). These are effective measures, but the inequality prevailing in the country calls for a need to examine the capacity of state institutions that are entrusted with formulating and implementing programmes. The issues that emanate and remain cogs in the wheel of the progress of the country due to the weakness of institutions remain crucial in this paper. An understanding of some factors that not only pose an immediate, but are potential threats to increasing poverty, and slowing down the pace of closing the racial gap is crucial.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical prism of this study is the state fragility theory. Cilliers and Sisk (2013: 5) define fragility 'as low capacity and poor state performance with respect to security and development'. Similarly, Bertocchi and Guerzoni, (2011) posit that the notion of fragility is connected to several dysfunctions such as the inability to effectively deliver basic services and fulfil essential needs, unstable and weak governance, unending extreme poverty, lack of control over territory, and a high risk of conflict and civil war. These represent what any government exists to prevent or minimise, but a fragile state may perform below expectations. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2008: 16) defined a fragile state 'as one unable to meet its population's expectations or manage changes in expectations and capacity through the political process.' Olowu and Chanie (2015) submit that states that demonstrate a deficit or fail to meet expectations in their commitment, institutional, technical, and administrative capacities, as well as in political will, functional authority, economic performance, good governance, judicious financial management, promotion of peace, and provision of public infrastructure and services portray the elements of a fragile state.

In a nutshell, fragile states are noticeable by political instability, violence, weak institutional and administrative capacity, and deteriorating or non-functional physical and social infrastructure. These lead to low human development and high levels of poverty (African Development Bank Group, 2011). The bureaucratic structure of a state and the political class formulate and implement policies through state institutions to ensure that the features of a fragile state are reduced to the barest minimum, and poverty is dwarfed. Thus, weak state institutions are linked with bad governance and high level of poverty. Cilliers and Sisk (2013) submit that fragility indicates that state institutions are weak. This results in challenges with security, high inequality and economic exclusion and poverty. These factors are associated with contemporary South Africa. However, this assertion does not imply that South Africa is a failed state, but it is at an elevated warning level which is average in terms of the Fragile States Index (FSI) (Fragile States Index, 2023). The FSI comprises of cohesion, economic, political and social indices as indicators. The South African government has not succeeded to effectively tackle the issue of weak state institutions, unemployment, infrastructural deficit or the service delivery issue, corruption, security challenges and dysfunctional family settings. Therefore, if these factors are not adequately attended to, poverty may perpetuate in the country.

Drivers of Perpetuation with the Potential of Placing More People in the Poverty Zone in South Africa

It is crucial to acknowledge that a notable portion of individuals who are above the poverty threshold are at risk of descending into poverty, while those who are within the confines of poverty may not easily overcome such. The reasons why these drivers pose these threats are explained below:

Weak state institutions

State institutions are responsible for carrying out the tasks of government. Their functions include the provision and maintenance of infrastructure, anti-corruption, security, defence, and foreign affairs, among others. However, if these institutions are weak, the situation could breed and sustain drivers of poverty. In South Africa, some of the state institutions are deemed to be weak (Alence and Pitcher, 2019). This has made it difficult to close the gap between the rich and the poor, and to promote social justice (Fagbadebo and Faluyi, 2023). Stated differently, the enforcement of policies hardly run smoothly if the state institutions are weak. This also affects the trust of investors in investing in the economy. Examples of such instabilities include the fact that most of the national commissioners of the South African Police Service were not been able to complete their tenure of office as a result of suspension from office or due to termination of their employment due to corruption or incompetence in the post-apartheid era (Masiloane, 2023). Recently, we witnessed the resignation of the speaker of the parliament due to allegations of bribery and corruption (Khoza, 2024). Furthermore, the South African Parliament is entrusted with oversight

functions on the activities of state institutions. However, if its presiding officer is allegedly corrupt, this might portray the country negatively. The National Prosecuting Authority is still dragging its feet to prosecute and bring to book those who have been implicated in the allegations of state capture (Olutola, 2012; Alence and Pitcher, 2019; Pillay *et al.*, 2023).

Unemployment

Unemployment has been a pre-1994 problem in South Africa and it has continued (Pasara and Garidzirai, 2020). Between October and December 2022, unemployment in South Africa was 32.7 per cent, but it decreased to 31.9 per cent between July and September 2023. However, it increased to 32.1 per cent between October and December of 2023 (Statistics South Africa, 2024). Furthermore, unemployment rate in South Africa has a racial dimension, with Black/Africans being the highest among the unemployed, followed by Coloureds, Indians/Asians and Whites (Statistics South Africa, 2024). The economic growth recorded notwithstanding, the formal sector has not been able to solve the unemployment puzzle (Pasara and Garidzirai, 2020). Moreover, in South Africa, the high unemployment rate is regarded as one of the contributing factors to poverty (Ngubane *et al.*, 2023). This has the potential of aggravating the situation. For instance, in a household, if only one member is employed or underemployed, the income earned will be used to cater for the needs of that person and other members of the household. This might push the household below the poverty line.

Infrastructural deficit or service delivery issue

Weak state institutions coupled with politicisation of administration hampers effective service delivery in South Africa (Masuku and Jili, 2019; Pasara and Garidzirai, 2020). The Global Competitiveness Report (2019) provided a breakdown of infrastructure in South Africa regarding its global ranking in terms of basic infrastructure. The basic infrastructure ranking comprises of 141 countries, and the country has been ranked according to types of infrastructure. South Africa is ranked 45th in transport infrastructure and 92nd in utility infrastructure. Utility infrastructure comprises water and electricity. For instance, electricity supply has not been regular and this accounts for the load shedding that has been experienced in the country for several years. In addition, water provision has also been irregular in some places. Tap water from public sources accounts for the bulk of the water source in the country (Statistics South Africa, 2022). The incessant protests over service delivery attest to underperformance by the government (Fagbadebo and Faluyi, 2023). The disruptions in the provision of water and electricity have negatively affected individuals, households and businesses. Having boreholes and well as other sources of water is not a common practice in urban and suburban South Africa. Thus, whenever there is no water supply, the populace is at risk of being exposed to diseases, spending more to buy water and finding it difficult to cook. Similarly, unreliable electricity supply means that individuals and households might spend more money to secure alternative sources of electricity. Moreover, companies are compelled to consistently cover substantial operational expenses for diesel generators, repair infrastructure damage caused by power outages, and occasional shut down operations due to the inability to carry out daily business activities (BusinessTech, 2023). Organisations that choose to continue operating during power outages might have no choice, but to increase the cost of their goods and services, and/or layoff their employees. Consequently, these decisions might 'push' more people into poverty.

Corruption

Some members of the political class and public servants directly tend to engage in corrupt practices or influence public policies and government decisions in South Africa to their advantage or those of their cronies (Olutola, 2014; Masuku and Jili, 2019). Corruption is on the increase in South Africa. According to the Global Organized Crime Index (2023), in South Africa, there is a significant prevalence of corruption in the public sector. This is characterised by instances of maladministration, procurement corruption, and abuse of authority. The sectors most frequently implicated in corruption reports include the police service, educational institutions, and healthcare services. Despite the presence of extensive anti-corruption legislation and agencies, enforcement has traditionally been lacking, thus resulting in numerous current and former government officials evading prosecution. These attest to weak state institutions. Public resources that are diverted for private use and using positions in public institutions for self-aggrandisement create a lacuna in the infrastructure that should have been provided to the public. Furthermore, local and international investors are discouraged because of the corrupt dispositions of different stakeholders, and the poor state or unavailability of functional infrastructure that grease the wheels of commerce. This means that investments might decrease, resulting in creating fewer jobs.

Security challenges

According to Statista (2024), South Africa has the highest crime index in Africa, and ranks as the fifth most dangerous country globally. The prevalence of various categories of crime are posing security challenges in the country. Reality portrays that cybercrime, arms smuggling, business robberies, gang violence and kidnapping for ransom or extortion are on an upward trend in the country (Global Organized Crime Index, 2023). These categories of crime have negative effects on service delivery, safety of citizens and investments. Safety issues and challenges with investments negatively affect the economy and protest is one of the ways to react to the symptoms of a declining economy. Protests are necessary, but they tend to go out of control due to weak law enforcement and the inability of the government to respond to the causes of protests and confine protesters to peaceful activities. These lead to arson and destruction of property. A recent example is the July 9 to 17 2021 violent protests and unrest after the arrest of former President Jacob Zuma. Vhumbunu (2022) provides a detailed description of these protests. The demonstrations led to damage to properties, business supplies, jobs, means of living, and crucial services like medical and pharmaceutical supplies in healthcare facilities, farming, financial services, telecommunication infrastructure, food distribution centres, and seaports. The loss of lives and the damage was worth about R50 billion and the government palliative of about R4.15 billion did little in taking care of the losses of businesses and households (SA News, 2021; Vhumbunu, 2022). As a result of the violent protests, long-term economic consequences impact on investment choices. For instance, corporations like Toyota, which operates a car assembly in KwaZulu-Natal, has expressed significant concerns about the suitability of the province's business climate (Vhumbunu, 2022). Apparently, the looting that was associated with the protests might have been managed better if there are no challenges with infrastructure and poverty. Security challenges in South Africa hamper the ability of local businesses to operate effectively and discourage foreign investors. Even when businesses are able to operate, they might be required to devote more resources towards providing conventional security and cyber security to operate their businesses effectively. Consequently, the cost implications of these decisions are that funds deployed to tackle security concerns would have been used to expand the businesses, pay more salaries and probably employ more people.

Dysfunctional family setting

Family life in South Africa is problematic (Centre for Social Justice, 2010). In South Africa, the 'typical' child is raised by their mother in a single-parent household. Most children also live in households with unemployed adults. Providing nutritious food regularly and promptly is often a challenge even in households where both parents live together. It is worse when the family is headed by single parent. This suggests that there is an interplay between poverty and a dysfunctional family. In order to respond to such issues, comprehensive policies, social support, and a deliberate desire to improve family units are required. The Revised White Paper on Families in South Africa (2021) recognised the challenges associated with dysfunctional families in the country, and the need to reverse the problem (Department of Social Development, 2021). However, implementing such a policy document remains *an elephant in the room* (Mokomane, 2023).

Conclusion

This study explored poverty in South Africa. It explained concepts such as income, food and multidimensional perspectives. The manifestation of poverty in South Africa was exposed using the income-based approaches, which are the international income poverty and national poverty lines. The multidimensional approaches have dimensions and indicators which serve as pedestals to measure poverty lines. The general root causes of poverty were itemised, and these were integral parts of the literature review. Though South Africa has performed better than the Sub-Saharan African average, it still battles with high income inequality. Challenges such as weak state institutions, unemployment, service delivery challenges, corruption, security challenges and dysfunctional family settings pose threats. These defects do not only account for the causes of poverty in South Africa, but the dynamics that accompany their existence and render them as catalysts for sustaining poverty in the country. Therefore, this paper explicitly explained how these challenges manifest, and how they can be resolved with the ultimate goal of alleviating poverty in South Africa.

The study recommends that governments at all levels should strengthen state institutions to improve their effectiveness in fighting corruption. These institutions should also be emboldened to monitor the excesses of government officials. Moreover, government should provide infrastructure and implement public policies effectively. Implementing such programmes or policies should be void of corrupt practices. The government should also

implement monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to ensure that citizens, bureaucracies and the political class discharge their responsibilities effectively. Moreover, the issue of security should be considered more seriously through the formulation of robust legislation, and training and equipping law enforcement agencies adequately. In addition, the government should enact and implement laws to reduce the rate at which protests result in violence. Furthermore, government officials should undergo value re-orientation to create awareness and make them conscious of their commitment to the country, and not to themselves and their cronies. Finally, value re-orientation programmes should be intensified to educate the populace about the importance of the family in society and reasons to abstain from crime and other vices.

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