Editorial

Betty C Mubangizi
Professor, University of KwaZulu-Natal
mubangizib@ukzn.ac.za

As I write this editorial, South Africa is witnessing widespread student protests that have gripped the country under the #Fees mustfall campaign. At the heart of this campaign is a call for free quality and decolonised education for all students in South Africa's institutions of higher learning. I would like, in this editorial, to reflect on the decolonisation of higher education that the students are calling for. Academics in South African universities are grappling for a common understanding of what a decolonised education might mean and are doing so, in some instances, through dialogue with students and various stakeholders. Although the debate is still at a formative stage, it appears that there is growing consensus that decolonising education is not about replacing western theorists and authors with African ones. But rather, it is about how to create understandings and practices that are contextually relevant and responsive as reflected through Aristotle's categorisation of curriculum as product, process, context and knowledge (Srivastava, 2005).

The narrative in this Issue, whose contributors are academics, in (mainly) South African Universities, is indicative of a conscious response to a decolonised view of interpreting curriculum process and context as well as epistemologies. The authors reflect on public policy and lament the general lack of knowledge of context and decentring and a detachment from indigenous knowledge systems. The undertones are clear and relate to a clarion call for policy to be informed by a better understanding of the individuals and communities that a given policy is meant to serve. Without this fundamental acknowledgement, policy is likely to fail as, indeed, argued in most of the articles. For, as Mgqwashu (2016) observes, "Theories that inform policy and practice must be informed by life as it is lived, experienced and understood by local inhabitants. Universities need to introduce well theorised scholarship emerging from, and underpinned by, the African local experience" (Mgqwashu, 2016).

Inspired by this, **Makoba and Ruffin** interrogate the conceptualisation and application of performance management in South Africa's public service. Defined as "an ongoing, systematic approach to improving results through evidence-based decision making, continuous organizational learning and a focus on accountability for performance", performance management is an attempt to ensure accountability and the attainment of effectiveness, efficiency and economical use of public resources. Makoba and Ruffin question whether, in introducing outcomes-based performance management in the public sectors, policy makers took African epistemologies into account. African epistemologies are ways of knowing and systems of knowledge production that reflect indigenous and contemporary socio-cultural beliefs and practices. Makoba and Ruffin draw on the views of Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013) and Nabudere (2011) on African epistemologies and show how culturally blind interventions could be counterproductive, discourage community participation and erode the would-be effects to the intended outcomes. The authors further contend that where interventions are required for communities, it is crucial that these are science-based and culturally relevant. In their conclusion Makoba and Ruffin assert that performance in the public domain is an "elusive concept" which is hard to define and to measure because different stakeholders attach different priorities to different elements of performance and hence its management and measurement. It is recommended that the South African government take cognisance of African ways of knowing and be at the forefront of decolonising the Public Service by using "Afrikology" to promote new knowledge production for employee development and citizen driven performance management to improve service delivery.

While we should be mindful of a decolonised epistemology we should not in any way adopt a navel-gazing stance where we fail to look beyond the local in crafting local ideals and responsive policies. It is often imperative to explore and benchmark our policy responses against international best practice. After all we live in a globalised environment where national boarders are nebulous and cultures dynamic. For example, Erez & Gati (2004) call for a shift in the research focus on culture as stable, to culture as a dynamic entity and for a greater focus on the interplay between different levels of culture – local and global.

In this regard, it is useful to use international standards to cement key principles and set norms and standards. This way countries can use the same yardstick in gauging the progress made by governments towards globally-set ideals like the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). A case in point is the

access to safe and affordable housing which forms part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as encapsulated by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Against this backdrop, **Jarbandhan, Viljoen, de Beer and Blaauw** question the adequacy of the housing modalities in South Africa and the funding thereof. Currently there are three main housing modalities in South Africa's housing sector. The first is the lower extreme consisting of informal accommodation, informal settlements and backyard dwellings. The second consists of the fully subsidised housing developments, which generally operate in parallel to informal housing. The third is the privately developed, fully mortgaged homes (Wilkinson, 2014:8). Consequently, there exists a group of people who are unable to afford bonded homes, and also do not qualify for government subsidised housing. It is this group that is usually referred to as the "gap market" grouping. Put more succinctly, the gap market "refers to people who earn too much to qualify for government-subsidised housing but not enough for homes in the traditional private market". To this end Government effort towards integrated sustainable housing delivery will depend on improved coordination and alignment with other government departments and on partnerships between the state, the private sector and communities. Jarbandhan, Viljoen, de Beer and Blaauw are of the view that the effort towards integrated housing delivery will not only take care of the gap market but will also progressively upgrade informal settlements in which housing units are considered by the state as inadequate.

Ojo-Aromokudu and Loggia question the concept of "informal settlement" within South Africa's housing modalities. Based on research conducted in these so-called informal settlements in the KwaZulu-Natal province of South Africa, Ojo-Aromokudu and Loggia show that informality is characterised by its own normality, comprising indigenous norms mainly dictated by socio-economic and socio-cultural factors. In their research, Ojo-Aromokudu and Loggia note that extensions to housing units is found in several low-income formal and informal settlements in KwaZulu-Natal Province and in the wider country and that such extensions are made to accommodate not just living spaces but also economic, socio-cultural and religious activities. While pre-defined standards of housing would categorise such extensions as "informal", Ojo-Aromokudu and Loggia conclude that such a practice is in fact normal for communities within which such housing units exist – further affirming the relevance of indigenous knowledge systems and the need for a flexible context-based approach to resolving

community issues. A shift from rigid and standardised norms towards more flexible and contextualised policies informed by grassroots approaches, is suggested for more responsive and participatory housing upgrading processes.

The need for contextualised policies is further highlighted by **Kampire and Mubangizi** based on findings of research conducted in rural Uganda on gender relations and food security. Against the backdrop of Uganda's Child Nutrition Policy, the study explored how gender relations may influence child nutrition with particular regard to selected rural areas of Uganda. The research established, among other things, that success of child food security in the rural households in Uganda not only depends on, but can be guaranteed, when there is gender equity in the allocation and control of resources and in decision-making processes in the households. An observation is made that while Uganda's Nutrition Policy targets a composite and seemingly homogeneous household, it overlooks the gender relations and power dynamics within households. Yet within households, variously positioned actors – split on the basis of gender and age – go through a laborious bargaining regime and make trade-offs in order to benefit from nutrition policies and strategies. Beyond nutrition interventions of policies and strategies, understanding gender relations in terms of resource control, resource allocation and decision-making within the household, can help strengthen women's position and their ability to improve child nutrition and food security in their homes.

Mwesigwa takes the discussion on food security further by questioning a definition of food security that focuses on national macro-level statistics. Mwesigwa does so by exploring Uganda's Prosperity for all (PFA) programme. The PFA programme aimed to transform rural and peri-urban households into commercial money-making units while ensuring that the beneficiaries are food secure. PFA implementation focused on key principles: household income, household food security, households as marketing groups, and poverty reduction. Findings suggest that agricultural produce marketing was hampered by socio-cultural factors including the attitude towards women entrepreneurs, biases against the rural poor, and low levels of education. Further the PFA programme did not address the factor of land ownership particularly for women – yet without access to and control of land, little can be achieved by way of agricultural productivity. The findings confirm the importance of understanding the cultural context prior to crafting interventionist policies and programmes.

Netswera's article points to the possible reason for failing to consider local context when crafting and implementing social development policies and programmes. Is the answer to be found in the rhetoric used during elections? That is, rhetoric that speaks to what sounds good but not necessarily what I, in fact, practical. Netswera focuses on the last four local government elections in South Africa and analyses local government election manifestos of the ruling party. He notes that each manifesto is prefaced by a slogan which gives members of the public an idea or a theme that the political party projects as their main focus and priority at that given era. Netswera's analysis shows that the presidential messages, with the exception of some emphasis on service delivery and community participation, do not have complete alignment with the functions of local government as listed in Schedule B of South Africa's constitution. The manifestos are thus a strong electioneering rhetoric that plays on societal sentiments regarding, among others, unemployment and poverty which are current societal grand problems. Key words like job creation, education, land ownership and housing, among others, feature in the election manifestos. It can be concluded from Netswera's analysis that alignment between local government manifestos and local government functions does not exist. The danger in this chasm is that local expectations are raised without a consideration of whether local government is, in fact, well placed to deliver on such manifestos. Strengthening the relationship between the community and their local government representatives might require that the local citizenry be given space to articulate their expectations of the political parties.

The views expressed in this Issue, in combination, speak to the value of locally articulated, context-specific responses to community challenges. Pityana (2002) once commented that ordinary human beings located in the real world devise their own norms which have the potential to contribute to international (and national) norms. Indeed, international (and national) norms have value only to the extent that they meet human needs. It is vital that policy makers take this into consideration.

In the context of the decolonisation ideals, if African epistemologies determine the response of Africans, including South Africans, then policy architects and implementers should understand and appreciate epistemologies influencing African behavioural patterns in their acceptance of, and participation in, government programmes. The utilisation of African epistemology-based theories is required to be able to meet communities at the level where

knowledge and prioritisation is acceptable to them. These will no doubt inform adaptation and implementation of international best practices.

References

Srivastava, D. S. 2005. *Curriculum and instruction*. Delhi. Gyan Publishing House.

Mgqwashu, E. 2016. "Universities Can't Decolonise the Curriculum Without Defining It First." *The Conversation.* 22, August, 2016. https://theconversation.com/africa. [Accessed 20th October, 2016]

Erez, M., & Gati, E. 2004. "A Dynamic, Multi Level Model of Culture: From The Micro Level Of The Individual To The Macro Level Of A Global Culture." *Applied Psychology*. 53(4), 583-598.

Pityana, B. N. 2002. "The Challenge of Culture for Human Rights in Africa: The African Charter in a Comparative Context" in *The African Charter on Human and People's Rights: The System in Practice, 1986–2000*, 219-245.

●