



PHASE ONE SUMMARY

WHAT DID WE DO?

The starting point for our project was to get a better understanding of how the public thinks about the economy and the connection, if any, they see it having to human rights. To do this, we analysed how economic justice issues are talked about:

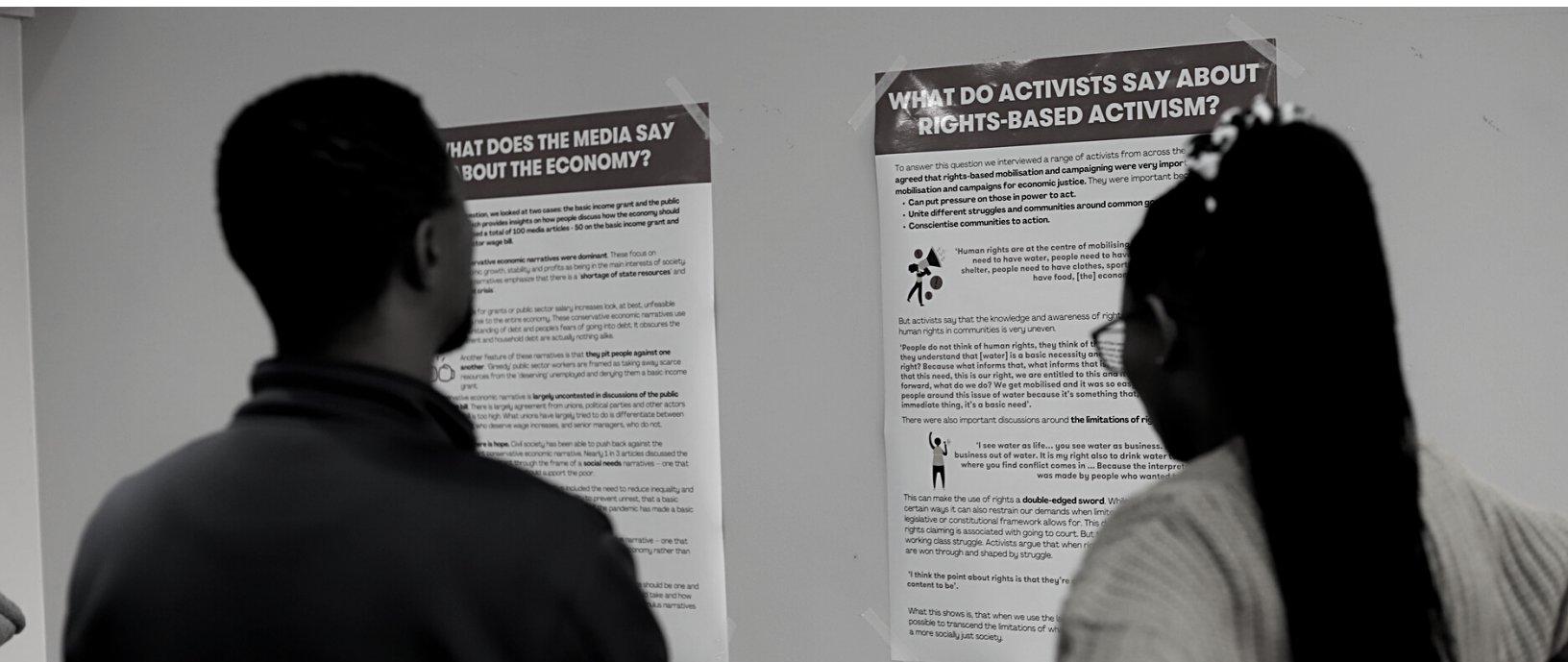
- In the media—examining the discourse used in a random sample of 100 media articles related to key policy debates: the basic income grant and the public sector wage bill.
- By the public—compiling existing social attitude data and collecting additional data through an online survey that received 518 responses.
- Among activists—interviewing 25 people across the country to understand how they spoke about the economy and human rights.

We shared this analysis with a group of 20 civil society and social movement activists and used it to workshop ideas about what we need to communicate to bridge the gap between what we're saying and what people are hearing.

WHAT DID WE LEARN?

Drawing together research findings, conversations with the project’s reference group, and workshop discussions, we distilled key elements of the dominant narrative. These include:

DIAGNOSIS OF THE PROBLEM?	MOTIVATION TO ADDRESS IT?
<p>South Africa’s economy is struggling due to its weak global competitiveness. Corruption, mismanagement, a bloated public sector, and state-capture all contribute to this. It results in chronic joblessness, high levels of poverty, and dependence on social grants.</p>	<p>Inequality is a problem that is causing social unrest and the government should do more to address it. But it shouldn’t do anything that risks slowing economic growth and making things worse—e.g. that puts off investors or that creates a debt crisis.</p>
SOLUTIONS PROPOSED?	END GAME?
<p>Because resources are scarce, the government has to be disciplined and has to make hard decisions about trade-offs. Large scale investment in public services and social protection is unaffordable. Job creation should be the priority and cooperation with the private sector—based on advice from economists and other experts— is how to achieve it.</p>	<p>With these solutions, we can achieve a “healthy” economy that will eventually benefit everyone.</p>



Civil society and social movement activists fighting for economic justice are contesting this dominant narrative through campaigns, organising, political education, mobilizations, and other types of communications. But, our discussions with them revealed a number of interrelated challenges that affect the uptake of the counter-narratives being put forward. These relate to:

- **Strategy:** no clear “theory of change” linking traditional advocacy targeting government actors, working class mobilisation, and efforts to influence broader public opinion.
- **Alignment:** many different messages coming from different groups at the same time, without a clear goal unifying them.
- **Content:** messages are crafted for those already “converted” and tend to be vague and fearful (i.e. they don’t paint a positive picture of the future we want).
- **Rights:** messages don’t often use rights framing, despite most activists stressing the importance of rights in interviews; perceptions about rights vary across activists and tend to garner more support among younger groups; what claiming rights means for different activists needs to be unpacked more.

Often, the issue is not that activists are facing strong opposition to their demands, but that their demands are being ignored. So strengthening our counter-narrative is important in order to “preach beyond the choir”, so to speak, and increase the attention and sense of urgency others in society give to their demands. For some activists, building support among their perceived base is a priority. We don’t want them to be a “rent-a-crowd”, as one put it, but a genuine mass movement. For others, the priority is building cross-class alliances that strengthen political pressure for reform. Having a shared perspective on the problem and common support for the solution across classes helps combat the “trade off” mentality.

As a starting point for addressing these challenges, we also identified some of the common themes that emerge in the counter narratives from civil society and social movement activists fighting for economic justice. These include:

DIAGNOSIS OF THE PROBLEM?

The extractive and exploitative structure of the country's neoliberal economic model puts profits over people; concentrates wealth among a powerful elite; guts state capacity; and excludes communities. People are governed, they don't govern. Their rights are ignored in policy debates. As the cost of living soars and jobs remain scarce, most people are left struggling to meet their basic needs.

MOTIVATION TO ADDRESS IT?

Inequality is a problem that is causing social unrest and the government should do more to address it. Everyone deserves dignity. This isn't a matter of charity, it's a human right.

SOLUTIONS PROPOSED?

We need policies that fundamentally redistribute resources in the economy. Demands vary. But generally, these include increasing taxes on the wealthy and introducing a basic income grant. Better service delivery is essential, as well, and public sector reform is how we achieve it. A just transition to renewable energy is also an opportunity to promote decent work. To be successful, any intervention must guarantee people's rights, including their right to participate in decisions affecting their lives and livelihoods.

END GAME?

With these solutions, we can achieve a more just and equitable society that strengthens democratic decision making; guarantees economic security; and improves living standards for everyone.

Comparing key elements of the dominant narrative, with shared elements of our counter narratives, helps to see what attitudes and beliefs are preventing our audiences from taking up our messages and where there is common ground that we could build on.

ATTITUDES AND BELIEFS WE CAN EASILY APPEAL TO AND BUILD UPON...

The level of inequality is too high across all sections of South African society and the government should do more to address it.

ATTITUDES AND BELIEFS WE SHOULD TRY TO SHIFT, OR, AT LEAST, BE CAREFUL NOT TO REINFORCE...

Poor understanding of the government's role in the economy (including through services delivered by the public sector and in relation to job creation).

ATTITUDES AND BELIEFS WE CAN EASILY APPEAL TO AND BUILD UPON...

The level of inequality is too high across all sections of South African society and the government should do more to address it.

Helping people (through a basic income grant) is seen as beneficial; there's broad public support for this policy; there has been a clear shift in the policy debate—not if, but how.

The public sector is generally seen as essential for service delivery.

The right to a minimum standard of living is considered to be very important.

Ordinary people believe they should have more power in the economy and they can do a lot to create an economy that works for everyone.

ATTITUDES AND BELIEFS WE SHOULD TRY TO SHIFT, OR, AT LEAST, BE CAREFUL NOT TO REINFORCE...

General dissatisfaction with/ lack of faith in/ mistrust of government.

Strong sense of apathy/ disillusionment/ cynicism/ fatalism.

Split views about whether the public sector works for the common good and whether the private sector can deliver services more effectively.

Disconnect between revenue raising (taxation and borrowing) and expenditure, which reinforces the "scarcity" narrative.

Pervasive "either or" thinking; have to prioritise the most "deserving" (e.g. poor and unemployed vs public sector workers); have to "protect our own" against foreigners.

Perception of grant recipients as lazy or otherwise undeserving, which is reinforced by government officials.

Low levels of awareness of rights; perceived conflict between rights of communities and "rights" of corporations.

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WHAT NEXT?

The next phase of our project will develop and test alternative messages, which frame our counter-narrative in a different way. For our efforts to really be effective, we need to focus on the particular audiences that are more strategic to advance our cause. Based on what we've heard in phase one, we've identified the following audiences to prioritise:

OUR BASE	DISILLUSIONED WORKING CLASSES	PERSUADABLE MIDDLE CLASSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community activists in some form of formalised social movement structure. • Mostly unemployed or surviving on forms of precarious work. • Located in urban and rural areas. • Diverse in terms of gender, age, sexuality, disability, and other identities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People living in working class communities in townships, backyards, informal settlements and rural areas. • Share the concerns of the base but feel disempowered and disillusioned about the prospects to change. • A mixture of the unemployed, employed and precariously employed. • For the employed and precariously employed, more barriers to participation in community movements – they're at work or fearful that participation may cost them their job/job opportunities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mid-income workers, formally employed. • Salary range: R4,165 to R11,263 • High school and/or some higher education. • Living in bond houses or rented new build flats in townships or suburban areas. • Are not opposed to BIG or other measures that would promote greater equality but fearful of the costs to them.

Drawing together everything we've heard in phase one, we've identified a number of objectives that we want our reframed counter-narrative to achieve. Specifically, we believe it will be important for our reframed counter-narrative to help our audiences:

1. Make the link between how the government raises money and how it spends it in order to contest the idea that resources are scarce.
2. Connect "bread and butter" issues to their systemic causes.
3. View rights holistically—bringing together their economic, social and political dimensions—and as a tool for supporting demands for economic justice.
4. Better understand how jobs are created and the role of the government in doing so.

We also identified cross-cutting principles that we want our communications to reflect:

- People living in poverty are portrayed as individuals with power, resilience, and dignity; not waiting for intervention.
- Our tone fosters a sense of urgency about the need for change and, importantly, a sense of hope about achieving it.
- We focus on transformative solutions, instead of getting bogged down in technicalities.