

# SHIFTING THE NARRATIVE



**Strengthening the stories we tell about the economy and human rights in South Africa**

**CENTER** for  
**ECONOMIC** and  
**SOCIAL RIGHTS**



## ABOUT US



The **Fight Inequality Alliance South Africa (FIA)** is part of a growing global movement organizing and mobilizing to counter the excessive concentration of power and wealth in the hands of a small elite. We are building a just, equal, and sustainable world.



The **University of Johannesburg Centre for Social Change (CSC)** is a research center dedicated to the study of social change from below in pursuit of building socially just and democratic societies. The CSC's research agenda strives to connect with the needs of civil society in a changing regional and global context and aims to expand knowledge through cutting-edge multidisciplinary research.



The **Center for Economic and Social Rights (CESR)** is an international nongovernmental organization that aims to transform the dominant economic system. Our vision is of a world in which a just distribution of resources and power enables current and future generations to live with dignity, in full enjoyment of their economic and social rights. In pursuit of this vision, our mission is to harness the power of human rights to inspire fairer and more sustainable economies.

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# FOREWORD



Narratives are powerful. They reflect the values and big-picture vision of the world we live in and the future we are fighting to make real. Narratives impact how people perceive, come to judgments, and act on certain issues.

Who holds power is shaped by, and shapes, dominant narratives. In South Africa, for example, as in other parts of the world, the deeply entrenched narrative that the market is the most efficient distributor of resources is a huge obstacle to transforming the economy. Despite mountains of evidence proving it false, this story of private-sector efficiency has stuck.

We're seeing increasing efforts to build narrative power (i.e. the ability to contest dominant narratives) around the world and across a range of social justice issues. There's widespread consensus that the stories we've been telling, and the messages we've been using, to deliver our counter-narratives have not been enough. Not enough to influence the actions of those in power. More worryingly, not enough to convince broad segments of the population that mobilizing against the cruel dynamics of neoliberalism is the way to go.

Without a clear strategy for how we're communicating, people "fill in the gaps" on their own. This risks reinforcing — not shifting — existing thinking.

This has inspired a new wave of thinking around communications. Practices for researching narrative change are also starting to become more standardized. Research plays a key role in building narrative power. First, it helps us better understand what dominant narratives are. Without this understanding, we're likely to default to our own beliefs and biases. As a result, we may fail to build connections with people who see things differently. Second, it helps us determine which counter-narratives allow people to change their perception of a certain issue.

In this context, the Center for Economic and Social Rights, the Centre for Social Change at the University of Johannesburg, and Fight Inequality Alliance South Africa came together to experiment with how narrative change research could help strengthen demands for economic justice. In this report, we share our findings about what ideas are the most prevalent in the dominant narrative, how activists are communicating for change, and what we could do to strengthen these efforts.

# INTRODUCTION: ABOUT THE SHIFTING THE NARRATIVE PROJECT AND THIS REPORT

In early 2022, the Center for Economic and Social Rights, the Centre for Social Change at the University of Johannesburg, and Fight Inequality Alliance South Africa embarked on a mission. Our objective: to explore how to “shift the narrative” about human rights and the economy in South Africa, in order to build support for progressive policies that allow everyone to live with dignity.<sup>1</sup>

South Africa is an apt context in which to experiment with narrative change research. The country has been described as the “protest capital of the world”,<sup>2</sup> due to its high level of working-class mobilization. Despite this pervasiveness of protest, South African civil society and social movements have encountered serious challenges in building and strengthening momentum for change.

In addition, much narrative change research has taken place in the Global North and has been facilitated through nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). This work is valuable. But we considered it important to experiment with narrative change research methods in a different way, to see how they might adapt to the practical challenges and daily realities of community-based struggles in South Africa.

## PROJECT METHODOLOGY

The research took place over 18 months and across three phases:

- First, we set out to understand the current narrative landscape, or which stories were the most prevalent in shaping people’s perceptions around the economy and human rights. We also sought to understand what activists thought about the economy and human rights and how they discussed this with their constituencies.

- The second phase looked at how to achieve improvements in economic policies to allow everyone to live with dignity, and how to create counter-narratives that were not only effective but also compelling enough for activists to use in their work. We held focus groups with our priority audiences<sup>3</sup> and carried out an online survey, testing different messages with our target audiences.
- Third, we followed activists as they applied the second-phase outcomes to their causes. And as part of this third phase we then reflected together on what worked, what didn’t, and what we could do differently next time.

We aimed to design a participatory, collaborative, and action-oriented project, with social movement activists and community leaders playing a central role in the research process. We set up a small reference group and a wider network of affiliates at the start of the project. Eventually, we merged the two. This allowed more meaningful and sustained participation among a smaller group, rather than superficial and sporadic participation among a larger one.

We were fortunate to count on the technical support of the [FrameWorks Institute](#), a leading nonprofit research think tank that helps mission-driven organizations build public will for progressive change. We also relied heavily on detailed advice based on similar projects from [ASO Communications](#), [NEON](#), and the [Public Interest Research Centre](#), among others.

## ABOUT THIS REPORT

So what does narrative change research to support community-based struggles for economic justice in South Africa look like in practice? This report covers the three phases of our research, what we did in each phase, and what we learned.

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1 See CESR, “Shifting the Narrative”, <https://www.cesr.org/shifting-the-narrative/>

2 The South African (June 2013). “South Africa: The ‘Protest Capital of the World’”. <https://www.thesouthafrican.com/news/south-africa-the-protest-capital-of-the-world/>

3 The “disillusioned working class”, the “struggling middle class”, and “the base” — see sections 2 and 4.



**Section 1** of the report describes how we mapped the patterns in what people currently hear about the economy, and how this shapes their thinking (project phase 1). It includes an assessment of challenges that impair the uptake of the alternative messages that civil society and social movements seek to promote.

In **section 2** we discuss the counter-narrative we aimed to foster and to build on, how this differs from dominant attitudes and beliefs, current obstacles to change and how to address these, and the priority audiences we decided to engage (project phase 2).

**Section 3** describes our co-creation of ways to achieve our communications objectives, our use of cooking-related metaphors for the narrative creation process, key narrative “ingredients” we sought to include in our messages, and the three main narratives we developed to tell stories about the economy, the country, and how to achieve change (continuation of project phase 2).

In **section 4** we relate how we tested our three main narratives and their messages with our three priority audiences using interviews and focus group discussions, and the recommendations we derived from this testing (completion of project phase 2).

**Section 5** gives an account of how members of our affiliates network piloted our recommendations on narrative change through their work with communities, and the main outcomes of this piloting (project phase 3). Our concluding section 6 shares our reflections on the process, distills our learning, and offers insights to people and organizations interested in building narrative power to advance a more just economic system in South Africa and beyond (completion of project phase 3).

The report’s annex summarizes the effects — positive, negative, or indeterminate — that each of our three narratives had for our “disillusioned working class” and “struggling middle class” audiences in relation to statements about the economy and human rights.



*Our first workshop was held in July, 2022.*

# 1

# MAPPING THE EXISTING NARRATIVE LANDSCAPE

**To develop effective messages, our first step was to uncover the patterns in what people currently hear about the economy and how this shapes their thinking.**

## WHAT WE DID

To better understand how the South African public thinks about the economy and the connection (if any) they see to human rights, we looked at how economic issues were talked about:

- **In the media** — examining the discourse used in a sample of 100 media articles related to key economic 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 on social attitudes toward the economy (conducted in June 2022) that received 518 responses.
- **Among activists** — interviewing 25 people across the country to understand how they spoke about the economy and human rights.

As well as identifying the topics dominating public discourse, our aim was to uncover attitudes, beliefs, and assumptions, seen as “common sense”.

In July 2022, we held a two-day workshop with 20 civil society and social movement activists from across South Africa to discuss our initial findings and talk in more depth about the challenges they face in communicating for change.

## WHAT WE FOUND

**The public’s thinking about the economy — and the role of the state in it — is often contradictory.**

In general, people are dissatisfied with the country’s economic situation and want the government to play a more active role in improving it. For example, earlier research shows 9 out of 10 people believe income differences in South Africa are too large; 7 out of 10

think it’s the responsibility of the government to do something about it.<sup>4</sup>

That said, there are mixed views about the policy interventions needed to tackle inequality, including strengthening public service delivery, expanding social protection programs, and boosting progressive taxation.

In our research, over two-thirds (68%) said the public sector is essential for the delivery of public services. But nearly half (45%) said that services can be more effectively delivered by the private sector. Opinion was divided on whether the public sector is too big: 36% agreed; 38% disagreed; and 26% didn’t know.<sup>5</sup>

Social protection programs enjoy widespread support. In earlier research, 85% of people agreed that the government should provide a decent standard of living for the unemployed.<sup>6</sup> Support for a universal basic income grant (or “a form of social assistance whereby each individual is guaranteed to receive a basic amount of monthly income”<sup>7</sup>), specifically, is notable in South Africa, compared to other countries (Figure 1).

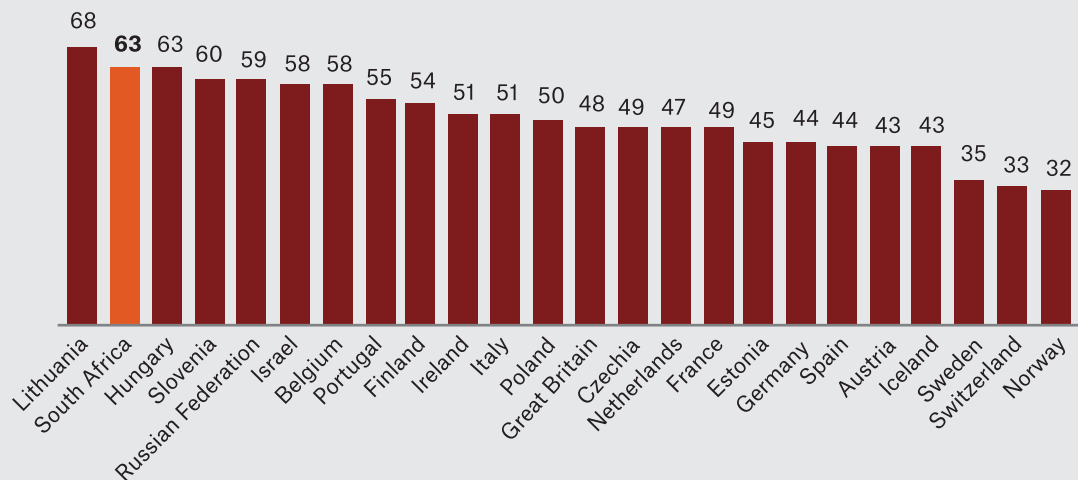
4 Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) (2020). *South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 2017: Questionnaire 1 – All provinces: metadata record*. <https://doi.org/10.14749/1607119378>

5 Dor, L., Matlala, B., and Runciman, C. (2022). *Shifting the narrative about human rights and the economy: Media analysis of the basic income grant and the public sector wage bill*, Centre for Social Change: University of Johannesburg (CSC: UJ). Brief 2 at [https://www.cesr.org/sites/default/files/2022/Research\\_briefs\\_-\\_Shifting\\_the\\_Narrative\\_Phase\\_1.pdf](https://www.cesr.org/sites/default/files/2022/Research_briefs_-_Shifting_the_Narrative_Phase_1.pdf)

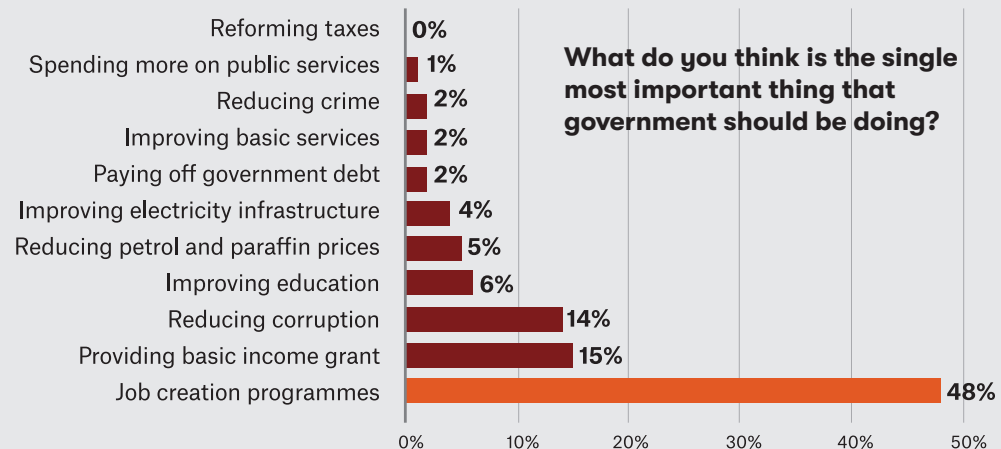
6 HSRC (2020). SASAS 2017.

7 Institute for Economic Justice (IEJ) (2021). *Designing a Basic Income Guarantee: Targeting, Universality and other Considerations*. [https://www.iej.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/IEJ-policy-brief-UBIG-3\\_2.pdf](https://www.iej.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/IEJ-policy-brief-UBIG-3_2.pdf)

**FIGURE 1.**  
**Comparative public support for a universal basic income (UBI) scheme in Europe and South Africa (% in favor)<sup>8</sup>**



**FIGURE 2.**  
**South African public attitudes: government economic priorities<sup>10</sup>**



But this support seems to be at odds with a strong belief in hard work, self-reliance, and independence. Perceptions of grant recipients are generally negative, for example. In earlier research, 59% agreed that citizens become lazy when they rely on government grants or old-age pensions<sup>9</sup> When we asked, “What is the single most important thing the government should be doing?”, 48% said job creation programs. By contrast, only 15% said providing a basic income grant (Figure 2).

The relationship between taxes and spending also appears to be unclear to people. Six out of 10 people support increasing taxes on wealthy people.<sup>11</sup> But this is not a policy people prioritize when presented with a list of policy options (Figure 3).

8 Sources: European Social Survey (2018). *The Past, Present and Future of European Welfare Attitudes: Topline Results from Round 8 of the European Social Survey*. <https://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/sites/default/files/2023-06/TL8-Welfare-English.pdf> and authors’ analysis based on HSRC (2017). SASAS 2016. <https://doi.org/10.14749/1505213190>

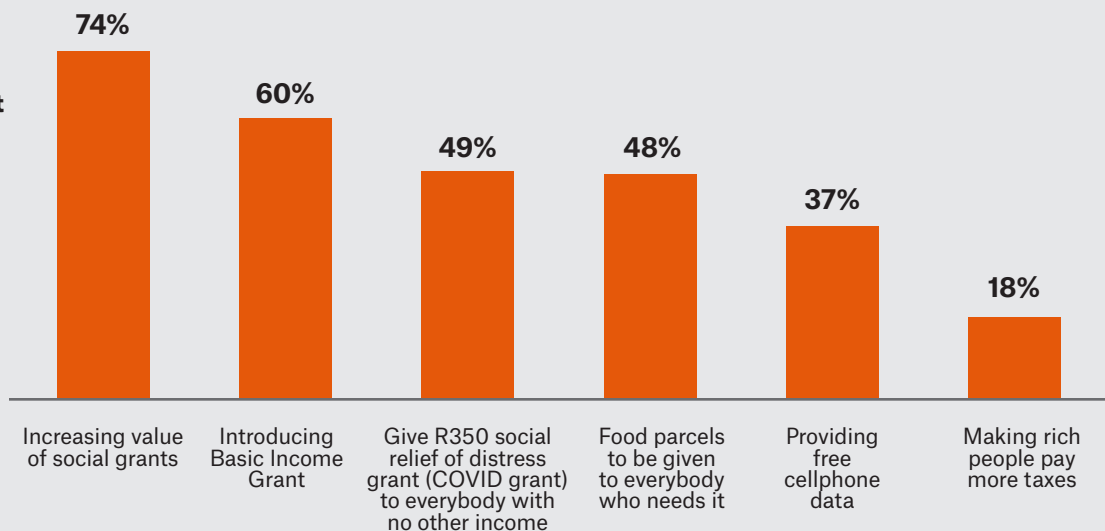
9 Afrobarometer (2018). *Summary of Results: Afrobarometer Round 7 Survey in South Africa, 2018*. [https://www.afrobarometer.org/wp-content/uploads/migrated/files/publications/Summary%20of%20results/saf\\_r7\\_sor\\_13112018.pdf](https://www.afrobarometer.org/wp-content/uploads/migrated/files/publications/Summary%20of%20results/saf_r7_sor_13112018.pdf)

10 Source: CSC: UJ (2022). What the public think about the economy survey. Unpublished.

11 HSRC (2020). SASAS 2017.



**FIGURE 3.**  
**Public support for different government policy options<sup>12</sup>**



Similarly, there is uneven support on what increasing taxes should do. In our research, less than half of people agreed that the government should increase taxes to create jobs, spend more on social grants, or improve service delivery.

**The dominant narrative in the mainstream media is generally conservative (and more so than public attitudes).**

There is a dominant media narrative that stresses resource scarcity, fiscal discipline, and crisis. This influences people’s uncertainty around redistributive economic policies and the role of the state in managing the economy.

For example, 63% of the media sample reviewed adopted a conservative economic narrative on the issue of introducing a basic income grant. This contrasted with 31% that adopted a social need narrative (stressing the positive effects a basic income grant would have on addressing issues such as poverty and inequality) and 6% adopting an economic stimulus narrative (emphasizing the economic benefits of a basic income grant).

Our analysis showed that the dominant narrative:

- Focuses on economic growth, stability, and profits as the primary interests of society. Such a narrative emphasizes a shortage of public resources and the threat of a debt crisis, repeating concepts such as “economic growth”, “spending discipline”, and “spending representing big sacrifices”. It doesn’t

challenge the idea of redistributive policies outright but, instead, seeds doubt about the form such policies should take and the feasibility of financing them. **The narrative makes demands for grants or public-sector salary increases look, at best, unfeasible and, at worst, likely to ruin the economy.**

- Presents redistributive policies as dangerous, naturally opposed to the proper functioning of the economy. We often see words like “risks”, “damage”, “warning”, and “alarm” and find “ocean and shipwreck” metaphors. **The economy and its impacts are depicted using words of physical restraint**, such as “limited” budget space, the poor “confined” to failure and unemployment, the government’s “constrained” financial position, and the fiscal “burden”.
- Presents fiscal discipline as common sense by exploiting our everyday understanding of debt and people’s fears of going into debt. **It obscures the fact that government and household debt are in practice nothing alike.** Although a state’s debt can have positive effects in the overall economy, the concept is presented negatively, linked to ideas such as “crisis”, “money squandering”, and “unsustainability”.<sup>13</sup>
- **Triggers a “trade-off” mindset that pits people against one another.** “Greedy” public-sector workers are framed as being “unjustifiably enriched”. The “ballooning” cost of the “bloated” public sector is a “burden” on the public finances and makes the economy less “dynamic” and “competitive”.

<sup>12</sup> Source: UJ-HSRC COVID-19 Democracy Survey 2020-2021, Rounds 1-5. <https://www.uj.ac.za/faculties/humanities/research/research-centres/centre-for-social-change/publications/>

<sup>13</sup> See e.g., CESR (2023). “Decoding Debt Injustice”. <https://cesr.org/decoding-debt-injustice/>



- **Positions the government as an irresponsible actor in the economy.** For example, the government is described as “kicking the can down the road” and “squandering” money.
  - **Places self-reliance as the value that should guide society.** Dependency appears as a curse that should be avoided (“we can’t condemn young people to a cycle of dependency”), while independence and autonomy appear as cherished values. This translates into a “job creation versus public spending” dichotomy, in which the promotion of people employed in private-sector jobs is presented in opposition, and as an alternative (not complementary), to a basic income grant, for example.
  - **Alignment:** Many different messages coming from different groups at the same time: without a clear goal unifying them, there is a risk of messages “drowning out” one another.
  - **Content:** Messages tend to be crafted for those already “converted” and focus on what activists don’t want rather than painting an alternative vision of what they do want.
  - **Resources:** The demands that community activists are subject to in their everyday lives, coupled with lack of financial resources to carry out their work, constrain their efforts and reach.
  - **Hesitancy about rights:** Among interviewees, rights were seen as an important mobilizing tool for activists. But they were not a prominent frame used by those championing redistributive economic policies. In the media sample, only 3 out of the 50 articles called for grants to be expanded to guarantee people’s rights. Rights are also seen, in the words of one activist, as a “dog with false teeth”; that is, they do not have the bite to bring about real social change. We found that younger activists tended to be more optimistic about rights, whereas older activists felt more jaded by their experience of rights-based activism.
  - **Apathy:** Often, the issue is not that activists face strong opposition to their demands. Rather, they are ignored — not just by those in power but also by people within their own communities.
- Building support for counter-narratives faces challenges.**
- Civil society and social movement activists fighting for economic justice contest this dominant narrative through campaigns, organizing, political education, mobilizations, and other types of communications. At the same time, however, interviews and workshop discussions with activists revealed interrelated challenges that affect the uptake of their messages:
- **Fragmentation:** No clear link between tactics, such as traditional advocacy targeting government actors, working-class mobilization, and efforts to influence broader public opinion: this leads to fragmentation and undermines activists’ and movements’ ability to build collective power.

# 2

# DEFINING THE AIMS OF OUR NEW COUNTER-NARRATIVE STRATEGY

**Drawing on our mapping, our next step was to identify what attitudes and beliefs we wanted our messages to change, or to build on, and among which audiences.**

## WHAT WE DID

During our workshop and in follow-up conversations with our reference group, we explored how civil society and social movement activists contest the dominant narrative in a variety of ways: campaigns, organizing, political education, and mobilizations, among others. Our aim was to better understand the goals of their narrative strategies.

For some activists, building support among their perceived base was 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 was building cross-class alliances that strengthen political pressure for reform. This involves combatting the “trade-off” mentality, by having a shared perspective on the problem and common support for the solution across classes.

Through these conversations, we identified the attitudes and beliefs we can appeal to and build on, as well as those

we should try to shift, or at least be careful not to reinforce. This helped us narrow down a number of objectives that we wanted our reframed messages to achieve.

We also prioritized key audiences we wanted our counter-narratives to influence.

## WHAT WE FOUND

**There are some common elements — and some critical differences — across dominant and counter-narratives.**

Drawing together the research findings, conversations with our reference group, and workshop discussions, we distilled key elements emerging in the counter-narratives from civil society and social movement activists fighting for economic justice. This helped us clarify the story we wanted to tell. We then compared them to the dominant narrative. This helped highlight where they converged and diverged.

Narrative element	Dominant narrative	Counter-narrative
<b>What is the problem?</b>	<i>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.</i>	<i>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.</i>
<b>Why does it matter?</b>	<i>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.</i>	<i>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.</i>

Narrative element	Dominant narrative	Counter-narrative
<b>How do we solve it?</b>	<i>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.</i>	<i>We need policies that 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 also essential, 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.</i>
<b>What is the end goal?</b>	<i>With these solutions, we can achieve a “healthy” economy that will eventually benefit everyone.</i>	<i>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.</i>

**To engage the public, we need to build on common ground and avoid deepening fault lines.**

Looking at the similarities and differences between the dominant and counter-narratives, we identified several widespread attitudes and beliefs preventing audiences from taking up our messages — attitudes that we should try to shift, or at least not reinforce. We see these attitudes and beliefs as “fault lines”<sup>14</sup> and they include:

- Poor understanding of the government’s role in the economy (including through services delivered by the public sector and in relation to job creation).
- General dissatisfaction with, lack of faith in, and/or mistrust of government.
- Strong sense of apathy, disillusionment, cynicism, and/or 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: we have to prioritize the private over the public sector, and the poor and unemployed over public-sector workers; we 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 priorities of (big) business.

On the other hand, we found common ground to build on:

- There is a widespread belief that inequality is too great and that 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 (from focusing on whether people should be supported to how that support should take place).
- The public sector is generally seen as essential for service delivery.
- The right to a minimum standard of living is considered important.
- Ordinary people believe they should have more power in the economy and that they can do a lot to create an economy that works for everyone.

**Our counter-narrative needs to perform particular “tasks”.**

Reflection on the above fault lines and common ground helped us identify several things we wanted our reframed messages to help our audiences do, in order to change their attitudes and increase their support for our counter-narratives. These included an ability to:

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.

<sup>14</sup> We borrowed this expression from PIRC, 350.org & NEON (2020). “Framing Climate Justice”. <https://framingclimatejustice.org/findings/>



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 creating jobs.

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

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

**There are priority audiences we need to engage.**

Deciding who to talk to is a major strategic question. Priority audiences should be both “movable” (i.e. you can persuade them to shift in some way) and relevant (i.e. they can make change possible). This means asking which groups of people are most likely to be persuaded to think, feel, and act differently as a result of our message? Of these, whose change of mind would have more of an impact in achieving economic justice?

Based on these questions, we came up with three priority audiences: the base, whose views we aimed to strengthen, and two target audiences, whose views we wanted to shift: the disillusioned working class and the struggling middle class. We created profiles for each, which we present in the following table, to help identify who we needed to engage in the next phase of the project.

The base	Disillusioned working class	Struggling middle class
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community activists in some form of formalized social movement structure.</li> <li>• Mostly unemployed or surviving on forms of precarious work.</li> <li>• Located in both urban and rural areas.</li> <li>• Diverse in terms of gender, age, sexuality, ability/disability, and other identities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People living in working-class communities in townships, backyards, informal settlements, and rural areas.</li> <li>• Share the concerns of the base but feel disempowered and disillusioned about prospects for change.</li> <li>• A mixture of the unemployed, employed, and precariously employed.</li> <li>• For the employed and precariously employed, barriers to participation in community movements include being too occupied with work and fear that participation may cost them their job or job opportunities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People living in formal housing in townships, suburbs, and working-class neighborhoods.</li> <li>• Have formal employment that may be just above the national minimum weekly wage or more (ZAR 4,165 to 11,263 in October 2023; approximately USD 220 to 593).</li> <li>• High school and/or some higher education.</li> <li>• Living in privately owned or rented accommodation.</li> <li>• Not opposed to a basic income grant or other measures to promote greater equality but fearful of the costs to them.</li> </ul>

# 3

# CO-CREATING NEW MESSAGES TO DELIVER OUR COUNTER-NARRATIVE

**With the collective brainpower of our project affiliates, our next step was to come up with creative ways to achieve the communications objectives we'd identified.**

## WHAT WE DID

We met a small group of our affiliates again in November 2022. At a two-day workshop, we got creative together — brainstorming the different elements making up a narrative, in order to create different messages to test.

Our first task was to get clarity on exactly what we're talking about when we talk about narratives. Introducing the elements of a narrative in an easily understandable way for those outside the communications field was critical. We found cooking-related metaphors helpful for this.

Afterward, we brainstormed alternative ingredients that could be mixed together to create different counter-narratives we could test empirically. In groups, the activists went through each ingredient, brainstorming different concepts and statements that could be woven into a larger narrative.

## WHAT WE FOUND

### **Cooking offers a useful metaphor for understanding narratives.**

A challenge we faced in engaging with our reference group and affiliate network was the abstractness of the concept of narratives and narrative change. Inspired by [Lucas Paulson's \*Narrative Spices\*](https://www.openglobalrights.org/userfiles/file/Narrative_Spices_Guide_English.pdf),<sup>15</sup> we made use of the power of food.

We found cooking-related metaphors really helpful to refer to the narrative creation process: cooking up something, spicing things up, and making things tasty. This helped emphasize that, just like cooking a meal

for someone, communicating means putting yourself in another person's shoes — understanding their tastes and preferences.

Drawing on the FrameWorks Institute's list of frame elements,<sup>16</sup> we identified five key "narrative ingredients"<sup>17</sup> to include in our messages:

- **Values:** Deeply held beliefs or principles that are widely shared across society.
- **Explanations:** A sequence of ideas or series of steps in a process.
- **Metaphors:** Describing an issue or an idea in a way that isn't literally true but helps explain it. A good metaphor helps people get a better sense of a complex issue by comparing it to something they're familiar with.
- **Solutions:** Proven or promising approaches to improving a situation.
- **Tone:** The emotion we convey through our communications.

### **Co-creating narrative recipes can be messy!**

The communications specialists we consulted acknowledged that the process of developing a narrative — mixing together the different ingredients to create a text — is usually done by a small group of creatives "behind closed doors". This approach didn't feel right for us, given the project's goals. Instead, we invited a diverse range of "cooks" into our "kitchen". While the process was extremely fruitful, it demanded a lot from workshop participants.

15 Paulson, L. (2022). *Narrative Spices: An invitational guide for flavorful human rights*, Fund for Global Human Rights and JustLabs. [https://www.openglobalrights.org/userfiles/file/Narrative\\_Spices\\_Guide\\_English.pdf](https://www.openglobalrights.org/userfiles/file/Narrative_Spices_Guide_English.pdf)

16 FrameWorks Institute (2020). "What's in a Frame?" <https://www.frameworksinstitute.org/article/whats-in-a-frame/>

17 Shifting the Narrative Project (2024). *Messaging Toolkit*. [https://bit.ly/narrative\\_toolkit](https://bit.ly/narrative_toolkit)



Here are some of the things we learned:

- **Have a communications expert in the room (but don't rely on them too much):** Our participants had various degrees of familiarity with more “institutionalized” communications efforts. Having a communications specialist facilitate, rather than lead, the drafting process makes sure it is genuinely participatory.
- **Diverge first, converge later:** Because you want your group to try out new ways of thinking around how to communicate, it's important to make clear that the first creative stage can and should be completely “outside the box”. Participants should draw on whatever comes to mind to generate new ideas, as crazy as they might sound. For us, this helped incorporate surprising ingredients into our dish. Afterward, we narrowed down on what could realistically work.
- **Identifying solutions is naturally hard:** This was the ingredient our participants found the most challenging, as we were trying to balance ambition and concreteness. In the end, we leaned toward being more general, to leave space for further tailoring based on each specific issue.
- **Start with some “dough” to knead:** Instead of asking people to start brainstorming on a blank page, the project team added a few initial ideas about each ingredient. This helped get ideas flowing. It helped participants understand what was being asked of them and gave them something to build on — leading to their own creative ideas.
- **Effective facilitation is crucial:** Because you're likely to be taking participants — and facilitators — far outside their “comfort zone”, confusion is likely. Before such a workshop, facilitators should take time to go through each prompt you'll put to participants and put their heads together about what to do when discussions go silent or seem stuck.

### **Create stories that engage different ways of thinking.**

After the workshop, the project team brought the ingredients together to form three different broad narratives. Each told a different story about the economy, the country, and how to achieve change. The three narratives were:

# 1

## Reassembling the stripped car

In South Africa, we believe everyone has a right to live with dignity. We support each other as best we can to make this possible. Yet we all know households struggling to earn a living, put a roof over their heads, and put food on the table.

This happens because the wealthy and powerful manipulate the system so it benefits them, not the rest of us. Like thieves stripping a car of its parts, they've used government ministries, state-owned enterprises, and public services to line their pockets. We're left on the side of the road with a "skorokoro".<sup>18</sup>

We have the parts to get the car running again and we have the manual that sets out how to assemble them: our constitution. If we come together to demand our right to live with dignity, we can change the balance of power in the country. We can redesign the system so we have a state that plays the role it's supposed to: fairly distributing the wealth created by our natural resources and the hard work of our people.

When the wealthy pay their fair share of taxes, the government can budget to improve our schools, hospitals, and housing; grow sectors of the economy that offer decent jobs; and fund social programs that help us when we fall on hard times.

# 2

## Spreading nutrients in the wilting garden

We all know it's important to keep the commitments we've made. But again and again, our government fails to fulfill its constitutional duty to provide a better life for all. We all know households struggling to make ends meet.

Our economy is like a garden; it must be well looked after to thrive. The government's decisions about how it raises and invests money affect how resources are circulated across our communities, just as water needs to be spread through the garden for it to grow.

But the system we have now means that so much is going to big businesses, they have become toxic overgrown weeds. They're filling their overseas bank accounts with wealth that's been created by our natural resources and our people's hard work, while the rest of the garden wilts.

But weeds can be controlled. By working together, we can build the same collective power we've used before to make sure everyone has the resources to thrive.

Our Bill of Rights<sup>19</sup> backs our demands for the garden to be tended, which means that big business and the rich must contribute their fair share to the government's budget, and the government must invest that money in improving our schools, hospitals, and housing; in growing sectors that offer decent jobs; and in funding social programs that help us when we fall on hard times.

# 3

## Not fighting over crumbs

In South Africa, we believe in ubuntu ("humanity toward others"). But business fat cats are chowing our resources and arguing that not everyone deserves the crumbs they leave on the table. They pit us against each other. So we keep blaming everyone else except them for the state of our economy and our communities.

While our day-to-day struggles might look different, at the end of the day we're all fighting for the same thing: our constitutional right to live with dignity. To enjoy this right, we need the government to do what it's supposed to do: tax progressively according to ability to pay ( i.e. wealthy people pay more) and invest that money in improving our schools, hospitals, and housing; in growing sectors of the economy that offer decent jobs; and in funding social programs that help us when we fall on hard times.

We know we're stronger when we're united and we've proved before that what seems impossible can be done. It's up to us to make the Bill of Rights a reality for all, by working together to demand that the government bring our resources back to our communities.

<sup>18</sup> Skorokoro is a South African term for an old worn-out car.

<sup>19</sup> The Bill of Rights is chapter 2 of South Africa's constitution: <https://www.justice.gov.za/constitution/chp02.html>



# 4

## TESTING OUR NEW NARRATIVE INGREDIENTS

To find out whether the messages we'd developed actually worked or not, our next step was to test them with our different audiences.

### WHAT WE DID

In late 2022, we tested the three stories with our priority audiences. We held five focus groups, with 34 participants in total.<sup>20</sup> Participants were interviewed about their attitudes toward the economy. They then read each story individually, listened to the stories being read out loud, and had in-depth group conversations about them.

We found some narrative elements clearly worked better for some audiences than others. For example, when we presented people acting together as a solution, participants from the “struggling middle class” were more optimistic: “Working together? I think we can be a solution.” On the contrary, the idea elicited feelings of hopelessness among the “disillusioned working class”: “It feels like we are fighting giants whilst we are ants.”

We made some minor tweaks to the stories in response.<sup>21</sup> After that, we conducted an experimental message testing survey online, using the Moya messaging app, in March 2023. The survey received 600 responses. All respondents were asked questions to test their attitudes toward the economy, human rights, and support for specific policy interventions (e.g., introducing a basic income grant).

We split respondents into four groups. One acted as a control (this group was not exposed to any story), and each of the other respondents was exposed to one of the three main narratives in audio format. These respondents were also asked five additional questions



about their comprehension of the story and their responses to it.

The survey findings gave us insights into which elements worked better (both in general and with particular target audiences). We summarized these in a “recipe guide”,<sup>22</sup> a short document using food-related metaphors to make the concept of framing elements more relatable. The document recommends nine narrative tactics for activists to apply in their “cooking”.

### WHAT WE FOUND

In line with the findings from the focus groups, the survey showed that the three narratives did often have influence, but not always, and sometimes not in the direction we expected. There were mixed results as to how the narratives impacted people's support for human rights and progressive economic policies. For example, two of the narratives increased the struggling middle class's uncertainty about the forces that shape the economy.

Nevertheless, the analysis showed that general recommendations for developing effective narratives still hold in South Africa. We were also able to identify some particularities to keep in mind when communicating in this context.

<sup>20</sup> We held two focus groups with the “disillusioned working class”, two with the “struggling middle class”, and one with “the base”. Three groups took place in Gauteng, one in the Western Cape, and one online. While we initially planned for telephone or online interviews, we decided that witnessing how participants interacted in focus groups would be closer to how narratives spread among communities.

<sup>21</sup> For example, we thought “promises” would be a more relatable word for people. But when linked to the government, this made people think of unfulfilled promises. So we changed the word to “duties” instead.

<sup>22</sup> Shifting the Narrative Project (2024). *Recipe guide*. [https://bit.ly/narrative\\_recipe\\_guide](https://bit.ly/narrative_recipe_guide)

## We drew nine key recommendations from the testing:

### 1. Values are the oil in your pan

Our stories followed previous research recommendations to start our messages by referencing a value deeply held by the audience we are trying to reach.

Instead of launching straight into a description of a problem, our recommendation is to oil your pan first: lead your messages with a sentence that showcases a value and also makes it seem like the norm for most of the audience (so you increase the chances of people wanting to accept the premise of your message).

Try starting with statements like:



*"We all know it's important to keep the commitments we've made ..."* or

*"In South Africa, we believe in ubuntu ..."* or

*"In South Africa, we believe everyone has a right to live with dignity."*

### 2. People's strong belief in change and prosperity is ready to be squeezed

Against some of our initial beliefs, there is widespread agreement among the disillusioned working and struggling middle classes that South Africa and its economy can change for the better and that change is possible when people work together.

Despite the skepticism and apathy that certain individuals show in focus groups (and that many of our comrades relay), this indicates a solid foundation to present messages to our audiences that are hopeful and positive, and show avenues for the type of change we want to create. In addition, we also saw widespread agreement on South Africa being a rich country (despite its resources not being adequately distributed).

Our recommendation is to take advantage of these existing views, making the most of them by emphasizing the mechanism of how change can come to life through the actions of united people. We noticed during our focus groups that, despite these general beliefs, conversations can quickly turn gloomy when talking about the possibility of people in power changing their ways, but our research shows that this improves when we emphasize the collective power of people acting together. In addition, there is no need to go in detail to explain what makes South Africa a rich country, as people are already aware.

Instead of:



*"Inequality will be fixed when politicians share the money ..."*

Try saying:



*"It's up to us to demand a better distribution of resources."*

### 3. A positive tone adds sweetness

All stories embodied a similar hopeful tone that audiences considered trustworthy, and this helps explain their effectiveness in shifting how people think. Previous research has shown that a "crisis" framing (for example, saying humanity is doomed) makes people panic and unable to see solutions. If we want action from others, we need to avoid that.

Our recommendation is to always stick to a positive tone. This will make people more willing to support your cause, even if you are being critical about the state of things. Avoid words and images linked to war and destruction, and emphasize instead how things can be better if people support a certain cause.

Instead of:



*"Our country finds itself at the edge of a cliff ..."*

Try saying:



*"If we work together, our kids can have the bright futures they deserve."*

#### 4. Keep negotiations away from your kitchen

Previous research has often shown that, when we negate something explicitly, we only reinforce what we are trying to reject. By saying “X is not true”, we make X more present in people’s minds, which is something we do not want.

To avoid playing by your adversary’s rules, our recommendation is to offer an alternative view instead of negating.

Instead of:

✘ *“It’s not true that income support for unemployed people is bad for the economy ...”*

Try saying:

✔ *“Money spent by people receiving income support circulates through the economy. It generates income for businesses, which in turn spend that income on wages and purchases.”*

#### 5. A good explanation is your best meat – or tofu!

Filling and satisfactory, a clear explanation of the issue we are trying to change is as important to a narrative as good protein is to a dish. Our research found that linking the common struggles of people with a cause, and explaining which action is at the root of it, was effective in increasing people’s understanding of the important role the government plays in the economy, and also increasing understanding of the economy as something designed.

In line with previous research, we also found that explanations are effective when they include the agent that is causing the issue, and not just its effects.

That said, our audiences had a mixed understanding of the role of government in the economy. For example, over 80% of respondents agreed that how well the economy works depends on how the government functions, and over 90% agreed that the government should provide more money for public services. They were split on whether the government has control over the economy, and less than half thought the government should reduce inequality through how it spends resources. We saw some shifts in these attitudes as a result of our stories, but these were both limited and mixed.

Try something like:

✔ *“When governments borrow money from the International Monetary Fund, it comes with strings attached. For example, governments might be forced to cut public budgets. This affects public services like schools and hospitals. To compensate, women have to do more unpaid care work, like looking after children or caring for sick family members, reducing opportunities for them to earn an income. This is how austerity worsens gender inequalities.”*




## 6. Use metaphors to spice things up


Metaphors describe something in a way that isn't literally true, but helps explain it. A good metaphor will strengthen your explanation, helping people get a better sense of a complex issue by comparing it to something they're already familiar with.

In our research, metaphors proved effective in presenting the antagonists, such as big business, in our story. They also worked when describing non-human things: "the economy is like a garden"; "the state has been turned into a 'skorokoro'".

Instead of:

 *"Executives", "entrepreneurs", "businesspeople" ...*


Try saying:

 *"Business fat cats who hog our food and leave us to fight over the crumbs."*


## 7. A dash of something concrete to make it real for people

One of the challenges we face when trying to explain the links between the government, investing in public services, and reducing inequality is that these concepts are too abstract to create clear images in people's minds. This can make it harder for people to think about them.

Our recommendation is:  
Instead of:

 *"The government should invest more in public services to end inequality ..."*


Try saying:

 *"The government needs to tax everybody fairly – the wealthy most of all – and invest that money in improving our schools, hospitals, and housing."*


## 8. Solutions are the magic sauce

The best way to finalize a story in a hopeful manner is with a concrete solution. We found that solutions worked best for both disillusioned working class and struggling middle class audiences when paired with a reference to rights. Rights can increase people's sense of empowerment when demanding a solution. Over 80% of survey respondents agreed that rights are an important tool to make society fairer.

Instead of:

 *"Inequality needs to be fixed and the government should stop ignoring our demands ..."*

Try saying:

 *"It's up to us to make the Bill of Rights a reality for all, by working together to demand that the government bring our resources back to our communities."*

## 9. Repetition

Just like the act of washing a sink full of dishes, communicating effectively is a matter of repetition. Given that we know the brain is more receptive to messages it has heard many times, we need all our messengers to stick to the story we define and to never shy away from repeating it.



# 5

# APPLYING THE RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings from our testing will have value only if they're taken up by activists in their work, so our next step was to pilot them in the real world.

## WHAT WE DID

Seven members of the affiliates network carried out activities with their organizations and movements between April and July 2023. The activities were designed to apply the recommendations on narrative ingredients in different ways. This table summarizes the activities the groups undertook:

Organization or movement	Medium of communication	Strategic orientation	Audience	Activity focus
<b>Assembly of the Unemployed/ Water Crisis Committee</b>	Speak-outs, <sup>23</sup> public meetings, and posters	Political education and mobilization	The base, disillusioned working class, and struggling middle class	Water
<b>Back to Work Campaign</b>	Oral communication	Community development and political education	The base and disillusioned working class	Environment and jobs
<b>Fight Inequality Alliance South Africa</b>	Pamphlets, posters, and workshop	Political education	The base and disillusioned working class	Understanding austerity
<b>The Housing Assembly</b>	Pamphlets and oral communication	Political education and mobilization	The base and disillusioned working class	Housing
<b>Marikana Youth Development Forum</b>	Oral communication	Community development	The base and disillusioned working class	Work
<b>Waterberg Women Advocacy Organization</b>	Door-to-door and workshop	Community development and education	The base and disillusioned working class	Gender-based violence
<b>Youth Arise</b>	Pamphlets, educational material, and oral communication	Political education and mobilization	The base and disillusioned working class	Local governance

<sup>23</sup> Speak-outs are community gatherings where residents discuss challenges they face.

## THE HOUSING ASSEMBLY



The Housing Assembly is a social movement that advocates for people's right to housing. With support from the Shifting the Narrative project, the organization undertook a series of actions including a peaceful protest, speak-outs in communities, and community workshops. The community workshops were part of a campaign to advocate for greater transparency regarding the City of Cape Town's housing waiting list.

The Housing Assembly's workshops were particularly effective in organizing residents who are on the Cape Town waiting list around defined actions, and they gave the movement a presence in new areas. The Housing Assembly also used support from the Shifting the Narrative project to produce a concise pamphlet incorporating the ingredients of the "recipe book" mentioned above. The pamphlet is a powerful document that made it easy for the Housing Assembly to explain what the problem is and what the solutions could be.

The project team developed a "recipe planning template"<sup>24</sup> to assist the seven members of the affiliates network in narrowing down their communication ideas and identifying which ingredients to use. We also discussed with each group their proposed activities and suggested ways to strengthen their efforts.

Members of the project team attended some of the groups' events and conducted 42 interviews with people organizing and attending them. In addition, we analyzed the language used in the different communication materials and in the face-to-face interactions our team was present for.

### WHAT WE FOUND

All the affiliate member groups' messages were intended to be empowering and were effective in this regard. Overwhelmingly, participants at the various events reflected a strong belief in people's collective power to change South Africa, mentioning things like:

"It [the country] can change if we work like a team. If ever we work as a team, we can change it."

"It [the country] can change for the better provided we mobilize."

The groups' messages were also somewhat successful in inspiring the belief that rights are a tool for social justice. (It is not possible to assert whether this resulted from their recent engagement in activist initiatives or is a wider reflection of pre-existing beliefs.) Four groups made substantive use of rights-based messaging. Overall, such messaging was well received, with most participants at these events expressing overwhelmingly positive opinions about the importance of human rights to themselves and their broader struggles.

However, like the activists, participants raised important concerns about the limitations of rights-based activism, for example: "Sometimes rights do not work in our favor as we would have wished them to work for us."

There was more variation in how successful the affiliate groups were in increasing understanding of the government's role in the economy, contesting the idea of scarce resources, and connecting bread-and-butter issues to systemic causes. Not all activities

24 Shifting the Narrative Project (2024). *Messaging Toolkit*. [https://bit.ly/narrative\\_toolkit](https://bit.ly/narrative_toolkit)

## YOUTH ARISE



Youth Arise is a grassroots organization for young people that is based in the Western Cape. It organizes young people to participate in the governance and development of their neighborhoods. With support from the Shifting the Narrative project, Youth Arise held workshops to help young people understand the role of local municipal structures in delivering basic services, as part of enabling them to hold government officials accountable. Using an interactive approach, the workshops helped young people understand the links between bread-and-butter issues and macro issues of governance. It also educated them on the structure of local government and the implications of this for service delivery.

In these workshops, Youth Arise used the video mentioned above based on the “recipe guide”. Participants appreciated the video for how it clearly and simply explained municipal governance. One of the major takeaways was understanding how service delivery should work and who is responsible for it. There was a strong sense after the workshops that as young people they too could hold local government accountable and encourage other young people to join Youth Arise.

were concerned with engaging audiences about these ideas. But in those that were, success was uneven. For example, one group’s activities focused on increasing understanding of the functioning of global capital, which appears to have left participants less convinced that the government has control over the economy.

Overall, the activists widely incorporated the language of narrative ingredients in their vocabulary and found value in exploring issues of language and audience more systematically. For example, in the learning workshop (section 6), they described how “it broadened our understanding to critically think how we engage with people” and how it helped them see “the value in communicating with people that we wouldn’t normally communicate things to”. Others expressed how the language of narrative ingredients helped them “explain to people in simple terms how the government and the system are working”.

Several activists expressed the desire to share what they learned from the activities in their own narrative change workshops.

How much the communications they produced reflected rights-based messaging about the economy varied. But it was clear that recommendations related to tone and values had a big impact on how they incorporated these ideas. Some activists reflected that the project had made them reconsider their tone and focus on what they were for (including rights) rather than what they were against.

A number also considered that more people were motivated to address the issue they worked on as a result of their activities. The Housing Assembly, for example, saw an unprecedented new wave of members (over 200) join the organization after door-to-door canvassing with pamphlets that incorporated rights-based messaging. Notably, they were the group that engaged the most with the project team in receiving advice and support for their campaign.

# 6

# REFLECTIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED

**Our final step was to distill and share learning from the project for others in the wider human rights and economic justice movements in South Africa and beyond.**

## WHAT WE DID

In August 2023, we held a two-day learning workshop with the project team and the seven activists who had led the activities described above. This was an opportunity to create a space for activists to share their respective activities and learning; explore how (if at all) their views regarding narratives had shifted; draw lessons from where we succeeded and where we faced challenges; and agree collectively on how to disseminate our findings more broadly.

## WHAT WE FOUND

At the beginning of the project, our affiliates identified several challenges for their communications. These included “speaking to the converted”, relying heavily on crisis framing, and having difficulties producing messages that attracted new people to their causes. At the end, all reported improved narrative skills, including being able to apply a critical lens to how they use language and knowing how to improve their messaging.

By adapting the theories and methods of narrative change research, we were able to support local activists to better interrogate dominant narratives and develop counter-narratives. We believe this is an important achievement. Narrative change research has typically been carried out by specialists in Global Northern contexts, far from the daily realities of the groups we worked with.

The project also taught us valuable lessons about how to adapt narrative change research for such groups. We share these in the hope that they may be valuable for others interested in undertaking similar work in the future.

- **Be intentional about who you’re bringing together and how.** When we identified who to involve in the project, we focused on ensuring diversity among the group, in terms of location, issue area, etc. With hindsight, we didn’t do enough to interrogate our



assumptions about how participating would benefit them and their communities. We also jumped straight into the project’s activities. More time building relationships within the collective spaces we’d set up for the project would have deepened people’s participation in it.

- **Be realistic about and responsive to people’s capacity.** With competing demands on their availability and attention, the activists weren’t able to engage as actively as we’d hoped. Internet connectivity issues and other communication challenges also muted the dynamic of our online meetings. So we came up with other ways to engage (e.g. one-to-one conversations and short online surveys). Implementing more creative “feedback loops” among project participants and their communities throughout the project would have helped make the engagement more dynamic.
- **Take the time to explain and make the case for narrative change.** Unpacking the technical concepts, specialized terminology, and underlying logic of narrative change research took a lot more work than we anticipated. But it was essential to get buy-in. Emphasizing the political dimension of narratives — how they help shift power — was especially important. It helped avoid the impression that it’s “just marketing”. Spending time together in



person to digest and discuss these ideas was more effective than trying to do it online (for reasons explained above).

- **Think about communication channels up front.** An assumption about narrative change seems to be that the primary channel for engaging the public is through the traditional media or social media. That wasn't the case for the activists involved in our project. Verbal communication channels — public meetings, songs, and door-to-door campaigns — were much more of a priority for their political organizing. The significance of this didn't fully come to light until the third phase of the project, when we were supporting the groups to apply the recommended ingredients. The guidance we provided was better suited to written than to verbal communication, and we had limited time to adapt.
- **Be clear about what you're trying to get from quantitative message testing.** The success of an online survey depends on having a large enough sample to show that changes in responses are statistically significant. For a number of reasons, we had to work with a relatively small sample — mostly because we weren't sure if the methodology would work in our context. It did! But because of the smaller sample size, we reported only changes in responses of 10 percentage points or more as significant.<sup>25</sup> This affected how specific we could make the recommendations for the third phase. This is something to factor in for similar tests.

**Questions, feedback, comments?**  
**Contact the CESR team at [info@cesr.org](mailto:info@cesr.org)**



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<sup>25</sup> Shifts of this size would indicate that differences are less likely to result from sampling bias and that there has been some effect on attitudes.

# ANNEX: LIST OF EFFECTS BY STORY AND AUDIENCE

This annex summarizes the effects — positive, negative, or indeterminate (no significant effect) — that each of our three main narratives/stories presented in section 3 had for our “disillusioned working class” and “struggling middle class” audiences in relation to a range of statements about the economy and human rights.













We record an effect as “positive” when one of our narratives/stories appears to have influenced respondents’ opinion in the direction of greater economic justice, when compared with the control group, and “negative” when the influence appears to be in the opposite direction.

**KEY:**  Had a significant positive effect     No significant effect     Had a significant negative effect

STATEMENTS ABOUT THE ECONOMY AND HUMAN RIGHTS	Disillusioned working class		
	Story 1	Story 2	Story 3
<b>1. Viewing the economy as designed</b>			
Who benefits in our economy is determined naturally by the free market — This statement was supported by 53% of the control group, and only 18% disagreed. Story 1 reduced agreement with the statement by 12%. Stories 2 and 3 had no significant effect.			
The economy is shaped by forces outside of people’s control — Most people in the control group agreed with this statement (66%).			
It’s natural that some people are going to be much wealthier than others — Most people in the control group agreed with this statement (73%), which made us wonder about different ways of understanding the word “natural”. Stories 1 and 2 increased agreement with it by 13%, and Story 3 decreased agreement by 16%.			
Economic inequality exists because of choices our society has made about how our economy will work — 69% of the control group agreed with this statement. Story 2 reduced disagreement with the statement by 12%, and Story 3 reduced agreement by 17%.			
<b>2. Understanding the role of government in the economy</b>			
The government has little control over the economy — Most people in the control group disagreed with this statement (55%). Story 2 reduced agreement with it by 12%; the effect of Story 3 was stronger, decreasing agreement by 21%.			
How well the economy works depends on how the government functions — There was strong support for this statement in all groups, around or over 80%.			
The government should reduce inequality through how it spends its resources — There was low support for this statement in all groups (35% in the control group), and no significant change with any of the stories.			
The government should provide more money for public services — Although the stories had no significant effect on responses, 90% agreed with this statement.			

<b>3. Recognition of rights as a tool for change</b>			
Rights are an important tool to make society fairer — This statement had very strong backing from all groups (over 80%); the stories didn't make a significant difference in shifting opinions.	?	?	?
<b>4. Support for progressive economic policies</b>			
A basic income grant should be provided to everyone — The control group backed this measure by 58%. The only story that made a significant difference was Story 2, which increased agreement by 15% and decreased disagreement by 14%.	?	✓	?
The rich should pay more tax — Support for this measure in the control group was 60%. Only Story 2 made a significant difference, increasing support by 13%.	?	✓	?
The government should gather more resources through tax in order to reduce inequality — Control group support for this measure was high (61%); none of the stories were able to shift it significantly.	?	?	?

<b>STATEMENTS ABOUT THE ECONOMY AND HUMAN RIGHTS</b>	<b>Struggling middle class</b>		
	<b>Story 1</b>	<b>Story 2</b>	<b>Story 3</b>
<b>1. Viewing the economy as designed</b>			
Who benefits in our economy is determined naturally by the free market — This statement was supported by 59% of the control group, and only 16% disagreed. Story 1 had no significant influence on opinions. Story 3 reduced agreement with the statement by 17%.	?	?	✓
The economy is shaped by forces outside of people's control — Most people in the control group agreed with this statement (76%). The stories 1 and 2 made no significant difference.	?	?	?
It is natural that some people are going to be much wealthier than others — Most people in the control group agreed with this statement (79%), which again made us wonder about different ways of understanding the word "natural". Story 1 reduced agreement with it by 10%, while Stories 2 and 3 made no significant difference.	✓	?	?
Economic inequality exists because of choices our society has made about how our economy will work — 77% of the control group agreed with this statement. Stories 1 and 2 made no significant difference, while Story 3 reduced agreement by 10%.	?	?	✗
<b>2. Understanding the role of government in the economy</b>			
The government has little control over the economy — Fewer than half the people in the control group agreed with this statement (44%). Story 1 increased agreement by 10%, while Stories 2 and 3 had no significant effect.	✗	?	?
How well the economy works depends on how government functions — There was strong support for this statement in all groups, with 81% in the control group, no significant effect from Stories 1 and 2, and Story 3 increasing agreement by 10%.	?	?	?
The government should reduce inequality through how it spends its resources — There was low support for this statement: 41% in the control group. Story 1 reduced agreement by 14%, and Story 3 increased disagreement by 11%.	✗	?	✗
The government should provide more money for public services — The stories had no significant effect on responses, and 100% of all groups agreed with this statement.	?	?	?

<b>3. Recognition of rights as a tool for change</b>			
Rights are an important tool to make society fairer — This statement had very strong backing from all groups (90%), and the stories didn't make a significant difference in shifting opinions.			
<b>4. Support for progressive economic policies</b>			
A basic income grant should be provided to everyone — The control group strongly backed this measure with 83% agreement. Story 1 had a major negative effect (23% less agreement), while Story 3 also made a difference (10% less agreement). Story 2 had no significant effect.			
The rich should pay more tax — Support for this measure in the control group was a high 72%. None of the stories made a significant difference.			
The government should gather more resources through tax in order to reduce inequality — Control group support for this measure was high (76%). Stories 1, 2, and 3 all reduced agreement (by 13%, 10%, and 19% respectively).			



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