Review Article

The housing-education nexus in South Africa beyond COVID-19: Implications for social work and social policy

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Abstract

The notion that housing is the bedrock of the social and economic development of families and communities is well acknowledged in all societies. From a social development and social policy perspective, this conceptual paper provides a compelling argument about the dividends that accrue from integrating housing and education planning. The rights to housing and education are social investments that promote human, social and economic development. The impact of Corona Virus Disease (COVID-19) and its subsequent lockdowns were too severe on children from poor households who occupied inadequate housing. The authors make use of a literature methodology that synthesises United Nations policies and updates on COVID-19, empirical research and government policies and steps taken to attenuate the impact of the pandemic. The paper establishes that the country is still impaired by high levels of poverty which locks poor children

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in poor schools and poor housing. During COVID-19, millions of these children had their rights to education undermined because their economic and housing circumstances could not allow them to participate in online learning. Having established the essential social development potential of housing it is therefore fitting to rethink how social policy could be employed to dovetail the housing and education nexus. The authors recommend research to help envision this relationship, not only from a theoretical level but also from collaborative implementation processes.

Keywords: housing, education, COVID-19, South Africa, social and economic development

Introduction

Across all societies, housing is known to play a huge role in social development. It conjoins the occupants with physical and intangible social and economic rights such as education, health, privacy, and dignity. Its role particularly in South Africa was appreciated during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic when most of the learners from poor housing and neighbourhoods could not take part in online learning because of their poor living circumstances. It must however be stressed that the impact of this pandemic was universal. Social development is a product of deliberate social policy, and thus in this paper, we motivate the value of integrating housing with education planning as we reflect on COVID-19 and its deep impact on education particularly for those in inadequate housing. It is germane to mention that the African National Congress' aspiration of prioritising housing dates to the 1955 Freedom Charter (ANC, 1955). This document, targets decent housing as a pivot for social development, with the potential to improve education and health outcomes and promote redistribution and nation-building (ANC, 1955).

However, poverty stands as a huge challenge to realise not only housing but other attendant rights such as education in post-apartheid South Africa (Chenwi & McLean, 2009; Mahomedy, 2019; McLean, 2006; Nyathi & Thobejane, 2018; Waetjen & Vahed, 2009). While the purpose and scope of this paper do not lend themselves to detailed scientific definitions of poverty,

it is fitting to give a brief context of poverty in South Africa as the latter does not only determine access to education, health, and housing but dictates the availability and quality of social services as was seen during COVID-19. Poverty is a very complex phenomenon and how it is measured usually attracts some controversy. With specific reference to South Africa, Statistics South Africa (Stats SA) applies an income-based measure of poverty using three national poverty lines: the food poverty line, the lower-bound poverty line and the upper-bound poverty line. These poverty lines are adjusted in tandem with inflation. Below is Stats SA's (2023, p. 3) definition of each of these categories and how much an individual under each poverty line category would need to survive.

- Food poverty line – R760 (in May 2023 prices) per person per month. This refers to the amount of money that an individual will need to afford the minimum required daily energy intake. This is also commonly referred to as the "extreme" poverty line.
- Lower-bound poverty line – R1 058 (in May 2023 prices) per person per month. This refers to the food poverty line plus the average amount derived from non-food items of households whose total expenditure is equal to the food poverty line; and
- Upper-bound poverty line – R1 558 (in May 2023 prices) per person per month. This refers to the food poverty line plus the average amount derived from non-food items of households whose food expenditure is equal to the food poverty line.

According to the World Bank (2022), half of South Africa's population is chronically poor with high poverty resistance, meaning that they live in extreme poverty. Even those with higher incomes in the upper poverty lines are at risk of sliding into poverty since COVID-19, which disrupted the economy and redistribution of income (World Bank, 2022). What is also notable in South Africa is spatial poverty, evidenced by 45% of the rural population being categorised as poor compared to 19% in urban areas (Gumede, 2021). While Gauteng is the wealthiest province in the country, it also has the highest number of informal settlements, some of which have poor community toilets, with no electricity, children live in overcrowded households, and they must walk long distances to the nearest schools (World Bank, 2022). With the growing urban population, Smith (2022) indicates that

one in five people in Johannesburg and Cape Town live in informal housing, on less than R1300 a month by 2016. On who are the poor in South Africa, evidence suggests that that while it is not restricted to any one racial group, it is concentrated among blacks particularly Africans, and female-headed households (South African Government, 2021; World Bank, 2022). Thus, it is those residing in rural areas, informal settlements and female-headed households (FFHs) that are very vulnerable in times of economic strain and pandemics such as COVID-19. It is in the light of the foregoing complexity that the impact of COVID-19 on education was ubiquitous, impacting even those children who occupy adequate housing but whose household incomes had plummeted abruptly for them to afford data and gadgets for example among other shocks that emanated from the pandemic.

Mkandawire (2004) thus underscores the obligation for deliberate and integrated social policy to guarantee children's uninterrupted access to education, promote human development and build their resilience against shocks such as COVID-19. For Noyoo (2015), comprehensive social policy is a prerequisite for South Africa; to protect its poor citizens while redistributing income to fight poverty and inequality that was entrenched during centuries of colonialism and apartheid. Carter and Polevychock (2004, p. v) view housing as 'good social policy' because it influences "health, education, income security, immigration, employment and community development…women and children…and children's educational achievements". This nexus was further stressed by Pillay (2017, p. 1) who argued that among other basics "housing needs are an essential part of academic success, since a safe and healthy environment is conducive to learning." The COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdowns have challenged the long-standing traditions of learning, with the housing and neighbourhood environment playing a pivotal role in online learning and children's education and outcomes. Housing can offer this opportunity only if it is in a safe and secure neighbourhood, with the necessary infrastructure and fitments for children to engage with the educational content.

In 1955, the African National Congress (ANC) and its alliance partners through the Freedom Charter pledged to open 'the doors of learning and

culture to all' (ANC, 1955). In the same document, the ANC also committed to providing South African citizens with decent housing in integrated, viable and sustainable neighbourhoods. In the context of racialised access to social welfare in apartheid South Africa, education and housing have become a barometer for democracy that is essential for progress in terms of health, nation building and human dignity post-1994. There is replete empirical evidence on the association between poor housing, COVID-19 and missed educational outcomes for children (Adediran et al., 2020; Ahmad et al., 2020; Bushman & Mehdipanah, 2022; Power et al., 2020; Rogers & Power, 2020).

Sadly, the provision of quality education and particularly housing in South Africa is still a perpetual challenge, more than 30 years since the country gained its independence in 1994. The widespread protests in the country's urban space are a deep reflection of the poor's frustration mainly over inadequate housing, lack of electricity, and sanitation and how these impact their children's education and health outcomes (Alexander, 2010; Mamokhere, 2019; Msindo, 2017; Ngcamu, 2019; Wasserman, & Chuma, 2018). The housing gap has not only increased since 1994 but also, some townships are arguably fragmented and hence dislocated the poor from their livelihood opportunities and advanced health, educational and recreational services. This perpetuates a generational cycle of poverty and hopelessness for the poor because of their high risks of pandemics such as COVID-19, droughts, floods, and other incidents.

The advent of COVID-19 followed by the lockdowns and the adoption of online learning meant that the housing and the neighbourhood environment became very central spheres for health and educational attainment. In our view, COVID-19 resonated with Sobantu (2021) who called for urgent and perceptible social policy rethinking of the relationship between health, housing, and education because many children could not take part in online learning due to limited housing, home, and neighbourhood circumstances (UNICEF, 2021, 2022). It is worth noting that a significant number of children occupying adequate housing also could not take part in online learning during COVID-19 for reasons that include a lack of gadgets, connectivity, and the mental strain associated with social distancing and loss

(Armbruster & Klotzbücher, 2020; Govender et al., 2021; Sewpaul et al., 2021). According to UNICEF (2021), some learners had lost between 75 per cent to a full year of school learning by mid-2021 due to COVID-19. Rotational learning, intermittent school closures for some grades and lack of devices, data, connectivity as well as skills were some of the challenges responsible for the loss of learning for some learners (UNICEF, 2021, 2022). In addition to that, UNICEF (2022, p.1) reports that "some 400,000 to 500,000 students reportedly dropped out of school altogether between March 2020 and July 2021". Vandalism of schools was very prominent in South Africa during COVID-19. UNICEF (2022) revealed that more than 2000 schools were vandalised and looted during the COVID-19 lockdown as criminals took advantage of the absence of children and staff from the premises.

The extent of the impact of COVID-19 transcends just loss of learning, but a "growing body of evidence shows that COVID-19 has caused high rates of anxiety and depression among children and young people, with some studies finding that girls, adolescents and those living in rural areas are most likely to experience these problems" (UNICEF, 2022 p. 1). The impact of COVID-19 on learning was universal but it is also true that it was severe for those children residing in poor housing because of overcrowding and associated risks to child abuse among other reasons. It is for this reason that Pillay (2017) foregrounds embedding adequate housing in health and education policies. In this paper, we highlight the strong intersection of education, health, and housing by analysing literature on COVID-19 and government strategies to contain its spread. The next section discusses the methodology that the authors made use of, followed by an appraisal of social development and social policy theoretical frameworks. The paper also reflects on the housing-education nexus in South Africa. With a high likelihood that COVID-19 may not be the last pandemic to befall humankind, the paper also discusses the implications for social policy. Before the concluding remarks and recommendations, the authors also discuss the relevance of the housing-education nexus to social work.

Methodology

This conceptual paper utilised a literature review methodology to synthesise empirical research evidence, government data and the United Nations (UN) policies and updates on COVID-19, children and education. The authors utilised their vast knowledge of housing and social development, which they coupled with the latest emerging research literature and policies in these domains. Snyder (2019, p. 333) described a literature review methodology as:

> A more or less systematic way of collecting and synthesizing previous research (Baumeister & Leary, 1997; Tranfield, Denyer, & Smart, 2003). An effective and well-conducted review as a research method creates a firm foundation for advancing knowledge and facilitating theory development (Webster & Watson, 2002). By integrating findings and perspectives from many empirical findings, a literature review can address research questions with a power that no single study has. It can also help to provide an overview of areas in which the research is disparate and interdisciplinary.

For the past five years, COVID-19 dominated scholarly, research and policy discussions in various disciplines including health, housing, and education. As a global institution, the UN-led efforts to raise awareness about the pandemic through periodical reports whose intention has been to educate the global community about the pandemic and more importantly how to mitigate the spread of the virus at homes, schools, and communities. Making use of social policy and social development theoretical frameworks, the article synthesises all this literature to make a case for the capability of housing to support educational, health and human development objectives during pandemics such as COVID-19.

Social development, social policy and housing

Social development is the outcome of a deliberate social policy. Midgley (2014, p. 13) came to define social development as "[a] process of planned social change designed to promote the well-being of the population as a whole within the context of a dynamic and multifaceted development process". Implicit in this definition is social change and social transformation, which Noyoo (2015) stresses as the main role of social development

particularly in the context of the country's historical legacy of racial segregation which created inequality, unemployment, and poverty. The 1994 White Paper for Housing, the 1994 Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) the 1997 Housing Act are some of the policies that reflect the government's commitment to use housing as a redistributive tool and one that would promote nation-building and social transformation.

There is no doubt about the post-apartheid government's strong social policy intent to improve people's living standards through enlarging access to health care, housing, education, and other social welfare services (Charlton, & Kihato, 2006; Nkala, & Sobantu, 2021; Noyoo, 1999). The current housing policy emerged from the intense National Housing Forum (NHF) negotiations in 1993. It is however beyond the prism of this paper to provide a fuller background overview of South Africa's housing policy and how it has found resonance in the country's social policy. Suffice it to mention that even the apartheid government deployed social policy to influence its housing policy specifically to provide housing subsidies to benefit white people (De Loor, 1992; Dewar, 1992). In deliberating the new housing policy in 1993, the NHF drew stakeholders from "separate sectors of society: (1) organised labour and community (through the Mass Democratic Movement); (2) the private sector (through the then Urban Foundation); and (3) the Homeless People's Federation/People's Dialogue alliance" (Huchzermeyer, 2001, p. 304). As a major stakeholder, the ANC and its alliance partners reiterated the vision of building decent adequate housing for the citizens, as they had articulated in the 1955 Freedom Charter. Adequate housing would equip citizens to fight poverty and improve access to advanced health care and educational opportunities for their children. Rolfe et al. (2020, p. 1) underscore housing as "an important social determinant of health, recognising the range of ways in which a lack of housing, or poor-quality housing, can negatively affect health and wellbeing [as seen in how many children in informal settlements and poor housing could not participate in online learning due to COVID-19]".

Post-1994, the RPD cemented the government's strong commitment to driving sustainable development that would positively influence the

economic and psychosocial well-being of South Africans (Republic of South Africa [RSA], 1994a). Noyoo (1999) describes the RDP as a macro policy that would restructure the economy and benefit mainly the poor citizens through redistribution. In addition to the RDP, the 1997 White Paper for Social Welfare serves as a blueprint for developmental social welfare and is applauded for its pro-poor focus. The social development paradigm as embedded in the White Paper stresses evidence-based holistic intervention through effective and efficient deployment of resources (Noyoo, 2000). The country's 1996 Constitution further mandates the government to provide not just housing but adequate housing with essential services such as clean water, sanitation, and electricity where inhabitants enjoy protection from extreme weather and contracting diseases such as COVID-19.

Sobantu (2019) argues that in policy planning, the multiplier effect of housing has not been fully understood by policy planners and hence, has arguably been subordinated to health, education, and education when it comes to social policy planning. On a similar note, Hohman (2013) bemoans that housing has been misunderstood, under-valued and under-studied yet it is a space where most cases of gender-based and domestic violence (GBDV) occur and its quality contributes to psychosocial and mental health and wellbeing. Studies that include Nyashanu et al. (2020) illustrate how learning during COVID-19 lockdowns was impossible for many children who live in informal settlements because of overcrowding, poor sanitation, lack of running water and high risks of physical and sexual abuse. Social policy therefore should buttress rights-based planning and delivery of housing that would facilitate children's education and promote health and well-being, particularly in times of distress as was witnessed during COVID-19.

Mkandawire (2004, p. 1), refers to social policy as "collective interventions directly affecting transformation in social welfare, social institutions and social relations." Thus, Sobantu (2019) challenges policymakers and practitioners to rethink and redefine housing beyond just a physical asset but one whose social, economic, and cultural benefits influence the well-being of individuals, families, and communities. Through deliberate social policy, adequate housing must be built into sustainable human settlements that would

shield individuals, families, and communities from COVID-19 for example. The 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) compels governments to use social policy to provide everyone:

> [with] an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food, clothing and housing, and to the continuous improvement of his living conditions. The States Parties will take appropriate steps to ensure the realisation of this right, recognising to this effect the essential importance of international co-operation based on free consent.

In the above excerpt, the UN (1966) not only aids in redefining housing but also raises awareness on the extent of collaborative effort that must be invested in prevention and fighting COVID-19, delivering quality education and the best health care for all citizens.

Housing and education in South Africa

In South Africa, housing, and education are rights that are enshrined in sections 26 and 29 respectively of the Constitution. The Constitution is informed by key international legislations, i.e., the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UNDHR) and the ICESCR. Section 10 of the Constitution is the Bill of Rights where the right of all citizens to human dignity is affirmed (RSA, 1996). It is not coincidental that housing, and education form part of the key rights that the government is mandated to deliver to its citizens – it is chiefly because of the housing-related backlogs that the post-1994 government inherited from the apartheid administration. Quality education and adequate housing have a high likelihood of transforming society positively and this is central to democracy and nation-building.

In 1994, the country's housing backlog was estimated at 1.5 million, resulting in over 7 million people turning to informal housing while thousands continue to live in backyard dwellings (Tomlinson, 2015). Several policies including the 1950 Group Areas Act were largely responsible for institutionalising separate development which barred other races from accessing and occupying better-resourced urban areas (Mabin, 1992). The most common housing types for Black people in urban areas were hostels and the dedicated

densely populated townships that were only convenient as a pool for cheap labour to sustain the apartheid economy. The apartheid education system as well was characterised by institutionalised discrimination against Black people. The 1953 Bantu Education Act and the 1979 Education and Training Act policies barred Black pupils from enrolling in schools that were reserved for Whites (Van der Berg, & Hofmeyr, 2018). Badat and Sayed (2014) also reported that the apartheid higher education system ensured that the enrolment of Black African students was kept to a minimum, under a system that made it difficult for them to graduate.

Post-1994, the government committed to deliver 1 million houses in 5 years through the subsidy mechanism as articulated in the 1994 White Paper on Housing (RSA, 1994b). This subsidy was ring-fenced for low-income household applicants whose combined incomes were below 3500 rands. As of 2016, the government claimed to have delivered 4.3 million houses and subsidies (RSA, 2017). It is common knowledge that the quality and location of some of these subsidy houses have been criticised for poor workmanship and being dislocated from livelihood opportunities respectively (Jeffrey, 2015; Manomano, & Tanga, 2018; Noyoo, & Sobantu, 2019). Despite social rental housing's developmental objectives, as reflected in the 2005 Social Housing Policy, this option continues to receive a low priority ranking from the government in favour of the individual subsidy which is for ownership (Noyoo, & Sobantu, 2019). The policy specifies that social housing should prioritise reversing fragmented urban spatial trends to facilitate the proximal location of the poor to advanced services (RSA, 2005, p. 19). The authors are aware of the 2004 Breaking New Ground (BNG) policy whose focus is to improve on the shortcomings of the individual subsidy RDP houses. Arguably, this new policy and the BNG housing as they are referred to have resulted in very marginal improvements from the earlier subsidy mechanism and housing.

On the education front, significant positive shifts have been realised from early childhood development (ECD) to HE. The National Development Plan (NDP) 2030 recognises ECD as "a top priority among the measures to improve the quality of education and long-term prospects of the future

generations" (RSA, 2012, p. 71). As a result of government subsidies to support ECDs, enrolments into basic education have been on an upward trend. Van der Berg and Hofmeyr (2013) noted that while ECD attendance benefited learners from wealthiest quintiles who performed very well in Grade R, those from lower quintiles performed poorly. Most of the learners in lower quintiles attend township schools which are poorly resourced and in addition, most of their housing and neighbourhoods barely support learning.

The quintile system in the country's basic education was introduced to give effect to the government's social, political, and economic transformation agenda, i.e., to reduce racial discrimination in educational spending. As spelt out in the 2012 National Norms and Standards for Schools Funding (RSA, 2012), each school is ranked into five quintiles based on the unemployment rate and the literacy levels of the community in which the school is located. Quintile 1 ranking refers to a poor school that is in a poor community while quintile 5 applies to wealthy schools in wealthy communities. For fairer and equitable funding and distribution of resources, the poorest schools in quintile 1 thus receive more funding than those schools that are better resourced from wealthier communities (van Dyk, & White, 2019). While access to education has improved for children in poor communities, most of these communities and schools still battle with poor infrastructure and funding, which undermines the transformative intent of the quintile system. According to UNICEF (2021, 2022), most quintile 1 schools had to contend with the challenges of rolling out online education, while most of the learners were unable to participate as they lacked the necessary technological gadgets during COVID-19. The authors acknowledge that many children from quintile 1 schools experienced challenges relating to access to gadgets, network connectivity, loss of income and the trauma that accompanied COVID-19 (Gustafsson, & Nuga, 2020; Spaull, & Van der Berg, 2020).

Reflecting on the housing-education nexus in context
South Africa, just like many other developing countries is experiencing deep challenges of providing affordable quality housing and education to its citizens. This is despite the government's persistent pledges to roll out

comfortable housing and neighbourhoods dating back to the 1955 Freedom Charter and 1994 respectively. Sobantu (2020) argues that the government has struggled to leverage the potential of adequate housing to boost the economy, connect citizens to the electricity grid and improve health and well-being. According to Lombard (2011, p. 535), the latter are social investments that contribute to the "future functioning of people". Perhaps, targeted research could point out why the government has not fully understood and utilised housing's potential to boost other social welfare sectors and the economy.

Noyoo (2015) applauds the government's policy commitment but also argues that the same authority must exercise a strong political will to create a more conducive environment that would make learning possible, without the fear of contracting COVID-19 and falling prey to sexual abuse and crime. According to Noyoo (2018) and Sobantu (2021), a pro-poor understanding of the demographic profile of the poor is essential in providing a specific kind of housing that will cater for the housing, education, and health needs of the communities. An evidence-based approach to providing housing is most likely to positively influence the education and health sectors.

Approximately 68,9% of Black African and 69.0% of Coloured households have large families consisting of more than five members according to Stats SA (2018). Most of the children in these families either share or do not have a bedroom at all. In addition, most of the initial public housing provided by the government is small, environmentally unfriendly and has poor ventilation (Zacks, & Charlton, 2003; Gardner, 2004; Manomano, & Tanga, 2018; Sobantu, 2019), rendering them unsuitable for studying, isolation, social distancing, and regular washing of hands as was required during COVID-19. This is corroborated by Nyashanu et al. (2020) who found out that among other challenges, sanitation and lack of clean water were huge health concerns for children and their families during lockdowns that were aimed at curbing the spread of COVID-19. The study further reported that several children contracted diarrhoea and other related diseases in this community. Pit latrines are common in several informal settlements in the country, resulting in very strong smells from chemicals that are used as disinfectants

(Nyashanu et al. 2020; Sobantu, 2014; Sobantu, & Nel, 2019). Most informal settlements are unable to support learning for children, especially during COVID-19 and the extended lockdowns that the country experienced.

Overcrowding particularly in small houses and informal settlements not only denies children the opportunity to study optimally at home, but it also increases their vulnerability to sexual abuse and other forms of crime and for some, by their family members as observed by Soudien et al. (2021). Conley (2001) also adds that overcrowding negatively affects the learners' physical and psychological health. It is because of these realities that planning for education cannot be concluded separately from housing and related welfare considerations.

What also compounds both the housing and educational problems facing children from some informal settlements and poor housing communities is the lack of/and unreliable electricity. Squires (2015) highlights that electricity has a direct implication on education, income, and expenditure. From his study in Honduras, Squires (2015) shared that school attendance, performance, and attainment (throughput) improved for children coming from homes and communities with stable reliable electricity. Pillay (2017) also elaborates that without electricity, children are unable to read at night and guardians often experience challenges in cooking and doing laundry for their children's meals and uniforms respectively. This affects both attendance and attainment. In their study in the Eastern Cape-based higher education institutions (HEIs) in South Africa, Tanga, Ndhlovu and Tanga (2020) found that academics and students could hardly use their digital gadgets for online learning because of load-shedding during COVID-19 lockdowns.

COVID-19 and beyond: implications on education and housing

Globally and in South Africa, the COVID-19 pandemic was a threat to human survival; it crippled economies, and decimated livelihoods, and incomes. Its impact was felt in the manufacturing, tourism, education, health, social, mining and agriculture sectors (Gustafsson, & Deliwe, 2020; Olaniran, & Llesanmi, 2021). The poor were further disenfranchised as their food security was threatened, and access and participation in education were jeopardised

because of interrelated problems such as the inability to pay fees (Gustafsson, & Deliwe, 2020; United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, 2020; UNICEF, 2021, 2022; Yesufu, 2021). In the education sector, the pandemic widened inequalities between learners from quintile 1 and quintile 5 schools (Graham, 2020 as cited in Parker, Morris, Hofmeyer, 2020; Olaniran & Llesanmi, 2021; Stats SA, 2020). The disparities between these quintiles were very visible as children, mostly from poor households did not have adequate study space and internet connectivity at home (Soudien et al. 2021; Parker et al., 2020).

As a result of the pandemic and closure of schools, most children were at a greater risk of dropping out of school and learning loss since access depended on whether learners had access to gadgets and internet connectivity in their houses for online education learning (Landa, Zhou and Marongwe, 2021; Soudien et al. 2021; Shepherd and Mohohlwane, 2020). The lack of the foregoing prerequisite undermined the learners' rights to education. The 2023 Background Report for the 2030 Reading Panel compiled by a leading education economist, Spaull (2023) paints a gloomy picture of thousands of South African children who lack fundamental literacy skills of reading for meaning partly because of the lockdowns. The lack of a supportive home environment partly contributes to this poor outcome. The report states that:

> Children in 2023 are estimated to be a full year behind same-age children from 2019. In her background note for the Reading Panel, Dr Gabrielle Wills reports on the findings of the 'COVID-Generation' research project summarizing the impacts of the pandemic on education from large studies in Mpumalanga, the Northwest, the Eastern Cape and the Western Cape. She reports that learning losses for children in the early grades range from 50-120% of a year's worth of learning. Put differently, the average 10-year-old in 2022 has worse reading outcomes than the average 9-year-old from 2019. To provide one concrete example: "Pre-pandemic, Grade 2's in the Eastern Cape sample would usually sound out an additional 23 letters correctly over a year. In 2020, alphabetic knowledge development during Grade 2 declined to just 7 additional letters correct per minute.

The authors argue that if these children were locked in housing and neighbourhoods that were developed for not only occupation but also for education, the impact of COVID-19 on their educational performance and

attainment would have been far less severe. Therefore, it is germane to express that housing needs to be integrated as a "member of the social policy sector and recognised as an integral part of the social policy agenda, taking place at the table with education and health care when spending priorities are discussed." (Carter, & Polevychok, 2004, p. iv).

Relevance of the housing-education nexus to social work

Social work as a practice-based profession empowers people, and promotes social change and development (International Federation of Social Workers, 2014). It has a long history of being linked to housing and education such as its ability to contribute to housing policies through knowledge development and advocacy through policy development and practice (Pillay, 2017; Sobantu, 2019). At the core of the profession are social justice and socio-economic and cultural rights which include the right to housing and the promotion of access to housing (Sen et al., 2022; Simcock & Machin, 2019). Given the resonance between social change, development and improving access to social justice and socio-economic rights, this paper observes that social workers can play a key role by advocating for the pursuit of educational and housing goals mutually and simultaneously rather than in isolation. In doing so, the educational and housing deliverables can pour into each other thereby enhancing outcomes for service users and in particular children to whom quality housing and education are the foundations of integration and development.

According to the International Federation of Social Workers (2014) at the core of the social work profession is the pursuit of social justice and the rights of the service users such as children. In pursuit of social justice, this paper recognises the need for social workers to advocate for access to adaptable education amongst the marginalised learners whose plight has been brought to the fore during the pandemic. Some of the functions of social work in the housing and education sectors include research, provision of information and guidance, coordination of the efforts of and collaboration with different professionals, direct attention and intervention and the promotion of social integration to meet the housing needs of the service users (Alvarez-Perez et

al., 2021; Kok-Hoe, Neo, and You-Wes, 2020; Simcock and Machin, 2019). Other roles played by social workers in the housing sector include supporting service users through the use of statutory powers, advocacy with housing providers and policymakers and recording service users' housing needs (Kok-Hoe, Neo, & You-Wes, 2020; Sen et al., 2022).

In the education sector, Reyneke (2018) observes that social workers can assist with the creation of a school environment where children's rights are attainable. In fulfilling their functions and performing their roles, social workers in the education and housing sectors can harness their research, practice, and intervention efforts in light of the symbiotic relationship between housing and education. Thus, social workers' scope of work is very comprehensive, but their role in education in the context of South Africa is not practised as it should which may be due to the limited number of Social Works that the country has. The Authors also need to stress the need to expand the workforce of Social Workers in the country. There are countless unemployed social work graduates across the country.

Conclusion and recommendations

This article highlights the desperate need for a purposeful harnessing of housing and housing policy and education. The authors argued that, for tangible and perceptible social and economic dividends to accrue from education, deliberate social policy is required to provide adequate, affordable, and liveable housing that is conducive to learning in the digital era. More deliberately, social policy thus becomes a catalyst for social development through informing integrated housing delivery planning that fulfils the ambitions of the education sector by providing the required housing enmities such as electricity and internet connectivity. The lack of such a reciprocal relationship was witnessed in South Africa by the failure of children and students from poor backgrounds to participate in online learning during COVID-19 lockdowns. The paper acknowledged the gains that the government has scored in improving access to education at ECD, basic and HE levels. However, there are persistent challenges of low throughput, non-school attendance, and poorly resourced schools, most of which are in the

townships. Intersecting the foregoing challenges is poverty, which remains racialised because of the apartheid and colonial discriminatory policies. Thus, making it extremely impossible for these communities to overcome their past. We recommend the following:

- Starting from the municipal level, partnerships and collaboration between the Departments of Human Settlements Basic Education and Social Development.
- Collaborative research should be promoted to explore the relationship between housing and education.
- At the same time, research that looks at the government's understanding of housing and its potential, and why these potential benefits have not been deliberately implemented.
- Government and stakeholders to initiate measures that are aimed at promoting social capital, social justice, education rights and reasonable housing for marginalised learners with favourable conditions for learning.

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