Wilderness of Mirrors: A policy reassessment

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INTRODUCTION

The persistent poverty in South Africa, despite significant social grant expenditures, indicates a need for rethinking poverty alleviation strategies (Ndaguba and Hanyane, 2019). Social grants provide immediate financial relief but often foster dependency, undermining long-term economic self-sufficiency (Devereux, 2002). This study examines the potential of the Igbo Apprenticeship Model (IAM) as an alternative approach. IAM, rooted in the cultural practices of the Igbo people of Nigeria, emphasizes skill acquisition and entrepreneurship through mentorship and community support. By shifting focus from the individual to a social and communal action, this study argues that South Africa can reduce dependency, enhance economic productivity, and achieve sustainable poverty reduction. Existing literature supports this perspective, illustrating that while social grants provide essential short-term relief, they fail to address the structural causes of poverty. Scholars like Devereux (2002) argue that social grants can sometimes create dependency rather than fostering self-sufficiency. Similarly, Ferguson (2015) highlights that although social grants can alleviate immediate financial distress, they do not contribute to long-term economic empowerment. The prevailing belief that increased social grants can alleviate poverty overlooks the need for sustainable, long-term solutions. Poverty, as Sen (1999) elucidates, is not merely a lack of income but a deprivation of capabilities, and addressing it requires more than financial aid. Nussbaum (2000) corroborates with this assertion in the study of wellbeing as a factor for understanding poverty alleviation, nonetheless, Granlund & Hochfeld (2020) argues that social grants give parents some sense of empowerment.

This study advocates for reallocating the significant funds currently dedicated to social grants, which support over 19 million people, towards skill acquisition programs. Countries such as India, China, Vietnam, and Bangladesh have demonstrated the efficacy of skill development in reducing poverty. Dreze and Sen (2013) provide compelling evidence on how skill acquisition and educational investments have driven economic growth in India. Similarly, Nembhard (2014) discusses how cooperative models in Bangladesh have fostered self-reliance and economic independence. Among the various solutions and investments proposed, the Igbo Apprenticeship Model (IAM) stands out. Embodying the spirit of Ubuntu—"I am because you are"—the IAM emphasizes practical skill acquisition through mentorship and community support. Rooted in the cultural practices of the Igbo people of Nigeria, this model has proven effective in creating entrepreneurs and skilled workers who contribute to their local economies. Research by Meagher (2010) highlights the success of the IAM in fostering entrepreneurship and reducing poverty in Nigeria.

This study contributes to theory, by integrating Location Theory, Core and Peripheral Theory, and Clustering Theory, this study provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the spatial dynamics of poverty and the limitations of social grants. It argues that poverty is not solely an economic condition but is heavily influenced by geographic factors and social networks. Thus, effective poverty alleviation requires targeted interventions that address spatial inequalities, foster local economic development, and reduce dependency on social grants. By adopting the IAM, South Africa can revise and reshape its poverty narratives, transitioning from unsustainable social grants to a model that promotes self-reliance and economic independence. This approach not only addresses the immediate needs of the poor but also equips them with the tools and skills necessary to improve their socio-economic conditions permanently. In conclusion, this study calls for a paradigm shift in addressing poverty in South Africa. Redirecting resources from social grants to skill acquisition programs, and specifically adopting the Igbo Apprenticeship Model, offers a sustainable and empowering path out of poverty, ensuring that economic aid leads to genuine and lasting development.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Existing literature robustly critiques the efficacy of social grants as a tool for sustainable development. Devereux (2002) argues that social grants, while providing immediate financial relief, often create dependency rather than fostering self-sufficiency. Ferguson (2015) echoes this sentiment, highlighting that although social grants can alleviate immediate financial distress, they do not contribute to long-term economic empowerment. These perspectives align with findings from the World Bank and National Treasury, which indicate

a troubling correlation between increased social grant payments and rising poverty levels in South Africa. This paradoxical outcome suggests a fundamental misunderstanding of poverty's root causes and the limitations of financial aid as a sole solution.

Social grants in South Africa provide essential support to vulnerable populations, including the elderly, disabled, and children from low-income families. While these grants are crucial for preventing extreme poverty and ensuring basic survival, they are not designed to break the cycle of poverty. They address immediate needs but do not equip individuals with the skills or opportunities needed for economic self-sufficiency. Consequently, recipients may become trapped in a cycle of dependency, unable to move beyond their current socio-economic status.

CORE AND PERIPHERAL THEORY

Core and Peripheral Theory, often attributed to the works of John Friedmann (1966) and Immanuel Wallerstein (1974), explains the uneven development across regions within a country or between countries. The theory posits that economic development is concentrated in a 'core' region with better access to resources, infrastructure, and investment, while the 'periphery' remains underdeveloped, relying on the core for economic support and opportunities. In South Africa, social grants primarily benefit peripheral regions that are economically underdeveloped and heavily dependent on the central government's financial support. This dynamic creates a persistent dependency and does not address the structural issues underlying regional inequalities. Investing in skill acquisition through models like the Igbo Apprenticeship Model (IAM) can potentially shift this dynamic by fostering local entrepreneurship and economic activities in peripheral regions, thus reducing the reliance on social grants and promoting regional economic growth.

Friedmann's (1966) work on core-periphery dynamics provides a theoretical basis for understanding how economic disparities are perpetuated through centralized development. He argues that resources and investments are often funneled into core regions, leading to their prosperity while peripheral regions lag behind. In the context of social grants, this theory suggests that financial aid alone cannot alter the entrenched economic imbalances; instead, there is a need for targeted interventions that promote economic activities in peripheral areas.

Cluster Theory

Cluster Theory, developed by Michael Porter (1990), emphasizes the importance of geographic concentrations of interconnected businesses, suppliers, and associated institutions within a particular field. This clustering

enhances productivity and innovation, leading to competitive advantages due to factors such as specialized labor markets, knowledge spillovers, and close proximity to suppliers and customers (Porter, 1990). Existing literature on economic clusters supports the notion that these concentrations foster environments conducive to higher economic performance and innovation (Martin & Sunley, 2003; Delgado, Porter, & Stern, 2014). Applying Cluster Theory to South Africa's context, skill acquisition programs such as the Igbo Apprenticeship Model (IAM) can stimulate the formation of local economic clusters. Literature on the Igbo Apprenticeship Model illustrates its success in fostering entrepreneurship and economic resilience in Nigeria (Meagher, 2010). These programs train individuals in various trades and business management, creating networks of skilled entrepreneurs who support and compete with each other, driving innovation and economic growth. This synergy drives innovation and economic growth, transforming peripheral areas into vibrant economic hubs (Porter, 1990; Meagher, 2010). This approach is critical for reducing poverty and inequality by generating local employment opportunities and fostering economic resilience. Studies have shown that clusters can mitigate economic disparities and enhance local economies by creating a critical mass of economic activity and promoting regional competitiveness (Ketels, 2013; Feser & Sweeney, 2002).

Porter's insights into the competitive advantage of nations through clusters underscore the potential for regional development through focused skill acquisition and enterprise development (Porter, 1990). In South Africa, fostering clusters around specific trades or industries can lead to localized economic booms. For instance, targeted training programs in agriculture, manufacturing, or technology can create hubs of activity that attract investment and generate jobs, thereby reducing reliance on social grants (Krugman, 1991; Pietrobelli & Rabellotti, 2011). Economic clusters can significantly impact regional development. By concentrating economic activities and fostering collaboration among businesses, clusters enhance the overall productivity and competitiveness of a region. In South Africa, the establishment of clusters can be particularly beneficial in regions currently dependent on social grants. Literature indicates that such clustering can lead to sustainable economic growth and reduce regional economic disparities (Porter, 2003; Scott & Storper, 2003). For example, a cluster focused on agriculture can leverage South Africa's vast arable land and favorable climate, creating a self-sustaining ecosystem of farmers, suppliers, and agro-businesses (Van Rooyen, Kirsten, & Esterhuizen, 2011). Similarly, clusters in manufacturing can capitalize on local resources and labor to produce goods for both domestic consumption and export. Technology clusters can drive innovation, attracting tech startups and established firms to collaborate and

compete, leading to job creation and economic diversification (McCann & Ortega-Argilés, 2013).

By leveraging Cluster Theory and implementing programs like the Igbo Apprenticeship Model, South Africa can foster the development of local economic clusters that drive innovation and economic growth. These clusters can transform peripheral regions into economic hubs, reducing poverty and inequality and decreasing dependency on social grants. The strategic focus on skill acquisition and enterprise development, as highlighted by Porter's Cluster Theory and supported by extensive literature, offers a robust framework for achieving sustainable regional development and economic resilience in South Africa.

Location Theory

Location Theory, which explores the geographic placement of economic activities, provides valuable insights into how skill acquisition programs might be optimally implemented to maximize their impact. Alfred Weber's (1909) theory of industrial location emphasizes minimizing costs related to transportation, labor, and agglomeration. More recent adaptations of Location Theory also consider factors such as access to markets, infrastructure, and the availability of skilled labor (McCann & Sheppard, 2003). Implementing the Igbo Apprenticeship Model (IAM) in strategically chosen locations where there is a high concentration of social grant recipients can optimize the impact of skill acquisition programs. Literature suggests that location plays a critical role in the success of economic interventions. For instance, Scott and Storper (2003) discuss how geographic proximity to markets and infrastructure can significantly enhance the economic viability of new enterprises. By selecting areas with potential for economic growth but currently lacking in skilled labor, these programs can effectively address both unemployment and poverty. This approach aligns with Weber's (1909) analysis, which highlights the importance of situating economic activities where they can be most effective. In the South African context, placing skill acquisition centers in regions with high unemployment and poverty rates, but also with growth potential, ensures that the benefits of training and development are maximized.

Weber’s theory is supported by contemporary research that emphasizes the strategic placement of economic activities to leverage local strengths and address specific needs (Martin & Sunley, 2003). The IAM’s focus on practical training and community-based support can help build local industries and services, transforming these areas into self-sustaining economic regions. This transformation is critical for reducing dependency on social grants and fostering economic resilience. For example, studies by McCann and Ortega-Argilés (2013) show that regions with targeted investments in skill development and infrastructure can achieve significant economic growth.

Similarly, Van Rooyen, Kirsten, and Esterhuizen (2011) found that strategic investments in agriculture and related industries could leverage South Africa's natural resources to create sustainable economic hubs.

Applying Location Theory to the implementation of the IAM in South Africa offers a strategic framework for maximizing the impact of skill acquisition programs. By focusing on areas with high potential for growth and significant needs, these programs can address unemployment and poverty more effectively. The strategic placement of skill acquisition centers, as emphasized by Weber (1909) and supported by contemporary research, ensures that training and development efforts lead to sustainable economic improvements.

The Igbo Apprenticeship Model (IAM)

The Igbo Apprenticeship Model (IAM) stands out as a model that aligns well with the principles of spatial analysis theories, particularly Core and Peripheral Theory, Cluster Theory, and Location Theory. Rooted in the cultural practices of the Igbo people of Nigeria, the IAM emphasizes practical skill acquisition through mentorship and community support, embodying the spirit of Ubuntu—"I am because you are." Meagher (2010) highlights the success of the IAM in fostering entrepreneurship and reducing poverty in Nigeria, showing its potential applicability in other contexts.

ALIGNMENT WITH SPATIAL ANALYSIS THEORIES

Core and Peripheral Theory

Core and Peripheral Theory, developed by John Friedmann (1966) and expanded by Immanuel Wallerstein (1974), explores the economic disparities between developed 'core' regions and underdeveloped 'peripheral' regions. This theory suggests that core regions typically have better infrastructure and economic opportunities, while peripheral regions are marginalized and economically dependent on the core. The IAM addresses these disparities by fostering economic self-sufficiency in peripheral regions through skill acquisition and entrepreneurship (Friedmann, 1966; Wallerstein, 1974).

Cluster Theory

Michael Porter’s Cluster Theory (1990) emphasizes the importance of geographic concentrations of interconnected businesses, suppliers, and institutions. These clusters enhance productivity and innovation through specialized labor markets, knowledge spillovers, and close proximity to suppliers and customers. The IAM’s approach to creating local clusters of skilled tradespeople and entrepreneurs aligns with this theory by stimulating regional economic development and fostering a collaborative environment (Porter, 1990; Delgado, Porter, & Stern, 2014).

Location Theory

Alfred Weber's Location Theory (1909) examines the geographic placement of economic activities and its impact on minimizing costs related to transportation, labor, and agglomeration. By strategically implementing the IAM in peripheral areas, South Africa can optimize the economic impact of skill acquisition programs. This strategic placement ensures that regions with high unemployment and poverty rates, but with growth potential, benefit from the economic activities generated by newly skilled workers (Weber, 1909; McCann & Sheppard, 2003).

PRACTICAL SKILL ACQUISITION AND COMMUNITY SUPPORT

By placing young individuals under the tutelage of experienced tradespeople or business owners, the IAM provides hands-on training and guidance, creating entrepreneurs and skilled workers who contribute to their local economies. This model promotes self-reliance and economic independence, addressing the root causes of poverty and reducing dependency on social grants. The IAM not only provides technical skills but also imparts valuable lessons in business management, customer relations, and financial literacy, essential for running successful enterprises (Meagher, 2010).

Holistic Approach to Skill Development

The IAM's success lies in its holistic approach to skill development and its strong emphasis on community support. Apprentices are integrated into their mentors' businesses, learning in real-world environments and building networks that can support their future endeavors. This community-based approach fosters a sense of belonging and mutual aid, which are essential for sustainable development. The literature underscores the importance of such community integration for economic resilience and sustainability (Scott & Storper, 2003; Van Rooyen, Kirsten, & Esterhuizen, 2011). By creating local clusters of skilled tradespeople and entrepreneurs, the IAM can stimulate regional economic development in South Africa. The strategic implementation of the IAM in peripheral areas, guided by Location Theory, ensures that these regions benefit from the economic activities generated by newly skilled workers. This approach can transform underdeveloped areas into thriving economic zones, reducing poverty and inequality and promoting sustainable growth (Martin & Sunley, 2003; McCann & Ortega-Argilés, 2013). The IAM exemplifies how spatial analysis theories can be effectively applied to address poverty and unemployment. By integrating Core and Peripheral Theory, Cluster Theory, and Location Theory, the IAM provides a robust framework for economic development. Its holistic approach to skill acquisition and community support fosters self-reliance, reduces dependency on social grants, and stimulates regional economic growth. Implementing the IAM in

South Africa can transform peripheral areas into vibrant economic hubs, promoting sustainable development and reducing economic disparities. Integrating spatial analysis theories—Core and Peripheral Theory, Cluster Theory, and Location Theory—provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the limitations of social grants and the potential benefits of skill acquisition models like the IAM. Core and Peripheral Theory highlights the regional disparities exacerbated by dependency on social grants. Cluster Theory emphasizes the importance of creating local economic networks to drive innovation and productivity. Location Theory guides the strategic implementation of skill acquisition programs to maximize their impact.

Material and methods

The data for this study were sourced from various annual reports of the South African Social Security Agency (SASSA), accessible through the SASSA's annual reports archives. Additionally, data on inequality trends in South Africa, measured by expenditure inequality per capita per province, were obtained from Statistics South Africa (2019). Expenditure inequality is proxied by the GINI coefficient, as recognized by the World Bank (2018), making the data on expenditure GINI what are coefficient per capita by province indicative of inequality levels. The study focused on the nine provinces of South Africa to ensure comprehensive coverage of both the poorest and wealthiest regions of the country, enhancing the reliability of the results. The validity of the data is assured as compilation and validation were conducted by Statistics South Africa.

To capture the current situation, cross-sectional data on social grants per type and per province were analyzed against expenditure inequality per capita and per province using structural equation modeling (SEM). SEM is a statistical approach used to test relationships between observed and latent variables (Hoyle, 1995; Anderson & Gerbing, 1988).

The cross-sectional nature of the data is attributed to the collection of 2018 data on social grants, representing the latest comprehensive government data on the seven social grant types from each of the nine provinces of South Africa. This approach is supported by experts such as Hoyle (1995) and Anderson and Gerbing (1988).

The number of social grants distributed is documented in the official report of the South African Social Security Agency for 2018. Similarly, the latest data on inequality, measured by the Gini Coefficient, were sourced from Statistics South Africa. The analysis focuses on inequality and poverty, as inequality is a pervasive issue affecting the entire population (World Bank, 2018). Expenditure inequality was chosen over income inequality as it better reflects

individuals' ability to meet their needs based on their total income and expenditure (Daneshkohan et al., 2011).

RESULT

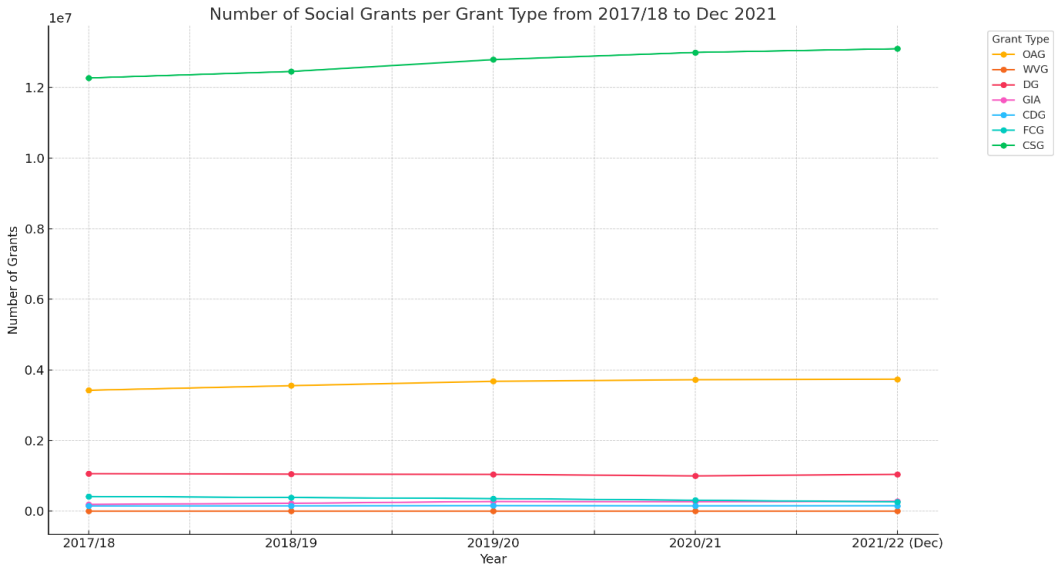

Figure 1: Social grants per Grant Type

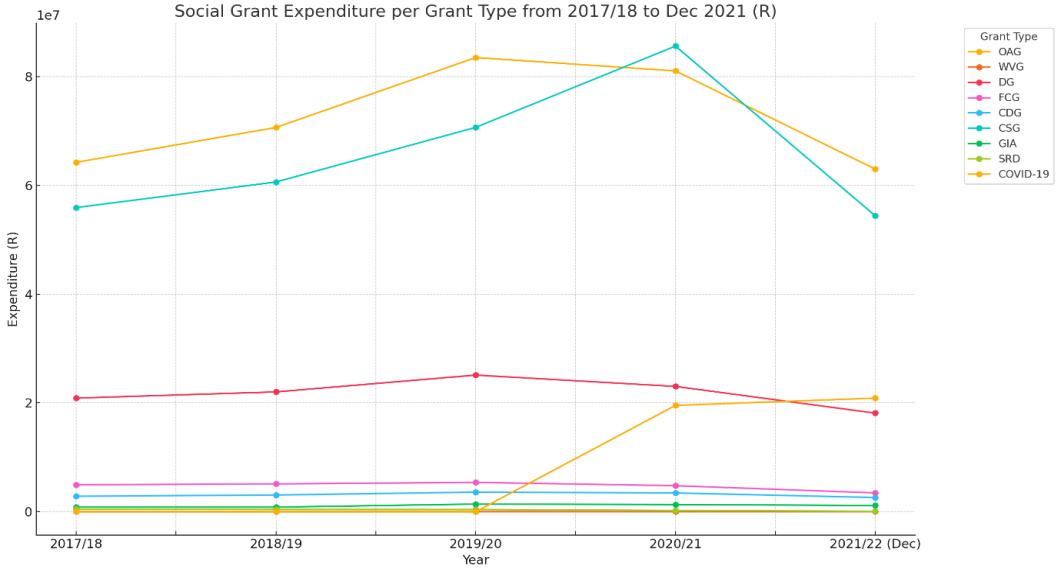

Figure 2: Social Grant Expenditure per Grant Type

The graphical analysis in figure 1 and 2 reveals trends in social grants and expenditures in South Africa from 2017/18 to December 2021. The Child Support Grant (CSG) consistently had the highest number of recipients, surpassing 13 million by December 2021. The Old Age Grant (OAG) also saw a steady rise, exceeding 3.7 million recipients. In contrast, the Foster Care Grant (FCG) declined from over 400,000 to around 264,000. Disability Grants (DG) remained stable at around 1 million recipients. Expenditures followed similar trends, with CSG peaking in 2020/21 and OAG showing an overall

increase despite a dip in 2021/22. COVID-19 relief introduced in 2020/21 marked significant spending. These insights highlight the government's substantial financial commitment to social grants and the dynamic nature of allocations in response to socio-economic changes. The data underscores the importance of continuous evaluation to ensure social grants effectively support South Africa's vulnerable populations.

Figure 3 further reveals the distribution of social grants across South Africa as of December 2021, highlighting key regional disparities. The Child Support Grant (CSG), particularly prevalent in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN), is the most widely distributed grant type, crucial for mitigating child poverty. The Old Age Grant (OAG) shows significant distribution in the Eastern Cape (EC) and KZN, reflecting higher elderly populations in these areas and providing essential financial security. The Disability Grant (DG), Foster Care Grant (FCG), and Care Dependency Grant (CDG) exhibit variability across regions, tailored to specific local needs. Major regions like Gauteng (GP), KZN, and EC have the highest total grant distributions, aligning with their larger populations and poverty rates. In contrast, the War Veteran's Grant (WVG) remains the least distributed. This visualization underscores the targeted nature of South Africa's social grants, addressing diverse regional socio-economic conditions effectively.

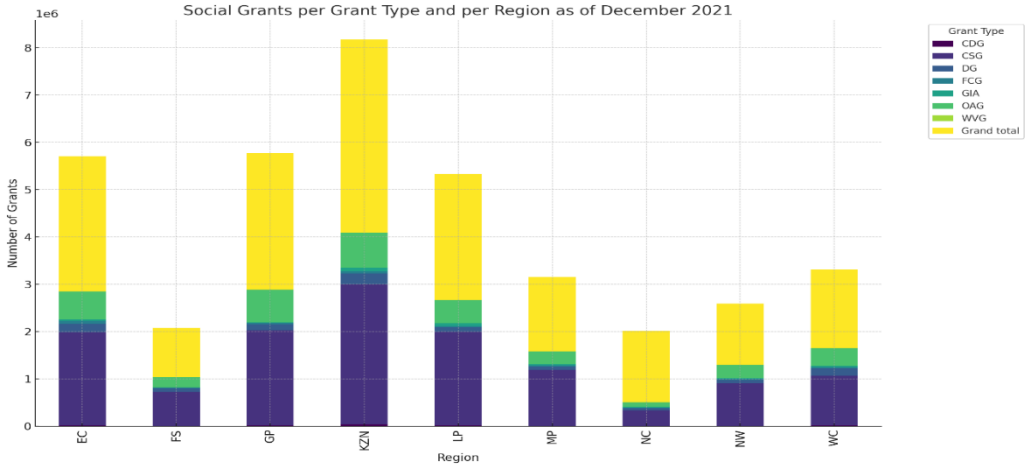

Figure 3: Regional dimensions of Social Grants per Grant Type

Furthermore, the study explored the relationship and intersection between poverty reduction and social grant. Figure 4 and 5 demonstrates the population and poverty rates overtime, and social grant values and poverty lines, respectively. In figure 6, we plotted a comparison between poverty rates and social grants below.

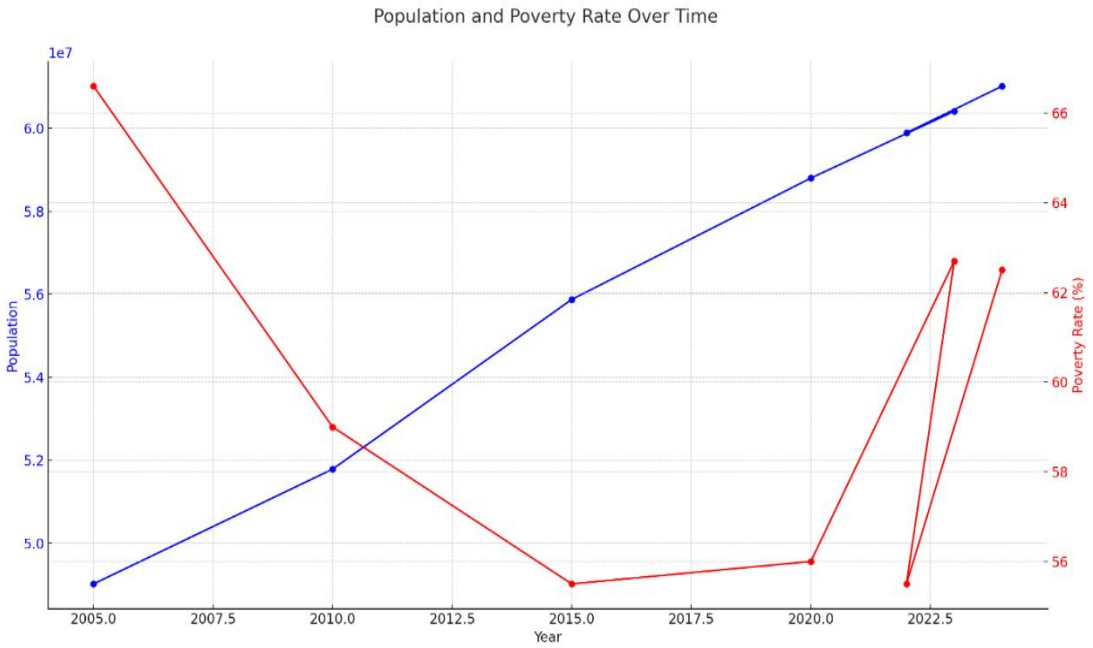

Figure 4: Population and Poverty Rates Overtime

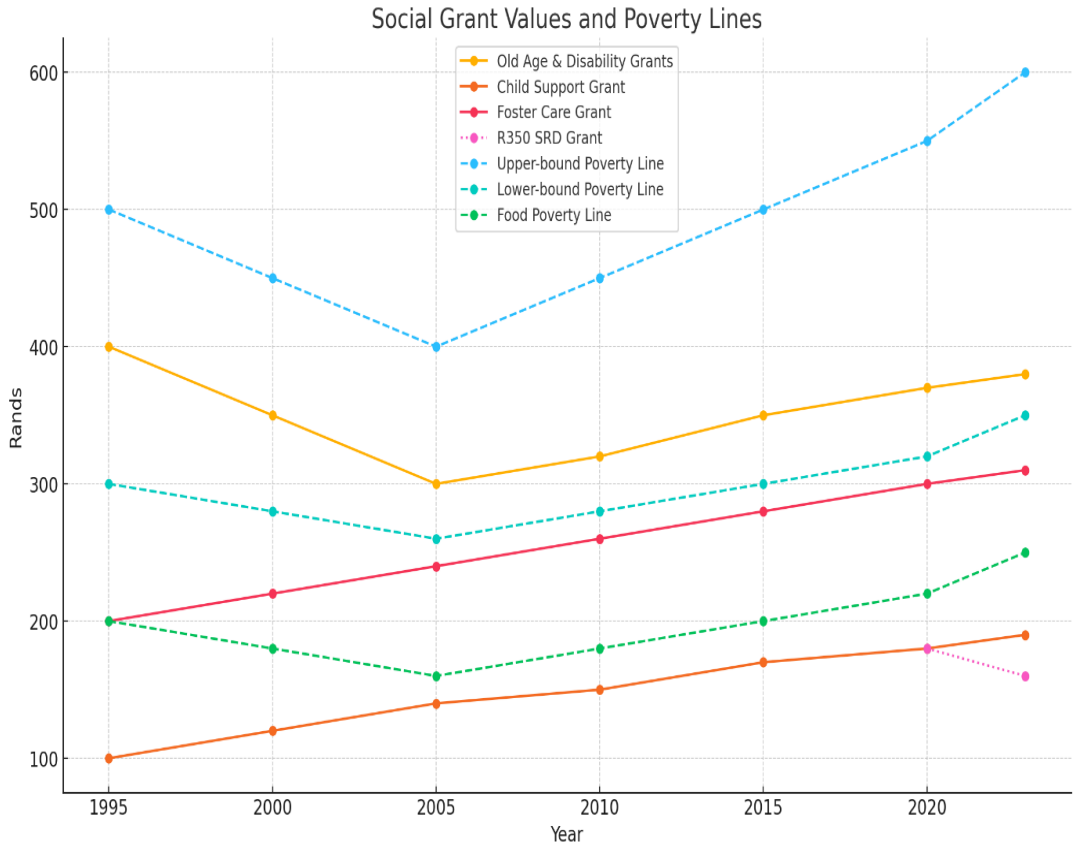

Figure 5: Social Grant Values and Poverty Lines

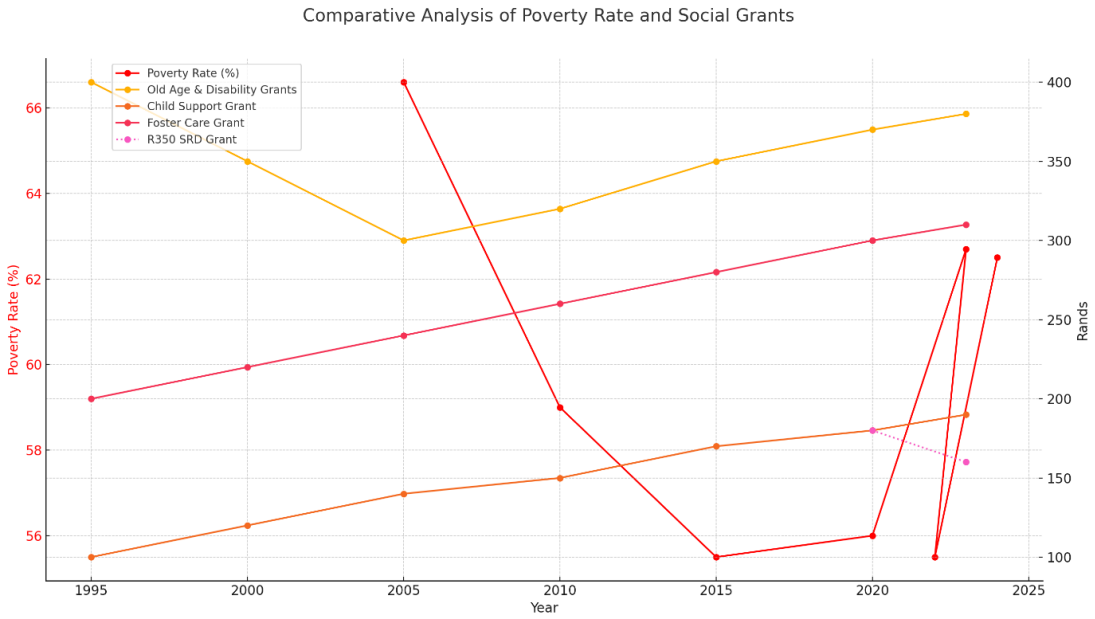

Figure 6: Comparison between Poverty Rates and Social Grants

Figure 4 reveals a compelling narrative of South Africa's demographic and socio-economic evolution from 2005 to 2024. Over these two decades, the population has shown a steady upward trajectory, reflecting natural growth and possibly migration trends. This rise in population underscores the increasing demands on social infrastructure and economic resources. Concurrently, the poverty rate depicts a more complex story, fluctuating notably. Initially, the poverty rate showed a commendable decline from 66.6% in 2005 to 55.5% in 2015, suggesting effective poverty alleviation measures. However, this positive trend reverses from 2022, with the poverty rate climbing back to 62.5% by 2024, highlighting new or unresolved economic challenges. Figure 5 provides a longitudinal view of social grant values and poverty lines from 1995 to 2023. The upward trends in social grants, including the Old Age & Disability Grants, Child Support Grant, and Foster Care Grant, reflect the government's commitment to enhancing financial support for vulnerable groups. These increases are essential in a country where socio-economic disparities are significant. The poverty lines, represented by the Upper-bound, Lower-bound, and Food Poverty Lines, also rise steadily, indicating escalating living costs. The introduction of the R350 SRD Grant in 2020, marked as a dotted line, is particularly noteworthy. This grant was a rapid response to the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, aimed at providing immediate relief to the newly impoverished.while figure 6 offers a nuanced comparative analysis of the poverty rate against various social grant values over time, revealing the intricate relationship between these variables. While the poverty rate (depicted in red) fluctuates, the values of social grants (shown in different colors) generally increase. This analysis underscores the

efforts made to bolster social support mechanisms. From 2005 to 2015, as grant values rose, the poverty rate fell, suggesting that increased financial support contributed to poverty reduction. However, the subsequent rise in poverty rates from 2022 to 2024, despite ongoing increases in grant values, signals that current social grants may not sufficiently counteract the broader economic pressures.

FINDINGS

The findings of this study would be broken into four phases, the first would deal with aspect of transitioning from a dependency-driven social grant system to an empowerment-oriented approach to poverty alleviation in South Africa.

- The Child Support Grant is the most widely distributed grant, particularly concentrated in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN).
- This trend highlights the critical role of CSG in addressing child poverty, especially in regions with high child populations.
- The Old Age Grant shows substantial regional distribution, notably in the Eastern Cape (EC) and KZN.
- This reflects the demographic profile with higher elderly populations in these regions, underscoring the grant's role in providing financial security to older adults.
- The Disability Grant, Foster Care Grant, and Care Dependency Grant exhibit regional variability.
- This indicates a tailored approach to address the specific needs of different populations across various provinces.
- Regions like Gauteng (GP), KZN, and EC have the highest total number of grants distributed.
- This can be attributed to larger populations and higher poverty rates in these provinces.
- The War Veteran's Grant is the least distributed, reflecting the aging and diminishing population of eligible recipients.
- The findings align with existing literature that emphasizes the significant impact of the Child Support Grant on reducing child poverty and improving household stability. Studies such as those by Case et al. (2005) highlight the extensive reach and positive outcomes of CSG.
- The substantial distribution of the Old Age Grant in regions with higher elderly populations aligns with literature indicating the grant's importance in alleviating poverty among older adults (Barrientos, 2003).
- The regional variability in the distribution of Disability Grants and other specific grants supports the understanding that these grants address diverse and localized needs.
- While the findings align broadly with existing literature, the decline in the Foster Care Grant recipients contrasts with expectations of stable or

increasing support for foster care. This deviation suggests potential administrative or policy challenges that may require further investigation.

- The limited distribution of the War Veteran's Grant is consistent with the aging population of war veterans but indicates a need for ongoing reassessment of support structures for this group.

The findings from this analysis largely align with existing literature, reinforcing the critical role of social grants in supporting vulnerable populations in South Africa. However, certain deviations, such as the decline in Foster Care Grant recipients, highlight areas needing further exploration and potential policy adjustments. Overall, the targeted nature of social grants and their regional distributions reflect an effective approach to addressing diverse socio-economic conditions across the country.

DISCUSSION

The analysis of social grant distribution and its associated expenditures in South Africa reveals significant insights into the socio-economic landscape. While social grants provide immediate financial relief, they often fall short of addressing the root causes of poverty and promoting long-term economic independence. This study explores how the Igbo Apprenticeship Model (IAM) can bridge this gap by focusing on sustainable skill development and economic self-sufficiency. The IAM emphasizes skill acquisition and entrepreneurship, offering a more holistic and sustainable solution compared to social grants. By training young people in various trades and business management within real-world business environments, IAM equips individuals with practical skills and knowledge, making them employable and capable of starting their own businesses. This hands-on training fosters entrepreneurship, creates job opportunities, and stimulates local economic growth, significantly reducing poverty levels. Recent research highlights the effectiveness of vocational training programs in enhancing employability and reducing poverty (McGrath & Powell, 2016; UNESCO, 2021). IAM's community-based support and networking further enhance its effectiveness. Apprentices receive mentorship from experienced business owners, providing guidance, resources, and access to a network of contacts that can help them succeed. This mentorship and support system are crucial for personal and professional development, ensuring that the skills and businesses developed remain embedded within the community. This leads to local economic development and resilience. The role of mentorship and community support in fostering successful entrepreneurship is well-documented, indicating that such relationships can significantly impact business success and sustainability (St-Jean & Audet, 2012; Du Toit & Gaotlhobogwe, 2018).

Moreover, IAM addresses the issue of dependency, a common criticism of social grants. While social grants can create a cycle of dependency on government assistance, IAM empowers individuals to become self-reliant. By providing skills and fostering entrepreneurship, IAM enables individuals to generate their own income and build wealth, reducing their reliance on social grants. This shift from dependency to self-sufficiency is vital for long-term poverty alleviation and economic stability. Studies on microfinance and entrepreneurship support this notion, showing that skill development and entrepreneurial activities can lead to increased economic self-sufficiency (Karlan & Valdivia, 2011; Bateman, 2019). IAM also contributes to the formation of economic clusters, as proposed in cluster theory. By training individuals in specific trades and fostering entrepreneurship, IAM can lead to the development of interconnected businesses and services within a region. These clusters enhance productivity and innovation, creating a thriving local economy. For example, a region with a focus on agriculture could see the development of a cluster of farming-related businesses, including suppliers, processors, and retailers, all supporting each other and driving economic growth. The concept of economic clusters has been extensively studied, with evidence showing that such clusters can drive regional economic development and innovation (Porter, 1998; Delgado, Porter, & Stern, 2014).

Aligning with the Capability Approach by Amartya Sen and the Wellbeing Approach by Martha Nussbaum, IAM enhances individuals' skills and capabilities, empowering them to lead lives they value and improving their overall wellbeing. The model focuses not only on economic outcomes but also on enhancing individuals' ability to achieve their personal and professional goals, contributing to a holistic approach to development. The Capability Approach emphasizes the importance of expanding individuals' freedoms and capabilities, which is central to IAM's objectives (Sen, 1999; Nussbaum, 2000; Robeyns, 2017). The practical implications of IAM in South Africa are significant. Implementing IAM can help transform peripheral regions into self-sustaining economic hubs. For example, in regions like the Eastern Cape and Limpopo, which suffer from high unemployment and poverty rates but have significant agricultural potential, IAM can provide the skills needed to harness this potential. Training programs in modern farming techniques and agro-processing can create local employment opportunities and foster regional economic development. This aligns with findings that highlight the transformative potential of vocational training in rural areas (Adams, 2008; Powell & McGrath, 2019).

In urban areas like Gauteng, IAM can focus on trades and industries with high growth potential, such as technology and manufacturing. By equipping young people with the necessary skills and fostering entrepreneurship, IAM can help reduce urban unemployment and drive economic innovation. Urban studies

literature supports this approach, indicating that targeted vocational training and skill development can significantly impact urban economic growth and employment rates (Glaeser & Mare, 2001; Florida, 2017).

To maximize the impact of IAM, it is essential to integrate it with existing social grant programs. For instance, social grants can be used to provide initial support for individuals while they undergo training and establish their businesses. This phased approach ensures that individuals have a safety net while transitioning to economic self-sufficiency. Integrating IAM with social grants can create a more comprehensive and effective poverty alleviation strategy, combining immediate financial relief with long-term economic empowerment (Barrientos, 2003; Devereux, 2016). Overall, the Igbo Apprenticeship Model offers a robust framework for addressing the limitations of social grants in alleviating poverty. By focusing on skill acquisition, entrepreneurship, and community-based support, IAM promotes long-term economic independence and local economic development. Its alignment with the Capability and Wellbeing Approaches ensures a holistic approach to poverty alleviation, enhancing individuals' abilities to lead fulfilling lives. Implementing IAM in South Africa can transform peripheral regions, reduce dependency, and foster a resilient and self-sufficient population.

CONCLUSION

THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Location Theory

Location theory, which traditionally focuses on the spatial distribution of economic activities, is enriched by incorporating the role of social policies and government interventions. The significant allocation of social grants in regions like KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) and the Eastern Cape (EC) demonstrates how targeted financial support can mitigate regional inequalities and enhance economic stability in less developed areas (Fujita, Krugman, & Venables, 1999). This understanding proposes a solution where social grants can be strategically used to target underdeveloped areas, thereby balancing regional development and reducing spatial inequalities.

Core-Periphery Theory

Core-periphery theory differentiates between economically advanced (core) and underdeveloped (periphery) regions. The substantial distribution of grants in peripheral regions underscores the importance of financial transfers in fostering development and reducing socio-economic disparities. This theory is expanded by illustrating that the flow of resources includes not only

economic capital but also social welfare programs, which play a crucial role in uplifting peripheral regions and integrating them more effectively into the national economy (Rodríguez-Pose & Crescenzi, 2008). This suggests a solution that involves continued and enhanced financial support to peripheral regions, coupled with policies that promote their integration into the broader economy, thereby reducing dependency and fostering sustainable development.

Cluster Theory

Cluster theory, typically focused on the concentration of industries and services to boost economic productivity, is extended through the lens of social services. The formation of clusters around social services, driven by the distribution of social grants, enhances the efficiency and effectiveness of these programs. In regions with high poverty rates, such as KZN, clusters of community-based organizations and services centered around grants like the Child Support Grant (CSG) amplify the grants' impact. This approach broadens cluster theory by recognizing social capital and welfare as essential components of regional development strategies, thus extending the theory's applicability (Porter, 1998). This proposes a solution where fostering clusters of social services can enhance the impact of social grants, promoting local economic development and reducing poverty.

Capability and Wellbeing Approaches

The Capability Approach, which emphasizes expanding individuals' abilities to lead lives they value, is vividly illustrated through the substantial expenditures on Child Support Grants and Old Age Grants. These grants significantly enhance individual capabilities and wellbeing by providing financial resources that enable access to education, healthcare, and a better standard of living. This empirical application underscores the theory's relevance in practical policy-making (Sen, 1999). Similarly, the Wellbeing Approach, often associated with Martha Nussbaum, is expanded by the observation that social grants substantially improve the quality of life. The introduction of the R350 SRD Grant during the COVID-19 pandemic exemplifies how responsive social policies can protect and enhance wellbeing in times of crisis (Nussbaum, 2000). These approaches propose solutions that involve not only financial aid but also policies aimed at enhancing individual capabilities and overall wellbeing, leading to sustainable poverty alleviation.

Empirical Analysis and Regional Disparities

The findings from the graphical analysis reflect significant regional disparities. The widespread distribution of the CSG, particularly in KZN, highlights the critical role of this grant in addressing child poverty. The substantial presence of the Old Age Grant in EC and KZN aligns with

demographic data showing a higher proportion of elderly residents in these areas, emphasizing the grant's role in providing financial security. The variability in the distribution of the Disability Grant, Foster Care Grant, and Care Dependency Grant across regions indicates a tailored approach to address specific local needs. Major regions like Gauteng (GP), KZN, and EC, which have the highest total number of grants distributed, align with their larger populations and higher poverty rates. Conversely, the War Veteran's Grant remains the least distributed, reflecting the aging and diminishing population of eligible recipients. This distribution underscores the targeted nature of South Africa's social grants, addressing diverse regional socio-economic conditions effectively.

CONCLUSION

The integration of location theory, core-periphery theory, cluster theory, and the Capability and Wellbeing Approaches with the empirical analysis of social grant distribution and expenditure in South Africa not only provides valuable insights into regional socio-economic dynamics but also enriches these theoretical frameworks. By incorporating social welfare policies within traditional economic models, the analysis offers a more comprehensive understanding of regional development dynamics. This holistic approach underscores the importance of interdisciplinary perspectives in development economics, highlighting the need for integrating social policies to foster inclusive and sustainable development. Overall, the theories provide a robust framework for understanding the complexities of social grant distribution and its impact on poverty. They suggest that while financial aid is crucial, it must be complemented with targeted interventions aimed at skill development, economic integration, and enhancing individual capabilities to achieve sustainable poverty alleviation. In conclusion, wilderness of mirror symbolizes the complex web of social, economic, and political factors that contribute to the perpetuation of poverty. In this metaphorical landscape, the true nature of poverty, is challenging and its underlying causes much complex amidst the social structures, government policies, and individual circumstances. Certain things perpetuate and repeat poverty, and this financial conditioning or grants or handout could hardly resolve, hence the reason that despite the increase in the amount payable by government and the expansion of the social grant net, poverty festers. The research demonstrates that the location, network, financial instability and historic conditionalities influence poverty rotation from generation to generation. Thus, for social grant systems to transcend a handout, it must be able to stimulate growth, and empower the highly vulnerable people in the society. Hence, the proposition of the I-AM South African initiative. The initiative involves mentoring, training, and apprenticeship, it is different from other

training and apprenticeship programs. The program intends that once the apprenticeship period is terminated within 2-5 years, the mentor would set up an establishment for the mentee.

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