A Conceptual Framework for Local Community Development

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What will I talk about?

- An approach to local / community development based on years of work as an engaged practitioner that has one foot in academia and the other in the 'real world'

- Work with different types, levels of communities to introduce a developmental mindset and process

- Not obvious that communities and community leaders will commit to a developmental approach and process. Success not guaranteed. Good stories and disappointments

- Structure my presentation around Five Messages that I weave into my engagements with communities; this holds together and provides a coherent logic that is understandable at a community level and speaks to some of the generic challenges and constraints in the way of development

Introduction

- **Systems approach to local development**
- **The approach that used in many projects. Some examples:**
  - **Poverty Alleviation in townships, rural towns and villages**
  - **Local Economic Development and Industrial Development in NMBM and elsewhere**
  - **Finding developmental solutions to local projects in crisis (Red Location Museum)**
  - **Many projects at township level in NMB and elsewhere**
  - **Deep Rural and semi-rural communities: Mthabazo, Qamata, currently Sundays River Valley**
  - **Community Development in areas of two Wind Farms**
  - **Developmental Approach to Access Project**

So, what do I mean with a systems approach …

- My work is an adaptation of Margaret Archer's 'morphogenetic' approach
- The term morphogenesis, comes from Greek, literally means a change in form or shape.
- Although its original usage in biology, found to describe social change by social systems theorists, who at that time thought biological models might also be appropriate to society.
- Margaret Archer (1982, 1995, 2007), however, new usefulness in social theory by using morphogenesis; response to the structure and agency problem; distinct from more prominent structuration theory Anthony Giddens (1979, 1981, 1984).
- My adaptation is for pragmatic purposes to be used in certain types of social contexts.
- A systems approach; not Parson's brand; over-emphasized order, consensus, could not explain conflict and contradictions, change as a linear unfolding of from pre-modernto modern (Western) society
- My approach: takes tension and conflict seriously, don't see a linear process of change, and don't have certainty about 'ultimate outcomes', no deliberate cultural bias etc.. Yet it provides a workable framework ……

A simple concept of society or community as a system

- Focus on people in a geographic /spatial context (always important to demarcate)
- Emphasis on:
  - Sub-systems – institutions: family, education, economy, polity etc.
  - Sub-communities: geographic, socio-cultural and demographic, etc.
  - Relationships: conflict, competitive, collaborative, partnerships etc
  - Structure and Agency > Context and Action taken by People

Why is this concept of systems useful?

- Explain and facilitate development to ordinary people

- Inter-relationship and interdependence in a social system inevitably relevant in country battled still battles with segregation, separation, exclusion and marginalization

- Explore causes: Where does this politics of patronage come from? What is the relationship between ongoing deprivation and poverty and what happens in families, the school and the economy? etc.. Systemic relational explanations for these

- Why inclusivity is so important for everyone. Self and common interests entangled. Sundays River and Access Project examples
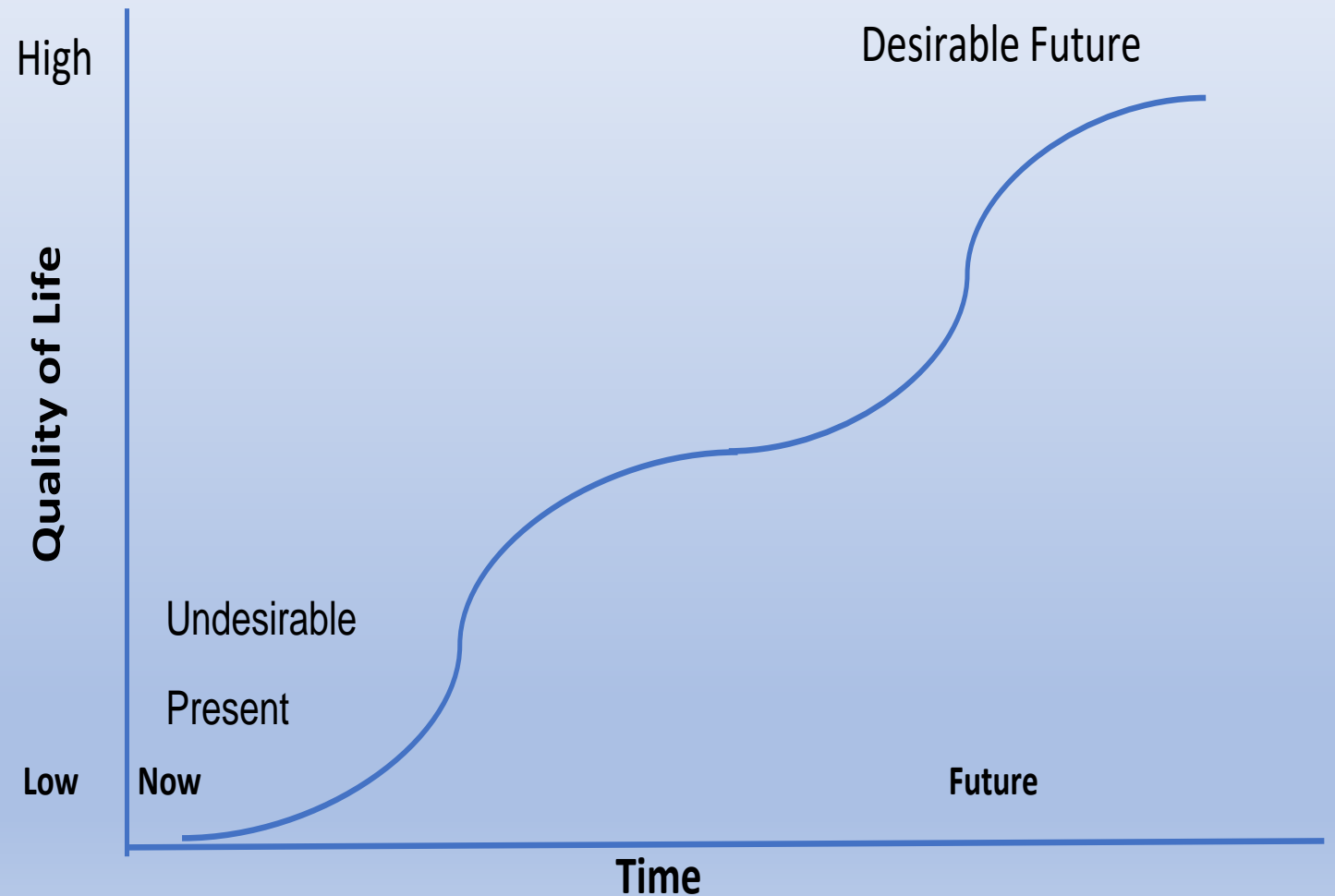
Systems approach and developmental approach go hand-in-hand. Goal of development is to optimize the system and the potential of all the people that inhabit the system.

Thus, a systemic approach to development and …

- **A few messages about 'development'** that I weave into the work with which I seek to convey.

- I use a set of **simple graphs** that are elaborations of one another to explain what I mean.

- Work with people in poor, sometimes deep rural, semi-literate communities.

- **So, five messages and a few graphs that holds together my work as a conceptual framework….**

Message One: Development is a directional but uneven process in Time

Graphic 1: Development as an uneven Process in Time from the Undesirable to the Desirable

Quality of Life

High

Desirable Future

Undesirable

Present

Low   Now

Future

Time

Change from an undesirable situation in a community to desirable community conditions

- A **progression from low quality of life to high quality of life**
- Make this concrete – profiling of communities; find a **list of things that are <u>undesirable</u> -** high school drop-out rates, low skills, low employability, high unemployment, low income, high dependency on state grants etc.
- Towards a **<u>desired future:</u>** more young people complete high school, acquire employable skills, get jobs, earn a decent wage and are less dependent on the state.
- Can use **quality of life indicators** to measure the difference between an under-developed and developed system.
- **Access Project** - working on a set of indicators to show what limited access looks like vs optimal access looks like.

You may say that it is obvious that development is a <u>process in time</u>, but it is not.

Post-Modernist inclined to the idea that development concept and practice of development - reflection of Western-Northern hegemony, creation of academia in tandem with an underlying political and economic ideology, not dismiss as irrelevant, but too vague and unsubstantiated to be helpful; no workable alternative

Truly revolutionary approach would object to an approach to development as a process in time. Revolution rhetoric common in South African development /politics; actual revolution is something else (more about that later)

Evolutionary approach to development also very different view on time compared to a managed / facilitated development process. Evolution, *laissez faire* process, does not require development practitioners and planners and happens or unfolds by itself (or the magic of the market) over successive generations. Unbearably slow.

Whereas **the process that we are talking about is a planned, managed / facilitated process that takes time but also takes into account that there is a sense of urgency in most instances; that realities out there does not provide people with an inclination to be patient … however, if development is going to happen they will have to be patient!**

Important, **communities have heard many promises and many disappointments. Impatient.** What do you do with that? Difficult … yet, my experience - **if one could assist communities to work out their vision of a desired future and that they can see a path with time-frames and targets from the present to a better future they may become more patient.**

But this is also why one should not waste time where it can be avoided …

Message Two: Development usually occurs along an uneven path

- Next, a a few words but an important point.

- Everyone must be prepared that there will be **ups and downs and the process will go fast and slow**.

- …… don't conclude that the process has broken down when that happens… it is normal

- The 'normalization of process is a common mediation strategy in conflict resolution.

- Hang in there … don't panic … don't give up and be prepared for some bumps and 'knocks', skirmishes …. Get thick skinned!
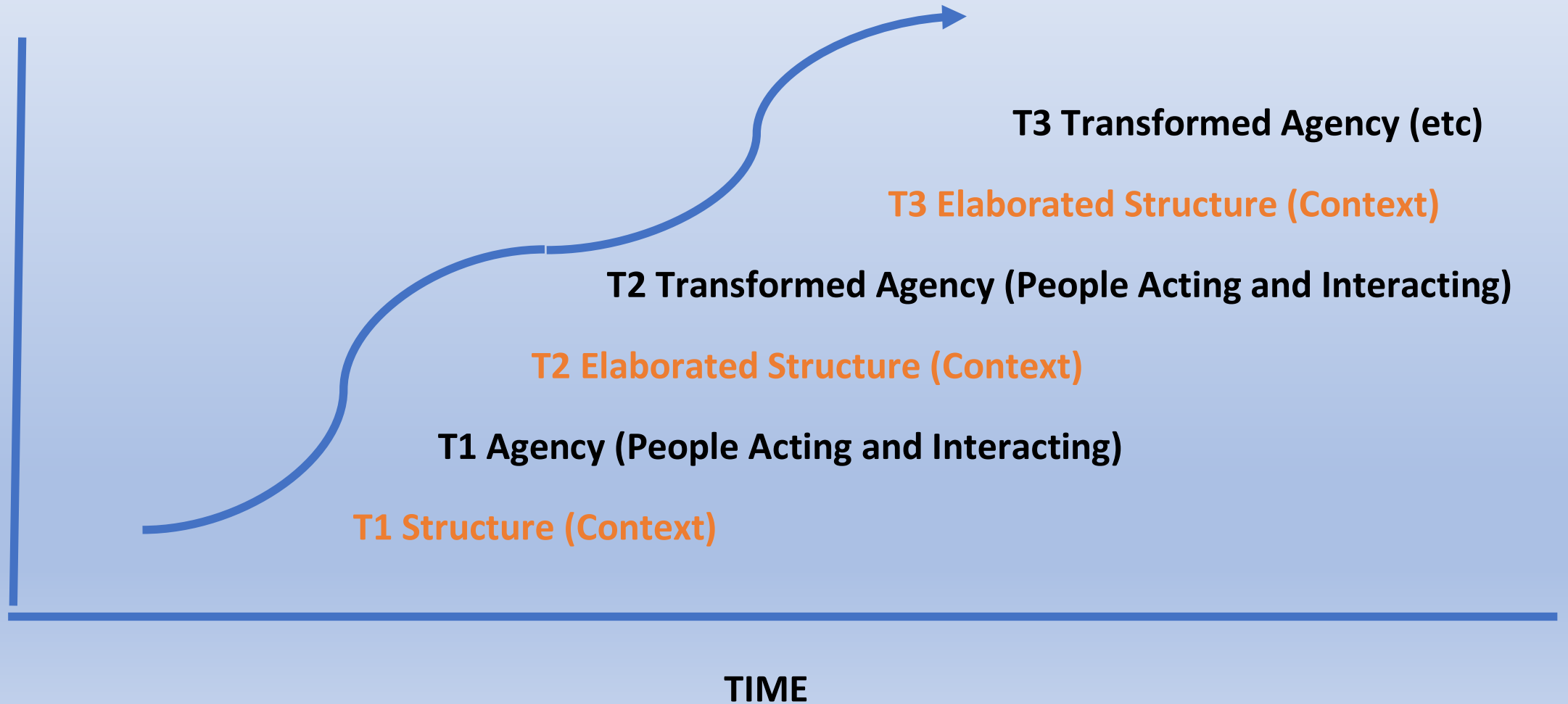
Message Three: Understand the relationship between Context and People's Actions

- Tricky part of talking about development to explain how it happens. Mechanism? **The theory of change?**
- Important to understand, also strategic. If people understand this everything else becomes somewhat easier.
- Some theory is required here – simplified though
- **Macro and Micro** theories in disciplines like Sociology
- **Macro** theories explain change as emanating from the structure of society
- **Micro** theories explain change as emanating from the ideas, actions and interactions of people.
- **Structure vs Agency debate**.
- **Simpl**y stated:
  - **Structure** way in which society is patterned according distribution of power, wealth, opportunities etc.
  - **Agency** - people and groups that act in pursuit of their ideas and interests.
- Debate that raged in the social sciences in the 1990s.
- To have to choose between either structure or agency (or context and people's action) intuitively, problematic and unsatisfactory.

So, not surprisingly, there are a few outstanding efforts to resolve this problem.

- The **structuration theory was proposed by sociologist Anthony Giddens** - a social theory of the creation and reproduction of social systems that is based on the **"duality of structure"** and an the analysis of both structure and agency, without giving primacy to either
- **Margaret Archer** objected to the inseparability of structure and agency in structuration theory.
- She proposed a notion of **analytical dualism** and maintains that **structure precedes agency** in **analytical importance, and that they should be analysed separately**
- Simply-stated, **to understand the causal relationships between structure and agency you have to separate them in time**
- Once again, to make this easier to explain, I simply talk about **Context and People or Action**

The Interplay Between Structure (Context) and Agency (Interaction of People) in /over Time

T3 Transformed Agency (etc)

T3 Elaborated Structure (Context)

T2 Transformed Agency (People Acting and Interacting)

T2 Elaborated Structure (Context)

T1 Agency (People Acting and Interacting)

T1 Structure (Context)

TIME

Explain …. At any particular moment …

- Time One (T1) the **existing structure of society** (the hierarchies and distribution of power, wealth, opportunity and access to means / facilities and amenities in a society)

- …. <u>constrain and enable</u> **agents** and **actors**, ….

- … and simultaneously, the characteristics of agents and actors at a given point enable or constrain action /agency (skills, resources, leadership, organized, mindset, cohesion)

- The complex relationship between the prevailing structural conditions and the **actions of agents and actors produce intended and unintended consequences**, which leads to **structural *elaboration*** (change or transformation) and the **reproduction** or **transformation** (morphogenesis) of the initial structure. Time Two (T2)

- The resulting structural conditions then provides a new context for action for future actors and agents. (T2)

The value of thinking like this?

- Makes it possible to analyse context and people separately; then to work out how they relate; what is possible; what not in particular moment in time. This has practical strategic value

- Possible to work out why some groups dominate, and others have to play second fiddle at a given point in time. What enables and what constrains who and why? What do some have what the others don't have. If you can work that out you can strategize what need to change to facilitate / enable change

- For instance: if one group has power and other groups are relatively powerless it may be that the sub-ordinate groups lack a vision of the future, don't have a plan, are not organized, don't have effective leadership, limited resources. Under such conditions it is futile to launch an ambitious campaign to further their interests

- It may be more strategic to start with a leadership development programme, spend time on developing a coherent future vision and a plan of action.
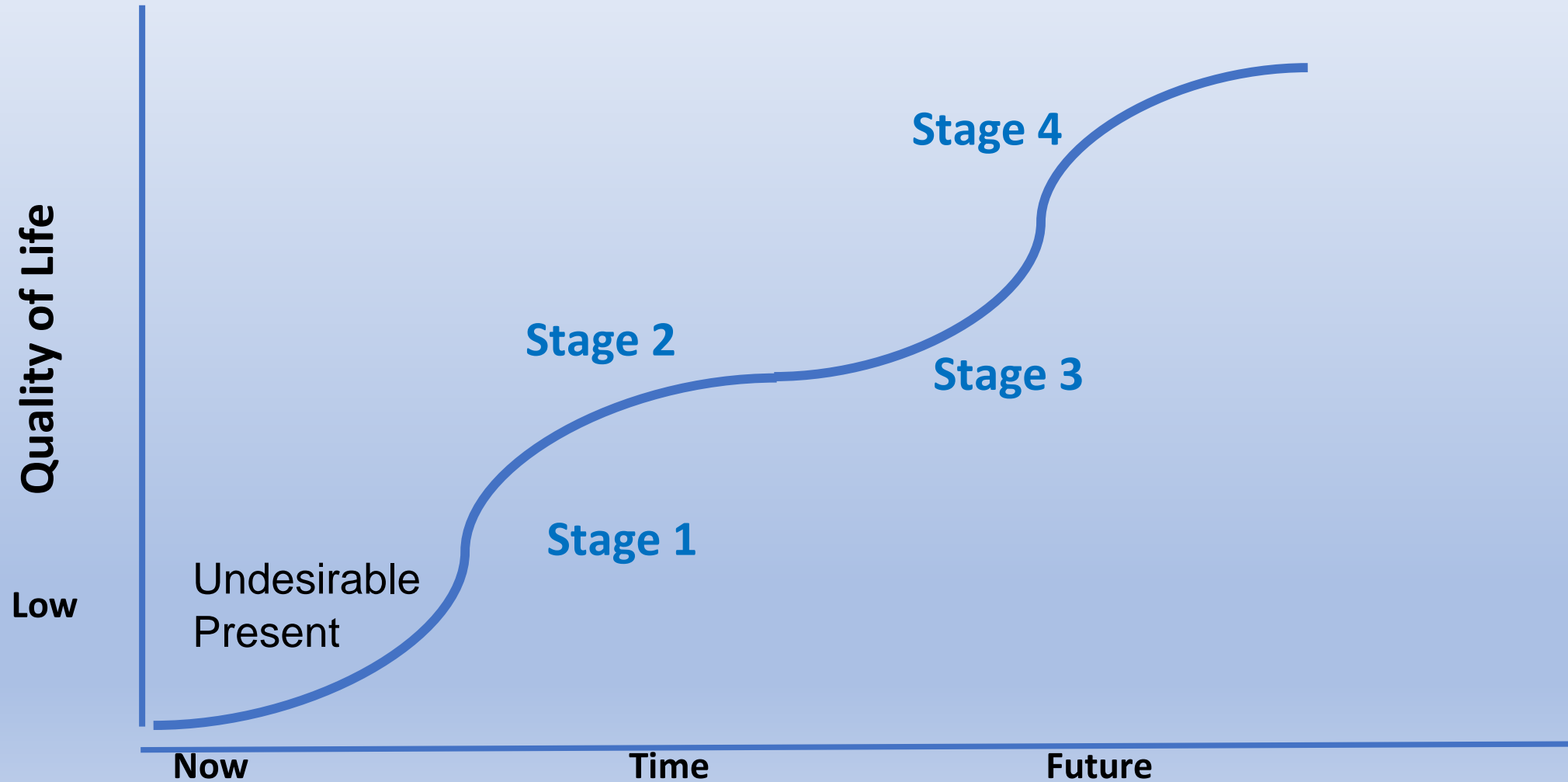
- More examples later ….

Message Four: Development is an incremental, cumulative, staged process

- It is vital that communities understand that **development** can best be understood as an incremental, cumulative, *staged* processes in time; this is inherent in the meaning of the word

- In a real social context, that does **not mean an orderly sequence of stages and events** but rather that development, to the extent that it is a **progressive (going forward) process, entails things like starting points or beginnings**

- Logic: for **certain actions and outcomes to materialize it requires that other actions and outcomes to have occurred or completed to a required level in an earlier in time.**

Simultaneous but different priorities

- This is an important point
- While there is a sequential logic in development it does not mean that everything happens in such a way that only one thing can happen at a time
- Many things happen at the same time but developmentally some things are more important at a particular point in time
- That means, strategically, one need to prioritize while keeping the other processes in motion

Graphic 3: Development is a Sequential and Staged Process

So, next stages of transformation may not be reachable or sustainable if prior stages were not sufficiently completed

- **Important strategic consideration for any serious agent of social or socio-economic change**. To foresee and plan his/her actions with aim of making sure *stack up* in a cumulative way. There is a starting point that involves initial obstacles; if these not conquered, necessary gains made from the effort, next stage of change will be difficult if not impossible

- **For the community it is vital to understand that *first things come first,* and the *basics* are important before you can attend to next level issues.**

- Talking about a developmental mindset. Community that is trapped in a negative (restricted) collective mindset due to generations of deprivation and exploitation may find it difficult to understand why they have to make short-term sacrifices in order to achieve longer-term gains. They may find it difficult to envision the possibility of a desired / better future and even less the step-by-step path that must be walked to get from where they are.

Some examples…. Promoting sustainable economic development and growth will not succeed if…

- People of the local community have not acquired certain skills levels required for effective action in an economy

- If politicians keep on fighting with one another and the decisions are not taken to implement policies, strategic plans, enabling infrastructure, spatial arrangements, organisational capacity is not developed the most well-thought economic development plans will fail

Another type of example: Our President recently announced a commitment to invest in the Fourth Industrial Revolution

- Provide tablets, other digital infrastructure, introducing coding, robotics and digital learning into the education system across the board
- Before certain basic conditions are in place this is an example of getting development wrong.
- Same content that previously used to be in book or paper format, not investing time and money in an appropriate approach to content and delivery, as well as proper educator and support staff training, will render such initiatives futile and expensive mistakes.
- Few children in our schools have text books and few teachers can effectively teach at the foundation level.
- This innovation will bring about more inequality. Some schools will be ready but most wont.
- A suburban school like Grey High School offers a course in Information Technology - it is assumed that if you do not get at least 70% in Mathematics and English you are discouraged from taking the course.
- Recent research shows that our learners at the end of the foundation stage of education (7 or 8 yrs.) in most of our schools are struggling with the very basics of literacy and numeracy.
- Where do you begin if you want to bring about systemic transformation? ….. certainly not by spending millions on tablets!

In the case of the **Access Project...**

- The argument will be that certain types of access come first

- What forms of access enables others?

- Perhaps it is the notional aspect; if mindsets of dependency on the state could be changed to what Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) talk about then some forms of access results from communities taking action instead of waiting for external agencies to solve problems. The latter is preferred! That is the logic of empowerment

Message Five: Beware of the misleading simplification of prevailing ideologies
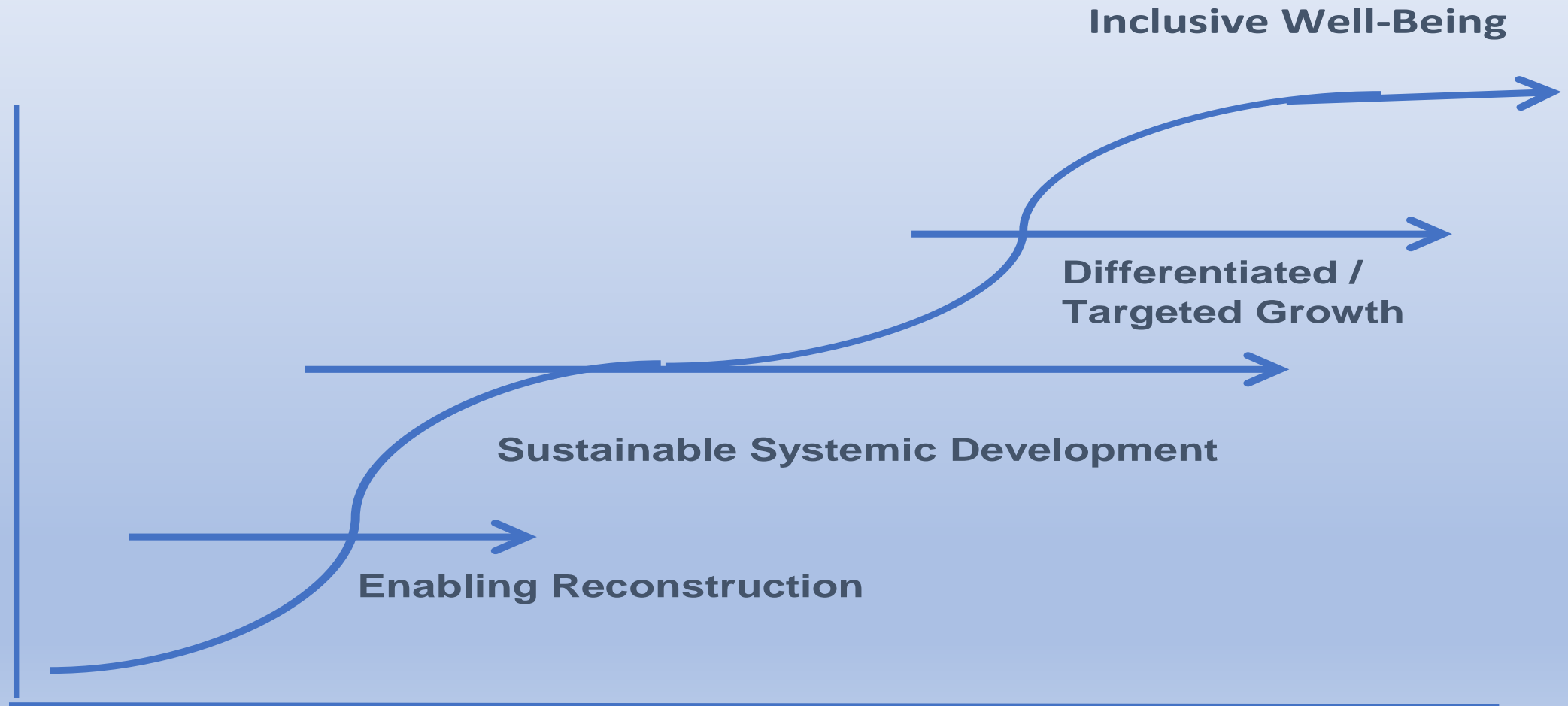
- Applied as a strategy in many ways in real community development contexts in the Eastern Cape of South Africa.

- The theory in developmental language; used every day.

- Origins in ideologies. This makes life difficult for some development practitioners.

- South Africa is conditioned / structured in a particular socio-political discourse.

- Options as a choice between two ideologically-justified development options – the state vs the market / socialism vs capitalism etc

- Usefulness of morphogenetic approach; overcoming the rigidity of these binary options

- Pre-determined solutions, desirable futures and outcomes that are based on an assumption about a reality

- Problem ideologies are "ideal types"; don't actually exist in empirical reality. If development that simple, much more success.

- Instead the history of socio-economic development or transformation in most developing countries reveals endless failures of ideologically-loaded remedies and recipes imposed by politicians and ideologues.

Reality is much more complex and messier

- Challenging … but important to engage with community members and to get the message across that the process that we embark on is not as neat as some political leaders and ideologues is making it to be. There is no inevitable future. There is no smooth path towards the future. One need to consistently work against the simplifying tendencies of politics and ideologies and the unrealistic expectations that it creates.

- So, I challenge people to think about these words and their meaning and instead of abandoning them rather seek to use them in a way that makes more sense. Always remain careful about how I use these terms and it is good to spend time on explaining them.

Graph 5: Reconstruction, Development, Growth and Well- Being

Let's look at some of these terms:

- In general, I use the word **transformation** and I avoid the term revolution.

- The term revolution is consistently being used and abused in South Africa.

- Necessary to understand that **revolutionary change** ("a turnaround") is fundamental change in political power or organizational structures that takes place in a relatively brief period when a population rises in revolt against the current authorities and **overthrows** the current dispensation usually in a **destructive** manner (breaking down in order to build the new system).

- Although Marxist revolutionary rhetoric is often used, the change processes that in South Africa since 1994 is not revolutionary and should rather be described as a **transformation process**

Transformation …

- … is a term that refers to a marked change in form, nature, or appearance.
- Synonyms are: alteration, modification, conversion, revision, amendment, reshaping, many more, etc. … applicable in our context.
- The point is that these terms, rather than revolution, describes what is happening in South Africa.
- And that one must be **careful to speak about a revolution** because of its creates the expectations of revolutionary outcomes that **cannot be delivered by most of those people who use this language**

Rather use a word like reconstruction ..

- … together with transformation; more useful to describe developmental change; refers to a deliberate but gradual building-up process

- Thus, in tandem with the terms development and transformation the term *reconstruction* is describes process of change that transforms without demolishing important systems and institutions like an economy, education, judicial systems

- The term **enabling reconstruction** makes particular sense because it refers to those initial actions that must be taken in a context to modify or remove obstacles in the way of *sustainable systemic development.*

Enabling reconstruction

- Actions that are *preconditions for sustainable change*

- For instance, people's attitudes and mind-sets towards change, obstructive policies and laws and physical or spatial obstructions may stand in the way of proceeding with development

- A morphogenetic strategy for development would require rigorous contextual or situational analysis to identify such obstacles and constraints as the first / early stages of a development process.

- In the context of a specific society or community having achieved reasonable success in terms of *enabling reconstruction,* theoretically, opens the way for actions and processes that can be described as **sustainable development ….**

Sustainable systemic development is the hard work that we want and should be focussing our time and efforts

- This is the long and more challenging process of:

  - Building people and community capacity to be self-reliant, re-building / modifying systems, institutions and networks in such a way that it they become means for advancing justice, equity, inclusivity, sustainability etc.

  - This is the real transformation of society or community. Where the initial phase could be relatively quick this phase is going to take longer because it is literally about modifying systems and institutions and conditioning them to function in a new way towards new outcomes

  - To follow through with the logic ... having invested enough time and effort and having made sufficient progress in terms of the **initial enabling reconstruction** and **long-term sustainable systemic development** the next stage is for some form of growth

However, it is evidently not growth as we use to know it

- Arguably, developing societies **do not need growth** that contributes to the **inequality** that characterizes many societies and communities.
- Rather, it is **some form of differentiated or targeted growth that compensates or corrects the structural distortions that have accumulated through past interaction.**
- So, the developmental logic would be that … if the prior developmental programmes and processes generated the desired outcomes, growth could under such optimal conditions potentially occur (*emerge*) where it is socially desirable and not where the system is already 'over-developed'… in theory

Finally, <u>growth</u> as the end-goal or desirable future of a societal development process contradicts contemporary views of sustainable development

- Although idea of *limits of growth* could be seen as irrelevant from the perspective of transformation of typical communities in need of development it is necessary to see and acknowledge there **no developmental argument to support the idea of endless growth particularly if it means the endless enrichment of old and new elites in newly transformed societies**.

- **Even differentiated growth** cannot be sustained forever and at some point, it must taper down; in the context of a society or community that has experiences prolonged deprivation it is assumed, at least in theory, that successful transformation will eventually reach a point when enough was achieved to create the conditions for ***inclusive and sustainable well-being***.

- ***Well-being*** refers to a state of reasonable or optimal quality of life – not only in material or monetary terms but in terms of a spectrum of indicators that are informed by a holistic understanding of human existence and the reality of finite resources.

- **Thus, the long-term goal of development is inclusive and broad-based well-being and not endless growth**

Simultaneous but prioritized ..

- It was mentioned earlier that processes like the ones referred to here happen at the same time but that some processes are more important that others at a given point in the development trajectory
- This, means that the pursuit of inclusive well-being and differentiated growth could happen while sustainable systemic development and enabling reconstruction is taking place
- It is imperative that the 'champions' of development understand where and what they should prioritize without shutting off space for other processes to take place
- This requires a thorough understanding of the context and the capacity of actors and agencies in the context

In Conclusion …

- Not a perfect approach but rigorous enough to work … keep improving

- If people are willing engage with a few abstract ideas / "theory" they will realize that it is useful

- Don't think we can afford the luxury of academics for its own sake

- Started the debate about the Engaged University in South Africa in the 1990s, my new (incoming) Vice-Chancellor at the time liked it so much that he used this as the theme for his inaugural lecture

- However, he did not follow through in making it a reality. That is why I left the university to do outside the university that which my university talk about but don't do

- So,
    - I will keep on challenging universities to become more engaged

    - but I also challenge my friends and colleagues who are in local government and in the practice of planning and development to make a bigger effort to be theoretically rigorous

    - And finally we all have to challenge our political friends and comrades to be more careful with the rhetoric that they use to mobilize people

I thank you for your time!