



**Africa College Foundation (MII UK) Submission  
to the UN Human Rights Council**

**on**

**"Eradicating poverty in a post-growth context:  
preparing for the next Development Goals"**

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Submitted by

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*"Higher education is a cultural and economic asset that fosters personal growth and societal progress. For vulnerable students, it offers economic security and a stable future."*

UNESCO



## I. Background

Africa College Foundation (MII UK) is a UK-registered non-profit, non-governmental organisation that represents South Africa-based Maharishi Invincibility Institute (MII), a world-leading institution providing universal access to free education for the most marginalised youth in Africa and beyond.

ACF advocates that education has the power to transform our individual lives and safeguard our collective future against growth dependencies. It does so by enabling every youth without the means to access the human right to education, in order to guide individual growth and socioeconomic mobilisation of the next generation. Given the fact that Africa is home to the largest population of youth on the planet<sup>1</sup>, ACF purports that this process of growth and mobilisation in Africa directly impacts global prosperity through development goals.

This comes after three decades of unprecedented success in socioeconomic mobilisation of grassroots populations of students in both rural and urban communities in both Southern and South Africa. This has been achieved through redefining economic growth in two ways: one, coupling economic growth with social development, and two, ensuring sustainability through a process that is not only related to our environment, but one that is based in human consciousness. As a result, our graduates achieve remarkable financial success, earning between 90% and 400% of their education cost in their first year of employment. Over the span of their careers, they are projected to earn 80 to 600 times the initial cost of their education. Additionally, an impressive 90% of our graduates transition to middle-class income levels within three years without being locked into growth-oriented economic models that dissuade individuals, institutions and communities from sustainability<sup>2</sup>.

## II. Introduction

This submission is based on our experiences of eradicating poverty by maintaining a steady record of 95% meaningful employment following education of each cohort of our students in a country with one of the highest rates of youth unemployment the world over. It responds to the fourth questions in the call for submissions<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> According to various sources, including the World Economic Forum, Africa is home to the largest population on the planet, leading this segment at 42% of the globe's population by 2030. This means education and eradication of poverty among African youth yields a significant impact on the globe and its sustainable development. Please see: <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2022/09/why-africa-youth-key-development-potential/>

<sup>2</sup> For more details please see our report on 'Economic Mobility' available on our website at: [chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://acfoundation.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/US-2-MII-Economic-Mobility-2.0\\_Spread\\_compressed.pdf](chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://acfoundation.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/US-2-MII-Economic-Mobility-2.0_Spread_compressed.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> The fourth question looks at the way societies conceive of work, relate to the environment, and finance their economies and welfare systems locks them into growth-oriented economic models. What measures should be taken to overcome such growth dependencies in each of these areas? And how can human rights guide efforts to overcome such self-reinforcement?



We begin this process by asking fundamental questions that to a large extent challenge the current narrative around eradication of poverty and development. These include:

1. What is the key to eradication of poverty?
2. What are the characteristics of the institutions necessary to overcome poverty?
3. What human rights-based approaches are necessary to overcome growth dependencies?

We ask these questions as a way to draw attention to the need to pivot our approach to eradication of poverty from what it is today--based on a set of assumptions that have globally increased the gap between material wealth and poverty more than ever before--to one that it needs to be if we are to meet the development goals the international community continues to set.

The world today faces significant social and economic challenges<sup>4</sup>. A cross-sectional response that we have successfully been tackling, is the materialisation of the key factor to eradication of poverty, meaning empowering each youth to access and employ constructive capabilities latent in them. Majority of these youth are highly marginalised and excluded from, yet central to requirements in achieving development goals through meaningful education, employment and entrepreneurship.

Over the past three decades, evidence has shown us that breaking socioeconomic barriers necessary to eradication of poverty lie in recognition of the most robust and valuable asset in our society, our youth. They are the new gold in Africa. Mining the gems that are hidden in their being through Consciousness-Based Education (CBE)<sup>5</sup>, educating them to the best of their capacities, and enabling them to take part in socioeconomic development of their own selves, families and communities is the surest way to eradication of poverty.

### III. Consciousness-Based Approach to Eradication of Poverty

Rooted among the most marginalised populations, we work with everyone from all walks of life who are interested in education, but because of systemic cycles of poverty are unable to access it. In order to break this cycle, we work with each youth to build their capacity in a multiprong manner, whereby transforming their daily habits through diet, transcendental meditation, exercise, work, and meaningful education in order to enable any youth of any background to take agency of eradicating poverty by becoming a protagonist for development. The key to this process is recognising the fact that true development does not begin in policy, it begins in our consciousness, and it is only through such recognition that the inalienable nature of human rights is optimised universally, and eradication of poverty goes from possible to inevitable globally.

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<sup>4</sup> According to the United Nations Statistical Division, around 41 per cent of low-income countries experienced a higher poverty rate in 2021 compared to the previous year. Please see: <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2023/Goal-01/#:~:text=Recovery%20from%20the%20pandemic%20has,cent%20of%20uppermiddle%2Dincome%20countries.>

<sup>5</sup> To learn more about the impact of this educational system on mental health among other benefits, please see: <https://consciousnessbasededucation.org>



Our record demonstrates that educating the consciousness within each youth, ensures that talented individuals without the means to pursue education can now do so, thus contributing to individual growth, socioeconomic mobility and global prosperity.

This is because CBE necessarily means that development is no longer a process where one segment of the population develops the other. In reality, it involves universal participation, meaning individuals of all backgrounds participate in a shared space where they each develop according to their unique challenges and opportunities. In this manner, everyone contributes to development of the whole, thereby eradicating poverty.

#### IV. Education: Highest Return on Investment in Eradication of Poverty

We purport that there is no other sector in Sub-Saharan Africa that has greater potential to shift poverty and inequality, than education<sup>6</sup>. Statistics show that 67% of youth in South Africa between ages of 15 and 24 are unemployed<sup>7</sup>. In addition, there are millions of children growing up in South Africa without a father, or a mother, with a grandparent, or sometimes no adults at all. There are millions of children growing into young people who are trying to launch themselves into a twilight economy. Living every day, often hustling to survive, the pressure can take its toll. Chronic anxiety, fear, trauma, depression and even anger are common conditions impacting tens of millions of younger Africans, a population whose lives yield a significant impact on the development of this planet.

On the other hand, education costs are spiralling faster than inflation globally. Student debt levels are at an all time high. Higher education is becoming increasingly elitist and exclusive. There are rising mental health concerns amongst university entrants, and graduate employment levels are dropping in a number of countries.

Our team are not only committed to, but continue to be focussed on providing universal access to the right to education and meaningful work (SDGs 4 & 8) for our graduates, who are 70% women, and from highly, and often cross sectionally, marginalised backgrounds.

Ultimately, we aim to put billions in lifetime earnings into the hands of marginalised youth, through educational innovation that works in measurable, replicable, reliable, and scalable ways, providing not only world-class academic education, but also 21st-century skills that give young Africans economic relevance. Through our ecosystem, while completing a degree programme, each student has the option to acquire an

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<sup>6</sup> "Returns to investments in higher education in Africa are 21 % per annum." David Bloom, David Canning, and Kevin Chan, Higher Education and Economic Development in Africa, Harvard University Press

<sup>7</sup> South Africa National Human Development Report, p. 31, available online at: [chrome-extension://efaidnbnmnibpcjpcjgclcfindmkaj/https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2023-07/sa-nhdr-2022\\_web\\_0.pdf](chrome-extension://efaidnbnmnibpcjpcjgclcfindmkaj/https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2023-07/sa-nhdr-2022_web_0.pdf)



industry specialisation in one of our Professional Academies to increase chances of employability and income exponentially. Examples are financial market, cybersecurity, global business services, insurance, entrepreneurship, and digital green industries academies.

Our organisation has led a series of consciousness-based system changing initiatives in South Africa. For example, we initiated, founded, and lead the E3<sup>8</sup> programme with the Department of Basic Education. This initiative brings project-based learning to all South African schools, encouraging problem solving skills from an early age, by focusing on three urgent areas towards eradication of poverty:

#### EDUCATION

School-leavers should be equipped with skills to be responsible good citizens, develop a strong character. and become lifelong learners

#### ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Possess the ability to start an enterprise and eventually employ others

#### EMPLOYABILITY

Maintain good critical literacy, well-developed number sense, and the skills to solve problems

Another example is our core mobile phone-based platform linking all schoolteachers, reaching close to 70% of all teachers, and over half of all school principals in the country.

TeacherConnect<sup>9</sup> is a free real time chat-based learning and mentorship platform for teachers, learners & educators. Through this platform, teachers attend enrichment webinars, and 410,000 teachers countrywide receive specialised training in curriculum, psychosocial support provisions and even school maintenance and repair, all critical areas of need in the South African education context. TeacherConnect helps improve education both in terms of access and quality, expediting the steps necessary to alleviate students out of poverty. We deliver this revolutionary approach through:

- a. WhatsApp chat-based, mobile support line available 24/7 to all teachers
- b. AI-powered helpline providing immediate answers and links to information
- c. Curriculum of E3 pedagogy in mobile format
- d. Coaching and peer-based support and guidance
- e. Real-time dashboards

In addition, our experience shows that providing free education often bears costs that deepen levels of poverty in hidden ways. For instance, majority of marginalised students who cannot afford education, are single parents with familial and care responsibilities. Our experiences have shown us that taking advantage

<sup>8</sup> For more information please see: <https://www.e3initiative.org/>

<sup>9</sup> For more information please see: <https://learn.ecubed-dbe.org/>



of free education often means childcare costs and/or having to let go of income to spend time on education. Our ecosystem addresses these deepening factors through innovative ways. Two examples are:

a. Learn & Earn

We work with partner businesses and organisations that enable agency by accompanying students to secure a paid job, either on one of our campuses or externally, in order to not only increase their employability rates through leadership and soft skills, but also to provide them with an income throughout their studies.

b. Pay It Forward

Through the above and other sources of income, each one of our successfully employed graduates contributes towards the education of another student, thus transforming the cycle of poverty into a cycle of development through human rights, with a particular reference to the socioeconomic rights to education and work.

V. Education Town: The Education Capital of Africa

Through the decades our team have continued to help eradicate poverty by revolutionising access to education in South Africa through new and innovative ways. For instance, while establishing a new university campus is estimated at around \$100 million, we have reduced this cost to around \$3.5 million. Furthermore, the average costs of higher education for 40,000 students per year is \$1.6 billion, while we have successfully reduced this cost to \$55 million. This means through our ecosystem we are able to educate 30 instead of 1 student through traditional higher education institutions, while maintaining one of the highest rates of graduate employment across the board. In fact, by 2035, we aim to enable at least 100,000 African students, earning \$65 million over their working careers to support at least 1,000,000 family members void of growth dependencies.

In recognition of our outstanding track record in transforming education, not only as a universal human right, but an imperative in eradication of poverty, in August 2023, we became the first institution to pioneer the most significant educational development this continent has ever experienced. Through a longstanding partnership, one of the largest businesses in Africa, Anglo-American<sup>10</sup>, donated its historic headquarters in the heart of Johannesburg to help establish the first education capital<sup>11</sup> of the African continent. In addition, more than 120 other partners across various sectors have come together as a 'coalition of the willing'<sup>12</sup> to create a university college town, similar to Oxford or Cambridge.

<sup>10</sup> For a detailed report on this historic development please see: <https://www.angloamerican.com/our-stories/communities/anglo-american-donates-45-main-street-building-to-maharishi-invincibility-institute>

<sup>11</sup> For an interview with Dr Taddy Blecher, the co-founder and CEO of MII, about his vision of Africa's first education town, please see: <https://www.biznews.com/good-hope-project/2023/09/29/dr-taddy-blechers-transform-johannesburg>

<sup>12</sup> For full details on this collective effort and the historic significance of the coalition, please see an interview by Adam Cracker in the Daily Maverick at: <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/opinionista/2023-08-16-jozi-my-jozi-poised-as-the-catalyst-for-jburgs-phoenix-moment-of-inner-city-renewal/>



Sites and structures are being transformed to provide education, art, sports and residences in a safe and sustainable manner. We are now positioned to educate generations of Africans, the largest population of youth on the planet, whereby directly contributing to an increase in socioeconomic rights that in turn help eradicate poverty.

## VI. Conclusion & Recommendations

This call for submissions provides a propitious occasion to offer our experiences and practical recommendations that may help illustrate the way toward eradication of poverty by increasing access to the socioeconomic rights to education, employment and entrepreneurship among the most marginalised youth in Africa, with particular reference to our extensive body of work in Southern Africa.

Our experiences point to the fact that individuals, communities and institutions continue to face unprecedented challenges to accessing socioeconomic rights essential to eradication of poverty. Evidence, including our experience, show that universal access to education lays the surest foundation to employment and entrepreneurial activities among the masses in a manner that in turn help eradicate poverty.

It is in this light that we offer the following recommendations for your consideration and possible inclusion in your report:

1. Initiate a democratic process of review and renewal of national policies around access to socioeconomic rights to education and work, starting with the most marginalised segments of the population.
2. Consider the central role of education in eradication of poverty through a comprehensive approach to human rights in employment and entrepreneurial sectors, including the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.
3. Allocate specific resources and opportunities to non-state actors (NSAs) in order to address poverty-related issues through proven approaches to education. These actors may include individual citizens, communities, or private and third sector institutions, who maintain a proven and sustained track record in educational efforts.
4. Ensure effective and impactful accountability mechanisms to guarantee meaningful access to resources and services necessary for students to take advantage of educational opportunities.
5. Encourage and fund United Nations agencies, as well as multilateral mechanisms to provide resources and opportunities for universal access to education, entrepreneurship and employment for the most marginalised populations within their neighbourhoods and communities, in both rural and urban settings.