

Abstract

The focus of the research is on the responses of urban individuals in households and communities to socio-economic crisis in post-apartheid South Africa. In both Enhlalakahle and Mpumalanga Townships, there is a process of diversification of social, political and economic livelihood activities by women and men, young and old. The livelihoods literature together with literature on work and inter-household relations are merged to achieve a holistic understanding of urban livelihoods in South Africa. The study adopts a relational approach to capture the unequal power dynamics shaped by both gender and age, in the process of acquiring and securing livelihoods. The central argument of the study is that women and men, depending on their age, tend to adopt different livelihood activities in responding to their socio-economic crisis in post-apartheid South Africa. Specifically, the study shows that for individuals, households become central sites of production and survival, but only if supported by the state through social grants. At a community level, there are embryonic forms of “counter-movement”, led by an alliance of popular movements in civil society such as the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC), Concerned Citizens Groups and anti-privatisation groups. The thesis explores diverse micro-level livelihood responses of urban households and communities shaped by specific structural and historical macro-level context.