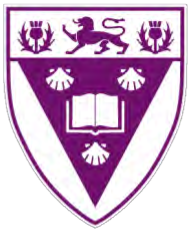

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This thesis is submitted in accordance with the requirements for the
PhD in Higher Education

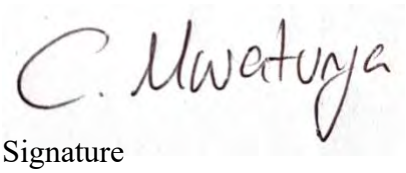
A capabilities analysis: Degree mobility and the impact of returning South African alumni on their home country's sustainable development

Carina Mwatunga, 19S2522
Centre for Higher Education Research, Teaching and Learning

Supervisor: Amanda Hlengwa

DECLARATION

I, Carina Mwatunga, hereby declare that the work in this thesis is my idea. Where ideas from other writers were used, they were acknowledged in full using references according to the Rhodes University Education Guide to References. I further declare that the work in this thesis has not been submitted at any university for degree purposes.



Signature

7th October, 2023

Date

ABSTRACT (ENGLISH)

The significance of sustainable development (SD) has gained increasing attention, particularly since introducing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015. SDG 4 focuses on ensuring inclusive and high-quality education for all individuals, as well as the provision of equitable access to lifelong learning opportunities. In addition, SDG 4 recognises education as a fundamental element of societal progress and SD. Given the role of education in fostering economic growth, social cohesion, and individual empowerment, SDG 4 is a crucial component of global efforts to foster a more prosperous and equitable world.

The primary focus of the study explained in this thesis was to address a specific aspect of Higher Education (HE) within the framework of the SDGs. While SDG 4 covers a wide range of targets, such as expanding scholarship opportunities for individuals from the Global South to study abroad, there remains a lack of comprehensive understanding of how pursuing a degree in a foreign country can influence graduates' potential contributions to sustainable development (SD) upon returning to their home countries. Moreover, despite researchers highlighting the need for attention to this topic, it has not received adequate focus thus far. Therefore, drawing upon the framework of the capability approach (CA) to sustainable development, the study explored whether returning graduates could contribute to SD in South Africa.

To integrate the concepts of SD and CA, the study developed a framework for a responsible agent (RA), which was facilitated through previous studies. This framework provides a set of capabilities that are essential for supporting SD in South Africa. Based on this framework, the study comprehensively explored the experiences of postgraduate students and their potential to contribute to SD in South Africa.

The study drew on survey data, semi structured interview, and document analysis to gain insights into how the structures of six selected scholarships aligned with SD objectives. However, upon analysing the eligibility criteria of these scholarships, it became evident that they already take into account certain capabilities associated with the RA in candidates. Furthermore, the analysis revealed that these scholarships tend to favour candidates who exhibit the potential to succeed in their professional endeavours. Therefore, this selection bias may exacerbate the existing inequalities within the South African education system. By disproportionately supporting candidates with advantages or resources, the scholarships may

inadvertently perpetuate the disparities in educational opportunities and hinder progress toward a more equitable system.

After administering questionnaires to alumni who had received these six scholarships, they were asked to voluntary participate in semi-structured interviews. Thereafter, data obtained was combined with document analysis, questionnaires, and interviews were analysed drawing on the RA framework with a narrative inquiry approach. The analysis of the data gathered during interviews with alumni revealed that certain capabilities were demonstrated and developed because of their degree mobility (pursuing degrees in different locations). However, it was also observed that some capabilities were negatively impacted by this mobility. Thus, the findings suggested a nuanced relationship between degree mobility and the development of specific capabilities amongst alumni, warranting further investigation to understand the implications of degree mobility on various capabilities.

The investigation of the study revealed that the structure of the selected scholarships is not fully aligned with SD and that some capabilities can be damaged through degree mobility. To ensure that the scholarships truly support SD, they would require restructuring and (1) lowering expectations and preparing alumni for an often rather difficult return to South Africa; (2) limiting the available scholarships to degree programmes that are less or not affordable at all in South Africa; (3) implementing a re-entry strategy for returning alumni to make the return more manageable; and (4) collecting more data to create a deeper understanding about the possible achievements of individual alumni.

Keywords: sustainable development, higher education, Sustainable Development Goals, goals, South Africa, capability approach, responsible agency

ABSTRACT (GERMAN)

Die Relevanz der nachhaltigen Entwicklung (SD) ist zunehmend in den Fokus gerückt, insbesondere seit der Verabschiedung der Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) im Jahr 2015. SDG 4 legt den Schwerpunkt auf die Gewährleistung einer inklusiven und qualitativ hochwertigen Bildung für alle Menschen sowie auf die Bereitstellung eines gleichberechtigten Zugangs zu Möglichkeiten des lebenslangen Lernens. Ferner wird in SDG 4 die Bildung als entscheidend für den gesellschaftlichen Fortschritt und die nachhaltige Entwicklung anerkannt, da sie das Wirtschaftswachstum, den sozialen Zusammenhalt und die individuelle Selbstbestimmung fördert. Angesichts der Rolle der Bildung bei der Förderung des Wirtschaftswachstums, des sozialen Zusammenhalts und der Selbstbestimmung des Einzelnen ist das SDG 4 ein entscheidender Bestandteil der globalen Bemühungen um eine wohlhabendere und gerechtere Welt.

Das Hauptaugenmerk dieser Dissertation liegt auf der Untersuchung eines spezifischen Aspekts der Hochschulbildung im Kontext der SDGs. Obwohl SDG 4 eine breite Palette von Zielen umfasst, darunter die Ausweitung von Stipendien für Studierende aus Entwicklungsländern, die im Ausland studieren möchten, besteht weiterhin Bedarf an einem umfassenden Verständnis dafür, wie ein ausländischer Abschluss den potenziellen Beitrag von Rückkehrern zur nachhaltigen Entwicklung in ihren Heimatländern beeinflussen kann. Trotz des von Forschern betonten Bedarfs wurde diesem Thema bisher nicht ausreichend Aufmerksamkeit geschenkt. Aus diesem Grund untersucht die vorliegende Studie, basierend auf dem Capability Approach (CA) für nachhaltige Entwicklung, inwieweit rückkehrende Absolventen einen Beitrag zur nachhaltigen Entwicklung in Südafrika leisten können.

Zur Integration der Konzepte von SD und CA wurde ein Rahmen für einen Responsible Agent (RA) entwickelt, gestützt auf frühere Studien. Dieser Rahmen bietet eine Reihe von Fähigkeiten, die für die Unterstützung der nachhaltigen Entwicklung in Südafrika entscheidend sind. Basierend auf diesem Rahmen untersucht die Studie umfassend die Erfahrungen von Postgraduierten und deren Potenzial, zur nachhaltigen Entwicklung in Südafrika beizutragen.

Die Studie führte eine Dokumentenanalyse durch, um Erkenntnisse darüber zu gewinnen, wie die Strukturen von sechs ausgewählten Stipendien mit den Zielen der nachhaltigen Entwicklung korrelieren. Die Analyse der Förderkriterien zeigt, dass bestimmte Fähigkeiten, die mit dem RA in Verbindung stehen, bereits berücksichtigt werden. Es wird deutlich, dass

diese Stipendien tendenziell Kandidaten bevorzugen, die das Potenzial für beruflichen Erfolg mitbringen. Dieser Auswahlprozess könnte jedoch bestehende Ungleichheiten im südafrikanischen Bildungssystem verstärken, indem er Kandidaten mit Privilegien oder Ressourcen bevorzugt und damit die Chancenungleichheit aufrechterhält.

Nach Ausgabe von Fragebögen an Alumni mit diesen Stipendien wurden Interviews durchgeführt und die gesammelten Daten anhand des RA-Frameworks analysiert. Die Analyse der Gesprächsdaten mit den Alumni ergab, dass bestimmte Fähigkeiten aufgrund ihrer Studienmobilität nachgewiesen und entwickelt wurden. Es wurde jedoch auch festgestellt, dass einige Fähigkeiten durch diese Mobilität negativ beeinflusst wurden. Diese nuancierte Beziehung zwischen der Mobilität von Studienabschlüssen und der Entwicklung spezifischer Fähigkeiten bei den Alumni deutet darauf hin, dass weitere Untersuchungen erforderlich sind, um die Auswirkungen der Studienmobilität auf verschiedene Fähigkeiten zu verstehen.

Die Studie zeigt, dass die Struktur der ausgewählten Stipendien nicht vollständig auf nachhaltige Entwicklung ausgerichtet ist und dass einige Fähigkeiten durch die Studienmobilität beeinträchtigt werden können. Um sicherzustellen, dass die Stipendien effektiv die SD unterstützen, bedarf es (1) einer Umstrukturierung, einschließlich einer Anpassung der Erwartungen an die Rückkehrer, (2) einer gezielten Auswahl der unterstützten Programme und einer (3) verbesserten Wiedereingliederungsstrategie für zurückkehrende Alumni. (4) Zudem ist eine umfassendere Datenerhebung erforderlich, um ein tieferes Verständnis für die individuellen Beiträge der Alumni zu gewinnen.

Schlüsselwörter: Nachhaltige Entwicklung, Hochschulbildung, SDGs, Südafrika, CA, Responsible Agent,

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Doing a PhD has not been an easy journey, and along the way, you start questioning whether you made the right choice, and whether it will be worth it. Submitting these pages was one of the most emotional days of my life. After all the sweat, tears, and sleepless nights, I finally completed my doctoral thesis of which I am proud.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

CA	capability approach
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
HD	human development
HEI	higher education institution
HEQC	Higher Education Quality Committee
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
NRF	National Research Fund
PCI	Professional Capability Index
RA	responsible agent
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SD	sustainable development
South Africa	South Africa
SAQA	South Africans Qualification Authority
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

We have our own history, our own language, our own culture. But our destiny is also tied up with the destinies of other people.

Mangosuthu Buthelezi

1.1 Introduction

Chapter 1 lays the groundwork for this thesis by presenting the contextual framework within which the research unfolds. It delves into the identified research gap, bringing to light the research questions, aims, and objectives that drove the study described in this thesis. By elucidating the methodology employed, the chapter offers insight into the systematic approach used to collect and analyse data. Additionally, the theoretical framework is introduced, providing a theoretical lens through which the research questions are explored.

This chapter, furthermore, delves into my positionality, acknowledging that the investigator's unique background, beliefs, and experiences can influence the research process and findings. By understanding and reflecting upon my positionality, the study strove for transparency and impartiality.

The chapter not only serves as a roadmap for the thesis but also establishes the foundation upon which the subsequent chapters will be built. Through its comprehensive overview of the research's underpinning concepts and methodologies, Chapter 1 sets the stage for a thorough and insightful examination of the subject matter, ultimately contributing to the advancement of knowledge in this field.

1.2 Background to the study

During the apartheid era in South Africa, the higher education system was divided in terms of race and language and thus availability, and accessibility differed highly between the race groups (Boughey & McKenna, 2021). Each higher education institution (HEI) was designated exclusively for Africans, Coloureds, Indians, or Whites, and the enrolment of another race would have only been possible with the approval of the Education Department. In other words, permission from the Education Department was required for any cross-racial enrolment in these institutions (Bunting, 2006).

Although there is no longer racial segregation in South African HEIs, they are impacted by the structures and ideologies of the apartheid era (Boughey & McKenna, 2021; Cloete, 2016; Scott, 2018). For example, recent graduation rates from various universities reveal disparities in success and failure based on race, despite the end of apartheid almost three decades ago (DHET, 2021c). This troubling situation raises deep concerns, as it gives the impression that South Africa has not yet achieved full equality for all races within its higher education system. The problems in the South African higher education system are not only the result of inequalities of the races but also of capacity (Boughey & McKenna, 2021). Even today, HEIs in South Africa are unable to provide sufficient capacity to accommodate all eligible applicants, despite the increasing importance of knowledge in our time. This shortage of capacity raises concerns, as it limits access to higher education opportunities for many individuals who are eager to pursue knowledge and further their academic aspirations.

According to Altbach (2013), higher education faces two main trends in the 21st century. The **first trend** is the knowledge economy. Over the past three to four decades, there has been a significant increase in the importance of knowledge, leading to a shift in the driving forces of economies. While industrialisation used to be a primary driver, economies are now more influenced by the development and attainment of knowledge. This shift emphasises the crucial role that knowledge plays in shaping and advancing modern societies and economies (Altbach, 2013c; Asongu, 2020; Ganda, 2022; World Bank, 2019). In addition, the shift towards knowledge-based development holds significant promise for countries in the Global South, enabling them to break free from the shackles of poverty and forge a path towards sustainable and inclusive growth. Embracing the power of knowledge can empower nations to transform their economies, and societies, and ultimately improve the well-being of their citizens (Asongu, 2020; Ganda, 2022; Singh, 2011; UNESCO, 2005).

In recent times, knowledge has emerged as the primary driver of development, and HEIs play a pivotal role as both producers and disseminators of knowledge crucial to countries' developmental agendas. As a result, governments around the world are increasingly prioritising access to and participation in higher education, and HEIs serve as the breeding ground for innovative ideas, cutting-edge research, and skilled professionals who contribute significantly to a nation's advancement in the form of economic growth, social progress, and the sustainable development (SD) of a country (Altbach, 2013c; De Wit & Altbach, 2021; Singh, 2011).

The significance of higher education is closely tied to the **second trend** highlighted by Altbach (2013c) - the massification of higher education, characterised by a substantial increase in the percentage of the population pursuing tertiary degrees. Over the past few decades, there has been a significant surge in enrolment rates at HEIs. This increase in access to higher education has profound implications for individuals and societies alike (Altbach, 2013c; Cooper, 2015; Singh, 2014). Even South African universities located near major cities[1] experienced an increase in student enrolment rates during the post-apartheid era. However, it is important to note that despite this increase, the enrolment rate still lagged behind the global average (Cooper, 2015). However, the inadequate capacity to accommodate eligible candidates poses a significant challenge in South Africa's higher education system (Boughey & McKenna, 2021). This problem not only impacts HEIs and individuals seeking education but also has far-reaching consequences for the entire economy. This issue arises at a critical juncture when knowledge plays a pivotal role in fostering economic prosperity (Asongu, 2020) and promoting SD (Ganda, 2022). As previously mentioned, higher education is widely recognised as a 'creator' of knowledge and a vital catalyst for development, which will be further explored in the following section.

1.2.1 Higher education as a public good

The notion of higher education as a public good is a multifaceted and intricate issue, as evident in various attempts to define it. Longanecker (2005) characterises the public good as the interconnection between individual and societal improvement, whereas Marginson (2007) views it as an aggregation of private goods. Additionally, Chambers & Gopaul (2008) propose the concept that achieving the public good involves collectively building a better state rather than pursuing individual interests alone. These diverse perspectives highlight the complexity and importance of understanding the role of higher education as a public good in shaping society and fostering collective progress.

The study explained in this thesis had an educational focus, thus conceptualising the public good as the recognition that education not only enriches the individuals participating in it but also contributes to societal welfare. Perceiving education as a collective gain for society makes it essential to strive for increased knowledge creation within the community. This, in turn,

[1]In South Africa this includes areas like Johannesburg, Soweto, Pretoria, Durban, Port Elizabeth, Bloemfontein, Cape Town, East London, Nelspruit, Kimberley, Upington, and Polokwane.

paves the way for greater possibilities for countries to enhance their economic competitiveness (Allais, 2017; Singh, 2014).

In essence, understanding education as a public good underscores the interconnectedness of individual development and societal progress, emphasising the vital role of knowledge acquisition and dissemination in fostering both individual prosperity and national economic advancement. Higher education supports SD and "contributes to labour productivity, entrepreneurial energy, and quality of life; enhances social mobility; encourages political participation; strengthens civil society; and promotes democratic governance" (World Bank, 2000, p. 92). Moreover, economic growth increases with a country's higher education levels, making higher education a vital tool for both social and economic development (Assie-Lumumba, 2006; Marginson, 2011).

In many cases, countries that invested heavily in education and skills benefitted economically as well as socially from the investment (Assie-Lumumba, 2006; Pouris & Inglesi-Lotz, 2014; Singh, 2014). Therefore, to ensure knowledge-based development[2] in countries like South Africa, more qualified graduates, especially postgraduates are needed (Boughey & McKenna, 2021; Singh, 2011). However, realising this vision is a challenging journey, given the current inadequacy of South Africa's capacity to accommodate all eligible individuals in HEIs. The lack of sufficient capacity poses a significant obstacle to ensuring universal access to higher education opportunities in the country (Heleta & Bagus, 2021).

1.2.2 Globalisation of higher education and degree mobility

With the trends of the knowledge economy and massification of HE, comes the trend of a globalised HE network with continuously increasing degree mobility. Degree mobility refers to the movement of students to graduate in another country (Altbach, 2001, 2015; Douglass, 2009). Altbach (2015) argues that the globalisation of knowledge has led to the positioning of higher education as a tradable product or service, which can be imported/exported like any other commodity and has facilitated the flow of students across borders for educational credentials.

On the one hand, the globalisation of higher education offers new opportunities through a growing network of HEIs where academics can learn from each other and create research partnerships (Altbach, 2013c; De Wit & Altbach, 2021; Douglass, 2009). On the other hand,

[2] Knowledge-based development describes the importance of knowledge for sustainable development and therefore to ability to fight poverty and create social progress (King & McGrath, 2004).

globalisation drives HEIs to become increasingly competitive on a global scale, as they seek to attract the best students and prepare a qualified workforce for post-graduate prospects (Altbach, 2013c; Benson & Griffith, 2016; De Wit & Altbach, 2021). However, this heightened competition often leads to a strong emphasis on increasing the enrolment rates of international students, instead of just attracting top students to improve their global reputation (DHET, 2013; Douglass, 2009).

The globalisation of higher education and degree mobility are widely discussed in current literature owing to their positive impacts as well as potential risks. Moreover, these phenomena have been equated to a new wave of colonialism (Sharpe, 2015) because they raise important questions about power dynamics, cultural influence, and the potential exploitation of certain countries or regions in the pursuit of global educational opportunities. Therefore, degree mobility needs to be discussed with sensitivity, awareness, and a critical understanding of its implications on a global scale (Sharpe, 2015). Criticism of the globalisation of higher education and degree mobility is rooted in a decolonisation stance that asserts, "One of the most destructive effects of colonialism was the suppression of local knowledge and the promotion of Western knowledge as universal knowledge" (Heleta, 2016, p. 9). This decolonial perspective highlights the historical inequalities and power dynamics that have led to the subjugation of local knowledge in favour of Western knowledge as the universally accepted form of knowledge.

Since the main movement of degree mobility is from the Global South to the Global North, the impression is created that knowledge of the Global North is more desirable. Therefore, efforts to decolonise the curriculum and emphasise the importance of indigenous knowledge in formerly colonised countries (Mampane et al., 2018) contradict the discourse advocating for an increase in degree mobility, which favours movement from the Global South to the Global North. In addition, this dilemma is exacerbated by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) promoting an increase in scholarships for students from the Global South to study in the Global North to foster sustainable, local, and socioeconomic development. By providing educational opportunities and scholarships for students from disadvantaged regions to study in more developed countries, the SDGs aim to bridge educational gaps and facilitate the transfer of knowledge and skills to empower individuals and communities for a sustainable future.

The tension between decolonialism and the SDGs' endorsement of degree mobility highlights the need for a nuanced and balanced approach to addressing historical injustices while recognising the benefits of international education in fostering global progress and SD.

1.3 Sustainable development

In 2015, the United Nations (UN) SDGs replaced the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which had been established in 2000 to advance development by setting eight goals to be achieved by 2015 (Rigg, 2014). Universal primary education for all countries was one of the aims set by the UN (Chopra et al., 2009). As their priority was primary education, the MDGs only briefly mentioned higher education when addressing the aim of "achieving gender equality in primary, secondary and tertiary education institutions" (Boni et al., 2016; Kumar et al., 2016). Criticism has been directed towards the past approach of the near exclusion of higher education from the MDGs and its potential contribution to development, as highlighted in previous studies (Boni et al., 2016; Kumar et al., 2016). However, as stated above, following the MDGs, the UN introduced the SDGs, which embrace a wider and more ambitious set of targets to be achieved by 2030. The focus shifted from merely considering development to prioritising sustainable development, defined as the "Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (Brundtland-Commission, 1987, p. 41). The shift has led to the development of new goals of sustainable development. The SDGs consist of 17 goals, each with a set of aims (Boni et al., 2016; UN, 2015a). Goal 4 of the SDGs, and its targets include a more pronounced consideration of higher education (Boni et al., 2016; Kumar et al., 2016; McCowan, 2016; UN, 2015a). This positions higher education as an essential factor for the sustainable growth of a country, making it an indispensable and necessary inclusion in the SDGs (Lotz-Sisitka, 2006; Oketch et al., 2014). In other words, SDG 4 acknowledges that higher education has the potential to address various challenges faced by countries in the Global South, such as poverty, inequality, and a lack of skilled workers to drive sustainable socioeconomic growth (Boni et al., 2016; Kumar et al., 2016).

In terms of HE, SDG 4 aims to achieve several objectives: (1) enhance equal access to education; (2) develop skills needed for employment; (3) eliminate gender disparities; (4) impart knowledge and skills that build human capital for sustainable socio-economic development; and (5) increase scholarships for students from countries in the Global South to study in developed nations (UN, 2015a). However, SDG 4 does not directly address the

challenges faced by higher education systems in the Global South. Instead, it promotes an approach that involves students moving to different countries to pursue their degrees. This emphasis on degree mobility as a means to achieve educational objectives may raise concerns about the potential brain drain from countries in the Global South and the limited capacity to address local educational needs. While promoting international exchange and educational opportunities can be beneficial, it is essential to strike a balance between improving local higher education systems within the Global South and facilitating global degree mobility. Although these two aspects are not meant to be mutually exclusive, it is essential to prioritise addressing the challenges of inadequate capacity in higher education within the Sustainable Development Goals, rather than focusing solely on degree mobility.

1.3.1 South Africa's National Development Plan

In addition to the SDGs, South Africa has national developmental goals, which were established through the National Development Plan (NDP) 2030 (NPC, 2011b). According to the National Planning Commission (NPC) (2011b, p. 16), "the Plan focuses on the critical capabilities needed to transform the economy and society". The objectives of the NDP 2030 are to do as follows (NPC, 2011b):

- Unite all South Africans around a common programme to achieve prosperity and equity;
- Promote active citizenry to strengthen development, democracy, and accountability;
- Bring about faster economic growth, higher investment, and greater labour absorption;
- Focus on key capabilities of people and the state;
- Build a capable and developmental state; and
- Encourage strong leadership throughout society to work together to solve problems.

Figure 1.1 below shows the Cycle of Development depicted in the NDP 2030 (NPC, 2011b). The study focused on the inner three cogs of strong leadership, active citizenry, and effective government, as these are the driving forces for the outer goals and, therefore, for development.

Figure 1.1: Cycle of Development (NPC, 2011b, p. 16)

In the figure above, higher education is included in the NDP as a mechanism to build up the capabilities of citizens (NPC, 2011b). This would be achievable partly by an inter-related strategy followed by the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET)[3] and the National Research Foundation (NRF). The DHET's Annual Performance Plan continuously promotes the increase of international scholarships (DHET, 2017a, 2021a, 2022a), which aligns with the NRF's focus on international collaboration to support knowledge production and international exchange. According to the NRF (2017), these international collaborations will uplift the quality of life in South Africa by combating unemployment, poverty, and inequality. This combined strategy links with the SDG to increase international scholarships and thus increase international collaboration in producing knowledge and ensuring SD.

[3] The 2019 national elections resulted in several merged ministerial portfolios. As a result, what the ministries for Higher Education and Science and Technology merged into the Department of Higher Education, Science and Technology. Documents referred to in the thesis will reference the DHET, which is the ministry name prior to the May 2019 name change. The DHET is a governmental department which ensures post-school education and training to the people in South Africa.

1.3.2 Scholarship and the SDGs

One of the targets of SDG 4 is a continuous increase in the number of scholarships for students from the Global South to study abroad (UN, 2015a), which would involve a substantial investment in international scholarships (Galán-Muros et al., 2022). However, many of these countries do not have money to improve their local higher education systems, and international aid should be provided for this instead of financing scholarships (Burnett et al., 2022). This aid has been provided, for example, in 2015 3.5 billion dollars were invested in the development of local higher education in the Global South globally, which increased to 5.3 billion in 2019 (Galán-Muros et al., 2022; UNESCO, 2016). Notwithstanding, between 2010 and 2016, around 1.2 billion USD were invested worldwide in scholarships, which increased to 1.67 billion USD in 2019 following the SDGs (Galán-Muros et al., 2022). In addition about 70 % (3.792 billion USD) of the official development aid designated for higher education was invested in international mobility (Galán-Muros et al., 2022).

Such a high percentage of the budget spent on international mobility invites questions and critiques in terms of scholarship funding and policies aimed at attracting scholars from the Global South to study abroad (Altbach, 2013b; Galán-Muros et al., 2022). The critics highlight the negative impact of losing highly educated and skilled people through mobility from developing to developed countries (also termed the “brain drain”) (Sabzalieva et al., 2022; Willis, 2014; World Bank, 2000; Zagade & Desai, 2017). This term refers to the graduates who stay abroad, hoping for a better future and living conditions (Cloete, Maassen, & Bailey, 2015). While many graduates who return home after studying abroad bring about positive changes for themselves and their immediate families by applying their acquired knowledge and skills to address local challenges, foster innovation, and drive socioeconomic development (Cloete et al., 2015), those who choose to remain abroad can negatively impact their country of origin. This negative impact is due to the loss of human capital in the form of knowledge, skills, and expertise, which are essential for its development and progress (Desai & Potter, 2014; Willis, 2014).

The critics also point out that the money for these scholarships given through development aid is not spent in the recipient country but in the donor country (Galán-Muros et al., 2022). Instead of strengthening HEIs in countries in the Global South, the money goes to HEIs in the donor countries of the Global North to cover study fees, accommodation, and other expenses for students from the Global South. This is why the money is even at times claimed as a subsidy for the donor country's institutions (Galán-Muros et al., 2022).

Another criticism is despite the SDG 4 of achieving equal access to HE, degree mobility remains accessible to less than 3% of the world's student population and is predominantly limited to the elite (Heleta & Bagus, 2021; Sabzalieva et al., 2022). The financial resources involved in supporting international scholarships and the restricted accessibility raise questions about how these scholarships can truly contribute to SD. In other words, existing inequalities in education are exacerbated, as scholarships favour students from affluent backgrounds or those with better access to educational resources instead of providing education to those who are most in need or marginalised in society.

This perpetuates a cycle where those who are already privileged have increased opportunities for personal and professional growth through studying abroad, while many deserving and talented individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds are left without the same opportunities to access higher education and the benefits it brings. As a result, the transformative potential of scholarships in creating a more equitable and sustainable future is hindered, and the broader objectives of promoting equal access to education and fostering SD are not fully realised.

1.4 Research gap

Existing research on scholarships has primarily focused on individual gains (Chalid, 2014; Dong & Chapman, 2008; Mawer, 2018), overlooking the contribution of scholarships to SD. However, the SDGs have been advocating for scholarships to achieve SD since 2015. The South African government is also actively promoting an increase in international scholarships. Therefore, the study addressed the gap in knowledge about the impact of degree mobility on the SD of a student's home country. Moreover, by investigating the contributions and challenges associated with scholarships for degree mobility, the study aimed to inform policies and decision-making to create a globally inclusive and sustainable education landscape.

The study focused on Target 4B of the SDGs, which promotes increasing scholarships for international students and gained traction following its promotion by the World Bank during the 1980s and 1990s (Heleta & Bagus, 2021; Heleta & Moodien, 2017). However, during that period, scholarships were predominantly available to the academic elite, and only those with exceptional grades qualified for funding to study in developed countries (Committee for Academic Freedom in Africa, 1992). Higher education was perceived as a luxury expense owing to students from low-income households being unable to afford it (Altbach, 2004; Committee for Academic Freedom in Africa, 1992; Heleta & Bagus, 2021; Lebeau, 2008).

The promotion of scholarships for high achievers from the Global South, who cannot afford education opportunities, to attend higher education institutions (HEIs) in developed countries, as part of SDG 4, faces criticism. This criticism stems from concerns that the strategy for SDG 4 drains countries in the Global South of talent (Bunting et al., 2014; Cloete et al., 2015; Committee for Academic Freedom in Africa, 1992; Lebeau, 2008; Lotz-Sisitka, 2006; Mamdani, 2008). Therefore, the study focused on understanding how the strategy may reinforce imbalanced power dynamics and the dependence of developing nations on developed countries despite the contention of SDG 4 that degree mobility contributes to SD through building human capital.

A few studies have investigated the contribution of degree mobility to SD (Campbell et al., 2021). For example, O'Reilly et al. (2013) researched international students in Ireland, the challenges they faced within a foreign country and how their learning could be improved to benefit the students. Another study showed the impact of professionals returning to their home country, India and the usefulness of their experiences and knowledge gained abroad (Zagade & Desai, 2017). Campbell et al. (2021) investigated the perceptions of returning alumni of how they could contribute to development in Ghana and Nigeria. However, the contribution to SD of South African postgraduate students returning to their home country has not been sufficiently researched. Therefore, the current study explored how degree mobility impacts the potential of South African postgraduates to contribute to SD upon their return.

1.5 Research questions, aim and objectives

1.5.1 Research questions

1.5.1.1 Main research question

How does the provision of scholarships for South African students to pursue postgraduate degrees abroad contribute to the sustainable development of South Africa?

1.5.1.2 Sub-questions

1) To which extend can the Capability Approach provide a normative and operational framework for exploring the contribution of degree mobility to sustainable development?
2) How do the structures of the selected scholarships align with Sustainable Development?

3) To what extent does the Capability Approach capture the multidimensional aspects of sustainable development influenced by degree mobility, including economic, social, and environmental dimensions?
4) What specific capabilities do individuals acquire through postgraduate degrees abroad that are relevant to addressing South Africa's sustainable development challenges?

1.5.2 Research aim and objectives

1.5.2.1 Research aim

The aim of the research is to conduct a thorough investigation to understand how postgraduate degrees attained abroad contribute to the sustainable development of South Africa. Additionally, the research aims to evaluate the appropriateness and effectiveness of the Capabilities Approach as both a normative and operational framework for analysing the impact of degree mobility on individuals' capabilities and its alignment with sustainable development goals.

1.5.2.2 Research objectives

1) Evaluate the extent to which the Capability Approach captures the multifaceted dimensions of sustainable development influenced by degree mobility.
2) Examine the specific knowledge, skills, and perspectives gained through postgraduate degrees abroad.
3) Analyze the ways in which alumni apply their acquired expertise to address sustainable development challenges in South Africa.

1.6 Theoretical framework

The Capability Approach (CA) was chosen as the best-suited theoretical framework for the study, since SD is a complex concept that looks beyond numbers and statistics (Boni & Walker, 2016; Sanz et al., 2017). Therefore, the current study sought a theoretical framework that allowed for a comprehensive understanding of the bigger picture of how degree mobile of South African postgraduates contributed to SD upon their return. Moreover, Campbell et al. (2021) highlighted "that the most logical way international scholarships can help foster sustainable development is through a human capabilities framework".

The CA, developed by economist and philosopher Amartya Sen in 1985, understands human development (HD) as "real development," focusing on enhancing people's capabilities and freedoms. According to Sen, true development should be measured by individuals' ability to lead the kind of lives they value, rather than merely focusing on economic indicators (Sen, 1985). The CA emphasises the importance of expanding people's opportunities and enhancing their capabilities to choose the life they value.

The study utilised the CA as a tool to analyse the notion of contribution to SD. To achieve this, the research needed a structured framework that aligned with the CA's emphasis on freedom and sustainability. As a result, the concept of responsible agency (RA) was developed for data analysis. The RA concept comprises a list of responsibilities, each based on a capability set and its functioning, which is essential to enable individuals' free choice while ensuring their contribution to SD. Chapter 3 provides a comprehensive outline of the RA concept and discusses the advantages and disadvantages of applying the CA in the study.

1.7 Research methodology

Qualitative research was considered the most suitable approach to analyse the social phenomenon of returning alumni and their potential contribution to SD in depth, thereby answering the research questions and achieving the research aim and objectives (Babbie, 2011; Matthews & Ross, 2010, p. 7). Thus, the study explored six different scholarships and their programmes' potential contributions.

The impact of the scholarships was explored through an analysis of various scholarship documents, a questionnaire, and interviews with alumni who had received the scholarships as well as two staff members working directly with the scholarships. By analysing the scholarships' aims, eligibility criteria, and financial support, it was possible to see if their set-up aligns with the aims of SD. In addition, through the questionnaire and the interviews, it was possible to explore the alumni's experiences, and how these shaped their functioning, and how this could contribute to SD in South Africa.

Before starting the data collection, the researcher applied for ethical clearance from Rhodes University's Education Higher Degree Committee. This was necessary to ensure that all ethical standards were met and that no harm was done to any participants. Ethical approval was granted on 9 April 2020 with the review reference number 2019-0930-2055, which had to be renewed through an annual progress report until the data collection was completed.

The qualitative research examined the capabilities of alumni who were recipients of the six selected scholarships. The notion of scholarships has been available for over 120 years[4] and like the scholarships chosen for the study, have been offered for various reasons. These reasons include the need to fund students who require financial aid, while others are based on academic merit or are offered to boost graduates in specific scientific fields (Cloete et al., 2015; DHET, 2017b; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Oketch, 2016). Some governments offer scholarships for citizens to study abroad to "develop a globally competent workforce while developing domestic capacity" (Benson & Griffith, 2016, p. 15). Independent from their motivation, the Fulbright Scholarship, the Kadar Asmal Fellowship, the scholarship offered by the Chinese Scholarship Council, the Stipendium Hungaricum scholarship, the Swedish Institute Scholarship for South Africa, and the scholarship offered by the African Business Education initiative were chosen for the study. These are explained below.

The **Fulbright Scholarship (FB)** is an example of the government using scholarships to meet the country's developmental goals (Benson & Griffith, 2016; Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, United States, 2016b). It is one of the most well-established scholarships in the world, launched in 1946 by the American government (Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs United States, 2016a) with partnerships in 180 countries and a global network of more than 370,000 alumni (Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs United States, 2016a). It aims to:

> "increase mutual understanding between the people of the United States and the people of other countries through educational and cultural exchange; to strengthen the ties which unite us with other nations by demonstrating the educational and cultural interests, developments, and achievements of the people of the United States and other nations, and the contributions being made toward a peaceful and more fruitful life for people throughout the world; to promote international cooperation for educational and cultural advancement; and thus to assist in the development of friendly, sympathetic, and peaceful relations between the United States and the other countries of the world". (Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs United States, 2016c, p. 5).

The number of FB scholarships granted every year depends on the availability of funds but usually is about twelve.

[4] The Rhodes scholarship programme from the UK for their colonies, for example, was established in 1902 and is, therefore, the oldest large-scale international scholarship in the world.

The **Kadar Asmal Fellowship (KAF)** is supported by the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs and intends to recruit candidates with leadership potential. The KAF considers itself a programme that offers "a prestigious, world-class, quality education contributing to capacity building". The Kadar Asmal Fellowship specifically states that it aims to support leadership for the achievement of the SDGs, enhance women's leadership capacity, and increase women's involvement in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields at Irish universities (Embassy of Ireland, 2021). The scholarship began in 2012 and usually granted to about 17 students annually.

The **Chinese Scholarship Council (CSC)** was established in 2016 and since then has offered 40 scholarships for South Africans to study in China every year. The CSC scholarship aims to do as follows:

> Strengthen mutual understanding and friendship between the Chinese and people around the world and promote China's exchange and cooperation with other countries in various fields, the Chinese government sets up scholarships for talented students and scholars to pursue higher education or conduct research in Chinese universities (CSC, 2021).

In 2017 the Hungarian government established the **Stipendium Hungaricum (SH)**, which aims to do as follows:

> Promote the internationalisation of Hungarian higher education and attract top foreign students from all around the world who can establish personal and professional attachments to Hungary while enjoying high-quality education in the heart of Europe (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Hungary, 2020).

South Africa gets 100 of these scholarships annually, including 30 bachelor's, 60 master's and ten doctoral degree scholarships (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Hungary, 2020).

The **Swedish Institute Scholarship for South Africa (SISSA)** has been offered to South Africans since 2017. The SISSA grants ten scholarships to South Africans each year, thereby contributing to the development of global leaders who can contribute to the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This is the aim of the Swedish government since 2017 (DHET, 2022c). The SISSA describes its aim as follows:

> The goal is to enable scholarship holders to play an active role in the positive development of the societies in which they live. Ideal candidates are ambitious young

> professionals with academic qualifications, [who] demonstrated leadership experience, ambition to make a difference by working with issues which contribute to SD in their country in a long term perspective (DHET, 2022c).

The **African Business Education (ABE)** initiative started to offer 150 scholarships annually for master's degrees in Japan in 2013. These scholarships aim to do as follows:

> Develop effective skills and knowledge in various fields, to contribute to the development of industries in Africa. This programme aims at human resource development in both private and public sectors to cultivate a strong human network between Japan and Africa (DHET, 2020b).

By offering these scholarships, the Japanese government wants to strengthen support for the "ongoing dynamic growth of Africa with stronger public-private partnerships" (DHET, 2020b). The scholarship looks explicitly at developing graduates with the needed skills for Japanese businesses in South Africa. Thus, the Africa Business Education Initiative focuses on strengthening its economic ties with South Africa.

The selection of scholarships was predicated upon the endorsement and backing extended by the government of South Africa. Some of these scholarships also received additional financial and organisational support by the South African government. Given that these scholarships predominantly funded postgraduate degrees, they became the main focus of this study. Notably, the SDGs advocate for a general increase in scholarships without specifying particular circumstances or imposing restrictions on recipients.

The prevailing narrative suggests that scholarships for individuals from the Global South to pursue studies in the Global North inherently contribute significantly to Sustainable Development. Consequently, this research opted not to selectively include scholarships explicitly designed to support SD. The overarching discourse implies a holistic contribution toward Sustainable Development irrespective of specific stipulations associated with individual scholarships.

1.8 Researcher's positionality

Every researcher should be aware of his/her positionality, which plays a role in qualitative research and refers to the position adopted by the researcher who is shaped by his/her experience, perspective, and cultural context (Holmes, 2020a). Being aware of their positionality allows researchers to acknowledge their subjectivity and potential biases,

ensuring transparency and integrity in the research process. My interest in the research topic was sparked by my experience of obtaining my postgraduate degree in development studies. My degree mobility experience had me moving from Germany – a country in the Global North – to South Africa, a country in the Global South. This provided me with immeasurable and authentic cross-cultural experiences and life in a country far from where I grew up. As a citizen from a different country studying in South Africa, I started wondering how my experiences from abroad would be able to contribute to SD upon my return to my home country. Coming to South Africa, my mindset and how I understood things were challenged daily while pursuing my honour's and master's degrees in this country.

As valuable as I consider these experiences for my personal growth, I often asked myself how I would fit in when I returned to my home country. What skills, knowledge, and or capabilities did I gain that would allow me to contribute something when returning to my country of origin? I was intrigued by the concept of investing money in sending scholars abroad to study to create SD. Because my degree mobility led me to the Global South, I am especially critical of the perception that the Global North is considered the best place to study to contribute toward SD, as indicated by the SDGs.

Throughout the data collection and analysis, I tried to keep in mind how my experiences shaped my understanding of the social phenomenon under study. I reflected on my thoughts and actively pursued discussions with my supervisor (who is South African) about my understanding of specific issues and upcoming topics. This approach gave me the role of an outsider during the interviews while also being an insider through my degree mobility at the same time. This will be discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

1.9 Thesis outline

This thesis is structured into seven chapters as follows:

Chapter 1 presented the contextual framework of the thesis, the research gap, and the research questions/aim/objectives. It introduced the methodology used, the theoretical framework and my positionality. Thus, it has served as the outline of the thesis and built the basis for the following chapters.

Chapter 2 entails an extensive literature review discussing the current situation of higher education in general and specifically in South Africa. It builds up on what was already briefly introduced in Chapter 1. Higher education is discussed in the context of SD, which allows for

an understanding of how HE can contribute toward it. Related concepts like the public good in higher education, degree mobility, and current trends like the knowledge economy and internationalisation are also introduced in this chapter, as they are connected to the study's conceptual framework.

Chapter 3 presents the theory on which the study was based, which was the CA. Thus, this chapter explains why the CA was the best approach for the study, and how it helped to answer the research questions and achieve the research aim and objectives. Since the CA focuses on human development (HD), and the study dealt with SD, this chapter also elaborates on how the study connected the two concepts. This elaboration built the framework used to analyse the collected data in the following chapters, which I termed RA.

Chapter 4 describes the qualitative methodology used for the study drawing on a combination of narrative inquiry and document analysis. This enabled the researcher to gain deep insight into six different scholarships and the experiences of their alumni. Document analysis, a questionnaire and interviews were used to gather data. This chapter discusses these data collection methods in detail and acknowledges their strengths and weaknesses. The data analysis method used my positionality, and the ethical considerations are also explained in this chapter.

Chapter 5 presents the results of document analysis and discussed how the setup of the scholarships enables or hinders SD. This was done by introducing the scholarships and their setup (eligibility criteria, funding agreements, and return policies) and comparing them with the SDGs as well as economic and higher education problems in South Africa. Additionally, this chapter presents the data collected from two staff members working directly with scholarships, who provided additional information on the selection process and the setup of the programmes.

Chapter 6 focuses on the findings of the analysis of data gathered from the alumni in terms of the capabilities they developed during their time abroad and their experiences after returning to South Africa. The findings explained in this chapter are based on the CA and RA, which were explained in Chapter 3. In addition, an analysis is conducted to explore how the capabilities of the alumni can effectively contribute to SD in South Africa.

Chapter 7 concludes the thesis by presenting conclusions and recommendations based on the findings explained in the previous two chapters. Moreover, the chapter refers not only to what research has to be done in the future to deepen the knowledge about the impact of returning

alumni on SD in South Africa but also to what the scholarship programmes and the government could do differently to improve the alumni's contribution.

1.10 Conclusion

This chapter provided a brief overview of higher education and the concept of SD, establishing the conceptual framework for the study. Furthermore, the chapter explained the research gap and how the study endeavoured to investigate whether scholarships for studying abroad can contribute to sustainable development. Given the potential increase in scholarships driven by the SDGs, this knowledge becomes crucial, emphasising the importance of the study. Additionally, the introduction of the conceptual framework allowed a glimpse into how the study would address the research question, aim and objectives and explore the impact of returning alumni on SD in South Africa."

CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.

Nelson Mandela

2.1 Introduction

HE is a public good that can contribute to society at large, rather than the individual (as discussed in Section 1.1.1). This chapter discusses the development of the higher education system, its contribution to SD, the importance of focusing on increasing the number of graduates, and the types of graduates that are produced. The discussion in this chapter focuses on the current trends of massification and internationalisation of higher education and clarifies their meaning in a South African context. When discussing higher education in the context of SD, this chapter critiques how the SDGs promote HE, especially degree mobility from the Global South to the Global North. This critique offers insights into the implications of degree mobility based on existing literature.

As this chapter discusses SD and degree mobility, it is important to highlight the importance of knowledge for SD in the 21st century. Furthermore, this chapter critiques the concept of the global citizen that has emerged in discussions around the internationalisation of higher education and the knowledge economy (see Section 2.4.2.1). By connecting these concepts, this chapter highlights that higher education is essential for SD and the importance of critical assessment of implemented changes and their effects on higher education. This critical awareness of higher education is based on how little attention was paid to higher education in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and by the World Bank in the past and the devastating impact this had on the Global South, as this chapter will explore (see Section 2.2.2). The conclusion of the chapter draws attention to the gap in knowledge regarding degree mobility and its possible impact on SD addressed in this thesis.

2.2 Higher education, public good and sustainable development

South Africa is challenged with high crime rates, poor public health, poor schooling, political corruption, and growing inequality. The country is challenged by a society divided by race, class, and gender, as a result of its colonial and apartheid legacy (Walker & McLean, 2013).

As highlighted in Chapter 1, higher education is seen as a potential contributor to social change and development, in that there is benefit not only to each graduate but also to the society around the individual. Perceiving higher education as a public good and a vital contributor to development suggests that it can impact a country's human capital (Singh, 2010). Human capital is a concept in which HE is seen predominantly as a means of investment and financial return (Walker, 2006), having the potential to render a country economically competitive (Allais, 2017; Singh, 2014). Having educated people in a country is perceived to increase individual earnings and improve the country's economic situation (Walker, 2006). Therefore, increasing the level of human capital by uplifting the higher education system can set the tone for development and aid in fighting the challenges of people in South Africa, as mentioned in Section 2.1.

The concept of human capital has been previously criticised, as it implies that there are simple numerical measurable results of investment in the higher education sector (Woodhall, 1992). McKenna (2021, p. 98) states that "for every dollar invested by the individual, there should be a return of social mobility and financial security for the individual". While there is evidence that investment in higher education can have some financial returns, it does not automatically guarantee them. This was seen in South Africa, where spending for higher education was continuously increased over the last 20 years, with the unemployment rate and economic growth responding very slowly (McKenna, 2021). De Wit and Altbach (2021, p. 40) argue that there is a shift away from "considering it exclusively as a source of revenue", and instead as a core element for research, innovation, and development. In the context of the study, drawing a conclusive correlation between investment for the scholarships and financial return is a challenging undertaking. By focusing on SD, however, financial return should not be at the core of discussions surrounding the outcomes of scholarships, as discussed in the next section.

2.2.1 Concept of sustainable development

The SDGs established by the UN highlight the importance of a global focus on "areas of critical importance for humanity and the planet" (Potter, 2014; UN, 2015a). They include 17 goals and 169 targets that should be achieved by 2030 to ensure SD (UN, 2015b). The SDGs challenge the notion that economic growth alone is the sole indicator of development. Instead, the SDGs emphasise the necessity of focusing on sustainable development, which presents a more comprehensive and holistic perspective. Before the creation of the SDGs, the importance of sustainability in development was on the rise in development efforts worldwide. Elkington

(1998) described the economy, society, and the environment as the three main pillars of SD 17 years before the SDGs were established.

While SD is an established concept, its meaning and understanding can differ widely. There are multiple definitions of SD in the literature which are not in agreement. “Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (Brundtland-Commission, 1987, p. 41) was amongst the first definitions of SD from 1987 and is still widely used when discussing SD in different contexts (Assie-Lumumba, 2006; Campbell et al., 2021; Crabtree, 2013; Imran et al., 2014; Mathebula, 2018; Sen, 2013). This definition shows that the aims of development are not solely focused on economic return, but the needs of individuals and maintaining future generations. Whilst this is the most commonly used definition, it has been challenged by scholars since the early 21st century (Redclift, 2014; Robert et al., 2005; Tickell, 1996).

The criticism of the definition from the Brundtland Commission surrounds both the entire concept and the meaning of some words within the definition. For example, Redclift (2014) criticised the use of the word ‘needs’, which can differ across different cultures, countries, and generations, and may change in the future. What is needed from graduates in South Africa to support SD might, for example, not be the same as in the United Kingdom. This also applies to the current needs of people in South Africa and their potential future needs. As South Africa is presently a divided country, an education system that sensitises individuals to have critical respect for each other’s cultures and backgrounds may be necessary (Walker & McLean, 2013).

In future, the situation may have evolved; people may be more united and require an education system that focuses on different areas. This emphasises the problem of how to define and determine the needs of any generation. While it is almost impossible to determine and include the needs of all living individuals, critics also ask how one can assume the needs of future generations (Rauschmayer & Leßmann, 2013; Robert et al., 2005; Ruggerio, 2021). Relating this to the definition of the Brundtland Commission, how is it possible to ensure development that meets the needs of current and future generations? This question has not been answered but highlights the complexity of SD.

The Brundtland Commission's definition guides understanding regarding SD in the study while acknowledging the challenge in assessing the needs of current and future generations. Therefore, in the study, SD is a concept that follows a general understanding of economic growth while simultaneously considering environmental and social needs. Instead of

considering only economic growth, SD includes more than just one aspect. This conception of SD can be drawn on to think critically about the effects of a purely economic approach to development that negates potential harm to society and the environment.

2.2.2 Sustainable Development Goals and higher education

The SDGs were preceded by the MDGs, which focused on primary education and did not address secondary and tertiary education. Higher education is now included in the SDGs indirectly, by focusing on the quality of education as a whole (Kumar et al., 2016; McCowan, 2016). Each goal of the SDGs focuses on different targets. The fourth goal is for "inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" and has ten targets. Five of those targets link directly or indirectly to higher education (UN, 2015a):

1) By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational, and tertiary education, including university (Target 4.3).
2) By 2030, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs, and entrepreneurship (Target 4.4).
3) By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous people, and children in vulnerable situations (Target 4.5).
4) By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote SD, including, among others, through education for SD and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship, and appreciation of cultural diversity and culture's contribution to SD (Target 4.7).
5) By 2030 substantially expand globally the number of scholarships available to developing countries, in particular least developed countries, small island developing States and African countries, for enrolment in higher education, including vocational training and information and communications technology, technical, engineering, and scientific programmes, in developed countries and other developing countries (Target 4B).

While Target 4 primarily focuses on improving primary and secondary education in countries in the Global South, target 4B specifically draws attention to a strategy that provides quality tertiary education for countries in the Global South through interventions beyond the country's

borders. This strategy is similar to the approach promoted by the World Bank in the 1980s (Heleta & Bagus, 2021). At that time it was promoted that academics from countries in the Global South should be funded to study in the Global North (Committee for Academic Freedom in Africa, 1992). Higher education was seen as a luxury investment without sufficient social and economic return (Heleta & Bagus, 2021). Instead of investing in HE, the World Bank intervention promoted investing in primary and secondary education, limiting the improvement of the higher education system in the Global South (Committee for Academic Freedom in Africa, 1992; Lebeau, 2008; Lotz-Sisitka, 2006; Mamdani, 2007).

This decision from the World Bank was based on the belief that higher education had only limited economic return in comparison to primary and secondary education. Higher education, however, provides more than purely economic returns and emphasises "capacity building necessary for development, progress and socio-economic and environmental sustainability" (Heleta & Bagus, 2021, p. 164). This intervention of the World Bank in the 1980s demonstrates the influence of economic return and the concept of human capital (discussed in Section 2.1), how they impact decision-making, and that other influencing factors were not considered.

The strategy of promoting studying abroad and neglecting the development of higher education institutions within countries in the Global South has been criticised (African Union, 2016; Cloete et al., 2015; Habib et al., 2008; Heleta & Bagus, 2021; Heleta & Moodien, 2017; Singh, 2001). Cloete, Maassen and Bailey (2015) suggest that this strategy was not sustainable, and once this was recognised by the World Bank, the damage to the higher education system in countries in the Global South had already been done. The neglected support for the continuous development of higher education sectors in countries in the Global South in the 1980s and 1990s led to higher education institutions being unable to deliver the required standard of teaching, research, and community service (Habib et al., 2008). These impacts can still be seen today: low-income countries are still challenged by weak public institutions and limited high-quality institutions in the private sector (Heleta & Bagus, 2021). Further problems include scarcities of qualified academics and inadequate resources to meet the demands of the respective countries (Heleta & Bagus, 2021).

Despite past criticisms and negative experiences of the World Bank, the SDGs advocate for almost the same strategy (Heleta & Bagus, 2021). While the SDGs aim to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all", most focus on improving primary and secondary education. The SDGs encourage developed countries to

offer scholarships and funding to students from low-income countries, instead of encouraging investment into strengthening universities in countries in the Global South (Heleta & Bagus, 2021). This approach is highly controversial when knowledge is seen as an essential driver for SD, and universities throughout the African continent are already struggling to provide capacity for all eligible scholars (Campbell et al., 2021; Heleta & Bagus, 2021).

Supporting local universities is fundamental, as higher education is seen as a tool to create "public good professionals" and graduates crucial to contributing to social change and development (Walker & McLean, 2013). To achieve this, professionals graduating from university should be equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to contribute to the public good in their respective countries. It is unclear what qualifies as 'needs' for a country to create social change and development. As mentioned in Section 2.1.1, economic and societal challenges are not comparable across countries as with SD (Redclift, 2014). The public good imperative for professionals can differ over time and between cultures and countries. This brings into question the extent to which a university curriculum can encapsulate the knowledge, skills, and other capabilities required of graduates embodying public good imperatives promoted by a university for a particular country's context. How reasonable is it to expect graduates with qualifications attained outside the country to possess the skills and capabilities needed to create SD within the South African context?

2.3 Higher education in Africa

Higher education in Africa, especially South Africa, has transformed over the years. It plays a crucial role in shaping the continent's development, fostering innovation, and producing skilled professionals. However, the sector also faces various challenges as explained in this section.

2.3.1 World Bank's call to shut down African universities

In the 1980s and 1990s, Africa's higher education systems struggled due to the decline of support from international governments and donors. The World Bank is an organisation with global power upon which many governments are reliant. Many countries are guided by projects and advice from the organisation (Cloete & Maassen, 2015). In the 1980s, the World Bank categorised higher education as a luxury and recommended the closure of universities in the Global South. The alternative offered was for countries from the Global South to select their best-qualified 'elite' students and award them scholarships to universities in the Global North (Cloete & Maassen, 2015; Committee for Academic Freedom in Africa, 1992; Lebeau, 2008).

The World Bank further recommended that Africa focuses on and invests in improving their primary and secondary education before attempting to remedy challenges faced in the higher education systems (Cloete & Maassen, 2015; Owens, 2017). As a result, public expenditure[5] on higher education in Southern African countries decreased from an average of 6,800 USD per student in 1980 to 1,200 USD in 2002 (World Bank, 2009). Research, however, has shown the substantial contribution of tertiary education and the importance of knowledge produced at higher education institutions for developing a country's economy (Cloete & Maassen, 2015; Owens, 2017). This led to the World Bank overturning its strategy regarding investment in African higher education. The change of strategy arose only after the neglected funding for higher education had had a devastating impact on higher education policy in African countries.

2.3.2 Impact of apartheid on higher education

South Africa's history of racial inequality through the apartheid regime remains a significant challenge after almost 30 years of democratic dispensation. The apartheid legacy is still evident in the higher education system, where many young people still do not have access to universities due to a lack of capacity. Various researchers point out that massification is one of the predominant trends in higher education in the 21st century (Cooper, 2015; De Wit & Altbach, 2021; Singh, 2014). Massification reflects a shift from an elitist model of higher education, serving a privileged few, to a more inclusive model that accommodates a broader segment of society (De Wit & Altbach, 2021; Trow, 2000). This expansion is driven by societal demands for a more educated workforce, with an emphasis on meeting the needs of non-traditional students, such as mature learners, part-time students, and those seeking practical skills for employment in emerging knowledge-based industries (Trow, 2000). The term captures the transformation of higher education from a select, elite endeavour to a more widespread and diverse educational experience. While the trend has not reached all the countries in the Global South (Cloete & Maassen, 2015; De Wit & Altbach, 2021), South African universities have experienced significant changes, indicating that massification is already influencing the national higher education landscape (Nyagope, 2023).

When many new higher education institutions were established in the 18th and early 19th centuries, studying was exclusive to the elite, not the wider population (De Wit & Altbach, 2021; Douglass, 2009). Access rates at that time were meagre, and higher education was seen as a tool to train people for government service and professions (Douglass, 2009) with a

[5]Public expenditure is the money spent by a state and all attached bodies.

“distinct national orientation and function” (De Wit & Altbach, 2021, p. 30). Even though the global coverage of universities increased over time, the focus remained on local contexts, and there was a limited exchange on an international level (Altbach, 2013a; Douglass, 2009). Enrolment numbers increased annually, and the higher education system went into a phase of massification, as knowledge itself is an essential contributor to creating development.

HE gained importance at a time when knowledge became an important driver for economies (De Wit & Altbach, 2021). Economies nowadays are driven less by increased capacity for industrialisation and more by an increase in knowledge development and attainment (Altbach, 2013a; World Bank, 2019). As knowledge is becoming increasingly important, highly qualified individuals are in demand (Matić, 2019; Nyagope, 2023). Alongside an increasing demand for highly educated people comes the need to achieve higher degrees to secure jobs, which results in an increasing number of higher education institutions, an expansion of existing institutions, and competition between these institutions (Matić, 2019). A labour market that requires higher degrees to obtain certain positions renders education levels relative to the education of competitors in the job market (Triventi et al., 2016). The more graduates in a country, the more competitors exist in the job market. While the Western world reports gross enrolment rates of approximately 50%, countries in the Global South are left behind, with a gross enrolment rate in African countries of approximately 15% (De Wit & Altbach, 2021).

There are several reasons for the differences in the increase of gross enrolment rates of countries in the Global North and Global South. One reason is significant instability and numerous strikes led by students and staff at universities in African countries (Assie-Lumumba, 2006; Becker, 2018). Over the past centuries, Africa has been affected by “disruption, destruction, and tragic human and social dislocation […], especially with the transatlantic enslavement and its extension and culmination in colonisation in the nineteenth century” (Assie-Lumumba, 2006, p.30). Numerous universities in multiple African countries were built by former colonial powers during the 1960s and 1970s. The building of these institutions was seen as a ”post-colonial nation-building project” (Singh, 2011, p. 350).

These universities and their structures were related to their former colonial powers and seen as an extension of their systems and ideology (Assie-Lumumba, 2006; Cloete & Maassen, 2015). In South Africa, the higher education system was racially divided until 1994, meant to maintain

and reproduce social inequality (Assie-Lumumba, 2006). The Black population[6] in South Africa was restricted by law to only study at higher education institutions designated for the Black population. These institutions also regulated the degree programmes for which Black students could enrol (Cooper, 2015; Salisbury, 2016). Equal education only became a goal in the South African higher education system after the publishing of the 1995 White Paper on Education and Training (Assie-Lumumba, 2006; Department of Education, 1995). Despite efforts to achieve this goal, higher education still creates inequality. One of the reasons for this outcome is that severely under-resourced schools formally reserved for Black learners underperform compared to well-resourced schools formally reserved for White learners, resulting in the perpetual reproduction of inequality (Walker & McLean, 2013; Walker et al., 2022).

Knowledge is critical for development, and the increasing demand for higher enrolment rates at African universities is no different to that of other countries in the world. Singh (2011, p. 353) claims that the quality of education is "determining [the] success or failure of African economies". The enrolment rate in higher education in South Africa increased from 16% in 2005 to 21% in 2017 (Essop, 2020). This increase is still behind the Global North, with an average of approximately 50% (De Wit & Altbach, 2021). The system cannot admit every young person who achieves the requirements for entrance into tertiary education, precluding their opportunity to obtain a degree (Benson & Griffith, 2016; Cloete & Maassen, 2015; Douglass, 2009; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Mohamedbhai, 2011).

It is concerning that children from poor families (comprising approximately 62% of the population) (World Bank, 2023) in South Africa are less likely to go to and succeed at university compared to those from wealthy families (Francis & Webster, 2019). Only about 10 % of children from poor in comparison to 40 % of wealthy families (approximately 10% of the overall population) pursue Higher Education (Spaull, cited in Nxumalo, 2021). To achieve SD, it is necessary to expand the overall and equal access to higher education in South Africa (DHET, 2013, 2022a; NPC, 2011c; UN, 2015a). Cooper (2015) draws attention to how white South Africans continue to be afforded access to quality primary and secondary schooling, which increases their chances of admittance into HE.

[6]Even though the researcher of the study would have preferred to distance herself from the division of race, statistics used for the study and previous research still refers to 'Black' as a racial group.

There is the claim that the higher education system in South Africa shifted from a pure inequality between students' races to an inequality based on people's social and racial class (Cooper, 2015). These disparities mean that socioeconomic status, rather than skill, determines the quality of higher education a South African can expect to achieve. Individuals who can afford to send their children to good schools can secure a good education for their children, while impoverished people cannot. However, the South African government has expressed the intention to fulfil the aim of having a South Africa in which all people can fulfil their full potential by the year 2030:

> This plan envisions a South Africa where everyone feels free yet bounded to others; where everyone embraces their full potential, a country where opportunity is determined not by birth but by ability, education, and hard work. Realising such a society will require the transformation of the economy and focused efforts to build the country's capabilities. To eliminate poverty and reduce inequality, the economy must grow faster and in ways that benefit all South Africans (NPC, 2011a, p. 14).

This aim shows that the South African government is committed to fighting inequalities and poverty in the country. The aim is to allow each individual to embrace their full potential, which is supposed to be achieved through education. Fighting inequality and poverty in general and ensuring equality in education are also addressed in the SDGs, showing the alignment of the South African National Development Goals with the SDGs (UN, 2015a). Having the same aims may help in achieving these goals, as involved parties are working in the same direction rather than contradicting one another (Fourie, 2018).

The SDGs and NDP highlight the importance of education for both development and SD. Higher education can contribute towards SD (see Section 2.1.2), but does this apply to degree mobility?[7] Previous research shows that degree mobility can enhance employment possibilities after graduating (Crossman & Clarke, 2010; Marginson, 2013; Roy et al., 2019), but this alone does not indicate whether degree mobility enhances SD (Campbell & Neff, 2020). Massification and the loss of value of a degree (as mentioned earlier in this sub-section) force students to stand out from other applicants, which makes the massification of higher education a contributor to increased international degree mobility. This trend is also supported by the increased opportunities occurring through globalisation and internationalisation strategies in

[7]Student mobility, where an individual goes abroad for a longer period of time to achieve a full degree in a foreign country will be referred to as degree mobility in this thesis (de Wit & Altbach, 2021).

HE. These strategies are drawing the most international students from the African continent, showing a recent trend to study abroad but still stay close to one's home country instead of going overseas (Benson & Griffith, 2016; Hou & Du, 2022). While a lot of young people from Zimbabwe, Nigeria, Congo, Namibia, Lesotho, and Swaziland come to South Africa to study, young people from South Africa try to achieve degrees in countries outside of Africa instead of other African countries (UNESCO, 2018).

Recognising the significant issue of capacity limitations in many countries in the Global South, the SDGs should have also emphasised addressing this challenge. While providing scholarships for South African scholars to study abroad may initially appear to enhance capacity, it should not be viewed as a comprehensive solution to this problem. Instead, it could potentially contribute to the goal of increasing the number of highly qualified graduates in the country. However, this approach may be perceived as a temporary solution by the United Nations, aiming to address the shortage of capacity in South African universities. Historically, higher education institutions in the Global South have been overlooked, prompting the World Bank to advocate for the development of a more sustainable higher education system in these regions (Singh, 2010). The World Bank aimed to strengthen the system, close the gap of capacity, and ensure quality in higher education institutions in the Global South (Singh, 2010). By doing this, the hope was to generate graduates that can contribute to social change and development in the Global South (Campbell & Neff, 2020). The returning graduates are seen as potential contributors in fighting challenges in countries in the Global South.

The higher education system in South Africa is still grappling with challenges of capacity, a lack of resources, and a scarcity of academics (see Section 2.1.2). Sending a small number of qualified young people abroad does not solve the problems in the country. While this might not be the aim, the problem is that this is the only aim of the SGDs that directly addresses HE. The SDGs neglect the existing problems in higher education in countries in the Global South and instead promote an increase in the provision of scholarships for scholars from the Global South to study in the Global North (Heleta & Bagus, 2021). This echoes the previous policy promoted by the World Bank, which had devastating impacts (as discussed in Section 2.2.1) and was undertaken without adequate knowledge as to how degree mobility impacts SD.

2.3.3 Development goals in South Africa and the SDGs

The NDP of South Africa was established in 2011 and set goals for overall national development and higher education by 2030 (NPC, 2015), the UN established the internationally

recognised SDGs in 2015 (UN, 2015a). While the two have some common goals, they differ in particular aspects (NPC, 2011c; UN, 2015a). With regards to HE, the SDGs and NDP acknowledge higher education as a part of sustainable development. While the SDGs aim for equal access and increased scholarships for studying abroad[8], the NDP focuses on improving the higher education system in South Africa. The NDP generally aims to unite:

> All South Africans around a common programme to achieve prosperity and equity. Promoting active citizenry to strengthen development, democracy, and accountability. Bringing about faster economic growth, higher investment, and greater labour absorption. Focusing on key capabilities of people and the state. Building a capable and developmental state. Encouraging strong leadership throughout society to work together to solve problems (NPC, 2011c).

The NDP clearly states that this goal will be achieved by building the capabilities of people and by broadening the "social cohesion and unity while redressing the inequities of the past" (NPC, 2011c). While the NDP seems to have goals that align with the SDGs in terms of addressing inequality, democracy, and infrastructure, they do not appear to agree with the aims of HE. A coherent programme with aligning rather than competing goals is required to create and maintain effective SD (Fourie, 2018). It is therefore essential to examine whether the aims of the South African government align with the SDGs.

The SDGs promote scholarships to study abroad, while the NDP (NPC, 2011a, p. 34) aims to:

1) Increase the higher education participation rate to 30% by 2030.
2) Achieve a goal of 75% of academic staff at universities having PhDs; and
3) Produce 100 doctoral graduates per million individuals in the total population per year.

The NDP also "focuses on the critical capabilities needed to transform the economy and society" and sees this as essential to achieving SD (NPC, 2011c). Key capabilities mentioned in the NDP include (NPC, 2011c):

1. Political freedoms and human rights.
2. Social opportunities arising from education, health care, public transport, and other public services.
3. Social security and safety nets.

[8]"Studying abroad" is a term used for students who moved abroad to achieve a full degree; it excludes semester-abroad students and short-term programmes.

4. An open society, transparency, disclosures, and a culture of accountability; and
5. Economic facilities, work, consumption, exchange, investment, and production.

Since education is included as a tool that can help to achieve these aims, the NDP outlines goals and strategies for higher education:

1. Develop higher education and training that enable people to fulfil their potential.
2. An expanding higher education sector that can contribute to rising incomes, higher productivity, and the shift to a more knowledge-intensive economy; and
3. A wider system of innovation that links universities, science councils, and other research and development role players with priority areas of the economy.

Furthermore, the objectives state that the government intends on ensuring more students are enrolled in general and in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields, specifically (NPC, 2011c). The aim is to increase the number of PhD graduates working in the higher education sector to 5,000 annually by 2030 (NPC, 2011c). These aims focus on developing the local higher education system without directly mentioning international scholarships.

While the focus of the NDP is on uplifting the country's higher education system, the South African White Paper on Post-School Education and Training supports the idea of increased cooperation for international scholarships and student exchange abroad (DHET, 2017a). It states that there is a need "to improve international communication, cross-cultural learning and global citizenship" and "to assist in strengthening South African institutions, especially the historically disadvantaged institutions which still do not have extensive international relations…" and to see higher education "…as an opportunity to take local and/or indigenous knowledge to the international community" (DHET, 2017a, p. 16). The DHET (DHET) conceptualise international cooperation as a mechanism to improve the South African higher education sector. The DHET recommends:

> (1) to enhance international research collaboration; (2) to attract talented and highly qualified people, "the best and brightest" to South African higher education institutions to enhance its human capital; (3) to open up South African higher education both to novice and experienced researchers; academics and support staff for personal and professional development and to gain knowledge. (DHET, 2017a, p. 19)

This is an indication that the country is concentrating on retaining qualified scholars within the South African higher education system instead of sending scholars abroad. These recommendations are aligned with the current trend of internationalisation of higher education, as will be discussed in Section 2.4.

Increasing enrolment rates and an important gain of knowledge arise at a time when globalisation is already happening in many spheres. The increase of degree mobility in an era of massification and globalisation of higher education has increased, which is no surprise. Globalisation is an international macro system and includes the higher education system. Globalisation refers to the current situation in which borders between countries are metaphorically invisible, and free markets make it easier to trade internationally (Kreber, 2009). It also describes the international exchange of knowledge and ideas (Knight, 2003). This definition aligns with that of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) (2009, p. 7):

> The reality is shaped by an increasingly integrated world economy, new information and technology, the emergence of international knowledge networks, the role of the English language, and other forces beyond the control of academic institutions.

In the 21st century's new global economy, there are more multinational corporations than ever before and financial markets worldwide depend upon each other (Castells, 1999; UN, 2010). A globalised world also produces new systems and networks that offer opportunities for the higher education sector (De Wit & Altbach, 2021; Douglass, 2009). Global exchange and cooperation enhance the quality of education, research, and service to society (De Wit & Altbach, 2021). Although globalisation and the global knowledge economy bring new opportunities, they also create new challenges for higher education institutions worldwide, and this is where internationalisation plays a role.

2.4 Internationalisation and the knowledge economy

HE needs to contribute to the knowledge economy, which is a framework of production and consumption built on intellectual capital and the utilisation of scientific breakthroughs and research findings to drive economic development, by fostering a culture of innovation, investing in cutting-edge research, and producing a skilled workforce equipped to apply knowledge in real-world settings. In addition, higher education needs to integrate global perspectives, experiences, and collaborations into academic and research activities by

embracing internationalisation and fostering cross-border exchanges. In other words, higher education institutions must prepare graduates to thrive in a globalised world and drive advancement in various sectors through the application of knowledge and innovative ideas.

The internationalisation of higher education manifests in multiple forms, such as more dual-enrolment programs, shared facilities, shared admission requirements, and single administrations for multiple universities (Douglass, 2009, p. 6). The Bologna Declaration in Europe is an excellent example of internationalisation and its impact on higher education, which is an approach to the higher education system that attempts to standardise this system in Europe, making it easier to move between countries and institutions (Douglass, 2009; Levina et al., 2016). Internationalisation includes the international mobility of students as well as the internationalisation of the curriculum, as will be outlined in Section 2.4.2.1 (De Wit & Altbach, 2021). According to De Wit and Altbach (2021), only 1-5% of scholars have the opportunity to spend part of their study time or achieve a full degree abroad. In the United States, these numbers are nearly 10% and in Germany and the Netherlands approximately 30%. With a global average of 1-5% of students internationally, this shows that the majority (99-95%) of scholars and students do not have the opportunity to undertake their studies in other countries (De Wit & Altbach, 2021). These numbers demonstrate the current inequality in the internationalisation of HE. An argument could be made for the increase of scholarships, as this would increase the number of young scholars from the Global South being able to study outside their country, creating more equality. This argument is, however, rather one-sided, which will be elaborated in Section 2.4.4.

A globalised knowledge economy requires globally competent graduates that match the job market requirements. Spending time abroad can favour an individual in the job market (De Wit & Altbach, 2021) (discussed in Section 2.3.2). There is an increasing trend in higher education institutions to internationalise education at home to accommodate the need for more globally competent graduates. Examples include international, global, and comparative content and incorporating internationalised forms of teaching, assessment tasks, and support services (Leask, 2015). An internationalised curriculum has the potential for local universities to produce globally competent graduates within the borders of their home country.

Local internationalisation of higher education does not include so-called ‘satellite campuses’, where universities from the Global North open campuses in the Global South. Instead, internationalisation at home is defined as “the purposeful integration of international and

intercultural dimensions into the formal and informal curriculum for all students within domestic learning environments" (Beelen & Jones, 2015, p. 76). This means local institutions incorporate dimensions that allow admission of students who do not participate in degree mobility but are still educated as globally competent graduates.

While universities abroad might not be able to consider the local context of their foreign students, local universities can consider the local context as well as implement "international, intercultural and global dimensions" into their curriculum (Heleta & Chasi, 2022; Leask, 2015, p. 9). If there is a need for globally competent graduates, this could be a way to allow more graduates to benefit from internationalisation and simultaneously consider the local context.

While the internationalisation of higher education has been seen as an entity that will continue to increase, some challenges have slowed down its development in the last few years (De Wit & Altbach, 2021). One of these challenges is the Covid-19 pandemic, which impeded degree mobility, challenging the logistical and educational arrangements (De Wit & Altbach, 2020). Travel bans delayed students moving abroad to take up scholarship opportunities and others experienced constraints in returning home once their qualifications were completed (De Wit & Altbach, 2020). Beyond the COVID-19 pandemic, there was increasing awareness of and a call for more carbon-neutral higher education programs (De Wit & Altbach, 2020). This is based on the impact travelling for degree mobility has on the planet's environment (De Wit & Altbach, 2020).

Further criticism involves questions regarding the internationalisation of higher education potentiating inequality between elite and disadvantaged societies (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Jooste & Heleta, 2017). This criticism stems from only the elite being able to participate in degree mobility, favouring members of the population who would have already been afforded greater opportunities to succeed in life than others (Jooste & Heleta, 2017). International degree mobility may offer new opportunities, but also comes with challenges regarding SD.

2.4.1 Knowledge economy and higher education

Theories about development have changed many times during the last decades. While theories about industrialisation and economic growth were dominant in the 19th century (Szirmai, 2012), a shift to knowledge and human capital as main pillars for development took place in the 21st century (Molla & Cuthbert, 2018). Although many organisations and institutions have a vested interest in contributing to knowledge, in most countries, higher education is recognised as a crucial contributor to knowledge. This makes higher education a potential driver for SD,

as it can generate more knowledge and development (discussed in Section 2.2.1). Graduates can be seen as potential contributors to social change and development in South Africa. However, does this mean it is enough to merely create more graduates? Or should the focus instead be on whether graduates are equipped with the skills and knowledge necessary for SD?

Alumni equipped with what is needed for SD are becoming more significant at a time when the importance of the knowledge economy has been increasing (Altbach, 2013a; De Wit & Altbach, 2021; Hayek, 1945). The concept of a knowledge economy is based on the fact that economies are becoming increasingly dependent on knowledge, information, and highly skilled individuals (Durazzi, 2019). Advanced manufacturing, such as that of Industry 4.0, or high-end services, such as the financial sector, are becoming more important for economies to be successful.[9] (Durazzi, 2019). Since jobs in these sectors require highly skilled workers, there is a great demand for graduates internationally (Durazzi, 2019).

While the concept of a knowledge economy is far from new, its prominence has increased in the last few decades (Altbach, 2013a; De Wit & Altbach, 2021; Hayek, 1945). The speed at which knowledge is expanding is accelerating, and so is the importance of the knowledge economy (De Wit & Altbach, 2021; Stehr, 1994). This shift from industrialised economies toward a knowledge economy is accompanied by the increasing importance of higher education in the last three to four decades (Altbach, 2013a; De Wit & Altbach, 2021). Countries in the Global South have begun to recognise knowledge-based development as an essential tool to fight poverty and ensure SD (Singh, 2011; UNESCO, 2005). Therefore, it is essential to focus on the possible contribution of graduates towards SD, regardless of whether they are graduating in their home country or abroad.

Knowledge has become the main driver for development, and higher education institutions have a fundamental role as producers and disseminators of knowledge significant to shaping a country's developmental agenda. The importance of knowledge (in terms of the knowledge economy) for an economy does not include common-sense knowledge, but advanced knowledge beyond general literacy and education, which is generally gained at a higher education institution (Durazzi, 2019; Majumdar, 1998; Reimers & McGinn, 1997). The assumption is that the higher the level of education in a country, the more successful the economy becomes, and the more growth will occur (Assie-Lumumba, 2006; Marginson, 2011).

[9]It is assumed that a higher level of education results in a higher productivity and a higher income (Assie-Lumumba, 2006). On a national level, an economy has a higher economic output and growth with a higher level of education of its population (Assie-Lumumba, 2006).

This claim makes higher education a vital tool for social change and development (Assie-Lumumba, 2006; Marginson, 2011). According to the literature, countries that invest heavily in higher education and skills benefit economically and socially from this investment (Assie-Lumumba, 2006a; Pouris & Inglesi-Lotz, 2014; Singh, 2014). To compete with globally increasing knowledge-based development[10], there is an understanding that countries such as South Africa must aim for graduates, specifically at a postgraduate level (DHET, 2021a, 2022a).

Considering the need for a knowledgeable population, how do countries increase graduates when there is a capacity shortage in local higher education institutions? In the case of South Africa, the government signs agreements with participating countries in the Global North that target eligible candidates for international scholarships as an alluring strategy to increase the number of graduates, theoretically increasing knowledge for the country to draw on for national development. However, there is cause to scrutinise this strategy and ask whether the approach perhaps neglects the fact that specific skills and knowledge might be needed to support SD in South Africa (Campbell & Neff, 2020; Heleta & Bagus, 2021). It is essential to remember that SD is more than pure economic growth and involves improving the well-being of people, protecting the environment, preserving cultural heritage, and ensuring equitable opportunities for all. Thus, higher education should focus on more than purely increasing graduates and also pay attention to the type of graduates being produced by institutions. Therefore, the study questioned the contributions graduates educated in institutions outside their home country can make to SD.

2.4.2 Knowledge economy and the global citizen

Internationalisation of higher education is a strategic approach linked to the opportunities and challenges that accompany the globalisation of higher education. The internationalisation of higher education relates to establishing strategies aimed toward degree mobility and includes curriculum enhancement and the creation of global citizens (discussed in Section 2.4.1). Knight (2003, p. 2) claims that internationalisation aims to integrate "an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions and delivery of postsecondary education". Using this definition for internationalisation allows for the concept of a strategy towards globalisation that discloses the creation of a global citizen (Altbach & Knight, 2007). Global citizenship is defined as shifting *"*the perspective from the local and immediate to a broader plane through

[10]Knowledge-based development indicates the importance of knowledge for SD and therefore the ability to fight poverty and create social progress (King & McGrath, 2004).

the idea of citizenship, it evokes a sense of practical responsibility towards others regardless of their location in terms of geography, class, gender or ethnicity"(Skrbis,2014 , p. 6). While the global citizen is not clearly defined, it is mainly seen as an individual that has knowledge about both the local and international context and should be equipped for the job market of the global knowledge economy (De Wit & Altbach, 2021). This concept was mentioned in Section 2.3.3 in the context of the aims of the DHET, which indicates the importance placed on global citizenship by the South African government.

The global citizen is often taken for granted and seen as an essential feature needed for the knowledge economy (De Wit & Altbach, 2021; DHET, 2013). No agreement has been made about the necessary qualities of a global citizen. While some do not question this concept of a global citizen, others see it as a liberal-democratic Western concept that promotes Western values and norms and allows other people to join their way of living and happiness (Bowden, 2003). It promotes a concept that people worldwide should adopt a 'one-size-fits-all' approach that copies the liberal-democratic Western political and economic strategies and values (Jooste & Heleta, 2017; Mac Ginty, 2010). Furthermore, the concept of the global citizen omits the necessity of each nation's sovereignty and local political and economic strategies to create development and economic growth (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012; Jooste & Heleta, 2017). Creating global citizens seems like a neo-colonial approach that puts the values of the Global North at the forefront while neglecting those of the Global South.

The study delved into an intriguing question: If scholarships are designed to cultivate global citizens, why is there an absence of emphasis on enhancing overall degree mobility within the SDGs? Wouldn't it be more fitting for the SDGs to establish a reciprocal exchange between the Global North and the Global South, facilitating movement in both directions? While offering more spaces to qualified people from the Global South in the Global North, the Global South could aim to create more capacity for people from the Global North. This way, degree mobility could allow for an increased mutual understanding of nations and cultures. Instead, the SDGs focus on increasing degree mobility from the Global South to countries, which are also in the Global South or the Global North. This seems to exclude the possibility that scholars from the Global North can become global citizens by studying in the Global South, which leads to an assumption that the Global North is perceived to have a better higher education system.

Despite criticisms of the intentions of the global citizen and its possible benefits for the Global South, it seems exclusively accessible for privileged citizens of this world. According to

Calhoun (2003, p. 543), being considered a privileged citizen, and therefore also a global citizen, requires 'good' passports which allow easy access to visas. Additionally, it necessitates international credit cards and invitations from conference organisers or private and business contacts. These advantages are often withheld from many citizens in the Global South. While the study agrees that there is a need for graduates who understand global problems and concepts, this does not necessarily mean that there is a need for a global citizen. By favouring the already privileged individuals in the world, the global citizen amplifies existing inequalities, which suggests instead the aim for globally competent graduates (Jooste & Heleta, 2017).

The globalising world needs graduates who are "socially responsible, ethical and globally competent" (Jooste & Heleta, 2017, p. 40) to deal with existing global and national problems. Having globally competent graduates means having professionals who can also contribute to a national context and are aware of their history and culture (Bowden, 2003, p. 359). They can value and respect other cultures and countries and consider the impact one country's decisions and changes have on others (Bowden, 2003; Jooste & Heleta, 2017). This responsibility towards oneself and others is necessary for SD. Thus, the study agrees that there is a need for globally competent graduates in the South African context rather than global citizens.

2.4.3 International degree mobility

The globalisation of higher education offers new opportunities through a growing network of higher education institutions, where academics can learn from each other and create research partnerships (Altbach, 2013d; Douglass, 2009; Heleta & Chasi, 2022). The opportunities created by 'disappearing borders' make it easier for those with a certain background (as mentioned in Section 2.3.2.1) to achieve a university degree outside their home country. Policies encouraging international degree mobility create increased competitiveness to attract the 'best brains' from around the world to universities and subsequently retain the graduates in the workforce (Assie-Lumumba, 2006; De Wit & Altbach, 2021; DHET, 2013; Dlamini, 2016; Douglass, 2009; Stein et al., 2016).

The availability of resources for research development can also impact international students' choices in pursuing degrees outside of their home country (Van der Wende, 2015). Universities in the Global North are often better equipped and have more financial resources for research development (Reale et al., 2019). Financial resources and good equipment make universities in the Global North appear more prestigious, and attaining a degree at one of these universities

is expected to increase job opportunities for their graduates. This reputation makes it easier for prestigious and well-resourced universities to attract students from the Global South (Reale et al., 2019).

Well-resourced universities should offer more opportunities to graduates, which could justify the claim that scholarships to study in the Global North can contribute to SD. However, there does not appear to be evidence that this supports SD. Degree mobility often does not equate to only achieving a degree in the Global North. While some African students strive for education abroad, the Global North has a huge demand for highly qualified and educated people (Chien & Chiteng Kot, 2011). For this reason, Australia, Germany, the UK, and other countries in the Global North have policies that aim to attract foreigners to study or work in their countries (Chien & Chiteng Kot, 2011; Schulmann, 2017). These efforts threaten the sending countries, as they experience a so-called brain drain, meaning highly qualified people leave the country on a long-term basis to achieve a career elsewhere. Even if degree mobility itself might not be a threat, it creates the risk of increased brain drain should the alumni stay abroad. While the study acknowledges the increased risk of brain drain through degree mobility, it wants to determine the possible contribution of returning alumni to SD in their home country. For this reason, the study wants to acknowledge the risk of brain drain but will not discuss it in depth.

Many potential students consider international university rankings in their selection of a higher education institution at which to pursue a degree. Commonly-used ranking systems include the Times Higher Education (THE) ranking, the Shanghai Jiao Tong University (SJTU), the Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP), the Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU), and the Times of London (Altbach, 2012; Dlamini, 2016). Most of these rankings are based on the research success of the universities, evaluated according to peer reviews, international students, research citations, publications, or international awards (Dlamini, 2016). The rankings are often critiqued based on their inability to prove good quality teaching to their students, as this is seen as a university's primary duty (Altbach, 2012; Terlević et al., 2015).

The international rankings show a huge global diversity in higher education institutions. Most highly ranked universities are in the Global North, and there were no African or South American universities in the top 100 THE ranking in the year 2023 (THE, 2023a). World-class universities often do not care for minority and underprivileged populations (Walker & McLean, 2013). They are more interested in maintaining their status and fulfilling the criteria necessary for the rankings. Since inequality is a problem in some countries in the Global South, higher

education institutions are often seen as contributors to reducing inequality and supporting local SD. A focus on climbing the scales of the most well-known international university rankings would shift the focus away from SD and towards the measured aspects of the international university rankings. Considering whether universities contribute to SD would result in a different ranking and a different focus of the universities, as shown in the relatively new Times Higher Impact Ranking (also known as the THE Impact Ranking).

This ranking focuses on international higher education institutions' impact on achieving the SDGs in terms of the contribution of universities towards achieving equality, eliminating poverty, and achieving other SDGs (Calderon, 2020). 2023 was the fifth year this ranking was made public (THE, 2023b). In 2023, the Impact ranking presented a distinct shift in the distribution of nations amongst the top institutions. Notably, the top 100 list featured a presence of two African (both in South Africa) and two South American universities. However, as this ranking is not yet very well-known, it is less likely to be a determining factor in the choice of where to study compared with the more common and established ranking systems. Relying solely on conventional rankings might cause capable students to overlook universities that actively contribute to SD and provide a platform for students to engage in such endeavours. The notion that seeking a high-quality education mandate by going abroad can overshadow the fact that the quality of education is not solely determined by rankings.

2.4.4 Decolonising education versus degree mobility

In the global landscape of HE, a growing number of institutions are embracing internationalisation policies (De Wit & Altbach, 2021). As a result, discussions surrounding the internationalisation of higher education and degree mobility have garnered significant attention in current literature, revealing both favourable and unfavourable impacts. Within this context, it is important to recognise that criticisms of degree mobility extend to the notion that these strategies can inadvertently replicate patterns reminiscent of past colonialism (Sharpe, 2015). Dlamini (2016) discusses the importance of universities' contributions to SD and recommends not adapting to the Western system to appear on an international ranking system but creating local knowledge and solving national problems.

This critique stems from similar concerns raised in decolonial debates: "One of the most destructive effects of colonialism was the subjugation of local knowledge and promotion of the Western knowledge as the universal knowledge" (Heleta, 2016, p. 9). Purely focusing on sending scholars abroad to achieve a degree appears to be a repetition of this strategy, as it

seems society values Western knowledge over the education and knowledge in South Africa, or other countries in the Global South. While there has been a call to decolonise, HE, degree mobility is still seen as a mode of improvement and upskilling for people from the Global South. The effort of decolonising the curriculum and the importance of indigenous knowledge in formerly colonised countries seems to be at odds with the discourse advocating for an increase in degree mobility favouring movement from the Global South to the Global North (Mampane et al., 2018). Recognising the significance of knowledge as human capital in the 21st century underscores the importance of valuing local and indigenous knowledge as contributing to the development of countries in the developing world (Jooste & Heleta, 2017).

The concept of international degree mobility, while offering opportunities for global learning experiences, introduces a challenge to the advancement of inclusive and locally relevant education. This challenge arises from the predominant influence of Western knowledge systems and epistemologies inherent in the educational systems of many institutions. This potential mismatch between the knowledge frameworks being imported and the cultural contexts in which they are being introduced can hinder progress towards education that truly resonates with local realities.

This situation is especially concerning for countries in the Global South, like South Africa, where the legacy of colonialism and the complexities of development challenges persist. In such contexts, the need to address the potential pitfalls of international degree mobility becomes evident. One proposed solution to navigate this challenge is through the adoption of a centralised approach to decolonising education, as highlighted by scholars such as Boughey and McKenna (2021) and Mampane et al. (2018). This approach would involve a deliberate and systematic effort to dismantle the remnants of colonial biases and power imbalances that continue to shape educational systems. It would encompass a range of strategies aimed at integrating local knowledge, indigenous perspectives, and community-driven expertise into the educational fabric. This would ensure a harmonious alignment between educational content and the lived experiences of students.

Through this approach, educational institutions strive to mitigate the potential adverse effects of international degree mobility. By embracing a curriculum that respects diverse cultural viewpoints, acknowledges historical contexts, and prioritises locally relevant knowledge, students are offered an enriched and meaningful learning experience. This educational

framework would empower learners to engage critically with the content, recognise the value of their heritage, and contribute to the positive transformation of their communities.

2.5 Scholarships for sustainable development

Scholarships have a long history and are offered for different reasons: some are addressed explicitly to students with exceptional financial needs; others are awarded according to the scholar's academic and professional background; some aim to increase the enrolment figures of specific scientific fields; and some simply support development (Cloete et al., 2015; DHET, 2017b; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Oketch, 2016). As higher education is an essential pillar of SD (see Section 2.2.2), scholarships are a way to improve and influence the higher education system of a country. As discussed, countries in the Global South face challenges in meeting the demand of accommodating all students eligible for higher education (see Section 2.2.2). Scholarship agreements between governments and or other sponsors are an attractive strategy to support countries in the Global South (Benson & Griffith, 2016; Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs United States, 2016; DFAT, 2018). While the SDGs promote an increase in international scholarships for scholars from countries in the Global South to study elsewhere, they do not specify what types of scholarships should be increased. The assumption is that studying abroad automatically results in SD. Moreover, while some scholarships might have altruistic intentions, this is not always the case, as mentioned in Sections 2.3.2.2 and 2.3.4.

The intention of the scholarship can often be seen in the objectives and eligibility of the scholarship programme, and they are generally either altruistic, diplomatic, academic, or economic in orientation. (Boeren, 2018, p. 44). Some scholarships are funded by ministries of foreign affairs and economic development, and others by private companies (Boeren, 2018). The recipients of these scholarships are often expected to be future leaders of a country as citizens with the potential to be in some position of influence and power later on (Boeren, 2018).

The Fulbright Scholarship, established by the United States government, is a reputable example. The United States government has agreements with governments worldwide to fund young people with leadership skills to study in their country (Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs United States, 2016b). In theory, should the alumni achieve leading positions in the future, this could allow the United States to have stronger economic ties with the respective home countries. This is expressed as one of the aims of the Fulbright scholarship (Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs United States, 2016b). The scholarship indicates

the economic and diplomatic intentions of the United States; however, the scholarship ought to be beneficial to the country in the Global South as it is meant to contribute towards SD, according to the SDGs. It was of interest to the study to examine how this could translate into SD for South Africa.

While some scholarships aim to contribute to alleviating the challenges faced within countries in the Global South, this is not always without self-interest. A clear benefit for the funder is that most of the money spent remains within the scholarship provider's country. The fees being paid are to the host institution, and the living expenses of the scholar benefit the host country's economy (Boeren, 2018; Kent, 2018). According to Sogge (2015), up to 80 to 90% of scholarship value remains in the funding country. Promoting scholarships for people from countries in the Global South to study in other countries in the Global South or North is in favour of the host universities, as most of them have policies in place to attract more international students. Scholarships increase the number of international students in the funding country's universities, which influences the international ranking scales. In addition, there is a connection between the scholars' academic input and the goodwill and influence of the alumni even after returning to their home countries (Boeren, 2018). The premise of these types of scholarships is that the enduring benefits are tipped in favour of the home country. If that is the case, can we identify the alumni's contribution towards SD?

Altruistic scholarships are often recognised as those that specifically focus on the needs of the home country (Boeren, 2018). These scholarships have a specific focus on funding critical skills and often require the awardee to undertake their studies in fields of particular interest to the home country and its economy. The scholarship contract often stipulates a clause compelling graduates to return to their home country after their studies are complete (NRF, 2017). Unsurprisingly, altruistic scholarships are a common strategy in South Africa, given its apartheid past and the need for more qualified graduates. This has necessitated scholarships as part of the redress strategy, prioritising funds to support disadvantaged groups to pursue postgraduate studies (DHET, 2013). In other words, investment in specific skills and disadvantaged groups is viewed as an approach to redress the racial and economic inequality that exists in South Africa.

2.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, the concept of SD assumed a central role. Given the multifaceted challenges confronting the 21st-century global landscape, it has become increasingly imperative for

scholarships to align with the principles of SD. This imperative resonates strongly within the framework of the South African NDP, where higher education emerges as a pivotal player in advancing the tenets of SD. The intrinsic value of specialised knowledge is paramount, catalysing nurturing a robust and resilient economy.

However, as we delve deeper into the discourse, a thought-provoking realisation comes to light. Despite the symbiotic relationship between higher education and SD, a notable discrepancy emerges. While the SDGs encompass a broad spectrum of global aspirations, they appear to lack a direct focus on the holistic expansion and fortification of higher education institutions within the countries of the Global South.

This observation raises pertinent questions about the intricate interplay between scholarships and SD. How effectively do scholarships, particularly those advocating for qualified scholars to study abroad, contribute to the advancement of higher education institutions in the Global South? In addition, can the pursuit of international degree mobility serve as a robust mechanism for enhancing specialised knowledge and fostering SD in countries in the Global South?

As we navigate these queries, it becomes evident that a comprehensive approach is warranted. While scholarships remain a potent tool for knowledge exchange and capacity building, their efficacy in directly addressing the unique challenges faced by higher education institutions in the Global South warrants scrutiny. The linkage between scholarships and sustainable development calls for a more nuanced strategy that not only acknowledges the importance of cross-border educational opportunities but also recognises the significance of localized expertise and context-specific knowledge.

In a landscape where sustainable development serves as a multifaceted goal, the role of scholarships in cultivating globally competent graduates gain renewed significance. To harness the potential of scholarships in advancing SD, a synthesis between international exposure and the cultivation of region-specific insights is needed. This fusion has the potential to foster a dynamic synergy whereby scholars, equipped with a global perspective, contribute meaningfully to the SD agendas of their home countries within the Global South.

The question arises: Can sending qualified scholars abroad to study overseas be a comprehensive solution for cultivating more academics and specialized knowledge? Despite past experiences showcasing the adverse effects of emphasising foreign investments in the Global South, the SDGs persist in advocating for this approach. Their intent to send qualified

scholars abroad is evident, yet the mechanism through which degree mobility might effectively contribute to sustainable development remains unclear.

The enduring impact of the colonial era continues to resonate in contemporary times, shaping a perception that the Western world is frequently regarded as a yardstick for higher education excellence. The adoption of Western concepts as a universal blueprint prevails, creating an assumption that everyone should strive to emulate. However, as the global landscape transforms through knowledge-driven development and the impacts of globalisation, the significance of individual countries' sovereignty cannot be overlooked.

This perspective prompts a critical examination of the notion of a global citizen and underscores the importance of nurturing globally competent graduates. The complexity of SD necessitates a diverse range of knowledge and skills that are context-specific to each country. Consequently, the relevance of scholarships in contributing to SD comes into question when scholars are educated overseas in different contexts.

As the world navigates the intricate path of SD, it becomes evident that a nuanced and adaptable approach is required. The traditional model of scholars studying abroad may need to be re-evaluated considering the unique needs and circumstances of each country. True progress in SD calls for a holistic understanding of local contexts.

CHAPTER 3
THE CAPABILITY APPROACH AS A THEORETICAL LENS

Poverty is not just a lack of money; it is not having the capability to realise one's full potential as a human being.

Amartya Sen

3.1 Introduction

The SDGs position scholarships as a driver for SD. As discussed in Section 1.3, this thesis contributes to the knowledge gap regarding the impact of alumni on SD in their home countries after degree mobility. However, the researcher acknowledges the complexity of SD and accept that it is nearly impossible to capture all its aspects. The tendency to conceive development within economic growth, employment rates, and other quantitative measurements with little consideration of the qualitative aspect of development was discussed in Chapter 2 (Boni & Walker, 2016; Sanz et al., 2017). Chapter 2 discussed how SD is understood more broadly, incorporating aspects that focus beyond pure quantitative measures. This chapter builds on this by arguing that the impact of SD requires a holistic theoretical approach. For this reason, the theoretical lens of this research draws on a theoretical framework that is best suited for this holistic approach and allows one to 'measure' the impact of individuals on SD in South Africa.

When considering the contribution of scholarships to sustainable development, the primary focus is on understanding how this contribution is realized. Previous research has emphasized the importance of fostering education that enables the individual to develop capabilities, empowering them to contribute to sustainable development (Becker, 2006; Pelenc & Ballet, 2015; Sen, 1985; Walker & McLean, 2013). This notion is grounded in the belief that certain capabilities of an individuals can enhance societal ell-being (Walker & McLean, 2013). While previous research has discussed such an individual's contributing to sustainable human development, there is a lack of clarity regarding how to define such individuals within the context of sustainable development. This has prompted a critical examination of how such individuals could be conceptualised. The research suggests that this definition could be derived from individual's capabilities, focusing on specific attributes that delineate a responsible agent in terms of how their capabilities contribute not only to personal well-being, but also to broader sustainable development goals.

As the CA is perceived as a holistic approach that captures the bigger picture of development and looks beyond simple monetary measures and economic growth (Nussbaum, 2000; Sen, 1985), it is the best-suited theoretical lens for the study. The concept of "considering the bigger picture" links directly with the concept of SD, which emphasises more than numbers and pure economic growth (see Section 2.1.1). The CA defines the 'actual' improvement of human lives as 'real' development, which can only be achieved when individuals have the freedom to decide what they choose to value in their lives (Sen, 1985). Drawing on the CA in the study allowed a more holistic exploration of the impact of alumni returning to their home countries, as this approach looks beyond rates of employment, income, or the number of graduates. Instead, the CA shifted the exploration to the impact of improving human lives. Outlining and discussing the concept of the CA and its meaning for HD and SD in this chapter illustrates why this conceptual framework was the best fit for the study. This discussion will examine how higher education and its vital role in the sector can be perceived through the lens of the CA.

How the study perceived HD was guided by definitions by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 1990). Its definition goes beyond "producing commodities and accumulating capital" (UNDP, 1990, p. 1) and instead focuses on human well-being (UNDP, 1990, p. iii) and a "conducive environment for people, individually and collectively, to develop their full potential and to have a reasonable chance of leading productive and creative lives in accord with their needs and interests" (UNDP, 1990, p. 1). The definition of SD was discussed in Section 2.1.1. The differences between the concepts of SD and HD will be elaborated upon in this chapter, developing a concept that links the CA with SD in the specific context of the study.

3.2 Capability approach, human development, and sustainable development

Amartya Sen is the pioneer of the CA, which fosters a different understanding of HD (Altbach, 2004; Anand & Sen, 1994b, 2000; Drèze & Sen, 2002; Sen, 1985, 1999, 2008, 2009). The theory departs from conventional development theories based on economic growth, money, and resources by challenging the simplistic concept of aiming for economic growth, which only benefits a few individuals (Sen, 1999; Walker & Unterhalter, 2007). Sen (1999) considers the concept of pure economic growth a failure and remedies this deficiency by the inclusion of HD, which they define as "expanding the real freedoms that people enjoy through the removal of various types of unfreedoms that leave people with little choice and little opportunity of exercising their reasoned agency" (Sen, 1999, p. 1). The study draws on the core concepts of

the CA: capabilities, functionings, conversion factors, agency, and well-being (Sen, 1999, p. xii; see Figure 3.1 below).

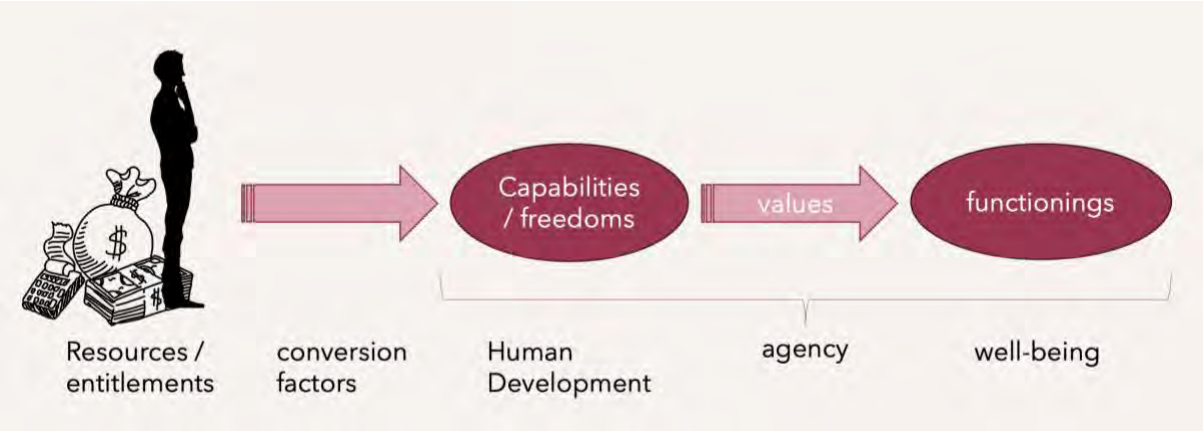

Figure 3.1: CA concepts[11]

The diagram above illustrates the relationship between an individual, resources or entitlements, conversion factors and how these contribute to the agent's capabilities (equalling freedoms). HD is achieved on the level of the capabilities (through having more freedoms), while well-being is achieved through being able to choose which capabilities one really values and decides to turn into a functioning.

The word "value" in the diagram refers to the inherent value or worth of the capabilities that an individual possesses. In the CA, the focus is not solely on material resources or commodities, but also on the substantive opportunities and abilities that people have to lead lives they value and consider meaningful. The value aspect emphasizes that what matters is not just having certain resources, but the actual opportunities and abilities they enable, which contribute to an individual's well-being and quality of life.

Sen (1999) defines HD as creating more freedoms for people and removing their limitations of not being able to live a life they choose to value. Figure 3.1 above demonstrates the connection between the different concepts and that HD is achieved through the **freedoms** (also referred to as capabilities) of an individual. **Resources** (such as manufactured goods, services, assets, and income), **entitlements** (the right to access these resources), and conversion factors determine the capabilities of an individual (Pelenc & Dubois, 2020). For example, the availability of

[11] The linear progression in this figure is only under ideal circumstances.

resources (such as money, infrastructure, and universities) determines whether an individual has the opportunity to access a higher education institution.

Conversion factors determine how available resources and entitlements provide the individual with certain capabilities (Sen, 2003). These conversion factors can be internal or external. While internal factors refer to personal characteristics such as gender, age, human capital, and experiences, external factors include their social context (including public goods, cultural traditions, and customs) and environmental aspects (such as geographical location, climate change, and access to water) (Crabtree, 2020a; Mathebula, 2018; Pelenc & Dubois, 2020; Robeyns, 2005; Sen, 2003). If there are universities in one's country, but an individual is pressured by their parents to begin working, that individual may decide not to pursue HE, despite having the resources available to do so.

Capabilities are at the core of the CA (see Figure 3.1 above). In the study, the free choice to decide whether one wants to study abroad is considered **freedom** and is also referred to as capability (Crabtree, 2020a; Sen, 1999). Having more freedom allows an individual to achieve well-being (Robeyns, 2005). In the CA, an individual gaining more freedoms is perceived as HD (see Figure 3.1). This perception is based on the assumption that more freedoms are likely to create lives for individuals where they can decide what is important for their well-being (Robeyns, 2005; Sen, 1999). Once one has certain freedoms, the individual can choose which to pursue based on one's own values. The outcomes or realised achievements in an individual's life are then understood as **functionings** (Alkire, 2002).

A functioning alone does not provide insight into whether it was someone's voluntary choice. Simply being enrolled at a university doesn't necessarily indicate true freedom of choice. One person might willingly choose to attend university, while another could be pressured into pursuing a degree by their parents. Despite both individuals engaging in the same university experience, their ability to make a free choice differs.

Focusing solely on the act of attending university leads to a limited understanding of development, such as when quantifying enrolment rates. A more comprehensive approach involves evaluating how many people have the capability to pursue higher education. Individuals should have the freedom to decide whether they value obtaining a university degree, depending on the extent to which they can exercise their agency in determining their values. This is where agency plays a crucial role in shaping one's life values.

Considering an individual's **agency** is an essential factor of the CA (Crabtree, 2020a; Sen, 1985). Sen (1985, p. 206) describes agency as vital for HD and defines it as "what a person is free to do and achieve in pursuit of whatever goals or values he or she regards as important". This definition signals the potential for an individual to make life choices without limitations and achieve a level of functioning that is important to their life. This is illustrated in the example above of the individual who exercised her agency and chose freely to attend university. Agency is seen as a capability in itself contributing to change and allowing individuals to reflect on their values and goals (Sen, 1999). Considering agency as an important aspect of the CA provides insights into decisions made by an individual about which freedoms they deem of value in life. A contribution to SD could be achieved if an individual deems SD to be valuable and makes their decisions of which functionings to pursue based on what contributes to SD. Factors that contribute to SD will be discussed in Section 3.2.

The previous paragraph highlighted that other concepts of the CA, not only capabilities, are of significance when working with this concept. It is not a foregone conclusion that studies that use the CA always focus on capabilities. Depending on a study's context, its focus can be on all concepts (including capabilities, conversion factors, agency, and functioning), a specific combination of the concepts, or one concept alone. The research question and scope determine which aspects are the focus of a study. Amongst the reasons for selecting concepts other than capabilities is that capabilities are opaque. While it is easy to examine enrolment rates, it is far more challenging to capture who can pursue a degree based on their own choice. Enrolled students could have either decided voluntarily to pursue a degree or been forced to do so by their parents, which would render the enrolment, not an actual freedom. This shows that it is easier to determine functionings than capabilities.

Focusing on agency by questioning the value for the pursuit of certain functionings was the best-suited approach for the study. Functionings are seen as indicators of capabilities and allow insight into the potential capabilities of an individual, while agency is seen as the value one places upon turning capabilities into functionings. Combining these two allows one to look beyond poor functionings and achieve an understanding of what an individual values in their life. Identification of whether an individual contributes to SD is only possible by assessing actual outcomes or functionings, and not only capabilities. While returning alumni could have the capability to contribute to SD, they may not value this capability and decide not to pursue it. Functioning refers to the actual life lived by people. Exploring only functioning runs the risk of capturing outcomes not pursued based on an individual's values. This interferes with the

original concept of the CA, that HD is achieved through creating more freedoms for people. By focusing on the agency in the study, it allows examination of the values of individuals and explores why returning alumni pursue certain functionings in the first place.

3.2.1 The CA as a holistic approach

This research was undertaken to examine degree mobility, a specific facet of HE, and its impact on SD. The CA is a normative framework that focuses on individuals' freedoms to evaluate HD (Crocker & Robeyns, 2009) and is not interchangeable with SD. The section examining the current literature (Section 2.1.1) discussed the concept of SD and its international and national significance. In Section 2.2.3 it was highlighted how the South African government emphasised the importance of their citizens' capabilities for South Africa's NDGs. South Africa's government's emphasis on capabilities and the growing prominence of the CA in studies regarding HD (Klasen, 2019; Simpson, 2018; Walker et al., 2022), were contributing factors to selecting the CA as a theoretical lens for the study. To use the CA in the context discussed in Chapter 2, it is essential to link SD to the CA, as its conception commonly deals with HD.

Common Development theories focus on economic growth and monetary measures (Highwood, 2014; UN, 2010). However, there is criticism that this is not a real development as it does not secure the advancement of the lives of individuals in a country (Highwood, 2014). Economic growth can make it appear as if a country is striving, and while that might be true at first glance, it could be only to the benefit of a few members of the population. Pure economic development does not consider inequality and the suffering of the impoverished in a country (Highwood, 2014; Sen, 1985). South Africa is an excellent example of this. South Africa was recorded to have a gross domestic product (GDP) of $329.53 billion in 2021, rendering it the third strongest economy on the African continent after Nigeria and Egypt (Benson, 2021). The Gini coefficient[12] of South Africa was 63 in 2021, meaning that it was the country with the highest levels of inequality in the world (OECD, 2022). While the GDP indicates development, it does not mean that this is accompanied by HD and therefore the well-being of all individuals in the country. The assessment of the improvement in the well-being of individuals requires an examination of the capabilities of each individual. This is the purpose of the CA: turning away from monetary measures and assessing the freedoms of the individual.

[12]"The Gini coefficient is based on the comparison of cumulative proportions of the population against cumulative proportions of income they receive, and it ranges between 0 in the case of perfect equality and 1 in the case of perfect inequality." (OECD, 2022)

Seeing HD through the lens of the CA indicates that the focus is on creating opportunities for individuals to choose a life worth living instead of purely increasing the economy (Sen, 1999). From a CA perspective, HD cannot solely be achieved by increasing the GDP, but instead by increasing freedoms for everyone (Nussbaum, 2000; Sen, 1999). It was outlined in the second chapter that SD is a holistic approach that looks beyond numbers, and the CA allows precisely that. It allows one to examine whether the well-being of the population improves, which indicates that people are living better lives. It is important to be aware that improving well-being (HD) is not the same as SD. This will be discussed in more detail in Section 3.2.3.

3.2.2 The CA and HE

Apart from gaining prominence in HD, the CA is also increasingly being applied in education, specifically higher education (Walker et al., 2022). Education has the power to influence an individual's agency, which in capability terms means it influences the decision-making process of which capabilities are worth developing (Nussbaum, 2000; Sen, 1999; Walker, 2018; Walker et al., 2022; Walker & Unterhalter, 2007; Williams, 2016). Walker and McLean (2013, p.29) agree with this by suggesting that the "goals of education are threefold: instrumental (preparation for economic opportunities), intrinsic (for example, the acquisition of knowledge for its own sake) and social (oriented to pressing civic problems)".

Considering that education can be instrumental, intrinsic, and social, education becomes a vital tool for social change and HD, strengthening Sen's (1999) and Nussbaum's claims (2000) that education is a capability which can expand other capabilities. Development of higher education systems is often only validated by an increased enrolment rate and an increase in graduates. This approach is similar to that of dominant development theories based on narrow perceptions of development as economic growth (Elkington, 1998; Potter, 2014; UN, 2015b). Some sources refer to basic education as a driver for HD, and characterise basic education as a basic human right (Alkire, 2002; Nussbaum, 2007). Other sources only discuss education as a whole as a human right, which includes higher education (UN, 2015a; Walker & McLean, 2013).Seeing higher education as a contributor to remove unfreedoms and improving individuals' well-being (Walker & McLean, 2013), this researcher agrees that higher education should be considered a human right and should be available for everyone eligible for, and interested in, choosing this path. However, increasing the number of graduates and enrolments alone does not necessarily create SD. Instead, the focus should be on the type of graduates produced by universities.

Degree mobility itself can also be perceived as a capability: the capability of an individual to decide whether to pursue a degree overseas. While this shows that degree mobility can contribute towards HD through being a capability itself, this is not where the argument ends. Previous research has shown that pursuing the freedom to study at a university abroad affords new opportunities for the individual (Akli, 2013; Baxter, 2018; Demir et al., 2000; Mawer, 2018). The gained knowledge and experiences can create new capabilities for the individual; meaning that degree mobility can enhance more capabilities and, therefore, create HD. It was mentioned in Section 3.1 how agency impacts what individual reasons to value. These values can change over time and can be influenced through education (Walker & McLean, 2013; Walker et al., 2022). If education can influence what one reasons to value, then this includes degree mobility and the education received while being abroad. The question remains how the time abroad influences the agency and what the alumni reason to value when returning to South Africa. While previous research showed that degree mobility enhances an individual's life, it has not yet been explored whether these expanded freedoms and potentially changed values match what is needed in South Africa to contribute to SD. As the study focuses on the impact of degree mobility on SD, the next section will link SD with HD and the CA.

3.2.3 HD as part of SD

When trying to link the definition of SD (see Section 2.1.1) with the CA, the notion of need is a well-discussed aspect, which forms part of the definition of SD. While the Brundtland Commission did not clarify need as a concept, it is often assumed to be related to basic human needs or basic standard of living (Sen, 2013). The problem with this definition of need is that there is no common agreement as to what is considered a need. To ensure that the needs of people are fulfilled, an external force is required to impose a threshold of need (Sen, 2013). According to Sen (2013), needs differ according to a country's standard of living, culture, religion, and other aspects. These differences make it almost impossible to agree on the meaning of the term. Another argument put forward is that people have more than just needs. Working with the notion of need limits SD to predetermined basic human needs instead of the freedom to decide what someone values (Sen, 2009, 2013). Sen (2009) critiques the notion of needs as being too narrow for the actual well-being of human beings. Crabtree (2013) instead suggests that the Brundtland Commission (1987) considered more than only a basic standard of living as their understanding of need. The report from 1987 shows that moral agency, obligations, active citizenry, and a call for action by all were also part of their definition (Brundtland-Commission, 1987).

Despite the broader meaning, the study suggests that fulfilling the needs of people does not appropriately address the concept of SD. The concept of the CA aims at a life where people can freely decide what they want to pursue, which goes beyond purely fulfilling needs. Sen (2013) promotes a freedom-based approach to development, which does not necessarily disagree with the concept of SD. Sen (2013, p. 7) stated that "we also have to go beyond the role of human beings specifically as 'consumers' or as 'people with needs', and consider, more broadly, their general role as agents of change who can—given the opportunity—think, assess, evaluate, resolve, inspire, agitate, and, through these means, reshape the world." Human beings should have the freedom to decide what to value in their lives and these values entail an agency that aspires to contribute to change in the world.

HD requires more than simply considering the fulfilment of needs. Therefore, the CA of Sen (2013) is at odds with the focus on needs and suggests instead replacing needs with freedoms in the definition of SD (Anand & Sen, 2000). Researchers argue under which conditions one should replace needs with freedoms, if at all (Anand & Sen, 2000; Rauschmayer & Leßmann, 2013). Changing the term 'needs' to 'freedoms' would consider HD in the same way as the CA, however, would not yet render the concept sustainable. SD cannot only aim to expand freedoms but has to ensure that this happens with consideration of sustainability. Instead of only focusing on the notion of needs, attention must be paid to the part of the SD definition referring to future generations. Individuals should not only aim to expand their freedoms but also consider those of future generations, which will be discussed in more detail in the next section. The study agrees that only aiming to fulfil the needs of people should not be sufficient to attain SD; instead, it should focus on creating more freedoms to achieve lives worthy of living and maintaining these freedoms for future generations.

3.2.3.1 Limiting freedoms

A primary concern of the CA regarding sustainability is the limitation of freedoms. While the CA promotes extending freedoms to achieve HD, SD is explicitly concerned with extending freedoms (Rauschmayer & Leßmann, 2011, p. 23). This concern is based on the claim that one cannot control how people use their freedoms and related resources (Rauschmayer & Leßmann, 2011, p. 23). Certain freedoms such as an excessive lifestyle, which is valued by some individuals, can limit future generations' freedoms, for example, if resources should be depleted (Crabtree, 2013, p. 163). This shows that expanding one person's freedom can limit the freedoms of others. A further example is that of sending qualified individuals abroad to study, but not considering if this also generates more freedoms for their home countries and

other people around them. Degree mobility and related scholarships are expensive, and the scholarships chosen in the context of the study are funded by governments (see Section 2.3.5). University fees in South Africa are a fraction of the amount paid at universities in other countries. The first year of an undergraduate degree in South Africa's top universities costs an average of approximately 50,090 South African Rand (ZAR) (BusinessTech, 2022). In the US, fees at ranked universities vary between $10,423[13] (approximately 185,840 ZAR) at public and $39,723 (approximately 708,253 ZAR) at private universities per year (Kerr & Wood, 2022). This shows that the amount of money required to fund one degree in the US could be used to fund multiple degrees and great more capacity in South Africa, highlighting that creating more freedoms for an individual such as studying abroad can potentially cause harm elsewhere, by limiting the opportunity of more scholars to pursue a degree.

The CA pertains to expanding freedoms, being at odds with limiting freedoms for any reason as this may limit HD (Crabtree, 2013; Nussbaum, 2003). Simultaneously, SD is at odds with only expanding freedoms, as this may impact future generations. One solution to this problem could be the implementation of regulations ensuring SD by governments (Deneulin, 2009). However, if governments and organisations begin determining people's lifestyles and ability to live sustainable life, this automatically results in a limitation of individuals' freedoms. Deneulin (2009) proposes that implementing regulations may not be effective if the people of the country do not share the values of the government, for example concerning environmental policies. Instead, the values of people would have to change to support these ideologies. The controversy between wanting to expand freedoms for HD and having to secure resources in the world for SD demonstrates the clash between the concepts of SD and the CA.

To use the CA in an analysis of SD, it is crucial to consider all of the aspects related to both concepts. SD cannot happen through expanding capabilities alone, thus applying the concept of well-being from the CA to SD calls for a different approach. Previous research has discussed the CA in an SD context, but there is no linking of the two concepts in previous research (Crabtree, 2013, 2020a; Neumayer, 2012; Seckler & Volkert, 2021). Crabtree (2020a), for example, highlights that neither Nussbaum nor Sen has solved the issues of sustainability in the CA, but mentions that this may not have been Sen's nor Nussbaum's intention. Instead, they recommend building on Nussbaum's and Sen's extensive research on the CA and HD. For this reason, the next section will try to establish a concept linking the CA with SD.

[13] Exchange rate of Bloomberg of 17.8298 USD-ZAR from 6/10/2022.

3.2.3.2 The sustainable angle of the CA

It was discussed in Section 3.1 that the meaning of what a person values and has reason to value is at the core of the CA. When discussing the sustainable angle of the CA, it is important to distinguish between one's well-being (well-being freedom) and other factors considered valuable (agency freedom) (Sen, 1985, p. 203). If an individual's agency has the potential of pursuing a particular capability that is not only in their interest, the functioning would be considered agency freedom. An individual voluntarily deciding not to pursue a degree abroad because their own family needs support at home is an example of this. This functioning (staying at home and not pursuing a degree abroad) would not be for others' well-being rather than that of the individual. Both types of freedom still reflect the freedom to decide which capability to pursue, but the decision-making is based on different reasons. In one case, the individual values well-being freedoms, and in the other case, agency freedoms. Agency freedoms assume that the individual has some altruistic values beyond their interest. Ensuring that these altruistic values contribute to SD requires a specific agency considering the impacts one's actions have on SD.

Anand and Sen (1994a) claim that capabilities are essential for the individual and their HD, as they increase "their 'human capital' with lasting influence in the future" (p.32-33). Various researchers draw on the work of Anand and Sen to further claim that HD is an essential driver for sustainability, as it influences future generations, which is an important part of SD (Crabtree, 2013, 2020b; Peeters et al., 2013; Pelenc & Dubois, 2020; Sen, 1999). Pelenc and Dubois (2020, p. 24), for example, stated that if wanting to achieve HD, "the conservation of critical natural capital for future generations should be regarded as a key objective of HD". This shows that HD cannot ignore the needs of humanity in future, and therefore supports the idea of ensuring that future generations must be considered if wanting to achieve HD.

The vision of community, respectful relationships with each other, and the acknowledgement of interdependent relationships is reflected in the African philosophy of Ubuntu, which means "I am because you are". Walker et al. (2022, p. 14) define Ubuntu in terms of the CA as "being connected to and concerned for the well-being of others". This means that sustaining HD and achieving one's well-being, requires concern for the well-being of others (Pelenc et al., 2013; Walker et al., 2022). As SD is concerned with meeting the needs of the current generation, not only including the individual but every living being, this agrees with the philosophy of Ubuntu. The concern of HD and SD regarding the well-being of the society shows the link between the two concepts.

Some authors claim that HD and SD are the same (Hirvilammi et al., 2013). While this researcher agrees that increasing the current generation's freedoms, that is HD, can have a positive impact on future generations' freedoms and SD (Crabtree, 2013; Peeters et al., 2013; Sen, 2013), it cannot be that the concepts are interchangeable (Demals & Hyard, 2014). While the CA offers an understanding of HD and how to sustain it, this researcher agrees that purely creating freedoms is not sufficient to also create SD (Crabtree, 2020c; Demals & Hyard, 2014). With a growing world population and insufficient resources to maintain the well-being of all individuals, it is crucial to consider the individual's well-being and whether their lived values are sustainable (Pelenc & Dubois, 2020). The combination of well-being freedom and agency freedom is essential in connecting the CA with SD without limiting freedoms. Agency freedom implies that the individual can create change voluntarily and contribute to society if they value more than their well-being. SD, discussed in Section 2.1.1, concerns what is important to oneself, others, and the environment. The concepts of well-being freedoms and agency freedoms are thus linked with SD. If the well-being freedoms and agency freedoms of an individual are connected to the well-being of not just themselves, but also others and the environment, they can contribute to SD.

Sustainability is becoming increasingly important in the 21st century, thus many researchers argue that the CA cannot purely promote more freedoms for individuals, but also needs to consider sustainability (Crabtree, 2020b; Demals & Hyard, 2014; Peeters et al., 2013; Watene, 2013). Crabtree (2020b), for example, suggests that one's capability to choose a privately-owned car as a means of transportation can limit the future capabilities of another in terms of health due to the potentially harmful impact of that choice on the environment. This example is connected to the work of Demals and Hyard (2014), who highlight that expanding capabilities cannot only consider the values of the current generation but also must align with the needs of future generations. To connect SD and HD, the freedoms of both the current and future generations need to be ensured (Crabtree, 2020a; Demals & Hyard, 2014; Neumayer, 2012).

Crabtree (2013) and Pelenc and Dubois (2020) argue that intragenerational justice[14] is vital in addressing the CA and that concepts of HD should not solely prioritise the needs of future generations[15]. Intragenerational justice, pertains to ensuring current generation can lead lives they consider valuable (Crabtree, 2013). Ensuring a worthwhile life for future generations

[14]Intragenerational justice refers to justice in the generation that is currently living.
[15]This refers to intergenerational justice.

should not mean imposing restrictions on the current generations; rather, it should involve striking a balance between intra- and intergenerational justice (Anand & Sen, 2000; Redclift, 2005; Sen, 2013).

The principle of justice, according to Watene (2013), aligns with this perspective, suggesting that individuals are inherently aware of future generations and consider their needs when pursuing their well-being. These discussions surrounding sustainability and future generations imply a certain , responsibility for SD, with some arguing that humans naturally prioritise more than just their own well-being (Sen, 2013; Watene, 2013).

While the research acknowledges the responsibility regarding SD, it argues that a mere 'strong reason' is insufficient to ensure individuals contribute to SD. Finding a balance between intra- und intergenerational justice is crucial, but the researcher disagrees with Watene (2013) that this comes naturally. Instead, the researcher asserts that a certain level of agency is necessary to feel a responsibility towards SD, and to value actions and entities that contribute to SD. This perspective can foster contributions towards sustainable development.

Previous research on the CA pertains primarily to human and sustainable HD and less to SD. Some researchers, however, discuss the CA for purposes of research on SD (Becker, 2006; Pelenc et al., 2013; Sen, 2013). One solution to combine the expansion of functionings with SD could be developing a sense of responsibility, as outlined above (Pelenc et al., 2013). This responsibility, however, needs to be defined accurately if wanting to claim a contribution toward SD. SD requires more than purely considering other individuals' interests, as it is a complex concept, particularly when it comes to combining it with the CA. For this reason, the study claims that considering SD in one's values is more than pure 'agency freedoms' and that it requires a particular type of agency in this context. The contribution to SD through degree mobility may be measurable in whether time abroad influences one's agency to focus on these aspects. This type of agency shall be referred to as a responsible agent (RA) in the study and will be discussed in the next section.

3.3 Responsible agent

"Persons should be conceived as active agents who choose their way of life from among several possible ways of life open to them – i.e. their capabilities", as stated by Rauschmayer et al. (2020, p. 91). This statement indicates that human beings should have several options from which to choose when it comes to their own life. Walker et al. (2022, p. 19) argue that human

beings flourish when they can freely choose the functionings they value and that **agency** allows an individual to "express their own values and goals". Being able to choose freely and practising one's own agency is an essential part of the CA, as discussed in Section 3.1. However, agency freedoms (aiming for altruistic goals, as discussed in Section 3.1.3.2) include a degree of **responsibility** towards others when pursuing one's own well-being. This researcher claims that SD requires more than only the possibility of altruistic behaviour and justice. A human being who can contribute to SD requires a RA, which allows the individual to critically evaluated their decision-making when pursuing functionings.

Many studies discuss the need for responsibility when using the CA for an SD analysis (Becker, 2006; Pelenc & Ballet, 2015; Sen, 1985; Walker & McLean, 2013). The concepts are similar and refer to the same issues regarding agency and their contribution towards change and development. Sen (2008, p. 335) mentions that the agency itself requires the agent to be responsible, which means "to bring about the changes that would enhance HD in the world". Having a sense of responsibility requires the agent to carefully consider the freedoms they decide to pursue. While these motivations include some social and environmental aspects of sustainability, they still focus on HD and do not directly cater to all the mentioned aspects of SD. The criticism of the absence of all of the aspects of SD is discussed by Becker (2006), who suggests that it is essential to reconceptualise the agent and include "responsibility into the three levels of human action" when connecting the CA with SD. Summarised from Becker's (2006) research, this requires responsibility towards (1) oneself, (2) the community and (3) nature, acknowledging that one's lifestyle has an irretrievable impact on the natural environment.

Consideration of the community was mentioned when discussing the Ubuntu philosophy (see Section 3.1.3.2) and it was affirmed that one can only truly achieve well-being when also supporting the well-being of others. While all three mentioned responsibilities (to oneself, the community, and nature) consider sustainability in a broader sense, they do not directly refer to future generations. It is often assumed that taking care of the community and nature will automatically result in SD. However, SD requires more than just taking care of the environment (see Section 3.1.3). Sustainability requires individuals who demonstrate being a RA to pursue functionings not only to meet their own needs, those of society, and the environment but also specifically consider the impact their decisions have on future generations. Ashwin (2020, p. 3) mentions that higher education has the power "to bring students into a transformational relationship with the knowledge that changes their sense of who they are and what they can do

in the world". This generates the potential for higher education, or studying at a foreign university, to provide what is necessary for an individual to demonstrate RA.

Figure 3.2 resembles the one presenting the CA concepts in Figure 3.1, depicting the connection between an individual, their accessible resources and entitlements, their capabilities, values, and functionings. However, there is a key distinction: while the original concept in Figure 3.1 concentrates on an individual's well-being as the ability to select a life they would deem valuable, Figure 3.2 introduces a new dimension of responsibility (abbreviated as SD) to the notion of well-being. This extension is achieved by incorporating the individual's responsibilities into their set of values, resulting in the individual taking on the role of a Responsible Agent (RA).

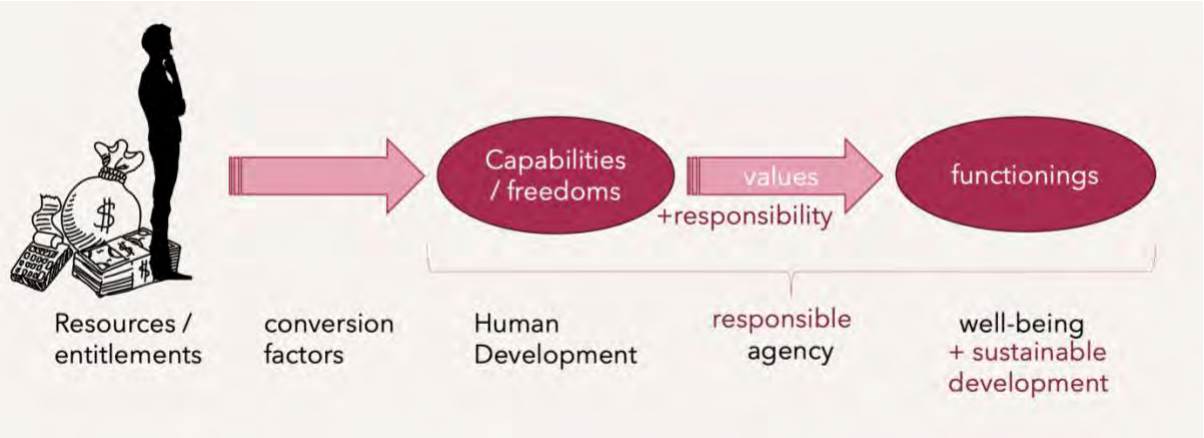

Figure 3.2: Concepts of the CA and RA

By adding responsibility to Figure 3.1 in terms of HD and well-being being perceived through the lens of the CA, Figure 3.2 demonstrates that the valued freedoms based on a RA result in functionings that can contribute to SD. The term "responsibility", however, has an expansive and context-dependent meaning. While similar concepts of a RA[16] have been used in the past, there is no agreement on what defines a RA. The following section discusses how previous research discusses the RA in a human and SD context. In addition, the next section aims to narrow down the definition of an agent that includes all the necessary features to act responsibly for SD whilst still allowing the expansion of the freedoms of an individual.

[16]Previously different terms have been used for this concept.

Table 3.1 below presents the framework for a RA, which was the analytical tool of the study to determine the impact of degree mobility on SD in South Africa:

Table 3.1: Framework for RA

RESPONSIBILITIES
Own well-being (Becker, 2006; Sen, 1985; Walker & McLean, 2013)
Society's well-being (Becker, 2006; Walker & McLean, 2013)
Nature's well-being (Becker, 2006)
Ex-ante responsibility (Pelenc et al., 2013)

Using the RA to determine the impact of degree mobility on SD in South Africa, a list of accompanying capabilities and functionings defining the four responsibilities were required. This list provides the analytical lens to examine the agency of returning alumni. However, researchers using the CA are still determining whether a list of capabilities is needed to use this approach (Robeyns, 2003; Sen, 2004; Simpson, 2018; Walker & Unterhalter, 2007). In addition, which capabilities are needed and how they can be defined are still being debated. However, although Sen does not provide a definitive list of capabilities for HD, the idea of a list is not contrary to his conception of the CA. Sen suggests that one has to establish a list via a democratic process requiring debate from those affected by the list (Sen, 1999, 2004). This argument related to the current study, as the aim was to analyse whether returning alumni are RAs, which would allow them to contribute towards SD. However, to determine whether they are RAs, the researcher had to first determine what was needed from them, which required determining a list of capabilities and functionings.

There are various lists of capabilities proposed by various authors (Alkire, 2002; Burchardt & Vizard, 2011; Nussbaum, 2000, 2003; Robeyns, 2003; Walker & Unterhalter, 2007): some for living a flourishing human life (Nussbaum, 2003); others for gender equality assessment (Robeyns, 2003); and some for educational purposes (Walker & McLean, 2013). The list by Nussbaum (1997) is frequently referenced, and comprises ten central human capabilities: (1) life, (2) bodily health, (3) bodily integrity, (4) sense, imagination and thought, (5) emotions, (6) practical reason, (7) affiliation, (8) other species, (9) play, and (10) control over one's environment. Nussbaum (1997) argues that these capabilities are essential in any human life and the foundation upon which any other capabilities develop. Walker and McLean (2013) utilise this list, claiming these capabilities to be essential for a full human life. For this reason, this list served as a foundation for the study. While the analysis did not focus specifically on

these capabilities, it was important to keep them in mind whilst performing the analysis. This allowed assessment of potential absences of any of the central human capabilities, and how this impacted the potential contribution towards SD.

While some of these lists may have a connection to the context of the study, most are related to a good human life, which in capability terms refers to the capacity of an individual to choose what they value (Becker, 2006; Sen, 1985). Another list appropriate to the context of the study was that of Walker and McLean (2013) related to public-good professionals, which forms part of the definition of the RA.

3.3.1 The Professional Capability Index and its relation to the RA

Walker and McLean's (2013) Professional Capability Index (PCI) determines the capabilities and functionings required from "public-good professionals" to enhance sustainable HD (SHD) and to eliminate poverty and inequality in the South African context. Walker and McLean (2013) researched professionals who are not only exercising their professional capabilities but also consider public-good functionings. Public good professionals are defined as "professionals with the values, knowledge and skills to provide services to the public which expand the opportunities to lead better lives (capabilities) and the achievements (functionings) that their clients have reasons to value" (2013, p. 1). Therefore, an agent that exercises public-good functionings is a RA, as this agent is not only interested in their own well-being but also demonstrates responsibility towards the well-being of society.

Providing service to the public and expanding the capabilities of other people around oneself uplifts the well-being of these people, creating HD. In Section 3.1.3.2, HD and SD were noted to not be interchangeable. A public good professional contributing to SHD does not necessarily contribute to SD. While having the capabilities of the PCI renders one a public good professional that supports SHD, the features of the PCI are insufficient to be considered a RA contributing to SD. However, the functionings and capabilities of the PCI still show certain connections to the features of the RA.

The PCI discusses the capabilities required of graduates in South Africa to be considered a public-good professionals who can contribute to HD. A 'public good professional' is identified as having particular capabilities that are evident in individuals who complete a university education to contribute to SHD (Walker & McLean, 2013). Theoretically, whether the scholar completed education in South Africa or abroad should be immaterial, as requirements of public good professionals remain the same once alumni return to South Africa. The exception remains

that there may be differences in education systems; however, in essence, if South African scholars are sent abroad, the capabilities of the public good professional remain the same.

It is, therefore, reasonable to expect alumni from universities abroad to demonstrate capabilities and functionings indicated on the PCI as contributing to SHD, and how or if that translates to contributing to SD in South Africa. The use of the CA in the assessment of contribution to SD by focusing on the RA was discussed in Section 3.2. While this researcher acknowledges that the capabilities of the PCI are essential for the RA, a new list of capabilities needs to be developed to add to the PCI for it to be used in the SD context.

The PCI comprises a list of eight public-good capabilities, four meta-functionings, and a set of educational arrangements aimed at contributing to the development of public-good professionals in South Africa (Walker & McLean, 2013, p.2):

1) Four meta-functionings: to recognise the full dignity of every human being; to act for social transformation and reduce injustice; to make sound, knowledgeable, thoughtful, and imaginative professional judgements; and to work/act with others to expand the full range of human capabilities of clients.

2) Eight public-good professional capabilities: knowledge and skills; informed vision; affiliation; resilience; social and collective struggle; emotional reflexivity; integrity; and assurance and confidence.

The study did not focus on the educational arrangements[17], but rather on alumni's potential transformation through degree mobility (Walker & McLean, 2013). The meta-functionings describe "what professionals oriented to social transformation, and poverty-reduction should be able to do, and, about what their practices would look like" (Walker & McLean, 2015, p. 67). All the meta-functionings show some connection to the RA. For example, the meta-functionings suggest recognising the full dignity of every human being to work or act with others to expand clients' full range of human capabilities, relating to the responsibility towards society's well-being. This indicates that the individual should not just consider one's own well-being but is also interested in supporting others.

Furthermore, the meta-functionings speak to acting for social transformation and reducing injustice, which impacts current and future generations. A RA ought to value these

[17] This decision was made as the study did not aim to determine the arrangements of the host universities of the scholarships.

functionings, requiring them to have the eight mentioned public-good professional capabilities. Walker and McLean (2013) suggest that the presence of one capability cannot compensate for the absence of another, as one can only be a public good professional by possessing all capabilities. While the capabilities of the PCI relate to the RA as outlined above, the PCI does not cater sufficiently for nature's well-being, own well-being, or ex-ante responsibility (see Section 3.2). These responsibilities are an important aspect of the desire to contribute to SD. It was described in Section 3.2 that all responsibilities require capabilities and functionings that define them. A literature review of previous research in the field of the CA and SD allowed further definition of the critical capabilities and functionings of an RA.

3.3.2 List of RA capabilities and functionings

Table 3.2 below outlines the responsibilities, capabilities, and functionings of a RA and from where they originate. Many of the capabilities and functionings of the RA are based on the PCI outlined by Walker and McLean (2013), while other literature sources were used to extend the capabilities required to expand the definition of a RA to make it a better-suited tool for analysis of SD (Becker, 2006; Crespo et al., 2017; Pelenc et al., 2013; Sen, 1985; Walker & McLean, 2013).

All capabilities listed below are essential for acquiring the associated responsibilities and being recognised as a Responsible Agent. Each capability holds equally importance, and only possessing the complete set of capabilities and responsibilities qualifies one as a responsible agent. The functionings highlighted in purple below were initially part of different capabilities of the PCI. By establishing new capabilities and assigning equal importance to all, the highlighted functionings align better with the new capabilities and other responsibilities.

The capabilities presented in Table 3.2 below will be outlined, explained, and justified in the sections, which follow the table. Each responsibility is explained in terms of its related capabilities, and the related functionings. The functionings will become more in the analysis chapter, when presenting the research findings.

Table 3.1: Capabilities and functionings of responsible agency (Version 1)

Responsibility	Capability	Functioning
Own well-being (Becker, 2006; Sen, 1985)	Self-care	Pursuing own goals (C. Becker, 2006; Sen, 1985) Personal Growth (Walker & McLean, 2013)
Society's well-being (Walker & McLean, 2013)	Integrity (PCI)	Acting ethically Being responsible and accountable to communities and colleagues Being honest Striving to provide high-quality service
	Emotional Reflexivity (PCI)	Empathy/narrative imagination Compassion Integrating rationality and emotions Being emotionally reflexive
	Social and collective struggle (PCI)	Community empowerment approach/promote human rights. Contributing to policy formulation and implementation Identifying places for change/leading and managing social change to reduce injustice. Working in professional and interprofessional teams Participating in public reasoning/listening to all voices in the conversation Building and sustaining strategic relationships and networks with organisations and government
	Resilience (PCI)	Perseverance in difficult circumstances Fostering hope Having a sense of career security
	Affiliation (PCI)	Accepting obligations to others Care and respect for diverse people. Understanding lives of poor and vulnerable Developing relationships across social groups and state hierarchies Critical respect for different cultures Communicating professional knowledge in an accessible way /with courtesy and patience
	Knowledge and Skills (PCI)	Having a firm, critical grounding in disciplinary, academic knowledge Valuing academic and indigenous knowledge Having a multidisciplinary/multi-perspectival stance Being enquiring, critical, evaluative, imaginative, creative, and flexible Integrating theory and practice Problem-solvers Open minded
	Assurance and Confidence (PCI)	Expressing & asserting own professional priorities Contributing to policy Having confidence in worthwhileness of one's professional work. Having confidence to act for change
Nature's well-being (Becker, 2006; Crespo et al., 2017)	Resource awareness	Understanding that our resources are limited (Becker, 2006; Crespo et al., 2017) Sustainable consumption; ensuring that we are not running out of specific resources (Crespo et al., 2017) Environmental Awareness (Walker & McLean, 2013)
Ex-ante responsibility (Crespo et al., 2017; Pelenc et al., 2013; Walker & McLean, 2013)	Informed Vision (PCI)	Understanding how the profession is shaped by historical and current socio-economic, and political context national and global. Understanding how structures shape individual lives. Being able to imagine alternative futures and improved social arrangements. Commitment to economic development and equitable economic opportunities
	Informed decision-making	Awareness, understanding, and reflection on the impact and influence that one has on society, future generations, and nature (Pelenc et al., 2013) Understanding of the complexity of local, national, and international political, economic, social, cultural, and environmental challenges (Crespo et al., 2017)

3.3.2.1 Responsibility for own well-being

The well-being of the individual is at the core of the CA. Achieving functionings in one's own interest is considered well-being and freedom (Sen, 1985). The RA pertains to not only other people and the environment but also an individual's own well-being (Becker, 2006). Therefore, the demonstration of responsible decision-making entails well-being and freedom. Responsible decisions towards SD are in tandem with the consideration of one's own well-being freedoms, which results in self-care being part of the RA, specifically the responsibility towards one's own well-being.

a) Self-care

Self-care is defined as the capability to take care of oneself and pursue one's own goals in one's personal and professional life. It was argued in Section 3.1.2 that gaining more freedoms for people on this planet is at the heart of the CA. When combining the CA with SD, it was discussed in Section 3.1.3.2 that more freedoms for the individual are crucial when aiming to achieve intergenerational justice. It is therefore essential to include self-preservation into the RA if wanting to use the lens of the CA.

3.3.2.2 Responsibility towards society's well-being

From the perspective of the CA, developing more freedoms is considered sufficient for HD (Sen, 1999). However, this is insufficient for SD (see Section 3.1.3). Society's well-being focuses on the capabilities required by an individual to contribute to the HD of others. Instead of only valuing one's own interests when pursuing functionings, one should also value so-called 'public-good functionings' (Walker & McLean, 2013). These functionings aid in the expansion of freedoms in society, resulting in more people leading a better life and consequently contributing to SD. Walker and McLean (2013) scrutinise which capabilities are required to be a public-good professional. Seven of these capabilities link with supporting the well-being of other people, which not only align with the Ubuntu philosophy but also with SD.

a) Assurance and confidence

It is essential to have assurance in one's profession and feel confident about one's ability to contribute towards transforming South Africa if wanting to do so. Without assurance and confidence, an individual may not have the drive to create change. Only if alumni act this way are they able to contribute towards society's well-being and, ultimately, SD. The capability of assurance and confidence relates to the worthwhileness an individual feels towards their

contribution to transformation in South Africa (Walker & McLean, 2013, p. 116). The understanding of this capability is based on the definition by Walker and McLean (2013) and their PCI.

b) Emotional reflexivity

Being able to reflect compassionately on challenges such as the impact of South Africa's unequal society is a capability of the RA and is directly connected to the capability of affiliation and resilience. In the South African context, social change requires one to not just show compassion but also be reflexive about one's own emotions when dealing with difficult situations and making rational decisions if necessary (Walker & McLean, 2013). Emotional Reflexivity, furthermore, entails narrative imagination, which is defined as the attempt to understand someone's feelings even if one is not familiar with the situation of the other person (Nussbaum, 2000; Walker & McLean, 2013).

c) Integrity

Integrity and willingness to do a good job require a level of honesty from an individual. This capability entails making ethical decisions, being honest, and standing up in public for what is right (Walker & McLean, 2013, p. 116). These features link with the responsibility towards the well-being of society, as one cannot contribute towards this well-being without integrity.

d) Social and collective Struggle

Social and collective struggle refers to a capability that connects people through organisations and networks to empower whole communities and promote human rights (Walker & McLean, 2013). Essential to this capability is mobilising communities' power to support SD, and to include all voices in the conversation of creating change (Walker & McLean, 2013).

e) Resilience

Contributing to society's well-being is challenging and requires resilience against barriers to achieving SD. It speaks to fostering hope for other people around oneself and not giving up when it seems impossible to achieve a goal (Walker & McLean, 2013).

f) Affiliation

According to Walker and McLean (2013) and Nussbaum (2000), the capability of affiliation is 'architectonic', as it is a fundamental capability for all human capabilities. Affiliation highlights the importance of relationship-building across different backgrounds. This capability is particularly significant in post-apartheid South Africa, where building relationships with people from all backgrounds, races, and social statuses is considered crucial (Walker & McLean, 2013).

g) Knowledge and skills

This capability allows alumni to create change and contribute actively to their specific field. Walker and McLean (2013, p. 113) state that "using good professional skills conscientiously (within the structure which defines good professional practice) is essential to professional practice for the public good."

3.3.2.3 Responsibility towards nature's well-being

Considering nature and the environment is central in discussions surrounding SD. Sen (2013, p. 8) states that human lives depend upon the resources provided by nature and that humans have an immense impact on nature: "It is now manifestly clear how easily we can deplete the exhaustible resources and drive many species to extinction, how rapidly we can warm up the globe or decimate the ozone layer, with what ease we can foul-up our rivers and mess up the air we breathe, without even pausing to think". The planet's resources are finite, and if fulfilling our freedoms is not cognisant of nature's limits, it is possible to reach the "carrying capacity" of our planet (Hirvilammi et al., 2013; Sen, 2013; WCED, 1987). Using up or destroying the most necessary resources risks current and future human survival (Ballet et al., 2011; Pelenc et al., 2013). Therefore, the concept of SD raises an alert of the dangers of creating capabilities and human well-being while destroying nature and overconsuming the earth's resources (Peeters et al., 2013). Being aware of the dangers of overconsumption is inadequate to ensure sustainability if creating more freedoms for individuals is an infinite possibility on a planet with finite resources. The RA is required to ensure the sustainability of resources and the natural habitat of our planet.

Nussbaum (2006, p. 409) notes that "creating a society where various species can co-exist and flourish requires that we have great sympathy and benevolence and that we sustain these sentiments over time". Sen (2009) agrees, identifying the power asymmetry between humans and other species. This asymmetry is why human freedoms must be accompanied by

responsibilities, in a trustee relationship (Crabtree, 2013), encouraging a sense of active responsibility towards nature.

a) Resource awareness

Resource awareness describes that there are limited resources on our planet and that a RA should be aware of this fact and try to act accordingly (Becker, 2006; Crespo et al., 2017). Only through awareness of our resources can one be responsible for nature's well-being and contribute towards SD.

3.3.2.4 Ex-ante responsibility

Pelenc et al. (2013) argue that agency itself needs a new definition when one wants to achieve SHD. While SHD is not interchangeable with SD, it is still linked to the concept. Pelenc et al. (2013) propose to use SHD in combination with an agent that acts as a responsible person. Acting responsibly means having an ex-ante responsibility, which includes having precautionary principles and considering possible future impacts of an action or functioning before pursuing it (Pelenc et al., 2013). SD requires agents with ex-ante responsibility, as some behaviours and decisions of society might have irreversible consequences on our planet. Therefore, it is essential to consider the impacts on society and nature before deciding on what one chooses to value.

a) Informed vision

An informed vision allows an individual to critically discern what is happening in the world and understand how their profession is shaped by the past and the context of the country (Walker & McLean, 2013). It allows an individual to understand what is possible, what is not, and what possibilities exist to create change. The RA can make responsible decisions that create SD through this capability, which requires a degree of commitment towards economic development and equitable economic opportunities (Walker & McLean, 2013).

b) Informed decision-making

To have ex-ante responsibility, it is also vital to have the capability for informed decision-making (Pelenc et al., 2013). This defines the capability to use available information to make responsible decisions for themselves, other people, future generations, and nature. It requires awareness and understanding to reflect on the impacts one's own decisions have on oneself, society, nature, and future generations.

3.4 Conclusions

The CA allows a holistic approach toward HD which casts off the simplistic assumption that a country should only aim for an increased economy. Instead, it focuses on HD by advancing individuals' freedoms and allowing them to choose the lives they value. SD pertains to ensuring development for current and future generations. SD is at odds with purely expanding freedoms, and in achieving SD, individuals need to take care of the environment and society while pursuing more freedoms for themselves.

This chapter argued that while the CA does not directly refer to future generations and the impact of nature and the environment, it can be aligned with SD when focusing on the aspect of agency. Agency allows an individual the choose functionings one values, and these values can change through certain knowledge and experiences. If one would not just value the own well-being, but also the one of others, nature, and future generations, the functionings could reach beyond an individual's well-being. Pursuing such a life and showing responsibility towards society's well-being, nature's well-being, and ex-ante responsibility was defined as being a RA in this chapter. This chapter further discussed and presented the features (responsibilities and related capabilities and functionings) of an individual who demonstrates a RA and can contribute to SD. Having defined these features allows the use of the RA as an analytical tool for analysis in this research.

CHAPTER 4
RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

There is more wisdom in listening than in speaking.
African proverb

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the rationale for adopting a qualitative methodology, which aligns with the chosen theoretical framework, to address the research questions and achieve the research aim/objectives. I have chosen to utilize a combination of narrative inquiry and document analysis, supplemented by questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, as the primary data collection methods, all of which will be detailed in this chapter.

Throughout the study, I have taken into account considerations of truth/value (credibility), applicability (transferability), consistency (dependability) and neutrality (confirmability). The methods employed to achieve these criteria will be thoroughly examined., Furthermore, I critically examined my positionality within the study, concluding the chapter with an exploration of the ethical considerations involved.

4.2 Research design

The methods discussed above facilitated the development of an understanding of the understudied phenomenon, which was the focal point of my study (Babbie, 2011; Matthews & Ross, 2010, p. 7). By combining narrative inquiry with a document analysis, I was able to leverage the strength of qualitative depth and documentary evidence to offer a more robust and nuanced understanding of the research question. Narrative inquiry enabled a thorough exploration of individual experiences, providing insights into the development and application of capabilities in the context of sustainable development (Clandinin, 2016). The emphasis on in-depth interviews offered a unique perspective on how alumni construct meaning of their educational journeys and their reintegration into South Africa.

Drawing on the methodology of a narrative inquiry provided an understanding of the graduates' functionings and agency. With the RA tool, which I created (see Chapter 3.2), a conclusion on their contribution towards SD was possible, which will be discussed in depth in Chapter 4.2.1

Employing narrative inquiry enabled me to gain an in-depth understanding of the RA of graduates, who had received the participating scholarships, by incorporating more than just one data collection method. Narrative inquiry allowed to explore and understand alumni experiences through the lens of their personal narratives, emphasizing the stories they construct about their lived experiences abroad and when returning to South Africa. This research design encouraged the alumni to narrate their educational journey, experiences abroad, and their subsequent perception of what they are bringing back to their home country. However, a narrative inquiry is not without challenges, as it, for example, limited the possibility of making general conclusions or generalisations based on the research findings since each case was unique, context-dependent, and based on specific knowledge (Clandinin, 2016).

Fish (1990) emphasises the role of phronesis, which is a concept in philosophy that refers to practical reasoning. Fish (1990) suggests that a researcher should apply practical wisdom reason when examining a phenomenon and recognise that its meaning can shift based on the specific context in which it is observed. In other words, as the circumstances surrounding a phenomenon evolve, its interpretation or significance may also change. Therefore, since each narrative inquiry was conducted under particular circumstances, it might have led to a different outcome if any of the variables had changed.

For example, choosing a different set of graduates or scholarships could have changed the study's findings, emphasising the importance of making deliberate and well-informed choices to ensure the validity and reliability of the study's findings. The potential for different results based on variations in participant selection highlights the need for careful consideration and methodological rigour in qualitative research to enhance the trustworthiness and robustness of the conclusions drawn (Thomas, 2011), which will be discussed further below.

While generalisable knowledge can easily be transferred to different sets of circumstances, social sciences are generally challenged by the unpredictable behaviour of human beings and their emotions (MacIntyre, 1985). The challenge of predicting human behaviour and drawing comprehensive conclusions in social science research underscores the fragility and vulnerability of the findings. (MacIntyre, 1985, p. 103). Building on this, Bassey (2001, p.5) introduces the notion of the “best estimate of trustworthiness”, suggesting that even a limited number of congruent cases can support drawing valid conclusions. Applying this concept to the present study implied that even a restricted sample of alumni from diverse scholarships could yield insights into their impact on SD. However, drawing valid conclusions hinged on

the requirement that interview outcomes exhibited commonalities. Upon analysing the interviews, a recurring theme emerged amongst alumni from different scholarships, reflecting shared experiences, gains, and perspectives. This consistency underscored the study's adherence to the principle of the “best estimate of trustworthiness”.

The limited number (17 expected for the interviews) might still not have allowed a scientific generalisation (Bassey, 2001). However, generalisation was also not expected of the study, as it rather sought to gain a deep understanding of the impact of returning graduates from abroad on SD in South Africa. Furthermore, the chosen scholarships for the study encompassed a diverse range of academic disciplines and were hosted by various countries in collaboration with the South African government. This collaboration implied that these scholarships were intentionally oriented towards advancing SD within the context of South Africa.

The expectation was that recipients of these scholarships would actively contribute to the advancement of SD in South Africa, which was the primary rationale for investing in the students’ education. The premise underlying this assumption was that individuals granted these scholarships would naturally align their interests and aspirations with the betterment of their home country. When scholars are allowed to pursue higher education through scholarships designed to foster SD, it is anticipated that their motivation would lead them to apply their acquired knowledge and skills to address the pressing challenges and developmental needs of their nation. Therefore, the expected alignment between the personal aspirations of the scholars and the developmental goals of their respective nations prompted the study’s in-depth exploration of how these scholarships could be channelled to maximally contribute to the realisation of SD.

4.3 Research methodology

Research methodology refers to the overall approach adopted for conducting a study, encompassing the techniques employed to collect and analyze the necessary data. The following section describes the research methodology used in the study: qualitative research methodology using document analysis, questionnaires, and interviews.

4.3.1 Data collection

A qualitative research methodology, was applied to gather in-depth data on the social phenomenon under study and to gain insight into the returning alumni’s personal experiences

and their capabilities for ensuring SD in South Africa on which there is little research (Saunders et al., 2012). Qualitative methodology focuses on understanding and interpreting subjective experiences, meanings, and social phenomena through methods, such as interviews, observations, and textual analysis. It aims to explore the complexities and nuances of human behaviour and interactions within their natural context. Choosing a qualitative methodology for the current study aligned with similar research, which adopted the CA followed in the current study (Sen, 1999; Walker, 2012).

The study employed a qualitative methodology to explore the impact of various scholarship programmes on graduates. Six scholarship programmes were involved: the Fulbright scholarship; the Chinese Scholarship Council initiative; the Kadar Asmal Fellowship; the African Business Education scholarship; the Swedish Institute Scholarships for South Africa; and the Stipendium Hungaricum. The qualitative research commenced with an analysis of relevant documents from these scholarships, focusing on their alignment with SD. The use of document analysis as the qualitative data collection method provided a comprehensive understanding of the scholarship structures and their SD compatibility.

To deepen the investigation, qualitative data were gathered through interviews with key stakeholders: the programme coordinator at the public affairs office overseeing Fulbright alumni in South Africa, and a senior official from the Directorate of International Scholarships responsible for the five DHET scholarships. These interviews shed light on the admission process and collaborative efforts between scholarships and the government, contributing valuable context to the study.

Although a questionnaire is considered a quantitative data collection instrument, the study sent one to the alumni database of the scholarships. This questionnaire gathered biographical information and initial insights into participants' educational and professional backgrounds, including degrees and work experiences. The responses from the questionnaire helped identify potential candidates for the subsequent phase of data collection: semi-structured interviews.

Semi-structured interviews gathered in-depth data on the experiences of South African postgraduates who had studied abroad. Through these interviews, the study delved into how the time spent abroad influenced respondents' RA. By analysing the information gathered from both the questionnaire and the interviews, the study ascertained the extent to which participants' academic pursuits and work experiences contributed to their RA. The document analysis,

questionnaire, and interviews, which were the data collection methods used in the study, are explained in detail below.

In the context of Higher Education research within South Africa, a comprehensive consideration of race is typically integral to data collection and analysis. Given the historically divided nature of South Africa, a nuanced examination of existing disparities in education between white and black South Africans becomes imperative. However, despite the acknowledged historical and contemporary significance of race, there are instances where omitting explicit emphasis on race in the context of higher education research proves advantageous. This study, in particular, derived benefits from abstaining from overtly highlighting race, and such advantages are elucidated through the following arguments:

1. Emphasis on Individual Agency:

The deliberate exclusion of explicit considerations of race allowed the research to underscore individual agency. This approach accentuated the abilities, achievements, and qualifications of alumni, irrespective of their racial backgrounds. The narrative thus promoted a valuation of personal accomplishments and qualifications facilitated by scholarships, transcending demographic categorizations.

2. Integration of Intersectionality:

By not singularly focusing on race, the research embraced a more comprehensive exploration of intersectionality. This involved considering the interplay of various identity markers, such as prior educational backgrounds and other criteria associated with scholarship eligibility. This approach facilitated a holistic understanding of eligibility criteria and their potential impact on scholarship outcomes.

Despite the decision not to explicitly emphasize the conventional racial categories prevalent in South Africa, precautions were taken to preserve the identity of the interviewed alumni. This was achieved by replacing their original names with names commonly associated with their respective tribes or racial affiliations. Such an approach was employed to maintain participant anonymity while recognizing the cultural and racial diversity within the sample group.

4.3.1.1 Document analysis

As a first step of the data collection, a systematic and strategic document analysis was conducted (Bowen, 2009). The study focused on documents produced by the scholarship

administrators, which included what is published on the NRF and DHET[18] websites and the scholarship websites concerning the selected scholarships. These documents described the aims of the programmes, the eligibility criteria for the applicants, and the funding. The document analysis allowed me to determine whether the set-up of the scholarships supported SD. In addition, it led to a deep understanding of the scholarships and was used as a foundation for the questionnaire and interviews that followed.

Document analysis is a well-established research methodology utilized across various academic disciplines and research contexts (Bowen, 2009). This methodological choice is underpinned by its inherent advantages, including the ability to access policy documents, textual narratives, and other written or visual artifacts, which can provide valuable insights into research questions. A document analysis was chosen for the following reasons:

1. **Non-Intrusive Nature**: Document analysis is non-intrusive, thereby preserving the integrity of the documents being studied (Bowen, 2009). Unlike methods involving human subjects, such as interviews or surveys, it does impose limited influence or observation bias. Comparing the structures of the scholarships with the aims to create sustainable development made the document analysis the perfect tool through being non-intrusive and allowing a direct comparison.
2. **Complementary to other methods**: Document analysis can complement other research methods (Bowen, 2009; Patton, 2002). Researchers often combine it with qualitative or quantitative approaches to triangulate findings, which was also the case in the study. It allowed to provide a deeper context into understanding the potential contribution of the scholarships towards SD.
3. **Replicability and transparency**: Document analysis offers a high degree of replicability and transparency. It is more likely to replicate the analysis by an examination of the same documents through another researcher.

For all of these reasons the document analysis was the best suited tool to gain an overall overview of the scholarships and their alignment with the SDGs.

4.3.1.2 Questionnaire

Although considered a quantitative research method to gather numerical data, a questionnaire can become a qualitative method when it is designed and utilised in a way that goes beyond

[18] The NRF works closely with the DHET by supporting its grant management and administration process.

collecting simple quantitative data and captures in-depth insights, subjective perspectives, and rich contextual information. In the present study, therefore, the questionnaire not only gathered demographic data but also through open-ended questions collected insights into thoughts, feelings, and experiences.

The initial phase of primary qualitative data collection, therefore, involved the distribution of an online questionnaire, chosen to reach an initial, broad, and diverse sample of participants (Babbie, 2011). The DHET and the Fulbright office sent out the link for the questionnaire to all alumni of the six scholarships. According to the Protection of Personal Information Act 4 of 2013 (POPIA), obtaining their contact details without the help of these offices would have been problematic since the scholarships would not have been allowed to reveal their identities (Republic of South Africa, 2013). From the responses, a rough picture emerged of the participants and their lives after graduation. I endeavoured to engage as many participants as possible in this research phase, enabling the collection of data from a substantial number of individuals on their post-graduate scholarship experiences. Additionally, the questionnaire facilitated access to a large pool of potential interviewees, as 57 alumni participated in the questionnaire. The data collection in this phase of the research was notably constrained, serving the sole purpose of acquiring general information from a larger pool of alumni. Its principal objective was to secure access to alumni for subsequent interview sessions. This limited data collection phase functions as a preliminary step, offering a broad overview to facilitate the identification and recruitment of alumni participants for more in-depth interview engagements.

The collaborative effort between the DHET/Fulbright office and me to distribute the questionnaire ensured a streamlined and official communication channel, while also enhancing the credibility of the research in the participants' eyes. Consequently, alumni were encouraged to voluntarily engage with the questionnaire, which concluded by inviting them to express interest in participating in an interview with me.

The demographic data included the details of the participants' scholarships (year, country, degree), previous work experience, and information about their career aspirations upon return. In addition, open-ended questions elicited participants' thoughts about the scholarship and the value of the knowledge/skills that had gained in a South African context. Using online questionnaires for educational research has advantages but also challenges, which I had to be aware of during the data collection. On the one hand, online questionnaires allowed "cheap, flexible, rapid access to large, diverse, geographically disparate, and otherwise difficult to

access samples, reduced social desirability and experimenter expectancy effects, and the ability to impose complex conditional logic on the presentation of items and stimuli" (Roberts & Allen, 2015, p.95). In other words, as the alumni of all the scholarships lived across South Africa, an online questionnaire was the best way to reach them. On the other hand, online questionnaires may have limited experimental control, low-response rates, and ethical challenges that need to be addressed (Allen & Roberts, 2010; Shih & Xitao, 2008; Stieger & Reips, 2010).

Unlike traditional laboratory settings, online questionnaires may provide limited control over experimental conditions. In controlled environments, researchers can manipulate variables precisely and monitor participants closely. However, online surveys are often completed in various settings, using different devices and Internet connections. This variability introduces potential sources of bias and confounding (when a third variable makes two variables seem connected, even if they are not), which can influence participants' responses. Researchers provide clear instructions, randomise question order, and consider statistical techniques to account for potential influences (Allen & Roberts, 2010; Shih & Xitao, 2008; Stieger & Reips, 2010).

Online questionnaires can face the issue of low-response rates whereby a low percentage of the intended participants complete the survey. Several factors contribute to this challenge. The convenience of online surveys might lead to participants starting but not finishing the questionnaire. Additionally, participants might be more prone to ignoring or deleting survey invitations in their crowded online communication channels. The potential lack of personal interaction with researchers could also diminish participants' motivation to participate. Researchers need to employ effective strategies to increase response rates, such as clear communication, incentives, personalised invitations, and reminders (Allen & Roberts, 2010; Shih & Xitao, 2008; Stieger & Reips, 2010).

The known challenge of low-response rates for questionnaires affected my study, which I had planned for when setting the research timeline by allowing more time for the responses. Initially, the plan was to focus the study on the Fulbright scholarship alumni. However, despite two reminders, the response rate of ten alumni was too low, and I decided to open up the study to five more scholarships administered through DHET's Directorate of International Scholarships. After the questionnaire was sent out from the DHET representative the survey had 57 responses in total, from which seven could not be included in the study since they had

not yet finished their studies or had only graduated with an undergraduate degree, and the decision had been made to limit the study to postgraduate degrees. After the exclusion of these participants, 50 responses of alumni remained for the study. I considered this as a sufficient number of participants, as they represented a cross-section of all scholarships and various disciplines.

Online questionnaires introduce unique ethical considerations. Participant privacy and data security are of concern owing to the digital aspect of the platform. Researchers must ensure that participants' personal information remains confidential and is not compromised. Informed consent becomes crucial, as participants need to be fully aware of the study's purpose, potential risks, and how their data will be used. Addressing issues like voluntary participation, anonymity, and the right to withdraw from the study without consequences becomes even more critical in an online context (Allen & Roberts, 2010; Shih & Xitao, 2008; Stieger & Reips, 2010).

To counter the ethical challenges and allow participants voluntary participation whilst retaining anonymity and confidentiality, the Fulbright and the DHET office sent the link to their graduates and did not have to reveal any contact details. Contact details were only required from those participants who gave their consent for follow-up interviews and were willing to enter their email addresses, which was done voluntarily.

4.3.1.3 Interviews

Twenty out of the fifty participants from the questionnaire indicated their willingness to participate in an interview. I decided to include all twenty willing participants in the study, opting not to pre-select/filter them based on specific criteria. During the interview phase, my focus was on gathering comprehensive and diverse data from each participant. The process of formulating codes, which entails creating labels or categories that represent different aspects of the collected data, was done during the subsequent data analysis, which I conducted after each interview. In this way, I assessed for data saturation, which signifies the moment when no new meaningful codes or themes emerge from the data analysis (Saunders et al., 2018).

The interviews were concluded when the data analysis that I conducted after each interview revealed that further interviews would not yield novel insights, ensuring a thorough exploration of the research topic. While some researchers argue that data saturation can be achieved if just one interview does not yield new codes, Coenen et al. (2012) propose a stricter criterion: data saturation is confirmed only when two successive interviews yield consistent results. While I

remained attentive to the emergence of new codes, I also applied a more rigorous standard by waiting for three consecutive interviews to reveal no new codes. This careful approach provided robust evidence that data saturation had indeed been attained, enhancing confidence in the comprehensiveness and depth of the analysis.

Semi-structured interviews were chosen as they allowed me to ask open-ended questions in terms of the research aim and objectives and for the participants to provide a variety of responses and elaborate on their thoughts and experiences (Fontana & Frey, 2005). By employing open-ended questions, I aimed to create an environment that empowered participants to delve into the nuances of their experiences. Unlike closed-ended questions that might elicit brief and constrained responses, open-ended questions encourage participants to reflect, recount, and elaborate on their feelings, motivations, and perceptions. This approach facilitates a deep exploration of participants' perspectives, enabling them to offer context, examples, and anecdotes that might otherwise remain unexpressed. The beauty of open-ended questions lies in their ability to unravel layers of complexity within participants' responses. This qualitative approach not only captures the breadth of individual viewpoints but also uncovers the unique and intricate facets that contribute to a holistic comprehension of the subject under investigation and insights into the personal experiences of social beings (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

In a semi-structured interview, the interviewer prepares an interview guideline of questions, which covers the important aspects that need to be explored (Babbie, 2011; Matthews & Ross, 2010). I developed a general draft of questions and allowed for individual adjustments according to the information provided in the questionnaire (job experiences, degrees attained, etc.). By adopting this approach, I was able to delve into the participants' viewpoints, considering both their personal educational journeys and professional backgrounds. This comprehensive exploration enabled me to draw insightful conclusions about the effect of degree mobility on SD.

I split the interviews into two sections. In the first section, the semi-structured interviews allowed exploring the personal experiences and thoughts of South Africans who graduated abroad through the provision of a scholarship. Sharing their narratives and thoughts about studying abroad and their subsequent return offered a window into their acquired capabilities and autonomy, shedding light on their experiences and perspectives. The second segment of

the interview exclusively focused on their comprehension of SD and the extent to which they had a sense of responsibility towards ensuring it in both their personal and professional spheres.

Since the order of questions can influence the perception the interviewee has about what is wanted in the answers (Matthews & Ross, 2010; Schwarz, 1999), I decided to first ask about their experiences and thoughts and then about their understanding of SD. This was done not to influence their thoughts of what I was expecting throughout the interview, which could have led to them giving different answers.

I conducted the first round of interviews with all four alumni of the Fulbright scholarship who had indicated their interest in being interviewed. This decision stemmed from the initial intention to investigate the experiences of Fulbright alumni exclusively because of the Fulbright programme's exceptional position in the landscape of international education. As one of the longest-standing and continuously active scholarships, the Fulbright programme carries a legacy that spans generations of scholars and learners. Central to the allure of the Fulbright programme is its steadfast collaboration with the South African government. This deliberate choice reflected a desire to uncover not only individual narratives but also a collective narrative that weaves through time, connecting the past with the present in the realm of international study.

Since I already had their responses from the questionnaire, I wanted to make sure my research was still present in the minds of the participants and made contact with them three weeks after receiving their questionnaire responses. At the same time, I waited for responses to the questionnaires from the other five scholarships linked to the DHET. Once I received the responses, 16 of the DHET alumni indicated availability for interviews. I decided to split these 16 up and invite only eight participants for the second round of interviews. The order of the invitations to the interviews was based on who participated first in the questionnaire.

After the first two rounds of interviews (four Fulbright alumni in the first round and eight from the five DHET scholarships in the second round), I drew up a rough draft of themes emerging from the interviews and drawing on the functionings of the RA. New themes emerged after each interview round, and new functionings showed up in every new interview. This necessitated another round of interviews. I made the decision not to invite all remaining eight alumni, but instead only six, as the new emerging themes continuously decreased throughout the last interviews, and I suspected that data saturation might be achieved soon. After this third round, I again applied the RA framework and worked through the interviews to discover the

themes that had come up. In the last three interviews of round three, no new themes emerged and no new functionings appeared. For this reason, I stopped the interviews after the third round and concluded the interview phase with a total of 17 interviews.

Semi-structured interviews were also conducted with two key agents administering the six scholarships. The first one was the programme coordinator in the public affairs office, overseeing the Fulbright alumni in South Africa, and the second one was with the senior official in the Directorate of International Scholarships overseeing the five DHET scholarships. These senior administrators had expertise not only in liaising with South African alumni but also in the selection and placing process of scholarship applicants. Interviewing these key agents allowed me to gain a deep insight into the policies and processes of the scholarships. This insight provided material, which would be used in discussions concerning the scholarships' objectives, selection criteria, and their potential impact on SD.

The interviews in the study presented inherent limitations due to their reliance on participants' self-reported accounts. This reliance raised concerns regarding the potential impact on the reliability of the gathered data. Given this challenge, the research design had to confront the intricate nuances of the "underlying cognitive and communicative processes" that guide how participants formulate and convey their responses, a consideration underscored by Schwarz (1999, p. 93).

The qualitative interview method introduced the potential for two significant biases: social desirability bias and the tendency for self-presentation. Participants might have tailored their answers to align with what they perceived as my expectations or societal norms (Matthews & Ross, 2010). Acknowledging the existence of these influences highlighted the need to formulate interview questions with precision and arrange them in a deliberate sequence to counteract potential biases, as mentioned above (Matthews & Ross, 2010; Schwarz, 1999).

Navigating these complexities demanded a strategic approach. The interview structure aimed to strike a balance between encouraging participants to express their thoughts and experiences freely while mitigating self-reporting bias. By crafting a framework that invited candid reflections, while also conscientiously shaping the line of questioning, I sought to unravel authentic insights into participants' perspectives on their experiences, ultimately contributing to a more nuanced and accurate understanding of the research topic. In other words, I meticulously framed the questions to encourage participants to express their thoughts and

recount their experiences freely, and the participants readily seized the opportunity to engage in reflective dialogue.

To mitigate bias due to self-reporting, social desirability and self-preservation, the inclusion of open-ended questions was pivotal. This approach aimed to avoid preconceived notions and invited participants to reflect on their experiences organically (naturally, in a spontaneous and unrestrained manner), allowing their genuine perspectives to emerge without being guided or influenced by external factors. I endeavoured to foster authentic and unfiltered insights, capturing the true essence of their experiences without imposing any artificial structure or limitations on their responses. Regardless of whether their encounters were positive or negative, the alumni felt comfortable sharing their sentiments, both excitement and frustration.

All interviews were conducted online for two reasons: (1) the participants were from all over South Africa, and it would have not been possible to conduct the interviews in person owing to financial and time restrictions; (2) the interviews were collected in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic when travelling and meeting people was restricted or not allowed at all. Therefore, even alumni close by were interviewed online. To accommodate the participants, I offered them multiple platforms: Zoom, Google Meet, Microsoft Teams, Skype, and phone calls. I wanted the participants to feel comfortable whilst talking to me and avoid them using a platform with which they were not familiar, which might have distracted them from the interviews. Thus, I used all options for the interviews, which showed that flexibility facilitates participation.

With the alumni's consent, the interviews were audio-recorded and, thereafter, transcribed as it was essential to ensure the accuracy of the participants' contribution during data analysis (Brenner, 2006; Bryman & Bell, 2015; Matthews & Ross, 2010). The transcriptions allowed me to engage repeatedly with what was said by the participants and also allowed for direct referencing in the chapters of this thesis on data presentation and analysis (Brenner, 2006; Bryman & Bell, 2015; Matthews & Ross, 2010).

4.3.2 Data analysis

4.3.2.1 Document analysis

The process of analyzing data gathered through document analysis involves several systematic steps aimed at uncovering patterns, themes, and significant information within the documents under examination (e.g. scholarship calls and regulations) (Bowen, 2009). The following steps were taken:

1. **Data Coding and Categorization** (Patton, 2002): Once the documents were assembled, I employed coding techniques to assign labels or categories to specific sections or elements within the documents. This involves identifying keywords, phrases, or visual cues that are relevant to the research objectives. Coding was done manually highlighting the different categories of the scholarship calls, namely: citizenship, academic performance, study objectives, social responsibility, leadership potential, extra-mural activities, work experience, commitment to development of South Africa, limited to certain degrees, demonstrated interest in the host country, good health, good understanding of programme objectives, commitment to return to South Africa, limitations to certain degrees, good health, demonstrated interest in the host country, good health, good understanding of programme objectives, commitment to return to South Africa, understanding of cross-cultural sensitivity, flexibility, age, wishing to foster a network between host and home country, certain population groups encouraged to apply.
2. **Content Analysis** (Bowen, 2009): Content analysis involves systematically examining the coded data to identify recurring themes, patterns, or trends. I delved into the content of the documents to extract the differences and similarities of the scholarships to compare them with the aims of SD.
3. **Qualitative Interpretation** (Bowen, 2009): Document analysis often includes a qualitative interpretation of the findings, which was also done in the study. I seeked to contextualize the extracted information, drawing on her expertise to discern the underlying meanings, implications, and nuances within the documents.
4. **Triangulation** (Bowen, 2009; Patton, 2002): To enhance the credibility of the analysis, researchers may employ triangulation by comparing findings from document analysis with data from other sources, which was the case for the study. This helped validate the insights gleaned from the documents.

In summary, the document analysis was a valuable method for uncovering valuable insights from the collected documents and information, contributing to the advancement of knowledge in regards of the potential of the scholarships to contribute to SD.

4.3.2.2 Questionnaire data analysis

The questionnaire comprised categorical and ordinal questions, as well as Likert scale and open-ended questions. Analysing the questionnaire responses before conducting the interviews

was not only necessary to find participants for the interviews, but also to prepare me to conduct them. Insights into what the alumni had studied and what they had been doing professionally led to an understanding of their experiences, which helped me prepare myself for the interview questions.

The approach used for analysing questionnaires strongly depends on the kind of questions. The categorical and ordinal questions led to an analysis of the frequencies of the responses (Babbie, 2010; Boynton, 2004). Questions featuring a Likert scale were examined individually, with a focus on calculating central tendencies (Babbie, 2010). This approach offered initial insights into aspects such as employment rates, the duration taken to secure employment, and the application of acquired knowledge in their present roles.

The frequencies and central tendencies of responses were used during the analysis of the participants' functionings, which is explained in Chapter 6. Integrating the data gathered from both the interviews and the questionnaire bolstered the robustness of the arguments during the process of data analysis and presentation of the findings.

4.3.2.3 Interview data analysis

The analysis of the interview data involved two cycles. The **first cycle** entailed writing a rough draft of the interview data. This rough draft aimed to synthesise the entire dataset by bringing together the insights gleaned from each interview which was done through preliminary coding, allowing themes to emerge through the data. It provided an initial overview of the primary themes that had emerged collectively from all the interviews. In addition, it served as an initial framework for understanding the overarching narrative presented by the data. It enabled me to identify prominent trends and connections across the dataset. This preliminary synthesis acted as a foundation for the subsequent stages of analysis, guiding the refinement of coding and the development of comprehensive and detailed conclusions.

Moving forward, the analysis entered the next phase, constituting the **second cycle**, which encompassed a refined coding process (Rädiker & Kuckartz, 2020). As mentioned earlier, I had already generated preliminary coding after each interview. This preliminary coding process involved systematically categorising and labelling segments of data to identify recurring patterns, concepts, or themes. This preliminary coding aimed to discern any emerging themes and assess the potential attainment of data saturation during the interviews.

This second cycle delved deep into the data, extracting intricate nuances and connections. The evolution from preliminary to fine coding allowed for a comprehensive exploration of the

collected information, enabling a thorough understanding of the participants' experiences. In addition, this cycle used the framework of the responsible agency for coding, and added sub-codes where necessary (Rädiker & Kuckartz, 2020). During this second phase of data analysis, I noticed certain functionings were specifically either absent or pre-existing even before the participants embarked on their overseas experiences.

In response, to these absent or pre-existing functionings, specific sub-codes were introduced, denoting what I termed “non-existent” or “pre-existent”" functionings. These sub-codes served a vital purpose: they enabled the distinction between functionings that were present before the international experience, those that surfaced during the period abroad, and those that appeared to be lacking entirely. Although all collected data contributed to addressing the research question and achieving the research aim/objectives, this differentiation proved pivotal. By segregating these nuances, an understanding of the functionings that gained strength during the time abroad was achieved. This methodological separation facilitated a precise evaluation of the impact of the international experience on the participants' functionings.

In many cases, one sentence of the transcribed interviews was an indicator of multiple functionings. This will become clearer in the data analysis section of this thesis when I explain the input from the alumni used to identify certain functionings. Hence, there was no need to persist in coding until each code achieved complete mutual exclusivity, as is commonly suggested. In qualitative analysis, striving for absolute mutual exclusivity of codes, although a valuable ideal, may not always be the most pragmatic approach (Allen, 2017). While saturation of codes can be achieved through coding until mutual exclusivity, I decided to choose a different and more suitable approach for the study. Instead, the fine coding of the second cycle was redone four times, and changes were done every time until I did not have to make any adjustments anymore to the coded sections and saturation of the codes was achieved (Rädiker & Kuckartz, 2020).

The coding involved both deductive and inductive reasoning. Deductive reasoning entails applying predetermined categories or concepts to determine and ensure alignment with established frameworks. However, inductive reasoning involves an exploratory and emergent approach, identifying patterns, themes, or categories that arise directly from the data itself, without being constrained by preconceived notions (which was done in the first step). The integration of both deductive and inductive reasoning enriched the coding process by not only validating existing concepts but also uncovering novel insights and nuances within the dataset.

The deductive coding was based on the predetermined features of the RA (see Table 4.1 below and Section 3.2.2) and was achieved using MAXQDA, which is a widely used software tool for qualitative data analysis. It is designed to assist with coding, analysing, and interpreting qualitative data. Researchers use MAXQDA to facilitate the systematic analysis of large volumes of qualitative data, identifying themes, and insights.

After having concluded the deductive coding with the RA framework, inductive reasoning was used to code to go back to the themes which emerged in the first phase but had not matched the predefined codes. The results from the inductive coding allowed me to expand the features of the RA. In Chapter 3, I explained that existing lists of capabilities of the PCI (Walker & McLean, 2013) refers to sustainable HD and lack comprehensive coverage of the matter of future generations and the natural environment Therefore, I assembled a list of capabilities based on previous research as essential for contributing toward SD (see Section 3.2.2 and Table 4.1 below). This meant that the RA framework was newly established for the study, although based on previous literature. Before conducting the data analysis, I expected that this newly developed list might not cover all upcoming themes.

The inductive coding allowed new themes in terms of the capabilities and functionings indicating the RA to emerge through the context of the transcribed interviews, while the deductive coding was based on pre-existing categories (Babbie, 2011; Patton, 2002; Yin, 2011). Thus, the inductive coding led to the detection of new capabilities and functionings, which extended the concept of the RA, as outlined in Section 3.2.2. In addition, during the deductive coding, which involved applying the pre-defined list to the collected data, it appeared that some functionings that the alumni considered essential in contributing to SD were not part of the list (see Table 4.1 below). These functionings either matched already existing capabilities or created new ones, such as the capability of self-preservation (see Table 4.1 below). The capabilities and functionings shown in red in Table 4.1 below are the ones that were added to the previous table (see Table 3. 2 above) because they emerged out of the data.

Table: 4.1: Capability set and functionings indicating responsible agency (Version 2)

Responsibility	Capability	Functioning (examples)
Own well-being (Becker, 2006; Sen, 1985)	Self-preservation	Making compromises for decent life 'forever'. Be self-functioning and sustaining your own life and not relying on others
	Self-care	Pursuing own goals (Becker, 2006; Sen, 1985) Personal growth (Walker & McLean, 2013)
Society's well-being (Walker & McLean, 2013)	Integrity (Walker & McLean, 2013)	Acting ethically Being responsible and accountable to communities and colleagues Being honest Striving to provide high-quality service
	Emotional reflexivity (PCI) (Walker & McLean, 2013)	Empathy/Narrative imagination Compassion Integrating rationality and emotions Being emotionally reflexive
	Social and collective struggle (Walker & McLean, 2013)	Community empowerment approach/promote human rights. Contributing to policy formulation and implementation Identifying places for change/leading and managing social change to reduce injustice. Working in professional and interprofessional teams Participating in public reasoning/listening to all voices in the conversation Building and sustaining strategic relationships and networks with organisations and government
	Resilience (Walker & McLean, 2013)	Perseverance in difficult circumstances Fostering hope Having a sense of career security
	Affiliation (Walker & McLean, 2013)	Accepting obligations to others Care and respect for diverse people. Understanding the lives of poor and vulnerable Developing relationships across social groups and state hierarchies Critical respect for different cultures Communicating professional knowledge in an accessible way/with courtesy and patience
	Knowledge and skills (Walker & McLean, 2013)	Having a firm, critical grounding in disciplinary and academic knowledge Valuing academic and indigenous knowledge Having a multidisciplinary/multi-perspectival stance Being enquiring, critical, evaluative, imaginative, creative, and flexible Integrating theory and practice Problem-solvers Open-minded
	Assurance and confidence (Walker & McLean, 2013)	Expressing and asserting own professional priorities Contributing to policy Having confidence in the worthwhileness of one's professional work. Having the confidence to act for change

Table: 4.1: Capability set and functionings indicating responsible agency (Version 2)

Responsibility	Capability	Responsibility
Nature's well-being (C. Becker, 2006; Crespo et al., 2017; Walker & McLean, 2013)	Resource awareness	Understanding that our resources are limited (C. Becker, 2006; Crespo et al., 2017) Sustainable consumption (Crespo et al., 2017) - Ensuring that we are not running out of specific resources Environmental awareness (Walker & McLean, 2013) - not exploiting or harming the environment and eco-system
Ex-ante responsibility (Crespo et al., 2017; Pelenc et al., 2013; Walker & McLean, 2013)	Informed vision (PCI) (Walker & McLean, 2013)	Understanding how the profession is shaped by historical and current socio-economic, political contexts, national and global. Understanding how structures shape individual lives Being able to imagine alternative futures and improved social arrangements. Commitment to economic development and equitable economic opportunities
	Informed decision-making (Pelenc et al., 2013)	Awareness and understanding of, and reflection on the impact and influence that one has on society, future generations, and nature (Pelenc et al., 2013) Understanding of the complexity of local, national and international political, economic, social, cultural and environmental challenges (Crespo et al., 2017) To consider long-term benefits and future generations

I would recommend this extended list (see Table 4.1 above) for future research on the capabilities that graduates in South Africa need to contribute toward SD. As mentioned above, the extended list is based on the data collected in South Africa from Walker and McLean (2013), who are international researchers in the field of SD and the CA (Becker, 2006; Crespo et al., 2017; Pelenc et al., 2013; Sen, 1985), and the findings of the current study. Thus, the list is not only relevant to South African research but also internationally conducted studies.

Framing the RA with encompassing concepts of SD – including personal well-being, the well-being of others, nature, and future generations –becomes a way to evaluate an individual's ability to support SD. The study revealed that engaging individuals in conversations about specific life experiences allowed for a determination of whether the individual valued certain functionings. This extended list can comprehensively serve as a framework to assess whether alumni possess the necessary capabilities and functionings to contribute towards SD in South Africa. As highlighted by Walker and McLean (2013) in their research, the capabilities themselves appear to exhibit universal applicability, potentially adaptable to different contexts and countries. In contrast, context-related functionings imply differences amongst various countries and contexts. Moreover, this contextual variation extends to the functionings outlined in Table 4.1 above, building upon the framework established by Walker and McLean's (2013) PCI.

4.3.3 Meeting formal requirements of ethical considerations

To ensure compliance with the required ethical standards for my study, I obtained ethical clearance from Rhodes University's Education Higher Degrees Committee before commencing my data. Additionally, I obtained informed consent from participants by having them sign consent forms before completing questionnaires or participating in interviews. These consent forms contained detailed information about the research aim and objectives, the ethical clearance number, as well as contact details for both my supervisor and myself. This allowed participants to reach out with any questions or withdraw from the study at any point.

Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained by using pseudonyms for all participants except two individuals whose positions made it impossible to guarantee anonymity even with pseudonyms. However, prior discussion with these participants ensured their consent for revealing their identities.

4.3.4. My positionality during the research

A researcher's positionality is a combination of his/her worldview and position in terms of the content of the conducted research (Darwin Holmes, 2020b). Furthermore, as Merriam, et al. (2001, p. 411) point out positionality is "where one stands in relation to 'the other', which can be affected by gender, race, nationality, personal history, and experiences". In line with these definitions, I ascertained my positionality by cautiously reflecting on my views, beliefs, and values and determining how my culture, experiences as a graduate in a foreign country, and epistemology would potentially influence how I relate to the participants and draw conclusions.

My interest in the research topic emerged from my own experiences. I arrived in South Africa from Germany for my honour's degree and remained for my master's degree and my doctorate. I came with a mindset that positioned Germany as a developed country and categorised South Africa as a developing country into which I would gain insights. However, what I learnt about cross-cultural interactions and life in a country with complex and competing norms and values, which were foreign to those with which I had grown up, profoundly challenged my thinking.

After staying in South Africa for some time, I started questioning how I would fit in when I returned to my home country. What skills, knowledge and capabilities would I have gained that could help me contribute to my home country? My background in development studies and interest in education made me notice how the SDGs promoted scholarships. When I juxtaposed this observation with my own lived experience as an international postgraduate scholar in a foreign country, I asked the following question: What are the perceptions of scholarships designed to assist students studying outside their home countries? What are the perceptions of higher education as a mechanism for fostering SD? Additionally, is the Northern Hemisphere suitable for nurturing capabilities to contribute to SD amongst individuals from the Southern Hemisphere?

To ensure the integrity and validity of the research, I needed to be aware of my background, the context in which I grew up, the way I understood the world and how that influenced how I conducted the study and the interviews, analysed the data, and interpreted the findings. Moreover, growing up in the northern hemisphere and relocating to South Africa only at the age of 27, my ontological and epistemological foundation likely differed from that of the participants. Ontology is the science of what is, of the kinds of structures of objects, properties, events, processes and relations in every area of reality" (Matthews & Ross, 2010, p. 17). Ontology is, furthermore, concerned with the question of what is the nature of the knowable,

and of reality (Allison & Hobbs, 2006) and, therefore, linked to a person's biography (meaning the cultural background and nationality of an individual (Denzin, 1989). However, a person's epistemology shapes how they perceive, relate to, and comprehend knowledge (Singh & Walwyn, 2017, p. 2), while ontology delves into the nature of reality, encompassing structures of objects, properties, events, processes, and relationships (Matthews & Ross, 2010, p. 17).

The impact of epistemology and ontology on social research is pervasive, influencing every facet of the research process (Carter & Little, 2007). Knowledge construction stems from our perceptions of the world, often influenced by our background and upbringing (Singh & Walwyn, 2017). Understanding this positioning is essential in comprehending the intricate dynamics at play within the research context. The divergence between my ontological and epistemological foundation, as compared with that of the participants, held implications for the research. In other words, in how I conceptualised knowledge (epistemological perspective) and reality (ontological perspective), I may have inadvertently prioritised certain perspectives, thus overlooking or undervaluing viewpoints that differed from mine. In addition, my different perspective could have not only impacted how way I formulated the research questions, aim, objectives, design, methodology and questionnaire items but also how I conducted interviews with the participants and analysed/interpreted data collected from participants who had always lived in the southern hemisphere (Court & Abbas, 2013; Carter & Little, 2007).

Although my epistemology was grounded in my initial education in the Global North, it had shifted somewhat through my education and experiences in South Africa due to completing two degrees and living in the Global South for a few years before starting my PhD. Therefore, I was aware of the need to gain a more nuanced understanding of the intricate interplay between different epistemological perspectives and the specific context of my research, enabling a more comprehensive and balanced exploration of the subject matter. In addition, discussions with my supervisor, who is South African, about which information was relevant and less relevant for the research, assisted me in navigating the nuances of data analysis and interpretation within the context of diverse epistemological and ontological perspectives.

4.3.5. My relationship with the participants

The disparity between my epistemological and ontological perspective and that of the participants might have influenced our relationship (Carter & Little, 2007; Court & Abbas, 2013). Therefore, I bracketed my perceptions as far as possible, read the questionnaire responses and listened to the interviewees' words with an open mind. In addition, I tried not to

expect answers based on my experience, background knowledge, and previous research on the topic. However, at times my perspectives might have impacted the participants' responses.

For example, I might have framed my questions, especially follow-up ones, in a way that subtly encouraged participants to respond in line with my expectations. In addition, through subtle non-verbal cues, such as facial expressions or tone of voice, I might have inadvertently conveyed my expectations to the participants during interviews, prompting them to provide answers aligning with my anticipation. However, I documented instances when my expectations might have influenced interactions in my research journal to ensure that I was objective and unbiased during data analysis and interpretation.

I had to be aware of the issue of being an insider or outsider in the studied group (Bourke, 2014; Court & Abbas, 2013; Merriam et al., 2001). The concepts of insider and outsider in research are closely tied to the idea of epistemology. In the study, insiders, who possessed first-hand familiarity with the specific cultural and contextual landscape of returning alumni to South Africa, might have naturally infused more of their knowledge into interviews, potentially including assumptions or interpretations (Court & Abbas, 2013). However, being positioned as either an insider or an outsider was not a research limitation. Instead, the crux lay in acknowledging and understanding my positionality in the study (Bourke, 2014; Greenbank, 2003).

Nevertheless, my experience of moving abroad and obtaining my degrees in a country far away from home in a different culture, mimicking the experience of the participants, gave me an insider status to an extent (Sultana, 2007). Even though our journeys' geographies were in reverse (from the Global South to the Global North for the participants, and from the Global North to the Global South for me), sharing this experience created a sense of shared commonality and relatability (Darwin Holmes, 2020a). Moreover, sharing that I came from Germany to study as a foreigner in South Africa seemed to encourage some participants to be more open about their own experiences of degree mobility. The feeling of togetherness created a safe environment, which allowed participants to speak freely about their thoughts and experiences.

Court and Abbas (2013) highlight that regardless of the amount of time someone spends in a foreign country, it does not qualify the individual as an insider. Hence, despite living in South Africa for four years (at the time of the interviews) I was still an outsider because there were still many aspects of South African culture of which I am unaware. Furthermore, factors, such

as the historical legacy of colonialism, the framing of what is termed “developed" and “developing” nations, and the impact of globalisation on local contexts should be taken into account when conducting research in the Global South from a Global North perspective (Al-Hindi & Kawabata, 2002; Roberts, Jones, & Nast, 1997). These factors involve power dynamics because they shape how countries and people are perceived, valued, and connected in the world. These factors influence who has control over resources, decisions, and knowledge, ultimately affecting how societies interact and who holds the most power and influence in various aspects of life. In addition, the perception is that the Global South, including Africa, is often considered less powerful in various contexts. Therefore, the potential for bias arises when a northern perspective is not critically examined or when assumptions based on this perspective are unconsciously applied to research conducted in the Global South. I needed to be aware of these power dynamics to ensure that the research remains objective, respectful, and free from unintended biases, thus accurately representing the experiences and perspectives of participants from diverse backgrounds.

The dynamics between researchers and participants can potentially create a situation where participants provide answers that they assume the researcher expects or withhold important information that can impact the study (Court & Abbas, 2013). I tried to limit the impact of cultural differences between the participants and myself by choosing an environment that was most comfortable for them and tried to create a feeling of togetherness through our common experience of studying abroad. I also tried to increase participant comfort by giving them multiple options for online platforms, and by giving an introduction about myself, my experience, and my interests in terms of the study at the beginning. In addition, conducting interviews online might have given the participants a level of comfort, as it allowed them to choose a time and space that suited them. Furthermore, I gave the participants the option to have the cameras on or off during the interview based on their comfort level, aiming to create a relaxed atmosphere during our discussions.

4.3.6. Rigour and trustworthiness

I focussed on ensuring rigour in the study, which is “useful for establishing consistency of the study methods over time and provides an accurate representation of the population studied” (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011, p. 151). Moreover, rigour encompasses not only validity and reliability, which is traditionally only associated with quantitative research, but also methodological transparency, member checking, triangulation, peer review, reflexivity, an audit trail, data saturation, and consistency, each of which is explained below:

- Validity: Ensuring that the research accurately measures what it intends to measure and that the interpretations and conclusions drawn from the data are valid.
- Reliability: Ensuring stability in the research process and outcomes. In addition, it is ensured by the steadfastness, uniformity and trustworthiness of how various researchers analyse the dataset and by the study's findings being replicated by others.
- Methodological transparency: Documenting and describing the research methods, procedures, and data collection processes so that others can understand and potentially replicate the study.
- Triangulation: Using multiple sources of data, methods, or perspectives to corroborate and validate findings. This approach enhances the credibility of the results.
- Peer review: Subjecting the research process and findings to scrutiny and evaluation by other experts in the field to ensure that the study meets rigorous standards.
- Audit trail: Maintaining a detailed record of the whole study from start to finish, to allow for transparency and accountability.
- Reflexivity: Recognising and addressing potential biases, assumptions, and personal perspectives that might influence the research process and findings.
- Saturation: In qualitative research, reaching a point where new data or information does not provide significant new insights, indicates that the data collection process is sufficiently comprehensive.
- Consistency: Ensuring that the research process is consistent, well-structured, and follows a clear plan from start to finish.

Although rigour and trustworthiness are related concepts in research, they refer to different aspects of ensuring the quality of a study. Trustworthiness refers to the degree to which the findings of a study are credible. Trustworthiness is particularly emphasised in qualitative research, where subjective interpretations and multiple perspectives are involved. Lincoln and Guba (1985) developed a model for trustworthiness in qualitative research, which takes into account the following:

i. Truth value (credibility)
ii. Applicability (transferability),
iii. Consistency (dependability)
iv. Neutrality (confirmability)

I endeavoured to address the aspects in the following ways:

I. Truth value or credibility, which refers to the need to ensure the veracity and uniformity of a study (Morrow, 2005), was ensured by my being truthful, accurate, and logically consistent. I evaluated the questionnaires, the interviews, and the findings in collaboration with my supervisor to ensure that they were objective and not impacted by my cultural background and personal experiences.
    - As I evaluated the questionnaires and the interviews with my cultural background and experiences, it was necessary to share the interpretations and conclusions with my supervisor for questioning and probing me to account for the interpretation and conclusions. Each statement and finding in the analysis section was discussed and reflected on with my supervisor to ensure truth-value.

II. Applicability of transferability, which shows whether research outcomes can be utilised in other research areas or population groups (Morrow, 2005), was considered in my study, although I acknowledged that this is difficult in qualitative research. A qualitative study delves deeply into the unique perceptions, perspectives, and experiences of individuals, shaped by their cultural and contextual background. Therefore, using the findings in a different environment could be problematic (like Babbie, 2011; Morrow, 2005).

III. Consistency or dependability, which means that the different steps of the research can be tracked and understood (Morrow, 2005; Thomas & Magilvy, 2011), was ensured by my explaining the study in detail in this thesis. In addition, every decision made throughout the research is clearly explained and accounted for as well as uniformly fitting into the overall picture.
    - Dependability relates to the fact that the reader can track the different steps of the research and understand why specific decisions and choices were made (Morrow, 2005; Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). Providing detailed explanations of the process undertaken throughout the research process (done in this chapter), was done to ensure dependability. It entails information about the planning process of the research, the data collection, and the data analysis. Every decision made throughout the research is clearly explained and accounted for. This information allows the reader to understand fully how I conducted the research in this specific way and why it was done that way.

IV. Neutrality or confirmability, which refers to the need for research findings to be based on the data gathered instead of the researcher's subjective interpretation was considered in the study. However, I acknowledged that entirely circumventing subjectivity in qualitative research is not feasible (Gasson, 2004), although I reflected on my subjective viewpoints and documented them in my research journal.

4.4 Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has delved into the qualitative research design and methodology used in the study. Through a comprehensive exploration of aspects, such as data collection methods, data analysis techniques, and considerations of rigour and trustworthiness, the chapter has underscored the nuanced processes involved in capturing the rich tapestry of human experiences and perspectives in the context of the study.

The complexities and challenges posed by subjectivity and context in qualitative research were discussed in detail in this chapter. In addition, the chapter has revealed that while the goal of complete subjectivity elimination may be elusive, researchers' commitment to reflective practices, coupled with rigorous methodologies, contributes to a robust interpretation of the data analysis findings, which will be covered in subsequent chapters.

CHAPTER 5
CONCEPTUALISATION AND CONTRIBUTION OF SCHOLARSHIPS TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

There comes a point where we need to stop just pulling people out of the river. We need to go upstream, and need to find out why they are falling in.

Desmond Tutu

5.1 Introduction

An analysis of the potential contribution scholarships can have toward SD requires a look into how they are conceptualised and implemented. The discussion in Section 2.1.2 indicates the SDGs target to improve quality education by increasing scholarships for scholars from countries in the Global South to study in the Global North. The assumption is that regardless of the field of study, country of origin of the scholars or host country (scholarship-giving country), these scholarships will automatically contribute to SD. In addition, previous research has shown that eligibility criteria, aims, and funding agreements can be an indicator of the intended outcomes and potential contribution to SD (Campbell, 2018).

This chapter examines the South African government's agreements with partner countries for the scholarships that formed part of the study. The aims, funding agreements and eligibility criteria of the six participating scholarships are the focus of this chapter. The intent is to offer insights into the structures and mechanisms of the six scholarships and provide an analysis of how this can impact SD.

Moreover, this chapter explains the findings of the analysis of publicly accessible documents providing information about each scholarship and, additionally, through the interviews with the Programme Coordinator of Fulbright South Africa, Jasmin[19], and the Director of International Scholarships at the DHET, Sarah. The interviews with these officials were conducted to get a deeper insight into the scholarships' setup. This information was needed to gain insight into the scholarships' potential to support SD and create RAs in degree-mobile students.

[19] All names were changed to guarantee anonymity as far as possible.

5.2 Selected scholarships

The sponsors of the six chosen scholarships (see Table 5.2 below), which are spread out over North America, Europe, and Asia, collaborate with the South African government in terms of the scholarships. Sarah and Jasmin (see Table 5.1 below) were the first two interviews conducted for the study. As mentioned above, Sarah, the Director of International Scholarships at the DHET was in charge of the implementation of international scholarships, which collaborated with the DHET (see Table 5.3 below). Jasmin was the Programme Coordinator of Fulbright South Africa, which is promoted by the South African government and co-funded in various ways, as will be discussed later in this chapter.

Table 5.1 presents Sarah's and Jasmin's profiles, whilst Table 5.2 thereafter describes the scholarships.

Table 5.1: Interviewed staff members

Name	Role	Responsibilities	Scholarship name
Sarah	Director of International Scholarships at DHET	• Application processes • Selection of candidates • Connections with various scholarships and governments • Part of committees and advisory boards for scholarships	• Chinese Scholarship Council scholarship (CSC) • Kadar Asmal Fellowship (KAF) • Stipendium Hungaricum (SH) • Swedish Institute Scholarship for South Africa (SISSA) • African Business Education Scholarship (ABE)
Jasmin	Programme Coordinator Fulbright South Africa	• Application process • Nomination of candidates	• Fulbright (FB) scholarship

Table 5.2: Scholarships chosen for the study

Name of the scholarship	Host country
Fulbright Scholarship (FB)	United States
Kadar Asmal Fellowship (KAF)	Ireland
Chinese Scholarship Council scholarship (CSC)	China
Stipendium Hungaricum (SH)	Hungary
Swedish Institute Scholarships for South Africa scholarship (SISSA)	Sweden
African Business Education Scholarship (ABE)	Japan

5.2.1 Scholarship funding

While all six scholarships collaborate with the South African government, the DHET's financial contribution is not the same for all of them. Nevertheless, according to Sarah, the DHET contributes to various scholarships for South Africans, provided the students are registered for accredited courses. The kind of funding depends on the agreement the DHET has with the respective scholarships and the governments of the host countries.

The scholarships might cover specific components of the overall educational expenses, such as tuition fees, textbooks, or accommodation. However, there are often additional costs associated with pursuing higher education that might not be covered by the scholarship. These could include costs of transportation, meals, study materials, personal expenses, and other miscellaneous costs. Therefore, the DHET, the South African government, foreign governments, or collaborations between the DHET and foreign governments might cover these additional costs.

The collaboration of the South African government is not always only financial; sometimes, it is through advertising the scholarships and selecting suited candidates. Table 5.3 below shows where the DHET supports the scholarships financially. The DHET funding covers a range of expenses from health insurance to the cost of SAQA verification[20] (see table below). Additionally, the DHET fully funds two KAF scholarships, which is not shown in Table 5.3 below. However, the table presents the details of scholarship funding by the DHET, the South African government, foreign governments, DHET/foreign government collaborations and where no funding is available. While some scholarships are not covering all the expenses, Sarah said that the DHET often fills these funding gaps. This bridges the financial gap for students who are unable to afford the not covered costs and allows them to participate by alleviate the financial burden they might otherwise face. The government's goal is to promote access to education and create opportunities for those who might otherwise be financially restricted from pursuing higher learning.

[20] Accreditation of a foreign degree in South Africa

Table 5.3: Scholarship funding

Scholarship ⟶ / Funding ↓	Fulbright (FB)	Kadar Asmal Fellowship (KAF)	Chinese Scholarship Council (CSC)	Stipendium Hungaricum (SH)	Swedish Institute Scholarship for South Africa (SISSA)	African Business Education (ABE)
Health insurance						
Tuition						
Visa fees						
Travel allowance						
Settling-in allowance						
Books and computer allowance						
Accommodation						
Monthly stipend						
Admission fees						
Orientation						
Research support						
SAQA verification						

Note: Yellow = additional funding provided from DHET; dark orange = funding provided from foreign government; light orange = no funding provided; green = funding provided from DHET and the foreign government

The following sections explain the funding provided by the scholarships themselves:

The **Fulbright scholarship** funds health insurance, tuition costs, visa fees, travel, settling-in, book and computer allowances, and monthly maintenance (DHET, 2022d). According to Jasmin, the US government fully funds the scholarship. The South African NRF[21] does not co-fund full degrees with the Fulbright Scholarship but co-funds visiting research students[22]. As seen in Table 5.3 above, the Fulbright scholarship covers most of the fees, unlike other scholarships, although the DHET does not contribute towards travel allowances, visa fees, and other expenses not covered by the Fulbright scholarship.

[21] The NRF was established as an independent government agency purely g responsible for promoting research in South Africa. By funding and supporting human resource development and research, the aim is to ensure knowledge creation, innovation, and development in all fields, thereby enhancing the quality of life in South Africa

[22] Visiting research student scholarships were not part of the current study. In addition, the DHET was not involved in funding the Fulbright scholarships that were part of the study.

Other scholarships contribute to or cover admission fees, orientation costs, the SAQA verification of the overseas degree, and research support expenses. This is the case with the **Kadar Asmal Fellowship** scholarship, which does not cover health insurance, although it covers admission fees (DHET, 2021b). In 2020, when the interview with the staff members took place, the Irish government funded most (15) of the Kadar Asmal Fellowship scholarships. In addition, two full scholarships were co-funded by the DHET of South Africa.

Table 5.3 above shows that some scholarships do not fund all the costs. The **Stipendium Hungaricum** and the **Chinese Scholarship Council**, for example, do not cover visa fees, travel allowances and other expenses. Depending on the availability of funds, the South African government covers costs for one return economy airfare for the students awarded the Chinese Scholarship Council scholarship, contributes towards a monthly stipend, visa costs, and the compulsory pre-departure orientation programme for a limited amount of scholars (DHET, 2022b). According to Sarah, every year, the DHET funds international travel as well as contributing towards a higher monthly stipend, a settlement allowance, pre-departure orientation, and the SAQA verification of qualification for two students awarded the Stipendium Hungaricum scholarship. With this additional funding, the DHET wants to ensure inclusivity for applicants from all kinds of financial backgrounds.

Sarah highlighted that the DHET would continue to endorse scholarships, even if the grants do not cover all the associated expenses. Moreover, the DHET official homepage would explicitly indicate when a scholarship does not fully fund a student's expenses and a portion of the funding would need to be met by the student, even if the Department contributes to expenses. In other words, many students find themselves responsible for some of the expenses, as DHET only supports a limited number of students financially.

Sarah pointed out that scholarships, which do not cover substantial portions of the costs, effectively excluded individuals from poor backgrounds. These individuals are automatically not considered for a scholarship because they lack the financial means to cover expenses, such as travel costs or living expenses. The contributions made by the DHET indicate that it is aware that limited funding excludes certain groups and thus supports equal access to the scholarships by covering the costs for some students who do not have enough funding. However, the amount of students that can be supported depends on available funds every year, and it cannot cover all the outstanding expenses for each scholarship (DHET, 2022b). For example, at the time of the interview, although 40 scholarships were awarded by the Chinese Scholarship Council,

which is the case every year, only one airfare ticket was covered by the DHET. The Stipendium Hungaricum scholarship programme presents a similar scenario. In this case, the DHET sponsors the travel expenses of two scholarships not covered by the Hungarian government. However, the Stipendium Hungaricum offers around 100 scholarships annually. As a result, a large portion of these scholarships go to individuals who can manage the extra costs on their own, which essentially benefits those who are already in a good financial position.

In addition, although the **Swedish Institute Scholarship for South Africa** provides a travel grant, it is only given upon arrival in Sweden, which means travel costs must be paid upfront by the scholarship recipients. While the scholarship will refund the costs in the end, some awardees might be unable to cover these initial costs. In addition, the application fees for Swedish universities are also not covered. While the DHET covers the application fees for up to 15 students each year, the travel costs are still left to the candidates until they receive the refund.

Kent (2018) points out that funding could potentially have an impact on the outcome of the scholarships. In other words, the more financial assistance a scholarship awardee obtains, the smoother his experience during the educational journey. For example, a reduction in financial stress allows the students to focus on his/her studies, leading to improved outcomes. In addition, students who receive sufficient funding are more likely to complete their studies successfully without dropping out owing to financial constraints. However, as stated above, an even greater problem is that financially constrained candidates are excluded from being accepted for a scholarship.

Inequality in South Africa persists, which underscores the ongoing challenges the country faces in bridging the gap between rich and poor and ensuring equal opportunities as well as SD for all. Moreover, scholarships for South African students, who are expected to contribute to SD on their return, ironically perpetuate disparities. This is done through favouring individuals already hailing from affluent backgrounds because scholarships, which do not cover expenses, such as the cost of travelling to a foreign country, exclude poor students who lack financial support and thus do not ensure equitable educational access (UN, 2015a). Goal 4 of the SDGs clearly outlines the aim of equal access to all levels of education until 2030. Therefore, the current scenario essentially permits only wealthier families to participate, implying that insufficient scholarship funding impedes progress toward achieving access to HE.

Through the interviews with the two employees and the document analysis, it became clear that most funding for the scholarships came from foreign governments. This imbalance in funding between the host and the sending country, creates dependency on other countries' willingness to provide funding for the scholarships. In addition, the foreign countries' funding decisions are made in their interests and not necessarily to ensure educational equality and SD in South Africa (see Section 5.5.), although the Fulbright and Kadar Asmal Fellowship scholarships cover most of the costs of studying in a foreign country. However, by not covering, for example, travel costs, visa fees, money for books, and settling in, the other four scholarships make it difficult for less resourced people to participate in their programmes.

5.2.2 Eligibility criteria

Funding is not the sole criterion requiring analysis when evaluating scholarships. Another factor that can significantly impact scholarship outcomes is eligibility criteria. The upcoming section will explore and analyse this aspect, elucidating how the qualifications and prerequisites for prospective scholarship applicants impact the efficacy of scholarship initiatives. These criteria often encompass academic achievements, extracurricular involvement, demonstrated leadership skills, and sometimes financial need, which have implications for the programme. For instance, an emphasis on academic excellence might result in a pool of scholars who excel in their studies and contribute to the academic vibrancy of the institutions. Furthermore, considering financial needs can open doors for those who might otherwise be unable to pursue higher education because of financial constraints, fostering a more inclusive and diverse learning environment.

The allocation of scholarships is inherently constrained by the number of recipients they can accommodate, necessitating the establishment of eligibility criteria. These criteria serve as parameters that govern access, ensuring that those who meet the specified requirements are considered. However, the impact of eligibility criteria on the contribution of recipients to SD in South Africa is complex.

Table 5.4 below presents the eligibility criteria for the different scholarships under study.

Table 5.4. Eligibility criteria for scholarships

Scholarship→ / Criteria ↓	FB	KAF	CSC	SH	SISSA	ABE
South African citizen/permanent resident						
Academic performance level	Excellent	75%	Bachelor: 70% Postgraduate: 65%	Bachelor: 70% Postgraduate: 65%	65%	65%
Clearly written study objectives			Priority			
Social responsibility						
Leadership potential					Priority	
Extra-mural activities						
Work experience		Two years			Priority	
Commitment to the development of South Africa		Specifically, SDGs				
Limited to certain degrees						
Demonstrated interest in the host country						
Good health						
Good understanding of programme objectives						
Commitment to return to South Africa						
Understanding of cross-cultural sensitivity, flexibility						
Age			Bachelor: 25 Master: 35 PhD: 40	Bachelor: 30 Postgraduate: 45		22 -39
Wish to foster a network between the host country/South Africa						
Certain population groups encouraged		Historically disadvantaged institutions	Historically disadvantaged			

Note: Dark orange = criteria adopted by scholarship

Certain eligibility criteria for scholarships exhibit a clear relationship with the measurable markers of SD. For instance, academic excellence directly contributes to a skilled and knowledgeable workforce that is vital for driving SD. In addition, age can indicate the potential to contribute to SD in different ways. Younger scholars can infuse energy and innovative thinking, while seasoned candidates may offer well-informed strategies and a deep understanding of real-world challenges. Moreover, work experiences a candidate's ability to translate theoretical concepts into actions, especially if it involves tangible contributions to SD through sustainability, community development, or environmental conservation initiatives. Furthermore, candidates with work experience may possess a network of industry connections that can facilitate the dissemination of SD practices.

Although not all eligibility criteria immediately appear directly relevant to SD, their impact becomes evident upon closer examination. For example, the criterion of demonstrated interest in a foreign country could foster cross-cultural exchange and collaboration, which can facilitate the sharing of sustainable practices and innovative solutions. Strong leadership skills as a criterion indicate the ability to drive positive change and guide SD initiatives within communities.

Whether the candidate meets the criteria often hinges on the subjective judgment of those responsible for choosing candidates. As Sarah highlighted, certain elements like motivation letters and interviews are employed to assess a candidate's commitment to making a positive impact on their home country and returning to South Africa. However, this introduction of subjectivity can lead to a lack of transparency in the selection process, creating a space where personal preferences come into play, which prevents the tracking of the rationale behind the inclusion or exclusion of certain individuals from scholarship opportunities, thereby impacting the overall effectiveness and fairness of the selection process.

While each scholarship has a specific set of criteria, they also have a few aspects in common (see Table 5.4 above). A commonality is that all the scholarships are only granted to either South African citizens or those granted permanent residency by the South African Government, ensuring that only South Africans are benefitting from the programs. Differences include criteria indicating high academic achievement (the Chinese Scholar Council, Stipendium Hungaricum and Fulbright scholarships), sustained extra-curricular activities (the Fulbright scholarship) and leadership skills (the Fulbright, Swedish Institute Scholarship for South Africa, and Kadar Asmal Fellowship). Two scholarships (the Swedish Institute Scholarship for South Africa and the African Business Education scholarship) prefer scholars with previous work experience. The African Business Education Scholarship prefers applicants working in the private or government sector that interests the Japanese government (DHET, 2020b).

All the scholarships except for the African Business Education Scholarship choose top graduates and those who already managed to secure a job to apply for the mentioned scholarships. Therefore, these scholarships recruit scholars with social capital, which refers to the resources, advantages, and benefits that an individual can access through social networks, relationships, and interactions within a community (Bourdieu, 1984). However, as mentioned earlier, previously disadvantaged backgrounds have less social capital than required by these scholarships and are thus excluded from being awarded a scholarship, in favour of those who

already have a degree and a job, which indicates that they have already succeeded in life. Therefore, this eligibility criterion maintains the existing inequality in the country by favouring the elite and interfering with SD (Dassin et al., 2018; Kent, 2018; DHET, 2020a)

Disparities of social capital are based on a lack of quality education at public primary and secondary schools in South Africa, which means that learners are inadequately prepared for higher education (Scott, 2018). Scott (2018, p.5) states the following:

> Graduation figures clearly show that unless the system can realise the intellectual potential within all communities, there is no prospect of producing the quantum of advanced knowledge and capabilities that the country needs.

This statement underscores the pressing need for educated individuals from all communities in South Africa. However, the reality is that only 30 % of students in the country manage to graduate within the expected time (DHET, 2020a). In other words, out of all students who begin their studies, only 30 % manage to fulfil all the requirements and graduate on time. This relatively low graduation rate raises concerns about factors that might be hindering students from completing their studies on time, such as financial challenges, academic support, or other barriers.

The comparative success rates of different learning environments emphasise the need for equitable access to resources and targeted support to enhance learning outcomes for all students in South Africa. For example, the success rate of students in a contact learning environment, such as attending classes, submitting assignments, and passing exams is 80.5% (DHET, 2021c). This suggests that students who experience a traditional mode of learning have access to the necessary resources and support. However, the percentage of students who successfully meet the criteria for success in a distance learning environment (DHET, 2021c). This signifies that although students in remote learning environments meet established criteria for success, the lower rate compared with contact learning might reflect the challenges such as self-discipline, access to technology/resources, and remote support systems. For white students, the average undergraduate success rate is higher, with 89.8 % for contact learning and 80% for distance learning. These figures glaringly illuminate the existing racial disparities in higher education in South Africa.

These statistics underscore the importance of ensuring fair opportunities for all students to succeed. In the context of eligibility criteria for scholarships, learning environments, the availability of resources, and support systems need to be factored in. Scholarships should

prioritise candidates who have excelled despite challenges that can promote equity in HE. In addition, scholarships should address systemic inequality by considering candidates from marginalised racial backgrounds, thereby promoting inclusivity and diversity.

The Kadar Asmal Fellowship addresses inequality by encouraging students from historically disadvantaged institutions who would otherwise not be able to study in Ireland to apply for a scholarship (Embassy of Ireland, 2021). Moreover, since the scholarship covers all expected expenses, it does not exclude potential candidates who do not have money. This addresses partly Goal 4 of the SDGs, which is to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" (UN, 2015a). In addition, increasing scholarships is part of this goal, which suggests that they should also be equally accessible to all. However, while the Kadar Asmal Fellowship appears to address Goal 4, its eligibility criteria seem to interfere with its achievement.

Applicants are required to have work experience, an undergraduate degree and leadership skills, as outlined above, which is unlikely in someone from a historically disadvantaged background. The contradiction is that while the scholarship claims to focus on marginalised learners and cover all expenses, the eligibility criteria might exclude them. In addition, by only offering funding for postgraduate degrees, the scholarships exclude those who could not gain access to a higher education institution in South Africa (possibly through limited capacity as outlined in chapter 2.3) in the first place, thereby reinforcing inequality. Of the scholarships under study, only two offer students the chance to pursue an undergraduate degree or a PhD (the Chinese Scholarship Council and Stipendium Hungaricum). However, the Kadar Ashmal Fellowship, Swedish Institute Scholarship for South Africa and African Business Education scholarships only offer the possibility to pursue a master's degree. The Fulbright scholarship allows for the pursuit of a master's and doctoral degree.

The rationale behind scholarship programmes advocating for an exclusive focus on postgraduate degrees is rooted in the notion that such an approach can have a far-reaching impact on the overall population. The underlying premise is that individuals who pursue postgraduate studies are involved in specialised fields and engage in advanced research, thereby contributing to the generation of new knowledge and innovative solutions for the benefit of SD. Moreover, armed with advanced skills and specialised knowledge, alumni can engage in policy formulation, thereby driving positive change in society. However, while the emphasis on postgraduate studies holds promise for high-level impact, it may inadvertently

exclude the significant portion of scholars who have not yet pursued undergraduate education, as explained above. An alternative approach could be to choose scholars for fully funded undergraduate programmes, thereby boosting accessibility and success rates in higher education for historically disadvantaged individuals. This would position scholarships as key players in promoting educational equity and fostering inclusivity within academia.

5.2.2.1 Eligibility criteria and RA

The concept of the RA was introduced in Chapter 3, highlighting which responsibilities and their respective capabilities and functionings are essential for the alumni to contribute to SD. Some eligibility criteria of the scholarships suggest that those selecting recipients are potentially looking for capabilities, similar to the features of a RA. The Fulbright scholarship, for example, requires applicants to demonstrate cultural sensitivity and social responsibility. These attributes align with the RA capability of affiliation, which, in turn, is linked to the responsibility for society's well-being. Table 3.1 in Chapter 3 outlines this capability, which is realised through the functioning of "'critical respect for different cultures" or "care and respect for diverse people".

The Fulbright scholarship also prefers candidates who are involved in extracurricular activities, such as volunteering in developmental programmes and aid-giving organisations. These activities are also aligned with the capability of affiliation, which is one of the seven capabilities concerning responsibility towards society's well-being, which is a core part of the RA.

Leadership skills were mentioned in three scholarships as either a requirement or an added advantage (the Fulbright scholarship, Kadar Ashmal Fellowship, and Swedish Institute Scholarship for South Africa). Leadership skills and what they entail can differ depending on the context, but definitions often agree that they include the capability to support others to achieve a common goal (Northouse, 2021; Silva, 2016). Furthermore, Bennis (2009) defines six features of a leader: (1) vision, (2) passion, (3) integrity, (4) curiosity, and (5) daring. These align with the functionings that result from the capabilities of informed vision (ex-ante responsibility) and integrity (responsibility towards society's well-being), which are part of RA.

Scholarships appear to look for people who are concerned about the future of their countries and interested in not just furthering themselves but also others, which, as stated in Section 3.2, is essential if alumni are to contribute to SD. In other words, various capabilities expected from

scholarship recipients align with those indicating the likelihood that they will contribute to SD, such as informed vision and integrity.

All the scholarships under study require previous academic achievement in candidates. While Fulbright prefers "academic excellence", others expect an undergraduate or master's degree with a minimum pass mark of between 65 % and 75 %. These criteria indicate the RA capability of knowledge and skills, which lead to functionings, such as having a firm, critical grounding in disciplinary, and academic knowledge or being enquiring, critical, evaluative, imaginative, creative, and flexible, which are prerequisites for achieving high marks at university.

Other eligibility criteria are a commitment to (1) SD and (2) returning to South Africa. Both align with the RA capabilities of (a) engaging in a social and collective struggle, where the individual promotes the empowerment of the community; (b) assurance and confidence when acting in the interests of change; and (c) informed vision, which leads to RA functionings like commitment to economic development. In other words, if the scholarship candidate is committed to contributing to SD, or returning to South Africa, he/she likely has a sense of responsibility not only for his/her well-being but also that of society and the environment, as outlined in the definitions for RA.

Targeting candidates with the above-mentioned attributes indicates that the scholarships seek recipients already equipped to promote SD in their home country. As Boeren (2018) points out, scholarships aiming to foster agents of change tend to award grants to individuals who possess leadership experience or are actively engaged in institutions or organisations. However, the current study expands Boeren's (2018) finding by linking the selected scholarships' eligibility criteria to the elements of the RA in the context of alumni contributing to SD in South Africa. Therefore, acknowledging the similarities between the features of the RA and certain scholarship eligibility criteria allows for the use of the latter in choosing scholars with the needed capabilities to contribute to SD when returning to South Africa. In other words, it appears that the eligibility criteria filter candidates who demonstrate the features of a RA.

Ramirez's (2016) study showed that people who decide to go abroad could already be culturally aware and open-minded. This finding reveals that degree mobility could be voluntarily chosen out of interest and curiosity concerning other cultures (Ramirez, 2016). This suggests that scholarship recipients already demonstrate the capabilities and functionings of RA, and the eligibility criteria exclude those who have not yet developed them. In other words, only those who already have the potential to contribute to SD are eligible to receive the scholarships.

However, while these scholars may have demonstrated RA capabilities and functionings, the document analysis conducted in this study did not uncover how their experiences abroad prepared them to leverage these capabilities and functions in pursuit of SD upon their return to South Africa. Instead, it provided insights into how scholarships structures facilitate the potential for sustainable development.

An examination of the eligibility criteria indicates the expected capabilities and functionings of the scholarship recipients. The examination revealed that the eligibility criteria resemble some of the features of the RA. This alignment suggests that scholarships like the Fulbright programme appear to acknowledge the importance of specific capabilities considered to be important for scholarship holder's potential to contribution towards SD when they return to their countries of origin. Through already choosing scholars with the features of a RA, raises the question of the extent to which the scholarships are then contributing to the development of these capabilities. Instead of choosing scholars with the mentioned capabilities, it could be considered to select scholars who have not yet gotten the change for developing these criteria to also give them a chance to do so.

5.2.3 Postgraduate requirements and support

Scholarship programmes vary in their post-graduate requirements and support for returning alumni. While the Fulbright programme mandates alumni to return to their home country, other scholarships lack this stipulation. The J1 Visa offered by the Fulbright programme restricts scholars from revisiting the United States for two years after their return to South Africa. However, this does not prevent alumni from departing from South Africa and relocating to a third country. In contrast, scholarship partners, such as Japan, Hungary, China, Ireland, and Sweden permit alumni to apply for work visas in their countries post-degree completion.

Only alumni receiving scholarships co-funded by the DHET are obligated to return to South Africa after graduation, as exemplified by the Hungarian and Chinese scholarships (those with additional DHET funding). Thus, despite, the potential for degree mobility to enhance alumni's contribution to SD, the absence of a return requirement hampers the application of their capabilities and functionings in their home country. In other words, scholarships should ensure that alumni return and contribute to the home country's SD. However, within the framework of the CA, the imposition of a mandate for alumni to return to their home country after graduation contradicts the principle of freedom for HD.

As explained earlier in this thesis, the CA, developed by economists, Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum, centres on enhancing individuals' capability and freedom to lead lives they value (see 3.2). Therefore, mandating a return to the home country, while aimed at supporting SD, could potentially hinder alumni to develop more freedoms. However, by choosing candidates with altruistic goals, such as giving back to their home country, the chances are that they would choose to return after graduation. This might happen owing to eligibility criteria that state, “commitment to the development of South Africa”, as is the case with the Fulbright, Chinese Scholarship Council, Stipendium Hungaricum, Kadar Asmal Fellowship, and African Business Education scholarships. Moreover, the Fulbright scholarship and the Swedish Institute Scholarship for South Africa require recipients to demonstrate a commitment to return to South Africa.

By choosing candidates who fit these criteria, the scholarships seek to ensure their return. As mentioned by Sarah, while the scholarship organisers cannot force people to return to South Africa, they are looking for people interested in supporting the home country after their return. In addition, during the application process, candidates are asked whether they will return home to support SD in South Africa. This criterion is aligned with the RA capability of affiliation, which is shown through the functioning of “accepting obligations to others” and the capability of informed vision, shown through “commitment to economic development and equitable economic opportunities”.

Emphasising altruistic objectives and actively encouraging alumni to return (utilising mutually agreed-upon commitments) presents another avenue for scholarship organisers to ensure alumni engagement with South Africa. Past research has highlighted the efficacy of "mutually agreed-upon commitments," whereby scholars commit to returning to their home countries post-graduation, leading to a positive impact on the return rate (Marsh et al., 2016). These agreements, although not legally binding, foster commitment, motivating scholars to return and leverage their skills in support of SD. This voluntary return aligns with the spirit of the RA in that alumni have a conscious, voluntary role to play in promoting SD in South Africa, by using their knowledge and skills. In other words, the RA emphasises an intrinsic commitment driven by a sense of responsibility towards the well-being of the nation.

Through the lens of the RA, the voluntary return becomes an embodiment of responsible agency, where alumni recognize their potential to contribute positively to South Africa's SD. This approach acknowledges the autonomy of individuals in deciding how they can best

contribute based on their expertise, passions, and circumstances. It encourages a holistic perspective that extends beyond mere obligation, fostering a genuine desire to engage in projects, initiatives, and efforts that align with the country's development priorities.

By voluntarily returning and participating in SD, alumni demonstrate their alignment with the principles of the RA. This paradigm shift from obligatory engagement to proactive and responsible involvement represents a powerful catalyst for driving progress and positive change in South Africa. As such, the concept of the RA enriches the discourse on alumni engagement and contributes to a comprehensive understanding of how individuals can effectively contribute to SD in their homeland.

Sarah mentioned that some alumni end up unemployed after returning to South Africa. Therefore, even alumni who had to sign an agreement enforcing a return are allowed to stay abroad for additional time to gain some work experience. This exemption assumes that additional work experience abroad increases job prospects upon return to the home country. However, while previous research has revealed that work experience from abroad can have a positive impact on the individual's career (Andresen et al., 2022; Breitenmoser et al., 2018; Conyon et al., 2019), other studies have indicated that working abroad can also have a negative impact on someone's career (e.g. not feeling valued enough when returning) (Kraimer et al., 2009). Nevertheless, limited data is available on whether work experience from abroad benefits or hinders the careers of returning alumni in South Africa and their contribution to SD.

While both staff members mentioned that the majority of alumni are returning to South Africa, there is no following-up with alumni by the South African government, and therefore no statistics proofing these statements. Since the study only had a limited number of participants, it did not allow for a conclusion on whether alumni who do not return to South Africa is a problem. This could be a topic for future research.

Sarah also mentioned that many alumni recommend that the DHET matches the graduates with jobs in the country. She revealed that they are considering establishing platforms that make it easier to match graduates with potential employers. Giving them support when returning to South Africa would enhance not only their job opportunities but also their willingness to return. With a higher return rate, the alumni would also be able to bring their gained capabilities and potentially support SD, (which will be discussed in Chapter 6). However, the problem with matching graduates from abroad to jobs in South Africa is the overall high graduate unemployment in the country, where graduates from South African universities struggle to find

a job after graduation (Mseleku, 2022; Statistics South Africa, 2021). Sarah said the government should not treat degree mobile graduates differently from those from South African universities. Considering the known problem of graduate unemployability in South Africa, favouring returning degree-mobile alumni by ensuring their jobs and not alumni from South African universities would create even more inequality. Therefore, instead, a robust support system is required to assist all graduates in South Africa in securing employment. Chapter 7.3.3. will get into more details regarding a potential re-entry program after analysing the RA of the alumni.

5.2.4 Aims of the scholarships

Sarah pointed out that the South African government places a strong emphasis on skills development and encourages students to choose fields of study, which align with specialised skills and are highly regarded. In addition, the government is willing to back programmes that provide study opportunities unavailable within South Africa. According to Sarah, the DHET looks explicitly at the demands and gaps in the South African labour market to identify fields of education and training in which the future labour force should qualify and offers scholarship support for individuals pursuing studies in these areas.

Sarah added that the DHET's investment in overseas scholarships was not to ensure "good quality education" because that was already accessible within South Africa. Instead, the support for scholarships was for students to pursue education and training in specialised fields in which there were gaps in the labour market and for which education and training were not available in South Africa. Jasmin supported this perception and mentioned that choosing programmes, which are not available in South Africa, would allow alumni to return with capabilities, which they could have gained in their home country, and fill gaps in the country's labour market in terms of qualified people who possess the necessary skills and knowledge.

While scholarships for scarce skill development bridge the immediate skills gap and contribute to economic growth, the broader concept of the RA emphasises a deeper engagement with societal responsibilities beyond professional expertise. This raises questions about the extent to which these scholarships encourage graduates not to excel only in their chosen fields but also to contribute actively to the betterment of their communities and the environment, reflecting the goal of SD and the notion of RA. Upon reviewing the scholarships, however, it becomes apparent that only a limited number are explicitly tailored towards degrees in the scarce skills domain, whereas the majority encompass a wider range of programmes. This

pattern may suggest that the scholarships prioritise not only a specific field of study as a determinant of one's potential contribution to SD upon returning to South Africa but also emphasise the experience of studying abroad and embodying the values of RA.

Scholarships that aim to support knowledge acquisition for individuals from the Global South while they study in the Global North have been subject to criticism in the past. This is because the degree mobility of students from the Global South to the Global North is underpinned by the belief that the Global North acts as a civilizing influence for countries in the Global South (Stein & De Andreotti, 2016, p. 30 (Baxter, 2018; Rizvi, 2009). In other words, knowledge from the Global North is considered universally valuable, surpassing the worth of knowledge from other regions (Kent, 2018; Lehr, 2008), which may not accurately reflect the contribution of knowledge from different regions. This perception, according to Sharpe (2015), reinforces oppressive power dynamics between the sending and host countries. Therefore, rather than taking it for granted that degrees earned in the Global North benefit countries in the Global South, scholars and policymakers should assess this premise critically (Kent, 2018; Lehr, 2008).

Not only has the perception of Global North knowledge as superior to that of the Global South been questioned, but its relevance in terms of the skills demanded by the South African labour market has also come under scrutiny (Kent, 2018). Walker and McLean (2013) assert that the skills required for graduates from the Global North may not align with those needed for the Global South. Moreover, Target 17.6 of the SDGs aims to "*enhance North-South, South-South and triangular regional and international cooperation on and access to science, technology and innovation and enhance knowledge sharing on mutually agreed terms*" (UN, 2015a) This implies that scholarships should also support degree mobility from the Global North to the Global South and not doing so reinforces the perception discussed in Chapter 2. that higher education in the Global North is of better quality. To achieve the above-mentioned target, knowledge exchange should not be one-sided, and students from the Global North should be supported in learning from the Global South.

It was mentioned earlier in this chapter that scholarships should not only support knowledge acquisition but enhancing capabilities and functionings of the RA outside the university campus. This exposure outside the campus is addressed explicitly by the Stipendium Hungaricum and African Business Education scholarships, which stipulate students must

complete a six-month internship while pursuing a degree abroad. This exposure allows for additional experience outside the university campus, which could contribute to being a RA.

Sarah stated that the South African government is also interested in offering students international exposure, which allows them to build relationships with people from abroad and broadens their horizons. Jasmin mentioned that international exposure and achieving a degree in a foreign country far away from home broadens one's "horizon at a cultural level, as much as the intellectual level". In addition, previous research has shown that degree mobility broadens an individual's horizon and intercultural competencies (Baxter, 2018; Ramirez, 2016), which are considered functionings of the RA and are also considered positive factors for a successful business in a globalising world (Jyoti & Kour, 2015). Intercultural competencies and intercultural understanding often go hand in hand and can be evolved through degree mobility, as universities host people from all over the world (Ramirez, 2016).

An understanding of other cultures created through degree mobility is seen as a contributing factor when wanting to achieve a peaceful life (Ramirez, 2016). Furthermore, creating relationships and strengthening economic ties with foreign nations are part of the aims of the Fulbright, Chinese Scholarship Council, Stipendium Hungaricum, and African Business Education scholarships, and previous studies have confirmed the achievement of these goals (Baxter, 2018; Ramirez, 2016). Additionally, the aim of the South African government to build relationships and economic ties contributes to developing RAs in alumni who would, therefore, support SD in South Africa.

In summary, the aims of the above-mentioned scholarships and the South African government, which are to create international relationships and strengthen economic ties with foreign nations, align with Goal 17 of the SDGs, which is to "strengthen the means of implementation and revitalise the global partnerships for SD", the previously mentioned Target 17.6, which is to "enhance international relations", and the features of RA. Nevertheless, the document analysis was not able to confirm whether degree mobility ensured the realisation of these goals and features, although they aligned with what is needed for SD in terms of relationship building and economic ties.

The Kadar Asmal Fellowship and the Swedish Institute Scholarship for South Africa are the only two scholarships that directly aim to contribute to SD. While it

They also offer an alumni network and want to support their scholars after graduation. However, not all of the eligibility criteria of the Swedish Institute Scholarship for South Africa

align directly with SD. Candidates can choose any subject for their study, which was mentioned in this chapter as problematic considering that alumni might come back, and their knowledge is possibly not useful, or they might not find employment. In addition, this scholarship was mentioned as not having a return policy in place but does look for candidates with a commitment to return to South Africa. Through this eligibility criterion, they try to ensure that alumni are returning to South Africa to support SD.

The Kadar Asmal Fellowship explicitly targets women and people from previously disadvantaged backgrounds to apply for the scholarship. Since the SDGs also promote gender equality and reduce inequality in general, this scholarship can, therefore, claim that it aligns in some aspects with SD. However, as previously mentioned that this scholarship also has eligibility criteria and funding limitations, which are at odds with supporting those from previously disadvantaged backgrounds. This shows that the structure of some of the scholarships interferes with their own aims, and also with the achievement of aims to contribute to SD.

The African Business Education Scholarships, for example, not only aim to develop graduates who will contribute to SD but also have the skills required by Japanese businesses in South Africa. Therefore, the scholarships are not only set up for SD in South Africa but also for the interest of Japanese companies. Therefore, research is required on the impact of Japanese companies on South Africa's SD to determine whether the scholarship's aims are contradictory. In addition, although, the scholarship aims to provide staff for Japanese businesses in South Africa, no data was found on whether the alumni of this scholarship did end up being employed by them. The lack of data on the destinations of all scholarship recipients limited the findings on the achievements of the scholarship programmes in general. Sarah verified the post-programme status of alumni is not tracked in terms of whether they have returned, reintegrated, and contributed to SD. This means that the South African government extends its support to the scholarships without evidence of the contributions of returning alumni to SD, although the goals of the scholarship align with the SDGs.

5.3 Conclusion

The chapter presented the findings in terms of whether scholarships and their implementation possess the theoretical potential to contribute to SD in South Africa. While only two scholarships have a direct focus on SD, others are aligned with SDGs, such as international relations. Analysing available funding and eligibility criteria revealed the controversy

surrounding scholarship structures. This becomes particularly significant against the backdrop of South Africa's substantial inequality, where eligibility criteria and funding allocation accentuate the nation's wealth disparity and uneven access to HE.

Certain scholarships are open to everyone because of generous funding but limit eligibility based on specific criteria. Others are more lenient in eligibility but offer less funding, thereby excluding individuals with financial constraints. All scholarships exclude certain groups through either eligibility criteria or funding, potentially leaving those from historically disadvantaged backgrounds in South Africa behind. This setup often benefits those who are already well-positioned to succeed in South Africa's HEIs, demonstrating both academic excellence and adequate financial resources to support international degree mobility. Even scholarships aiming to assist disadvantaged backgrounds often create significant challenges in achieving this goal, inadvertently placing more obstacles for candidates from economically weaker backgrounds to meet the criteria. None of the six scholarships provide an accessible pathway for individuals with limited educational opportunities and no personal funding. Therefore, eligibility criteria need to not only identify suitable candidates but also ensure that access is possible for all despite educational and financial disadvantages.

Scholarships hold promise in addressing inequalities by explicitly targeting individuals from historically disadvantaged backgrounds, and granting access to young people who would otherwise struggle to attend universities in South Africa and abroad. Nevertheless, studying abroad requires a specific skill set, including a high level of education, strong academic records, in some cases, work experience and also possessing personal funding.

One approach to resolving this dilemma could be the implementation of a tiered scholarship system. In this system, scholarships could be categorised based on varying levels of eligibility criteria. For example, a certain number of scholarships could be dedicated to candidates who meet the traditional academic requirements, while another set of scholarships could prioritise candidates who demonstrate a commitment to overcoming educational and financial disadvantages, even if they do not possess the same academic credentials. This approach would recognise the value of both academic achievement and the potential for growth and contribution from individuals facing greater challenges. By creating multiple pathways to access scholarships, this system could strike a balance between addressing inequalities and acknowledging the specific skill sets required for studying abroad.

The findings revealed that in many cases, the goals of the scholarships were to develop RAs and, therefore the potential to contribute to SD. However, to understand whether the goals were achieved, data needed to be gathered from alumni who had returned to South Africa, although certain South African groups may have been excluded from scholarship programmes.

CHAPTER 6
FINDINGS IN TERMS OF RESPONSIBLE AGENCY

It is through the weakness and vulnerability that most of us learn
empathy and compassion and discover our soul.
Desmond Tutu

6.1 Introduction

The previous chapter explained the findings of the document analysis and interviews with scholarship staff members in terms of the conceptualisation and contribution of the selected scholarships towards SD in South Africa. This exploration highlighted the controversies surrounding the alignment of the scholarship structures with their actual capacity to foster SD.

To gain a more comprehensive understanding, the research extended the methodology to incorporate questionnaires and interviews to the document analysis. The goal was to create deeper insight into whether the scholars exhibited the capabilities and functions of RAs and actively contributed to SD. Therefore, the data gathered through an online survey and interviews were analysed to determine whether selected alumni demonstrated the capabilities and functionings essential for RAs and their potential to contribute to SD.

In this chapter, after describing the participants, the findings of the analysis of the data in terms of the RA features of (1) own well-being, (2) society's well-being, (3) nature's well-being and (4) ex-ante responsibility, will be presented. These findings will be interpreted to determine whether the participants demonstrated these features, which would lead to their potential to contribute to SD.

6.2 The participants

The online survey, discussed in Chapter 4, garnered 56 respondents from 6 scholarships. However, the responses of 6 respondents were excluded from the data analysis because they did not match the study's criterion of having graduated with the degree they were pursuing. Therefore, alumni who had completed their degrees and returned to South Africa were included to determine their features of the RA and potential to contribute to South Africa's SD.

Table 6.1 below presents the 50 participants by scholarship programme and country.

Table 6.1: Participants by scholarship programme and country

No.	Scholarship Programme	Country
9	Fulbright	United States
17	African Business Education Initiative	Japan
3	China Scholarship Council	China
9	Kadar Asmal Fellowship	Ireland
2	Swedish Institute Scholarship for South Africa	Sweden
10	Stipendium Hungaricum	Hungary
TOTAL = 50		

I decided to seek participants who had graduated between 1994 (the end of apartheid in South Africa) and 2020 (the year of the data collection) (see Figure 6.1 below). This selected period allowed the researcher to gain input from alumni who had different kinds of post-scholarship experiences. This diverse spread of participants in terms of the time of their graduation allowed the researcher to gather different insights into the research topic (Morris, 2015). Figure 6.1 below presents the 50 participants by number and year of graduation.

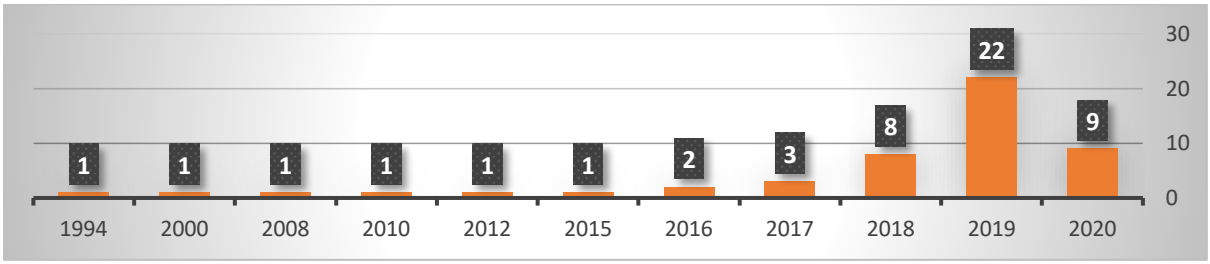

Figure 6.1: Participants by number and year of graduation

As explained earlier, the framework encompasses key elements that reflect the multifaceted nature of the RA in the context of SD. The first dimension involves participants' responsibility towards their own well-being, focusing on their personal growth, development, and overall fulfilment. The second dimension extends to their contribution to society's well-being, emphasising their potential to impact their communities and societies at large positively. The third dimension considers participants' responsibility towards nature's well-being, encompassing their commitment to environmental preservation and enhancement. Lastly, the

fourth dimension emphasises ex-ante responsibility, which involves the proactive anticipation and prevention of potential harm or negative consequences.

In the context of these dimensions, the study sought to assess the participants not merely based on their completed academic journey but also by considering their experiences upon their return to South Africa. This approach aimed to shed light on how these alumni practically embodied and enacted the elements of the RA within the realm of SD. This assessment would lead to an understanding of how alumni who demonstrated responsible agency had the potential to drive initiatives for sustainable development.

Table 6.2 below offers a comprehensive overview of the participants who took part in the interviews, shedding light on various aspects of their academic and professional journeys, scholarship affiliations, their demonstration of responsible agency and their potential to contribute to SD in South Africa. The table presents their names, scholarship programmes, gender, and educational achievements. However, the "masters (graduation year)" column provides insights into their master's degree programme and the respective years of graduation. If applicable, the "PhD (graduation year)" column specifies whether participants pursued a doctoral degree and indicates the year of completion. In addition, the table highlights the participants' career trajectories. The "Previous job" column describes the type of employment the participants engaged in before pursuing further education. On the other hand, the "Job after return" column outlines the participants' current jobs after completing their educational journeys and returning to South Africa. The final column, titled "Resides in South Africa," signifies whether the participants currently reside in South Africa, with entries denoting either "Yes" or "No." Thus, in essence, Table 6.2 below serves as a valuable reference to understand the diverse pathways of the participants in their pursuit of responsible agency and SD in the context of South Africa.

Table 6.2: Interviewees

Name[23]	Scholarship	Gender	Masters (graduation year)	PhD (graduation year)	Previous job	Job after return	Resides in South Africa
Aisha	SH	Female	International Relations[24] (2019)	-	English language teacher	Communications officer (NGO)	Yes
Botshelo	FB	Female	Comparative and International Education (2018)	-	English teaching (Korea) Education sector for NGOs	Project associate - Second early-grade reading study (Department of Basic Education)	Yes
David	SISS	Male	Business, Economics, Business Administration (2016)	-	Bank employee	Communication specialist (Sweden)	No
Dineo	KAF	Female	MBA Project Management (2018)	-	Graduate civil engineer & project manager	Civil site engineer (Ireland)	No
John	FB	Male		Comparative Politics (2012)	No	Lead economist - South African Reserve Bank	Yes
Krish	FB	Male	Data Analytics (2019)	Yes (not with a scholarship)	Junior engineer	Data machine learning engineer	Yes
Lesedi	CSC	Female	Environmental Science (2019)	-	No	Junior environmental practitioner	Yes
Linda	KAF	Female	Strategic Management & Planning (2015)	-	Teaching abroad	Director of institutional relations for a social enterprise	Yes
Mandla	KAF	Male	Climate Change, Agriculture, and Food Security (2018)	-	PR intern	Section leader citrus farm	Yes
Maria	FB	Female	Journalism (2000)	Yes (not with a scholarship)	No	Editor/Journalist	Yes
Mulalo	ABE	Male	Material Engineering (2019)	Yes (not with a scholarship)	No	Patent examiner	Yes
Nadiim	ABE	Male	Industrial Engineering (2019)	-	Process improvement analyst	Process improvement analyst	Yes
Nandi	ABE	Female	International Relations (2019)	-	Teacher	Economic assistant Japanese embassy	Yes
Nceba	ABE	Female	Regional Development & Planning (2018)	-	Internship for NPO (development; re-development)	Research assistant	Yes
Pula	ABE	Female	International Development Studies (2017)	-	Mobile Telephones Network (MTN) employee	Information officer Robben Island	Yes
Velile	ABE	Female	Education Policy DEV (2017)	-	Assistant director DHET	Assistant director DHET (students with disabilities)	Yes
Vuyokazi	SISS	Female	Rural Development and Natural Resource Management (2019)	-	Water sector consultant	Water resource management specialist	Yes

[23] All names used in this research are pseudonyms to protect the participants identity.

[24] The orange highlighted fields show the degree they pursued with a scholarship.

The pursued degrees and prior employment choices presented in Table 6.2 above are considered indicators of whether the alumni were already engaged in SD-related activities before pursuing their studies abroad. Such interests could suggest that these graduates already possessed some of the capabilities associated with RAs, such as a vested interest in contributing to social and collective causes, as evidenced by their work in sectors supporting students with disabilities.

Table 7 highlights that 13 alumni already had work experience before going abroad, and all had previous degrees. The discovery of a high percentage of scholars already possessing formative degrees and employment experiences confirms the observation made in the previous chapter that successful scholarship applicants could already demonstrate knowledge, specific skill sets, and work experience. Some even had jobs where they displayed RA functionings. Velile is a prime example, as she already had a job supporting students with disabilities before going abroad. This indicated that her passion for helping others (responsibility towards society's well-being) preceded the opportunities to develop this RA functioning offered by the scholarship. This raises the question to which extend degree mobility can create the potential to contribute to SD if scholarships seem to select candidates who already demonstrate RA functionings.

6.3 Findings

6.3.1 Enhanced RA functionings

During the coding process of the interview data, which was explained in Chapter 4, it became evident that three specific alumni displaying strong RA functionings in terms of the responsibilities associated with personal well-being (3.2.2.1), societal well-being (3.2.2.2), environmental well-being (3.2.2.3), and ex-ante responsibility (3.2.2.4). The enhanced demonstration of responsible agency in these participants underscored the depth of their connection to the framework and suggested a heightened potential for their contributions to SD. Their 'stronger voice' was uncovered through highlighting the different codes of the alumni, showing that some alumni's quotes appeared more often than others.

The rationale for primarily focusing on these three alumni can be summarised as follows:

1. Relevance to Research Questions: These three selected interviews specifically addressed or provided the most insightful information regarding the primary research question or objectives.

They contained rich content directly related to the research aims, making them suitable for in-depth analysis.

2. Exemplar Cases:

The three interviews served as exemplar cases that captured key themes or patterns identified during data analysis. These cases were illustrative of broader trends within the entire dataset.

It is important to note that while this chapter predominantly highlights the experiences of these three participants, it does not imply that other alumni did not express similar experiences or that their experiences were excluded from the analysis. Throughout the chapter, the researcher also draws on direct quotations and references from alumni who were not identified as having 'stronger voices' to substantiate evidence of the functionings of a responsible agency. This inclusion of additional alumni demonstrates that certain behaviours are identifiable among a cross-section of participants, highlighting the potential impact of scholarships on nurturing responsible agents. The selection of the "stronger voices" was simply a structural choice to organize the chapter based on the appearance of different behaviours.

These participants, namely Botshelo, Velile, and Dineo (highlighted in blue in Table 6.2 above), strongly demonstrated the responsibilities mentioned above. Descriptions of these three participants and their distinct perspectives are presented below. **Botshelo** was awarded a Fulbright Scholarship and studied Comparative and International Education in the United States of America. At the time of the interview, she worked for a non-governmental organisation (NGO) in the education sector.

Velile studied education policy and was funded by the African Business Education programme. in Japan. At the time of the interview, she was an assistant director at the DHET, where she mainly advocated for students with disabilities. She already had this position before being awarded the scholarship but returned to this job after graduating.

Dineo was funded by Kadar Asmal Fellowship, completing a project management qualification in Ireland. She returned to South Africa after graduating, thus adhering to the scholarship requirements. However, she later decided to return to Ireland. Responses from Dineo were particularly interesting because the motivation for her decisions added a layer of rich complexity. Her decision made her case unique and highlighted the problems faced by returning alumni, which led them to choose to stay abroad instead of in their home country.

6.3.2 Alumni's insights into RA capabilities and functionings

During the interviews particular RA capabilities and functionings were more pronounced than others depending on how much insight alumni had into them. Moreover, by examining the frequency of the appearance of these functionings during the coding process, the researcher could determine which ones were more robustly fostered through degree mobility in contrast to others.

6.3.2.1 Responsibility towards own well-being

The CA focuses on the well-being of everyone. This perspective acknowledges that the overall quality of life and the ability to lead a fulfilling existence are fundamental aspects of HD. As elucidated in Chapter 3 of the thesis, the concept of own well-being assumes a pivotal role in driving SD within the context of the CA framework. In other words, own well-being refers to an individual's capacity to thrive, achieve personal fulfilment, and lead a life that is not only free from deprivation but also enriched with opportunities and choices. However, the concept encompasses not only basic needs but also the broader dimensions of human flourishing, encompassing elements like dignity, agency, and the capability to pursue one's goals and aspirations.

Chapter 3 underscored the significance of own well-being as a foundational pillar for contributing to SD within the CA framework. It highlighted the interconnectedness between individual well-being and the larger goals of SD. When individuals are empowered with the capability to enhance their well-being, they are better positioned to engage in activities that promote sustainable, social, economic, and environmental development. Therefore, the CA recognises that fostering the well-being of individuals goes beyond a mere reduction in poverty or access to necessities. It encompasses people's capability to lead lives of value, dignity, and agency, aligning with the broader objectives of sustainable development.

Scholarly literature (as presented in Chapter 3) establishes own well-being as encompassing the capability of self-care as the basis of SD, which the researcher integrated into the RA framework, as explained in Chapter 3. However, during the coding and analysis of the interview data, the researcher observed that although the discussions resonated strongly with the concept of own well-being, they did not align perfectly with the conventional notion of the capability of self-care. This discrepancy suggested that own well-being within the CA encompasses not only the capability but overall flourishing and thriving within a societal context.

In the interviews, these functionings surfaced as (1) making compromises for a decent life forever, (2) being self-functioning, sustaining your own life, and not relying on others[25]. These two functionings point towards a capability the researcher defined as *self-preservation,* which was added to the responsibility of ensuring one's own well-being. It is about making compromises to ensure a better life in the future and to pursue capabilities voluntarily, which might be uncomfortable or difficult in the present but assumed in the hope of securing a better future. This capability is related to what was discussed in the chapter, where it was stated that SD requires every human being to limit consumption or make other compromises if wanting to ensure that the generations now and the ones in the future will have a life worth living. The analysis in the next sections will focus first on the capability of self-care (Becker, 2006; Sen, 1985; Walker & McLean, 2013) and then self-preservation (which emerged from the data set).

a) Self-care

Self-care showed up in the data as an aspiration to pursue own goals, such as finding a job that the participant was passionate about, and personal growth, such as the ability to solve a problem in a foreign country or being exposed to new experiences. While SD might require taking care of future generations, the environment and society, what should not be forgotten is the well-being of oneself, as discussed in Chapter 3. For an initiative to be considered as contributing to SD according to the perspective of the CA, individuals need to assume responsibility not only for their well-being but also for fulfilling responsibilities for the betterment of society and the environment. This interconnectedness between individual well-being and societal responsibilities reflects the holistic approach of the CA to achieving SD.

Botshelo's job-seeking journey after her return underscored the intricate connection between individual self-care and social responsibility within the context of RA. Despite having obtained an international degree and work experience, Botshelo found herself grappling with entry-level job offers that did not align with her expectations. She had to prioritise her well-being whilst recognising the broader societal responsibility in a job market characterised by unemployment rates and disparities in opportunities, especially for graduates. In other words, she needed to make choices that would contribute to her professional growth and fulfilment, even if it meant starting at an entry-level position. Thus, the interplay between personal aspirations and the collective well-being of society sheds light on the multifariousness of RA.

[25] The capabilities and functionings mentioned in Chapter 3 will be written in italics in this chapter to highlight where they originate from and why they are so meaningful.

At the same time, Botshelo's recognition of her societal responsibility stemmed from the understanding that her experience was not an isolated one. Many other graduates were also facing similar challenges in finding suitable employment opportunities that aligned with their qualifications and expectations. By recognising this larger context, Botshelo acknowledged the need for collective efforts to address systemic issues affecting employment prospects for young professionals in South Africa. As Statistics South Africa (2022) reports, unemployment rates amongst graduates are staggering, varying according to age groups. Young graduates, including those aged 25 to 34, experience high levels of unemployment, further reinforcing the challenges young professionals face upon entering the job market. The research conducted by Graham et al. (2019) underscores these difficulties, revealing that graduate unemployment rates are influenced by various factors such as gender, race, and fields of study.

Despite the differences between her expectations and the reality of the South African job market, Botshelo insisted that she wanted to work in education in the NGO sector and was determined to find a job about which she was passionate:

> *It can't just be another job, and so finding those things either within the job or the industry or the sector a person wants to be in, that you care deeply about, that excites you, and that humbles you enough to want to learn more* (Botshelo).

Attaining employment aligned with one's passion, a hallmark of self-care and personal freedom as evidenced in Chen et al.'s (2020) cross-national study encompassing the United States and Singapore, might not be feasible in the South African context. Nevertheless, in recent years, it has become increasingly important for people to find a job in their passion, which Chen, Lee and Lim (2020) discovered in a study done in the United States and Singapore, but also considered this a phenomenon which is becoming increasingly important all over the world. This also relates to the CA, where well-being is related to creating more freedoms for the individual, which would also include the freedom to choose a job which one is passionate about. Considering the high unemployment rate in South Africa (as mentioned in the previous paragraph), finding employment that matches one's passion, as suggested in the literature (see Chen et al. 2020), might not be the reality for everyone. This would show that graduates in South Africa are often challenged with the unfreedom to pursue a career they value. Botshelo was persistent after about six months and found a job that aligned with her passion. This persistence showed that her achieving her own goals was highly important for her. Botshelo

mentioned that her degree from abroad made her believe that she could pursue her goal of wanting a job that she is passionate about.

The theme of pursuing own goals also surfaced during the interviews conducted with six other alumni (Krrish, Nandi, David, Aisha, and Velile). The concept of pursuing own goals is aligned with the RA self-care whereby individuals prioritise their well-being and pursue their own objectives. Moreover, it becomes conceivable that the educational experiences offered by scholarships could play a role in enhancing the capability of pursuing personal goals.

Through the diverse perspectives that international education offers, students might develop an expanded worldview, which would enable students to approach challenges with adaptability, open-mindedness, innovative thinking and proactiveness in pursuing their aspirations[26]. Moreover, as they progress towards their goals, their positive contributions to their immediate environment and communities might collectively contribute to broader societal well-being and SD.

Personal growth seemed to be a big part of degree mobility since it was discussed in fourteen interviews. In the context of this topic, Nadiim had the following to say:

> *It's a growth experience. It's like all of a sudden, you get dropped into the deep end, and you have to figure out how to swim. You get a lot of stimulus all at once, and you have to figure out a lot of things. And you have to solve a lot of problems that you did not anticipate. You learn to let go a little bit. Take things in your stride. You expect the unexpected. You relinquish control. You're not always going to know how your day is going to look or what you need to do. Or how everything is going to work out* (Nadiim*).*

David mentioned something similar:

> *But I think the biggest change was probably more self-confidence. Of believing in my abilities. I think personally that was the most drastic change and believing that you can do things that you thought were impossible. It is possible. Those were the major changes if that makes sense* (David).

Nadiim and David's experiences offer valuable insights into how coping with challenges led to personal growth, as part of self-care, as they needed to adapt, learn, and evolve in response to the complexities of relocating to a foreign country and acclimating to a new educational setting

[26] The functionings mentioned here are part of other capabilities, showing the interconnectedness of the whole framework and the need to ensure the full set of the capabilities.

and lifestyle, navigating unfamiliar social and cultural dynamics (Baklashove & Kazakov, 2016)Root & Ngampornchai, 2012; Yu et al., 2014; Ramirez, 2016; Reardon et al., 2022; Waibel et al., 2017). The concept of personal growth, which can be cultivated through exposure to international experiences, not only benefits an individual's development but also aligns with the pursuit of SD objectives, as detailed in the RA framework. Personal growth enables individuals to contribute effectively to the advancement of social, economic, and environmental well-being within their own communities and on a broader scale by devising innovative solutions that drive positive change.

b) Self-preservation

The data analysis revealed that some alumni had additional functionings concerning own well-being, which were not mentioned in the RA list. These functions were: making compromises for a decent life forever and sustaining her own life, and not relying on others, reflecting the essence of self-preservation. Therefore, these new functionings were combined to be part of the capability of self-preservation, suggesting a functioning contributing to *own well-being*. In other words, this pursuit of own well-being might involve temporary personal sacrifices aimed at securing greater future freedoms and opportunities.

Dineo, for example, described how because of a need for self-preservation, a future, and a stable income, she chose not to work in South Africa, although she had wanted to contribute to the SD of her home country:

> *They [scholarship provider] want you to come back and contribute to the country's development. I wanted to do that, but with the high unemployment rate, struggling to find a job* (Dineo).

After, struggling to find a stable job within her field in South Africa, she accepted a lucrative job offer in Ireland, where she had studied. In addition, remaining in South Africa, where her unemployment status rendered her reliant on her family, her decision to leave the country indicated the functioning of sustaining her own life and not relying on others. Dineo indicated that being away from home was not easy for her; however, it allowed her to support her family financially in South Africa and secure a better future for herself:

> *I was able to save a lot and plan for the whole year. I was able to build a whole new house back home. I was able to install a kitchen. Now basically, when I go home, I still feel like I am walking into a home in Sandton* (Dineo).

The lack of job opportunities in the graduates' home country is one of the main reasons, they move abroad (Holtbrügge, 2021). While Dineo's expectation that her qualification from abroad would allow her the freedom of employment close to her family was not realised, networking abroad created the freedom to have financial security working in Ireland and to support her family. While her financial security was part of her own well-being, she also demonstrated responsibility towards the well-being of her family. However, she did not contribute to the well-being of society as a whole.

One might argue that the functioning of making compromises for a decent life forever imposes limitations on an individual's freedom to choose and act. Dineo had to sacrifice a personal goal of staying home to secure a job and financial security in Ireland. While it was a restraint on Dineo's freedom to be unable to secure a job in South Africa, her degree from abroad gave her the freedom to work abroad to pursue the goal of being able to realise the functioning of sustaining her own life and not relying on others to ensure her own well-being. Moreover, the overseas job allowed her to support her family financially, which could be considered a contribution to SD in South Africa and a realisation of her responsibility to others.

Highly skilled people moving away from their country of origin would contribute towards a loss of human capital (discussed in Chapter 2) and result in political instability (Vega-Muñoz et al., 2021). This phenomenon, conceptualised as brain drain, leads some researchers (Mukhtarov et al., 2022) to argue for policy intervention to limit its impact and ensure SD in countries in the Global South. Although the SDGs promote the international exchange of skilled people, and alumni staying abroad realise this goal, a migration from the Global South to the Global North detracts from SD in countries like South Africa and strengthens the already abundant human capital in the Global North.

6.3.2.2 Responsibility towards society's well-being

Responsibility towards own well-being must be accompanied by responsibility for that of society as discussed in Chapter 3.2.2. Resilience, assurance and confidence, social and collective struggle, affiliation, knowledge and skills, and emotional reflexivity, are the capabilities required for responsibility towards society's well-being.

a) Resilience

The functionings of having a sense of career security (feeling confident about finding a job), persevering in difficult situations (not giving up in difficult situations), and being able to be

hopeful and foster hope in others (staying optimistic about a better future and motivate others' optimism) are indicators of the capability of resilience, as outlined in Chapter 3.

While Dineo wanted to stay in South Africa, she felt she could not fulfil her dream of a stable income and a decent life in her home country, which indicated the absence of the functionings of having a sense of career security and being able to be hopeful and foster hope in others. Her degree from abroad did not enable her to find a job in her own country, which led to the sacrifice of leaving South Africa to enhance her well-being, and she opted to work in Ireland:

> *When I went, I was just going to study for the year and come back. But when I was here, I learned more about this. That if you study in Ireland, you get a two-year graduate programme. You can stay longer if you want because you get a work visa and I really like the country. The strength of the Euro is much better than the Rand—more work. No violence as well, so it was, this is it. I am staying* (Dineo).

The lack of job security in South Africa leading to a brain drain was mentioned earlier in this chapter as preventing the achievement of the scholarships' goal of contributing to the SD of alumni's home countries. However, lacking employment prospects was not the only factor keeping alumni away from South Africa. Dineo mentions the strength of international currency and the lack of violence as additional factors for her moving to Ireland. Chapter 3 discussed the importance of Nussbaum's (1997) 10 central human capabilities. One was bodily integrity: "*being able to move freely from place to place; to be secure against sexual assault and domestic violence*" (Nussbaum, 1997, p. 287). For Dineo, this capability was severely limited in South Africa compared with Ireland, which contributed to her staying abroad. While alumni possess the theoretically potential to make contributes to SD in South Africa, the challenges impeding such contributions are not being addressed by the scholarships, and the experience of studying abroad often exposes them to the full extent of these challenges. This suggests that before individuals can become responsible agents contributing effectively to South Africa, it is necessary to prioritize the development of the central human capabilities.

While Dineo mentioned sending money to her family in South Africa as her way of giving back to her home country, this is not always seen as a positive contribution. Campbell and Neff (2020, p. 826) criticise sending money as a way of contributing to SD and claim that people could instead stay at home and "built organisational capacity or campaigning for social change". Staying in their home country means they could demonstrate being a RA in South Africa and not limit their contribution to sending money. Therefore, a so-called "quick fix"

could be to implement policies forcing alumni to return to South Africa, which is already done by the Fulbright scholarship. However, the implementation of a return policy might limit the alumni's responsibility towards own well-being and, as mentioned in Chapter 3, SD should not be created through policies limiting people's freedoms. Alumni should want to give back to their home country, which is an eligibility criterion for the Fulbright and the Swedish Institute Scholarship for South Africa. This will so be discussed in the section on the capability of affiliation, which is related to the functioning of obligation to others.

While Dineo improved her family's life in South Africa, her contribution would have limited impact on the well-being of the South African society as a whole. The responsibility of own well-being (self-preservation and self-care) needs to be accompanied by those of society and the environment's well-being as well as ex-ante responsibility to ensure a contribution towards SD. Therefore, to enable alumni like Dineo to embody their responsible agency and actively contribute to SD, the scholarships should ensure alumni return and remain in South Africa upon completing their studies by implementing targeted support systems, such as post-graduation employment opportunities, mentorship programmes, and community engagement initiatives that align with the alumni's academic and professional interests.

Such interventions by scholarship programmes are necessary at a time when knowledge is vital to socio-economic development in South Africa, as discussed in Chapter 2, and South Africa has struggled with an increased brain drain over the last few years (Mittelmeier, et al, 2022). For this reason, skilled workers need to remain in South Africa if wanting to contribute to change (Mlambo & Adetiba, 2019). While socioeconomic development is not the only driver for SD, and environmental conservation, social equity, and technological innovation also contribute, it is considered an essential part (UN, 2015a). Skilled South Africans (like Dineo) remaining in a foreign country is considered a loss of human capital (Mlambo & Adetiba, 2019), which can threaten SD.

I mentioned earlier that Dineo lacked the functioning of a sense of career security, which was the case with other alumni interviewed (Pula, Nceba, Linda, and Vuyokazi). These alumni also found it difficult to find a suitable job when returning to South Africa. Pula, for example, mentioned the job problems upon return as an immense frustration of the scholarship programme. She quit her job when leaving for Japan because she was told it would be easy finding a job when returning to South Africa. Events promoting the scholarships to gain more applicants gave her the impression that graduates from abroad are in high demand in the South

African labour market. However, the high graduate unemployment rate in South Africa indicates that alumni struggle to find employment in South Africa, even those with degrees from abroad. While some alumni might have secured permanent employment and a sense of career security, it seems like this is not an ensured outcome of degree mobility. Out of 50 alumni, 16 were unemployed at the time of the survey[27], indicating a 32 % unemployment rate for returning alumni (data collected through the survey). Two were not job-seeking at the time of the survey, while three had a job since returning to South Africa, and the rest (11) had not worked in South Africa since they returned. Figure 6.2 below reflects the 14 job-seeking alumni at the time of the interview. The figure below shows that some alumni had just started looking while others had been looking for a job for up to two years.

Figure 6.2: How long alumni had been looking for a job

For the alumni who had employment at the time of the interview, the duration of finding a job varied between finding a job immediately and looking for about two years. Of the 16 out of 50 returning alumni immediately found a job, while another 17 found employment the first year after returning, and 4 took longer than one year to find a job. Having to spend months or more than a year to find a job limited the alumni's sense of career security, which affected their resilience capability.

The alumni's frustration and insecurity were amplified because of their expectations of finding a job after graduating abroad. These expectations echo Baxter's (2018) findings, which indicate that qualifications from abroad are considered an advantage in the labour market. However, interview data from the current study suggested otherwise. The analysis of the survey data showed that some alumni had not only been looking for jobs for a long time but also ended up accepting work that was neither secure nor related to their studies. Moreover, these alumni had

[27] June until September 2020

better jobs before going abroad, although for some the work had been unrelated to their scholarship studies.

Alumni mentioned that some scholarships promised them that the time abroad would be a life-changing experience and enhance their job opportunities. The disappointment was tremendous when finding out this was not the case, especially since they had given up their previous jobs to pursue their degrees abroad:

> *We had a meeting with our department of public affairs before we left. And we had a meeting with the Department of Education. They were encouraging us: "Maybe some of you are not working and have resigned. But when you come back, you will get first priority when you are applying". Then I went to Japan, I did my two years, and then I came back, and it was in November 2017. Then in 2018, I started applying. I applied for jobs every single day. I went for interviews, and there would not be anything (*Pula*).*

Experiencing unwanted unemployment and related financial insecurities limits the capability of *resilience* and, therefore, responsibility towards the well-being of society. Through the absence of career security Pula's capability of resilience was limited in terms of allowing her to keep trying to find a job she feels valued in. Despite choosing degrees in demand in South Africa, it did not guarantee the alumni's employment or a sense of career security upon return. The capability of resilience is necessary is shown through a sense of career security, as it allows individuals to endure difficult situations.

Pula, for example, lacked resilience because of her sense of career security because she applied for over one year before taking a job as an information officer, a position where no degree is required. She pursued a master's in international development studies in China but could not apply her knowledge in South Africa. Feeding her child and her financial needs forced her to take a job which she could have done without any degree. She mentioned that the time abroad did not help her in securing employment, and this seemed to hinder the capability of resilience.

Furthermore, other alumni (listed below) mentioned challenges to securing a job in South Africa relevant to what they had studied, even though their degrees were on the critical skills list (Department of Home Affairs, 2022):

- Regional Development Planning (African Business Education scholarship, Nceba)
- Strategic Management Planning (Kadar Asmal Fellowship, Linda)
- Environmental Science (Chinese Scholarship Council scholarship, Lesedi)

- Rural Development and Natural Resources (Swedish Institute Scholarship for South Africa, Vuyokazi)

Despite having studied programs on the critical skills list, they became unemployed or found employment in different fields. Linda felt that companies did not recognise her degree and preferred employing someone who had studied in South Africa, despite the high demand for suitable managers in the country (BusinessTech, 2021; Department of Home Affairs, 2022).

The challenge of alumni not finding jobs when returning from abroad could stem from various factors. As noted by Mseluku (2022), a reason for graduates in South Africa struggling to secure employment is their deficiency in work experience, job search techniques, and interview skills, which are prerequisites for the positions they are pursuing. To gain an understanding and offer solutions, further research would be necessary to determine whether the skills mentioned by Mseluku (2022) were lacking in the alumni who participated in the present study and the reasons that they faced difficulties in obtaining work, despite obtaining the crucial skills listed by the Department of Home Affairs (2022) during their studies abroad.

Chapter 2 discussed the high unemployment rate of South African graduates, which seems to be the case for graduates from abroad as well. This suggests that degree mobility could harm the functionings the alumni had before gone abroad. This lack of career security could harm their potential contribution toward SD. A statement made by Botshelo confirmed this:

> *When I came back home, I would actually realise just how not damaging but risky it had actually been. It felt like I was starting over again. People didn't recognise my name; people didn't really know who I was; my resume, my skill set, was still quite junior. It was hard actually getting a kind of job in a skill set, in the kind of experience, that I really believed I could do and matching that with an employer who saw that—that kind of experience. So, when you come back, or at least when I came back with my masters, a lot of people thought I was quite junior. Also, I look quite young. Oh no, here's an entry position, and I was like, no, I did the entry position three / four years ago; I have done this work (*Botshelo*).*

Botshelo's statement shows that she had the feeling of having better connections, a reputation, and career security before her scholarship studies. Upon her return, she struggled to find a job that matched her education and experiences. She worked as an English teacher before going abroad and then decided to pursue a master's in comparative and international education.

However, upon return, not only did she lack a sense of career security since she struggled to find a job upon return but also her assumptions and expectations were challenged by the realities of the job market and the mismatch between her academic qualifications and the available opportunities. She mentioned the following:

> *When I came back home, I would actually realise just how not damaging, but risky it had actually been. It felt like I was starting over again* (Bothselo).

While she also mentioned that she expected challenges when returning to South Africa, this statement indicates that she had different expectations of her chances of finding a job. Having experience in teaching and a master's in the field, she did not want to take on a junior position when returning home. These expectations could have contributed to her feeling insecure about her career and whether it had been a good choice to pursue a degree abroad.

Other alumni revealed that their sense of career security improved through their time spent abroad. One example was John, a lead economist at the South African Reserve Bank. He felt secure in his position and professional future, which he could have only obtained through contacts made during his time in the United States. The same was true for Maria, who was self-employed in the fields of editing, writing articles and maybe lecturing at a university. She mentioned that she felt "pretty safe" in her job. According to these alumni, pursuing a degree abroad can contribute to a sense of career security, although this was a guaranteed outcome for the alumni discussed earlier in this chapter.

Interestingly, the two alumni who showed a strong sense of career security graduated via the Fulbright scholarship. Moreover, 5 of the 9 Fulbright alumni immediately found a job after returning from abroad, and none of the scholars had to look for more than six months. Could this mean some programmes are more successful than others? The limited number of the study's participants did not allow for an answer to this question, but future research could determine whether the scholarship set-up enhanced a sense of career security in some alumni upon their return to their home country while not in others.

The current study did not reveal that the subject area of scholarship study was the cause of alumni unemployment. This is because even degrees related to critical skills did not guarantee employment. Therefore, the reason could be the scholarship itself. The Fulbright scholarship, with its stringent eligibility criteria, selects candidates already possessing RA capabilities and functions. Therefore, the notable success of Fulbright alumni in securing jobs upon their return

suggests that these eligibility criteria enhance employment prospects. An investigation involving a large alumni sample could provide insights into this phenomenon.

Resilience was evident in interviews as participants recounted instances of persevering in difficult situations. Nadiim highlighted that studying abroad often presented unforeseen challenges, cultivating an ability to anticipate the unexpected and effectively handle difficulties. The experiences of building resilience in unfamiliar environments extended to the capability of persevering in difficult situations, which is valuable in addressing obstacles to sustainable development. Chapter 3 underscored the importance of resilience in contributing to societal well-being. John shared a similar sentiment, emphasising that confronting the challenges of being in a foreign country without familiar support structures honed his resilience upon which he continues to draw in his present career:

> *It is also about benchmarking yourself against others, provided it doesn't break you. And so, you suffer through it. But at the end of it, you feel much more confident in yourself; you feel more confident that you have something to offer* (John).

John's statement shows that moving abroad was challenging but taught him about *persevering in difficult situations* and being confident about what he had to offer.

Demonstrating both resilience and confidence in a single sentence highlights the interconnectedness of these RA's capabilities. In addition, this illustrates that these capabilities reinforce each other: the development of resilience contributes to increased confidence and vice versa. Both capabilities are integral to the promotion of SD. Moreover, the entire spectrum of inter-related RA capabilities is necessary, as explored in Chapter 3.

Not every alum showed the capability of resilience, and some even showed the absence of the related functionings. Instead of being able to foster hope, it seemed that some alumni were neither able to be hopeful for themselves nor foster hope for others (Nadiim, Pula, Nceba, and Lesedi). The lack of hopefulness became evident during the interview with Nadiim, as he explained his frustration upon returning to South Africa, where the technological landscape was not as advanced as in Japan. He expressed the belief that the country was lagging in adopting the latest software and technology programs. The slow pace of development and innovation in the technology industry, particularly in the field of data science, contributed to his diminished sense of hope for positive change.

Nceba, who had experienced how Japan cares for the environment, said something similar. She did not see a significant change in South Africa concerning environmental protection. While employed as an environmental scientist, she thought that her position only existed because of rules made by the government and that they were only doing the bare minimum to protect the environment. Nadiim's and Nceba's observations suggested that the time spent abroad exposed the alumni to different approaches and advancements in various areas, which led them to perceive the foreign countries as more advanced than South Africa. This evoked frustration and dampened their optimism upon returning to their home country.

According to Walker and McLean (2013), fostering hope is vital for resilience under challenging situations. Being hopeful is an essential functioning, as it indicates motivation to drive change, create opportunities for improvement and ensure SD. The lack of hopefulness of six alumni based on their negative experiences when coming back to South Africa impacted their *resilience,* and hinders their contribution towards SD.

b) Integrity

South Africa grapples with significant issues of corruption and crime, emphasizing the importance of integrity for fostering sustainable development. Integrity is assessed through key functionings such as acting ethically, being responsible and accountable to communities and colleagues, being honest, and striving to provide high-quality service (Walker & McLean, 2013). Notably, a sense of responsibility and accountability towards communities and colleagues was identified as a development that occurred while pursuing a degree abroad, as highlighted in the education sector, where the commitment to passing on knowledge and aiding young individuals in reaching their potential was emphasized (Botshelo). This sense of responsibility deepened during her studies in international education in the USA, underscoring how pursuing a degree abroad can contribute to fostering accountability and responsibility within one's home community.

Dineo also pointed out that contributing to the community extends beyond the workplace, exemplifying this by contemplating giving a talk to young students in her South African village while residing in Ireland. This illustrates that professionals, even if not physically returning home, can still hold a sense of responsibility and accountability towards their home communities and colleagues, emphasizing the broader impact of their actions.

Furthermore, the commitment to providing high-quality service emerged in several interviews. John, working for the South African Reserve Bank (SARB), acknowledged the additional responsibility to perform well in a country where people have endured betrayal by those in power. He recognized the opportunity to provide valuable services to people, understanding the reliance of citizens on government and institutions like the SARB. Demonstrating ethical conduct and delivering high-quality service is crucial for building trust and achieving positive change, contributing to sustainable development in South Africa.

c) Assurance and confidence

The RA capability of assurance and confidence is linked to the following RA functionings: contributing to policy (giving direct recommendations for people in charge) and confidence about the worthwhileness of one's own professional work (having a sense of an impactful job), as discussed in Chapter 3.

Botshelo displayed not only the capability of assurance and confidence but also the functioning of confidence about the worthwhileness of one's own professional work when she mentioned that since she had furthered her education abroad, people were listening more to her recommendations, and her research had gained importance in the field:

> *And being part of this conversation with people who make incredibly important decisions, take seriously what you have to say, or what your team is bringing to the table is mind-blowing* (Botshelo).

In other words, in her job as a project associate, she could contribute to policy, which allowed her to directly impact change and influence South Africa's direction in the future, which indicated that she was positioned to contribute to SD.

The analysis of interviews with other participants (John, Maria, Nandi, Krish, Linda, Mandla, Aisha, and Vuyokazi) also showed that confidence about the worthwhileness of one's own professional work could be strengthened through a degree abroad. The findings were as follows: (1) their degree from abroad allowed them to find work (Botshelo, John, and Nandi); (2) the knowledge gained abroad led to the functioning of confidence about the worthwhileness of one's own professional work (Botshelo, John, Maria, Krish, Linda, Mandla, Aisha, and Vuyokazi); and (3) their degree enhanced their visibility and influence within their fields (Botshelo and Velile).

In addition, David highlighted that his time abroad built his self-assurance and confidence, rekindled his trust in his professional capabilities, and confidence about the worthwhileness of his professional work. This fostered his potential to contribute to SD. While many alumni mentioned confidence about the worthwhileness of their professional work, Botshelo and Velile were particularly outspoken when it came to this functioning. This was because they could make changes in their fields and contribute to their profession:

> *I was really interested in the way education could be a catalyst or a mechanism for change. Social change and societal change … So, for me, that is incredibly personally enriching, just seeing with my eyes the difference small little research projects actually have on people's lives* (Botshelo).

Abroad, both Botshelo and Velile discovered that dedicating time to research enriched their professional endeavours. This newfound perspective had been seamlessly integrated into their work in South Africa. Velile emphasised that the more effort she invested in research, the greater her ability to contribute to her field and confidence about the worthwhileness of her professional work. However, the interview revealed that this mindset was already intrinsic to her before her international experience, and her professional duties were already part of her routine and role before she had the opportunity to study abroad. Her engagement in professional responsibilities before going abroad served as a baseline against which the impact of her international education and subsequent developments could be measured. Presently, students, lecturers, and parents reach out to her for assistance, affirming the value of her work.

Beyond her existing job responsibilities, Velile's experience abroad also brought about a transformation in her approach. Specifically, she developed a greater sense of confidence in advocating for the rights of others. This change was triggered by her realisation that her workplace values her opinions and suggestions highly after completing her degree. This shift in how her insights were perceived bolstered her belief that the work she did had a meaningful influence. Her international education not only enhanced her existing duties but also empowered her to become a vocal advocate for the rights of others within her professional sphere.

Although the functioning of speaking up for others is part of the capability of social and collective struggle, which will be discussed in the next section, growing assurance and confidence contributed to Botshelo's capability of social and collective struggle. This demonstrates how the capabilities are connected and emphasises that the lack of one capability

cannot be compensated by the presence of another. Instead, the absence of one capability might hinder the presence of all the other capabilities. For instance, if the capability of assurance and confidence is linked to the capability of social and collective struggle, lacking either would limit the respective other capability.

Sometimes, during interviews, participants might not have expressed certain functionings, but that did not necessarily mean that the alumni lack the corresponding capabilities. This potential difference between what was expressed and what was truly present complicated the process of measuring capabilities, as discussed in Chapter 3. Nonetheless, capabilities are interconnected, implying that the lack of one can potentially weaken the overall set. Assurance, confidence, and social struggle exemplify this interplay. All RA capabilities are equally vital in supporting SD; none holds more importance than the others. This underscores the holistic nature of capability development for SD.

It was not entirely clear from Botshelo's interview whether her authoritative presence was due to her degree from abroad or her self-assured confidence in her degree's value. However, within the framework of the research analysis, her self-assurance held greater significance than the rationales underlying external observers' assessments of her. Nevertheless, exploring how colleagues and employers view and value returning alumni could be a separate study. For this research, it was important to note that studying abroad boosted her professional confidence, which is key to RA.

d) Social and collective struggle

Contributing to policy formulation and implementation (influencing decision-makers by delivering recommendations) and participating in public reasoning/listening to all voices in the conversation (involving local people when establishing developing projects) are functionings due to the capability of social and collective struggle, which also appeared while coding the interviews.

The confidence that Botshelo felt about her work might also be related to her functioning of policy formulation and implementation. She actively influenced the decision-making in the Department of Basic Education based on her job, which she only found because of her degree from abroad. Her recommendations, continuous research and experiences were considered when the Department formulated new policies. In return, the new policies also influenced her work, and she would have to implement them in her projects. The ability to influence policy

formulation is a direct opportunity to contribute to SD. While the functioning mentioned above of confidence about the worthwhileness of one's professional work is self-directed, the functioning of policy formulation and implementation is directed towards others. Nevertheless, these functions are interconnected.

The functioning of participating in public reasoning/ensuring that all voices are heard in the conversation came up during the interviews. For example, Botshelo, who was involved in projects that aimed to improve the work of English teachers in rural areas, demonstrated this function. In helping the teachers, her intention was not merely to arrive and dictate to the teachers. Botshelo was aware that she needed to understand which teaching practices were effective, identify areas for improvement, and envision practical strategies for enhancing those practices:

> *Actually, really understanding what they are doing right, what they could be doing better, and what could practice actually look like* (Botshelo),

In other words, Botshelo demonstrated participating in public reasoning/ensuring that all voices are heard in the conversation. The demonstration of this functioning aligns with her earlier remarks about her overseas experiences, when she highlighted the importance of listening to diverse perspectives, comprehending commonalities and disparities in issues, and exploring varied problem-solving approaches. Notably, Botshelo pursued studies in comparative and international education abroad, a decision driven by her desire to explore diverse educational systems and gather insights from global counterparts. Her aspiration was fulfilled during her scholarship studies, as she engaged with students from various countries and engaged in a cross-cultural exchange of ideas and experiences.

Botshelo expressed regret over the limited cross-country collaboration in enhancing education. She believed that learning from the achievements and failures of others would lead to impactful outcomes and prevent the downfall of numerous development initiatives. She aspired to foster collaborative endeavours, which she considered her life's purpose. Therefore, in Botshelo's case, it appeared that degree mobility aligned with Target 17.4 of the SDGs, which advocates for the exchange of knowledge between nations whether they are in the North or South.

Participating in public reasoning/ensuring that all voices are heard in the conversation was also mentioned during Nandi's interview. She said that gathering the views of those around her was important in her work as an economic assistant at the Japanese embassy and disapproved of

projects initiated in countries of the Global South without consulting the communities impacted by them about their needs:

> *They need a road. But you didn't ask them if they want a road. They don't have cars. They wouldn't know how to drive. So how do you put a road there when you haven't asked them what they need? … You must do this because it is human rights, but have you spoken to those people? … Have you found out from them what they need? Then you find out what they need, and you think, make it sustainable for them* (Nandi).

For Nandi, she really valued empowering individuals, comprehending their requirements, and providing them with explanations for the actions being taken.

Nandi contended that working with diverse groups of people, teaches individuals to be adaptable and open-minded, as they learn to navigate situations where their preferences may not always prevail. The experience helps them develop skills, such as compromising and understanding different viewpoints, particularly when interacting with individuals from varying cultural backgrounds:

> *You get to know yourself when you are working with different people because you have to understand that you can't always get your way. Or you have to learn how to compromise. How to see things from other people's perspectives, especially with different cultures* (Nandi).

Ensuring the engagement of all voices within a diverse society and incorporating them into decision-making processes is a fundamental prerequisite for SD, as emphasised in Chapter 3. The concept of listening to the perspectives of all stakeholders is a pivotal principle within the CA. Chapter 3 elucidated the notion that compiling a meaningful list of capabilities necessitates a contextualised approach involving the active participation of relevant parties (Nussbaum, 2000; Sen, 1999).

Individuals and their respective communities are best equipped to identify what holds value for them and what aspirations they wish to pursue. The alumni's experiences abroad led them to understand that participating in public reasoning/ensuring that all voices are heard in the conversation practice of actively listening to everyone and being responsive to different needs, has the power to bring about positive changes in people's lives and greatly contribute to SD. Enhancing this functioning through education could be a step towards becoming someone who demonstrates being a RA with the potential to contribute to SD.

e) Affiliation

Nussbaum (2000) calls the capability of affiliation "architectonic" since building relationships with people of different backgrounds is vital to creating SD in a diverse nation like South Africa. Care and respect for diverse people (caring for and respecting people from other countries and social backgrounds), accepting obligations to others (feeling an obligation to give back to society) and developing relationships and rapport across social groups and state hierarchies (making friends with people of other nationalities) are the functionings that result from having the capability of affiliation.

Spending time abroad and connecting with people from different backgrounds did not just seem to engage individuals to empower their communities but also enhanced the care and respect for diverse people (Botshelo, Nandi, Pula, and Dineo). Being away from home and in a foreign country often also included getting in touch with diverse people. Previous research has shown that being an international student often includes interacting with other international students from different cultures and backgrounds (Beech, 2015; Ramirez, 2016). Bothselo, for example, seemed to have enhanced her functioning through interactions with people from different nations while studying in the US:

> *Then you can find people's similarity of their beliefs. They are so closely to what you believe, that like literally resonates so much of the things that you want for the world, and they want that too, and they can come from completely different backgrounds, speak completely different languages* (Botshelo).

Being exposed to people from various countries and cultures made her aware that different people can have the same desires, which she found enriching:

> *It is not a South African problem; it is not just a Kenya problem; it is not just an Indonesia problem. And so, the solutions aren't necessarily always different. A solution that you have in Kenya isn't necessarily all that radically that different from South Africa, but these two people or these two organisations of these two projects aren't talking to each other and aren't collaborating and understanding how much they could be learning from each other […] That, yes, it is an amazing opportunity. All this potential that we could have, the enrichment of lives, and the changing of lives, and it really isn't just the 15 or 20 people that you send off, but the way that they get to reach. when they come home* (Botshelo).

This quotation indicates that Botshelo learned to understand people of different backgrounds, which is important in achieving change. Being exposed to different cultures and being a foreigner seemed to have forced the alumni to learn, understand and respect people from different cultural backgrounds to ensure that they got along with others during their scholarship studies:

> *Or you have to learn how to compromise. How to see things from other people's perspectives, especially with different cultures. So, what you might consider rude, or things that may seem upsetting to you, you may realise it might just be a cultural thing. So, you have to re-negotiate in your mind and restructure the way you see things. Your personal flexibility and the way you adapt to certain things* (Nandi).

The experiences of the alumni could have played a role in fostering better understanding and acceptance between South Africans and people from other nations. However, insights from interviews suggested that certain alumni were already inclined to interact with individuals from diverse backgrounds even before they left South Africa. In addition, alumni intimated that one of the reasons for studying abroad was their interest in different cultures, as illustrated in Nandi's words below:

> *So, I gave my degree [International Relations] a lot more weight. It gave me a more overall experience being that side. Japan, South Africa, I don't think there was a major difference, necessarily, but being in an international environment, in a completely diverse university, if you look from all around the world, it just makes you understand international relations a lot more effective because it depends on what you are studying* (Nandi).

This statement indicates that the functioning of caring for and respecting diverse people is more likely to be gained with an openness to new cultures and different views and not a guaranteed outcome of degree mobility. If this is the case, it will justify the eligibility criteria of being interested in the host country (as discussed in Chapter 5). Making openness and interest in the host country a selection criterion might have enhanced the possibility of the scholars developing the RA capability of affiliation, which involves feeling a sense of belonging and connection to a group or community. When people are affiliated with a particular group, they

are more likely to feel empathy[28] towards its members because they share a common identity or experience.

The connections built abroad taught the alumni a lot about communicating and working with different people, a necessary skill for contributing to society's well-being. It is about caring for different cultures and across different levels of society. Therefore, developing relationships and rapport across social groups and state hierarchies also surfaced during the interviews, with four alumni mentioning that keeping close contact with leaders, communities, and people in charge was part of their daily job (Botshelo, Mulalo, Velile, and Vuyokazi). Connecting with people and building relationships across society was also mentioned as something individuals learnt or improved while abroad along with learning about other cultures and people (Maria and Vuyokazi).

Vuyokazi also said she enjoyed building relationships with people abroad, allowing her to improve her networking skills, which benefited her current position, where she needed connections in the water sector. Through this functioning of developing and maintaining relationships, Vuyokazi could find the person who might be needed in a particular situation to achieve certain project goals or influence decisions through knowledge exchange. Networking skills play a crucial role in facilitating collaboration, knowledge exchange, resource mobilisation, and advocacy efforts, all of which contribute to advancing SD on local, national, and global levels.

Maria maintained that being exposed to different social groups in the United States also made it easier to work with Black people and other social groups returning home. When she went to the United States, it was right after apartheid had ended, and she had grown up at a time when South Africa was strongly divided by race, which impacted her professional life. Nussbaum (2000) and Walker and McLean (2013) emphasise the significance of fostering connections between individuals from diverse backgrounds to achieve effective professional collaboration. Therefore, relationship-building is part of being a RA and allows for the potential to contribute to SD, as highlighted in Chapter 3.

If the time spent abroad helped the alumni to build connections with different social groups, it boosted the impact of the scholarships. Learning how to build relationships while abroad gave the scholarship recipients the qualities of being responsible and able to make a difference in

[28] Empathy is the ability to understand and share the feelings of another person.

SD development when they come back. Although this was especially important in 1994 when apartheid ended, it is still a concern today. The ongoing cultural divisions in South Africa show that building relationships between different cultures is needed to bring people together and create understanding.

The issue of racial division was a topic that emerged in other interviews as well. Velile's decision to pursue studies abroad was driven by her desire to advocate for inclusive education and have her voice heard. While she expressed her pre-existing concern for others, she also noted that her time abroad broadened her perspective and deepened her empathy for individuals from other African countries living in South Africa:

> *I didn't care about the next person from Zimbabwe; I didn't care about the person from Cameroon or Ruanda. Why is this person here? I would judge based on my environment and my comfort zone, but being in Japan helped me understand because I could engage with people from different countries* (Velile).

This quotation shows that while she considered herself someone who cared about others, she did not care about everyone before going abroad. In her job preceding her time abroad, she did care for people with disabilities, but she was not open to people from different backgrounds. This statement and the comments made by other alumni showed how spending some time abroad changed their mindset. Even someone who already considered herself as caring for others found that she was prejudiced against those she did not want in her home country.

Since South Africa is home to many different cultures and nations, respect is necessary to feel responsible for others. Sometimes, to understand this, a person might need to go beyond his/her familiar home and visit other places (Walker & McLean, 2013). When individuals are away from their families and friends, they tend to reach out and build connections with new people to make friends. This experience not only allows them to meet people from their own country but also teaches them to tolerate and care about those from various nations.

The alumni seemed obliged to others, with some mentioning a commitment to return to South Africa and give back to their community because of the privilege of receiving a scholarship to study abroad (Maria, Krish, Dineo, and Aisha).

> *I got the money to study in the States, and I kinda felt like I should actually go and pay my dues in South Africa, in a sense. So, I should go, and I think that is the spirit of the*

> *Fulbright scholarship if I understand it correctly as well. The idea is for you to go and use what you've learned and to apply it in your home country* (Maria).

Other alumni also mentioned that they feel obligated to pass on the knowledge and experiences they gained abroad to other people. Maria and Nadiim took this idea further, mentioning that people in senior roles should feel the responsibility to help train younger people. While passing on knowledge seems to be an advantage, it is being "soft power" by Atkinson (2010, p.1).

The term "soft power" suggests that the host country can promote its values through education given to alumni who then return to their home countries to spread them. Asada (2021) examines prior research on the concept of soft power and highlights the need to understand the differences between the knowledge gained abroad with what is relevant within the alumni's home countries. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, some alumni felt frustrated because what they had learned abroad could not be implemented when returning to South Africa. Implementing a reintegration programme to assist alumni in readjusting and integrating back into their lives in South Africa would help them to harness their capabilities for SD. The programme could facilitate their return, help them adapt to their home country, and enable them to apply their acquired knowledge within the South African context. This approach would ensure that their contributions align with South Africa's needs without prioritising the values of the host country where they studied.

f) Emotional reflexivity

The RA capability of emotional reflexivity determines the functionings of empathy/narrative imagination (learning about other people's perspectives, understanding or trying to understand another person's story) and compassion (being kind to people even in difficult situations), which was explained in Chapter 3. Dineo made the following remark:

> *Understanding that the people who believe what you do is wrong, but you learn to work with them either way. So, it was a sense of fairness. 'It doesn't matter what you think of me, but we have to work together.' That helped me. So, if there are any issues with anyone, I know that I can overcome them* (Dineo).

This statement suggests that even when beliefs differ, collaboration is possible by being fair and recognising that working together matters, despite personal distinctions. Dineo learned to handle situations where beliefs clashed by valuing cooperation more than others' perceptions

of her. This mindset has given her the confidence to tackle conflicts and challenges when interacting with others.

Emotional reflexivity is an essential capability in South Africa, where one has to take on "*the inner task of personal transformation to grow capacity for the outer work of social transformation*" (Walker & McLean, 2013, p. 116). Walker and McLean (2013) mentioned this functioning in the context of working with the suffering of others, not becoming too attached to those who are challenged, and being patient without being emotional. When the alumni collaborated with individuals from various countries, they faced difficulties. However, these experiences taught them to be patient and not feel hurt when they encountered different opinions and issues. Combining clear thinking and feelings is important when working with people from diverse backgrounds in foreign countries, which would help the alumni in the context of South Africa to create understanding and cooperation.

Nandi, who studied international relations in Japan and agreed with Dineo's opinion above, maintained that collaborating with diverse individuals helps with self-understanding. Working with others shows that solutions often involve finding a middle ground whereby different outlooks are tolerated, especially in interactions with diverse cultures. What might come across as impolite or disruptive might be rooted in cultural variations. Changing perspectives and adjusting mindsets helps in better comprehending these subtleties:

> *But at the same time, you get to know yourself when you are working with different people because you have to understand that you can't always get your way. Or you have to learn how to compromise. How to see things from other people's perspectives, especially with different cultures. So, what you might consider rude, or things that may seem upsetting to you, you may realise it might just be a cultural thing. So, you have to re-negotiate in your mind and restructure the way you see things* (Nandi).

Previous studies have revealed that spending time in a different country could contribute to cultural sensitivity and empathy (Roy et al., 2019). Campbell (2018) highlights that spending time abroad enhances people's empathy and willingness to understand others, indicating emotional reflexivity. Nandi, Dineo and Bothselo were open to learning about people of different backgrounds, allowing them to understand other people**.** Showing compassion and being emotionally reflexive are essential for change (Walker & McLean, 2013).

Velile mentioned feeling more privileged in South Africa compared with students from other African nations. When interacting with these students during the scholarship programme, she

was surprised by the different lifestyles in other countries. Exchanging experiences and impressions of their different home countries, Velile realised that people from these countries looked up to South Africa owing to its economic status. This experience humbled Velile and helped her understand different perspectives, including the reasons for the presence of many immigrants in South Africa.

Velile demonstrated emotional reflexivity because she reflected on her emotional reactions and changes in perspective, as she encountered different lifestyles and perspectives from other African countries.:

> *Especially African countries. Because in South Africa, I think we are more, more privileged, if I may use that word. Because when I met my fellow students from other [African] countries, I was like, like most of the time when they shared their lifestyles and how things are done in their countries, for me it was a shock. How they live their livelihood, how everything is done. When you share pictures with them of where you come from, they are like they see us differently from them. Because of the systems and the level of the economy of our country, they look up to us on everything. And for me, I was humbled that I had an opportunity to meet other people and to understand, and also to understand the issues of why in South Africa we have so many immigrants from other countries* (Velile).

South Africa has different tribes, nations and races and a big gap between rich and poor (Walker & McLean, 2013), as discussed in Chapter 2. Therefore, having the RA capability of emotional reflexivity is vital in a diverse country like South Africa (Walker & McLean, 2013). RA functionings related to this capability, such as empathy are needed for the potential to contribute to SD as mentioned in Chapter 3. The time spent abroad seemed to encourage the development of empathy, which was a common theme in the interviews, which was not the case in Walker and McLean's (2013) study, which found that emotional understanding did not reflect strongly in South African alumni and suggests that the scholarship experience of encountering other cultures led to its development in the participants of the current study. This raises the following question: If engaging with diverse cultures during the exchange programme enhanced the alumni's emotional understanding, could they not potentially develop this ability in their home country of South Africa, where they are already immersed in a mix of cultures and races?

g) Knowledge and skills

The RA capability of knowledge and skills would lead to the functionings of firm disciplinary and academic knowledge (understanding one's profession), having a multidisciplinary/multi-perspectival stance (considering factors of other disciplines playing a role in one's profession), being enquiring, critical, evaluative, imaginative, creative, and flexible (challenging one's own knowledge and constantly being critical about one's impact), and *open-minded* (being open about other people's opinions). The importance of knowledge and skills allows the alumni to contribute to change, as described in Chapter 3.

Botshelo showed firm academic knowledge of basic education. She mentioned that the knowledge gained in her field and industry was one of the advantages of going abroad, which was confirmed by other alumni (Maria, Krish, and David). She mentioned that she understood the field of education and its complexity a lot more than before. Having firm critical academic knowledge is essential for contributing to a better life for others. It not only allows using knowledge to create change but also to pass on the knowledge to support other people in their endeavours to achieve freedom. It can empower others and contribute to the formulation of policies. As mentioned before, seeing how these capabilities build on each other shows that the capabilities are interconnected, one does not work without the other, and the absence of one would hinder the development of other capabilities necessary for SD. This makes all capabilities equally important, and essential for being considered a RA. Walker and McLean (2013) note that "using good professional skills conscientiously (within the structures which define good professional practice)" is essential to professional practice for the public good. However, while Walker and McLean (2013) argue for good professional practice, the study advocates for the qualities of the RA and emphasises that its capabilities should be applied to make a meaningful contribution to SD.

In the survey, when presented with the statement that they could apply their knowledge in South Africa, 38 alumni gave ratings of 6 or higher (on a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 represents complete disagreement and 10 indicates full agreement). This suggested that the alumni felt that they had firm academic knowledge, which is crucial for developing the capability of knowledge and skills and may have been enhanced by degree mobility along with RA.

The question is whether firm academic knowledge as a RA capability means general academic knowledge or knowledge relevant to South Africa's situation. Walker and McLean (2013, p. 113) stress the importance of specialised knowledge for addressing complex "social, economic,

political, and cultural factors", which vary depending on a country's circumstances. Acquiring knowledge from abroad that does not fit South Africa's situation might not contribute to SD. However, it seems from the alumni's responses in the survey, that they believed that their knowledge would be applicable in South Africa.

The survey responses suggested that the inability to use acquired knowledge was linked to the alumni's difficulties in securing jobs. All six alumni who rated their adaptability as six or lower mentioned that their degrees did not give them an advantage in their careers. They struggled or were still struggling to find employment. These six alumni had studied subjects, such as engineering (African Business Education scholarship), tourism (African Business Education scholarship), and strategic management and planning (Kadar Asmal Fellowship). This suggested that the knowledge they had acquired might not have been applicable or valued within the employment market they were entering. While academic knowledge is not the sole determinant of contributing to SD, the knowledge gained during overseas studies should align with the needs of the job market and the South African context. Baxter (2018) mentions that the knowledge and experiences gained abroad might not be applicable in the home country and training or professional experience might be necessary when returning. Currently, no reintegration programme exists for any of the scholarships. Such a programme could reintegrate alumni and give them more opportunities to use their knowledge and skills gained abroad in the South African context.

Studying in a foreign country taught the alumni a multidisciplinary/multi-perspectival stance in their disciplines. Furthermore, Botshelo noted that her experience taught her to consider factors indirectly related to the school system, such as socioeconomic disparities, cultural influences, and community dynamics, which impact education. Nandi said that being abroad taught her that poverty is complex and should be perceived from the perspectives of various disciplines. Creating graduates who see problems from different angles allows for a holistic approach to contributing to SD in South Africa.

Mulalo, Nadiim, and Nandi mentioned that the degree programmes in Japan are structured to allow students to choose modules in different departments, which allowed them to learn about various disciplines. Nandi, for example, said that while studying international relations, she could do international law, international development, and MBA courses. This set-up allowed alumni to have a multidisciplinary or multi-perspectival stance in their professions when in South Africa.

Godwin and Altbach (2016) discuss the concept of liberal education, which goes beyond imparting specialised knowledge and aims to nurture the development of the whole person. SD, as highlighted by Baleta et al. (2019), is multifaceted and demands an approach drawing from various disciplines (see Chapter 2). This suggests that education with exposure to a variety of disciplines, environments, and cultures, can foster a multidisciplinary or multi-perspectival stance, which, in turn, could lead to responsible agency and the potential to contribute to SD.

A liberal education is, however, not only offered at Japanese universities, it is also offered in South Africa (Bolton et al., 2020). However, the alumni in the study thought it was unique to their host country because, at the time of their departure from South Africa, they only had undergraduate degrees, which potentially allowed for less flexibility and led to the perception that the comprehensive, interdisciplinary nature of liberal education was associated with their foreign learning experience. Alumni who haven't pursued postgraduate degrees in South Africa may lack familiarity with the structure of national degree programs, which can lead them to perceive foreign degrees as uniquely designed. However, it's essential to acknowledge that similar multidisciplinary and multi-perspectival educational approaches are also attainable in South Africa (Bolton et al., 2020). Therefore, it becomes challenging to assert that this particular multidisciplinary and multi-perspectival approach is exclusively achieved through degree mobility. Instead, it seems more likely that such an approach is primarily shaped by the specific design and setup of educational programs, whether they are pursued abroad or within South Africa

The multidisciplinary also goes along with the functioning of being enquiring, critical, evaluative, imaginative, creative, and flexible. For example, Botshelo was more enquiring about education development work after returning from her teaching experience in South Korea. To drive transformation, she sought a stronger theoretical foundation and a deeper understanding of the field of education. In addition, being abroad gave her insight into the complexity of developmental aid and taught her to be critical and enquiring.

In line with the findings of Asada's (2021) study, in the interviews, alumni mentioned that being abroad gave them fresh perspectives on their home country and challenged prior knowledge and perceptions. They now critically analysed and evaluated what they had taken for granted before. This indicates the potential to contribute to SD, as mentioned by Anand and Sen (1994b), who claim that it requires continuous adaption to change, which, in turn, requires flexibility and the ability to question, critique, and analyse everyday life and professional

situations and decisions (Walker & McLean, 2013). However, the alumni in the study did mention that studying in a foreign country enhanced the functioning of being more enquiring and critical, evaluative, imaginative, creative, and flexible which is needed to contribute to SD in an ever-changing world.

The alumni who demonstrated the functioning of being enquiring, critical, evaluative, imaginative, creative, and flexible mentioned above also seemed open-minded. For example, Botshelo said that although she was already open-minded before going abroad and had taught English in Korea, which had led to her wanting to explore international education through the scholarship programme:

> *Teaching English as a teacher so that sort of exploration and want you to understand more, just like emerging experiences in cultures and the way people live their lives … So when I've been working for a few years after coming back from South Korea worked for a view years, it was very interesting education, specifically education development and I wanted to understand how I could not only draw on my international relations experience but also the fact and understanding that really when it comes to education development work, whether it might be through aid, whether it be through funding for various education project. Some projects across cross-country.* (Botshelo)

The analysis showed that her voice was one of the strongest in regards of being a RA (as mentioned in 6.3), which could also be connected to her degree in international education. However, the question is whether the experience of degree mobility made her more open-minded or the international education programme she followed abroad.

Given that comparable programs are available in South African universities, it might be possible to foster an open mindset amongst students even without the necessity of pursuing a degree abroad. These local programmes could provide opportunities for students to engage with diverse perspectives, cultures, and fields of study, contributing to their personal growth and global awareness. Universities in South Africa can create environments that expose students to interdisciplinary approaches and encourage them to explore viewpoints from different angles. This could develop skills in critical thinking, empathy, and adaptability, which are qualities often associated with an open mindset. While degree mobility can certainly offer valuable international experiences, similar outcomes in terms of an open mindset could be achieved through well-designed programmes and initiatives within the local educational context.

6.3.2.3 Responsibility towards nature's well-being

Alumni like Botshelo, Velile, and Dineo, who emphasised personal responsibility and societal welfare, displayed a relatively weaker emphasis on the well-being of nature. As a result, this section includes quotations from other alumni instead of those highlighted in previous sections.

Recognising the significance of nature is integral to pursuing SD, as elucidated in Chapter 3. Consequently, responsible agency includes the capability of resource awareness, which empowers individuals to make life choices that do not harm the environment and enable its sustenance for future generations.

a) Resource awareness

Understanding limited resources (being aware that the use of resources needs to happen sustainably) was demonstrated in different ways. Mandla, for example, mentioned that humanity needs resources to reach its goals and survive, which is why it should not exploit what this planet has to give:

> *If they say the world is changing, temperatures are rising, glaziers are melting. So, we, as people in general, need to come up with mitigation strategies on how we can stop emissions from affecting the layers in the atmosphere … I didn't have enough working experience, so a lot of the knowledge that I had in agriculture, linking it to climate change and food security, was mainly theory for me. It was just on paper. So now, coming back with that knowledge and being able to actually participate practically, it is something that I needed* (Mandla).

Mandla studied climate change, agriculture, and food security abroad and said his sense for sustainable farming mainly came through this degree. The question is whether he could have only gained this knowledge or whether he could have also learnt about sustainable agriculture in South Africa. In the questionnaire, Mandla rated 10 out of 10, indicating total agreement with the statement that he could use the knowledge gained through his scholarship in South Africa. However, in the interview, he mentioned that while he gained theoretical knowledge and understanding about Earth's resources, climate change and food security abroad, his curriculum did not focus or sufficiently invite him to draw on the South African context to work out the practicalities for food production, which was the area in which he was employed after returning home. Nevertheless, the knowledge he gained abroad was applicable.

Environmental sustainability encompasses not only resource preservation but also the guarantee of enough resources, especially food, for future generations (Nicholls et al., 2020). As the global population continues to expand, the need for resources that have a direct impact on the environment is also on the rise. These resources, often referred to as environmentally related resources, include essentials like food, water, energy, and raw materials for production. With more people on the planet, the consumption of these resources intensifies, putting additional strain on ecosystems and contributing to issues such as pollution, habitat degradation, and depletion of natural reserves. This escalating demand for environmentally related resources underscores the urgency of implementing sustainable practices to ensure the availability of these resources for current and future generations while minimising negative environmental effects (Nicholls et al., 2020; UN, 2015a).

b) Sustainable consumption

Mandla's resource awareness extended to acknowledging not only the finite nature of Earth's resources but also the need to build more. Moreover, this realisation prompted him to make informed choices for sustainable consumption. A few alumni also mentioned sustainable consumption when talking about what they learned abroad. One topic that came up was renewable energy, hydro plants, and the carbon footprint (Nadiim, Nandi, and David). Currently, South Africa is not producing enough energy for its whole country and still relying on fossil fuels (Mbomvu, Hlongwane, Nxazonke, Qayi, and Bruwer, 2021). Expanding green energy would make ensure enough electricity in the country. The past years have regularly been affected by extensive load-shedding, negatively impacting South Africa's economy (Mbomvu et al., 2021). The alumni showing awareness of these problems can be considered an indication of their showing responsibility towards nature's well-being.

Mandla's interview provided more details about sustainable consumption, explaining how he implemented it in his practice, thereby benefiting the agricultural sector and contributing to SD, as recommended by the UN (2015a). Mandla clarified that he applied what he had learned while abroad by implementing new technology and sustainable farming methods. The question is, however, whether his agricultural activities were due to pursuing a degree abroad or specifically pursuing a degree in climate change, agriculture, and food security. Similar degrees can also be studied in South Africa (Stellenbosch University, 2023), which might not only include the same theoretical knowledge but also its application in a South African context.

This revisits the points discussed earlier in this chapter, emphasising that while certain capabilities might be acquired through pursuing studies abroad, others appear to stem from the content taught during the degree programme itself, rather than solely from the experience of studying in a different country. If comparable programmes in South Africa can foster equivalent capabilities, the relevance of degree mobility could diminish. The only situation where sending scholars abroad could be justified is if research could demonstrate the existence of capabilities exclusively attainable through international study experiences. This would provide a basis for advocating overseas education over solely expanding educational capacity within South African universities.

Mandla's statements went beyond merely demonstrating resource awareness and sustainable consumption. They revealed that this awareness was an integral part of his everyday work, which suggested that he had chosen a profession, which allowed him to contribute positively to nature's well-being and thus enhance his own well-being by pursuing a career aligned with his sustainability goals. Mandla's example highlights that valuing the well-being of nature and society does not require neglecting one's own well-being. Instead, embodying responsible agency can naturally arise from committing to both societal and environmental welfare, simultaneously enhancing one's well-being, which is crucial for achieving SD. In addition, as explained in Chapter 3, RA capabilities and functionings can emerge naturally without being forced on individuals or compromising their freedom.

The data analysis revealed that concern about nature's well-being was more prevalent amongst alumni who had completed programmes directly related to nature and sustainability. Therefore, the question arises: Could responsibility towards nature's well-being be a consequence not necessarily of pursuing a degree abroad but rather of engaging in a degree programme that specifically focuses on nature and sustainability? In other words, as stated earlier, since similar degree programmes are offered in South Africa responsibility towards nature's well-being could be fostered through domestic education comprising specialised programmes and curriculum design.

6.3.2.4 Ex-ante responsibility

As explained in Chapter 3, ex-ante responsibility refers to the concept of responsibility before an event or action occurs. It is the obligation to consider and anticipate the potential consequences of actions before they are taken. This proactive approach involves assessing the potential harms and benefits that may result from a decision and taking steps to minimise

negative impacts and maximise positive outcomes. This responsibility is realised through the capabilities of informed vision and informed decision-making.

a) Informed vision

The capability of informed vision is defined through to the following functionings: understanding how the profession is shaped by historical and current socio-economic, and political contexts, national and global (for example, understanding the impact the apartheid still has on South Africa until now) and understanding how structures shape individual lives (for example, understanding why other African nations are seeking for more opportunities in South Africa); being able to imagine alternative futures and improved social arrangements (for example, how supporting SD could create well-being in South Africa); and a commitment to economic development and equitable economic opportunities (for example, a willingness to give back to society and support others).

To understand how the profession is shaped by historical and current socio-economic, and political contexts, national and global, Botshelo decided to study abroad:

> *And it was actually on comparative and international education. So, one of the things that I also wanted. Through my application when I was sort of researching schools to forward that into my application. I wanted a global programme. I didn't just want to go to the States and study an education programme that was very states centric … And studying abroad tends to be a really good magnet for that … I might imagine at their universities; there tends to be a really nice community of other people, who are interested in the things you are interested in, but also keen and excited about sort of studying abroad and doing a Master in a different country. So that was important for me, and that's why specifically chose the global programmes that I did and was looking for schools that had a global orientation* (Botshelo).

To justify degree mobility, Botshelo presented arguments, such as comparing various educational programmes and interacting with people from diverse backgrounds to gain insights into the present state of education. However, she could have done this in the internationally diverse settings of several South African universities, which are popular destinations for students from different parts of the world (Hou & Du, 2022).

By studying overseas, Botshelo gained exposure to the different education systems on a global scale, which enabled her to identify commonalities and differences between them. Moreover,

she learnt education systems worldwide grapple with similar challenges. Therefore, while South Africa may host a diverse student community, the global perspective gained through Bothshelo's international degree enriched her understanding of education systems, unveiling shared struggles and the potential for collaborative solutions worldwide.

The functioning of understanding how the profession is shaped by historical and current socio-economic, and political contexts, national and global was demonstrated by Nandi, who had pursued studies in international relations in Japan:

> *Once you live abroad, global news becomes a big thing in your life. And when you are teaching people about your culture as well as learning about other people's cultures, it becomes the norm to actually understand international relations* (Nandi).

Nandi's statement revealed that being in a foreign country can provide an understanding of the current state of one's profession, as evidenced by her experience in the field of international relations. However, a contrasting viewpoint emerged during the interview with Velile. She mentioned the need for more research in African higher education sectors on students with disabilities. Velile's observation was rooted in her awareness that Western nations possess a greater body of knowledge in this domain and have taken steps to support students with disabilities.

Although pursuing a postgraduate degree in Japan offered her insights into the research landscape of that country, she might have lacked an understanding of the research landscape in her home country, which a similar degree programme in South Africa could have ensured. Therefore, equipped with an understanding of the research conversations and developments in South Africa, she could have made an impactful contribution to the educational needs of disabled students.

When the alumni participated in degree mobility programmes, they developed a better understanding of their professions. This experience helped them learn about the professional landscape in the country they were studying in and how these unique conditions related to other countries. This understanding goes beyond academic knowledge; it encompasses the practical realities, challenges, and opportunities of a profession within a particular setting. Alumni who experienced degree mobility gained first-hand insights into the nuances of their fields as practised in different parts of the world. They became aware of the cultural, social, and economic factors that shaped their professions in those contexts.

These insights played a crucial role in developing ex-ante responsibility. By understanding the intricacies of their professions in various global settings, these individuals were equipped to anticipate potential outcomes and impacts of their actions. This awareness enabled them to make informed decisions in their profession and terms of its interconnectedness with diverse global contexts.

Alumni mentioned that experiencing education in a foreign country led to their understanding of how structures shape individual lives. Walker and McLean (2013) outline that this understanding is an integral part of informed vision, which leads to insights into a country's challenges and opportunities in the country. Informed vision was demonstrated by Velile, who saw that the limited access to education for students with disabilities means that South Africa is missing an opportunity to tap into their potential to ensure their own and others' well-being.

Velile's experience abroad has equipped her with a vital perspective on the limitations of South African educational institutions in accommodating students with disabilities. This understanding is essential for her to make informed and responsible choices about how to bring about positive change within these institutions, thereby enhancing the well-being of these students. Even though Velile was already working in a relevant position before going abroad, her exposure to approaches adopted by other countries enriched her pool of ideas. This exposure enabled her to envision alternative possibilities for enhancing the lives of students with disabilities in South Africa.

The time spent abroad appears to have prompted alumni's insights into how structures in South Africa impact individuals' lives. Leveraging the insights gained and their disciplinary knowledge, the alumni had the potential to intervene either in their professional spheres or beyond. This intervention would have aimed to enhance not only their own well-being but also that of society, nature, and future generations.

b) Informed decision-making

Informed decision-making comprises the functionings of awareness, understanding and reflection of the impact and influence that one has on society and nature (understanding how humanity can influence the degradation of the environment); understanding of the complexity of local, national and international political, economic, social, cultural and environmental challenges (including considering the circumstances in South Africa and how these impact actions taken when wanting to make responsible decisions).

Several interviewees showed awareness and understanding of and reflection on the impact and influence that one has on society, future generations, and nature. For example, Lesedi revealed this functioning in the following comment:

> *I would say that professionally, it made me aware of how important it is to protect your environment because the environment in China is very polluted. So, it made me aware that if we also don't follow our rules and be more stringent in our legislation with the environment and not be careful, we might also end up by being air polluted, soil polluted, and water polluted* (Lesedi).

Although Lesedi mentioned China, which is well known for its polluted air and related health hazards (Hu & Guo, 2021), she was also aware that South Africa is challenged, for example, in waste removal in townships owing to poor service delivery (Kubanza & Simatele, 2020). According to Chetty & Bangalee (2021), many people in South Africa are still not aware of how this can negatively affect the health of current and future generations and that action is needed to make a change as a result of this awareness.

Alumni who studied in Japan noticed that the country was clean and brought it up as an example of what South Africa should achieve. However, what was not mentioned is that Japan is experiencing environmental degradation and needs more renewable energy to protect the environment (Adebayo & Kirikkaleli, 2021). At first glance it looked like their time abroad created some awareness, their experienced 'reality' of Japan was not the whole reality of the Japanese environmental situation. This shows that it needs more than purely visiting another country to understand one's impact fully and also to be able to see what can be done differently to secure a future that people value to reason. Therefore, in the context of Japan, the alumni need to up their level of awareness and understanding of and reflection on the impact and influence that one has on society, future generations, and nature (Crespo et al., 2017).

This shows that just spending time in a country does not necessarily mean understanding the complexities, and understanding might be limited to the level of exposure while abroad. However, other alumni also showed the functioning of understanding of the complexity of local, national, and international political, economic, social, cultural, and environmental challenges was demonstrated by Vuyokazi, who had studied rural development and natural resource management, Nandi, who had studied international relations, Botshelo, who had studied comparative and international education), and Velile, who had studied education policy. As they had all studied subjects concerning development in an international context,

which raises the question of whether they would have had this functioning if they had studied these topics in a South African context or whether it was due to degree mobility.

Vuyokazi demonstrated an understanding of the complexity of local, national, and international challenges, encompassing political, economic, social, cultural, and environmental dimensions when she pointed out during her interview that each problem is unique, and it is not feasible to apply a single project design across various locations to drive development. This understanding of the intricacies of problems would empower individuals to adopt a critical approach when introducing changes and have a clear perspective on how to foster SD because the necessary transformation to achieve it is dependent on context. This mirrors the CA, which Sen (1999) maintains allows individuals to realise that a list of capabilities cannot be universally applicable. Instead, a list of capabilities needs to be tailored to the context and shaped by those directly involved. The needs of individuals evolve not only across different contexts but also over time (as discussed in Chapter 3). Consequently, individuals must grasp the context and its associated challenges to adapt effectively over time. In essence, this understanding emphasises the need for a context-sensitive and dynamic approach to addressing development challenges and fostering SD.

Spending some time abroad seemed to have helped other alumni to understand the complexity of local, national, and international challenges, encompassing political, economic, social, cultural, and environmental dimensions. For example, Nandi said the following:

> *You know when you are abroad, and you study international relations, there are a lot of questions that you get asked about your own country, and I thought, 'Okay, I need to read up on this* (Nandi).

Nandi is essentially conveying that while studying international relations abroad, she became aware of the wide range of questions asked about her home country. These questions likely touched on various aspects such as politics, economics, society, culture, and the environment. Nandi's recognition of the need to read up on these topics reflects an understanding of the intricate interplay of political, economic, social, cultural, and environmental factors that contribute to them.

Botshelo made the following statement (already quoted on page 151 for a different capability):

> *So, there's understanding that, like, a lot of the themes and a lot of the difficulties and challenges are just like growth paths at a country level, or school level, or district level*

> *that people are sitting with, actually cross-cut throughout all over the world. It is not a South African problem; it is not just a Kenya problem; it is not just an Indonesia problem. And so, the solutions aren't necessarily always different. A solution that you have in Kenya isn't necessarily all that radically that different from South Africa, but these two people or these two organisations of these two projects aren't talking to each other and aren't collaborating and understanding how much they could be learning from each other. This does not only imply that they understand the local and international context but also that one's knowledge and view is always limited to the own experiences and education* (Botshelo).

Botshelo recognised a common thread in various themes, difficulties, and challenges that countries, schools, and districts face. These challenges are not isolated to specific regions; they have universal relevance. She suggested that these issues are not confined to South Africa, Kenya, Indonesia, or any particular country – they transcend borders. According to Botshelo, solutions to these challenges often share similarities across different countries. For instance, a solution implemented in Kenya might not be drastically different from one that could be applicable in South Africa. The issue, she highlighted, is that the various parties involved, whether individuals, organisations, or projects, often operate in isolation. There is a lack of collaboration and knowledge-sharing amongst them, which limits the potential for mutual learning and improvement.

In this context, Botshelo's insights not only underscored her understanding of both local and international contexts but also emphasised the limitations of a one-sided perspective. She suggested that people's understanding is inherently shaped by their personal experiences and education. The implication is that fostering collaboration and knowledge exchange across different regions can lead to effective solutions and shared growth, addressing challenges on a wide scale. Through her statement, Botshelo demonstrated that she had gained an appreciation for the intricacies of national challenges. Furthermore, she developed the ability to recognise the interconnectedness of these challenges with those faced by other countries. This realisation ignited a drive within her to effect change, as she comprehended the potential for shared solutions and collaboration across borders.

The capability of informed decision-making was linked to the functioning of considering long-term benefits and future generations in the interviews. This functioning was, for example, mentioned during the interview with Botshelo, who said that in her profession, she had to

consider the long-term impact her teacher training had on the learners and other teachers. Velile emphasised that students with disabilities need to cope with their education and prospects, thereby indicating the need to look beyond immediate outcomes and consider the long-term benefits, especially for future generations by creating a sustainable, inclusive educational environment:

> *They would be able to sustain themselves because they would have acquired the relevant skills that enable them to access employment, or maybe they become entrepreneurs to become economically active and be able to afford life. Maybe afford basic needs, even if it's not the once, but they can afford basic needs and maintain their livelihood* (Velile).

Velile's words align closely with the principles of SD by emphasising equipping individuals with skills that enable them to thrive economically and maintain a decent quality of life. Her focus on students with disabilities gaining relevant skills and accessing employment echoes the goal of fostering inclusive economic growth and reducing inequalities, which are integral components of SD. Velile's vision of these students becoming entrepreneurs and economically active individuals highlights the potential for self-sufficiency and empowerment. By providing them with the means to access livelihood opportunities, she envisions a scenario where they can afford their basic needs and maintain a certain standard of living. This resonates with the SD objective of ensuring that all individuals have the resources and opportunities to meet their needs and participate fully in society.

Velile's perspective underlines the notion that empowering marginalised groups and addressing their specific needs is not only a matter of social justice but also a pathway toward sustainable, inclusive development. By enabling individuals to participate in economic activities and support themselves, society can work towards achieving the SDGs of poverty reduction, economic prosperity, and social well-being.

6.3.3 Reimagining the role of scholarships

The findings from the interview analysis revealed that while scholarships broaden horizons and knowledge, ensuring employment upon return is not their central mandate. The alumni's job security, post-return, was not an automatic outcome. While employment is not the exclusive avenue for fostering sustainable development, it was primarily emphasised during the interviews with alumni regarding their motivations for studying abroad and their perceived contributions to sustainable development. Although in the pursuit of SD, the South African

government has strategically employed scholarships for studying abroad, thus echoing the principles of the SDGs, and cultivating responsible agency in alumni, its impact on employment prospects and driving meaningful change is questionable.

Employment is not just about providing individuals with a source of income; it also shapes the socio-economic fabric of a nation and fosters SD. Therefore, the contrast between anticipated career advancements and the reality experienced by some alumni upon their return was evident and dampened the impact of degree mobility on South Africa's SD trajectory. However, as mentioned before, to address this challenge, implementing focused re-entry programmes, workshops and dedicated job centres could empower returning alumni to secure employment and enhance their contribution to SD. Thus, scholarships will not only expand knowledge but also ensure that alumni become catalysts for SD, ensuring a brighter future for South Africa.

The Fulbright alumni interviewed for the study did not, however, have problems finding suitable employment, which could be attributed to its emphasis on degrees that benefit returnees and the nation and its rigorous eligibility criteria. The Fulbright scholarship e focuses on programmes, which are less available or unavailable in South Africa, and the eligibility criteria target high-achieving and exceptionally qualified candidates, as discussed in Chapter 5. Thus, issues of unemployment and frustration among scholarship recipients were mitigated. Moreover, the Fulbright scholarship is recognized as one of the most esteemed scholarships globally. Consequently, alumni who have been recipients of this prestigious scholarship may experience enhanced ease and advantage when applying for various opportunities, given the notable prestige associated with the Fulbright scholarship.

Earlier in this chapter, the argument was put forth that alumni who graduated with their first degrees a while ago might exhibit different outcomes compared to more recent graduates. One of the Fulbright scholarship eligibility criteria was work experience, which implies that scholarship recipients likely possess pre-existing RA capabilities and functionings. Although developed by post-graduate study, these probably led to their finding of employment on return to South Africa more easily than scholars who entered programmes with prior challenges in finding employment and went abroad primarily to improve job prospects.

Alumni who already possessed RA capabilities and functionings before degree mobility not only deepened these qualities during their scholarship programmes but also their expertise in specific fields. This contributed to their finding suitable employment and enabled them to contribute to SD because they could apply their capabilities and functionings effectively within

a professional context. Although this finding supports eligibility criteria favouring candidates with pre-existing RA, they might not ensure equal access, as explored in Chapter 5. However, as mentioned before, the solution could be a tiered approach to scholarship programmes. This approach could include scholarships aimed at those who need to develop RA capabilities and functionings anew, as well as those who already possess them. By acknowledging the diverse starting points of candidates and tailoring scholarship opportunities accordingly, the potential for both enhancing existing capabilities/functionings and fostering new ones to ensure the potential to contribute to SD could be maximised.

6.4 Summary of the alumni's responsible agency

This chapter extensively explored the responsible agency exhibited by the alumni. To offer a concise overview of how degree mobility contributes to the development of responsible agency, the subsequent table encapsulates the key findings presented in this chapter.

Table 6.4: Summary of alumni and their responsible agency

Responsibility	Capability	Functioning	Summarized how it reflected in the interviews
Own well-being (Becker, 2006; Sen, 1985)	Self-care	Pursuing own goals (C. Becker, 2006; Sen, 1985) Personal Growth (Walker & McLean, 2013)	The data reveals that self-care emerged as a prominent theme among alumni, encompassing aspirations for personal growth, pursuing individual goals, and navigating challenges with adaptability. This self-care perspective, highlighted through narratives of job-seeking journeys, personal development, and the pursuit of passion-aligned employment, underscores the interconnectedness between individual well-being and contributions to societal and environmental betterment within the Capability Approach framework.
	Self-preservation	Making compromises for decent life 'forever'. Be self-functioning and sustaining your own life and not relying on others	Dineo, despite the scholarship provider's expectation of contributing to her home country's development, chose to work abroad due to the high unemployment rate in South Africa. While her decision limited her contribution to society, it reflects the complex trade-offs individuals make between personal well-being and societal impact, contributing to the ongoing debate on brain drain and its potential negative effects on countries in the Global South.
Society's well-being (Walker & McLean, 2013)	Integrity (PCI)	Acting ethically Being responsible and accountable to communities and colleagues Being honest Striving to provide high-quality service	In addressing South Africa's challenges of corruption and crime, the study emphasizes the significance of integrity, measured through ethical actions, responsibility, honesty, and the pursuit of high-quality service. The narratives from alumni underscore how pursuing degrees abroad contributes to the development of responsibility, accountability, and a commitment to delivering quality service, essential elements for fostering sustainable development in South Africa.
	Emotional Reflexivity (PCI)	Empathy/narrative imagination Compassion Integrating rationality and emotions Being emotionally reflexive	The capability of emotional reflexivity, involving empathy and compassion, was demonstrated by Dineo's ability to collaborate despite differing beliefs, emphasizing the importance of cooperation. This emotional understanding, crucial in South Africa, was evident in Nandi and Velile as they navigated cultural differences, fostering compassion and contributing to their potential for positive change in sustainable development. The experiences abroad raised the question of whether these abilities could be cultivated within South Africa's diverse cultural landscape.
	Social and collective struggle (PCI)	Community empowerment approach/promote human rights. Contributing to policy formulation and implementation Identifying places for change/leading and managing social change to reduce injustice. Working in professional and interprofessional teams Participating in public reasoning/listening to all voices in the conversation Building and sustaining strategic relationships and networks with organisations and government	Studying abroad, such as in Botshelo's case, not only enhanced professional confidence but also facilitated the functioning of policy formulation and implementation, allowing direct contributions to sustainable development through influencing decision-makers in the Department of Basic Education. Additionally, alumni like Nandi highlighted the importance of participating in public reasoning, emphasizing the value of actively listening to diverse perspectives and ensuring all voices are heard in the conversation, aligning with principles essential for sustainable development.
	Resilience (PCI)	Perseverance in difficult circumstances Fostering hope Having a sense of career security	Instances such as Dineo's decision to relocate to Ireland due to a perceived lack of career security in South Africa exemplify the challenges alumni face in realizing these functionings. The study indicates a potential discrepancy between the scholarship programs' promises of enhanced job opportunities and the actual employment outcomes for returning alumni. The findings underscore the importance of fostering resilience, career security, and hopefulness as interconnected capabilities for alumni to effectively contribute to sustainable development upon returning to their home country.

Table 6.4: Summary of alumni and their responsible agency

Responsibility	Capability	Functioning	Summarized how it reflected in the interviews
	Affiliation (PCI)	Accepting obligations to others Care and respect for diverse people. Understanding lives of poor and vulnerable Developing relationships across social groups and state hierarchies Critical respect for different cultures Communicating professional knowledge in an accessible way /with courtesy and patience	Studying abroad not only enriched individuals' understanding and respect for diverse cultures but also facilitated the development of networking skills and relationships across social hierarchies, contributing to their capability of affiliation and reinforcing their commitment to societal well-being upon their return to South Africa.
	Knowledge and Skills (PCI)	Having a firm, critical grounding in disciplinary, academic knowledge Valuing academic and indigenous knowledge Having a multidisciplinary/multi-perspectival stance Being enquiring, critical, evaluative, imaginative, creative, and flexible Integrating theory and practice Problem-solvers Open minded	The alumni, particularly Botshelo, emphasized the crucial role of firm academic knowledge acquired through degree mobility, asserting that it enhances their ability to contribute meaningfully to societal well-being. While the study identified a multidisciplinary perspective and open-mindedness fostered by studying abroad, it also highlighted the importance of aligning acquired knowledge with local needs to address challenges effectively, suggesting that a comprehensive reintegration program could further support alumni in utilizing their overseas-acquired knowledge in the South African context.
	Assurance and Confidence (PCI)	Expressing & asserting own professional priorities Contributing to policy Having confidence in worthwhileness of one's professional work. Having confidence to act for change	This capability was, for example, exemplified by Botshelo, who noted increased impact and influence after studying abroad. Other participants, including John, Maria, Nandi, Krish, Linda, Mandla, Aisha, and Vuyokazi, also showed enhanced professional confidence post-international education. David highlighted how his overseas experience built self-assurance and trust in his capabilities, contributing to SD potential.
Nature's well-being (Becker, 2006; Crespo et al., 2017)	Resource awareness	Understanding that our resources are limited (Becker, 2006; Crespo et al., 2017) Sustainable consumption; ensuring that we are not running out of specific resources (Crespo et al., 2017) Environmental Awareness (Walker & McLean, 2013)	Mandla, with a background in climate change, agriculture, and food security from abroad, emphasized resource awareness and sustainable farming practices, questioning whether similar capabilities could be developed through domestic education. His remarks underscored the importance of practical, context-specific learning within South Africa, challenging the notion that certain capabilities are uniquely acquired through international study experiences.
Ex ante responsibility (Crespo et al., 2017; Pelenc et al., 2013; Walker & McLean, 2013)	Informed Vision (PCI)	Understanding how the profession is shaped by historical and current socio-economic, and political context national and global. Understanding how structures shape individual lives. Being able to imagine alternative futures and improved social arrangements. Commitment to economic development and equitable economic opportunities	This capability was exemplified by alumni who pursued international degrees to gain a global perspective in their professions. While degree mobility offered valuable insights into diverse educational systems and professional landscapes, questions arose regarding whether similar understandings could be achieved through diverse settings within South Africa, highlighting the need to critically assess the necessity of international study experiences.
	Informed decision-making	Awareness, understanding, and reflection on the impact and influence that one has on society, future generations, and nature (Pelenc et al., 2013) Understanding of the complexity of local, national, and international political, economic, social, cultural, and environmental challenges (Crespo et al., 2017)	The capability was demonstrated by alumni who gained perspectives on environmental issues during international studies. While some showcased awareness limitations by relying on surface-level observations in foreign countries, others exhibited a comprehensive understanding of local and global challenges, emphasizing the importance of context-sensitive approaches, collaborative solutions, and considering long-term benefits, particularly in fostering sustainable and inclusive development.

6.5 Conclusion

Previous research showed that personal growth and career benefits (*pursuing personal goals*) are an outcome of degree mobility, which was confirmed by the findings of the current study. Additionally, the findings revealed that personal growth was aligned with responsible agency in terms of responsibility towards one's own well-being, which indicates the potential to contribute to SD.

Interviewees discussed self-preservation and the willingness to compromise for the sake of securing a better future for both current and upcoming generations to lead a fulfilling life. Although these capabilities were not strongly emphasised during the interviews, they could still value them. The limited awareness of these functionings during the interviews could be due to two reasons: (1) they had not needed to prioritise them, as their current life provided well-being without major sacrifices; or (2) they might have been reluctant to compromise their present comfort for future benefits, even if they recognised the advantage. The first scenario indicates that their current circumstances already ensured their well-being, while the second raises concerns about contributing to SD by neglecting self-preservation. To explore this further, follow-up interviews could delve into understanding the willingness to make sacrifices for the future and its potential impact on contributing to SD.

In terms of responsibility towards society's well-being, the capabilities of resilience and affiliation came through strongly during the interviews. By developing resilience, and the ability to handle challenges, the alumni not only enhanced their well-being but also contributed to a resilient and capable society that can collectively face and address challenges. By developing affiliation, and the ability to connect and form meaningful relationships, the alumni were positioned to engage with their communities, collaborate on solutions, and contribute to social cohesion and collective well-being.

Through moving abroad and being confronted with a new environment and culture, the alumni experienced challenges, which taught them to push through difficult situations and not to give up easily. In addition, returning to South Africa came with challenges, which again seemed to have taught the alumni *perseverance* in difficult situations. However, returning to South Africa and being confronted with unemployment and an environment that did not offer as many opportunities as their host country seemed to have ended in some alumni being frustrated and not very hopeful. Not being hopeful and able to foster hope for others could hinder SD in South

Africa, as highlighted in this chapter. The next chapter will pick up on this challenge and recommend how to improve this situation.

The enhancement of affiliation was due to the alumni's understanding and acceptance of people with different backgrounds. Moreover, while the alumni should have learnt this growing up in a country like South Africa, with its diverse cultures and nationalities, the time abroad seemed to be an eye-opener for alumni who mentioned being more tolerant and inclusive returning from their time abroad.

The responsibility towards nature's well-being was emphasised by alumni who had studied disciplines related to sustainability or the environment, which questions whether awareness of this obligation was due to their degree mobility or by pursuing degrees focused on ecologically sustainable practices. If it was the latter, the question is whether they could have developed these capabilities while studying similar degrees in South Africa without going abroad.

In the context of ex-ante responsibility, the findings indicated that experiencing life abroad contributed to the alumni's enhanced sense of informed vision in terms of responsibility towards future societal well-being, and the environment. In addition, their experience abroad nurtured an understanding of the collective obligation tied to future societal and environmental well-being because it exposed them to diverse cultures, perspectives, and challenges that highlighted the interconnectedness of global issues and the need for collaborative efforts to address them effectively.

The alumni, armed with their enhanced informed vision gained from their experiences abroad, could apply this newfound understanding back in South Africa by advocating for and driving initiatives that promote responsible decision-making for the betterment of future generations, societal welfare, and the environment. They would be equipped to identify the interdependencies between various local and global challenges, enabling them to design holistic and sustainable solutions that consider the complex relationships between various factors. This informed vision would guide their efforts in prioritising functionings contributing to SD.

CHAPTER 7
CONCLUSION

The most powerful weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed.
Steve Biko

7.1 Introduction

Despite the growing prevalence of degree mobility, there has been a shortage of attention devoted to investigating its impact on SD. Despite that the incorporation of degree mobility into the SDGs in 2015, there remains a lack of awareness and understanding regarding this concept. Efforts have been made to promote degree mobility by offering more scholarships to individuals from the Global South to study in other countries.

With degree mobility being recognised as a contributor to SD through its inclusion in the SDGs, it becomes essential to understand its impact on SD. Previous chapters discussed this impact, and this concluding chapter will summarise the main findings and contributions of this research, reflect on the research process, and provide a synthesis of the critical insights gained from the study. This chapter will also provide insights into the study's limitations and demonstrate how a deeper understanding could be obtained through further research.

7.2 Reflecting on the research journey

HE is an essential tool in contributing toward HD. In the 21st century, knowledge has become the key to improving not only an individual's life choices but also a country's development. It is thus unsurprising that higher education has been included in the SDGs, as explained in Chapter 2. The SDGs include higher education by promoting scholarships for individuals from countries in the Global South to study in the Global North. The critiques of Target 4b raised the question of how these scholarships could potentially contribute to SD, as most research into scholarships focuses on the benefits for the individual rather than the public good. Despite the lack of knowledge regarding the benefit of scholarships for degree mobility to SD, the SDGs promote these scholarships. This research gap may be a result of a difficulty in measuring the impact of scholarships on SD, as this impact cannot easily be quantified, as discussed in Chapter 3.

This research was structured around the following main research question:

> How does the provision of scholarships for South African students to pursue postgraduate degrees abroad contribute to the sustainable development of South Africa?

The research sub-questions were as follows:

1) To which extend can the Capability Approach provide a normative and operational framework for exploring the contribution of degree mobility to sustainable development?
2) How do the structures of the selected scholarships align with Sustainable Development?
3) To what extent does the Capability Approach capture the multidimensional aspects of sustainable development influenced by degree mobility, including economic, social, and environmental dimensions?
4) What specific capabilities do individuals acquire through postgraduate degrees abroad that are relevant to addressing South Africa's sustainable development challenges?

Finding a framework to evaluate the impact of scholarships on SD was a challenging aspect of the study. The CA was selected as the best-suited tool to approach this issue (see Chapter 3). This approach enabled the researcher to transcend qualitative data, allowing for a holistic understanding of how returning alumni can contribute to SD in South Africa. Drawing on prior research presented in Chapter 3, the generation of a list of capabilities deemed vital for SD contribution was undertaken. Although the initial objectives of this research did not explicitly include the determination of these capabilities, their inclusion was vital to address the research questions, as expounded in Chapter 3. This list, compiled from relevant previous research (see Chapter 3), served as a framework for assessing the contribution of alumni.

The data analysis revealed some functionings (such as the consideration of long-term benefits and future generations – see Section 4.4.1) that aligned with the identified responsibilities but had not been described in previous research (see Section 3.2.2). For this reason, functionings and capabilities were added to the definition of a RA for the data analysis (see Section 4.4.1). The contribution of individual scholars' times abroad to the creation of RAs required to enhance SD in South Africa was discussed. The analysis involved examining whether alumni possess the necessary capabilities to make contributions towards SD, going beyond personal gains and considering a broader societal benefit.

While Chapter 5 examined the first research sub-question by analysing the structural aspects of the scholarships, Chapter 6 analysed the data collected through interviews, focussing on the second research sub-question. By undergoing an extensive literature review (see Chapter 3) and data collection and analysis process (see Chapter 6), the concept of the RA was developed. This concept established a link between the CA and SD. Building on the work of Walker and McLean (2013), the RA expands on the understanding of capabilities and SD. It provides insights into the gains of individuals and how these individuals can contribute to the broader concept of SD. Walker and McLean (2013) argue that the capabilities identified in their study, referred to as the Personal Capabilities Index (PCI), possess a more universal nature, whereas the specific functionings of those capabilities may vary depending on the context, such as in different countries. The RA framework extends the PCI developed by Walker and McLean (2013) in the context of SD and adopts their assertion that the capabilities identified in their research may have universal applicability, while the respective functionings are more contingent upon the specific context of South Africa.

Scholarships to study abroad have existed for several decades and extensive research has been dedicated to this topic (see Sections 1.2.3 and 2.3.5). In the past, criticism has been directed at the paucity of research regarding the benefits to the scholars' home countries (see Section 1.3). This research endeavoured to fill the identified knowledge gap by investigating the essential proficiencies alumni must possess to make meaningful contributions to Sustainable Development (SD), while critically assessing the efficacy of scholarships in augmenting these proficiencies. Furthermore, the study expanded our understanding of the scholarship framework and its potential role in advancing Sustainable Development within the country, considering existing regulatory mechanisms.

7.3 Contribution of the study

This research was undertaken to address the existing research gap concerning the contribution of scholarships to SD. Through interviews, document analysis, and review of existing literature, the study aimed to provide valuable insights into the correlation between scholarships to study abroad and SD.

7.3.1 Scholarships and their alignment with SD

In answering the first research sub-question, Chapter 5 discussed the structure of these scholarships and how this structure may impact their contribution to SD. The following are the main findings of the study:

1. **Global equality:** The objective of the SDGs and the NDP in South Africa is to promote global equality. However, Section 5.4 revealed that the structure of scholarships offered in the country does not effectively contribute to reducing inequality. Instead, it further exacerbates the existing disparities in South Africa. Section 5.3 shed light on the challenges faced by applicants from disadvantaged backgrounds in terms of specific scholarships, namely the Kadar Asmal Fellowship and the China Scholarship Council scholarships. Although these scholarships claim to prioritise previously disadvantaged groups within the country, their eligibility criteria present significant obstacles for such applicants. The contradiction between the official goal of these scholarships to contribute to SD and their actual implementation becomes apparent due to their elitist eligibility criteria and limited availability of funding, as discussed in Sections 5.2 and 5.3.
2. **Interests of the host governments:** Examination of the chosen scholarships' structure revealed that these scholarships are not solely established to contribute to SD in South Africa, but also serve the interests of the host governments. Some of the scholarships appear to be designed to promote the host country's agenda, such as fostering international relations or equipping alumni with skills required by foreign companies. The South African government supports these scholarships not only by promoting them but also by providing financial assistance. While the implications of this support can be questioned, it may still yield benefits for South Africa's SD if alumni return equipped with the necessary capabilities.
3. **Relationship building:** The data analysis indicated that scholarship recipients maintain strong connections with their host countries and establish long-term relationships with individuals from overseas. These scholarships can be viewed as platforms that facilitate the formation of ties between recipients and international alumni. While these relationships benefit the host countries, they also benefit South Africa. The SDGs emphasise the importance of global partnerships in achieving SD (UN, 2015a). Moreover, the RA concept employed in the study emphasised the significance of building and sustaining strategic relationships and networks with organisations and governments (see Table 7 on page 116), aligning to promote partnerships. The period spent abroad enables alumni to cultivate relationships with individuals from different nations, potentially leading to partnerships or collaborations later in their lives. This plays a role in promoting SD by aligning with the SDGs and the objectives of RAs. The scholarships foster these goals and facilitate international exchanges among various

countries. This finding is supported by the fact that the alumni not only interact with individuals from their host countries but also encounter individuals from other countries across the world.

4. **Return home policies:** Among the selected scholarships, only the Fulbright scholarship demonstrated robust measures to encourage alumni to return to their home country. This finding may not come as a surprise, as the Fulbright scholarship aims to strengthen ties with South Africa, necessitating the return of alumni to their country. However, even the Fulbright scholarship only ensures that scholars cannot return to the United States; it does not contain measures to guarantee their continued presence in their home country. Other scholarships, such as the KAF, allow their alumni to stay and work in the host country, indicating that the interests behind these scholarships are not purely altruistic.

   Host countries strive to attract young scholars to study and work within their borders. Although the brain drain was not a focus of the study, it underscores that the structure of these scholarships does not always align to ensure SD in the home countries of the alumni. If scholarships permit alumni to remain and work in their host countries, they may contribute to SD there but not in South Africa. Considering that SDG Target 4b explicitly aims to enable individuals from the Global South to pursue studies abroad, it would be incongruous if these alumni were being utilised to support SD elsewhere rather than in their own countries. The presence of alumni abroad not only benefits the economy of the host country but also poses a threat to SD in South Africa by depleting the pool of qualified individuals (see Section 1.1.3).

   In most cases, the South African government does not provide funding for these scholarships, thus limiting its ability to enforce return policies (see Section 5.4). Only scholarships fully funded by the South African government incorporate measures to encourage alumni to return. However, compelling alumni to return to their home country was criticised in Section 5.4, as it contradicts the goal of enhancing individual freedom. In the long run, many expatriates have a finite period during which they plan to stay abroad, often intending to amass sufficient resources for a better life in their home countries and subsequently return.

5. **Investment in the host country:** The study posits that financial investments made in these scholarships are predominantly directed towards the host countries (see Section 5.2). While these scholarships enable South African students to pursue education abroad, foreign universities benefit from increased funding and a significant influx of

international students. As mentioned in Section 2.3.1, this serves as a means to enhance the rankings of universities and contribute to the host country's higher education system. Although it appears to be an investment in the SD of South Africa, it simultaneously represents an investment in the higher education systems of the host countries.

6. **Creation of dependency:** Given that the SDGs do not explicitly aim to concurrently enhance the local higher education system, there is a potential risk of impeding the development of South Africa's HE system. If these scholarships were the sole investment in higher education as implied by the SDGs, this could foster dependency on foreign governments. While the study reports that studying abroad contributes to the acquisition of required capabilities by the RA, South Africa should not rely solely on foreign countries to develop these capabilities. For instance, gaining an understanding of other nations and cultures is a significant benefit of studying abroad. However, South Africa itself boasts a diverse array of cultures within its borders. Instead of promoting and investing in sending scholars overseas to acquire intercultural understanding, efforts should be directed towards ensuring that scholars gain these capabilities within their own country. This may involve enhancing the capacity of South Africa's higher education institutions. The strategies for achieving this objective extend beyond the scope of the study and necessitate further exploration in future research.

7.3.2 Scholarships as a mechanism to create RAs

Analysing the capabilities of alumni uncovered the contribution of degree mobility to SD, thus answering the second research question. Using the concept of the RA as an analytical tool for examining the data led to the conclusion that degree mobility possesses the potential to positively impact SD efforts.

1. **Self-preservation:** This RA capability emerged as notable in terms of degree mobility, suggesting that individuals are willing to compromise in certain situations to secure a life of value, both presently and in the future. However, it is worth noting that this particular capability did not emerge strongly during the interviews. Notably, Dineo's decision to remain in Ireland for employment purposes despite her desire to return home demonstrates the influence of self-preservation (see Section 6.1.1). This finding carries significant implications, as it highlights the presence of factors contributing to brain drain, which the government should strive to mitigate where feasible (see Section 7.3).

2. **Self-care:** Leaving their home country and experiencing life elsewhere, where they were unfamiliar with the people, culture, and way of living, resulted in personal growth and allowed some alumni, such as Nadiim and David, to pursue their personal goals. Living a life, one values is at the heart of HD, which is an integral part of SD (see Section 3.1.3.2). Degree mobility seems to enhance the capabilities of the individual, which has the potential to improve one's well-being. It was discussed in Section 3.2.2.1 that the responsibility towards one's well-being extends beyond individual benefit, as it is directly connected with other responsibilities, such as the well-being of society via career security, and is an essential part of contributing towards SD.
3. **Social and collective struggle:** The concept of the RA emphasised the significance of public reasoning, as it considers the needs of all individuals in South Africa. The experience of degree mobility appears to remove individuals from their comfort zones, raising their awareness and sensitivity towards the needs of others.
4. **Knowledge and skills:** Time abroad allowed alumni to view the world differently and learn about the culture of their own country and of their host country. Exposure to different countries and their practices fostered a greater openness among individuals, enabling them to embrace change and novel ideas. While the transfer of academic knowledge is an integral part of South African universities, degree mobility has demonstrated the capacity to cultivate an open-minded approach and foster a critical perspective. It encourages individuals to question and re-evaluate previously accepted notions, expanding their intellectual horizons through international exposure (see Sections 2.3.4 and 4.4). This brings into question whether this epistemic shift occurs in a way that benefits SD in South Africa. Answering this question is beyond the scope of the study and would require a study focusing solely on this epistemic shift and its potential advantages for SD.
5. **Emotional reflexivity:** The experience of being away from South Africa during their postgraduate studies appears to have fostered increased empathy and compassion among the alumni. Living in a different country without the support of family and friends presented a challenge for some alumni. However, this unfamiliar environment also encouraged them to be more open-minded and empathetic, leading to the generation of stronger connections with the people around them.
6. Stepping out of their comfort zones and immersing themselves in a foreign country had a significant impact on the social interactions of the alumni, resulting in greater **compassion** towards others. This development is notable because it aligns with the

notion of RA, which includes a responsibility towards society. The enhancement of emotional reflexivity through degree mobility can be seen as a valuable contribution to SD.

7. **Affiliation:** The opportunity to study abroad often confers privileges that can foster a sense of altruism and compassion towards others. Pursuing a degree in a foreign country not only encompasses academic pursuits but also provides individuals with the chance to interact with people from diverse backgrounds and gain a deeper understanding of various worldviews and cultures. The scholarships offered for studying abroad can play a significant role in promoting cross-cultural understanding and contribute to addressing issues of xenophobia and racism in South Africa. By exposing individuals to different perspectives and fostering a greater appreciation for foreigners, these scholarships have the potential to cultivate a more inclusive and tolerant society in South Africa.
8. **Resource awareness:** The alumni who primarily studied in China and Japan demonstrated a greater awareness of the importance of environmental stewardship and maintaining cleanliness within the country. This heightened sense of responsibility towards nature emerged as a prominent theme among these individuals. The observation of contrasting environments, with Japan demonstrating cleanliness and China demonstrating environmental degradation, provided the alumni with valuable insight into potential outcomes for South Africa. It served as a powerful illustration of the possible consequences that South Africa could face in terms of environmental conditions. This finding is intertwined with the acquisition of knowledge and skills, as it pertains to understanding the advantages and disadvantages that can arise from observing other countries' situations. In the study, an important question is raised regarding whether a complete degree programme is necessary to comprehend environmental issues in foreign countries, or if shorter exchange programs could be sufficient for fostering such understanding.

In contrast to the previously mentioned capabilities, the study unearthed an intriguing observation indicating that the subsequent capabilities were discerned to have been adversely affected by some of the alumni by the experience of degree mobility:

1. **Perseverance**: Alumni frequently encountered the harsh realities of unemployment and an environment that presented fewer opportunities compared to their host countries.

These circumstances led to a tangible frustration and a diminished sense of optimism among some alumni. This loss of hope, coupled with an inability to inspire hope in others, potentially poses a hindrance to Sustainable Development (SD) initiatives within South Africa.

2. **Informed Decision-making**: While it has been acknowledged that degree mobility enriches individuals' comprehension of both national and international contexts, it is imperative to acknowledge that not all aspects of the knowledge acquired by alumni during their overseas experiences were entirely aligned with an accurate understanding of local contexts. This discrepancy is exemplified in Chapter 6, where returning alumni from Japan perceived the country as a role model in environmental protection. However, their perspective appeared to be grounded primarily on observable aspects, without delving into comprehensive research, leading to a somewhat simplistic understanding that relied predominantly on somewhat simplistic observations rather than well-informed, researched knowledge.
3. **Knowledge and skills**: Although the study acknowledges that alumni acquired valuable knowledge and skills during their international experiences, it also unveiled a notable gap in their understanding of their respective professional fields upon returning to their home country. While they possessed insights into research and academia within their host country, their awareness of similar dynamics in their home country appeared comparatively limited. This disparity may have contributed to an elevated perception of the value of their time spent abroad, potentially overshadowing the realization that comparable opportunities for growth and development could have been equally attainable within the context of South Africa.

The previous chapter emphasised the divergence between alumni who exhibit a stronger inclination towards responsibility towards nature and those who prioritise other responsibilities. This suggests that scholarships may not be able to cultivate all aspects of responsibility equally but, depending on the discipline, can enhance specific responsibilities necessary for SD. While the acquisition of capabilities associated with personal well-being, societal well-being, and ex-ante responsibility may not appear directly linked to certain academic disciplines such as tourism, economics, teaching, or management, it is noteworthy that the responsibility towards nature appears to be more closely aligned with specific fields of study, particularly environmental science, and climate change.

Alumni who pursued degrees related to the environment demonstrated a robust embodiment of the capabilities required for assuming responsibility towards nature. This indicates that certain disciplines or programs accentuate and cultivate these capabilities more effectively than others, rather than these capabilities being universally fostered across disciplines. However, due to the limitations of the study, a detailed exploration of whether these capabilities emerged similarly in structured degree programs in South Africa was not possible.

Further research could provide valuable insights into the redirection of international scholarship resources towards funding local scholarships that articulate knowledge and practices tailored to the local context. This approach would not only enable more scholarships due to the difference in study expenses as discussed in Section 3.1.3.1 but also facilitate the transmission of knowledge about the local environmental context, as discussed in Section 2.12. This demonstrates the complexities of creating SD using scholarships to study abroad.

7.3.3 Solutions for scholarship challenges

The study was able to uncover some challenges relating to international scholarships which could be eliminated through the following suggestions:

1) **Management of the expectations of the alumni:** Some alumni mentioned that they were promised a successful career upon their return to their home country and resigned from jobs with the expectation that a qualification from abroad would accelerate their careers. However, when they returned, they were frustrated by the limited impact of the qualification from abroad and the unexpected struggle to find jobs. The pre-departure events aimed at providing useful information to scholars could include highlighting these challenges to potential candidates[29].
2) **Degree alignment:** The provision of improved alignment between degree choices made available by scholarships and what is needed in South Africa would enhance their relevance. Moreover, due to the limited number of scholarships, sending scholars abroad to study fields that could have been studied in South Africa may have less impact. Instead, focusing on degrees that can provide the knowledge needed in South Africa but not taught here may have a more significant impact on SD.

[29]As the study did not include the collection of data regarding information events, it is not known what information was provided to alumni at these events. However, based upon the findings of the interviews, alumni had not understood or been properly informed that their return could potentially be difficult. If this is usually relayed during information events, its manner of reporting may have to change so that potential candidates become aware of the risks.

The implementation of a re-entry programme designed to support alumni upon their return to South Africa: This programme would aim to assist alumni in leveraging their acquired capabilities and effectively transitioning into a RA role. An essential aspect of this support system would be the facilitation of job placements and career development opportunities for alumni, thereby enhancing their sense of career security as a capability of resilience, enabling them to contribute actively to their respective fields. Additionally, the re-entry programme could foster connections between alumni and professionals from diverse fields, promoting social and collective struggle as well as interdisciplinary collaboration.

Considering the South African government's aim to increase the number of scholarships, responsible stakeholders must strategize regarding the maximisation of the benefits of these programs. This could involve exploring ways to optimise the impact of scholarships, such as aligning them with comprehensive support mechanisms such as the proposed re-entry programme. By providing ongoing assistance and guidance to returning alumni, these programs could aid in creating an environment that facilitates the conversion of capabilities into practical action, ultimately promoting the realisation of SD goals in South Africa.

3) **Collection of more data:** More information about returning alumni may provide better insights into what individuals can achieve. It would be valuable to gather data regarding alumni employment, social engagements, and locations in South Africa. This information could provide a better insight into the events following their graduation. While the study did not deal with the concept of brain drain, this could harm the SD of countries in the Global South if scholarships engage highly qualified people to study abroad and these individuals do not return following graduation.

7.4 Limitations of the study and recommendations

The first limitation of the study was establishing the timeframe and temporality of functionings and whether they were an outcome of studying abroad or existed before going abroad. The narratives shared by the alumni regarding their experiences abroad and upon their return led to the identification of certain enhanced functionings resulting from their degree mobility. It would have been valuable to compare their capabilities related to the RA before their departure and after their return. However, the chosen data collection method did not permit the determination of whether these capabilities were pre-existing. To undertake such an analysis,

a longitudinal study would be required, encompassing the assessment of capabilities both before the individuals' departure and upon their return. Considering that individuals participating in degree mobility typically spend a minimum of two years abroad (corresponding to the duration of a master's degree), collecting this type of data would have exceeded the available timeframe for data collection, which would have been outside the scope of the study.

The study has made a significant contribution to the field of SD and the CA by introducing the concept of the RA and analysing the potential contribution of scholarships towards SD in South Africa. However, it is important to note that broad claims cannot be made regarding the overall impact of scholarships on SD. The capabilities gained by scholarship recipients while studying abroad can vary considerably depending on factors such as their nationality, culture, upbringing, previous education, and host country. Given the qualitative nature of the study and its limited sample size, it is challenging to generalise the findings to the broader South African context.

The choice of contacting individuals via email and conducting interviews and surveys online introduced certain constraints that could impact alumni participation. Specifically, individuals facing limitations in accessing data might have refrained from responding to the questionnaires, and consequently, they may not have indicated their willingness to participate in online interviews. While the researcher also offered to conduct the interviews via a phone call to avoid the exclusion based on a lack of data, this constraint was not entirely avoidable due to the lack of direct access to the alumni's contact details. Getting in touch with the alumni was only possible through the respective offices sending out the emails with the link to the survey, which made a participation for alumni with limited access to data nearly impossible. Additionally, Covid-19 regulations, along with financial and time constraints, would not have made it possible to conduct the surveys and interviews in person.

The generalisability of the results is constrained by a reliance on self-reported data from alumni. To enhance the rigour of the study, efforts were made to validate the data through a review of the extant literature and interviews with scholarship directors. For future research, it would be valuable to incorporate the perspective of employers in the data collection process. This would provide insights into the capabilities observed in alumni and their potential to contribute to SD compared to non-scholarship recipients. By expanding the scope of data collection, a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of scholarships on SD in South Africa could be achieved.

Throughout the data analysis process, it appeared as if there could be differences in the outcomes of individual scholarships. Due to the limited number of participants in each scholarship, the study could not draw a definite conclusion regarding such differences. For this reason, it is not possible to generalise or make an argument for a particular scholarship's structure. A larger, more representative sample size is required to validate this assumption, which could be achieved through future research.

7.5 Conclusion

The initial challenge of this research was identifying a theoretical framework that would enable the analysis of the contributions of the alumni to SD. Learning about the CA and PCI provided a new perspective and a foundation for a conceptual framework specifically tailored to this research: the RA. By focusing on creating more freedoms for the individual and ensuring the well-being of current and future generations through a RA, this concept facilitates SD without excessive regulations or constraints on individual freedom. With this framework, this research gained insight into the capabilities that degree mobility enhances and determines the scholarships' contribution to SD.

In conclusion, it is essential to acknowledge that the SDGs only tangentially address higher education in their objectives. While scholarships for studying abroad can cultivate crucial capabilities for RA, they remain accessible only to a privileged few, primarily elite postgraduate scholars. Furthermore, these scholarships carry the risk of brain drain, potentially exacerbating the loss of local talent. Instead of sending individuals abroad, a more prudent approach would be to prioritise the strengthening of local higher education systems to develop RAs within South Africa. This approach would entail investing in the local education infrastructure, fostering academic excellence, and promoting research and innovation in line with the country's specific needs.

This research contributes to the ongoing discourse surrounding the extension of scholarships. Numerous scholars have questioned the necessity of scholarships for studying abroad as a means to foster SD. The current study suggests that scholarships indeed possess the potential to contribute to SD but require careful planning, structured implementation, and a focus on the scholars' return and integration into the local context. It is crucial to avoid mindlessly extending scholarships without considering the specific needs and priorities of South Africa. Instead, a deliberate and tailored approach should be adopted that aligns with the country's requirements.

By adopting such an approach, scholarships can be effectively utilised as a means to advance SD and address the unique challenges and opportunities within the local context.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Online Survey

Your experiences as a returning Fulbright Scholar in South Africa.

I am currently doing my PhD at Rhodes University in Grahamstown. My thesis focuses on South Africans graduating from institutions abroad and there contribute to the development of South Africa. I am inviting graduates, such as yourself, to participate in my research. Would you be interested in participating in my study by answering this anonymous questionnaire and opting for a follow-up interview? (you can express your interest at the end of the survey).
The questionnaire asks you to provide details about the scholarship you received and focuses on your career trajectory upon returning to South Africa.
Informed consent:
By participating and submitting the survey, you agree that you have read the given information and confirm that the above information has been explained to you in a language that you understand, and are aware of this document's contents. You also agree that you fully understand the expectation during the research and that you have not experienced any pressure to participate. You agree that your participation in this PhD study is voluntary.

You are aware that:
1. The purpose of the research project is to find out about how graduates from abroad can contribute to the development of South Africa.
2. Rhodes University has given ethical clearance to this research project, and you have seen/ may request to see the clearance certificate.
3. By participating in this research project, you will be contributing to a better understanding of how graduates from abroad can contribute towards social change and development in South Africa.
4. You will participate in the project by filling in a questionnaire.
5. Your participation is entirely voluntary and should you at any stage wish to withdraw from participating further, and you may do so without any negative consequences.
6. You will not be compensated for participating in the research.
7. The researcher intends publishing the research results in the form of her PhD thesis and academic journal articles. However, confidentiality and anonymity of records will be maintained, and your name and identity will not be revealed since the questionnaire is anonymous.
8. Any further questions that you might have concerning the research or your participation will be answered by Carina Strohmeier (carina.b.strohmeier@gmail.com).
9. By participating in this survey, you are not waiving any legal claims, rights, or remedies.

* Indicates required question

Survey: Your experiences as a returning scholar in South Africa.

1. Which scholarship did fund your degree?

2. What degree did the scholarship fund?*

Bachelor
Master
PhD
Other:

3. At which university did you graduate (funded by the scholarship)?*

4. What year did you graduate?*

5. Has the scholarship a clause that entails that you have to return to your home country?

Yes.
No.
I do not know.
Other:

6. Are you currently residing in South Africa?*

Yes
Skip to question 7

No
Skip to question 8

Returning to South Africa

7. When did you return to South Africa*

Straight after my graduation
1-6 months after my graduation
7-12 months after my graduation
> 12 months

Skip to question 10

South Africans who returned for a period of time after completing qualification.

8. Did you spend some time in South Africa after finishing your scholarship program?*

Yes
Skip to question 9

No
Skip to question 20

Time spent in South Africa

9. How many years did you spend in South Africa after graduating abroad?*

< one year
1-2 years
3-4 years
> 4 years

Your career after studying abroad.

10. Are you currently employed?*

Yes
Skip to question 14

No
Skip to question 11

Job situation

11. Are you currently looking for a job?*

Yes
Skip to question 12

No
Skip to question 14

Job situation

12. How long have you been looking for a job?*

Job situation in South Africa

13. Have you worked in South Africa after your graduation abroad?*

Yes
Skip to question 14

No
Skip to question 20

Employment in South Africa

14. How long did it take you to find a job after returning from your time abroad?*

I immediately found a job.
1-3 months
4-6 months
7-12 months
> one year

Employment since graduation

15. Please fill in the positions you had since graduating with the your scholarship program (with time period). Alternatively you can upload an anonymous CV (it will only be used for the purpose of this research). *

16. Please upload your CV (voluntary).

Experiences as an alumni from abroad.

How strongly do you agree / disagree with the following statements?
Rank 0 to 10; 10 for I fully agree, 0 for I fully disagree and 5 for neutral

17. I can transfer my knowledge gained through my studies abroad to the South African context. *

Mark only one oval.
I fully disagree 0 to 10 (I fully agree)

18. How is your career benefitting from your experiences abroad? Please elaborate.*
19. If you had to make the choice of studying abroad now, would you do it again? Please elaborate. *

Thank you for participating in my survey.

I really appreciate your participation towards a study that aims to create better understanding of how people who graduated abroad can contribute to the development in South Africa. However, there is an additional step for my research. I am looking for alumni who are willing to be interviewed by me. The interview will be about your personal experiences abroad and your return to South Africa, I endeavour to provide you with anonymity.

20. Please enter your e-mail address if you are willing to participate in a follow-up interview. The interview will take no longer than an hour and will take place on an electronic platform that suits you. (your e-mail address will exclusively be used for this purpose)*

21. Please enter your e-mail address if you want to receive the findings of this study. (your e-mail address will exclusively be used for this purpose)

Appendix B: Interview Questions Alumni

Example of Interview Questions Alumni
(adjusted according to scholarship / degree / work experience)

Starting with your experiences of studying abroad:

1) Why did you decide to study abroad?
   a. Why did you decide to apply especially for the Fulbright Program?
   b. Did you apply for any other programmes? Did you have the option to study in South Africa?
2) Why did you choose to study Education? What especially appealed to you about this profession?
   a. Why did you decide to study this course abroad? (maybe answered in 1)
3) In your view what qualities are most important in your profession?
   a. Do you think your university in the US prepared you with the necessary qualities for your profession?
   b. Have your views on the profession changed while being abroad?
4) Tell me about your experiences abroad. How did the experience impact you personally?
   a. And how did it impact you professionally?
   b. Have you ever considered staying abroad? Or returning at some point?

After returning to SA and finding a job:

5) How has your university education and training in Education abroad equipped you for your professional career in South Africa?
   a. Where there any areas in which your professional education abroad did not prepare you adequately?
6) What excites you about working in your profession?
   a. What made you choose the job you are having at the moment?
   b. Do you feel you're making a difference with your daily work?
      i. Difference in means of people around you, younger and future generations, the environment, policies …
6) What do you consider a good professional life?
   a. What do you value in your professional life and why?
7) What are your hopes for your future professional life?
8) Imagine you are sitting in an advisory panel for the South African government and you have to argue for or against funding to send scholars abroad to achieve a degree. What would you argue?
   a. If you had to make the decision to invest more in the South African Higher Education system or scholarships to study abroad, how would this impact your argument?
9) What does the term "sustainability" mean for you?
   a. What role do you think the profession in education plays with regards to sustainable development?
   b. What moral or ethical responsibilities do you think your profession has towards society in this regard?
10) Thank you. Is there anything else you want to add to the topic? Any experiences, thoughts, stories from your time abroad or returning to SA?

Appendix C: Interview questions staff members

1) Better background for me: You are the Program Coordinator for Fulbright in South Africa. What exactly does your position entail? What are your daily duties?
2) When you are reviewing an application for a full degree in the US, what are you looking for? Who gets invited for an interview?
3) In the interview: What skills / experiences does a future Fulbright scholar need to have?
4) What would you say is the main aim of the Fulbright scholarship?
   What is the biggest achievement of programs like Fulbright in sending scholars abroad to achieve a degree?
5) During the time abroad, do they have any support from the Fulbright program? Regular meet ups with other scholars, …?
6) Do the alumni get any support for their return to SA? While still being in SA also after their return? And if yes how does it look like?
    a. Are you personally in touch with your alumni? What are your observations when they are returning? Any change / growth? How do they manage to fit in?
7) How do you handle people who want to stay in the US? What would happen in case someone stays / returns before the two-year deadline? How do you observe this?

Appendix D: Consent Form

Studying abroad and the impact on the home country's sustainable development
Centre for Higher Education Research and Learning

Consent to take part in the above mentioned research

- I ___(name to be filled in)_____voluntarily agree to participate in the above mentioned research study.
- I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question without any consequences of any kind.
- I confirm that the researcher explained to me the purpose and the nature of the study and she gave me the opportunity to ask any questions related to the study and the planned interview. The content of the study was given in written form as well as discussed verbally.
- I understand that participation in the above mentioned research involves talking about my own experiences and thoughts related to my studies abroad and my current position and thoughts about my gained capabilities.
- I also confirm that I am aware that this study will not directly benefit me in any way.
- I, furthermore, agree that the researcher is allowed to record my interview.
- I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially.
- I understand that in any report on the results of this research my identity will remain anonymous. This will be done by changing my name and disguising any details of my interview which may reveal my identity or the identity of people I speak about.
- I also acknowledge that there is still a risk that people might be able to identify my identity according to my given answers even though the researcher is using a pseudonym.
- I understand that disguised extracts from my interview may be quoted in the researcher's dissertation, academic conference presentations and published papers.

_____
Signature