

Dear Members of the College of Fellows

Professor Haroon Borat

I would like to nominate Professor Haroon Borat for selection as a fellow. He is Professor of Economics and Director of the Development Policy Research Unit at the University of Cape Town; a Non-Resident Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institution and a Research Fellow at IZA, the Institute for the Study of Labour in Bonn. Prof. Borat holds the DST/NRF SARCHI Chair in Economic Growth, Poverty and Inequality Research. He currently serves on the Presidential Economic Advisory Council (PEAC), established by President Ramaphosa to generate new ideas for economic growth, job creation and addressing poverty. He sits on the editorial advisory board of the journals: *World Bank Economic Review* and *Development Southern Africa*, and is a regular referee for the discipline's leading journals including *Journal of Development Economics*, *World Development* and *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics*.

Professor Borat is that rare breed of an economist who is able to span both the applied, policy world and that of academia. This is witnessed in his variety of public roles ranging from high-level advisory work to government departments and multi-lateral institutions, to public lectures and seminar presentations at the world's leading universities including for example Columbia, Cornell, Yale and Oxford University. Prof. Borat's ability to seamlessly switch between conducting hard empirical analysis and providing evidence-based policy advice that is accessible to a broader audience, has had a direct impact on the discipline both within and outside of UCT. The research he has undertaken has attempted variously, to add methodological, analytical and also policy value to the specific research question at hand. Anecdotal evidence reveals that his research feeds into policy decisions and pronouncements at the highest level, including Cabinet memoranda, State of the Nation Addresses and legislative promulgation. Indeed, the arc of his work, for example on minimum wages which, on the one hand is published in the world's leading Agricultural Economics journal – but simultaneously has impacted on the South African government's policy decisions on sectoral minimum laws – is a powerful example of this 'research with policy impact' that Professor Borat is perhaps best known for.

Prof. Borat holds an NRF B2 rating, and with a total citation estimate of over 6400, and an *h*-index is 43; he is one of the most cited South African economists globally. His work has been hugely influential in policy making in respect of poverty, inequality and labour market issues in South Africa. He is also highly invested in contributing to Science Communication, in the context of public engagement via the press, and a strong social media presence. He is possibly one of the more recognised names globally, within the development economics fraternity. His research outputs are excellent. He has, *inter alia*, published a significant number of research papers in high impact journals; built networks of researchers to advance the frontiers of knowledge in labour markets and poverty; supervised an impressive group of students; worked collaboratively with the leading international networks of researchers in his field of expertise, and leveraged his NRF funding by raising a considerable amount of research funds.

Borat's work has three key discernible strands: Firstly there is a long-standing focus on the empirics of household poverty and inequality dynamics in South Africa. Secondly, a consistent and expansive research programme for a period close on 25

years – on developing country labour markets. Thirdly, and possibly much more recently – has been a relatively new avenue of research on trying to undertake applied work in the area of economic complexity. In each of the strands, his *modus operandi* is the application of econometric techniques to large survey datasets.

His early work on poverty and inequality dynamics, much of it in collaboration with Professor Murray Leibbrandt, served as the first empirical work on post-apartheid survey datasets examining poverty and inequality dynamics in South Africa. It is fair to say that this body of work – which garnered the Alan Pifer book Award and spawned a series of journal articles – has served as the intellectual seedbed for all the future empirical work by economists on poverty and inequality issues in South Africa.

His rich vein of research on labour markets in South Africa rank him possibly as the best known economist working on South African labour market issues. His work has ranged from estimating the gender wage gap in South Africa, to a more careful econometric assessment of the contribution of union membership to wages across the distribution. Most notably though, he was at the forefront of the debates in the early 2000s around labour regulation in South Africa, using his multiple publications – an article in the *International Labor Review* was a stand-out – to build an empirical argument for estimating the level of labour regulation in South Africa. For a debate that has often been mired more in rhetoric than in science, his contribution here has been profound. More recently, and in keeping with Bhorat's attempt to remain at the forefront of trying to analyse changing labour market dynamics in South Africa, he has sought to understand the phenomenon of wage polarisation in South Africa. Using a combination of unique data-sets as well as fairly novel econometric techniques, this work feeds into the global labour market literature on how the task content of occupations are fundamentally changing the nature of work, as well as the returns to employment.

Of major import however, has been Bhorat's contribution to our understanding of minimum wages in South Africa and beyond. Specifically, he is widely considered to be one of the leading experts in the world on understanding minimum wages and their impact in the developing country context. This research has elicited a significant debate and discussion within the academic and policy community, and the ongoing body of work is viewed as a novel intellectual contribution to the South African (and arguably developing country literature), ultimately published in global Economics journals such *American Journal of Agricultural Economics*, *The World Bank Research Observer*, *Labour*, *Review of Development Economics*, *IZA-JOLD*, and *Industrial & Labor Relations Review*, and is forthcoming in the *British Journal of Industrial Relations*. In addition, he served as co-editor in turn for an *IZA-JOLD* global Special Issue on *Minimum Wages In Developing Countries*. Apart from the minimum wage impact work, Prof. Bhorat and his colleagues have opened up a new area of research globally, on measuring and understanding the impact of minimum wage violation in the developing world – via the development of a Multiple Index of Violation (MVI). The MVI is a novel index applying the Alkire-Foster method of measuring multidimensional poverty, and uses principal components to check the robustness of the measure. Bhorat and his colleagues thus remain leaders in the field in terms of modelling the determinants of violation of labour laws by firms, providing innovative econometric solutions to the problems of endogeneity inherent in this type of work. The work remains at the forefront of such

research in South Africa, and has contributed to similar discussions and debates globally. The MVI or its antecedent, the V-alpha index, has now been applied globally in 24 countries around the world: Chile, Ecuador, Honduras, Namibia, Kenya, Tanzania, Zambia, Mauritius, Comoros, Seychelles, Czech Republic, Italy, Hungary, Poland, Lithuania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Estonia, Bulgaria, Romania, Latvia, China, India, and Jordan.

Prof. Bhorat has successfully developed and nurtured global partnerships with a distinctive African lens – valuably attracting and connecting people from all over the world. His international stature is underscored by his many distinguished collaborations with international experts, and the fact that he is consistently producing research and participating in academic arenas and networks that position South Africa within ongoing global debates around economic growth and development in the economics. He is also an exemplar of engaged scholarship.

Prof. Bhorat is one of UCT's foremost researchers, and probably South Africa's most influential policy researcher, certainly in the economics space. His research has considerable impact both locally and internationally and he is making a difference to South Africa through this work. He is a core part of a very strong centre of excellence in evidence-based policy making at UCT. His particular contribution to the research culture is to make clear by example that one can make crucial national policy contributions through rigorous and strong academic work.

His election to a Fellowship will be a fitting recognition of his enormous contribution to labour economics, poverty and inequality studies.