

## **The NDP is nothing but lip service: the worst curse SA has ever seen**

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10 July 2017, 11:45

Not so long ago, I read a thought-provoking column by a young South African who is a Commonwealth Scholar, studying towards a doctorate in the United Kingdom. Metjie Makgoba in his latest writing said institutions of higher learning provide avenues for students to acquire social, cultural and symbolic capitals that set the tone for their professional and economic development. I could not agree more with his view of tertiary education.

As we already have the knowledge, young people, especially those previously classified as disadvantaged, now have access to basic education. And high enrolment rates at basic education level can only suggest one thing – increase in applications for space at tertiary institutions. Although the quality of education is still a thorny issue. The proportion of young people that attend tertiary, especially playing the race card, is too small to realise the much-sought-after equality and, therefore, cannot redress social imbalances if not tackled head-on. It is more than tormenting to see the economy growing at a snail's pace. It is even disheartening that young people are forced to take the back seat when it comes to the economy.

Shockingly, South Africa's labour market participation rate for young people is down at a mere 26%, less than half the equivalent participation in the United States, according to STANLIB. A miserable feeling as every nation depends on its youth for growth and development. There is no one who accounts for the sluggish role played by youth agencies. All we hear about is how the National Development Plan (NDP) aims to create about 11 million more jobs by 2030.

We hear about how the NDP plans to reduce the appalling unemployment rate to 6% by 2030. Indeed, all we hear is a journey we are forever about to take - long walk to freedom. There has been too little progress since the adoption of the NDP. President Jacob Zuma and his cabinet have, by this far, advanced obliviousness and negligence of the youth. During the previous State of the Nation Address (Sona), the president brilliantly dodged to explain the high rate of unemployment among youth. He only acknowledged it with no solution. The answer is straightforward. There is little care about the future of this country. Neglecting the developmental needs of the youth translates into turning a blind eye on the future.

So far, the NDP is doing well as a PR document than a solution to our increasing problems. It is just a lip service. The document was archived way before it could be inscribed. Achieving full employment, decent work and sustainable livelihoods are the only weapons we can use to advance our society and the youth. To create more jobs means encouraging young people to start businesses. And to start more businesses is to create an enabling environment for these youngsters to cut their teeth in the business world.

When President Zuma created the small business ministry in 2014, we thought 90% of the youth jobs were going to be created. But it remained a lip service and a broken promise. The economy lazily grew, seeing unemployment reaching its highest level in 13 years, increasing from 25.5% to 27.1%. All these could be possible if government agencies, such as the Small Enterprise Development Agency (Seda) and the National Youth Development Agency (NYDA) among many others, did not exist as impractical, unworkable structures that keep on discouraging our youth. I am very sad to witness the numbers of companies, opened by young people, close before their first anniversary. For the youth, starting businesses is not about passion or entrepreneurial spirit but to escape calamities of poverty. Over 70% of small businesses do not have business plan. I am unhappy about the large number of small enterprises that close due to non-compliance with the Companies and Intellectual Property Commission (CIPC). I am equally depressed by the growing number of graduates who lose hope of a better future on a daily basis.

These young people end up settling for mediocre and every job opportunity that is thrown at them even if it is not sustainable. We saw Seda rejecting to listen to thousands of business ideas. When asked for reasons, they are either understaffed or said to be only helping medium enterprises that have been running for years with at least ten or more workers. This is just a stunt to claim to have created more jobs. Parliamentary caucuses should address real developmental issues – the youth and the youth. There is just no any other promising route to development than the youth way.

The government needs to make sure that everyone has the opportunity to improve the quality of their life and pursue their dreams, always. In Parliament and touting speech we must listen to listen to a report that talks about how development finance institutions such as the Industrial Development Corporation (IDC) or Development Bank of Southern Africa and others have provided finance for small businesses in infrastructure and in many other high contributing sectors of the economy, such as agriculture and technology. Since the government has failed its youth, the young thought the private sector would assist. It is unfortunate that these private sectors buy out the small businesses. This is how the private sector sustains its monopoly, eliminating potential competition.

The youth should refuse to spend hours listening to a nation address that does not give them the figures of young businessmen and businesswomen who were trained by government agencies and have fruitfully exploited our rich minerals to make a living for themselves and thousands of other youth who are marginalised. We cannot applaud the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) because it creates short-term contract works. What an ordeal our youth have to grow through. They are introduced to an independent life where they are forced to settle for a shameful wage of less than R80 a day.

While we thought it was better than nothing, these EPWP workers later lose their jobs as contracts end. When we try to check, picking up litter, waving red flags on roads and controlling a stop and go is what the government of today calls job opportunities for thousands of youth. We can not only stand proudly on the international stage as a country that is rich in minerals whereas food security remains a challenge in South Africa. Until our youth exploit opportunities of making the most out of our wealth found in Cowpeas, nuts, tomatoes, pine trees, commodities, and all that, we are a disaster-prone nation. Job opportunities should be when the youth, from low levels of skills to the highest, can create their own employment opportunities from the treasures found in our country.

The curriculum, from basic education, should have entrepreneurship as a compulsory subject. This curriculum should extend to Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges. This can only mean one thing, the building of more TVET colleges to allow all students in.

After graduating, these young people will need to start their businesses. The government should fund them. If their ideas might not be good enough as the likes of Seda and NYDA claim, then they should be mentored until their business ideas are viable. Starting their businesses means they will need land, hence, the issue of land reform should be a matter of insistence. It should be to grow our economy more than it is to score political points. These restructurings would aid the country to reduce unemployment while strengthening food security and eradicating poverty, especially among the unskilled.

However, they will only be introduced by visionary leaders who occupy strategic positions not because of being loyal to the struggle but having necessary qualifications to lead in certain portfolios. Currently, we just see sleeping ministers and MECs who have been changed from one position to another, without mastering even one trade. It is certain that the creation of millions of entry-level factory jobs is the most important reason for the success of every developing country that has raised millions of people out of poverty.

Therefore, the government should come up with strategies earmarked for youth development in all respects. Imagine a society in which even a child born into the most desperate poverty can become a brain surgeon, a concert pianist or a sports hero. That is what we call equality for all. Our youth would only be the center of turnaround strategies if they were to be regarded as the future.