

COMMENT

Prioritise development

WORKERS employed in the Mayoral Cleaning Project, an Expanded Public Works Programme initiative, came under fire this week after questions were raised regarding the purpose of the programme, which is costing the Sol Plaatje Municipality millions of rand.

Many feel that the city is getting little back from the bucks it is spending.

Around 378 people are employed daily in the programme to clean up the city at a cost of a whopping R1.4 million a month.

While central government pays around R3.5 million a year towards these costs, the city funds the remainder with money collected from rates and service fees.

The workers have been accused of being “lazy”, while the city continues to look like a trash heap.

The workers in turn argue that they should receive the government’s minimum wage of R3 500 a month, and not the paltry R90 a day that they currently receive.

The issue raises a myriad of questions.

Should cleaning of the city be outsourced to a private company? Several businesses have launched clean-up programmes recently, raising the funds themselves or getting donations in an attempt to restore pride in the city. They argue that with R1.4 million a month they could not only keep the city sparkling clean but do a lot more.

It is not a secret that the programme is not properly managed.

And really, who wants to clean up other people’s mess and dirt in the boiling hot Kimberley sun for a R90 a day?

The EPWP, like many government projects, sounds very good in theory.

EPWP participants are able to work in different projects such as the Community Work Programme (CWP), Early Childhood Development programmes, home/community-based care programmes, extra school support programmes, Working on Fire, Working for Water and roads maintenance projects, among others.

The theory is that through various skills and training that the participants receive from the EPWP they stand a better chance to enter the formal job market and/or become entrepreneurs.

One wonders though who thought this through. Realistically, how many EPWP workers have gone on to open their own businesses or market their skills?

There isn’t much skill development in picking up other people’s litter.

With little prospects of future full-time employment – irrespective of how hard you work – it is little wonder that the EPWP cleaners are not more motivated. The programme makes the quarterly employment figures look good – almost 400 additional people have jobs. But let’s be honest, these aren’t sustainable jobs and shouldn’t even be considered when determining labour market statistics.

Instead of spending millions on creating temporary employment for a handful of the population, the Sol Plaatje Municipality would do much better to focus its efforts on attracting proper investment to the city, investments that can create sustainable employment. Our city councillors need to stop playing politics, trying to win support by offering measly jobs in return for votes, and start putting the real development of the city first before we become a ghost town.