

# Youth jobs: dream deferred?

## OPINION

Piwe Mkhize

I have always felt that white people have let down the ANC government and it is possible that this has something to do with racial prejudice and a white superiority complex.

I have great respect for the manner in which the ANC led the process to a peaceful settlement in South Africa. I equally admire the level of co-operation white people exhibited at a political level, thanks to international sanctions against the apartheid government.

Our journey as a 26-year-old non-racial nation is riddled with old problems, i.e. black incompetence and racial prejudice. I see this in the fact that the private sector, which is mainly controlled by white people, has not come to the party in creating jobs for young people at a level we would want to see.

I see some meaningful efforts coming from the public sector through the Department of Education and Training's Services Seta, as well as the Extended Public Works Programme, but I am not sure about the private sector's input. I would be very keen to see updated research findings in this area.

I do not think that the government's youth employment incentive has done much to tackle the problem of unemployment, and neither do I encounter civil-society structures that are in a position to challenge the private sector in this area. My personal attempts at pro-

posing some action through the Black Management Forum have not borne much fruit, as facilitators of the government youth employment incentive have reported the absence of incentives to drive the process forward.

"We find jobs for young people and nobody pays us for the work we do, and so we end up having to behave like labour brokers who take from the little the young worker gets paid," has been the observation made by some of the comrades who have headed the call by government to help facilitate job creation.

Meantime, the country's labour union movement is against labour brokers (however useful they may seem to ordinary people who are desperate for jobs). Therefore, in my experience, it has been problematic for black progressive structures which promote the black economic empowerment and job-creation agenda, to throw their weight behind the government youth job-creation initiative as it does not provide incentives for job placement service providers. It feels like an unfunded mandate. Job placement service providers should not feel like they are sucking the blood of the poorly paid worker.

The youth job-creation incentive that was started by government which pledged to pay the private sector for employing young people is not being well co-ordinated and its potential and anticipated impacts are questionable. Obviously, Covid-19 has not made the situation any better as many businesses have closed due to the negative impact of the pandemic lockdowns.

As I approach my middle-age, I am no better off than my parents of the

apartheid era. Like broken records, when we as parents meet in the streets and city corridors, we sing the old tune that was sung by our parents — many of our children finish matric, or get post-matric diplomas and degrees, but the job market is not absorbing them.

It is my view that some white business interest groups are not very excited about helping black youths find jobs, and the black government is not pushing the private sector hard enough in this direction. The hype that was generated when Cyril Ramaphosa came to power has not translated to much action and we are still waiting for the national youth conference which was promised.

I can say with confidence that the president's fight against gender-based violence and the government's commitment to women empowerment in the public sector have been great, but I do not know if the same can be said about creating jobs for young people.

It is my view that one of the problems is that white people are not grateful to the ANC government for having honoured its commitment to free enterprise. Capitalism is believed to be better positioned to create jobs, but I do not think it is happening fast enough. Sometimes it feels like a dream deferred owing to poor co-ordination, incompetence and carelessness from black people. And sometimes it feels that racial prejudice, and a white superiority complex that is insensitive to the needs of black people, are also the problems.

• Piwe Mkhize is a former Black Management Forum member and writes in his personal capacity.