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UNEMPLOYMENT CRISIS

DA questions use of newly proposed EPWP policy as means of job creation

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DA SPOKESPERSON on public works and infrastructure Samantha Graham-Mare has challenged the Department of Public Works and Infrastructure (DPWI) to desist from using the newly proposed Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) policy as a job creation strategy.

In a submission Graham-Mare made to Parliament on the draft EPWP policy, she said the DA was querying the attempt by the DPWI, through its new EPWP policy, to reposition temporary public employment programmes as a substitute for the ANC government's failure to grow the economy and create real jobs. She said this was not the answer to South Africa's unemployment crisis, and should be rejected.

This was in response to Public Works and Infrastructure Minister Patricia de Lille's call for the draft EPWP policy to create temporary work programmes that will offer short-term employment to vulnerable communities.

Graham-Mare was responding to a request for public comments on the EPWP policy by the DPWI, in which she made a formal submission on Monday calling for a forward-looking EPWP policy that leverages on the private sector to create value for participants through skills development.

She said the proposed business case for this new EPWP policy, while it was rightly anchored on "tackling the triple challenges of poverty, inequality and unemployment", remained inward-looking and redistributive in its orientation.

"Instead of pivoting outside the public sector to create value for EPWP participants, the policy envisages a



THE DA is querying the attempt by the Department of Public Works and Infrastructure, through its new Expanded Public Works Programme policy, to reposition temporary public employment programmes as a substitute for the ANC government's failure to grow the economy and create real jobs.

programme that revolves around an expansive role of the state in job creation, raising the risk of crowding out private enterprise participation in short-term Public Employment Programme (PEP) initiatives.

"In order to ensure that public employment programmes, of which the EPWP is one that creates value for participants and increases their rate of transition into the formal economy, the DA proposes that the policy should be anchored on these foundational pillars."

Graham-Mare asserted that PEPs are at the lower end of the employment policy continuum, and as such should ideally facilitate transition into long-term employment.

"While PEPs do play a critical role in providing transitory work opportunities for individuals and communities struggling with unemployment, the new EPWP policy must emphasise the point that unless South Africa embarks on a sustained programme

of structural economic reform, that unlocks investment, growth and jobs, it is counter-productive to expect that PEPs will be the answer to chronic long-term unemployment."

She insisted on the need to broaden public/private partnerships in the EPWP through collaboration incentives with the private sector, adding that since bankable skills should be at the centre of any PEP roll-out, it was recommended that priority should be given to high-value sectors such as the green economy, artisanal industries and early-stage ICT sector start-ups.

Graham-Mare stressed that the DA agreed with the broad effort to reform the EPWP, however, did not support the reform path recommended by the DPWI's new draft EPWP policy.

"In designing the PEPs, it is much more beneficial to innovate outside the public sector by broadening opportunities through the incorporation of the untapped potential of the private sector," she added.