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An investigation of the usefulness of training provided by the infrastructure sector of government's expanded public works programme in addressing youth unemployment in the Gauteng provinced

Madlala, Auralia

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this study was to investigate the usefulness of the training provided by, and the skills acquired from, the infrastructure sector of Government's Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) in enabling participants, in particular the youth, to get jobs elsewhere in the labour market post EPWP participation.

The notion of usefulness was measured in terms of whether the duration and type of training provided and the skills acquired tallied with the nature of youth unemployment and its main drivers in Gauteng and indeed the whole of South Africa.

The EPWP forms part of an array of initiatives that have been implemented to address two of the most pressing challenges in post-apartheid South Africa, unemployment and poverty, in general, and youth unemployment, in particular. With an emphasis on drawing large numbers of people into productive work so that they gain skills, through training and experience, as they work and thus, increase their employability after their programme participation, all spheres of government and state-owned enterprises have been enjoined to implement the EPWP.

The study focused on the Gauteng province which, despite being the most industrialised region of South Africa, faces one of the highest prevalence rates of youth unemployment. In this province, the study conducted semi-structured interviews with the current and former participants of several EPWPs, namely: the current Charlotte Maxeke Hospital EPWP; the Nelson Mandela Childrens' Hospital EPWP implemented in 2012; the Charlotte Maxeke Hospital Renovation EPWP implemented in 2014 as well as key interviews with Department of Infrastructure Development officials and contractors from the EPWP currently implemented at Charlotte Maxeke Hospital. The objective of these interviews was to obtain information about the type and duration of training provided in these projects as well as to extract their perceptions about whether this training could address youth unemployment in Gauteng and indeed the whole of South Africa.

The study also reviewed documents relating to the implementation of the current Charlotte Maxeke project to gain insight into the intuition behind the implementation. This information formed the basis for investigating the usefulness of the training received from EPWPs. Principally, this study found that training provided by the infrastructure sector of the EPWP is, owing to its short-term nature combined with the limited skills provided, not useful in enhancing the skills of participants. This finding resonates with the verdict reached by other critics about the efficacy of public works in addressing unemployment and poverty in South Africa.

The findings of this study, therefore, means that the already high rates of youth unemployment will not be addressed by the EPWP and will continue to rise until more sustainable solutions are found.