

Poverty, Inequality
Inquiry [\[insert logo\]](#)

THE POVERTY AND INEQUALITY INQUIRY COLLOQUIUM

**A call to action: Engaging poverty, in
equality and unemployment & rethinking
social policy and post-school education in
the Eastern Cape**

20 To 21 August 2015

**Missionvale Campus, Nelson Mandela
Metropolitan University Centre**

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1. Introduction



On the 20th and 21st of August of this year the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University hosted a two day regional colloquium on the triple crisis of unemployment, poverty and inequality. Following Turok's insistence that "we have to talk at local as well as national levels" and his concern that "thinking about poverty and inequality is divorced from place" (cited in Wilson & Cornell, 2014, p.14), the Colloquium sought to localise the debate to the Eastern Cape. The emphasis was on the way in which the 'triple crisis' (henceforth also termed 'the triad') is experienced and responded to in the Eastern Cape and, in particular, the role that post-secondary education and training (PSET) could play in intervening in the triad.

The Colloquium is the first of a five year plan to host an annual regional Colloquium on the triad. This first Colloquium sought to bring together the experience and thinking of a small group of scholars, government officials and members of civil society organisations. As the first of five Colloquia, the scope was purposefully wide with the Colloquium tasked with engaging with the current and possible educational responses at PSET to the triad. In particular the Colloquium was to focus on the following:

- i) The ways in which poverty, inequality and unemployment intersect in the Eastern Cape and the different ways in which PSET can intervene. Although this triad of terms is used interchangeably, inequality has causal primacy in this relationship and can best be explained as very much a part of the causal consequences of poverty and unemployment – the latter because of the considerable power to withhold productive investment and the nature of the financialized regimes developed by global corporate capital and its ideology. This issue needs further explication but that is not done here.
- ii) The responses to the triad by government, non-government organisations (NGOs) and communities and the ways in which PSET can better support such responses.
- iii) The range of other possibilities required to address inequality and its effects on poverty and unemployment and the role(s) that PSET can play in enabling these. In terms of this, an important aspect of the programme involved highlighting and showcasing projects that are currently attempting to intervene in the triad in innovative and creative ways.

The discussion was on the existing PSET landscape in the Eastern Cape that currently has four universities and a number of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges. In light of the structural limitations of existing institutions it was also on identifying new institutions and forms of learning that might more powerfully intervene in the triad. Here it was noted that the Centre for Integrated Post-Secondary Education and

Training (CIPSET) has been tasked with piloting the first community college in the country.

The emphasis was not on describing the extent of inequality and its effects on poverty or inequality in the Eastern Cape as it was considered that this is well provided in the Carnegie report on *Inequality and Poverty* and in the Eastern Cape Planning Commission's *Diagnostic Overview* of the Eastern Cape (Eastern Cape Planning Commission, 2013). Together these documents show how the history of the province as a Bantustan and labour reserve continues to manifest in poverty and unemployment levels that are significantly higher than the national average. The median household income in the province is about 20% less than the South African income median resulting in the province having the highest hunger rates and the highest levels of unemployment in the country with women and young people being the hardest hit.

The focus was also not on investigating why so little had changed in the material wellbeing of poor South Africans, and particularly black rural South Africans, since the first democratic election. Despite this, almost every presentation sought to deepen debate and understanding about the ideological and structural underpinnings of inequality, poverty, and unemployment in the Eastern Cape and the responses thereto at the levels of policy, community and – in line with the focus of the Colloquium – at the level of PSET.

Instead, the focus was on what was termed in the title of the Colloquium '*a call to action*'. This 'call to action' included the following:

- (i) Actions that aimed to challenge the hegemony of the dominant ideology of neoliberalism.
- (ii) Projects or activities that served to disrupt the inherent inequalities of capitalism and that aimed to build alternate forms of production and engagement from below.
- (iii) Identifying the barriers that prevent communities from actively engaging in the development and transformation of their own communities.

The emphasis in the discussion was on the role that PSET could play in supporting these important 'actions' or interventions or what the Vice Chancellor, Professor Derrick Swartz, in his opening address referred to as "disruptive interventions".

In one sense, the Colloquium could be described as a move at the provincial level towards the goals spelt out by the National Development Plan (NDP): most notably towards "the elimination of poverty and the significant reduction of the current levels of inequality". And, more locally, towards the goals of the Provincial Development Plan that aims to increase "the well-being and flourishing of all in [the province]" (Eastern Cape Planning Commission, 2014, p.12). It could also be seen as supportive of the goals of the White Paper on PSET which aims to orientate PSET towards "build[ing] a non-racial, non-sexist

and prosperous South Africa characterised by a progressive narrowing of the gap between the rich and the poor”(DHET, 2013).

In another, and deeper sense, the conference could be described in Freirean terms as a reawakening of a *Pedagogy of Hope*. In contrast to pragmatic discourses that would have the world adapt to and accept as the norm growing inequality, increasing poverty and staggering levels of unemployment, the conference encouraged a view of the triad “not as a static reality but as a reality in the process of transformation” (Freire, 2005, p.12). The Consortium sought to reach beyond the notion of education as neutral and to shatter the ‘culture of silence’ that rests within instrumental fix-it approaches. The hope was to create a space where the discussion could transcend the false neutrality and instrumentalism within which the role of PSET in relation to the triad is increasingly posited. The aim being to provide an intellectual space where the dominant discourses on PSET could be challenged, where new discourses could be developed, and where a unity of understanding and commitment around these progressive alternatives could be forged. As stated by Ivor Baatjes, “the hope is that we can begin to put alternatives on the table” and by Salim Vally, “what we’re grappling with are alternatives to capitalism, practical and demonstrable alternatives”.

The expectation was that the Colloquium would focus on the potential of PSET as it is currently constructed whilst simultaneously developing a vision of what a transformed PSET actively contributing towards a more socially and economically just world could look like. This was well articulated by Professor Derrick Swartz, who in his opening address asked that the Colloquium “cite alternatives to capitalism that are underway and consider what role PSET can play in supporting these progressive projects and the movements within which they are embedded?”. He challenged the Colloquium to consider: “How we can use PSET to shape and support these emergent energies in our system and how far we can stretch these institutions so that they can support and protect progressive innovations and initiatives”. In asking these questions, he reminded the Colloquium that while the push might be to adopt instrumental approaches that focus on tangible and concrete alternatives, that the development of any viable alternative is completely dependent as a first step on critique as “critique and reconstruction can and should go together, in fact critique is the beginning of reconstruction” and critical to ending the ‘culture of silence’.

The broad focus of the event allowed six intersecting themes to emerge that are crucial to developing a better understanding of the role that PSET could play in intervening in the triad in the Eastern Cape and for defining more specific foci for the four future Colloquiums. It is not possible in this report to capture the full content of all the

“...cite alternatives to capitalism that are underway and consider what role PSET can play in supporting these progressive projects and the movements within which they are embedded” (Professor Derrick Swartz)

presentations and the discussions that ensued. Podcasts of the Colloquium are, however, available on the CIPSET website at <http://cipset.nmmu.ac.za> as are copies of all the presentations. Instead, this report identifies in Section Three below entitled, *The Role of PSET in the Triad*, the six central themes that emerged from the Colloquium. It does so by making detailed reference to the presentations and the discussions held at the Colloquium. The next Section entitled, *Key Conceptual Tensions*, lays the background for the discussion of these six themes by highlighting the tensions that underpinned the Colloquium discussions. The final section concludes the report by summarising the recommendations that emerged.

2. Key conceptual tensions

Before presenting the six key themes that emerged from the Colloquium, it is necessary to highlight three tensions that underpinned the presentations and discussions. The first tension refers to the application of the term ‘PSET’. The term, as provided in the White Paper on PSET, refers to a range of public and private educational institutions established to provide mainly formal educational provision to post Grade 9 learners. The strength, and simultaneously the weakness, of a broad discussion encompassing PSET as an entity is that it allowed for a focus on the ‘actions’ (programmes or interventions) that sought to intervene in the triad rather than on programmatic or institutional differences. The risk, however, of discussing PSET as a single entity is that real differences that exist between TVET colleges, community colleges and universities in terms of funding regimes, student profile, teaching and learning cultures, curriculum, and the aspirations of learners might be elided. Here the danger is that the different ‘actions’ that different institution might best be suited to could escape discussion, although the presentation by Lesley Powell on the TVET colleges, and by Irna Senekal and Anele Dloto on CIPSET’s community education programme went some distance to addressing this. So too did the presentations by Jen Snowball on the work of the Cultural Observatory at Rhodes University, Janet Cherry on the work of the Development Studies Department at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (NMMU) and Leslie Bank on the urban regeneration strategy currently being undertaken by the University of Fort Hare. Also that interpreting PSET as a landscape of educational institutions could obscure a view of the informal and yet very valuable learning taking place in communities which were showcased by a few of the presentations such as that by Simphiwe Dada on the Khanyisa Education and Development Trust.

The second tension rests in the fuzziness that exists in the notion of poverty, even without consideration of its causal connection to inequality. What constitutes ‘poverty’ and how poverty is to be defined has been at the heart of decades of vicious fighting within

academic, policy and donor circles. This, quite simply, is because how poverty is defined matters. It matters to governments who have a vested interest in the definition of poverty as it affects the nature of the social support budgets and the achievement of poverty alleviation targets for political mileage. It matters to the donor community whose business it is to dispense billions of dollars to communities identified as poor and in some cases to make a profit through doing so. It matters to academics concerned with social justice who argue for broad and inclusive definitions. But mostly it matters to the poor whose ability to access social support through income grants or educational opportunities are dependent on where the poverty line has been drawn. It matters also because it compels recognition of the many different and distinct groups amongst the poor and the varied interventions required.

Following the work of Amartya Sen, who developed the capability approach (also called the human development approach), Clark and Qizilbash (2005) argue that poverty exists as a deprivation across multiple dimensions and that while income is a critical aspect it is by no means the only issue relative to poverty. Drawing from an understanding of poverty put forward by the capability approach as capability (or opportunity) deprivation across multiple dimensions allows for a much deeper reflection of the role that PSET can play in intervening in poverty.

Applying a definition of poverty that is broader than income deprivation allows the debate on the role of PSET to include but extend beyond notions of increasing and facilitating access of the poor to PSET. While supportive, from a social justice perspective, of the goal of the White Paper on PSET which argues that, “access to quality post-school education is a major driver in fighting poverty and inequality in any society”, Lesley Powell argued in her presentation that “access to educational opportunity remains a human right but that it is not in and of itself sufficient to addressing poverty”. She provided three reasons for this: (i) Firstly, because poor students have different abilities and capacities to cope with the educational opportunity made available as they face social and economic challenges that affect their learning experiences in ways that we have not adequately developed an understanding of. (ii) Secondly, because qualifications and skills do not necessarily translate into sustainable employment or employment that provides a career path of growth. (iii) And, thirdly, because employment does not necessarily translate into poverty alleviation. Citing the work of Bhorat, *et al.* (2010), she showed that 34% of workers are paid below the legislated minimum wage with the average shortfall in wages being 36% of the minimum wage. As pointed by Mziyanda Twani in his presentation, the share of income of workers declined from 56% in 1995 to 51% in 2012. As he says it, “the picture that is being painted is that the condition of workers has deteriorated worse than it was before”.

The third related tension is that the focus on unemployment and poverty has the potential

of coupling unemployment to poverty in a manner which sees the latter as causally linked to the former, i.e. it sees unemployment as the prime cause of poverty and consequently deflecting from its relationship to inequality in particular. Understanding the problem of poverty as a problem of unemployment has led to the conclusion that the solution to poverty is increased employment. This, in turn, has led to the idea that PSET should increasingly orientate itself to skills provision that will enable employability. Seeing the problem as located in employment avoids the tricky reality that jobs in the formal labour market are internationally and nationally in decline. Holloway (2010) put this well when he says that,

More and more people are being pushed out of employment or finding that they have no way of becoming employed, or, if at all, then only on a very casual and precarious basis. They are obliged to make their lives in other ways. The state systems of unemployment benefits and social assistance (where they exist) are designed to extend the discipline of employment even to the unemployed, to make sure that the unemployed really function as an industrial reserve army. (2010, p.23)

The concern here is with understandings held about the nature of work itself. At the risk of oversimplification, if to be unemployed is the absence of employment then the reality of unemployment depends upon the reality of employment. The two notions are asymmetrically interdependent but dialectically dependent. Unemployment (and under employment) is best seen as a continuum of employment with unemployment being the threat that maintains employment, and the unemployed being the reserve labour force that maintains employment. Both employment and unemployment exist as a feature of wage labour and are contingent upon a capitalist economy. The question, as Derrick Swartz put it in his opening address, is “How do we break out of the mechanisms that keep reproducing this (poverty) 20 years after democracy?”.

While necessarily broad, this first colloquium did not have the space to adequately debate what was meant by poverty, unemployment or its causalities and how PSET is to intervene in poverty and unemployment. Embedded in different notions of what these terms mean are conflicting ideological approaches and multiple understandings of the central purpose(s) of PSET. Janet Cherry in her presentation challenged the notion of employment as a solution to poverty by citing Chambers (1995) who argued that “poverty line thinking concerned with income-poverty and employment thinking concerned with jobs, project Northern concerns on the South, where the realities of the poor are local, diverse, often complex and dynamic” (p.173). In line with this understanding, she argued for the important contributory role that PSET can play in poverty alleviation and in challenging the hegemony of capitalism through supporting local, community driven

sustainability projects. Robbie Van Niekerk in his presentation argued that the debate has to shift away from a discussion on poverty to a focus on inequality as this would mean bringing class relations sharply into focus. Doing so, he argued, would mean bringing the middle class back into the discussion and would reduce the current tendency of seeing the poor as a class category separate from other classes.

Future Colloquia would need to build on the work begun in this Colloquium to carefully unpack these three concepts and the theoretical and practical implications that different understandings have for our understanding of how PSET can best intervene in the triad.

Key Points

The understanding of what constitutes unemployment, poverty and PSET matter as embedded in different notions of what these terms mean are conflicting ideological approaches and multiple understandings of the central purpose(s) of PSET and the role(s) that PSET in intervening in the triad.

3. The Role of PSET in the Triad ■ ■ ■

This section discusses the six central themes that emerged from the Colloquium. The themes highlighted are: (i) Supporting the development of a capable state; (ii) Producing the skills needed for inclusive economic growth; (iii) Transforming the Expanded Public Works Programme; (iv) Developing active and empowered citizens; (v) Growing the solidarity economy and (vi) Developing and producing socially engaged scholarship.

3.1 Supporting the development of a capable state

The opening presentation of the Colloquium was made by Nomfundo Luswazi and Nhlanganiso Dladla who provided a useful summary of the work of the Eastern Cape Development Council and the Eastern Cape Planning Commission. They focussed their presentation on the Eastern Cape Vision 2030 Provincial Development Plan (PDP). In line with the National Development Plan, the PDP emphasises the importance of education and training with the purpose of education seen as “Empowering people to define their identity, take control of their lives, raise healthy families, take part confidently in developing a just society, and play an effective role in the politics and governance of their communities” (Eastern Cape Planning Commission, 2014, p.83).

In terms of this, the presenters noted that the problems faced in terms of low numbers of learners enrolling in and succeeding at PSET begin in early childhood. The recent statistics show that only 7% of the province’s children are enrolled in Early Childhood

Development and 29% of children from the poorest 20% of families are estimated as suffering from malnutrition and stunted growth. These challenges then affect early schooling with only 4% of the provinces children enrolled in Grade R and continue to be a major factor in the province's school and PSET systems.

In recognition of this, the PDP highlights the critical role that the PSET sector can play in the pre-service and in-service professional development of educators for Early Childhood Development, schools and TVET colleges. In particular, the PDP notes that there has been a lack of innovation and understanding of the real experience of educators in schools, as well as the social background and needs of learners. Further, that far more needs to be done to address the importance of language in instruction and cognitive development, especially the use of mother-tongue languages.

Within the context of the particular challenges facing the province, the PDP differs from the NDP by focussing on four rather than three institutional types as the NDP does. While the NDP focusses PSET on adult education, TVET colleges and higher/ university education, the PDP highlights the importance of community colleges as central for youth

“... the community colleges are not something that we've really talked enough about in this country” (Francis Wilson)

and adults who did not complete their schooling or who did not attend school at all, and therefore do not qualify to study at TVET colleges and universities. An introductory pilot is proposed at two sites for the first two years (2015–2017): one rural in Cofimvaba and one urban in Nelson Mandela Metro. Francis Wilson noted that “one of the big ideas that has emerged from the Colloquium is the importance of the community colleges” He continued by reminding the Colloquium of the important role that the worker education colleges played in Britain as part of a huge and very radical mass movement and noted that “the community colleges are not something that we've really talked enough about in this country”.

In addition, the PDP challenges the higher education sector to be more proactive in playing a leading role in understanding the province's core development challenges and in developing a body of knowledge that is relevant to the context of the province and supportive and relevant to the transformation of the province. The PDP also stresses the importance of producing “a new kind of graduate who can better understand, relate to and address challenges of underdevelopment”(Eastern Cape Planning Commission, 2014, p.87)and incorporating “indigenous knowledge and non-formally accredited experience and expertise into new research and innovation” (Ibid, p.87).

The important role of all PSET institutions in the promotion of a society-wide literacy campaign and in promoting the reading, literary awareness and the writing and publishing of fiction and non-fiction produced in home-languages for children and youth was strongly emphasised. Here PSET's role is emphasised as both producing the material, but

also as educating the literacy workers who can support the literacy campaign.

The importance of PSET in supporting the strengthening the health sector was also noted. Here PSET's role is two pronged: (i) to produce the health care workers needed to strengthen the delivery and management of the sector and (ii) to strengthen and empower communities to be actively involved with their health.

Nomfundo Luswazi emphasised the important role allocated to PSET in the PDP, particularly TVET colleges, in producing the artisans needed. As he said, "The potential use of local artisans allows the province to get the infrastructural work done cheaper as you don't have to parachute in big contractors from outside of communities, but it also creates employment opportunities". The underpinning logic of the PDP is for development in the province to exist in what Nomfundo Luswazi described as "a virtuous cycle of development" which involves TVET colleges producing the artisans for local co-operative and development projects, the universities producing the innovation and knowledge required and the communities supported by community colleges producing the agricultural products as needed.

Key Points

PSET can play the following roles:

- Extend programmes targeted towards the pre-service and in-service professional development of educators for Early Childhood Development, schools and TVET colleges.
- Develop greater understanding of the real experience of educators in schools and in colleges.
- Develop a deeper understanding of the social background of learners and what this means in terms of the learning support required by institutions and educators
- Address the complexities of language in instruction and cognitive development, especially the use of mother-tongue languages.
- Produce a new kind of graduate who can better understand, relate to and address challenges of underdevelopment

3.2 Producing the skills needed for inclusive economic growth

The notion of skills development and the role that PSET is to play therein is central to logic of South Africa's policy approach to poverty and unemployment. There are three prongs to this logic. The first prong is that the 'right' skills will allow sectors identified as having high potential for economic growth to develop. The PDP, for example, identifies seven high potential economic areas: agriculture, mining and energy, construction,

manufacturing, tourism, social economy and knowledge based services. Here the idea is that education and training has a critical role to play in producing the skills needed for these sectors to develop and to sustain and, conversely, that skills shortages have served to constrain the development and growth within these areas. Essentially the belief is that skills that are better matched to the needs of these potential economic sectors will result in both economic growth and therefore also increased employment. Mziyanda Twani, however, indicated that the “while the national wealth in terms of GDP has grown, the distribution of that wealth has not been equal but has favoured the ruling class”.

“The national wealth in terms of GDP has grown. The distribution of that wealth has not been equal but has favoured the ruling class” (Mziyanda Twani)

Second is that increased education allows better access to economic inclusion. As the PDP says, “economic opportunity and rights are both the means and an end for human development” (Eastern Cape Planning Commission, 2014, p.12). In this logic, a central role of education is “to improve the ability of people to obtain gainful employment and ownership of enterprises and assets that will provide the economic basis for human development” (Ibid, p.12). This has led to an emphasis on identifying the skills that would most ensure employability and to questions about whether education is preparing learners for employability and how education and training can do this better. These questions are frequently phrased in the following way, “Are we as educational institutions training and educating for employment or for unemployment?” with the approach being to “look at the reality on the ground as to how many people that have gone through our institutions are employed and how many are unemployed” (Silas Zuma).

Third is that economic growth will create jobs and therefore also employment. The logic is that addressing skills are essential for economic growth which, in turn, is essential for the creation of jobs. This is the underpinning logic of much of South Africa’s policy approach to poverty alleviation. This logic, however, brings to the fore the extent to which South African policy has been negligent of the way in which neoliberalism has nationally and internationally restructured work in ways that has led scale to mass unemployment. It also largely ignores the fact that employment gains post-apartheid have been either in the informal sector, or in micro enterprises (to a small extent) or in the public sector. Further, and as Simphiwe Dada indicated in his presentation, the economy has become more finance lead and deindustrialisation has become the order of the day. Manufacturing which constituted 24% of the GDP in 1994 has decreased to 11%. Fourie (2012) commenting on Hodge’s (2009) study of South Africa’s employment coefficient concludes that “South Africa has too many people in the workforce” (2012, p.29). He continues by noting that,

This conclusion can sound cold blooded – as if he is saying that discouraged workers and those in the informal sector should just stop

wanting to work. However, it captures an important implication of the employment coefficient: formal sector growth alone is unlikely to absorb sufficient numbers of people to reduce unemployment rates significantly.(2012, p.29)

Equally worrying is that it ignores the extent to which the structural character of firms are equally, if not more so, a problem. In this logic, “the cause of unemployment, in general, is put at education’s door, more broadly arguing that education is not teaching what the [society or the] economy wants” (Klees, 2014, p.vii). Quiggin (2010), cited in Treat (2015) has called this “zombie economics’: ‘beliefs about economic policy that have been killed by evidence and analysis, but somehow, like ‘zombie ideas, keep coming back’”. As argued by Treat & Motala (2014), the “‘education for employment’ lens offers an unnecessarily narrow conceptualization of the role of education in human development” (p.22). This has led Treat & Motala (2014) to ask the following important question which sits at the heart of this Colloquium: “What does post-school education have to offer us other than training for formal sector jobs which don’t exist?” (p.22). Powell (2014) suggests that an essential initial step towards responding to this question lies in “reimagining the purpose” of PSET.

A response to the shrinkage in formal sector jobs has led to support for expanding South Africa’s informal economy. As argued by one of the speakers at the conference, “it would be naïve to speak of employment only in the context of formal employment. We also need to think in the context of self-employment” (Silas Zuma). In response to the policy commitment to orientating education towards unemployment, it is important to note the body of work cited in Lesley Powell’s presentation which argues that the informal sector is characterised as the second-best alternative to the formal sector as: (i) the returns of return to education are lower than in the formal sector; (ii) incomes are significantly lower in the informal sector; and (iii) self-employment is a much less stable state than regular employment with retention rates low and (iv) that workers in the informal sector have a higher incidence of transitioning to unemployment than transitioning to formal sector employment (Banerjee, *et al.*, 2008).

There is, however, strong evidence at the individual level that more education decreases the risk of unemployment and increases protection against poverty and work security. (Branson, *et al.*, 2009)found that tertiary education dramatically increased the probability of being employed and the wage income of individuals. Their findings show that individuals with some tertiary study are between two to three times more likely than matriculants to be formally employed and with earning potentials of between 170% to 220% higher than those with a matriculation (Branson, *et al.*, 2009). There is, however, also strong evidence that qualification escalation has resulted in a decline in the value of qualifications. For example, current statistics show clear evidence that the benefits of

having a matric is in steady decline with the unemployment rate for matriculants doubling from 15.2% to 28.2% during between 1995 to 2005 (Banerjee, *et al.*, 2008). Despite this, in the absence of large scale vacancies which Dias & Posel (2007) can find “little evidence of”, it is unlikely that higher skill levels will create employment and more likely that higher skills will result in qualification escalation with employers increasing their demand for qualifications that are irrelevant to the task(s) that the employee needs to undertake.

Despite the above, a number of presentations highlighted the important role of skills in poverty alleviation for one or more of the above reasons. It is important to note, as one of the speakers emphasised that “we don’t have a hegemonic view” about development and how it should take place in South Africa. Against this backdrop, a fundamental challenge for PSET is to develop an understanding of what constitutes unemployment, poverty and inequality and what role PSET could play in supporting such whilst acknowledging that PSET, as it currently exists, is constrained by its locus in the existing economic structure. Equally important, is to shift the debate away from notions of unemployment towards notions of work or what Enver Motala termed socially useful work.

Key Points

A stagnation of formal sector jobs challenges the ability of PSET to prepare learners for employment in the formal sector.

3.3 Transforming the Expanded Public Works Programme

Pumezo Lupuwana reflected on the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) as experienced in the Eastern Cape. He referred extensively to a paper reviewing the EPWP prepared by Cutcheon and Parkins (2014). Following Cutcheon and Parkins (2014), he focused on the experiences of the infrastructure sector as this accounted for 84% of national expenditure and provided the greatest opportunity for employment per unit of expenditure.

The EPWP is an important component of South Africa’s multi-pronged strategies towards poverty alleviation, job creation and skills development. The goal of the EPWP was to alleviate unemployment for at least one million people between 2004 and 2009. This goal was to be achieved by generating work opportunities in four sectors of the economy: infrastructure, environment, social and economic through providing public goods and services through labour intensive methods.

Despite having reached the target of creating short term employment for 1 million people, Pumezo Lupuwana indicated that the EPWP suffered enormous problems. The following three are the most threatening to the goals of the EPWP.

- i) The first challenge was located in the emphasis on achieving a target of 1 million people employed on a short term basis. This resulted in large numbers of people being employed for little more than a day or a week which did not contribute in any meaningful way to lifting the barriers of poverty and unemployment.
- ii) The second located in the continued utilisation of conventional machine intensive methods. The legislated conditionality of labour intensive productive processes was not adhered to by many of the contractors which resulted in low levels of labour-intensity (of about 11%) being achieved. Contractors would hire EPWP workers to meet compliance and then proceed with conventional mechanised methods of production. Pumezo Lupuwana spoke in his presentation of cases where EPWP workers were hired to sit under the tree for the day watching as machines did the work that they were hired to do.
- i) The third challenge is that the 1 million jobs were created at nearly two to three times the original budget estimate. The main reason for this is that is that project costs were inflated by contractors continuing with conventional machine intensive methods and then adding to the project budget the costs of employing EPWP workers who were then not productively utilised.

“The EPWP exists as a huge public resource and it’s essential that we open discussions on how the EPWP can be used better” (Enver Motala)

The result is that the EPWP failed to create meaningful employment opportunities. As Pumezo Lupuwana put it, “despite the huge resource that the EPWP provides, it did not create employment and particularly amongst the rural poor”. The intention is to expand the EPWP fourfold over the next five years. Cutcheon and Parkins (2014) conclude by arguing that should the shortcomings experienced in the planned recent roll out not be remedied that it is likely that the EPWP will continue to be inefficient in generating work opportunities for the poor and the unskilled. They emphasise in their recommendations the importance of establishing a developmental programme based on labour intensive methods and the provision of skills for labour intensive construction for small scale contractors. Here their recommendation is that a national training college for labour-intensive construction for small contractors be established.

Two important points were raised in response to the presentations that are worth noting. The first, raised by Enver Motala, is that “the EPWP exists as a huge public resource and it’s essential that we open discussions on how the EPWP can be used better”. The second input challenged the idea that increased centralisation will improve the EPWP’s functioning. Instead, it was recommended that thinking needed to be undertaken on the role that the EPWP could play in small scale and local development.

Key Points

- Key roles for PSET in relation to the EPWP involves: (i) Interrogating theoretically and empirically the ways in which the EPWP could be harnessed to support community development and poverty alleviation and (ii) Providing training for small contracts on how to utilise labour intensive methods of production.
- An important area for future dialogue is to open up debate on the functioning of the EPWP and on how this resource can be better utilised in the future.

3.4 Developing empowered citizens

The notion of education and training as empowering citizens to actively shape and transform the world which they live was central to the discussions held at the Colloquium. It is also the cornerstone of the NDP and the PDP with the NDP beginning with a commitment to develop citizens who are able to “participate fully in efforts to liberate [them]selves from conditions that hinder the flowering of [their] talents” (National Planning Commission, 2012, p.9). Indeed, the word ‘empower’ or derivatives thereof is utilised over 50 times in the NDP.

The role of education in ‘empowering’ citizens is interpreted in development discussions in South Africa in two potentially contradictory ways. The first way in which the term empowerment is used locates within the instrumental role of education. Here empowerment refers to the skills and abilities that are needed for people to function effectively in their day to day lives. As stated by the NDP, “effective training is empowering and makes people feel valued” (Ibid, p.420). Mainly though, empowerment is used to refer to the skills required for employability which is seen as central for poverty alleviation. The NDP, for example, argues that “broaden[ing] opportunities through education, vocational training and work experience” exists as the most “direct and immediate measure to attack poverty” (p.28). In this sense, the role of PSET is to provide the aptitude, attitude and skills required for a person to find a job and to be less vulnerable to unemployment in the labour market.

The role of education in ‘empowering’ citizens is interpreted in development discussions in South Africa in two potentially contradictory ways

This notion of ‘empowerment’ rests firmly within a human capital view that considers education an investment into the productivity of human beings as workers and, at an individual level, as an investment into the individual’s future labour market competitiveness. The critiques of the human capital approach are well laid out in Vally & Motala (2014) and, other than three important critique that are central to our understanding of the role that PSET plays in the triad, will not be repeated in any detail here. The first of these is that the human capital approach is too economic and fails to

addresses the inequalities inherent in race, gender and class divisions. The second is that the human capital approach ignores unpaid yet socially valuable (or what Motala, 2015, termed 'socially useful work') role played by women in caring for children and the elderly. The third, is that different people have different rates of return from the same education, i.e. given the same amount of education, not everybody will have the same opportunities to proceed to PSET or to utilise this education in the same way in the labour market.

The second way in which the term 'empowerment' is used talks to what Drèze & Sen (2002) have described as the *empowerment and distributive role* of education where greater literacy, numeracy and the ability to engage in debates can enable oppressed groups to resist oppression and organize politically to get a fairer deal. In these terms, the role of education is to expand the agential ability of individuals and communities to critically understand and to mobilise to transform the world within which they live.

For Freire (2005) this means resisting all attempts by educators and policy at what he describes as 'banking education' that serves through instrumentally driven content approaches to socialise students into adapting to the struggles and suffering that they experience in oppressive societies (what Amartya Sen has termed 'adaptive preferences'). Instead, Freire (2005) recommends what he calls 'problem posing' education where "people develop their power to perceive critically the world in which they find themselves" (p.83). In these terms, the challenge includes expanding what Bonvin & Thelon (2003) refer to as the "capability for voice", i.e. "the ability to express one's opinions and make them count in the course of public discussion" (p.1). It also includes expanding what Appadurai (2004) refers to as the "capacity to aspire" which he describes as the ability for the poor to work towards transforming the conditions of their poverty through mobilising towards horizons of credible hope.

The distinction between the two notions of 'empowerment' is between education that attempts to socialise people into the inequalities inherent in South Africa's society and economy through providing the skills and attitudes required for employability, and education that attempts to emancipate through building solidarity that enables communities to resist the social, political and economic processes that cause poverty, unemployment, exploitation, suffering and despair. These are two radically opposed concepts, yet they are both referred to as 'empowerment'. The challenge for determining the role of PSET in poverty alleviation is to unpack and engage with what the different applications of the term 'empower' means for PSET and the ways in which this can be achieved. One view expressed powerfully at the Colloquium is the importance of programmes and movements that exist as possibilities of hope in that they serve to disrupt and intervene in oppressive social and economic relationships.

3.5 Growing the solidarity economy

The importance of co-operatives as an alternative form of enterprise and social organization and as a central vehicle for social and economic development was well noted at the Colloquium. Nationally, co-operatives have been identified by the NDP as central to providing poor and rural communities with collective “market power in accessing value chains” (p.228) and are regulated through the Co-operatives Act 14 of 2005.

The two central strategies adopted by the Eastern Cape Province to encourage co-operatives grew from the Cooperative Indaba held in 2010. At this Indaba it was decided that the following mechanisms would be put in place: (i) the establishment of an Institute for Cooperative Development and (ii) the establishment of the Imvaba Eastern Cape Provincial Cooperative Development Fund. The Institute for Cooperative Development was established at Fort Hare with the mission being “to promote a capable, socially committed and economically vibrant and self-sustaining co-operatives sector in South Africa through facilitating knowledge and institutional development and building of social capital, as well as the development of appropriate support systems”. A key aspect of achieving this mission is to develop and provide in partnerships with other institutions the education and training required by co-operatives.

Abongile Hala spoke about the large number of co-operatives that register and then fail within a short period of time. A number of key obstacles to the establishment of sustainable co-operatives were identified by the speakers. First is the issue of land reform which has challenged the development and sustainability of agricultural co-operatives. Simphiwe Dada shared the challenges facing small scale cattle farmers was having access to sufficient grazing land and water for their cattle. This has resulted in stock straying onto municipal roads and onto commercial land and then being impounded by the municipality. Simphiwe Dada described the practice of stock impounding as a process that “punishes the poor by depriving them of the few assets that they managed to accumulate”. The contradiction of this is that these farm workers are “are surrounded by agricultural land that is largely owned by white commercial farmers”. Second is that small scale co-operatives need to compete with the highly capitalised and entrenched large-scale commercial companies. Third is the capacitation of co-operatives.

PSET has an important role to play in the capacitation of co-operatives by developing curricula and training educators who will work in the co-operative movement. The key concerns are with capacitating the co-operatives in terms of the production skills required, but also in terms of the management skills. This is of particular importance in the current cooperative movement where the chain management of the co-operative work has been undertaken largely by industry.

Another critical role for PSET is in the area of knowledge production. There is a need for

deeper theoretical and practical understandings. In particular, theoretical understandings need to grapple with the way in which co-operatives can be utilised as a way to change oppressive social and economic relations. Here it was noted that much of the policy language around co-operatives are uncritical of the economic context and have, instead, reinforced this context through the adoption of the language and approaches of capital. Other important areas for theoretical work include: (i) theoretical work on the culture of individualism entrenched in capitalism and how this serves as a barrier to effective co-operatives and (ii) the way in which existing co-operatives have maintained or altered gender power relationships. As Francis Wilson put it, “We need to clarify what we mean by co-operatives, what they can do and how they can really work. There is real potential there but we need to design then in such a way that they are not designed to fail because most of them have been failing”.

The presenters noted that besides the work currently being undertaken through the Institute for Cooperative Development at Fort Hare that a number of postgraduates have been sent to study internationally. Further, that they are currently working with a local TVET college and the AgriSeta to provide programmes at NQF levels 1 to 3. Currently, the programmes relevant to the co-operatives begin at NQF level 4 which has been an obstacle in communities where people did not have qualifications at NQF levels 1 to 3. An important recommendation made was that a virtual co-operatives university be set up which allows the four universities in the province to collaborate on their work with the co-operatives.

Key points:

Roles for PSET: (i) provide the technical skills required for production in the co-operatives, the qualifications required for educators who work within the cooperative movement and the management skills that will enable co-operatives to take charge of the chain management process. (ii) Engage theoretically with the role of co-operatives. Particular engagement is required with the way in which co-operatives can be utilised as a way to change oppressive social and economic relations.

Key recommendation: Establish a co-operatives a co-operatives university collaboration across the four universities in the province

3.6 Socially Engaged Scholarship

Ivor Baatjes spoke about the importance of community engagement (CE) and socially engaged scholarship (SES) where CE refers to university-community partnership, or what Jen Snowball in her presentation spoke of as the ‘porous university’, and engaged scholarship to higher education partnering with communities and other organisations in search of answers to the pressing social and economic problems. Highlighting the work of CIPSET, he stressed the importance of embedding the university more firmly in the community rather than, as is usual in the ivory tower approach, as separate and distant from the community. He highlighted five ways that CIPSET is currently attempting to do this by:

- i) Working actively in “trying to get academics involved in real issues so that the curriculum can become more real and more appropriate to reality” (Ivor Baatjes).
- ii) Being involved through its Community Education Programme (CEP) in building from the ground up a non-formal programme with communities. Through this programme there are attempts being made to develop a much deeper understand of the relationship between poverty and unemployment and the response that PSET institutions can make to intervening in the triad through apply participatory approaches and critical pedagogies. Irna Senekal and Anele Dloto described in their presentation the community-based participatory action research that the CEP has undertaken.
- iii) Working closely with the TVET colleges in the region to see how these colleges can be shaped to best serve the needs of the students that they serve. This engagement allows a deeper understanding of youth and of student experiences at the TVET colleges and through this understanding is beginning to open up the debate on how to create an institutional form that is more responsive to social needs.
- iv) Housing the seat of the first community college in the province and will be supporting with the piloting of this first college.
- v) CIPSET has also been allocated a Research Chair: Education, Work and Society: Unemployment, Employability and Empowerment. The Chair, supported by eight CIPSET staff members, will make an intellectual contribution at three key levels: building theory, institutional modelling, applied research and new research capacity and networks. Future Colloquia will fall under the responsibility of the Research Chair.

Janet Cherry in her presentation discussed some of the ways in which the Development Studies Department at Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University has been working towards cutting edge social science through community driven environmental projects. These projects work democratically, are focused on sustainable livelihoods in a localized

economy and aim to get “real worker control in a decentralized way” whilst simultaneously working theoretically and empirically with the experiences of other communities nationally and internationally.

Leslie Banks shared the experience of the university contributing to “midtown” Buffalo City Centre Renewal. He emphasised the importance of city development and growth, whilst also noting the interrelationship between urban and rural contexts.

Both Salim Vally and Derrick Swartz noted that the university exists as a contested space. Derrick Swartz noted that universities tend to “reproduce and form part of the dominant logic and despite the rhetoric and innovations within them, they tend to reproduce many of the problems that we identify in the main stream economy and within education”. And Salim Vally spoke of universities suffering from “managerialism, corporatisation, and racism”. Despite these challenges, they both emphasised that the university exists as a contested space where agential possibilities for transformation and manoeuvre exist.

An important aspect of social engaged scholarship is the question about how PSET contributes to and supports the building of a youth movement and civic movement. Siyabonga Madikoe presented the work of the Rural People’s Movement and the importance of supporting the campaigns and the growth of the Rural People’s Movement and discussed the alliance that was formed between the student movement, particularly in Grahamstown, and the Rural People’s Movement. Simphiwe Dada built on this by emphasising the importance of ensuring that the voices those who are struggling in the rural areas be heard and that their experiences be shared. The importance of co-constructing knowledge and of developing mechanisms to do was raised. Although, as Enver Motala asked, “What exactly do we mean when we talk about the co-construction of knowledge and how do go about doing it”.

4. Conclusion

The importance of the Colloquium as a space that brought various players together to discuss and to extend the debate cannot be overstated. While we would need to admit, as Enver Motala said, that “we won’t solve the problems”, what spaces like the Colloquium provide is an opportunity to “jointly talk about the problems” and to develop “fuller understandings of the issues”.

In this sense, the Colloquium has raised more questions that it has answered. It has insisted on a more careful engagement of the triple challenges facing South Africa; raised concerns with the policy direction being adopted; acknowledged the central role that neoliberalism and capitalism has played in creating the triad and highlighted the possibilities and limitations of PSET in meaningfully intervening in the triad.

What was strongly emphasised is the importance of developing a working relationship between PSET in the province. Recognising that work at the universities have tended to be fragmented, collaboration across PSET institutions was highlighted as a key outcome and goal of the Consortium. A concrete suggestion made by the Vice Chancellor and which had strong support from Francis Wilson was the establishment of a virtual university, composed of the four universities of the Province, to engage with issues that emanate from this and other similar colloquia with a view to providing research and other forms of support for initiatives that take the ideas generated here forward in a concerted way. It was understood that CIPSET (Ivor Baatjes) and the Poverty and inequality Inquiry (Francis Wilson) will take the initiative in this regard.

Importantly, in the face of high levels of pessimism at growing inequalities, the Colloquium represented what Enver Motala described as “hope, optimism and possibility”. As he said,

That’s very important because we are living through a period where there is so much pessimism. There is so much impossibility, that it is very important to be able to say that in actual fact there are real possibilities. (Enver Motala)

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