

Chronic Unemployment in South Africa: Whose Role is it to Create Jobs in a Developmental State?

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ABSTRACT: The history of colonisation and apartheid in South Africa has left many people neglected and disadvantaged. Furthermore, the government's most essential objective is to reduce South Africa's high unemployment rate. South Africa's official unemployment rate is 35.3 percent. President Cyril Ramaphosa said during his State of the Nation 2022 address in response to the unemployment crisis, "We all know that government does not create jobs, business creates jobs." This statement contradicted the President's vow to create millions of jobs for South Africans during the 2018 jobs conference. In this context, the paper focuses on determining who is responsible for creating jobs in a developing economy. The paper will employ literature review as a research method. The paper will begin by discussing the current state of unemployment in South Africa. Second, the paper will look at the factors that contribute to unemployment in South Africa. Third, the paper will look at the government's involvement in job creation, and finally, the paper will give recommendations.

KEYWORDS: Unemployment, Job creation, Entrepreneurship, Business, Government

Introduction

The mainstream media has constructed an Africa Rising narrative in recent years, claiming that African countries have transformed their economies into growing vibrant engines of growth as a result of a series of "good" governance reforms and more responsible economic management by technocratic leaders (Carmody, Kragelund, & Reboredo, 2020). The contention appears out of place in comparison to the economic challenges facing most Africans in their respective countries. A multitude of Africans from Sub-Saharan Africa are willing to traverse the Sahara from their home nations into war-torn Libya and other regions of North Africa, and then make the risky trek across the Mediterranean and into Europe in search for greener pastures (Carmody, Kragelund, & Reboredo, 2020). This contradicts the story of Africa's rise. There is a

clear distinction between the typical African's perception and that of the mainstream. Likewise, despite the colonial legacy that continues to burden South Africa, the country is confronted with fresh faces and forces of vulnerability and poverty (Díaz Pabón, Leibbrandt, Ranchhod & Savage, 2021).

Conflicts, corruption, poverty, and pandemics are now posing a threat to South Africa that was unimaginable even during the colonial and apartheid periods (Reddy, 2021). While there have been several proposals for corrective action, actual commitment to productive and collaborative procedures has always been minimal (Reddy, 2021). Consequently, unemployment is ubiquitous in South Africa standing at the rate of 35.3 percent, according to Stats SA. Since unemployment appears to be growing rapidly, a major shift in how South Africa deals with the internecine crises of unemployment is required. As a result, the issue is one of the necessity for collective learning about responses, as well as the obligation to people whose suffering served as the foundation for that learning, which has never been more pressing than it is now. Unfortunately, such lessons learnt through the shocks of stark reality are rarely readily transformed into personal or organisational memories and the underlying will to change.

Human inertia, weakness, and self-interest are some of the causes behind this. They are also frequently the result of genuine uncertainty about how to act most effectively in an increasingly complex economic environment. Despite the fact that South Africa has put in place constitutional and policy instruments to ensure human development, real commitment to national action that must foster processes by which communities and individuals grow stronger, are able to enjoy employment, live fuller and more productive lives, and become less vulnerable to the scourges of poverty and insecurity, action is still required (Levy, Hirsch, Naidoo & Nxele, 2021). President Cyril Ramaphosa said during his State of the Nation 2022 address in response to the unemployment crisis, "We all know that government does not create jobs, business creates jobs." This statement contradicted the President's vow to create millions of jobs for South Africans during the 2018 jobs conference.

In this sense, the paper delves into the perplexing topic of unemployment by delving into different myths and misunderstandings. Three basic questions must be answered in order to get to the bottom of these challenges. What are the actual causes of unemployment? what are the options for resolving the problem? And whose role is it to create jobs in a developmental state?

The Unemployment Context in South Africa

The term unemployment, refers only to those who have actively searched for work in the last four weeks and are able to take a job within the following week (Alenda-Demoutiez & Mügge, 2020). All other "discouraged" workers (those who want to work but are

not actively looking for work) are categorized as not economically active (Alenda-Demoutiez & Mügge, 2020). It is a common misconception that unemployment only became a problem following the 1994 democratic election. The reality is rather different, as this problem has existed for a long time. Historically, African and colored people were far more likely to be unemployed, but white people were much more likely to be employed (Marumo and Sebolaaneng, 2019). The most visible manifestation of this racial divide was in government administration, where all but the most menial occupations were designated exclusively for Whites (Marumo & Sebolaaneng, 2019).

In general, skilled jobs were reserved for the White population, while the African labor force was paid less in comparatively unskilled jobs (Sharp, 2021). Unfair employment reservation for a small segment of the population was the norm (Sharp, 2021). The bulk of black people were previously largely excluded from the mainstream economy and viewed as a source of cheap labor (Marais, 2020). This caused false skews in employment patterns, which South Africa is still working to correct. As a result, the African population formerly faced not just higher unemployment rates, but also lower salaries for those who were employed. Apartheid's intentional exclusion of black people from the education system and skilled occupations contributed to today's high unemployment rates. Jobs are being lost due to a lack of knowledge and productivity (Vally, 2020). Unemployment rises in lockstep with lower educational levels, and the educational system is failing to produce the necessary skills for the labor market.

In 1994, unemployment was 20.5 percent (Francis & Webster, 2019). The number of people in working age (those aged 16 to 64) went from 23 million in 1995 to 29 million in 2008 (Francis & Webster, 2019). Simultaneously, the labor force participation rate rose from 49 percent to 55 percent (Francis & Webster, 2019). The proportions of Africans, young people, and women in the population increased significantly. As African females began to interact with the post-apartheid labor market and correct their relatively low participation rates during the apartheid years, participation rates rose most substantially for the less-skilled (Sharp, 2021). Over the course of this epoch, these reinforcing variables resulted in an additional 5 million people joining the labor market (Sharp, 2021). The rapid expansion in the availability of less-skilled labor in the 1990s was coupled by a failure to hire these workers, resulting in a significant increase in unemployment (Bhorat & Khan, 2018). The situation was compounded by skill-biased technical change.

Currently, South Africa is experiencing a surplus of especially unskilled and low-skilled job seekers, owing to historically low levels of investment in African education. In 2021, South Africa's unemployment rate grew by 0.5% to 34.9% (Flaming, Orlando, Burns & Pickens, 2021). Since 2008, this is the highest official unemployment rate. These findings indicate a struggling economy with large employment losses and high levels of

economic inactivity, aggravated by COVID-19 pandemic lockdown restrictions and, more recently, civil unrest in some parts of the country that resulted in the permanent closure of some firms (Flaming, et al. 2021). The situation is further compounded by the chastising and killing of foreign nationals, as international investors are afraid of investing in an economy that is not friendly to non-citizens (Mago, 2018).

All industries saw a reduction in employment in 2021, with the exception of finance, which saw a 138 000 gain in employment (Stats SA, 2022). The trade sector lost 309 000 jobs, followed by community and social services (210 000), construction and private residences (65 000) (Stats SA, 2022). Job losses were greatest in the formal sector, while job gains were recorded in the informal sector (an increase of 9 000) (Stats SA, 2022). Therefore, the government's most essential objective is to reduce South Africa's high unemployment rate.

Methodology

As a research method, the paper employs a literature review. A literature review is a method of collecting and summarising previous research that is more or less systematic (Snyder, 2019). As a research approach, an effective and well-conducted review establishes a solid platform for increasing knowledge and aiding theory development (Snyder, 2019). A literature review can address research questions with a power that no one study can match since it integrates results and viewpoints from many empirical studies. It is also useful for giving a broad overview of topics where research is diverse and interdisciplinary. A literature review is also a good technique to synthesis study findings to provide evidence on a meta-level and to identify areas where more research is needed, which is important for policy reform.

Causes of Unemployment

The crux of the paper is to establish whose role it is to create jobs in a developmental state. However, in order to make this determination, it is pertinent to first ascertain the causes of unemployment. In this regard, the section discusses issues causing unemployment in South Africa.

Imports and Exports

The paper will use the trade relationship between China and South Africa as an example to depict how imports and exports are contributing to unemployment in South Africa. However, it is pertinent to state from the onset that the discussion depicted in this section is not only limited to China but is applicable to most trade relations between South Africa and the European market. Chinese trade growth has had a detrimental direct competitive effect on domestic manufacturing production and employment,

most notably textiles and clothes, rubber, paper, and metal industries (Edwards & Jenkins, 2014). The majority of South Africa's exports are processed raw materials, whereas China's imports are mostly manufactured items (Edwards & Jenkins, 2014). The relatively low cost of Chinese imports has put downward pressure on domestic prices (Masipa, 2018). Consequently, clothing, leather goods, and footwear prices were all decreased as a result of Chinese competition (Edwards and Rankin, 2012).

The implication is that imports from China will put downward pressure on producer prices, putting further pressure on competing South African manufacturers. Concerns regarding the direct consequences of Chinese competition on output and employment in the South African manufacturing sector have been fueled by high increases in import penetration, particularly in labor-intensive industries, paired with relatively low exports of manufactured goods (Chakraborty & Sundaram, 2019). This shows that industrial businesses that have been subjected to more Chinese import competition have experienced smaller increases in sales volumes and employment. As a result, projections of output and employment losses ascribed to increased import penetration will be skewed upwards. To begin with, exports have been concentrated in industries that are very capital- and labor-intensive. As a result, the number of direct employment possibilities provided by these exports has been limited. Second, imports from China have had a particularly negative impact on labor-intensive businesses.

Legislation and Policy

Any labor market operates within the framework of labor market policies and institutions that govern collective bargaining and working conditions. Apartheid's labor policies were fundamental in undermining Black workers' rights (Ndinga-Kanga, van der Merwe & Hartford, 2020). Blacks were denied access to the official collective bargaining framework of the time, particularly Industrial Councils (Ndinga-Kanga, et al. 2020). Due to the lack of legal protection for Black labor unions, wages and working conditions for Black employees were particularly depraved. The Labour Relations Act (LRA) of 1995 and a slew of new legislation governing working conditions and employment standards came with the inauguration of the ANC government in 1994. However, employers have complained about the rigidities associated with the LRA and contend that it extends far beyond achieving minimum wage requirements (Abel, Blair and Fabregas, 2014: 384).

Employers often cite strict labor legislation and an inflexible labor market as a business constraint, and to escape the "hassle factor" of permanent employment, many turn to hiring part-time or casual labor (Bhorat et al, 2020). The difficulties of hiring and terminating labor, as well as adhering to bargaining council agreements and labor regulations that exclusively cover permanent workers, are examples of these

inflexibilities. The enactment of the LRA, the Employment Equity Act of 1998, and the Skills Development Act of 1998 coincided with a dramatic increase in the usage of temporary workers and as a result, the number of permanent, secure employment has decreased. The inference is that, as a result of strict labour laws, not only is labour being replaced by capital and people being laid off for long periods of time, but businesses are also maintaining employment levels to a bare minimum.

As a result, fewer workers will be protected by legislation, and they will be significantly more likely to become unemployed. This trend in part-time labor not only reflects a reduction in the use of workers' full productive ability, but it also has consequences for inequality. Casual labor is on the rise, where the percentage of people working part-time has more than doubled (Niymanira & Sabela, 2019). This could be explained by the fact that part-time workers are more likely to have a lower degree of education. In other words, the percentage of the employed people who are fully utilising their productive capacity while also benefiting from protective labor legislation is progressively declining. As a result, it appears that the legislative environment has certain detrimental implications. The appeals for nuance and South African specificity are complicated by the fact that there is scant evidence that the collective bargaining institutions have provided any positive advantages to offset their costs.

Entrepreneurship Underutilised

Despite the high rate of unemployment, informal entrepreneurship is underutilised, especially when compared to other developing countries. Regardless of several government measures to promote entrepreneurship, South Africa's entrepreneurial activity is low. For example, less than 10% of the population is running their own businesses (Bushe, 2019). This finding corroborates the argument by Cao and Shi (2021) that strict labor laws increase the cost of labor for small businesses, creating a barrier to entrance into entrepreneurial activities. Entrepreneurs consider labor legislation and an inflexible labor market dominated by trade unions as roadblocks to formal self-employment. Low access to finance, a lack of business expertise, and crime have all been suggested as impediments to entry into informal entrepreneurship (Mahadea & Khumalo, 2020).

Of course, these limits should not prove to be a serious deterrent to informal sector entrepreneurship, which frequently operates outside of the regulatory framework. Fernandez (2020) argues that apartheid's legacy suffocates black entrepreneurship, as informal businesses were frequently discouraged or outlawed due to racial segregation, strict zoning, and restrictive by-laws. Blacks continue to be geographically isolated from business centers, primarily in rural areas and informal townships (Fernandez, 2020). However, there does not appear to be much evidence to support the hypothesis that

blacks do not engage in self-employment as a result of apartheid's legacy. In this regard, low levels of human capital or access to cash required for entrepreneurship are more likely deterrents. In this context, the authors argue that increased entrepreneurship reduces unemployment.

Foreign Direct Investment (FDI)

As a sub-imperialist power, South Africa's capital is involved in "systematic domestic exploitation" of the rest of Africa (Shoba, 2018). Martin (2019: 51), contends that "South African capital has all the essential features of imperialism as conceptualized by Lenin." Martin (2019: 53) argues that "what is incontrovertible is that South African corporations wield great power up and down the continent". Namibian political economist Melber cited in Bond (2015: 130), said

"...Pretoria has always protected its own industry and destroyed infant industries in other countries. At the same time South African companies ruthlessly destroyed local enterprises to create monopolies in the Southern African Customs Union states. I never had any illusions that SA economic interests were only pursuing exactly these. Yes, from a Namibian perspective South Africa is sub imperialist and a junior partner to imperialism."

Extrapolating from this quote, the corporate expansion and penetration model appears to be to leverage larger markets in South Africa to attain economies of scale, then flood other countries with cheaper items, destroying the remaining basic needs manufacturing sector in these countries. Likewise, McKenzie (2016: 15), states:

"About a dozen South African companies take part in the looting and carving up of Africa; British American Tobacco, SAB Miller breweries, the MTN and Vodacom cell phone networks, Naspers newspapers, four banks (Standard, Barclays, Nedbank and FirstRand), the Sasol oil and remnants of the Anglo American Corporation empire—all use FDI as a weapon and all derive substantial FDI profits from its deployment in Africa."

Most African economies and manufacturing industries have been crippled as a result of these initiatives (McKenzie, 2016). As a result, a large number of Africans have migrated to South Africa in quest of employment and survival (Crush, Tawodzera, Chikanda, Ramachandran &Tevera, 2018. South Africa's insertion into the world of capitalism enabled it to absorb a large army of these migrant workers from other African countries to work in mercantile capitalism's industries and farms (Crush et al. 2018). That position has unchanged over the years, despite the fact that labour arriving in South Africa is unwanted. The absorbed migrant workers serve an important role in the South African economy, not just as a reserve army that drives wages down, but also as a reserve that

funds capital reproduction by its own unpaid labor. Against this backdrop, migrant workers continue to compete for employment with locals in South Africa, an aspect which has an effect on unemployment levels.

Job Creation

The paper established that South Africa has been hard hit by the spiraling unemployment rate. Consequently, the relative roles of the public and private sectors in creating employment are hotly debated. Is it the role of a developmental state to bring about economic and social transformation, or is it the role of a thriving, expanding private sector to spur development and employment? The debate was sparked by President Cyril Ramaphosa during his State of the Nation 2022 address, where he said “We all know that government does not create jobs, business creates jobs” (Daily Maverick, 2022). The authors agree to the Presidents sentiments that businesses have an obligation to create employment. However, the government equally has an obligation to create employment as corroborated by the President’s vow to create millions of jobs for South Africans during the 2018 jobs conference.

The President’s Youth Employment Initiative, in tandem with the Basic Education Employment Initiative for teacher assistants, is a suitable example to corroborate the authors’ claim. For many young individuals, the initiative has resulted in several employment prospects. Asongu, Akpan and Isihak (2018), argue that the government’s main role is to implement policies that allow the private sector — large and small — to emerge, grow, access new markets, create new products, and hire more people. In this context, government policies must promote economic growth, which will result in the creation of jobs. The government must develop economic policies that will attract investors and result in the development of a large number of jobs.

Government departments, entities, and municipalities must also create jobs through programs like the Expanded Public Works Program and other comparable programs (McDonald, 2018). The government must not only create jobs, but also protect them, not just in the public sector, but also in the private sector (Kuziemski & Misuraca, 2020). In order to create employment, the government must also promote and encourage industry. More sectors, such as the textile industry, which has been neglected, should be revived (Wood and Bischoff, 2019). To produce additional jobs, manufacturing sectors must be built throughout the country, particularly in rural provinces like Limpopo, the Eastern Cape, and Kwazulu Natal.

The private sector, particularly mining, must, on the other hand, process raw materials locally and export finished products (Aiginger & Rodrik, 2020). Mineral resources abound in South Africa, but they partially benefit South Africa (Cockburn, Cundill, Shackleton & Rouget, 2019). This is because South Africa has been exporting

raw materials and importing consumer goods (Cockburn et al., 2019). Local manufacturing industries will create more employment opportunities and South Africa will be enriched through exporting finished products. Against this backdrop, the paper establishes that employment creation is a collective effort. Both the developing state and a vibrant and adaptable private sector are important in creating employment. The public and private sectors must collaborate and complement one another.

In this context the government should envision a democratic state with ultimate responsibility for coordinating, directing, and steering the development of the economy towards a sustainable growth pattern. The government must emphasise on the importance of economic policy that democratises the economy and promotes meaningful employment opportunities for all South Africans at a living wage. Likewise, a thriving private sector, utilising the skills and acumen of all South Africans and of business operations that contribute considerably to employment creation is pertinent. In the next section, the paper proceeds to make recommendations to redress unemployment.

Recommendations

The current situation in South Africa is far from ideal, and long-term solutions to redress unemployment are paramount. In this regard, all role participants, including government, business, and labor, will need to collaborate to reduce unemployment. In this context, the paper recommends the following:

Promoting Entrepreneurship

The paper emphasises how labor supply exceeds demand, implying that there will never be enough jobs generated in the formal economy to absorb the unemployed. Therefore, the paper recommends that more people should be encouraged to create their own businesses, become entrepreneurs, and eventually become self-employed. Facilitating the growth of entrepreneurship is an alternative way to create jobs. Thus, communication campaigns are critical in addressing negative perceptions and encouraging entrepreneurial spirit among South Africans, as well as addressing emotions of pessimism and perceptions of nepotism, among other things.

In this context, the need for information on how to grow a business is imperative - for example, where and how to get funding; how to market your business; how to attract new customers; how to run a firm, what skills are required; training possibilities; opportunities to obtain experience. Although there has been considerable growth in this sector, it has not responded well to rising unemployment. This appears to imply that there are barriers preventing more unemployed people from engaging in formal or informal entrepreneurial activity. As a result, policy interventions in this area may have

the advantage of seeing results very quickly. Increased informal employment is not the best solution because earnings are lower and working conditions are poorer than in the official sector, but it would likely improve the lives of individuals who are unemployed and do not receive a wage.

Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF)

The paper recommends that government amends the Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF) to provide beneficiaries with a one-time grant to help them launch small businesses. In its current form, the UIF provides short-term income support to those who have lost their jobs, become ill, or are on maternity leave. Benefits are only paid in the period following the end of employment, and the person must have been contributing to the UIF at the time the event that caused the cessation of employment occurred (Seekings, 2020). Benefits are available for a maximum of 238 days (Seekings, 2020). The majority, on the other hand, have never worked and hence have never contributed to the UIF.

Furthermore, among those with previous work experience, some have been unemployed for more than a year and would have exhausted their benefits if they were ever eligible. While the UIF certainly plays an important role in providing replacement income to the short-term unemployed people with work experience, the great majority of unemployed people are not covered by it. In this approach, providing one-time business subsidies to all unemployed persons to establish businesses, will give long-term solutions, encourage entrepreneurship, reduce unemployment, and alleviate poverty.

Policies and Laws

The government should enact effective and friendly laws and policies to assist small businesses in surviving and growing. In addition, educational reform, training programs, and training subsidies could be used as policy responses to the constraint of the mismatch between the unemployed skill set and the skills necessary in the labor market. Relaxed regulations, such as making it easier for employers to hire and fire employees, are based on the existence of substantial information asymmetries that preclude proper assessments of potential employees' productivity. Given that all of these rules are based on behavioral responses by employers and employees, the paper recommends the government to experiment with relaxing the regulations on a small scale before implementing them. Relaxed regulations may encourage employers to increase labour force without being deterred by strict laws and bargaining councils.

Reignite Economic Growth in Africa

The paper recommends that South Africa must foster economic leadership by literary building the Africa of the future. In this regard, South Africa must revisit its FDI to

promote and resuscitate industry in Africa. South Africa must help the continent by bringing goods from other African countries into South Africa's strong supply chains and trade networks, encouraging the development of industry and agriculture across the continent. In addition, the highly proficient South African construction firms, banks, financial institutions, and government ministries, working together with their counterparts in other African nations, may create new employment opportunities within the African continent. In order to resuscitate its own prospects, South Africa must embrace its role as regional leader and place itself at the center of Africa's economic regeneration. Consequently, this will reduce migration in to South Africa, thereby freeing more employment opportunities for citizens.

Reduce Raw Material Exports

The paper recommends that to reduce poverty and unemployment in South Africa, South Africa must lessen their disproportionate reliance on raw material exports and imported consumer goods. South Africa must implement bold policies in order to transition to a model in which raw materials are processed domestically. As a result, more wealth and employment will be created, as well as increased investment in the infrastructure sector, which is a critical engine of growth. Local processing industries will aid in the fight against unemployment and vulnerability, as well as poverty in general.

Conclusion

The paper discussed the current state of unemployment in South Africa. The paper also examined factors that contribute to unemployment in South Africa. Furthermore, the paper outlined the government's role in job creation, and finally, the paper made recommendations to redress unemployment. The paper concluded that it is both the role of the public and private sector to create employment. In this regard, the government should envision democratic state with ultimate responsibility for coordinating, guiding, and steering economic development toward a long-term growth pattern. Similarly, a vibrant private sector that makes use of all South Africans' skills and knowledge, as well as company activities that contribute significantly to employment creation, is critical.

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