



IF some of the latest statistics are anything to go by, policies on poverty alleviation only had limited success, argues writer Chris Jones | HENK KRUGER African News Agency (ANA)

## STATISTICS ARE TELLING A NOT-SO-GOOD STORY ABOUT SA

CHRIS JONES

EARLIER this year, during an anti-corruption conference held at Stellenbosch University, Dr Pali Lehohla, former Statistician-General of South Africa, explained grippingly how statistics tell a story – how evidence can be a cure for despair and the platform for development.

He said that since the dawn of democracy, South Africa applied a range of evolutionary planning approaches, but asked: How can we accelerate the planning imperative?

In his view, certain statistics suggest that there is an uneasy intersection and confluence of socio-economic, demographics, biological and economic forces which portend a country at the crossroads.

A lot more (probably relevant) statistics or evidence could be given to answer this question, but I refer in my reflection on this teasing challenge, only to the following.

I leave it to the reader to connect the dots.

So, to begin with, what story do statistics tell about South Africa? Let's start by looking at different government policies over the years to see if they actually had the desired effect.

There were several economic policies since 1994, namely: the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) – 1994; Growth Employment and Redistribution Strategy (Gear) – 1996; the Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative (Asgisa) – 2002; the Medium Term Strategic Framework (MTSF) – 2009; New Growth Path (NGP) – 2010; and the National Development Plan (NDP) – 2012, with all their specific aims and goals like, among others, to address and reduce poverty and socio-economic inequalities; macroeconomic stability; strengthening skills;

creating jobs; and enhancing development.

If some of the latest statistics are anything to go by, these policies only had limited success. According to the Quarterly Labour Force Survey, Quantile (Q) 3: 2018, released by Statistics South Africa, 6.2 million South Africans are currently unemployed and 4.3 million of them have been unemployed for a year or longer.

Between Q3: 2008 and Q3: 2018, the number of persons who were in long-term unemployment increased by 1.7 million. The official unemployment rate now is 27.5%. The expanded unemployment rate – including people who have stopped looking for work – is 37.3% (Q3: 2018).

Black Africans and coloured population groups remain vulnerable in the labour market, with black women the most vulnerable with an unemployment rate of more than 30%. Among the youth (age group 15-34) there were increases in skilled employment (as a proportion of corresponding total employment) between 1994 and 2016 in all population groups except black African.

South Africa has 41.3% female headed households but suffer disproportionately higher rates in terms of a range of social issues such as addressing access to basic needs and services, poverty, HIV/Aids, and domestic violence.

A 2017 study by the Children's Institute found that approximately 40% of South African children are exposed to domestic violence. The rate of women killed in the country is five times the global average. Half of these are committed by intimate partners, among the highest rate in the world.

When one looks at fatherlessness in South Africa, the following

question arises: What do we understand of the inconsistency of coupling?

According to Lehohla, it perhaps suggests what is at the heart of family dysfunction in childbearing and rearing.

By 19 years of age, 28% of girls have begun childbearing. A third of these births are to girls who have not completed primary school. Ninety-eight percent of fathers are alive, but only 42% are part of their households, while 99% of mothers are alive, and 98% of them form part of their households. Sixty-two percent of births registered in 2016 had no information of fathers.

We need to be less obsessed with co-ordination and be obsessed with education

Dr Pali Lehohla  
Former Statistician-General

Almost half of all mothers in South Africa are single. Fifty-four percent of women in our country who are married or living together as married, make use of modern contraceptives, while 78% of the demand are satisfied with modern methods.

South Africa's rate of population growth slowed from an average of 2.6% per year in the 1960s and 1970s to 1.5% from 2010-2017.

There were long-term declines in mortality and fertility rates. Our per capita growth rate from 1961 to 2015 averaged just 1%, which was well below the East Asian growth rates and below five of the

six Latin American growth rates.

There is a noticeable representation of learners who are older than the ideal graduation age in South Africa's primary and secondary schools. Just over 12% of learners are not yet in some form of structured education by the age of 5. At age 21, there are more learners in secondary school than university and TVET colleges combined.

Approximately 13.8 million South Africans were living below the Food Poverty Line in 2015, down from a peak of 16.7 million in 2009. About 79.2% of individuals with no formal education were poor compared to only 8.4% of individuals who had a post-matric qualification in 2015.

The major contributor to the poverty among the youth is the lack of educational attainment.

So, given these somewhat depressing statistics, why should we hope for a better tomorrow? According to Lehohla, the African market both in production and consumption holds promise. But, the leadership choices made by society have profound planning implications in choosing the right path. We need capable people and effective, sustainable systems.

Lehohla argues that we can move from hope to reality, among others, by planning and implementing. We need to be less obsessed with co-ordination and instead be obsessed with education; with evidence; and with real public engagement so that our statistics can tell a different story; a story of a country moving forward on a trajectory of sustained national development.

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