

O PINION

EDITORIAL

MUNICIPALITIES CANNOT IGNORE CLIMATE THREAT

THE recent devastating floods in KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape have highlighted the dire need for all municipalities to build climate-resilient infrastructure and to focus on human settlements, especially for vulnerable communities.

Climatologists have warned that climate change will result in an increase in the frequency of floods and their intensity on the eastern part of the country, while drought will impact the western part.

The onus is on municipalities to start planning now for these future events, to mitigate the loss of life and the damage to vital infrastructure.

They need to tap into national government infrastructure funds and make changes to how they view climate change and its impact, or this will be a vicious cycle that continues to repeat itself.

The investment conferences that have been held have seen billions pledged, but how much of this is aimed at mitigating climate change?

How much has been allocated to building climate-resilient infrastructure, and which projects are focused on reducing carbon emissions and the effects of climate change?

These are the questions that municipalities should be seized with.

In KZN, those living in informal settlements along flood plains and in wetlands felt the devastating effects of the floods. Infrastructure that was designed decades ago according to apartheid planning systems did not take into account future climate evolution.

Municipalities now cannot adopt traditional methods of town planning that ignore climate change or the environment.

President Cyril Ramaphosa summed up the extent of the devastation in KZN when he addressed business and said: "Damage to key economic infrastructure such as roads, energy transmission and distribution, water and sanitation facilities and the port of Durban has had a dire impact on operations."

If municipalities continue to ignore the threat of climate change, it will continue to lead to the loss of lives and livelihoods.



Youth unemployment is 'SA's winter of discontent'

Rate at 66% is a 'world record', adding to national metric of shame

SOUTH Africa's 21 million or so youth (aged 15-34) have never had it so bad! They constitute a third of the national population of 59.3 million, projected to rise to 61.9 million this year, with the gender balance slightly in favour of men.

Through no fault of their own, they have been persistently living with the blight of joblessness with its despair, sense of hopelessness and trapped in their very own "lost decade", only to be clobbered, yet again, in the last two years by the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic, and, since February, by the supply chain disruptions caused by the Ukraine conflict and its resultant inflationary pressures on energy and food prices, which have shocked the global economy.

With a youth unemployment rate at 66.5%, according to Stats SA – a world record – welcome to South Africa's "Covid-19 or lockdown generation".

As if this metric of national shame is not enough, it has attracted the attention of global media giants – the BBC, CNBC, CNN, Al Jazeera – which in recent weeks have all devoted airtime to berate successive ANC governments' failure in dealing with yet another entrenched national crisis.

Compared with the UK, the youth unemployment rate there was 10.6% from January to March this year.

Youth unemployment has the potential of being the trigger of South Africa's own "winter of discontent" if that despair transforms into frustration, desperation, and unrest, especially if what the IMF calls "youth-specific unemployment policy inertia" persists.

Whether it is a mere coincidence or a sop, President Ramaphosa will roll out his "Youth Month 2022" on June 1 – a month-long celebration of South African youth, highlighting the Presidential Youth Employment Intervention initiative and other measures aimed at supporting young people.

RIGHT ON THE MONEY



MUSHTAK PARKER

Not that the 9 to 10 million unemployed youth have much to celebrate!

Pretoria, no doubt, points to the flagship Presidential Employment Stimulus (PES) programme, launched in October 2020. Its first two phases, Ramaphosa revealed in his February State of the Nation Address, "supported over 850 000 opportunities".

"More than 80% of participants were young people, and over 60% were women." The last published data for PES is March 2021, when 700 000 job opportunities were "supported", but 422 786 actual jobs were created.

While any initiative in support of youth job creation is commendable, policy impact, however, is complex and difficult to achieve, especially in the context of South African socio-economic and political dynamics.

There is a consensus among international agencies that the ANC government's jobs policy, in general, is fragmented, ill-thought out, badly executed and under-resourced. It is also inextricably intertwined with the vagaries of policy deficits in other key sectors – very low GDP growth, high public debt and debt servicing burdens, low inward FDI, a serious deterioration of basic education standards, which means job seekers are at an instant disadvantage in terms of employability, and there is a low capacity to absorb these youth in a deflated private sector job market already hit by the pandemic and global shocks.

South African socio-economic dynamics are caught in a Catch-22 situation because solving the various challenges is interdependent.

Any ideological posturing or attempt to resolve them through policy compartmentalisation is an exercise in futility and a waste of resources. There is also the misnomer of the public sector being the "employer of last resort".

Absorbing some of these youths into government and public sector employment initiatives in an already bloated bureaucracy, may bring short-term relief.

What most young people aspire to everywhere is a decent education (university, vocational or apprenticeships), with reasonable job prospects at living wages, with elements of continuous education, training and upward mobility, and chances at entrepreneurship and start-ups, especially in a future jobs market defined by digitalisation and Fintech. They want job security.

During his Sona, Ramaphosa called for a new consensus "which recognises that the state must create an environment in which the private sector can invest and unleash the dynamism of the economy".

After all, he confirmed that "around 80% of all the people employed in South Africa are employed in the private sector".

He is even toying with adopting "the German model of dual education and how German firms integrate the training of young people in the working environment", as he mentioned during the visit of German Chancellor Olaf Scholz last week.

The cause of youth unemployment in South Africa is structural, reflecting a mismatch between existing labour supply and demand at prevailing market wages, and not cyclical, dependent on the fluctuations of economic cycles and market conditions.

As the IMF maintains, "repackaging" of policies that existed pre-pandemic would not work in the post-pandemic era.

South Africa's jobless rate has never fallen below 20% during the past two decades and steadily increased to more than 35.3% at the end of last year – one of the highest levels globally.

Since the twilight years of the Mbeki administration, youth joblessness has been on an upward trajectory due to structural deficiencies in government policies; institutional corruption and state capture that reversed the earlier gains in employment during the term of president Nelson Mandela; the shocking decline in the quality of education, and what the IMF calls the onerous collective bargaining system and burdensome employment protection legislation.

"The poor quality of basic education limits the youth's capacity to exploit further opportunities at post-secondary levels. As a result, existing skill deficiencies and mismatches are likely to persist in the form of high unemployment, particularly in poor black communities, and a scarcity of skilled workers," observed the World Economic Forum Global Competitiveness Index report.

If Ramaphosa is serious about his new consensus, then it needs to go much further than the private sector. Bold reforms of labour market institutions in collective bargaining, labour protection legislation, minimum wage-setting and the adoption of gender-sensitive policies would give firms greater workforce management ability and boost employment opportunities for the inexperienced and the young.

Measures to improve the quality of education, apprenticeships, and vocational training schemes would not only help tackle high structural unemployment, but also support displaced workers via re-skilling and upskilling.

Parker is an economist and writer based in London

LETTERS

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Crossing a disaster waiting to happen

IN A world ravaged by mindless and horrific violence, it is a remarkable fact that a possibly similar scenario has been quietly developing in the precinct of Kenilworth railway station.

For several years following the removal of the metal booms guarding the level crossing, their ineffectually fore-shortened replacements have threatened the lives of all users, pedestrian or vehicular, of the roadway.

With minimum effort even the widest of vehicles can navigate the opening between these new booms, pedestrians cross without hindrance and the new red warning lights flash or remain unlit, apparently unconnected

with any approaching rail traffic. To introduce a note of tragi-comedy, an un-uniformed individual, presumably in the service of the South African railways, occasionally appears, waving a cloth to motorists inviting them to run the gauntlet, which they invariably do.

The operator of the signal box also has a mind of his own, detached from the progress or otherwise of the few trains that run on the suburban line. He allows queues of vehicles to build up with no sign of a train on either the up or down line, then as whimsically activates the booms through which many have already manoeuvred, at their peril.

What will it take to correct the surely punishable way in which the crossing at Kenilworth is run? Only perhaps, the awful sound of tortured

metal and the screams of those caught up in this system's criminal ineptitude. NEIL VEITCH | Kenilworth

Dangerous driving in 'red light' districts

RED light districts. No, not those sleazy areas, I mean those far more dangerous places: traffic lights.

Some weeks ago, after narrowly avoiding a driver who had run a red light, I did an informal survey at various traffic lights around Cape Town. As expected, it depends on traffic density. When traffic is light, drivers are less impatient, and the ratio seems to be about one red light runner per three cycles.

Things are different during peak times. Then the number of drivers

running a red light is almost 100%. We have generally blamed the minibus taxis for bad driving, and with good reason, but South Africans have slowly embraced the lower standard of driving on the principle of "if they can do it/get away with it, so can I".

The current fine for this offence is R500, which, given the potential for disaster, is far too low.

Still, just one hidden camera or traffic cop armed with one could generate R500 every three or four minutes. That's R7 500 to R10 000 an hour.

Now there's a really good source of income for a traffic department. Plenty of signs read "Speed Kills", but T-bone collisions are probably more lethal.

Instead of squatting under bushes on highways, traffic police would be far better utilised policing traffic lights. PHIL GREENLEES | Pinelands

COMMENT



TASNEEMAH CORNELISSEN-NORDIEN

Fundamental changes needed to stem child abuse in SA

AS WE commemorate National Child Protection Week from May 29 to June 5, we should also create awareness about the continued vulnerability of South Africa's children as incidents of child abuse increase alarmingly.

Why are we failing so miserably? The answer may lie in an overemphasis on dealing with abuse after it has occurred, with a focus on remedial services, and not prevention.

Service providers such as social workers often indicate that their case-loads are too high. Although our government acknowledges the shortage of social workers, it still blames them for failing at their duties, especially those related to child protection.

Considering the lack of resources in social welfare, it seems evident that a change of focus is needed in how social ills such as child abuse are addressed.

A proactive stance in reinvigorating community participation to equip parents and caregivers with the necessary tools to protect children is needed.

As the African proverb says, "It takes a village to raise a child." Community and group work intervention in social work practice offers the opportunity to render prevention services; however, it appears to be neglected as the focus is on remedial action. Furthermore, in organisations where community work projects do exist, they seem to be driven by neo-liberal tendencies.

These organisations are required by the state to meet numerical targets, as opposed to measuring the impact of their interventions. This has resulted in our community-based child protection projects becoming awareness campaigns that offer information to the masses and are not developmental in nature, as required by the 1997 White Paper on Social Welfare and the 2013 Framework for Social Welfare Services. Additionally, campaigns related to child protection and the prevention of child abuse often target the children, instead of the adults in their lives.

This places undue responsibility on children to protect themselves. It is the adults in their lives who need to take responsibility to protect children and to be equipped with the necessary tools to fulfil this important responsibility.

Child protection programmes should thus be aimed at educating parents, caregivers and other adults in the lives of children on how to keep them safe.

These programmes should empower parents, caregivers and all other adults in children's lives with skills to raise well-rounded, responsible citizens. Citizens who are equipped with skills to engage with others positively, thus mitigating the risks of child abuse.

Children need and like boundaries as they are important for their development. It is therefore the responsibility of adults to model appropriate behaviour.

Positive discipline offers opportunities to engage with children in a meaningful manner, where positive boundaries can be set and where children can grow into well-rounded adults.

Positive discipline is, however, time-consuming and requires patience and a willingness to repeat, redo and restart several times.

Equipping parents and caregivers with the necessary tools that encourage children to be part of a solution, rather than be seen as a problem, can foster positive relationships between adults and children. This can also mitigate the risks of child abuse and address this societal ill.

We need fundamental changes and many prevention projects, which target adults rather than children, to begin to protect our children properly against the injustices they face.

A good place to start would be at each home, where people should have uncomfortable conversations about where we are in our thinking regarding discipline and what the responsibility of every adult is to protect children.

If we can manage to do this, we'll be a step closer as a society to making the lives of our children just that little bit more bearable.

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