

Job shedding in mines threatens to reverse gains made in socio-economic sector

The recent high levels of retrenchment in the mining sector and shutting down of key mining companies are proving to be the one reason in South Africa to undermine the gains made by the government in the EPWP Social Sector front. This was revealed by the study conducted on the Wild Coast area in the Eastern Cape.



The report reveals that the Wild Coast is the worst affected area in the country in terms of people who were retrenched from the mines.

“The backward migration of mine workers is a serious threat for the over-stretched social grants,” said Mr Luzuko Gaxamba from the Wild Coast Spatial Initiative and EPWP.

Mr Gaxamba indicated that the Wild Coast area in the Eastern Cape has been and, still is the largest feeder of labour to mining companies across the country, saying the current spate of retrenchment is threatening “to create high dependency of retrenched miners on social grants and other government social assistance programmes”.

“Although EPWP has been implemented throughout the Wild Coast, intra and inter - departmental coordination remains the biggest challenge,” said Mr Gaxamba.

He asked the conference how prepared was the EPWP Social Sector to cushion and deal with any disaster that could strike the mining sector?

“We need to start harmonising our resources and collaborate as different sectors in the EPWP, and avoid over reliance on EPWP Incentive grant funding over other funding pockets, such as line function budgets for the implementation of EPWP,” Gaxamba said.

He added that over-reliance on incentive grants often delays progress in the implementation of the EPWP Social Sector programmes.

Coordinators and implementing Department should stop sulking about resources but to utilise funding at their disposal more effectively and efficiently to address issues affected by poor communities.

He highlighted that the Integrated Wild Coast Spatial intervention is one of the strategic interventions of the Eastern Cape provincial government targeted at improving the living and economic conditions in the Wild Coast area.

The Wild Coast area covers Alfred Nzo, OR Tambo and Amathole regions (which, among others include Mbashe and Mquma local municipalities). These are labour sending areas for the mining industry.

According to Statistic SA, these areas are one of the hardest hit by poverty in the country with poverty pockets hovering over 54 percent as compared to other areas in the Province.

Gaxamba argued that for harmonisation to exist there was a need for political leadership, both at departmental and municipal level to unblock high levels of implementation challenges, which cannot be addressed at administrative level.

“We also need to develop a province-wide public employment strategy with more emphasis on much needy areas such as Wild Coast,” he said.



Integration of resources key in unleashing EPWP Social Sector potential

The Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP), social sector, can be implemented effectively if all coordinating and implementing Departments and institutions could work collectively and converge their resources in a specific regional area.

“Lack of harmonisation and convergence of resources in the implementation of Phase III of the EPWP Social Sector activities has led to challenges of achieving the set targets in terms of work opportunities,” said Dr Kate Phillip, Independent Researcher and Development Strategist from the SA National Treasury.



Mr L Gaxamba with Dr K Phillip

Dr Phillip stressed there was a need and an opportunity to create partnerships between the EPWP Social Sector activities and other stakeholders, such as mining companies.

She further advised that there was also a need to incorporate the EPWP Social Sector programmes within the Local Economic Development and the municipality Integrated Development Plans.

According to the Department of Public Works EPWP Social Sector report, there are 278 municipalities participating in the EPWP Social Sector programmes.

The Monitoring and Evaluation reports compiled on the EPWP Social Sector also revealed that due to fragmented implementation of the EPWP projects, the sector could not achieve the set target of working opportunities in the second year of Phase III (2015/2016).

The Social Sector was expected to create 153 980 work opportunities in Quarter 3 (April-December 2015) of Phase III of the EPWP Social Sector, but they managed to create 47 667 only as at the end of quarter.

“As you are preparing to enter into the next year of Phase III, it will be advisable to harmonise and converge your activities in the social sector, such as the community development workers and the early education development,” said Dr Phillip.

Providing examples, Dr Philip said there is a symbiotic relationship existing between Community Development Workers and ECD in KwaZulu-Natal.

She said the CDW in one region in KZN has assisted some of the ECD in the “establishment and maintenance of food gardens, assisting in fencing safe play areas; production of toys from recycled materials for use in ECD Centres and playgroups, building of jungle gyms”.

“EPWP can contribute to a vital national challenge: building active citizenship in communities; unlocking local agencies as a force for development; moving away from a ‘Mr Delivery’ state of affairs,” said Dr Philip.

She further indicated there were opportunities in collaboration to strengthen community capacity to use participatory processes to identify useful work, saying we need to involve community members in the mining sector in identifying their own challenges and coming with solutions.

“Distressed mining towns are a priority area for National Upgrading of Settlements Programme (NUSP) in DOH. Why social sector department and agencies cannot collaborate in this programme so that they can address problems of community members in a collective manner,” she asked.

Dr Philip said there was a need for forms of community participation and involvement for effective implementation of programmes. She added the work of EPWP social sector was widening up especially when they are dealing with the mining sector.

Challenges go beyond just creation of work opportunities, but include socio-economic problems such as high structural unemployment, issues of hunger, need for ECD, safe environments for children, better learning environment at schools, problems of substance abuse in communities, need for the establishment of youth recreation structures, and many more, said Dr Philip.

She indicated that these identified challenges call for collaboration and convergence of resources if they are to be addressed.

The debate and discussions were robust on the second day of the EPWP Social Sector Conference held in Ingwenyama Conference Centre and Lodge in Nelspruit. The conference continues tomorrow with discussion of commissions. Issues to be discussed will be on Social Sector Training Strategy, Interventions on the M&E and reporting, Institutionalising and mainstreaming disability in the EPWP Phase III, Distressed mining communities and the Integrating knowledge management within social sector.





