



EPWP helps unearth critical skills

A partnership between the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) and the Manufacturing, Engineering and Related Services Sector Education and Training Authority is doing its bit to help close the critical skills gap plagu-

ing the economy.

Public Works and Infrastructure Deputy Minister Noxolo Kiviet said through the partnership, the country's youth is being trained to be competent in various artisan disciplines such as auto electricians, boilermakers, diesel

mechanics, electricians, fitters and turners, and motor mechanics.

"As of the end of 2017/18, a total of 62 participants have successfully completed their trade tests and are now qualified artisans," said the Deputy Minister.

She was speaking at the two-day EPWP Colloquium on Youth and People with Disabilities, held in Tshwane recently.

The EPWP has been instrumental in creating employment at grassroots level, and equipping unemployed youth and people with disabilities with the necessary skills for the job market.

Deputy Minister Kiviet cautioned that at times, there were unrealistic expectations of the EPWP, as many look to it as the panacea for the country's unemployment problem.

"Although the EPWP offers short-term employment, income support provided in terms of wages to participants contributes towards reducing poverty levels.

"When participants are working in EPWP, the daily wages they earn reduce the level of poverty for them and their households.

"EPWP has an important role to play but it cannot be the only instrument to address unemployment. These unrealistic expectations are likely to result in failure and pessimism about the value of the EPWP."

Launched in 2004 to provide poverty and income relief through temporary work for the unemployed, the EPWP has had four phases, which have created millions of job opportunities.

Under the current Phase IV (implemented from 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2024), the EPWP is



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expected to create five million work opportunities, with participation dis-aggregated into 60 percent women, 55 percent youth and 2 percent people with disabilities.

"Approximately 208 small, medium and micro enterprises, which include cooperatives and non-profit organisations, have been provided with enterprise development support. Support includes capacity building, assistance with regard to compliance matters and training on existing enterprise support."

The Deputy Director General of Public Works and Infrastructure, Stanley Henderson, says more

unemployed youth should benefit from the programme.

"It is not enough for people to say they [youth] can now put food on the table. The aim is to give people hope and the necessary skills. The programme should be used as a tool for social cohesion."

The EPWP Colloquium brought together organisations representing youth and people with disabilities, senior government officials across all three spheres of government, as well as representatives from the International Labour Organisation to discuss ways to increase participation in the EPWP. ●