

IT'S A JOB, ANY PAYING JOB

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In his SONA earlier this year, President Cyril Ramaphosa promised that a national Jobs Summit would be held this year. This is now planned for 4 to 5 October. All constituencies represented in Nedlac will be present. In his statement leading up to the conference, the President highlighted the need for “creating decent work and building an inclusive economy”. So far, so good.

The critical premise for this Jobs Summit is the following. What can a Jobs Summit achieve in a time of deep recession when the economy is in a slump, when there is almost no economic policy certainty and when the cornerstone of the economy, property rights, is perceived to be under threat? Additionally, the presidential drive for international and national investment has been lukewarm at best. This despite Ramaphosa having lined up a dream team in April 2018 to sell SA Inc.

The question then is how this hard and cold reality is going to inform and influence the Jobs Summit.

We can, for no reward, tell you Mr President, what the Jobs Summit should not entail. It should not remotely consider an enlargement of the already bloated civil service to create jobs, as has been reported on the recommendation of the committee that is updating the National Development Plan. Jobs in the civil service, however important, are not jobs that would kick-start the economy and real job creation. We need fewer civil service jobs, not more, not even for political appeasement.

Secondly, the Summit organisers would do well to work with what we have, and not with what we wish to have. We have an economy that is in the deepest slump since the dawn of democracy. We have a serious skills shortage, especially among younger job seekers. We have a largely sceptical and investment shy private sector who are risk averse precisely because of political uncertainty, not least due to the land debate and its potential harm to property rights in South Africa.

We will not correct any of these realities in the short or even medium term, these require a climate of certainty and trust. Both seem in short supply.

Therefore, the emphasis of the Jobs Summit must be on the short to medium term and take cognisance of a current reality, however brutal, that SA has a very large under-educated and unskilled workforce. The ideal of course, is for a future with a skilled work force, maximum inflow of foreign and domestic investment and labour maturity including putting in place a more flexible labour regime.

The realism that must inform attendees at the Jobs Summit should focus on the Public Works programmes, such as maintaining basic infrastructure, youth employment, the revival of the youth wage subsidy, despite the protestations of labour. The Youth Employment Service (YES), launched earlier, should also be given some momentum. Sectors such as manufacturing and agriculture could also, with the right incentives, be productive areas to create jobs for unskilled or semi-skilled South Africans. The short to medium term job creation strategy must coalesce around what is available as opposed to what is desirable. This while the education sector is forced to account for not producing quality school leavers who can fill the ranks of a skilled labour force.

A critical imperative for the present discussions is that of the need for some flexibility with regard to minimum wage, otherwise jobs for the unskilled will simply not materialise.



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Finally, and perhaps controversially, the people at the summit should bear in mind that those without jobs or even job prospects are not attending the summit. They are not members of a trade union with highly protected jobs. They are desperate for any job and don't have the luxury of the "haves" to demand a "decent job". They should be first and foremost in the minds of the "haves" at the summit. They are those most in need of a job - any paying job. They will tell you, Mr President and other Jobs Summit attendees, that not only are they jobless and broke, but their dignity has been snatched. Any job will do to restore hope.