



Re-imagining a thriving economy through purposeful job creating interventions

[By Innocent Sirovha (Dr) Chief Executive Officer of AgriSETA, author and community activist]

President Cyril Ramaphosa delivered his 2022 state of the nation address (SONA) on 10 February 2022. The address served to arouse hope and encourage a plan of action to get the country's economy moving again. It was no more unusual than any other president's address following almost two years of the COVID-19 pandemic, which crippled the world economy.

More so and in South Africa, the divide between rich and poor, employed, and unemployed widened – so much so, it put a further two million people out of work. The latest, official unemployment rate was 34,9% in the third quarter of 2021.

The short supply of skilled labour is a serious obstacle to the competitiveness of our country and the Skills Development Act aims to expand the knowledge and competencies of the labour force to improve productivity and employment. SETAs are defined by the Skills Development Act among other acts and guidelines. The Act, which was ratified in 1998, served to develop a series of sector skills plans within a clearly defined framework of the National Skills Development Strategy. Among other things, the Act aims to improve the quality of life of workers, their prospects of work and labour mobility.

All SETAs carry a responsibility of developing a Sector Skills Plan (SPP) which is in line with the National Skills Development Plan (2030). The Plan describes the trends within the sector, the skills that are in demand as well as identifying Sectoral Priority Occupations for skills development - and then implements it through learning programmes. Together, these interventions are meant to create the workforce required for the sector and conversely, ensure the employability of the sector's workforce. Past statistics showed that the training SETAs embark on is not relevant to provide employment, therefore SETAs need to now focus on training that is purposeful towards employment.

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In the words of the president, “the agriculture sector has significant potential for job creation in crops such as citrus, table and dried grapes, subtropical fruit, avocados, berries and nuts.” And Masterplans in the sugar and poultry industries are contributing significantly to increased investment, improved production, and transformation.”

It is the commitment of AgriSETA as a government entity to help the country to achieve high levels of economic growth and address unemployment, poverty, and inequality, and facilitate social partners to work together to invest in skills development to achieve the vision set in the National Skills Development Plan (NSDP) , which is to produce educated, skilled and capable workforce for South Africa.

As a case in point, AgriSETA’s 2022/23 Annual Performance Plan (APP) makes provision for 505 TVET students requiring Work Integrated Learning (WIL) to complete their qualifications and to be placed in workplaces, mostly by those who facilitate the training. Furthermore, 400 artisan learners who have been trained, will be placed in a cross section of sectors over three (3)-years, this programme is already two years into completion and to date, we have placed 320 learners in workplaces. AgriSETA also makes provision for 180 university students to complete their qualifications and to be placed in workplaces. Strategic public private partnerships (PPPs) will serve as the basis for this, in addition to the 27 PPPs that is being established and 40 Community-based organisations (CBOs) / Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and Non-profit organisations (NGOs) with funded training. Additionally, provision is made for 80 Co-operatives, 40 entrepreneurs to start their own business and ten (10) SETA employer partnerships to aid employment.

AgriSETA’s interventions are but miniscule in terms of closing the gap between the employed and unemployed. It does, however, serve as a response to the president’s call 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.” And “as the social partners – government, labour, business and communities – we are working to determine the actions we will take together to build such a consensus.”

Furthermore, as employers, of which the state is one, we are considered the keepers of the economy by providing work to the people and securing them a decent livelihood. It would be reasonable therefore to own the responsibility by collaboration of efforts, transfer of skills, upskilling and reskilling. All large companies belong to industry bodies and before letting people go or retrenching, it could become a useful norm to consult such bodies to provide intelligence, guidance and even transfer and placement of people where needed.

In heeding the calls for “discussions on what trade-offs and what contribution we will each make.” AgriSETA’s contribution is both a public service and a national duty. We look forward to others joining hands with us and other government entities.

References:

State of the Nation Address (SONA) - 11 February 2022

Revised framework for Strategic Plans and Annual Performance Plans

AgriSETA APP 2022/23

Statistics SA | Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS) – Q3:2021

For more information, contact:

Mandy Rutgers

Head: Marketing and Communications at AgriSETA

mandy@agriseta.co.za

[082 496 2457](tel:0824962457)
