

Monday, 13 June 2022



SOCIAL EMPLOYMENT OFFERS YOUNG PEOPLE HOPE AND OPPORTUNITY

Dear Fellow South African

Later this week, we will commemorate Youth Day in honour of the bravery and sacrifices of the generation of 1976 in its struggle against an unjust and illegitimate regime.

Today, the youth of South Africa confront new struggles in their quest to lead lives of dignity and in pursuit of a better life. Though we have made substantial progress in broadening opportunities for young people in basic and higher education, millions of young people remain unemployed.

While the latest employment figures give some cause for optimism – some 370,000 jobs were created in the first quarter of this year – we still have a huge mountain to climb in our quest to create more jobs, especially for young people. According to Stats SA, youth unemployment in South Africa is at 66.5%. No society can expect to grow or thrive when the vast majority of its young people are out of work.

Our foremost priority as government is to achieve higher rates of inclusive growth that generate sustainable jobs at the scale of social need.

The economic reforms we are implementing, alongside measures such as industrial policy to support labour-intensive growth sectors, aim to drive growth and expand private sector employment. However, we cannot simply wait for higher growth to create jobs, especially for young people.

I hold the view that even as millions of people are unemployed, there is no shortage of work to be done to build a better South Africa.

This is the fundamental premise of the Presidential Employment Stimulus, which is designed as a once-in-a-generation effort to tackle unemployment at scale.

The employment stimulus is on track to support a million jobs through a wide range of programmes, all of which contribute to improving communities and creating public goods that will last beyond the work itself.

Eighty-four per cent of all participants in these programmes are young people, and 62% are women.

The most recent initiative to be launched through the stimulus is the Social Employment Fund, which will pioneer a new and innovative approach to public employment.

The Social Employment Fund will partner with non-governmental organisations across the country to deliver 'work for the common good'. This work is in areas like community safety, food kitchens, urban agriculture, early childhood development and the fight against gender-based violence.

The Social Employment Fund will create 50,000 new work opportunities in the first phase before scaling up further in subsequent phases.

The unique feature of social employment is that it recognises that unemployed people in communities are a powerful resource for development, not a 'problem' to be solved.

We have many real problems to address – from improving waste collection to creating safe and beautiful public spaces – that require work, and many people who are eager to do it.

Not only does social employment provide an income for participants by supporting locally-driven initiatives to fulfil local needs; social employment can also unlock creativity and agency, build local participation and strengthen mutual support systems in communities.

Another important programme that has now entered implementation, and which I announced in the State of the Nation Address, is a revitalised National Youth Service.

This programme will create a further 50,000 jobs for unemployed young people performing acts of service across the country, while providing much-needed work experience and reinforcing the value of active citizenship.

The recruitment of participants for social employment and the youth service is currently underway.

What these programmes show is that public employment can achieve multiple objectives at once. These include addressing unemployment, building skills and experience, providing public goods and services, and, perhaps most important of all, contributing to a massive national effort to improve the state of our country.

Despite the great setback caused by COVID-19, our economy is slowly returning to pre-pandemic levels. As government, we will continue to champion programmes and initiatives that limit the impact of unemployment on young people until the private sector starts creating more jobs at scale.

I once again call on business to be part of this effort by employing more young people, by making use of the Employee Tax Incentive and other measures, and by supporting and buying from businesses owned and run by young people.

This Youth Day, as we recall the struggles of our past, let us remain firmly focused on the work that we are doing – including through our innovative public employment programmes – to build a better future for all the young people of our country.

With best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Cyril Ramaphosa". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'C'.