

# POLICY NOTE

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## *Rural Youth Employment, Development and Training*

This policy note draws on a DST/HSRC government cluster workshop on 11 September 2013 that discussed the National Rural Youth Service Corps (NARYSEC) from a policy viewpoint.

### INTRODUCTION

The relationship between rural and urban South Africa is the result of a complex history, still evident today. Over centuries, indigenous societies have been conquered or absorbed into white colonies or independent white-dominated states. This process was driven substantially by the agricultural and commercial need for labour and from the mid-nineteenth century for mining and industry. These sectors grew by using large numbers of badly-paid, mainly African workers. This mobilisation took the form of migrant labour, at first drawing mostly African males to mining, industrial and commercial farming areas from impoverished reserves (later called Bantustans or homelands) and from areas outside South Africa's borders. In such societies black African leaders became instruments of white-controlled governments, maintaining control over communal landholding and family law. In the mid-twentieth century, permanent migration to urban areas commenced on a substantial scale, becoming a flood after the removal of influx control and the collapse of apartheid.

It is against this background that contemporary rural poverty should be regarded, whether in the previous homelands or among rural workers on commercial farms

in what used to be 'white' areas. Many young people leave the rural areas for urban areas but employment is hard to obtain for any but the well-educated and skilled. Many remain in rural areas where there is even less employment available and where agriculture is difficult on land that is often eroded and unproductive and where marketing channels are weak. It is these unemployed young people that NARYSEC and other government programmes hope to assist.

### DEBATES

Poverty on the scale of that in rural South Africa is daunting and there are many attempts to grapple with it from different perspectives. Debates range from questions of land reform and redistribution; traditional versus freehold or leasehold tenure; whether migration to the cities is inevitable or whether rural development schemes can reduce it; the different experiences of men and women in the context of rural poverty; to what 'rural' and 'urban' mean when there is constant circulation of people between villages and towns; and many others. Such issues impact with particular force on young people in areas where economic opportunities are extremely limited and where the amenities and diversions of cities and

towns are largely absent. A 2011 report of the Development Bank of Southern Africa noted that 'unemployment is concentrated in the 14-34 age cohort, which accounted for 72% of the unemployed in 2010. Consequently, the country's unemployment crisis is seen as a youth unemployment crisis in particular.'<sup>1</sup>

In the second quarter of 2013 the overall 'strict' unemployment rate was 25.6%, 32.9% of youth ages 15-24 were not in employment, education or training in the country as a whole. In areas of communal land tenure in predominantly rural provinces, the percentage of youth unemployment is much higher, especially if taking into account the expanded definition of unemployment which includes 'discouraged work seekers.'<sup>2</sup> In a sense this could be viewed as an opportunity, as argued in the National Development Plan, since a country with a young population should be productive and active but with problems of quality in education and increasing mechanisation in many fields it may rather be an obstacle and a threat to social stability.

<sup>1</sup> Marina J. Mayer et al., *Towards a youth employment strategy for South Africa*, Halfway House: DBSA (2011): 6.

<sup>2</sup> Statistics South Africa, *Quarterly Labour Force Survey: Quarter 2, 2013*, Pretoria: StatsSA (2013): xvi.

# policy note

## INITIATIVES

Whereas this policy note focus on NARYSEC has been offered as a prominent and concrete initiative that deals with rural youth unemployment, other initiatives not discussed here include the Youth Housing Settlement and Youth Build programmes of the Department of Human Settlements; the Expanded Public Works Programme of the Department of Public Works with its strong rural youth element; and recent funding from the National Youth Development Agency for training and supporting youth-run cooperatives, mostly in rural areas. There are also many provincial and non-governmental initiatives.

While a single rural youth agency would be unwieldy there is room for a better flow of information and for eliminating duplication among the many bodies active in rural youth development and training.

## LESSONS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

### 1. Share knowledge about programme content:

Programmes tend to include generic training such as business, entrepreneurial and life skills and specific skills, such as building and motor mechanics.

#### *Policy implications*

- As with the government cluster approach, planners must be familiar with initiatives in departments other than their own.
- Mechanisms are needed which will transmit information between the various authorities and enable collaboration between them.

### 2. Maximise the benefits of the government's role:

On top of funding training schemes and providing employment for rural youth, the government should ensure that all of its practices and policies lead to the best possible enabling

environment for graduates of NARYSEC and other schemes.

#### *Policy implications*

The government should:

- make any necessary adjustments to policies, laws and regulations that inhibit youth employment, such as procurement policies and labour legislation;
- build into its own practices and those of bodies that it funds or controls mechanisms that favour youth employment, particularly of graduates from rural development schemes; and
- negotiate with trade unions for easy access for trainees to work positions.

### 3. Maintain the right balance between numbers and quality:

balance the attractions of expanding rapidly against the absorptive power of local economies and the risk of disillusionment.

#### *Policy implications*

- Ensure that all training provided to rural youth is of a good quality and is linked to work experiences from which they can learn and on which they can build into the future.
- Do not crowd in more trainees than training facilities can support or than the surrounding economy can absorb. If larger numbers are enrolled in the facilities, ensure that the curriculum includes content that can be used in the wider economy and not just in the immediate area.

### 4. Find out how to pick and support winners:

Rural areas are extremely varied as are the young people who live there. Initially, NARYSEC's aim was to provide training as equally as possible across all areas. Experience showed that some responded much more vigorously than others and resources were focused on those young people.

#### *Policy implications:*

- Commission and support research into factors such as gender, economic,

class, cultural, environmental and others to best enable young people to respond to programmes such as those provided by NARYSEC.

- Adjust programmes to achieve the best fit between personal needs, dispositions, aspirations and programme content.
- Ensure that there is clear and appropriate policy about who should be enrolled in programmes, taking into account levels of education, poverty and disadvantage; personal initiative and ability to progress; gender; disability; race; and other relevant issues.

### 5. Be realistic:

Programmes such as NARYSEC may tend to imply that programme graduates should remain in the rural areas and 'give back to the community'. However, economic opportunities in these areas are few and the urban pull is powerful. Young people who have been through training schemes are more likely to find jobs but these will not all be in their home areas.

Related to this is the question of defining what is 'rural' and what is 'urban', particularly since the two areas are linked so closely through the long history of migration and where many people move regularly between the two environments.

#### *Policy implications*

- Fine-tune the content of rural youth training to the greatest degree possible so that it is relevant both to rural areas and to the wider economy.
- When young people who completed training schemes make a successful transition by moving away from their area to another area, regard it as a victory.

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