



**REVOLUTIONISING SKILLS DEVELOPMENT:** The improved quality of life for currently employed workers through education and training – both vocational and theoretical – should lay the basis for improved and transformed working conditions for young workers.

# THE POWER OF CHANGE FROM BELOW

**Eddie Majadibodu**

**T**HE democratic dispensation of 1994 heralded a breakthrough for the collective wisdom of our organised societal structures.

The reconstruction and development programme (RDP) served as the basis for mobilising our people, with education and training being one of its critical pillars.

The democratic government introduced an inclusive education and skills training system that aimed at responding to societal and individual development, and to supply the skills needed for an inclusive economy.

This system argues that the RDP is focused on the people's most immediate needs, and in turn relies on their energies to drive the process and help them achieve their needs.

Education and training should be regarded not only as part of a nation-building exercise, but also as an intervention to assist the people to work together to shape their own future – regardless of race or sex, rural or urban, rich or poor.

Service delivery is not about the delivery of goods to a passive citizenry; it is about the active involvement and growing empowerment of the people.

As we mobilise our people to participate in the establishment of a post-school education and training system as envisaged by the White Paper for Post-School Education and Training, we do this to avoid perpetuating

## How Workers can Revolutionise Skills Development

separation of our society into first and third world strata, which would merely be another disguised way of preserving apartheid.

The people-driven pillar of the education and training system must be taken side by side with the deliberate programme of linking construction to development and transformation.

The RDP is based on reconstruction and development being parts of an integrated process. It decisively breaks away from the approach that says growth and distribution are processes that contradict each other.

It is pleasing to note that the review of the Manpower Training Act towards the skills development Act No.7 of 1998 as amended has involved workers and their leaders.

This has happened in spheres previously regarded as the preserve of academics, education strategists and government technocrats.

Workers now participate in areas such as SETA boards and committees – that is, in their process and functions such as standards-generating bodies, including education and training quality assurances.

To strengthen participation and accountability in driving the education and training campaigns and programmes for workers in our economy, Minister Blade Nzimande has appointed union leaders to many of the SETA boards.

He has ensured that worker education gets the ear of, and was adopted by, the Human Resources Development Council in 2014, for it to get proper attention and support.

Many trade unions have enrolled their members at formal post-school institutions in order to deepen their understanding of the complex but very important education and training matters that affect their daily working lives.

Workers must understand the impacts of concepts and terms such as access and quality, the National Qualifications Framework and articulation, and a single but differentiated institutional offering.

Trade unions should not lose sight of the important roles that they are still expected to play in shaping the future of the post-school education and training system for South Africa during this difficult economic situation, by avoiding disintegration and

fragmentation of workers.

With the levels of unemployed youth forever increasing, the current employed workforce stands the risk of being left behind by other evolving processes and interventions, as more attention is correctly and understandably being given to the youth.

It has to be understood that the improved quality of life for the currently employed workers through education and training – both vocational and theoretical – would lay the basis for improved and transformed working conditions for young workers who would later be absorbed by the labour market.

Minister Nzimande and his department take the longstanding demand for the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) very seriously.

Thousands of retrenched workers roam townships and rural streets because the skills and knowledge they acquired at work have not been formerly tested, recognised and properly rewarded through RPL.

The problem is compounded mainly by the fact that our education and training institutions have not

been realigned to the needs of the South African workplace, something the Minister is addressing through a number of interventions.

Our people must be involved in the decision making process – in the implementation, in identifying new job opportunities requiring new skills, and in managing and governing our society.

This means that education and training is crucial to empowering our people.

The underlying approach of these programmes is that education and training should be available to all, from cradle to grave.

This is because the RDP takes a broad view of education and training, seeing it not only as something that happens in schools or colleges, but in all areas of society – in homes, at the workplace, public works programmes and in rural areas.

Organised labour, particularly Cosatu, Fedusa and Nactu, have a role in ensuring that all the issues raised herein are speeded up at the workplace.

Institutional and policy levels and any impediment must be detected at the workplace and addressed bottom up.

As the slogan says, "Education and training is too important to be left alone in the hands of the bosses."

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