

'Rain making in South Africa: connecting the right parties'

De regering van Zuid-Afrika zet momenteel een grootschalig talentontwikkelingsprogramma op dat door 20 regionale opleidingsautoriteiten wordt geïmplementeerd. Dat kost tijd, maar een van de resultaten is het JIPSA - The Joint Initiative on Priority Skills Acquisition - dat in 2006 door de regering werd gelanceerd. Dit bureau heeft als uitdaging om de werkloosheid in Zuid-Afrika terug te dringen van 30 naar 15% in 2014. We praten met de secretaris-generaal van het JIPSA, mevrouw Makano Morojele.

INTERVIEW

Robert van Noort
en Mark Turpin

De werkruimte van Makano Morojele – die direct verantwoording aflegt aan de vice-president van Zuid-Afrika, mevrouw Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka – bevindt zich aan de groene noordkant van Johannesburg. Het bureau lijkt mijlenver verwijderd van het bruisende centrum, waar duizenden mensen iedere dag worstelen om hun brood te verdienen, zonder diploma's, zonder toegang tot trainingen en bankleningen om die te bekostigen.

Mrs Morojele: can you tell us what JIPSA stands for, what is different and makes it so unique?

JIPSA is the joint initiative on priority skills acquisition and brings together high-level government, employers' organisations and trade unions in a strategic social partnership. The objective is speeding up skills development in key areas of the economy.

This programme is unique because it is very focused on realising the immediate needs of high-growth areas of the economy, such as the chemical industry, mining, tourism, small-scale businesses. Half the companies in our country employ less than fifty people.

Why do you need to speed up skills development?

We need to speed it up otherwise we won't be able to meet the annual 6% growth targets needed to reduce poverty and

unemployment. We are talking particularly about massive investments in training in maths and sciences, technological and technical skills and artisan skills.

How do you do that?

It requires innovative, diverse and fast-track solutions both in respect to training, apprenticeships and mentoring. JIPSA itself does not have any money to support these training areas. We only have the moral leadership of guiding all kind of government and private learning institutions to start working together. There is a lot of bureaucracy and ignorance on what is going on in suburbs and rural areas within these institutions. That's why a lot of available money is not being spent or allocated correctly. Let me give an example.

Background

When the new government of South Africa came to power in 1994, they launched an ambitious programme to reconstruct the economy and promote social development. This was called the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP).

The RDP was developed in line with ANC policies, supporting processes of redistributing wealth and promoting skills development. Within a few years, the policies of the government shifted to focus more on economic growth and less on redistribution. Pursuing high economic growth with ambitious targets of 6% a year requires a huge investment in skills development.

Further, the transformation of the economy means that there is less and less employment in the older traditional industries such as mining and industrial production, which generally require unskilled labour. New jobs are being created in the secondary sector, such as the chemical industry, financial services and tourism, where higher levels of skills are required. And when it comes to the mining industry the needs for skills is not in the mines so much but more on engineering and technical areas leaving behind the unskilled worker who is being replaced more and more by machines. At the same time companies like DeBeers (the world's largest diamond producer) are focusing on value-adding processes such as polishing the diamonds and even creating designs for jewellery.





The higher education institutes like our universities and business schools don't deliver enough graduated students in the right fields. And if they deliver, lots of them disappear because there is no proper way of registering them. The students don't have access to the job pools because they don't know the way. There is no connection between the institutions, authorities and the business. So many of these graduates find jobs in other areas of the economy. This happens for instance with graduates in town and regional planning. We need them desperately because we are building a lot of new towns, houses and infrastructure but we cannot find the right people. So what we do to support the different government departments and educational institutes is to bring them together and enlighten them on what we are trying to achieve in our growth targets.

And to make it more concrete, letting them think about how they can align these targets with creating connections between the people and the jobs. That's then where the money goes.

So actually JIPSA has no power although it's been appointed by the deputy president?

Yes you are right, and that is the interesting thing - it's not about power and pushing things. It's about our moral leadership in connecting the right parties that naturally do not easily work together. And making it attractive for everyone to want to be part of the process of really bringing in results. The fact that the Deputy President is sponsoring and monitoring our activities does give us a some additional credibility. There is no single framework for action; this creates a lot of space for companies and organisations to choose their partners and create programmes

together that precisely address their specific needs. Let me give another example. In Soweto, in fact in almost all schools in South Africa, there is a huge shortage of teachers in maths and sciences. Although the department of labour and the department of education do their best to attract and retain these teachers they are unsuccessful. They can't reach out in the field. They can't find the people. Then diamond producer DeBeers comes in. This impacts on them because the basics of maths and sciences are not taught at school, so professional universities cannot teach students engineering skills and DeBeers do not get new expertise in their company.

So we brought together the mining industry, the relevant government departments and some of the Soweto schools. We facilitated the talks between these parties, emphasized the different interests and started to work on a programme of acquiring teachers and reorienting them to become maths and sciences teachers. This whole effort has been sponsored not only by the government but also by the mining industry and more specifically by DeBeers. In return DeBeers is able to take on additional graduates with the relevant skills. Everybody happy.

Let us go into this moral leadership, how does it work?

As I said earlier we don't have any formal power to get things done. We build upon four pillars for interventions:

1. Focus on joint initiatives.
2. Daring to have specific targets.
3. Emphasize we are autonomous and independent.
4. Concentrate on problem solving.

These four pillars are underpinned by the concept of partnership in an national process of transformation. At

the same time it's about relationships. The less power you have the more you automatically start working on effective and sustainable relationships. We put a lot of effort into this, because it is in the relationship that we succeed or fail in our plans! So we are required to be good facilitators by guiding and listening actively and ask the critical questions. We also constantly emphasize the importance of creating effective coalitions.

Could you also say that next to being connectors you are also match-makers?

In the Western Cape one of the growth areas for the economy is international call centres where South Africa is competing effectively with India. One of the advantages South Africa has is that we are in the same time zone as Europe. The Afrikaans and English speaking people can be easily understood in Holland and Belgium, the United Kingdom and other English speaking countries. If we can promote skills in multilingualism, then this sector will offer great potential for new business formation and job creation. What we did was again bringing the different parties together, we set targets together with them, focussed on where one could get funding from and then supported these parties in solving problems, like transporting people from the rural areas to the schools in the cities, creating connections and dialogue between recruiters, training institutes and the call centres. Here again the budget came from the government and the business.

So you see we actually are high-level match makers ourselves!

Can we ask you: do you have a vision on training and education yourself?

The answer is yes and no. When it comes to the access to education we do have and also carry out our vision. When you ask me about training methods we very much rely on the necessary knowledge of the professionals. We have to admit that we do not have enough educational specialists. So we work with professionals from all around the world who are closely related to different institutions of the United Nations. We also stimulate high-level dialogue between senior business leaders and university vice chancellors nationally.

These connections don't always run smoothly because they both come from totally different paradigms. Business people talk about immediate profit to the business and the need for high level skills, while the vice-chancellors talk about the academic tradition and high-level research that does not necessarily connect with the needs of the economy. But we at JIPSA see this bringing together as a learning process and a prerequisite for our country to be a leading economy.

Can you give us some clues on if you are satisfied with what you are doing so far?

This way of working is exciting and totally new to us. We are finding our way. We have set ambitious targets and the way we now make progress is in itself innovative. The focus on connections instead of using power bluntly is a major shift in paradigm. And it suits us now. We find more and more that all contributors from business, labour unions and the government appreciate our initiative and are joining in. We are filling the gap. It is hard to give you concrete figures because we are in the beginning of setting up these relationships. We only have the feedback of the participants and what we see is that some of the initiated programs actually are running. So we can predict changes and higher output of skilled and graduated students. We are very optimistic that we will bring about change and results.

We see ourselves as the persons who light the fire under education and training to accomplish our targets on job creation and reducing unemployment!

We go outside to make some pictures. We stand next to a statue honouring the miners. Makano is busy and rushes – even though it is a Saturday – to another appointment to facilitate and connect. We wish her luck and hope to hear from her again when JIPSA has succeeded in its mission.

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Uitgesproken

ED FENNEMA

Lui

Lang, lang geleden, in een ver, ver land leefde eens ...een boer. Op zekere dag kwam hij een ezel tegen. Toen de boer langs liep, groette de ezel hem vriendelijk. De boer was verbaasd en vroeg aan de ezel hoe het kwam dat zo'n dom dier als hij kon praten. De ezel antwoordde dat hij jaren terug getuige was geweest van een bijzondere geboorte in Bethlehem en dat hij sinds die tijd kon praten met als enig doel om eenieder te vertellen over die Bijbelse gebeurtenis. De boer rende stomverbaasd naar de plaatselijke pastoor en vertelde hem het verhaal van de ezel. De pastoor liep nu zelf naar de plaats van de ontmoeting alwaar hij de ezel aantrof. Nadat de ezel aan hem hetzelfde had verteld als aan de boer, liep de pastoor hoofdschuddend terug naar de boer en zei: 'Domme boer, vergeet die ezel maar, je weet toch dat ezels niet kunnen praten!'

Dit aardige verhaal van Paulo Coelho, schrijver van onder meer 'de Alchemist', zette me aan het denken over thema's als luiheid en intenties – als in 'de zelfmoordenaar was zo lui dat hij uiteindelijk een natuurlijke dood stierf (anoniem)' – alsmede over thema's als beroepsblindheid en het dom houden van mensen die in je (moeten blijven) geloven. Want dat laatste is evident. Je cursisten moeten natuurlijk wel geloven dat ze van jou iets kunnen leren. Wel, als ze dat willen – of moeten – dan dienen ze je verhaallijn natuurlijk te laten voor wat hij is – al heel lang – en deze preek zeker niet in de weg te zitten. Het is verdorie niet de chaos van de straat of het internet. Of we daar nu dan niet iets innovatiever mee om moeten gaan? Zeker, die intentie hebben we zeker. Wellicht een thema voor een congres.

Ik moest ook ineens denken aan een goede vriend – een opleider – die ik de vraag stelde welk nieuws hij de afgelopen jaren op congressen, seminars en andere professionaliseringsdagen was tegengekomen. Niets dus. Behalve soms een dom ding dat je vertelde dat je online technologie al sinds vele jaren kon gebruiken om er mensen mee op te leiden, waarmee dan bijzondere resultaten konden worden bereikt. Zijn hoofd opleidingen had zich echter het kippenvel van de arm geslagen en hem hoofdschuddend gezegd: 'Domme boer, vergeet die technologie maar, je weet toch dat je met technologie niks kan leren!'

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