

Post-schooling of youth in Nchabeleng

Challenges and imaginations

The Emerging Voices 2 (EV2) project identified a number of ways in which youth in Nchabeleng in Limpopo can learn skills that are necessary for their daily livelihoods.

Brian Mandipaza and **Evans Shaku** explore some of the options that came out of the research project.

INTRODUCTION

The EV2 research project, encouraged and funded by the Department of Higher Education and Training, builds on the example of a similar initiative which took place during the period 2003-2004. The first *Emerging Voices* undertook a comprehensive probe into the condition of, and the experience of rural communities with basic education in South Africa, which culminated in a publication called *Emerging Voices - A Report on Education in South African Rural Communities*.

EV2 seeks to extend this effort to an investigation of post-school education, training and development in rural and peri-urban areas. Against the backdrop of the *Green Paper on Post-School Education and Training*, the first primary aim of the EV2 project is to investigate and elicit citizens' reflections on their experience of post-school education and training (PSET) in South Africa, as well as views and meanings held on learning and human development beyond the conventional notion of schooling. The probe further encourages an imagination of the PSET sector that could best serve the interests of the country.

NCHABELENG YOUTH

Engaging youth from the Nchabeleng community in Sekhukhune district in Limpopo in story-telling and photographic documentary through the EV2 research project, is nothing short of tragic seeing the devastating effects of the neglect of post-school opportunities, and the difficulties young people face in entering the job market despite their efforts to get certified at institutions of higher learning. There is a clear indication of a disconnect between the education being promoted – one that trains for entry into the labour market – and, the reality that there are almost non-existent jobs in the real world.

For example, the Further Education and Training (FET) College education system has perfected the art of hopelessly offloading graduates on to the job market every year. The same system is still churning out more graduates who want to be employed when they also can see and know that there is no employment. The system indeed is meant to feed into a consuming economy whose people have not gone far beyond the invention of a mouse-trap. If the new cohorts of

educated workers find themselves unemployed as is the case presently, households could be less motivated in investing in human capital and this could have devastating results for Nchabeleng's future generations.

A World Bank Approach Paper identifies the school-to-work transition as key to dealing with the problem of youth unemployment. The school-to-work transition represents the transition of young people to working life from formal secondary or tertiary education, non-formal education or vocational training. Successful transitions are crucial to young people's social and economic well-being and sustainability of communities. Failed transitions are characterised by increased school drop-out rates, youth unemployment, underemployment and the brain drain. An analysis of school-to-work transitions must therefore focus on the educational, employment/labour, and social and welfare policies of a country.

Youth in Nchabeleng community are faced with challenges in navigating these school-to-work transitions. One is that there is an inappropriate matching of FET courses with demand occupations



Unemployed graduates: Fetakgomo Youth Brigade graduates hold their certificates.

in the community. This results in an over-abundance of students graduating with courses in areas that do not match the types of dominant industries in Limpopo such as mining, agriculture and tourism.

The second factor is the overall lack of jobs in the formal economy in a rural province like Limpopo. As most new job growths are in the informal sector of the economy, there remain few opportunities for young graduates to find work that corresponds to their level of educational attainment. Many of these graduates end up migrating to urban areas in the hope of improving their job prospects. The resulting brain drain holds serious consequences for the future of a community such as Nchabeleng and rural areas in general as the very people who are meant to build these communities get absorbed elsewhere if they are lucky or come back more dejected and demotivated and resort to social deviant behaviours like drug addiction.

Globally, young people are a vehicle of positive social and political change through their participation in the democratisation processes, peace movements and anti-corruption efforts. Yet in spite of this, public policy programming targeting the youth has been woeful in many parts of the Limpopo province. This calls for a multi-sectoral action response on focused youth policy and programming to ensure that their concerns and aspirations are captured in line with the Millennium Development Goals and that some implementation of these policies begins to take place on the ground.

The government pays a high cost for every young person attaining an FET diploma/certificate or university degree through the provision of resources such as bursaries and loans. It thus becomes a waste of public resources to leave a significant share of the stock of human capital unemployed like the youth in Nchabeleng. Marouani points out

that as education is the best way to achieve social mobility, higher unemployment within the highly skilled will disfavour relatively more the less wealthy who cannot rely on physical capital assets to create their own businesses, nor on social capital to get the good jobs because of the rationing that will inevitably grow in the market of skilled labour. The issue of graduate unemployment needs to be given adequate attention by policy-makers in view of its implications to the dignity of the unemployed graduates as well as social stability.

Interestingly Nchabeleng has a number of resources on hand that are not being utilised at all. Let's examine a few of these.

The closure of a local college known as Sekhukhune Teachers College in 1999 has resulted in this infrastructure becoming a white elephant with facilities and equipment dilapidated, creating not only a negative impact in the Nchabeleng community but in Limpopo province as well. This is a tragedy, as it is a well-known

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fact that any country's teachers' training system is the backbone of social and economic progress. More so, taking into account the undeniable fact that South Africa, and the Limpopo province in particular, has a serious shortage of teachers, especially in mathematics and science.

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In contrast, many youth in the area cannot afford to go to Sekhukhune FET College due to lack of money for transport since a single trip costs R60, and the alternative is for them to find accommodation which is out of reach for most of these youths. Opening the Sekhukhune Teachers College is one way that people of Nchabeleng can fight the menacing claws of poverty that is threatening to take their remaining human dignity.

Sekhukhune Teachers Training College is not the only abandoned facility that is bringing frustration to the youth in this community. The Fetakgomo Agricultural Hydroponic project was also abandoned under unclear circumstances and the youth argue that the project would have gone a long way in addressing the high levels of unemployment in their community. Considering that agriculture plays an important role in rural areas and is a major industry in Limpopo, many young people feel that they would have benefited through practical learning and would have acquired relevant skills through this project.

This would have spared them the 'wasted' three years they took to complete their diplomas which has not resulted in any form of employment. They rather would have started projects such as agricultural co-operatives and started to earn a living to meet family responsibilities. The community also have unused sports facilities and community development centres which can help the young people realise their dreams or keep themselves busy and away from crime. But due to lack of government intervention the infrastructures have not been maintained in order to improve the lives of the young people or the community at large.

While the voices of the rural periphery is largely unheard, the young people of Nchabeleng community have a clear

understanding of their predicament, have a critique of the developmental agenda they are witnessing and can point out solutions to far-off politicians (and academics). The responses they get as they make noise about their daily challenges will be the judgment of how seriously this growing social, economic and political problem is being taken by those that are hearing and listening. ^{LB}

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Abandoned Sekhukhune Teachers Training College closed in 1999.