

Why youth unemployment is a human rights issue

As South Africa approaches Human Rights Day on 21 March, The BEE Chamber's Dimpho Sepeng raises poignant concerns about the persistent youth unemployment crisis in the country.



Image source: nito500 – [123RF.com](https://www.123RF.com)

Human Rights Day commemorates the events of 21 March 1960, a pivotal moment that reshaped the understanding of human rights in South Africa and specifically for Black people. This day, hundreds of South Africans took to the streets to protest against pass laws, which required Black South Africans to always carry a document of identification.

“Human rights, defined as 'rights inherent to all human beings', include the right to work, education, and a standard of living adequate for health and well-being. However, a substantial portion of South Africa's youth faces the stark reality of these rights not being fully realised, a concern I was facing too whilst completing my studies,” Sepeng says.

The alarming rates of youth unemployment in South Africa are a multifaceted challenge rooted in high inequality, inadequate education systems, and a sluggish economy. Youth unemployment in South Africa has reached staggering levels, with a disproportionate impact on Black people. “The unemployment rate among the Black African population group (36.1%) remains higher than the national average (32.1%) and other population groups and has been consistently so for the past 10 year period.” – [Stats SA: Official unemployment rate by population group Q4:2023](#)



Here's how we can get SA's youth in jobs

Larisha Naidoo & Zaheera Soomar 17 Jul 2023



Right to work

“The right to work, as articulated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, emphasises 'the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment.' Yet, when a significant

portion of the youth population is denied this fundamental right, it becomes a direct infringement on their human rights.”

Youth unemployment extends beyond economic consequences, it permeates the fabric of society, affecting mental health, self-esteem, and overall well-being. The inability to secure employment hampers access to basic needs, creating a ripple effect that extends to housing, healthcare, and education.

Human rights advocacy necessitates a focus on education and skills development, but access to employment opportunities post-training is crucial for empowering youth to navigate the job market successfully. Therefore, collaboration between the government and the private sector is vital in creating sustainable job opportunities aligned with the country's developmental goals.

Still work to be done

Sepeng adds: “While commendable policies such as the Broad-Black Economic Empowerment (B-BBEE), the Employment Equity Act, and initiatives like the Youth Employment Service (YES) exist, there is still work to be done in reducing youth unemployment and reinforcing the universal human right to work.

“There is an urgent need for comprehensive and actionable strategies to create a more inclusive and equitable society. Collaborative efforts between the government and the private sector which prioritise education and skills development, are essential to address the root causes of Youth unemployment. Only by ensuring suitable opportunities for the Youth can South Africa move toward a future where all its citizens - especially the youth - can enjoy the full spectrum of their human rights.”

The BEE Chamber has been involved in managing a number of YES and Skills Development programmes on behalf of its members. It strongly believes that whatever it does, there needs to be real impact on beneficiaries in a sustainable manner which leads to economic growth for the country. It encourages the public and private sector to collaborate where possible to allow for a better future for all.



Dimpho Sepeng, a young Social Media Manager and part of the marketing team at The BEE Chamber

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