

Universities are not the only solution to skilling, we need an equitable budget for TVET and CET

By Nomsa Marchesi – Shadow Deputy Minister of Higher Education, Science and Innovation

Honourable Chair,

The majority of South Africans are unable to compete or participate in our economy. They are locked into a cycle of poverty, joblessness, and inequality, which presents a threat to our democracy. If you don't believe me, think of the looting that recently happened in KZN last year!

Our Social and Economic crisis deepens daily. At the heart of this lies a government that is completely incapable of moving us into a better future, they are sleeping on the job. The total number of employed persons is 14.3 million people (3rd Quarter 2021: StatsSA) and the total population of South Africa is 60.1 million (StatsSA: 2021). If we look at the expanded unemployment rate, 66.5% of those are young people! We are indeed in trouble!!

It is without a doubt that when the ANC introduced free fee education, they didn't anticipate the number of students who would apply to universities; they didn't do the headcount and take into cognizance that we are a youthful nation, and they didn't anticipate that both TVET and CET are not adequate and neither desirable to South Africans. Not because the idea of TVET qualification is not appealing; in fact, we all agree that we need skills. However, TVET colleges are grossly under-funded with a curriculum that does not speak to our economic needs and a lack of capacity-building initiatives required to support our lecturers, management, and practitioners within TVETs, which do remain major challenges.

Our higher education system fails to skill our people; even if they do receive training, a large number of those still cannot find work. Graduates move from one internship to the next without getting permanent employment positions! This government is failing to expand our economy!

Up skilling our youth is one of the goals of this government, but their actions do not speak to these goals.

According to the NDP, TVET colleges have been identified as essential in skilling our youth, and an NDP target has been set such that 2.5 million students should register at TVET colleges by 2030. The Department has never shown the Committee the strategic plan that will tackle the desired increase of 2 million students in the TVET system within 8 years. In the annual performance report, enrolments in TVET college programmes have decreased by 32.8% from 673 490 in 2019 to 452 227 in 2020.

However, the minuscule budget of R12 billion is a mere 11% of the Department's budget; and if you compare it with the universities' budget of R92 billion, it is a drop in the ocean. Not forgetting a lack of adequate infrastructure budget means this plan is just one of the ANC's pipe dreams.

Honourable chair,

We need an equitable budget that speaks to the goals of the department, the NDP, and the aspirations of our youth!

As we speak, TVETs are not receiving the number of headcounts that is desirable because of a lack of adequate and acceptable accommodation. In Thaba Nchu, for instance, not very far from where I live, Motheo College has no acceptable accommodation for students. The neighbourhood where accommodation is allocated is not safe and it poses a threat to students!

And not forgetting the delays in certificate issuing once you complete your studies. It is utterly discouraging it perpetuates poverty and limits graduates from taking advantage of the few job opportunities out there! TVET colleges are just not attractive to South African students hence the headcount is dwindling! Plain and simple!

Honourable Chair,

Budget cuts are also not helping! Programs that talk about social cohesion and e-learning, which provide career development, have been cut by R12 million.

CET is also in a dire situation. The CET program constitutes 2% of the overall budget of DHET. Despite its critical role in supporting the development of short-term skills for out-of-school young people and adults to access the labour market,

CET relies on Basic Education to provide access to teaching and learning. During our CET summit, infrastructure was brought up as an issue of great concern over and over again.

This means if there is no school in the area, CET cannot exist and, as long as there is no infrastructure budget, it will remain as such. The lack of infrastructure also deters students from enrolling. If there is no intention of providing infrastructure, a more proactive arrangement must be made, and for example, utilizing municipal and government facilities should be an option for use for CETs.

From my observation, there is also a tendency to set targets that are unattainable because of a lack of sufficient funds or even a lack of thorough thought. For instance, the target for CET to enrol students from 142 000 to 266 000 in 2022/2023 makes no sense when CET has no accommodation capacity, given the limited resources. Is it fair for officials to be expected to meet such goals when there is no budget that speaks to those targets?

In addition, Honourable Chair, I would like to bring to the attention of this House the scourge of gender-based violence in TVET colleges. It has become an epidemic, and it needs to be tackled. We need a uniform policy position on this issue across institutions.