



# Review of Labour Markets in South Africa

## Career Guidance and Employment Services

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HSRC

Employment Growth & Development Initiative



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# CAREER GUIDANCE AND EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

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## 1. Introduction

School-to-work transition in a broader sense is seen today as a comprehensive approach to educational program development consisting of an alignment of student goals with educational experiences and services. In a narrower sense it is described as the process where young people move from fulltime schooling activities to post-school activities, including post-secondary education, vocational training, potential employment – this might take the form of casual work, fixed-term employment, or labour market programmes, and community participation. Labour market intermediation in this regard refers to the process of matching the supply of skills with the demand and involves youths and adults. For the purposes of this paper the question is: what is the role of agents such as career guidance and employment services in facilitating these processes through public policies, and what is the context in a developing country in which these services must be delivered?

This paper falls under the theme *search and access* of the Labour Market Project and investigates the role of career guidance and employment services in the process of transition and intermediation, describes the subject area, scopes the context of a developing country like South Africa in which the services need to be delivered, looks at some policy challenges in this regard, and identifies to some extent the research questions in the field.

## 2. Career guidance and employment services

The role or function of career guidance and employment services has been extensively researched in developing countries. In a comprehensive study by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2003) that was conducted on career guidance and public policy issues, public policy objectives regarding career guidance focused on learning-, labour market- and equity goals.

The indicators for learning goals relate *inter alia* to the contribution of developing human resources, the improvement of the efficiency of education systems, as well as the improvement of the match between education and the labour market. Some of the pointers for labour market goals are the contribution to labour market policy objectives such as mobility, and support with the changes or adjustment of the labour market. The equity goals of career guidance and employment services speak directly to addressing social imperfections such as gender, race and education inequalities. It is quite evident then that career guidance services are a strategic policy mechanism that works well in unrestricted and democratic societies. These goals can therefore supposedly be reached in a developed country context where unemployment rates are relatively low, where all people have access to education and training opportunities, and formal economies are well developed. In addition in developed countries, labour markets are not over controlled and function effectively, and equity issues are prioritised.

Watts and Fretwell (2004) indicated in a study for the World Bank in developing and transitional economies that regardless of their problematic issues, there are signs of a more dynamic approach emerging with respect to career guidance. The main reason for this is the increasing awareness by these countries of the importance of career guidance as a facilitation process for their overall human resource development strategies if they want to be competitive in global markets.

The following examples in Africa and Asia are evidence of this awareness. In April 1997, a Board of Governors consisting of African Ministers of Education was established. The people serving on this board are responsible for policy decisions as well as for establishing a modus operandi for the development of Guidance and Counselling Programmes. Even though the guidance movement in Africa is relatively new and many services are still on a trial-and error basis, the establishment of such a Board is an indication of the greater awareness of the need for career guidance in schools. Although career guidance in Asia seems to be rather a new development, a special section on Challenges for Career Counselling in Asia was published in March 2002. The publication consisted of articles on career guidance issues in Japan, Taiwan, China, Hong Kong, Philippines, Singapore, and Malaysia. The last article in the publication by Leong proposes a conceptual model that fits the Asian cultural context. Notwithstanding these developments, developing countries still have to contemplate their challenging *milieus*.

Watts (1996) calls attention to the fact that the priority level for career guidance and employment services is closely linked to the economic development of a country. If this is the case, there are consequently quite a number of distinctive issues that loom large in a developing country that have an impact on the forming of efficient policies in career guidance and correspondingly on the development of systems and services. These issues include high unemployment and accompanying poverty, extensive informal economies, the over-supply of unskilled or semi-skilled people, the loss of

highly skilled people, limited resources such as knowledge, finance, information, technology, human capacity and lastly, equity issues. Added to this are various cultural factors.

The development of any policies, systems and services in this context therefore needs to take into consideration the realities of national demographic, educational, social and economic conditions.

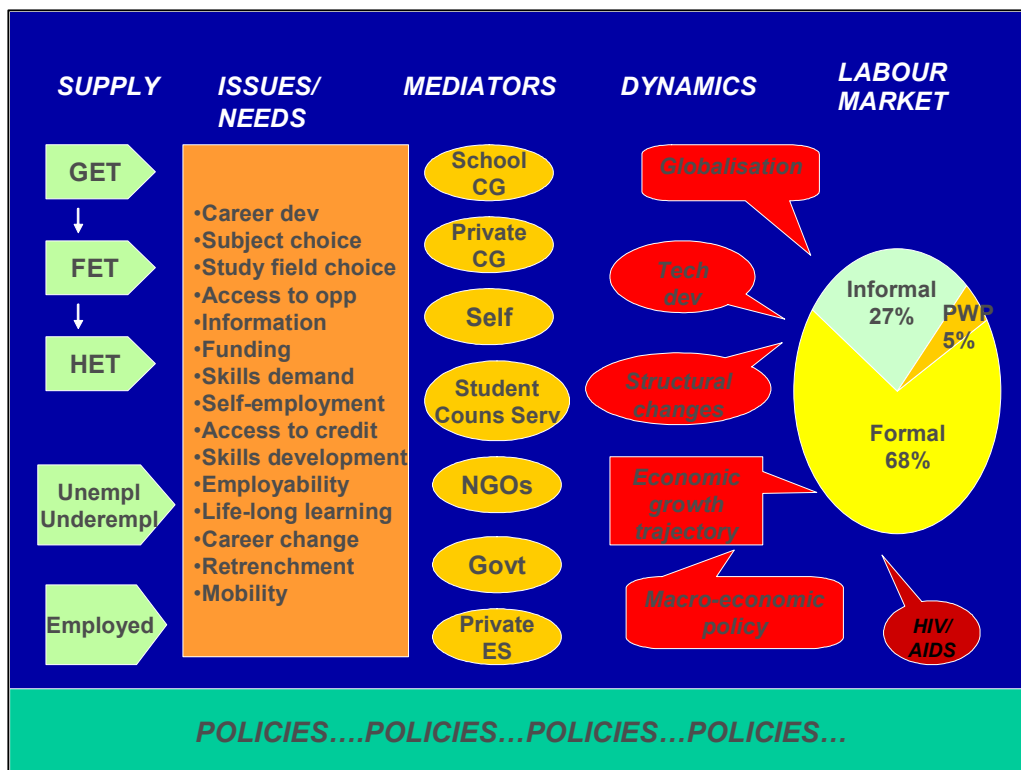




### 3. Describing the subject area

The figure below is a graphical presentation of the subject, trying to identify the factors or elements of the inclusive process of school-to-work transition and labour market intermediation. This picture includes the following: on the supply side cohorts of people or clients who are either skilled or unskilled wanting to gain access to the labour market; these cohorts of people or clients have issues, needs and topics of concern in terms of transition and intermediation; there are mediators or agents involved in the process assisting the clients; and specific dynamics play a role influencing the labour market over which they have no control. Policies underpin the whole process of school-to-work transition and labour market intermediation. It is important that these policies are designed in such a way that they can act as enablers of this process.

**Figure 1: Inclusive process of school-to-work transition and labour market intermediation**



#### 3.1. Cohorts of supply or clients

The supply side comprises of different cohorts of people or clients who want access to the labour market. This might include:

- People leaving school or a training institution with a Grade 9 qualification (GET), a Grade 12 qualification (FET), or a certificate, degree or diploma (HET);
- Unemployed, underemployed people wanting access to employment or skills development opportunities; and
- Employed people who want to change jobs, and/or retrain and re-skill themselves.

### 3.2. Needs of the clients

The cohorts of people have specific issues or needs in terms of their transition into the world of work. These needs depend on their status and readiness and might include issues such as the following:

- *Career development:* People wanting to gain knowledge about their potential and vocational interests, their decision-making styles, their level of career maturity.
- *Information:* People needing information on subject choice at school, study fields at FETs and HETs, funding opportunities for further training, career opportunities, demand for certain skills in the labour market, self-employment opportunities, access to credit, etc.
- *Placement in job opportunities:* People needing access to agencies that facilitate their placement in job opportunities.

### 3.3. Major mediators or agents

There is an array of mediators or agents involved in the process of delivering services and addressing the topics of concern and facilitating the transition or intermediation. In the field of career guidance and employment services these include for example the following:

- *Department of Labour:* Prior to 1990, the Department of Manpower was responsible for services to white people exclusively. It was only after 1990 that services became more inclusive and since 1994 the department has radically restructured its focus and services (Kay & Fretwell 2003).

Currently the Department of Labour has 10 provincial offices and labour centres through which 120 employment services practitioners render a service. Their client base consists of specific groups such as short and long-term unemployed, underemployed, youth, women, people with disabilities, retrenches and communities. Their service ratio is 1: 34 458, and this only applies to assisting the unemployed, who is their major client-base. The rationale for career guidance in this context is that through these public employment services a labour brokerage service is offered and the unemployed are also directed to skills development programmes and learnerships.

The delivering of a career guidance service was limited when new legislation brought a shift in focus from elaborate career guidance services to skills development. The challenge now is to create a balance between guiding people into demand areas in the labour market versus considering the traditional



model of choice. It is also required in this set-up that guidance should address the notion of lifelong learning as stated in the Human Resources Development Strategy of the department.

The Department of Labour has accordingly developed a career guidance model based on a systems approach. At the first level services are delivered to individuals by frontline staff. These services are direct and involve a computerised database of work seekers at the different labour centres, an employability measure, and a skills profile and vocational interest questionnaire developed for them by PACE Career Centre. At the next level lies group intervention that includes life skills programmes such as retrenchment counselling, group assessments and career information sessions at the labour centres or special exhibitions. The last level of service delivery accommodates communities and primarily routes community members into skills development projects.

Their major challenges are to: deliver a meaningful services to the large numbers of clients – over four million potential clients if the strict definition is applied; bridge the gap for rural clients, adapt the services for designated groups such as people with disabilities, focusing on the youth; and ensure that policies cover other labour market forces impacting on the client (Crafford 2005).

- *Department of Education:* Historically most of the privileged white schools offered career guidance opportunities to their learners. These opportunities included guidance with the selection of school subjects and study field choices. Many of these schools used the services of psychologists who conducted psychometric testing in order to determine learners' potential and vocational interests.

Currently the Revised National Curriculum Statement Policy of 2002 of the Department of Education makes provision for career guidance from Grade 1 to 9 under the learning area *Life Orientation*. Policy has been planned and prepared for quite some time to give career guidance the status of a school subject from Grades 10 to 12. This policy is now ready and will be implemented in 2006. The Department of Education categorises subjects as core, fundamental, or elective. Career guidance is now classified as a fundamental subject and all learners will have access to it and any services that are offered in this regard (Seckle, 2005).

- *Student counselling services in the higher education sector:* Student counselling services at public higher education institutions operates under the leaderships of the Society for Student Counselling in Southern Africa (SSCSA) and offer a wide range of comprehensive services. These services include counselling and career guidance and development services aimed at empowering students in all their major transitions phases related to higher education.

The SSCSA develops and monitors the delivery of these services at institutions for higher and further education in Southern Africa. This is done through guideline documents, the provision of a quality assurance programme, facilitating training and networking between members through annual conferences and regional activities. The Education White Paper, 1997 included support services with specific reference to the need for career guidance. The Department of Education is envisaging a national higher education information and administration service that would provide career guidance.

Many of the higher education institutions are often found to offer good services and examples of best practices are available. What is noteworthy about career guidance services provided at some of these institutions is the good contact that such entities have with certain industries in the labour market and the consequent successful placement of their graduates. Most of these institutions have special units that specialise in graduate placement (Van der Walt, 2005).

- *Private career guidance and employment services:* The private sector consists of career guidance services offered mostly by psychologists and career guidance practitioners and employment services delivered by private employment agencies. The career guidance part is mostly aimed at learners and the focus is usually on subject choices at school and study field choices for training after school. The employment services are usually aimed at youths and adults who have completed school and further training and focus more on recruitment, selection and placement.

Historically public employment services enjoyed a monopoly in labour markets in most countries, but this situation has changed dramatically over the years. Market liberalisation and demonopolisation have resulted in the acceptance of and an increase in private employment services due to the fact that many countries have permitted private employment agencies to function with different degrees of regulation. According to Thuy, Hansen and Price (2001), quite a number of developed countries in the EU have eradicated public employment services monopolies. Convention 181 of 1997 regarding private employment services is seen as the official recognition of the role of private employment agencies in the employment services sector.

Some of the main reasons for this change relate to the growing inability of public employment services to render an effective service in the changing labour market, and to the financial constraints experienced by public institutions. History has also shown that through the years companies and work seekers have used various other contacts and networks to gain access to job opportunities. Convention 181 endeavoured to provide general guidelines for a framework for agencies with particular emphasis on temporary worker agencies (IWAs). Private employment agencies are an essential part of efficient labour markets because they meet the demands of employers and work seekers.

In South Africa the private employment agencies in the industry are currently regulated by the Skills Development Act of 1998, which replaced the Guidance and Placement Act of 1981. The SDA defines these private employment agencies as “any person wishing to provide employment services for gain” and imposes only a few requirements on them in respect of the applicable regulations. These agencies also have to register with the Department of Labour.

One of the major professional bodies for the recruitment industry in South Africa is The Association of Personnel Services Organisations (APSO). APSO is internationally recognised as the representative for the industry in South Africa through its membership with the International Confederation of Temporary Work Business (CIETT).



It is estimated that only half of the operations in the recruitment industry belong to any professional or representative association. Other associations include the National Staff Association of South Africa, the Labour Broker's Association of Southern Africa, the Employment Bureau for Africa (TEBA), the Association of Nursing Agencies in South Africa and the Construction Engineering Association. The Confederation of Associations of the Private Employment Sector (CAPES) was established in February 2001 to bring together all these relevant associations operating independently of one another and to address self-regulatory issues. The confederation became a fully constituted body in September 2000.

While lower-skilled unemployed people use the services of the labour centres in the public domain, more highly skilled work seekers make use of the services of private agencies. One of the major issues in the industry at the moment is the casualisation of labour – labour taken on not through staffing services, and the externalisation of labour (Jack, 2005).

A worldwide phenomenon that is mentionable is online recruitment services. The characteristics and functions of these operators are totally dependent on the rate at which technology is introduced and used in South Africa. A major problem experienced by online recruitment services is the issue of confidentiality. Many work seekers are scared that confidential information about them will be compromised. Some of the advantages of online recruitment services are enhanced reference checking and skills matching, and reduced consultant time and cost. Online services are mostly developed for work seekers who have no difficulty with self-help models. Online recruitment practitioners do not see themselves as employment agencies. They argue that they do not engage in actual recruitment, assessment and selection, but only provide the tools and channels for work seekers and employers to make contact. In South Africa some of the major role players are careerjunction.co.za, jobs.co.za, jobfood.co.za, pnet.co.za, resume-link.com, bigbreak.co.za

- *Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and non-profit organisations (NPOs):* These have played an important role in the development of career guidance and placement services for the unemployed work seekers, especially first-time work seekers. They normally offer services to those who have a low level of education and skill, i.e. young adults who have completed Grades 7, 8, 9 or 10. These are usually unemployed youth who have endured difficult socio-economic conditions. The NGOs train them in core life skills and then negotiate further development with technical colleges or skills training programmes in order to give them a minimum level of skills with which to enter the job market.

The non-governmental environment was very active in the early 1990s. The South African Vocational Guidance and Education Association were established in 1991 with donor funds and a number of NGOs provided services under their auspices. After the democratic elections in 1994 donor funds became scarce and most of them had to close down.

Most of the current agencies that continued to operate in the informal sector do training for work placement, work placement, employment through job creation in collaboration with business partnerships, and employment through job creation via SMMEs. Some examples of these NGOs are the Youth

Development Trust, Khulisa, Business Skills Development Centre, and the Career Research Information Centre.

- *Other.* In the case of the unemployed cohort who mostly consists of unskilled and lower-skilled people the Department of Public Works plays for example an active role in assisting them to get access to short-term employment through government programmes. Apart from matching people with opportunities in the infrastructure sector, other Departments such as Social Development, Education and Health give the unemployed access to job opportunities through the Expanded Public Works Programme – Early Childhood Development, Home Community Based Care, and Community Health Workers programmes.

### **3.4. Dynamics influencing the labour market**

At the macro level there are certain dynamics that have an impact on the labour market and over which the individual has no control. These dynamics might include globalisation, technological development, structural changes in the economy, the economic growth trajectory, macroeconomic policies that might have an influence on employment for example, and HIV/AIDS.



## **4. Scoping the context in a developing country: career guidance and employment services**

It is essential to be acquainted with the context of a country like South Africa when an attempt is made to understand and analyse the policy framework, management and provision of career guidance and employment services. There are quite a number of factors that have an influence on this (Du Toit, 2004).

### **4.1. Unemployment and accompanying poverty and social exclusion**

The unemployment and accompanying poverty rates are some of the major problems which developing countries face. At the extreme end lies a country like South Africa where the official unemployment rate is 26% and the expanded rate 42%. This latter figure includes workers who have given up hope and who are not looking for jobs anymore (Stats SA, 2004). Unemployment rates of such proportions mean people will take whatever work they can get. The most vulnerable groups in this unemployment equation are the youth, who are wasting their time at a formative age, and low-skilled black women.

The related policy questions in this instance would therefore focus on the key issue of unemployment and how government policy should respond in order to address this issue. The impact of unemployment on career guidance is that relevant services will only be available to privileged groups who are able to access the labour market. A policy response may well be to provide sufficient services for the privileged groups in order to match them effectively with the labour market, but also to provide services of another kind to the afore-mentioned disadvantaged work seekers such as unemployment counselling, and assistance with returning to school in order to up- and re-skill people.

One might find that developing country governments may react on unemployment by putting active labour market policies such as public works programmes into place - the Expanded Public Works Programme is a good example of the South African government's policy reaction on giving the longer-term unskilled unemployed access to temporary job opportunities, attempting to upgrade unskilled and semi-skilled people through special skills development programmes - the National Skills Development Strategy is a good example of this, or simply by providing safety nets through special grants. Some developing countries also have positive labour migration policies and programmes in place to develop skills that can be exported in high unemployment conditions.

Beyond the orthodox causal factors of unemployment lies a range of less tangible factors that have an influence on unemployment, or on the matching of people with jobs. These include such things as lack of labour market information, inexperience with the processes of applying for jobs, and lack of access to the main information networks in the labour market. This creates a dichotomy in terms of the argument about unemployment and the policy response to it. On the one hand it can be argued that developing countries might respond with public works programmes, special skills development strategies on unemployment, and that they would concentrate on a low-

skills path to development which would attract investment in labour intensive industries. On the other hand it is argued that the absence of systems that provide information about the world of work has an influence on employment. It seems that in a developing context the balance between these different policies should be kept in mind, and the one should not be prioritised above the other.

## **4.2. Large informal economy**

In developing countries, most of the economically active population finds work in the informal sector or non-formal economy as it is sometimes referred to. In South Africa 27% of employment is in the informal sector. This trend is likely to continue in the immediate future. The notion is that the informal sector is where people have the opportunity to develop entrepreneurial activities and skills. However, it is often found that employment in the informal sector is characterised by varied degrees of economic potential, ranging from survivalist activities to successful small enterprises. It is therefore important to distinguish between the different levels of activity in the informal sector in a developing country. At one end of the spectrum there is employment activity which could lead to absorption into the formal sector, and this should be identified and relevant support such as entrepreneurial training, financial assistance, and so forth should be provided. At the other end of the spectrum exists employment activity that only allows people to survive on a day-to-day basis and this will need other service solutions.

Career guidance frameworks in a developing context should therefore take cognisance of the role and especially the nature of employment and employment arrangements in the informal sector. This might specifically relate to information on the labour market – it would be important in this context to include information on the informal economy in any career guidance program. This information should, for example, include descriptions of the nature of employment and the type of employment arrangements or agreements existing in the informal sector, as well as information on entrepreneurial training, business opportunities, self-employment options and access to credit.

## **4.3. Equity of access**

There are a number of circumstances that have an impact on equity of access in a developing context. In South Africa the primary one is the legacy of apartheid: this political system created high levels of inequality between the different race groups. With reference to the labour market, a policy of job reservation for whites existed which inevitably led to the exclusion of other race groups from certain job opportunities. Access to education and training for these groups was also limited to a certain extent.

Prior to 1994 guidance in schools was compulsory for white learners. Black education operated under the Department of Education and Training and some schools did offer guidance services through their auxiliary services. Since 1994 the Department of Education has been involved in activities and the development of policies to ensure a more equitable and applicable education system for all. Due to this restructuring process many career guidance teachers lost their positions, as career guidance as a learning area is not subject to examinations. However, some attention has been given to career guidance since then. The most recent development is that the Revised





National Curriculum Statement Policy of 2002 of the Department of Education makes provision for career guidance from Grade 1 to 9 under the learning area *Life Orientation*. Policy has been planned and prepared for quite some time to give career guidance the status of a school subject from Grades 10 to 12. This policy is now ready and will be implemented in 2006. The Department of Education categorises subjects as core, fundamental, or elective. Career guidance is now classified as a fundamental subject and all learners will have access to it and any services that are offered in this regard.

Another constraint for equity of access is where circumstances relate to limited resources. Marginalised communities might not have the infrastructure or means to accommodate career guidance systems – this includes access to ICT for example, and communities are therefore excluded from receiving potential services.

#### **4.4. Over-supply of unskilled or semi-skilled people**

The high proportion of unskilled or semi-skilled people among the unemployed in developing countries is attributed to factors such as the displacement of less qualified people by skilled labour, and inequalities of the past where certain marginalised groups did not have access to education and training opportunities.

The policy response on such issues is usually to provide training or skills development opportunities or schemes in order to improve the qualifications of the labour force, as well as reforming the certification system. In South Africa relevant policies like the National Skills Development Strategy were put in place after 1994 in order to pursue the goal of skills development. The result of this strategy was the Skills Development Act in 1998, which served as the policy instrument to establish 25 Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETA) across the different sectors of the economy. These bodies are responsible for the upgrading of workers' skills in the workforce, as well as the development of the skills of the unemployed through learnerships. The Department of Labour has also aligned its own services according to the goals of the National Skills Development Strategy. The emphasis is on training unemployed people through social development projects. The employment and skills development services (ESDS) units are responsible for the delivery of these and a range of other related services.

Although the aim of such policies is to improve participants' qualifications and most importantly, their employability, this type of response unfortunately does not always have a significant effect. In a labour-surplus market this might only lead to the redistribution of job opportunities among unemployed and underemployed people. It is therefore of importance that such policies should be developed and planned alongside broader economic growth and job-creation strategies. Policies relating to career guidance in this regard would only refer to the development or improvement of comprehensive information systems that could inform people of all available possibilities for upgrading skills and qualifications. In developed countries the unemployment rates usually fall when the level of education improves. However, in some developing countries it is often found that youth unemployment, for example, is also high among the better educated. This is sometimes attributed to the over supply of "wrongly" skilled people, for example in the social services field (Moleke, 2003).

#### **4.5. Migration of high-level skills**

One of the major problems that developing countries face is the migration of people with high-level skills to developed countries. This usually happens due to the fact that their skills and the benefit of their educational investment are more highly rewarded in developed countries. The open trade of specific services between countries enhances migration. However, there is a positive and a negative impact of migration of high-level skills. The positive impact lies on the macro level; people with high-level skills migrating from developing countries do so primarily to increase their incomes and to have access to better employment opportunities. Economic impact studies that have been done in this regard show that from a global perspective economic welfare is increased in this way. This includes the often significant contribution to economies derived from repatriated funds from labour migration. The negative impact, on the other hand, might be devastating to developing countries. The loss of highly skilled people working in essential services in these countries has a damaging effect on their labour market and economy. Migration consequently can lead to the loss of knowledge, creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship which developing countries especially need to progress.

According to the World Bank (2003) a policy response on such an issue would rather be political than economic. Pioneering strategies should be developed to try and retain highly skilled manpower in the country and to repatriate the ones who have already left. Current policies to address the brain drain problem usually focus on counter-measures in order to try and prevent migration or eliminate the negative effects.

#### **4.6. Limited resources**

One of the major restrictive issues that confront developing countries is limited resources. This does not only involve financial resources, but might also include knowledge, information, technology and human resources. The restrictions on public resources usually imply meticulous prioritisation of needs. This usually impacts on the existence of career guidance services, as well as the type and level of such services.

On the subject of knowledge it is often found that there is a small corps of practitioners and researchers that operates in certain enclaves, usually relating to the sector in which they are active, such as the school environment, tertiary education, and public employment services. The knowledge is, however, not widely shared due to the lack of an overarching and integrative national framework and forum.

The lack of information on and in the labour market is another issue of constraint with a deleterious effect for developing environments. This information usually refers to occupations, training opportunities, trends in the labour market, and needs for specific skills in the labour market. There are usually two levels of impact in this regard. Firstly, the resources might not be available to generate this type of information. Secondly, if this type of information is generated, resources might not be available in order to package it and provide it to all people who have to make relevant decisions. It is often found that information and guidance services are marginal within the priorities of specific institutions like schools or universities. This information is therefore only available to a small exclusive group of clients. This practice definitely suggests a lack of policy coherence in this regard. A key challenge for the policy



environment is how widespread access to career information and guidance could be provided.

The limited availability of technology is another matter of constraint to consider. Even if policies are put in place to establish career guidance systems, the lack of computers might hamper such endeavours. In developing countries only some have access to computers and even in the rural schools where there are computers, it is often found that only teachers have access to them. In such instances policy responses should be not only to establish electronic systems with information, but also manual processes and traditional printed material should be available in order to make relevant information accessible to the technologically disadvantaged communities.

On the topic of the lack of human resources, it is often found that career guidance officers are not trained sufficiently, both in terms of theory and practice. Most importantly, personnel only fulfil these duties part-time, or as part of another function. For example in schools, career guidance teachers are always full-time, and in public employment services these officers have other duties as well such as the registration of the unemployed and so forth.

The policy solution that would address the issue of the lack of resources in developing countries would be to create a framework for the formation of partnerships with private, non-governmental and community entities. Any such public-private partnership could, from a public perspective, have an operational and strategic function. The operational benefit of a public-private partnership should result in the initiation or improvement of relevant services that could be accessible to all citizens, while the strategic benefit should result in coordinated and focused policies by government departments in order to establish and drive such a process.

#### **4.7. Cultural context**

The influence of cultural factors on career guidance has only recently been given recognition and this is well illustrated in a special edition of *The Career Development Quarterly* in March 2002 on *Challenges for Career Counselling in Asia*. It is evident from this that there are factors that need to be considered in relation to career guidance and cultural diversity. This might include aspects such as the following: different languages; extended family orientation towards decision-making; collectivism versus individualism; and different religious beliefs and value systems. The predication of the traditional Western notion that life is centred around work is usually the first predicament that developing countries face, as this ethic is not always equally shared – family or community based values might be of higher importance. Cultural factors further become a contentious issue for developing countries when Western models of career development and career guidance are imported into their non-Western contexts. Aside from the cultural context, the Western models are usually developed against the backdrop of stable economies and a well-established science and technology framework that allow them to invest in research.

The appropriateness of these first world models in third world countries is always questionable. Even though they might include some universal elements, there are always cultural specific elements that might not be applicable cross-culturally. Some form of adaptation and integration has to be provided for before such models can be applied. Leong (2002) refers to a cultural accommodation approach that will allow for the development of culturally sensitive models. Although there is evidence of the

increase of cross-cultural studies in this regard, we are still far from an adequate portfolio of research in order to make a significant impact.

A policy response on this issue would therefore pertain to the awareness and recognition of cultural diversity, as well as the allocation of resources for the development of indigenous models and systems. Such indigenised models could facilitate school-to-work transition, for example, in a culturally enabling environment. In South Africa one of the most imperative works in the discipline that has seen the light is a text book on *Career Psychology in the South African context* that has been published in 1999. This publication includes a chapter by Stead and Watson, two of the leading researchers in the field, on the indigenisation of career psychology in South Africa. In this chapter they motivate career counsellors and educationists to develop and employ theories, models and methods that stem from Africa. They also provide suggestions regarding the research that could be conducted within the South African indigenisation framework, taking into account the contextual realities.



## **5. Policy challenges**

Based on the contextual difficulties discussed in the previous section, developing countries are faced with several major policy challenges and related issues. The meeting of these challenges and addressing of the issues will ensure the success and efficacy of career guidance and employment service related exertions in the broader context of the labour market or the world of work. Important therefore in a developing context are the mechanisms that policy-makers can or should apply in order to establish the framework and priorities to encompass the realities they face. Some of the policy challenges and issues that developing countries face can be summarised as follows (Du Toit, 2004):

### **5.1. The type of governance or active labour market policy framework that is needed**

Developing countries should realise that career guidance policies as such serve a very important developmental role regarding socio-economic and employment issues. Such policies should therefore be utilised and optimised in this regard. Career guidance policy should primarily be directed towards the development of services and systems that can enhance the notion of lifelong learning which has become a reality in the world-of-work over the past few years. This means that services are not only needed at one specific point in time, but should be made available to people across their work-life span whenever they need them. Career guidance policy should furthermore strive to augment labour market efficiency. People should have access to information on the labour market in order to make informed decisions and be absorbed in the labour market in positions where they can apply their skills efficiently. Finally, career guidance policy should also aim to improve social equity, one of the major problems many developing countries face. Everyone should have access to information and services according to their specific needs throughout their work-lifespan. If career guidance policies are planned and developed within this framework, the value of these policies as a developmental instrument will certainly increase. In developing countries change can be very rapid and often profound. Consequently there can be a greater need to keep career and employment information flowing at all levels and across all sections of the community.

### **5.2. Policy co-ordination across the relevant sectors**

The responsibility for guidance services is usually fragmented across a range of government departments, which makes policy development extremely difficult. At one level career guidance policy needs to be part of a coherent coordination of other relevant policies relating to education and training, skills development, the labour market, and social equity and development. This is necessary in order to link policy and practice in a broader context that can lead to a decrease in unemployment, the development of people's skills, and access to support for everyone when needed at any point in their working lives. A coherent and strategic system or mechanism in this regard might lead to multiple stakeholders being responsible for the development of the different elements of service delivery. According to the OECD study (2003) it has already been ascertained that career guidance can serve as a key element in other effective policies relating to labour market programmes, welfare-to-work programmes, secondary schooling, and the transition from school to work.

At another level certain structures, processes and forums should be in place to establish and enhance the coordination between government at national, regional and local level with other relevant stakeholder alliances and professional bodies or associations. A fundamental need is still in the secondary schools where critical decisions are made regarding courses and even schools, colleges, etc. Education departments have the responsibility here but need to co-ordinate with Ministries of Labour and with public employment services systems to give youth access to both accurate, up-to-date information, as well as relevant experts from the world of work.

### **5.3. Constraints on public resources**

Most developing countries are faced with limited public resources. This means they have to plan meticulously and prioritise their needs in order to meet their targets across a range of other issues they need to address, such as poverty and unemployment. However, they must realise that the improvement of career and educational information, for example, can serve the purpose of assisting people to enter the labour market well informed, and as productive citizens. Other policy strategies in a limited resource environment can relate *inter alia* to the investment in self-help services, exploiting the use of information and communication technology, improving staff training, and developing incentives to encourage the private and NGO sectors to develop and provide services.

### **5.4. Public-private partnerships**

Although governments play a key role in developing career guidance services, they should not be the sole providers and should not underestimate the power of efficient public-private partnerships. There is enough evidence available to indicate that the career development and guidance environment is actually a realm of public policy that necessitates a strong commitment to public-private partnerships. In a developing country with limited resources, it is an effective strategy to augment and form local partnerships between existing providers. These might be non-governmental, community-based, private, and public services in the education and training and labour sectors.

### **5.5. Customised services**

Developing countries must reflect on the nature and level of career development and guidance services suitable for their specific circumstances. Firstly, they should determine the nature or type of strategy and assistance necessary to deliver a customised service that can serve their specific needs. In a developing context where few schools have access to computers or the Internet, for example, a decision regarding occupational and training opportunities in a printed format might be the right option. Secondly, the different circumstances and needs of the people requesting the services might demand a system on different levels.

### **5.6. Standards and quality**

In developing countries it is often found that the occupational framework or structure in the career guidance domain does not compare with other related professions.



Common practice is the provision of career guidance by people who have not received the appropriate training. It is also evident that in this context there is usually no framework within which to set standards and to assure quality. Attention should therefore be given to the development and benchmarking of standards and the assurance of quality.

## 6. Research questions

It is observable that developing countries plan and make policy decisions on career guidance and employment services without taking any research outcomes into consideration. In this context not much time and effort is spent on related research because the necessary infrastructure is usually not in place. However, policy makers should take cognisance of the fact that research evidence must be taken into consideration before any policy decisions can be made. For example, they need to determine the demand for career guidance services in their environments, and calculate the cost of such services or the delivery of parts of these services if possible. The client base should be profiled in order to make decisions on the nature and level of services to be provided. A portfolio of evidence of the socio-economic and employment impact of these services needs to be developed in order to assess the longer-term existence of such services.

In a review of research studies conducted in South Africa it showed that in the field of career guidance and development most of the research relate to topics such as: career development (Mathabe & Tamane, 1993; Mkhize & Frizelle, 2000; Patton *et al*, 2003; Stead, 1996 and Watson & McMahan, 2004), career maturity (De Bruin, 1995; Freeman, 1995 and Jooste, 1992), career decidedness and career decision-making (Eaton *et al*, 2004; Watson, 1993; Watson *et al*, 1999; Watson & Stead, 1997 and Williams, 2002), career aspirations and perceptions (Dean, 2002 and Watson, 1997), appropriateness of western career development theories and career psychology in South Africa (Du Toit & De Bruin, 2002; Naicker, 1994(a); Stead & Watson, 1998 and Stead & Watson, 2002), the role of vocational training in school-to-work transition (Theunissen, 1999), the effect of the relationship between the secondary school and the business sector in the transition from school to work (Olivier, 1995), school guidance needs (Euvrard, 1992, 1996), the role and relevance of career counselling in South African schools (Naicker, 1994 and Stead & Watson, 1994), and factors affecting the career choices of learners (Cosser & Du Toit, 2002).

The few impact studies that were identified refer to topics such as career awareness and development programs (Mouton, 1995 and Quinn, 1993), computerised career guidance systems (Langley & Scheepers, 1990 and Pretorius *et al*, 1991 and Tarnow, 1993), and the effect of career counselling on career choice (Roux, 1993).

In the employment services field studies were conducted on themes such as the employment services sector (Du Toit & Koopman, 2002), employer perceptions of the service of personnel agencies supplying high technology human resources (Theron, 1990), the role of recruitment and selection in human resource management (Ilhabanelo, 2003), recruitment and selection against the background of transformation work in progress by Taleni (2001), and recruitment, selection and placement of disabled people (De Bruyn, 1990; Silver & Koopman, 2000 and Smit, 2001).

A two-day international round table on school-to-work transition and labour market intermediation in developing countries was held at the HSRC during May 2005. Participants represented Botswana, Brazil, India, Thailand, South Africa, and the ILO. Contributions included *inter alia* the following: the different country perspectives on policies and services issues with regard to career guidance and employment services; contextual issues on career development; misconceptions about transition into the





labour market; the economics of job matching; and career psychology in South Africa and the development towards an indigenous framework.

The overall conclusion of the participants was that limited coordinated research is done in the field. There is furthermore a lack of a coherent perception of the value of research in this domain, and if research does exist there is a lack of the acknowledgement of the impact of the research.

Some of the broad potential research areas that were identified relate to the following:

- *Theory building:* Under theory building a few topics such as the following were highlighted in the field of career guidance and development: the meaning of work across different social-economic groups, gender, cultures and generations; the meaning of career adaptability – referring to employability, versus career maturity; the indigenisation of career theory; and the theory-practice divide that currently exists.
- *Policy issues:* In the policy arena it was suggested that the current applicability and impact of policies in delivering of services should be investigated in order to identify the policy gaps and to work towards a coordinated policy framework.
- *Service delivery:* On the service delivery side an audit of services across the different sectors would be valuable in order to determine the type of services needed, access issues, impact of these services as well as the gaps that might exist.

## 7. Conclusion

The key conditions that are necessary in order to develop an effective framework to facilitate and sustain the process of people's working lives are *inter alia*: a healthy economy and labour market; access to education and training for everyone; well-organised pathways that connect initial education with work and further study; safety nets for those at risk; good information and guidance systems; and effective co-ordination between relevant institutions. Experience has shown us that this is predominantly the context of the developed world.

The role of career guidance and employment services is important in the process of school-to-work transition and labour market intermediation. Delivering these services in a developing context bring about many challenges. These challenges need to be addressed through a coordinated framework of policies and established services across the different relevant sectors. This can only be achieved through knowledge gained from research. Research that can identify the needs of the clients in the different sectors, highlight the problems they experience regarding transition to employment, and determine and analyse the major factors that seem to either facilitate or prevent the implementation of successful transition or access to employment.



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