GRAPPLING WITH YOUTH EMPLOYABILITY IN SOUTH AFRICA

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1. Introduction

In 2005, South African Labour Minister Mdladlana described youth unemployment as "a powder keg waiting to explode unless something drastic was done to address it." (Department of Labour, 2005) The purpose of this paper is to create a platform for discussion and debate regarding youth employability within South Africa. Specifically it considers the question of what capabilities are minimally required to enable economic participation; touching on both international and local research. The paper then considers the extent to which these capabilities are being developed in schools within the South African context, and explores the role of special programmes in bridging any identified gaps[1]. Finally, it locates the discussion pertaining to employability within an analysis of broader contextual issues and highlights a number of questions that require further consideration.

Obviously, there is neither one cause of youth unemployment nor one simple solution to it. Similarly the answers do not fall within the power or abilities of one sector or body, whether government, labour, civil society or the private sector. Rather, it is suggested that to address the complexities of youth employability a multi-disciplinary as well as a multi-sectoral analytical approach is necessary.

It should be noted that while a wide array of information and documentation exists on the subject, there is limited research-based data on how best to engage, efficiently, pragmatically, and strategically, in concrete actions to increase youth employability in South Africa. An overview of the methodology that was therefore employed to provide greater nuance regarding these issues is provided in Annex One.

This paper is structured as follows: Section 2 establishes a functional working definition of employability; Section 3 reviews the extent to which schools appear to be providing these skills. Section 4 considers the implications that these developing definitions have had on the nature of programmes interventions and explores the range of programmes that have been established within a South African context. Section 5 then explores a set of questions designed to examine the feasibility of attaining minimum capabilities for youth employment and critically reviews these different initiatives within the context of challenges pertaining to levels of employment, the nature of job creation and the systemic weaknesses in the education system. This latter issue points to broader questions and concerns that should be addressed as part of a robust debate and concrete action plan to improve youth employability.

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[1] In an example from Portugal, Alves (2007) underscores this point. Reviewing youth employability he comments, "exclusively relying on lack of employable skills is hiding the social and economic effects of [a] new phase of capitalist accumulation." See Singizi Consulting, "Literature Review on the Factors Enhancing the Employability of Young People", Johannesburg: 2008, pg. 15.

Methodology used for this paper

A series of interviews (11) with both private companies and NGO/CBO agencies was undertaken. These included both standard commercial employment and/or placement agencies with broad demographic and sectoral portfolio as well as non-profit centres dedicated to leadership development for a specific "youth" constituency. A further set of interviews (7) were conducted with teachers that are responsible for the provision of Life Orientation within the schools and (2) with trainers of life skills teachers. In addition, contextual and theoretical issues were elucidated via a broad-based literature review and an initial review of global and local research and documentation on the question of youth employability. Global trends as well as SADC contextual issues form the research base.

2. The meaning of employability

Globally there is no standard agreement regarding the definition of employability. The meaning will vary depending on culture, level and type of economic development and employer norms. Moreover, the concept has changed over time, particularly with the demise of life-long employment and the expansion of the services economy. This section provides an overview of the current discourse on employability focusing on the manner in which these skills are shaped by the changing nature of the labour market.

Tin (2006) emphasizes that the definition of employability has evolved and states that "it is apparent that lifelong employability has become an important and necessary trait that any worker should aim to possess in this rapidly globalising economy". Tin draws on the definition for employability as articulated by McKenzie & Wurzburg's (1997) which states that "in general, lifelong employability is the capacity to be productive and to hold rewarding jobs during a working life, and to be equipped with up-to-date skills and competences".

This definition resonates with a study embarked upon in Australia[2] which attempted to ascertain what employers think are the types of aptitudes and skills required in work; either working in an enterprise or being self-employed. Through this process they developed an understanding of employability which they defined as the "skills required to not only gain employment, but also to progress within an enterprise so as to achieve one's potential and contribute successfully to enterprise strategic directions".

Fernando Vargas Zúñiga exploring Key Competencies and Employability in Brazil[3] defined employability skills as those which "are necessary for obtaining employment,

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[2] The Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (2002)

[3] Working with the notion of "competencies for employability" espoused by Mertens (1999)

remaining in it, and for finding new employment. These are not necessarily a collection of technical abilities; rather they reflect attitudes, behaviour and capacities of a general nature, often derived from the application of capacities acquired as a result of education such as understanding written texts and operating with numbers.

Specifically, the kinds of capabilities that were identified as being important for employability are outlined in Table 1[4].

Table 1 - Key capabilities

Technology
▪ Having a range of basic IT skills
▪ Applying IT as a management tool
▪ Using IT to organise data
▪ Being willing to learn new IT skills
▪ Having the occupational health and safety knowledge to apply technology
▪ Having the appropriate physical capacity.

Teamwork
▪ Working with people of different ages, gender, race, religion or political persuasion
▪ Working as an individual and as a member of a team
▪ Knowing how to define a role as part of a team
▪ Applying teamwork skills to a range of situations eg, crisis
▪ Identifying strengths of team members
▪ Coaching, mentoring, and giving feedback.

Communication
▪ Listening and understanding
▪ Speaking clearly and directly
▪ Writing to the needs of the audience
▪ Negotiating responsively
▪ Reading independently
▪ Empathising
▪ Using numeracy effectively
▪ Understanding the needs of internal and external customers
▪ Persuading effectively
▪ Establishing and using networks
▪ Being assertive
▪ Sharing information
▪ Speaking and writing in languages other than English

Initiative

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[4] Developed by the University of Southern Queensland's Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST), the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (2002) and the Business Council of Australia (BCA)

- Adapting to new situations
- Developing a strategic long-term vision
- Being creative
- Identifying opportunities not obvious to others
- Translating ideas into action
- Generating a range of options
- Initiating innovative solutions

Self Management

- Having a personal vision and goals
- Evaluating and monitoring own performance
- Having knowledge and confidence in own ideas and vision
- Articulating own ideas and vision
- Taking responsibility

Learning

- Managing own learning
- Contributing to the learning community at the workplace
- Using a range of mediums to learn – mentoring, peer support, networking, IT, courses
- Applying learning to technical issues (eg, products) and people issues (eg, interpersonal)
- Having enthusiasm for ongoing learning
- Being willing to learn in any setting, on and off the job
- Being open to new ideas and techniques
- Being prepared to invest time and effort in learning new skills
- Acknowledging the need to learn in order to accommodate change.

Planning

- Managing time and priorities – setting timelines, coordinating tasks for self and others
- Being resourceful
- Taking initiative and making decisions
- Adapting resource allocations to cope with contingencies
- Establishing clear project goals and deliverables
- Allocating people and resources to tasks
- Planning the use of resources including time
- Participating in continuous improvement and planning
- Developing a vision and a proactive plan to accompany it
- Predicting – weighing up risk, evaluating alternatives, applying evaluation criteria
- Collecting, analysing, and organising information
- Understanding basic business systems and their relationships

Problem Solving

- Developing creative, innovative solutions
- Developing practical solutions
- Showing independence and initiative in identifying problems and solving them
- Solving problems in teams
- Applying a range of strategies to problem solving
- Using mathematics including budgeting and financial management to solve problems
- Applying problem-solving strategies across a range of areas
- Testing assumptions, taking the context of data and circumstances into account
- Resolving customer concerns in relation to complex project issues

Table 1 emphasizes"employability skills (as) the attributes of employees, other than technical competence, that make them an asset to the employer". The skills include reading, basic arithmetic and other basic skills; such as problem solving, planning, decision making, other higher-order thinking skills*;* and dependability, a positive attitude, cooperativeness, and other affective skills and traits.

This combination of skills can be extended to consider two dimensions of individual employability(de Grip, A.,et al, 2004.): Firstly, *willingness* which measures peoples' desire to engage in activities that keep them attractive on the labour market and secondly, *capacity* which is concerned with the power to broadly develop one's position in the labour market. It is suggested that this applies both in relation to mobility across jobs and in terms of participation in training.

These dimensions are explained further in terms of an individual's *willingness and capacity to be mobile* across jobs; that is to change jobs both internally and externally and to have the capacity (knowledge and experience) to make these changes which allow workers to gain more knowledge and experience. Further, it is acknowledged that the *willingness and capacity to participate and invest time, money and energy in training* to support the development of their human capital will depend on the expected return on this investment. This return relates to both a direct increase in earnings and to an improved labour market position. They further argue that the capacity to participate in training can be determined using three types of worker knowledge: *basic knowledge -* where extensive basic knowledge is acquired, higher initial education improves workers' labour market position and employability; Meta-*cognitive knowledge* facilitates the process of learning, knowing where to find specific information is part of this type of knowledge, and especially in very technology intensive sectors of industry, it is highly valued; and the third type of knowledge, *knowledge and opinions about one's own learning capacities*, has a more psychological character and may be related to the decision to participate in training.

An interesting point to consider in these discussions is the extent to which the onus of employment is placed upon the individuals themselves, that is, that employability is seen as a matter of aptitude and skill; behaviour and will. In contrast to this, the Education Special Committee of the Japan Federation of Employers' Association defines employability as both the "skills that enable worker mobility" and the "skills that are demonstrated in a company that enable a worker to be employed on a continuous basis."

A number of papers written within a South African context also suggest an emphasis on individual attributes. Dr Raymond Patel (CHIETA Conference, 1995) states that employability skills are those "skills that are required not only to gain employment, but also to progress within an enterprise so as to achieve one's potential and contribute successfully to enterprise strategic directions." However, there is also an awareness of the importance of understanding employability in terms of the context in which the individual is located. This perspective is captured by the South African Federation for Mental Health (2006) which states that, "employability is about having the capability to gain initial employment, maintain employment and obtain new employment if required. For the individual, employability depends on their assets in terms of the knowledge, skills and attitudes they possess; the way they use and deploy those assets; the way they present themselves to employers; *and the context (e.g. personal circumstances and labour market environment) in which they seek employment*. More comprehensively, employability is the capability to move self-sufficiently within the labour market to realise potential through sustainable employment". The National Youth Policy, 2007-2012 extends this further, and highlights the importance of

individual attributes and networks, and emphasises the role of stakeholders in supporting these developments.

This approach is captured in the policy recommendations contained in this policy which states that:

▪ The Departments of Education, Labour, and Trade and Industry should scale up opportunities for career guidance, job search and work-related life skills, targeting youth in and out of school so as to facilitate their decisions about fields of study and encourage them to obtain their National Senior Certificate.

▪ The social partners should encourage young people to gain work experience at an early stage – part-time work while at school (grade ten and above) as well as work during weekends and holidays – as a means of being introduced to the world of work. Employers should be encouraged to provide such short-term opportunities, across the spectrum of skill and education, to as many young people as possible, and government is encouraged to scale up its internship programme within the public service.

▪ The Youth Development Forum should action private sector leadership to help young people widen and strengthen their social networks and gain the experience that would benefit them in the workplace.

In summary, it is evident from the various definitions presented in this section that central to the concept of employability is the need for individuals to have the capabilities to access and maintain employment, and to find new employment should the need arise. However, this section also begins to hint at the imperative to locate any discussion on employability and the capabilities that individuals require to access the labour market, together with an analysis of the role of companies and other stakeholders in enabling this employment and in the manner in which the broader economic and educational contexts shape these requirements and possibilities.

3. The Role of Formal Education in Developing these Capabilities

It is suggested that approximately one million young people leave school and enter the labour market (of which only 270 000 have a Grade 12) (Cloete, 2008) [5]. Of these learners, 500 000 young people remain unemployed a year after leaving school. The other 500 000 are split between accessing the labour market and entering public or private post school training. Research suggests that educational qualifications definitely assist individuals to access employment; the unemployment rates of those who drop out of secondary school before completing senior secondary education is indicated as being 58.5% which is the highest of any education exit group and represent 40.3% of the unemployed youth of South Africa(Altman, 2007; Oosthuizen,

[5] N. Cloete (CHET), Department of Education and Umalusi workshop, 2008

2007)[6]. Interviewees confirmed that most (but not all) employers want prospective employees to have at least a matric.

However, the question that remains is whether schooling, beyond improving an individuals' credentials, also plays a role in assisting individuals to develop employability skills and the impact that these skills have on both who can access employment as well as employers' willingness to employ.

Research suggests that critical to the development of employability skills in formal education is the imperative for these institutions to[7]:

- Include employability skills among the instructional goals and ensuring that these skills are explicitly taught.

- Ensure that students understand the skills and talents they have and how they can contribute to their and the country's economic well-being'.

- Ensure students know how to present themselves to employers.

- Provide students with a reflective process that will be of use both currently and in the future.

- Develop students who are ready and prepared for their next step.

- Provide students with experiences that simulate the world of work.

- Provide students with actual experiences of the world of work.

- Instructors holding and communicating high expectations for the learning and behaviour of their students

- The overall culture of the school holds high expectations for the learners.

So how do schools measure up in terms of these stated imperatives? It is beyond the scope of this paper to provide a detailed analysis and review of schools in South Africa.[8] There has been extensive debate about the new curriculum in the schools and the intended and unintended consequences of these developments and it not possible to capture all of these nuances here. Rather this paper primarily considers the introduction of the Life Orientation programme and provides a glimpse into the views of a small number of life orientation teachers.

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[6] Submission to the National Youth Policy, Oosthuizen, 2007.

[7] Madras (India) Management Association's conference paper entitled "Enhancing Students Employability is a Great Concern." and Cotton (1993) Developing Employability Skills

[8] And it is noted that this question is very broad and differs substantially across public and private schools and within public and private schools.

The responses of the Life Orientation teachers are made within the context of the changes to the curricula that have been introduced within the schools, and specifically the introduction of the Life Orientation Subject in both schools as part of the National Senior Certificate and in colleges within the National Certificate Vocational. The life orientation subject statement provides the following description of the subject:

> *Life Orientation is the study of self in relation to others in society; it applies a holistic approach concerning the personal, social, intellectual, emotional, physical growth and development of individual learners concerned. Life orientation guides and prepares learners for life and its responsibilities as it addresses knowledge, skills values and attitudes in relation to self environment, responsible citizenship, healthy and productive living, as well as informed decisions and choices, including the career choices. It is an inter – disciplinary subject that integrates knowledge, values and skills in various disciplines such as Sociology, Psychology, Political Science, Human Movement, Science, Labour Studies and Industrial studies.*

> *The focus areas in the delivery of the subject includes: Personal Well Being; Citizenship Education; Recreation & Physical Activity and Careers & Career Choices. These areas engage learners in a number of activities aimed at developing their knowledge and skills in disciplines relating to their lifestyle and inter personal issues such as planning, management, control of both of the self and the situation they find themselves. This empowers learners to enhance their potential and talents in either dealing with situations that they are currently confronted with or that might confront them in the future. The subject statement also indicates that Life Orientation broadens the range of career options for learners and exposes them to a number of opportunities that exists within the labour market by way of providing information that assists young people to make informed choices about their career paths hence the necessity to guide and presenting them with the links especially to those careers that were not easily accessed by the disadvantaged in the past.*

It is further explained, that the themes addressed in the Life Orientation Programme are also addressed in other subjects within the curricula such as business economics and communication.

Teachers interviewed stated that they felt that the old curriculum, while "acceptable", had a number of gaps and challenges and indicated that it did not allow teachers to respond to issues emerging for young people. One teacher commented, "the old curriculum was about talking to learners just to while away the time." However, teachers suggested that the revised curriculum provides a platform to assist learners to take responsibility and make choices. The teachers stated that opportunities are created for learners to inform the curriculum "as we are mostly driven by their needs in designing activities for their life orientation programme.

The whole programme is centered on helping them to make informed decisions about their life and also developing as active and responsible citizens for the country, hence we touch on issues such as planning, communication problem identifying and solving and others"

In order to develop decision making skills, the teachers stated that they engage learners in activities that enhance their inter-personal skills such as communication

skills, problems solving skills, analyzing skills and self awareness skills. They indicate that the focus of these activities is to develop learners to be able to engage with the world post- matric. Thus practical skills development includes:

> *"How to compile CV's and some of the things related to job hunting such as knowing how to respond to a vacancy advert, what to expect from employers, interview skills, what to wear and other issues related to an interview process - behaviors and attitudes required in the job market.*

> *"Engage learners on their ability to assert themselves as individuals."*

> *"The ability to communicate with individuals who could potentially help them to finance their tertiary studies and we also enable learners to start the process of applying to institutions."*

Many of the teachers interviewed also emphasize that there is a career guidance and counselling component of the programme which takes forward the skills developed (as outlined) and helps the learners to identify actual job and learning opportunities. They further explained that within the context of the Life Orientation programmes they take responsibility for organizing career exhibitions where they provide learners with information about the kinds of learning pathways that the learners can follow and the type of study assistance that is available. Some teachers indicated that they receive assistance with this process from an organization called 'school trade' which is an organization that was formed by the teachers to assist with such activities. Some of the teachers also stated they try and ensure that potential employers attend these sessions. Teachers were very positive about these career fairs, and comments included:

> *"What we do is that we expose them to different fields and share with them the opportunities that goes with the fields and thereafter when they go to career exhibitions they come back more confident and ready to push on the careers that they have chosen because the exhibition has helped them to decide."*

> *"The good thing about the career exhibitions is that they get many institutions presenting the different courses and they also share the advantages of those courses, which ultimately inspire them to act on their careers."*

> *"At the exhibitions they provide them with a lot of information and brochures that helps them to know what their courses of interest are all about and our role is to support them in making sure that they have send out applications, and the school help them with the faxing of application letters and we also give them testimonials to accompany their applications and posting of documents the school help them with doing that."*

> *"It helps somewhere because in the career exhibition we meet people who are potential employers and one of the people I met there was from the municipality and she works at Human resources and what we did was that we started a network for us to feed her with people who are doing matric and when the*

opportunities come she will contact them and have them applying for those opportunities, and they help learners to access the bursaries at the municipality."

However, some teachers expressed concerns that they "continue to struggle to convince employers to attend these fairs or to explain to learners and teachers what they are looking for". Although one teacher indicated that their school had started a forum in which employers engaged with the teachers and assisted them to understand the nature of the competencies that they require from learners.

Another teacher raised a concern that while they offer these career guidance programmes they "are not doing much to prepare the learners for the job opportunities." It is suggested that there are very few opportunities for learners to access the workplace and experience this environment and so the learning continues to be quite removed from the work environment.

Individuals responsible for training other life skills teachers indicated that teachers do not all have the life skills which form part of the curricula; "this makes it difficult for them to develop these skills in others". It was further indicated that while the teachers facilitate the curriculum there is limited experience regarding the ability to ensure that learners make the shift from knowledge to changes in attitude and ultimately to a change in behavior. It is suggested that this is reinforced by the emphasis on the development of knowledge as expressed in the assessment criteria as compared to behavioral changes – which are difficult to assess. This concern is also reinforced by the absence of counseling; a concern highlighted by certain of the teachers.

Teachers express concern about their ability to secure partnerships with other organizations in support of the life orientation curricula. A few of the teachers provided examples of partnerships that they have been able to form; one teacher indicated that they had a relationship with social workers from the Department of Social Development who assist with grants, registering learners for food parcels and accessing the services of community safety officers where there are cases of abuse. Another teacher reported that they have access to an organization which places their learners on a database and assists learners to access tertiary institutions. However, teachers consistently commented that there is a need to secure relations with other organizations which could provide a continuum of services to complement what they are attempting to so in the school.

But what of the other skills also considered critical for employability such as communication, basic arithmetic and other *basic skills*; problem solving, decision making, and other *higher-order thinking skills* as well as skills related to dependability and cooperativeness. According to the Baseline Study of the DoE, Intermediate Phase Systemic Evaluation Report (Dec 2005), 6 out of 10 South African learners in Grade 6 are not achieving in the language of learning, and 8 out of 10 are not achieving in mathematics ("achieving" means scoring 50 percent or better in a Grade 6 assessment task)[9]. Further, studies[10] suggest that in many subjects, including Biology (HG & SG),

9 Cited in National Education Quality Initiative & Education, Science and Skills Development (2005) Grade 6 Systemic Evaluation: Free State province.

10 For example a study conducted by Umalusi (2004)

History (SG), Mathematics (SG), English Second/Additional Language (HG) and English First Language (HG) there is a declining level of conceptual capability. The reports of an absence of discipline in school also impacts adversely on the ability of individuals to learn the skills required to work in a structured environment.

Life orientation teachers are positive about the potential contribution that the programme could play in supporting the development of employability skills. However, it also raises a number of areas in which it is suggested that there are limitations regarding the implementation of this curriculum. There was also consideration in development of those skills that should be developed in the remainder of the curricula as well as in the manner in which the school operates. In doing this, it is suggested that the weaknesses in the system pertaining to mathematics, communication and related to this the development of higher level cognitive skills creates real challenges for the learners in terms of employability and point to the need for any intervention that seeks to develop individuals' employability skills to address both those skills that may conventionally be associated with employability, in a South African context this also needs to address foundational skills such as communication and mathematics. In doing this, there is a need to support the development of higher level cognitive skills.

In the next section, there is an analysis of the different programme interventions that currently are provided which could potentially actively complement those initiatives that are in place within the schools and colleges as part of the NSC and NCV.

4. A Continuum of Interventions to Support Employability

So what services are selected employment and youth development bodies providing to enhance the ability of young people to develop employability skills and to access the labour market?[11] That is, which are those interventions that enhance the employability skills of young people, who are leaving school, to enable them to develop "the attributes of employees, other than technical competence, that make them an asset to the employer."

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[11] For a brief overview of ALMPs as means to stimulate labor market integration through demand- or supply side instruments see, the United Nations Economic and Social Council, "Promoting full employment and decent work for all: Report of the General Secretary", New York: 2007

Table 2 - Progressive development of concept of employability

Type of employability	Focus of concept	Policy measure
Dichotomic employability (prior to 1950s)	Depending on age, ability and family burden a person is dichotomously categorized as employable or not for administrative purpose	Unemployables are given cash or kind and employables are given work
Socio-Medical employability (1960s)	Through functional balance sheets social workers identified certain persons for the purpose of rehabilitation	Assisting people to overcome the barrier to regular employment
Manpower policy employability (1970s and early 1980s)	The aspects of gap between employment needs and employees characteristics, particularly with reference to disadvantaged groups	Assisting people in job search and placement conciliation
Flow employability (Late 1960s and early 1970s)	Macro level issue of absorption capacity of economy: "Employability is the reverse of the average duration of unemployment for one group"	a. Recognition of recession and booming period for labour market b. Anti discriminatory policies
Labour Market performance employability (Early 1980s)	Adaptive content of employability such as technological changes	New training programmes and comparing its effects
Initiative employability (late 1980s and 1990s)	Along with human capital framework, social capital (ability to network and gain access to labour market) necessity is emphasized.	Life -long learning in the context of flexibilisation of labour market
Interactive employability (1990s)	Listing employee qualities and work trajectories to connect with future work orientation	Involving various partners (educational institutions, corporate institutions and governments) in labour market for enterprise development and worker adaptation
Integrative employability (more prevalent in contemporary times)	Employees taking the risk of firm's profit and loss by becoming partners in the evolution of firm	Enabling workers for innovation

To develop a greater understanding of these programme types and the manner in which employability is both perceived and developed a number of documents were

reviewed, and interviews were conducted with individuals that offer these services so as to probe the extent to which they believe that the individuals that are accessing their services are employable, and to understand the role that they play in developing these skills.
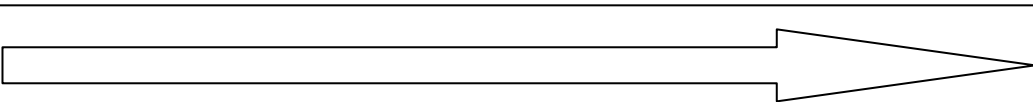
It is suggested that the manner in which employability is understood determines the nature of the intervention that is developed. The table on the next page provides a summary of the different conceptions of employability and highlights the manner in which this translates into a specific policy measure[12]:

While it is not possible, or necessary to locate current employability initiatives within one of these frames, it is felt that it provides a useful way of understanding the nature of the interventions that may be possible based on an analysis of the definition of employability and the manner in which contextual factors are understood.

A brief scan of current interventions in South Africa was conducted to understand the nature of the interventions that are available to enable school leavers to access the labour market. This included a review of organisations as well as research reports. The interventions that were reviewed include ones that fall within this ambit of Government institutions as well as NGOs and private placement agencies.

The interventions that are provided can be represented in terms of the following categories of services[13]:

Table 3: Range of ways to access employability skills

A database of work-seekers which employers can utilise	A database which registers both employers and work-seekers (and a mechanism to improve matching)	Assisting young people with job search assistance	Providing an integrated service (including life skills, mentoring and counselling)	Work place experience / voluntarism

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[12] Gazier's (1999) notions are summarised by Datta, Pellissery and Bino (2007)

[13] Note that technical skills are not included within this continuum in terms of the definition provided.

These interventions vary from minimal to more proactive interventions. What is clear though is that there is demand; all of the agencies/centres interviewed indicate that large numbers of individuals request their services (this is relative to their location and size). Numbers varied depending on the size and type of the agency/centre. On one end of the spectrum, a youth advisory centre would see 12 to 100 people a day (in addition to calls or, where available, internet inquiries.) In the mid-level, a small agency would have 20 to 200 calls each day as well as some "walk ins". And, on the other end of the spectrum, a large agency would place 11,000 people each day.

Interestingly, where studies have been done, the organisations suggest that the young people make repeated visits to the centres to address a number of related needs. Research that has been carried out to understand the reasons that young people access these services include a desire to access: life skills, computer training, carrier guidance, resources, entrepreneurship education, business counseling and referral services..

The organisations that assist young people with job search assistance primarily offer support with placement and they indicate that they offer placement in either temporary or permanent employment. Those organisations that place school leavers state that, *"our clients do not look for qualification but they look for people who are willing to work."* However, others suggest that, *"Grade 11 and less? We don't turn them away but they don't have a lot of chances out there because of lack of formal qualification and experience."* Interviewees also suggest that there is a correlation between the entry level skills of a young job-seeker and the type of placement s/he may be able to access. Both private agencies and youth centre contexts indicate that young people with lower skill and experience levels are often only able to qualify for temporary placements. Further, they suggest that agencies do not invest in the same levels of service for temporary and permanent job seekers, "the people don't get training because they are temporary." Many of these interviewees note that their "clients" were the companies that are hiring the workers and no added-value services are available to job seekers within the temporary employee category.

However, one temporary placement company was unique in that it did offer additional services to persons seeking temporary work. *"A majority of our clients do have skills, but lack qualifications, so we categorise them within our database."* In this instance, job seekers significantly benefit from the agency's willingness and ability to circumvent lack of formal qualifications by validating potential workers' CVs and including them in a job bank. These temporary workers are then more able to access future employment. Plumbers, carpenters and cleaners were used as examples of what types of skilled, but not formally qualified; workers are included in the agency- verified database. This particular agency also offers some life-skills training such as labour law, BEE qualification and direct assistance to those people who would like to develop their own businesses. "We see potential in them," the interviewee noted.

Other organisations suggested that they provide more integrated services. This could include: coaching and mentoring (job application, career counselling, CV development, professional attire, and interview practice). Depending on the interviewee these areas also include: life-saving/CPR and substance abuse education; labor law/worker's rights; driving lessons; time management; goal setting and planning; and conflict resolution, communication and professional behaviour in the workplace as well as workshops to address issues such as health and sexuality and

citizenship[14]. One organisation stated that it provided a range of services to support employability which includes:

- The provision of outreach services to communities that can't get to the centres, by taking career info, skills development and entrepreneurial advice to local schools in mobile centre.

- Provide business support, preparing young people for the labour market and explaining how to take advantage of different career opportunities.

- Help job-seekers with career guidance, psychometric testing, study strategies and life skills, as well as information on trends in the workplace and the careers that are in demand.

- Teach young people how to write a CV, how to impress in an interview and how to prepare for the working world.

- Refer young people to the right employment agencies and youth service providers, including those who offer help with job-seeking, funding, entrepreneurial support, information, inspiration and HIV/AIDS materials.

- Provide information on scholarships, bursaries and other sources of funding, as well as contact details for educational institutions, internships, learnerships, volunteerism and community service opportunities.

However many of these organisations appear to struggle to make relevant linkages with employers. Though there are also some examples in which NGOs were able to link in with companies within certain economic sectors. For example, one NGO states that their "focus is on assisting the course participants to take full responsibility for their independence and success by securing gainful employment within the Financial Sector". This training focused on developing skills such as: Self-esteem and how attitudes govern the way we act and react; Interpersonal skills, use of initiative, control and self-discipline; Use of science and technology in the workplace (ITC component); Goal setting of short and long term goals; Time management; Personal Finance; Entrepreneurial development - creative thinking, feasibility, viability and market research; Work ethics and professionalism; Labour relations; CV writing and interview skills; Effective communication and Career planning and research.

What the review highlighted is that while many of the organisations that offer placement services have extensive contacts with employers, while those on the other end of the continuum (generally NGOs) offer comprehensive services tended to be rather distant from companies and the labour market. However, while many of these programmes indicate that they are addressing employability skills and some do appear to support the development of appropriate attitudes, behaviours and capacities to access employment, these organisations do not address the cognitive, language and

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[14] The length of life skills training varied as well: from none at all, to 3 days, and up to one year.

mathematical skills required to continue to access learning – a fundamental tenet of employability – and to adapt to on-going changes.

Further, in both rural and urban areas, interviewees indicated that youth are constrained in their ability to search for work by lack of finances, and particularly with regards to transportation. It was suggested that this was a particular difficulty for young people in rural areas,

> *"We had young people coming from far just to inquire about the Youth Advisory Centre services. Most of them complained about transport money and the fact that they travel long distances without any meals."*

> *"Most young people from previously disadvantaged backgrounds experience difficulty in accessing us for pre-assessments; they cannot make it to our company due to financial related problems. Most of them send their CVs and when called in for assessments they cannot make it and those who can, usually come late because they depend on public transport."*

The other factor impacting on employability is access of young people to information; most interviewees indicated that they rely on newspaper advertisements to market their services or opportunities. They report that this impacts adversely on youth that do not have regular access to these newspapers, similarly inadequate access to internet services make it more difficult for some groups of young people to access information about possible employment. These perspectives resonated with the findings of a previous study[15] which found that, *"Youth often have little if any access to basic information sources such as newspapers, magazines and books".*

5. Considering the Key Questions

This paper focuses on the nature of employability and considers the extent to which formal education develops these skills, and whether there are programmes in place to assist individuals to develop the skills to access the labour market.

This paper has highlighted that there are schools programmes aimed at developing employable skills. However, there are weaknesses in these programmes, as well as the general education system, in preparing young people for work. That said, it is noted that there are real differences within the schooling system, both between private and public high school education as well as between different public schools. This nuances the argument and it is emphasised that this paper focuses on the features of the majority of schools in South Africa.

This paper also suggests that there are a number of programmes outside of the formal education system which focus on enabling young people to develop employability skills and to have access to the labour market.

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[15] Gamble, Jeanne and Garisch, Carl

However, interventions must be designed with the context of the individuals who will be seeking to access the labour market in mind.

The 2005 Labour Force Survey estimated that of the approximately 7.8 million unemployed people in the country, the youth accounted for 73% of these, that is about 5.6 million young people. While it is indicated that the inclusive definition of youth – between 15 and 34 years of age – affects this statistic, the problem extends far beyond this. The broad unemployment rate for youth in South Africa is 51 per cent. In terms of the narrow definition, the rate is 36 per cent. By contrast, the unemployment rate for the non-youth labour force is 24% and 14 % according to the broad and narrow definitions respectively (Oosthuizen, 2007).

It is also indicated that young people account for two thirds of those who have never worked before (LFS March 2003 and March 2006). Further, young people with little education, women and rural youth are worse affected by unemployment than others. According to the *Labour Force Survey* of March 2006[16], there are just under 1.3 million young people in the 15-24 years age group who have become too discouraged to look work. Young people also experience insecure employment, and low levels of self-employment.

Over and above these issues, a study commissioned by the Umsobomvu Youth Fund[17] pertaining to the situation of young people within the labour market states that other factors that requires consideration pertaining to social capital: family networks of friends and acquaintances, clubs and associations – are often crucial to the economic participation of young people, especially to their entry into the labour market. This issue is considered particularly serious as studies suggest that in 1992 78% of African urban youth said they were engaged in an organisation such as religious, sports or politics, as compared to only 43% in 2000 (see Altman 2007). This decreased involvement therefore impacts adversely on the extent to which young people can garner social capital and ultimately access the labour market.

This emphasizes that employability cannot only rely on interventions which assist with placement or even the development of employability skills through more integrated services. Rather it needs to consider the wider context of related issues. Viswanathan (2007) argues that widely used definitions of employability do not consider current supply and demand of the job market; the individuals' ability compared with the abilities of other applicants; personal circumstances; and the global recruitment market. This approach is elaborated upon by the United Nations' Youth Employment Network (YEN) which situates employability within a wider context of related issues which they refer to as the 6 E's. These are outlined below:

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[16] StatsSA, 2006 p. xx P0210, Table R

[17] Morrow et al, cited in F Potgieter-Gqugule, draft paper, unpublished

- **Employability**: To ensure access to appropriate skills training followed by adequate support, regardless of youth location and background. Programmes must teach marketable skills and promote self-esteem

- **Employment Creation:** To adopt policies that will encourage economic growth and promote institutional structures that promote scalability of micro-enterprises

- **Equity**: To provide equal opportunities for youth to realize their full potential, particularly among marginalized groups in society

- **Entrepreneurship**: To engender the creativity of young entrepreneurs, who see social and economic opportunities in areas where others only see problems

- **Environmental Sustainability:** To seek sustainable employment without further damaging the environment

- **Empowerment:** To bring the unprecedented opportunities of the ICT revolution to under-represented groups in society with a focus on marketing, connectivity, and content

- **Education:** To provide informal education and skills training to stigmatized members of society

According to de Grip et al (2004) "The need for employability therefore depends on the intensity of various developments in the sector of industry and the characteristics of the markets in which the firms in the sector sell their products or services". The four main developments can be distinguished (Riddell & Sweetman, 1997) as Technological developments; Organisational developments; Economic developments: mainly developments in competition; and Demographic developments.

In a review of youth employability in Portugal, Alves (2007) further assert that "*in a context where job shortage and increasing wage flexibility reign, placing the onus of unemployment on unemployed people and exclusively linking it with lack of employability skills means mystifying a problem, which is complex by nature*". Alves (2007) further states that "*exclusively relying on lack of employability skills is hiding the social and economic effects of this new phase of capitalist accumulation*".

This does not suggest that improving schooling and access to special programmes cannot impact on youth employment. Rather the limitations associated with these programmes must be borne in mind, and these interventions should be located within a broader strategy to address employability as per the various issues highlighted above. However, those areas that have been identified as being important areas of foci in the development of employability skills are outlined below.

Interviews with staff in employment agencies, youth advisory centers and youth development organizations confirmed that the most critical soft-skill was communication. This included the ability to communicate *to* and *with* others. In other words, the individual must have the capacity to present him/herself verbally and also engage with others coherently and effectively. Communication was emphasized across sectors (where information was available). Other soft skills included behavioral and attitudinal qualities such as willingness to do the work; reliability, honesty and trust.

Further, the minimums for technical skills included literacy and computer skills. The need to speak English was underscored in most interviews. And, the need to speak both English and at least one African language was mentioned as specifically important in some service sector jobs. In addition, the way a person dresses and behaves in the workplace context was also given considerable import regardless of the type (permanent, temporary or contract) of employment or the sector and level of work involved.

The need for practical experience was also consistently noted in the interviews. The literature supports this conclusion and even draws attention to the fact that practical work and even work simulation experience can leverage young people into jobs that they would not otherwise get. Many employers are reluctant to hire young people because of assumptions about maturity, ability and skills. Demonstrating real experience can assist young people to dismantle stereotypes about youth skills and abilities. It can also provide core development of higher order thinking and problem solving skills; develop confidence; and improve technical proficiencies. Related to this is the emphasis placed on the need to develop mentoring and work preparation initiatives.

Finally, the importance of providing accessible and effective career planning, guidance counselling and of ensuring access to up-to-date labour market information and employment opportunities is also deemed to be critical in facilitating job searches and in h*elping youth to respond to the complex and changing nature of work*: and in helping youth pursue careers in new and emerging occupations.

These interventions, designed to support individuals to have increased mobility in the labour market rely on continued research and development to understand the changing nature of work. This area also poses a particular challenge regarding access for young people in rural areas, as well as individuals that lack the necessary resources to either access information or to search for opportunities.

The following points emerge as critical in the development of these skills. All stakeholders must be engaged in debating solutions and implementing programmes,.[18] and maximizing employability through training and labour market information will require a concerted group effort.

It is further suggested that relying on the already overburdened education system to address minimum capabilities is neither realistic nor practical, though this does not suggest that schooling does not have a role. Rather the emphasis is on enhancing

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[18] The Rwandan government provides a good example of how all key stakeholders are engaged in developing a national action plan for youth employment by including the Ministries of Youth, Labour, Education, Finance, Gender; the private sector federation, the National Youth Council, the Rwanda Chapter of the Youth Employment Summit (YES) and other civil society youth bodies. See, the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, "Review of National Action Plans on Youth Employment", New York: 2006, 18.

current initiatives and considering partnerships that can be developed between the schools and a range of other interventions is critical.

With regards to special programmes, the complementarity of services provided by the private agencies as compared to NGOs and government services suggests real possibilities for joint engagement. The possibility of extending this to include other facets such as communication and access to workplace experience also needs to be considered. Specifically, there is a need to explore how the human and structural support will be put in place to ensure the success of these interventions. Towards this end, how might universities, high school, private sector and civil society- with government's help- take on a greater role in promoting and enabling such special programmes? Case studies around the world have shown that public/private partnerships are more likely to succeed.[19]

Further, the onus of ensuring minimum capabilities should not be left to young people themselves. To develop national programmes that bridge the gaps, there is a need to involve companies and government in enabling this access. This requires consideration of the ways in which employability skills will be coupled with a careful consideration of other labour market interventions (such as incentives, wage subsidies, and learning programmes)

6. Concluding remarks

In conclusion, this paper suggests four key areas to focus on in terms of youth employability:

▪   A consideration of where the jobs are now and where they will be in the next 10-15 years; what sectors are expected to absorb the youth cohort in question? What is government's policy on job creation and what kind of jobs? If we are talking about what minimums are needed for employment, we need to understand which sectors may employ the cohort?

▪   An analysis of the causes of the very high levels of unemployment amongst the youth cohort. This paper has highlighted youth unemployment as part of a larger unemployment problem but it has also indicated the wide range of opinions about the causes of youth unemployment in particular. In addition to those already addressed in the discussion which focus on the absence of relevant employability skills; in particular challenges pertaining to communication, limited practical experience and an absence of information about the nature of the labour market and ways to access opportunities. Other reasons suggested by the literature conform to stereotypes of youth as a

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[19] This effort would also benefit from a review of global employment and workplace trends offered in the United Nations Economic and Social Council, "Promoting full employment and decent work for all: Report of the General Secretary", New York: 2007, pgs. 3-9.

'problem' cohort "who want higher wages than they should have, have unrealistic expectations, and choose areas of study that are not marketable and that are not consistent with market needs..[20]

- Based on this analysis there is a need to develop policies and interventions consistent with an Active Labour Market (ALM) Strategy. Examples of the kind of strategies that could form part of a ALM include: the improvement of the quality of education and training, better articulation between these programmes and the skills needs of the labour market, *programmes that address the school to work transition (these are diverse as discussed throughout this paper), career guidance and information for young people both in and out of schools*, facilitating the meeting of the supply and demand side of the youth labour market through public employment services, .a combination of subsidized job search assistance; work placement to gain experience and employment training, policies that encourage employers to employ young people such as wage subsidies as well as strategies that encourage self employment, by promoting and introducing the self-employment option, entrepreneurship training, mentor support, access to finance and work space, business expansion support and access to support networks.

- Finally, there is a need to understand which groups are currently engaged in the questions of youth employability and to explore whether there are ways in which synergies can be created. This needs to take into account the breadth of services required as articulated within this paper. This should focus on ensuring that efforts are coordinated, coherent, and strategic. The role of government in facilitating this coherence among the active stakeholders also requires consideration. Further, ways in which to strengthen existing networks and opportunities should be maximized in a manner that utilizes existing resources/mechanisms to improve and scale up efforts.

While the focus at this point is on minimum capabilities there is a need to understand how this can be extended to feed into a future vision which captures a vision for the "youth" of the next generation and takes into account the demographic and socio-economic predictions for this cohort in a manner that ensures that interventions are put in place now to ensure that meaningful work will be an option for them when they come of age. This long-range look is vital to adequately serve the needs of young people or the long-term interests of the nation (government, labour, private sector, or civil society).

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[20] Report of the Southern African Sub-Regional Conference on Youth Employment" www.employment-policy.net/uploads/documents/docs/Youth_Employment_Conference_2005_Report.pdf,

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