

Ex-Mineworkers and New Skills: Contradictory Perspectives of Stakeholders¹

Siphelo Ngcwangu

Department of Sociology, University of Johannesburg

Email address: Siphelon@uj.ac.za

Abstract

The issue of skills development is placed centrally as a means of empowering ex-mineworkers to pursue alternative careers and/or to pursue means of 'self-employment' targeting their local economies as a primary basis to pursue such opportunities. Ex-mineworkers face crucial challenges of economic survival upon exiting employment due to retrenchment and mine closures. This paper draws on twenty-two interviews with trade unionists, an employer association and ex-mineworkers based on their experiences of undergoing various programmes meant to train them for participation in various economic activities outside of the mining sector. The research was conducted in the Carletonville area on the West of Johannesburg in the Gauteng Province of South Africa, the workers had been employed at a Gold Mine, which had closed due to prevailing economic conditions. The research concentrates on those workers who participated in a project of skills training which was run by the Mining Qualifications Authority (MQA). The findings show tensions among stakeholders in understanding the successes and failures of efforts of empowering the ex-mineworkers with new 'portable skills' such as bricklaying, carpentry, plumbing, painting and decorating and plastering and tiling proved inadequate to uplift them economically as the surrounding economy faced a general decline due to mine closures. The ex-mineworkers expressed concern for further employment opportunities within the sector or for training in areas that will provide economic opportunities for themselves and their families. The findings show that the optimism prevalent in South African developmental discourse on the role of skills development tends to overlook the ways in which structural conditions inform the availability of opportunities to employ the skills which people are empowered in. This aspect is not, however, a matter that has been routinely studied in the skills development literature and the paper thus calls for future research on the realities which confront ex-mineworkers.

Keywords: ex-mineworkers, skills development, mining, trade unions, South Africa

¹ This research draws on a project which was supported by the Mining Qualifications Authority (MQA) who had contracted the Wits University REAL Centre to conduct research on a pilot project aimed at researching the challenges of finding alternative livelihood strategies for ex-mineworkers. The MQA has later expanded this project to a national level covering the various regions of mining activity in South Africa as well as labour sending areas. The pilot study was conducted in the Carletonville on the West of Johannesburg in the Gauteng Province of South Africa.

Résumé

La question du développement des compétences est placée au centre comme moyen de donner aux anciens mineurs les moyens de poursuivre des carrières alternatives et / ou de rechercher des moyens de «travail indépendant» ciblant leurs économies locales comme base principale pour saisir ces opportunités. Les ex-mineurs sont confrontés à des défis cruciaux de survie économique lorsqu'ils quittent leur emploi en raison des réductions d'effectifs et des fermetures de mines. Cet article s'appuie sur vingt-deux entretiens avec des syndicalistes, une association d'employeurs et d'anciens mineurs sur la base de leurs expériences de participation à divers programmes destinés à les former à la participation à diverses activités économiques en dehors du secteur minier. La recherche a été menée dans la région de Carletonville à l'ouest de Johannesburg dans la province de Gauteng en Afrique du Sud, les travailleurs avaient été employés dans une mine d'or, qui avait fermé en raison de la conjoncture économique. La recherche se concentre sur les travailleurs qui ont participé à un projet de formation professionnelle géré par la Mining Qualifications Authority (MQA). Les résultats montrent des tensions entre les parties prenantes pour comprendre les succès et les échecs des efforts visant à responsabiliser les ex-mineurs avec de nouvelles "compétences portables" telles que la maçonnerie, la menuiserie, la plomberie, la peinture et la décoration et le plâtrage et le labour se sont révélés insuffisants pour les élever économiquement comme l'environnement environnant. L'économie a fait face à un déclin général en raison des fermetures de mines. Les ex-mineurs se sont déclarés préoccupés par de nouvelles possibilités d'emploi dans le secteur ou par une formation dans des domaines qui offriraient des opportunités économiques pour eux-mêmes et leurs familles. Les résultats montrent que l'optimisme qui prévaut dans le discours de développement sud-africain sur le rôle du développement des compétences tend à négliger la manière dont les conditions structurelles informent la disponibilité des opportunités d'employer les compétences dans lesquelles les personnes sont habilitées. Cet aspect n'est cependant pas une question qui a été régulièrement étudiée dans la littérature sur le développement des compétences et le document appelle donc à de futures recherches sur les réalités auxquelles sont confrontés les ex-mineurs.

Mots clés: *ex-mineurs, développement des compétences, mines, syndicats, Afrique du Sud*

Introduction

Concern over the direction of skills policy in developing countries is a subject of much deliberation across the world. The multilateral bodies such as the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) have on various occasions presented reports assessing the skills development challenges of South Africa and other African countries. The general sentiment that is echoed by African scholars (Jiboku and Akpan, 2019) is that skills development remains a challenge that needs to be addressed if these countries are to survive and compete in the global economy.

This paper departs from the dominant approaches to the skills question by focussing on the contradictions that arise with attempts to empower ex-mineworkers with new skills upon experiencing retrenchment. This is an aspect of the skills discussion that is not addressed in many of the research in this field. How should African states respond to this question? What is the most appropriate intervention when attempts to train workers in new areas are undermined by structural factors that militate against them realising the economic value of such skills acquisition? This research grapples with these questions by looking at a case study in which ex mineworkers were trained in “portable” skills such as tiling, bricklaying, plumbing etc. But soon realised that the context of a depressed local economy in which they reside (due to mine closures) results in the community being unable to purchase the services they offer with the new skills that they have acquired.

This research concentrates on a case study based on a project that was aimed at empowering ex-mineworkers with skills that are considered ‘portable’ in the sense that they can use these skills in other parts of their local economies besides mining. The study was conducted in the in the Carletonville area in the West Rand district of the Gauteng Province. The ex-mineworkers who were interviewed were from a gold mining company that had closed due to operational reasons and rising costs. Whilst many of the previous employees of this company had either returned to their homes in the labour sending areas many had continued to live in the area of the mine to pursue alternative economic activities to sustain themselves and their families.

The historical migrant labour system was a critical source of labour for the mines. The influential large mining houses had a strong voice as to the inflow of African labour particularly from inside the country, in particular the rural Eastern Cape and other Southern African countries such as Lesotho, Zimbabwe, Mozambique and others. Job shedding has become an increasingly worrying feature of the mining sector in South Africa, with at least one report describing it as a product of a ‘perfect storm’ of a range of factors which necessitates government intervention at the highest level. Statistics South Africa (Stats SA: 2015) showed the extent of decline in the Gold Mining sector in its comparable mining production indices that go as far back as 1980. According to Stats SA (2015) Historical values of the gold index show the extent of how production has fallen. In January 1980, the index was 359,0, while the volume of gold produced was far lower in January 2015, resulting in the low index of 48,4. In other words, South Africa produced 87% less gold in January 2015 compared with the same month in 1980. The Mining Qualifications Authority (2018:4) states that mining production decreased 8.4% year-on-year in March 2018. The decline was largely driven by downfall in the production of diamond by 245.1%, gold by 18%, iron ore by 8.9% and PGMs by 6.1%. During the same period mineral sales increased by 0.1% and the increase was driven by manganese, coal and other metallic minerals. In terms of employment year on year covering December 2016 and December 2017, mining and quarrying has shed off about

0.7% of its total employees. These figures point to a bleak picture and a negative outlook for the future employment prospects in the country's mining sector. There are numerous reports of mining closures resulting in the economic decline of former mining towns in South Africa.

This research is based on a bigger study that researched the skills development and socio-economic challenges of ex-mineworkers in South Africa. The study aimed to explore the value of skills training for ex mineworkers in an environment of mine closures. The data was obtained from this project which was supported by the MQA and was done over a seven month period in 2014 and 2015.

The Skills Debate in South Africa – A contested terrain

In the South African context the skills debate is situated within the history of apartheid and colonisation, which created a legacy of racialized inequalities in the society. Apartheid created a racialised labour market hierarchy through the migrant labour system and Bantu education which deliberately produced a layer of black workers for specific purposes of manual labour under conditions of exploitation. The mining sector particularly was built by migrant labour from the Eastern Cape and neighbouring countries such as Lesotho, Zimbabwe and Mozambique. This labour market structure has left a legacy which resonates up till the current period where the racialised divisions of labour are visible in the economy. Black African and Coloured workers are largely in lower level occupations while White and Indian workers tend to occupy professional levels or higher level occupations. The skills question in South Africa arose out of this context throughout the twentieth and early twenty- first centuries.

The National Training Board (NTB) a structure that oversaw training within the state system of the apartheid government developed the National Training Strategy Initiative (NTSI) with the so called 'blue book' as its foundational document. The Manpower Training Act, 1981 was passed following the decisions of the Wiehan Commission. The thinking in the state at the time was that a principle of allowing some into the labour market and skilled trades would diffuse the 'many'. The South African economy was experiencing a rising demand for skilled labour and these could not only be drawn from the white community as many white artisanal skilled workers had been gradually moving into the professions and 'white collar' work in the civil service (Crankshaw, 1994; McGrath, 1996). By the early 1990s the reforming apartheid government had begun to explore ways of engaging the growing black trade union movement in attempts to build a social accord.

It was against this backdrop that under the provisions of the Manpower Act of 1991, 33 Industry Training Boards (ITBs) were established by the government at the time. The ITBs were focused on artisan training. The National Training Board together with

the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) produced a number of reviews of the training system. The main interests groups on these review processes were the apartheid state and the mining sector. The apartheid state prioritized elements of reforms given the growing popular local and international resistance to apartheid, the apartheid state also had interests in education reforms and building of manpower resources to contribute to the rebuilding of the South African economy given the years of exclusion that the economy had experienced due to international sanctions which gave the country a pariah status in the world (Ngcwangu, 2016).

The NTB and National Economic Development and Labour Council – Nedlac (1995:17) report on various funding mechanisms for training showed that by 1996 under the Manpower Training Act the ITBs were given autonomy to establish their own funding mechanisms which were based on one of three criteria: the total cost of remuneration, the number of employees or a fixed levy per enterprise. Given the complexities which the various funding mechanisms of ITBs had created the report concluded by saying that:

‘The funding of industry training is a controversial issue which needs to be debated by the various industries to determine a fair, workable and easy to implement financing system. However, it is clear that the future funding system for education and training should be sufficiently flexible to cater for the unique characteristics of the respective industries,’ (NTB/NEDLAC, 1995:18)

The Sector Education and Training (SETA)² model of funding skills training arose within the context of these considerations. The ITB system had been more employer dominated with very little participation by employees. Training under ITBs was largely focused on artisanal training, was done nationally, had a coverage of 50% to 100% in their sectors and like the SETAs had a low coverage of small businesses. SETAs have been criticized for being highly bureaucratic, being mostly regulatory, accused of poor management of funds and inability to keep closer relations with sectors. However these assessments vary between SETAs as some are seen to be more efficient than others.

Since the promulgation of the Skills Development Act in 1998 till 2008, skills development has been the responsibility of the Department of Labour (DoL) and was framed in government policy as part of labour market interventions to bring equity and overcome the apartheid legacy in the economy. The DoL skills development work was driven largely by former trade union activists (Adrienne Bird, Sam Morotoba,

2 In South Africa there is a system of Sectoral Education and Training Authorities (SETA) which are responsible for enabling training within respective sectors. They cover 21 sectors of the South African economy and are governed through co-determinist structures and funded through a 1% levy that is administered by the national Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET).

Les Kettledas etc.) who had gone into the state as the key technical bureaucrats who implemented skills development policy with support from a number of international development agencies. By 2009 with political changes inside the African National Congress (ANC) precipitated by the historic Polokwane conference, skills development within the state became the responsibility of the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) which has articulated skills development within a framework of a Post School Education and Training system rather than just as a labour market issue.

Criticisms of the state are associated with perceived poor management of financial resources allocated for skills development within the SETAs and related agencies. Numerous programmes such as the Joint Initiative for Priority Skills Acquisition (JIPSA) under the Accelerated Shared Growth Initiative (ASGISA) programme sought to accelerate skills development through targeted interventions in 'scarce skills' areas. An analysis of the role of the state in skills development is critical in making sense of the nature of programmatic interventions that have been implemented by the democratic government. The tensions between addressing the challenges of socio-economic redress while also growing a competitive economy within a global context has been a historical tension within the state's skills policy (Ngcwangu 2014; Ngcwangu 2016).

A more critical body of scholarship is beginning to take shape within the broader field of research into the relationship between education, the labour market and the economy in South Africa (Hlatshwayo, 2014; Vally and Motala, 2014; Motala and Vally, 2014). At the core of these writings is to question the basic assumptions of a linear relationship between education, skills and the economy. These authors systematically set out both conceptual and empirical arguments to challenge the popular views of mainstream economists, sections of the media and sadly even some trade unionists that the 'lack of skills' in South Africa is effectively slowing down the economy and is the main cause of unemployment, inequality and poverty. At the core of such reasoning is the dominant neoclassical paradigm of Human Capital Theory which postulates that 'productivity' and growth can be driven by directing education and training to address the needs of the labour market. Vally and Motala (2014) argue succinctly that:

'Education might increase employability but is not an automatic guarantee for full employment; that an instrumentalist view of the role of education is unhelpful especially as such a view is always based on a raft of unjustified claims about the outcomes of education and skills in capitalist societies; that education and training is not simply a handmaiden for resolving the problems of low economic output; and that a wide of range of exogenous factors and social relations circumscribe the potential value of education and training.' (Vally and Motala, 2014:32)

The 'shortage' of skills has been presented (by policy makers, think tanks and some economists) as the main constraint to South Africa's development and effectively holding back the country's competitiveness resulting in the country slipping down in global indices of economic performance. The above discussion shows that the central concerns in South African scholarship are around the links of skills training to the labour market and the economy particularly about the shape that such a relationship should take. Ideological tensions relate to the framing of this relationship given the rising unemployment and need to pursue the notion of skills beyond the formal or mainstream economic arrangements.

The mining communities also experienced social changes related to job loss, for example unemployment and poverty. Even though plans for skills development and job creation schemes were proposed in the MPRDA (Minerals and Petroleum Resources Development Act), in the past these interventions were not realized in time to ameliorate the consequences of closure for the mineworkers. These individuals had acquired skills only for employment in the mining industry, and job creation schemes failed as well (Ackerman, van der Walt and Botha, 2018: 440). Recently some researchers (Kruss and Wildschut 2019; Buchanan 2019) have pointed out the need to understand the education and training needs of the unemployed and those in the informal sector. This research sought to grapple with these challenges by concentrating on the experiences of ex-mineworkers who had undergone a skills training programme but face challenges that relate to the configuration of their local economy. This is an issue that skills research in South Africa tends to overlook.

Addressing socio-economic challenges of ex-mineworkers

With almost the entire economy in towns such as Carletonville or Westonaria somehow dependent on the mines, ranging from suppliers, craftsmen and consultants to supermarkets, cafés and hairdressers, the (inevitable) closure of mines is perceived as a fundamental threat to the economic future of these municipalities. Adding to the bleakness of such prospects of economic collapse and unemployment is often a mining legacy of environmental degradation and social problems such as increased HIV infection rates and xenophobia, both linked to the migrant labour system employed by mines for decades (Winde and Stoch, 2010:73).

The challenge for the South African mining industry is to deal with the plethora of problems that typically arise due to mine closures, and particularly premature ones. The difficulties associated with such closures in South Africa revolve mainly around two issues: the rehabilitation or restoration of the environment, and the dependency of the surrounding community on mining activities for employment, services, and a market for local businesses. Planning for a mine closure should thus focus not only on rehabilitating the environment, but also on the various socio-economic aspects of closure. (Ackerman *et al*, 2018:440).

A sense of abandonment and loss prevails when we think of the material and non-material challenges of ex-mineworkers. Questions relate to the type of skills that are, or should be, relevant for such training and how such skills for empowerment contribute to personal livelihood development and sustainability. According to Philip (2005) the notion of livelihood strategies may well incorporate a complex mix of causal labour, income-generating activity, occasional wage remittances from other family members, some subsistence agriculture, and contributions from a social grant of some kind. In so far as skills are concerned Allais (2015) argues that widely held views all suggest that different kinds of skills are crucial to ensuring individual livelihoods. Raising levels of general education and of technical skills needed in the world of work at various different levels will help individuals to earn more and will improve general economic and social development, which will in turn improve individual livelihoods. The notion of "livelihood" in this narrative usually invokes survivalist activities in the informal sector, self-employment or home-based enterprise. (Allais, 2015:240).

Research on formerly employed (retrenched) workers in South Africa is largely found in the literature related to the sociology of work. In this tradition, some literature focuses on survival measures faced by workers as they face retrenchment (Mosoetsa: 2011& Hlatshwayo: 2013). Ngononi (2007) explores the decline of migration as returning ex-miners return to communities following large-scale retrenchments for example in the Eastern Cape Province. Mosoetsa (2011) shows how families in the KwaZulu-Natal and Mpumalanga areas have sought to find alternative livelihood options following closure of the textile factories in the area. Also drawing from this livelihoods literature, Mosoetsa (2011) discusses the central role of the economic survival of households and families in two rural townships that were affected by large-scale employment downscaling.

Ngononi (2007) has shown that decline in formal mining sector employment has affected the social organization of the labour sending areas like eMampondweni in the Eastern Cape where that historical trend of migration is being reversed resulting in a different set of complexities and furthering of the economic crisis within those areas. The result of this is that proposals of doing projects in the Eastern Cape in order to assist workers while they live there is fast receiving more attention. These initiatives tend to be focused on agriculture as it has potential to grow given the already existing knowledge and land within the province that can be used to improve the socio-economic prospects of ex mine workers and their communities.

Hlatshwayo (2013) focusses on the organizational approach of the Working Class Coordinating Committee (WCCC), an organization designed to respond to retrenched workers of Arcelor Mittal's Vanderbijlpark Plant. This committee, founded in 1987 by National Union of Metalworkers (NUMSA) was established as a structure aimed directly at assisting workers that were retrenched in order to address legal issues, but which also confronted issues related to re-training in light of the retrenchments that resulted in work reorganization. Interestingly Hlatshwayo shows that by 2010 Arcelor

Mittal had hired mostly semi and skilled-workers, with very few characterized as 'unskilled.' Clearly, the impact of the transition to modern technologies resulted in retrenchments over time.

The role of trade unions in assisting ex-employees with skills training beyond employment is vital and shows a union's continuous engagement with a worker beyond his/her formal employment. Unions vary in their institutional capacity to respond to support the ex-employees. The National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) established the Mining Development Agency (MDA) in 1987 after the mine workers' strike, to initiate job creation programmes for the 40 000 mine workers who lost their jobs as a result of the strike, and expended through the 1990s as 300 000 more jobs were lost in successive waves of retrenchments in the mining industry (Philips, 2005:365). The MDA still exists and centres its work on projects of skills development, agriculture and other similar forms of support for ex-mineworkers. Despite the existence of the agency the challenges facing ex-mineworkers is much larger and the interventions are not able to keep up with the scale of job losses in mining.

Methodology

The methodological design of this study is informed by the research question: *How effective are skills development programmes in improving the socio-economic prospects of ex-mineworkers?* The methodological approach was therefore qualitative, i.e. based on semi-structured interviews and a focus group discussion with a range of stakeholders, including but not limited to the beneficiaries – i.e. the former mineworkers, some of whom participated in the skills training initiatives. The approach to analysis was based on thematic categories identified by the researchers as being relevant to respond to the broad issue of understanding skills analysis. This meant that interview questions were open-ended and were meant to elicit a broad range of responses which emerged from the field. Unlike a survey method, the semi-structured interviews generated data which was more suitable for thematic analysis. The idea was to get data designed to show meanings and attitudes – subjective factors that are critical in producing findings that were relevant to the objective of this research project. Thematic analysis allowed for themes, patterns, convergences, paradoxes and contrasts to be identified.

Access to respondents was a peculiar feature of this study. Mine companies were particularly sensitive to the whole issue of retrenchments a result of the mining downturn, with the popular press reporting an imminent mass retrenchment process. Thus, entering the field to conduct interviews with (soon-to-be-) retrenched workers to examine skills interventions was not possible. The notion of 'retrenchment' was, therefore, not merely a matter of semantics, but resulted in serious methodological challenges. The politically charged nature of its mere mention meant that it was not

something companies were prepared to endure. On the other hand the ex-mineworkers and the trade union were willing to participate in the research. It appeared that in most of the interviews and focus group discussions that labour was keen to raise the current gaps in skills development programmes in order to show employer's failure to respond adequately to the challenges faced by ex-mineworkers. The article is based on twenty two interviews and it picks up on nuances or critical points which were raised that have future impact on research on ex-mineworkers. A variation of programme suggestions and reflections on sustainable solutions post the mining employment were raised. Some of these ideas contradict each other while some are complementary. This is reflective of the tension between these two social forces in conceptualization of development.

Findings

The findings reveal a number of contradictions with skills development as a solution to socio-economic challenges of ex-mineworkers. The findings show the importance of taking into account the structural context of post-employment skills development initiatives and to scrutinize the assumptions that are made in certain project interventions. The findings are presented in four thematic areas: skills and community development; nature of programmes for training of unemployed former mineworkers; confronting economic challenges beyond mining employment and portable skills training. These thematic areas represent key issues that emerged from the interviews with stakeholders and illustrate areas of convergence and divergence within the responses of the participants.

Skills and community development 'life beyond mining'

One of the central questions of this research was to look at the discourse and different perceptions of skills training for unemployed former mineworkers within the mining sector. Views of different stakeholders within the sector converge on some areas while they diverge with respect to others. Questions relate to the type of skills that are, or should be, relevant for such training and how such skills training contributes to personal livelihood development and sustainability.

A crucial trend is that the skills issue is not confined to the individual worker who has lost employment or been retrenched, a strong community dimension has taken shape over the recent period. Reality is that decisions related to economic sustainability rest with shareholders, company executives, geological issues related to minerals and other that are beyond the scope of the MQA (which had commissioned the research). One unionist underlined this view by saying:

We are saying give community skills that are going to make community to survive when the mines are closed. That's what we are saying. The (Social and Labour Plan) SLP's is the responsibility of the mines. But in terms of the MQA, MQA must accommodate. Even SLP, SLP could not only address the mining learning programmes. They must equip the community to exist beyond the mining. We don't want the town to become a ghost town after the mine had stopped mining (Research Participant, National Union of Mineworkers Regional Office, 2015).

The role of trade unions in assisting ex-employees with regards to skills training is vital and shows a union's continuous engagement with a worker beyond his/her formal employment. Unions vary in their institutional capacity to respond to support the ex-employees. The National Union of Mineworkers (NUM's) Mining Development Agency (MDA) is tasked with providing a coherent response and programmes to support ex-miners. The capacity of the institution is being built continuously in order to provide adequate support to workers across the sectors where the union organizes. The success is uneven and is not well profiled in so far as what its projects entail.

So actually MDA has indicated is a developmental structure, is a development of the union for mineworkers as established by NUM to take care of the unemployed former members of the organization from mining, energy and construction. "So we are talking about a classical case, they would tell you if you go there that they have been retrenched in mine and now they are actually learning some skills which they didn't have before (Research Participant, National Union of Mineworkers Regional Office, 2015).

The nature of the interventions that are available are broad as they cover a range of issues from education bursaries, to portable skills, entrepreneurship and other similar programmes which are aimed at building worker skills beyond formal employment. A sharp contradiction to this view of the NUM comes from the South African Chamber of Mines representative who argue that some of the portable skills training is inadequate since it is unable to generate an adequate financial income for an ex-miner. Currently many interventions such as portable skills are premised on the assumption of empowering a worker with a skill that she/he can use in generating an income through entrepreneurial means or through future employment. The critique from the business interviewee is that neither the portable skill nor the entrepreneurial skills training are workable solutions due to constraints in the economy and the society.

These people got retrenched but you go and train them as bricklayers, it's not going to work. And sometimes you say okay we are going to train you as a welder and you

going to weld one thing at a time. My question is that are they going to survive with that. I think the lot of training they have done and a lot of training they have in mind is totally useless, what you give these people is a false hope. The other thing, we think that entrepreneurship is a panacea for every single evil. I don't support entrepreneurship in many ways. To take these people and teach them to be a welder and say okay go out and do entrepreneurship. We are not sitting with our own businesses, we all got qualifications, and we've got experience in the industry and skills, why not because it's damn hard. If you look at the number of business that fail, I don't know what's the figure its like 80% business that fail. Why should we set these people up for another fail? (Research participant South African Chamber of Mines, 2015).

Risks associated with entrepreneurship are well documented in South Africa, in spite general popular sentiment that sees entrepreneurship as a solution to development what is critical is that structural economic factors and lack of access to credit discourage some to pursue the entrepreneurship route.

Nature of programmes for training of ex-mineworkers

The question of capacity and availability of resources is crucial in making skills development interventions viable. Training interventions cannot be left for the period after retrenchment because it needs to be done while workers are in employment and the company anticipates future downscaling. Trade Unions argue that skills development should be seen as part of the empowerment of workers to confront future socio-economic challenges.

The thing we as a union we were saying if you are training me for carpentry are you going to give me tools after I've done the training. I think it would be important to check on the data base what projects we have at NUM and if there is a person to interview who was a beneficiary. We should not only talk about the successful areas. We need to talk about other because these companies they are not likely to give you all the information because they are doing nothing. What they are doing it's just the compliance to keep their mining license. From NUM side skill development is required in order to face different circumstances. From our side NUM we've been saying we need skills that are going to take mine workers to a life beyond mining, something that is going to prepare me if am leaving mining industry, I'll be able to survive in the Eastern Cape. I need that skill, that skill I need while am still working not when I am facing retrenchment so that I can do business and be able to survive. (Research Participant, National Union of Mineworkers Regional Office, 2015).

The assumption that workers receive training alone or as individuals is too limited to address the extent of the social crisis that arises once downscaling or retrenchment occurs. The mining industry employs numerous unskilled workers who are then trained and developed for mining operations. However, these workers do not find employment easily in other industries after a mine closure. In most cases, they have to settle for a severely reduced income and a considerably lower quality of life. It is clear that retrenched mineworkers are reluctant to leave their communities at the mine sites. They prefer rather to wait for new owners to take over the mine, which may provide employment (Ackerman, *et al.*, 2018).

One other issue that emerged is that within the union there are diverse views about whether the union is doing enough to fight struggles that relate to training and dealing with challenges of absorption after the training. South African trade unions have declined in strength on dealing with shopfloor level issues since the democratic era (Hlatshwayo and Buhlungu 2016), unions have tended to prioritize wage bargaining and macro political issues over workplace restructuring issues around which the skills issue arises. The comment below shows that the issue of skills and employment is contested between management and unions.

You know what the problem there is, is the same union. The same union when learners go and study once they achieve they come to the union and say I got the certificate but am not employed. Remember there's no vacancy. Then the Union goes to management and fight with the management and said why you don't employ this person. He is a miner then the management felt to say you know what we only train when there are vacancies. We've been saying to these comrades, comrades you are also killing us, because management would be reluctant to train. Currently someone was saying we want to train 15 thousand artisans and management is saying who is going to absorb those artisans. We only train for our vacancy. Even today I got a mail I got my certificate I haven't been appointed and how long should I have to wait for appointment. I said no wait for a vacancy or is there a vacancy? Because what you are doing now you want management to stop training others (Research Participant, National Union of Mineworkers Regional Office, 2015).

A contentious issue seems to be management's idea of training for vacancies while unions want many more workers to be trained. Given the historical legacies of South Africa and the need for redress, such contradictions will remain for a long time. The irony is that the downscaling in the mining sector also affects skilled workers such as artisans. The point could be more about how we understand the skill requirement rather than stressing shortage. The long-term trend of mechanization and technological

advancement sees more skilled ex mineworkers in need for employment and it is not obvious that they are interested in being trained to explore opportunities to work in other sectors.

In terms of how do we allow ourselves as a union to have the skills that matches the changing economy? We got government gazette at skills (scarce skills). When mining company/ institution such as SETA's embarks on a training programme our view should be what we can use the skills like plumbing. If we aligned our programmes to scarce skills, I mean sectors such as a construction are diverse and fast growing. (Research Participant, National Union of Mineworkers Regional Office, 2015)

There is a lot of hope invested in the idea that once skills are planned for or are 'demanded' by the economy that there will be a match which will occur naturally or automatically. What would be of interest is for a union or unions to explore deeper the data that they have as they interact daily with workers and they know their skill levels and occupational knowledge. It could produce stronger findings because there is direct contact with ex mine workers or current mineworkers. Often the skills issue is based on speculation when it comes to the workplace, the basis of addressing the issue need a stronger qualitative and quantitative base as the ex mine workers cannot be considered 'unskilled' after working for most of their lives in a company.

If we aligned our skill programme to ever changing economy we won't find ourselves in a position where we got retrenched workers sitting with skills that are not required in a country generating income. I think as a union we constantly view such and maybe should report new possibilities with regards the training programmes and such. (Research Participant, National Union of Mineworkers Regional Office, 2015)

A general sentiment about skills training is that it should be aligned to needs of the economy and also those published within governmental policy documents. This would be crucial to ensuring that the skills training interventions are diverse and relevant to economic trends. This is a commonsensical way in which investment into skills training is justified and is influenced by the logic of 'scarce skills'. The scarce skills issue is controversial in itself and some scholars have challenged the methodologies behind it and the theoretical assumptions about skills shortage (Ngcwangu and Balwanz 2014; Vally and Motala 2014).

Unfortunately, even that one when it comes to the scarce skills we are having the problem in what the company are reporting. You can't tell us miner is a scarce skill, whereas you got over 1000 started to be retrenched. We had an SSP (Sector Skills Planning) focus group to the entire provinces. You'll find in Limpopo that they would say there's a scarcity of miners. But when you say how many vacancies do you have and where you advertise, how long does it take for you to get them. They would say no they all come from Gauteng and North West province. Is it scarce? No it's scarce in that particular province because there are no mines. A scarce skill to us is a skill you advertised and you don't find it. It's either from Cape Town, Eastern Cape etc. Like in diesel mechanic most of these mining houses they pay a scarce skill allowance. What needs to be done train more so that you can take away that scarce skill allowance? (Research Participant, National Union of Mineworkers Regional Office, 2015).

There are many other controversies such as the one captured above about the conceptual and empirical basis of the skills issue. The issue involves the complexity of scarcity of skills and geographical factors, this is often referred to as relative scarcity. Nevertheless the key issue is less about the skills and more about the economy in which skills are applied or required.

Confronting economic challenges beyond mining employment

The South African state's response to the challenges of ex-mineworkers is to be found in the Minerals and Petroleum Resources Development Amendment (MPRDA) [Act No 28 of 2002] is the requirement for the submission of Social and Labour Plans (SLPs) as a pre-requisite for granting of Mining and Production rights. The plan requires applicants to plan, develop and implement a comprehensive Human Resources Development programme to ensure that holders of Mining and Production Rights contribute to the socio-economic development of the areas in which they are operating and the areas from which a majority of the workforce is sourced.

According to the Revised Social and Labour Plan Guidelines of the Department of Mineral Re-sources (DMR), the objectives of the Social and Labour Plan are to:

- a. Promote economic growth and mineral and petroleum resources development in the Republic (Section 2 (e) of the (MPRDA);
- b. Promote employment and advance the social and economic welfare of all South Africans (Section 2 (f) of the MPRDA);

- c. Ensure that holders of mining or production rights contribute towards socio-economic development of the areas in which they are operating as well as the areas from which the majority of the workforce is sourced (Section 2 (i) of the MPRDA, and the Charter); and
- d. To utilize and expand the existing skills base for the empowerment of Historically Disadvantaged South Africans (HDSA) and to serve the community. (DMR, 2010: 5)

It has been contended that in conditions of a deepening capitalist crisis and increases in retrenchments private companies in partnership with government have sought to find ways of ameliorating the consequences of large-scale work reorganization, by downscaling and rationalization. SLPs seek to address issues ranging from economic development in support of the unemployed, local economic development, human resources development of retrenched workers and the management of downscaling. Of importance is that the submission of the SLP one of the bases of awarding mining licenses to companies, a question that begs civil society is whether the state actually monitors the implementation of these SLPs.

One of the most critical issues related training of retrenched workers is what future prospects are there for them in the labour market given the already existing dynamics of the labour market and the inherited inequalities that have existed historically. The labour market is seeing increasing casualisation of work as companies restructure their work methods and work on short term projects in which they try to reduce costs by hiring casual labour. Some industries like agriculture are seasonal and therefore have that contractual nature in their employment relations. However in many instances the prospects of re-employment within the mining industry are very low so much so that many company's community and Social and Labour Plan (SLP) reports speak more about broader socio-economic challenges rather than future prospects of reemployment.

The big contractors they employ casual, all of them and it doesn't matter if you building a road or bridge. If you were to see construction they are all casual workers. At some point they take guys off the street like the retrenched. They give them training for one or two days on how to mix a concrete etc. the other thing is that there was an idea that lot of those people weren't real going to be re-employed (Research participant South African Chamber of Mines, 2015).

The result of the lack of reemployment opportunities is that workers end up returning to their homes within the labour sending areas such as the Eastern Cape. This trend is observable over time as the historical model of migration is being reformulated in the face of declining employment prospects in the mining industry (see Ngononi, 2007).

The effects of retrenchment and the downturn in mining has multiplier effects within the economy. Lack of employment results in lack of salary or income, lack of income limits the capacity of communities to spend and this limited ability to consume or spend directly impacts the demand for goods, the declining demand for goods or services invariably impacts the prospects of growth of local businesses. The effect is therefore economic and manifests in the interlinkages that exist within the economy. The result of this is the inevitable slowdown in local economic activity which then raises questions of development within the context of declining workforces.

So because of those people are being retrenched, some furniture shops are going to close down, food shops, and clothing shops are going to closed down. There is that impact and the town become a ghost town. I think the reality is that these people are not the type of person who's going to work for themselves. If they get any work anywhere they going to work for someone. I think if you decide on a few principles, because you not going to solve everybody's problem, number one that's the principle. You can solve certain problem, you can't solve all. Number two is whatever you put together; this is for a person who's likely to be employed again not an entrepreneur, because not everybody has to be entrepreneur (Research participant South African Chamber of Mines, 2015).

A critique of entrepreneurship arose within the discussion above. Like skills training entrepreneurship tends to be presented as a solution to the crisis of unemployment as if considering entrepreneurship is an option that can suit many people. Instead the reality is that entrepreneurship requires a range of skills and attitudes that are related to starting a business. It is not a straightforward matter, some people have a history of being involved in entrepreneurship through their families and are therefore very likely to pursue it as a career due to their personal experiences. Entrepreneurship is often presented as a solution to developmental challenges but what it does is to individualize structural problems and is delinked from the structural realities that militate against the success of entrepreneurial ventures.

Portable Skills Training

Interviews were done with fourteen ex mineworkers through a focus group discussion, these ex mineworkers are on a training programme in the Gauteng Province which is aimed at training portable skills: bricklaying, carpentry, plumbing, painting, decorating, plastering and tiling. This part of the findings shows the micro level dimension of training of retrenched or ex-miners through one case study that exemplifies such interventions.

There are many other examples of training which are being done some focused on agriculture while others are more within the construction field. Methodologically it shows a more concrete expression of the broad issues discussed above. These training programmes are aimed at both ex-mineworkers and proxies who are relatives of the ex-mineworkers. The training was provided through a service provider who also has a practical training facility for simulated training.

All those employees that were affected then they identify the portable skills that are relevant for them. One was bricklaying, carpentry, plumbing, painting and decorating and plastering and tilling. There were about 60 of the employees. Then we had some sort of agreement understanding that once they complete the training, then they had to be absorbed somewhere in terms of employment (Research Participant, National Union of Mineworkers Regional Office, 2015).

Such training is not designed purely to lead to re-employment. It provides the trainees with skills that can be used for other purposes such as entrepreneurial activities or other means of income generation. Practical skills such as those in these portable skills are generally in demand within communities as they provide a critical service to the community at a domestic household level. One example is what another ex-miner stated

We want that knowledge of knowing how to fix and make chairs and cupboard but as things are now it is clear that we not going to get it (Research participant Worker/thirteenth respondent ,2015).

While benefits may not be at a huge scale, what we found is that those small survivalist benefits are critical to provide a source of income for the ex-mineworker or proxy. The portable skills training in itself does not ameliorate the crisis sufficiently and in future may prove less effective if the local economy is not developing. The types of training on 'wet trades' that are being provided assume that there is consumption of the services on which training has been given. The ex-miners are people with families and saw benefits to themselves through the portable skills training.

Sir we can see the change in our lives. Because when people with nice jobs got a problem with their toilets, they come to us and we go and fix their toilets. After we done we say just give me R50. That is not the same as selling apples on the street. My hands can give me food, so the training was beneficial (Research participant Worker/first respondent, 2015).

The critical issue is that in the face of persistent unemployment which is worsened

by job losses in the mining industry there is a need for such interventions to be viewed with caution as they address only a part of the problem. The cash generation potential of such training is critical in empowering the ex mine workers. The main issue of concern is what type of market structure would best absorb these trainees and what prospects exist for the creation of a vibrant small business sector within the construction industry. The diversity of the training captured the range of building related skills such as plastering and tiling, which are relevant in the context of improvements in the demand for construction related skills. The ex miners and proxies expressed an overwhelmingly positive response to the training as it gives them practical skills which they otherwise did not possess. In specific fields such as plastering and tiling one ex-miner stated:

The programme was okay there in the training centre regardless of the issue of material but we did well. The plastering and tiling that is what I was doing. I wasn't interested in plastering alone but when time goes I decided to take plastering and the tiling. I got two things unlike someone who had one thing like the person who had plumbing only. Let's take a practical example; after a house is being build, they call me to come and do the plastering and tiling. Moreover, we did well in the training centre although there were some issue in some way (Research participant Worker/sixth respondent, 2015).

The training that the ex-miners received included practical examples of testing their skills in ways that they would confront work in the real world. The content of the training included theoretical aspects of trades which were taught across the different trades as the theory course is common across the fields and not specific to a certain trade. The theory part lays the foundation of knowledge about the trades and also provides those without a foundation in trades or technical fields the necessary background to able to understand the language and concepts of the trades.

We did theory together because we using those books and those books are about the building structure. Let's say we going to study about direction of the back of the house (the north point). When it comes to the point of writing we do it separately. Because when it comes to our trades we are doing different things. Also when it comes to making the foundation of the house we do theory together (Research participant Worker/first respondent, 2015).

A sense amongst some of the ex miners is that this portable skills training is better than not doing anything or being disengaged. Those faced with socio-economic challenges and the threat of non-participation in economic activities often look to such projects

as a way of remaining involved, reading, having contact with the outside world and pursuing means of survival in the face of an economic crisis. In communities wherein mining is a major employer the impact of large scale retrenchment is felt throughout the community and serious socio-economic challenges of daily survival confront the communities. Those undergoing training also receive stipends which substitute for salaries and making a meaningful difference in the lives of the ex-miners and their families. As one ex-mineworker stated.

It is better than nothing. And we hoping we can continue with this project and gain more skills and get absorbed in some construction company or something. It seems there's hope as our leaders say. That is why we need something to do and be able to feed our family and be able to survive those underground skills only applicable underground. In the surface there are officials and you only know mine laws (Research participant Worker/tenth, 2015).

Other ex-miners pointed out that the skills they acquired are important even if some of the courses were not completed due to logistical reasons. This means that a number of options are available in pursuing the training in future by ensuring that the miners complete their programmes and are exposed to many other training areas that could empower them to explore diverse economic activities.

Overall the portable skills training seems to have provided the workers with the basics of skills in the 'wet trades' which they could use in future however such training is not in itself a panacea for the problems that cause unemployment, it may create short term activity but it is not the solution per se. The mining industry in South Africa is undergoing a long-term trend of downscaling particularly in the gold sector, there is anticipated to be more mechanization in future which will impact the industry immensely resulting in further job losses.

Discussion and conclusion- Limits of skills training interventions for ex-mineworkers

The foregoing discussion has shown critical questions about the character that skills training for ex-mineworkers has taken in the South African mining industry. The interviews were with three constituencies: trade unions, employer associations and ex-mineworkers. The optimism for training in portable skills to empower ex-mineworkers is criticized by the employer representative as creating 'false optimism' as the economic environment militates against the success of such ventures. On the other hand the union criticizes the way in which the issue of skills is shaped and the timing of when

ex-mineworkers are provided with skills training for life after working in the mines. The ex-mineworkers themselves who confront the daily struggles of survival view skills training as giving them hope in spite of the reality of general economic decline in local communities when mines have closed.

By singling out the case of the Carltonville area which experienced mine closures in the Gold sector I have sought to illustrate through an in-depth study of a skills training intervention offered by the MQA the kinds of contradictions that arise as such programmes are implemented. Despite the optimism of empowering ex-mineworkers with new skills it emerged that the changes in their livelihood are minimal as the general decline of the local economy due to mine closures militates against the beneficiaries sustaining themselves and gaining sufficient income from their newly acquired skills. It emerged that unions are sharply critical of the timing of the skills training for ex-mineworkers as it is done when the workers have already exited employment as opposed to being done when employers anticipate or foresee mine closures that are imminent.

The issue of skills features strongly in discussions over job creation in many ways centred on the shortage or 'mismatch' of skills in relation to available skills. I have argued elsewhere (Ngcwangu, 2019: 28) that the assumption of most South African state policies is that increasing 'supply' of skills through education and training is a singular solution to the jobs crisis, yet the jobs crisis is shaped by a range of factors that prevail in the capitalist labour market many of which have very little to do with skill. However this is not to imply that education and training are not important but to show that our approach to the skills debate has been strongly dominated by neo-liberal policy assumptions and human capital theory which distort the structural nature of the jobs crisis and simply make unemployment an individual problem which can be resolved through skill acquisition. Scholars such as Amsden (2010) argue that purely emphasising supply provision or expansion without dealing with demand side restructuring in order to create jobs may prove futile for countries seeking to widen employment opportunities. Amsden (2010) argues that in the presence of high unemployment at all levels, improving the capabilities of job seekers will only lead to more unemployment and not to more paid employment or self-employment. To believe that improving only the supply side of the labour market is enough to reduce poverty without also improving the demand side, and investing in jobs, is logically flawed and subject to the same error as Say's Law – that supply creates its own demand (Amsden 2010:57).

The paper has sought to occupy a gap in South African sociological and policy development literature in relation to the socio-economic challenges of ex-mineworkers in an environment of mine closures. While it is assumed that skills training is critical for re-engaging workers into the labour market, and by opening up re-employment opportunities or further study pathways for re-trenched workers, the skills development component provides a vital element in the entire architecture of support to ex-mineworkers. This aspect is not, however, a matter that has been routinely studied in the

skills development literature. This research has sought to contribute to future research on socio-economic realities that face ex-mineworkers. There is room for further theoretical work that considers the ways in which alienation occurs as a result of the challenges of prolonged unemployment. Coupled to this are questions of the psychosocial challenges that ex-mineworkers confront. The preponderance of research related to livelihoods tends to overlook the importance of understanding the psychosocial challenges that ex-mineworkers face.

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APPENDIX A- INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Trade Unions

1. How would you characterise the extent of retrenchments in the Mining Industry currently?
2. How does NUM see the future of the mining industry given the growing retrenchments? (other any documents or papers you could share in this regard)
3. Social and Labour Plans (SLPS) have been conceptualised by government, labour and business as interventions to ameliorate the plight of retrenched workers and communities. How effective are the SLPs in your view?
4. Does the skills training requirement of the SLP sufficiently address the needs of retrenched workers? How could the SLP model be improved in order to improve the economic livelihood opportunities of retrenched workers?
5. Skills training for alternative livelihoods through portable skills training is apparent in many SLP's of companies, which other priority areas of skills training do you think should be prioritized ?
6. Are there specific positions that the NUM will be taking in relation to re-skilling of retrenched workers? Or programmes that link reskilling to either entrepreneurship or re-employment in other sectors (please share relevant documents or papers). What are the programmes of the MDA?
7. Our research is going to lead to the MQA developing a conceptual model for future research on skills training for ex-mineworkers ? How would you envision such future research, any ideas of how it could be framed?

Chamber of Mines

1. Introductions and permissions (as per ethics document)
2. Please outline what is the broad scope of reskilling of ex-mineworkers and the approach of the Chamber of Mines
3. What skills development interventions does the Chamber support, how are they designed and what is the nature of impact?
4. How effective have previous interventions been? how does it impact the livelihoods of ex mine workers?
5. Do beneficiaries indicate how their livelihoods have changed? Which type of training is most popular? Are there age characteristics to note?
6. Any other issue related to the programme (social and labour intervention) in their personal and professional development
7. What would be the best medium term vision of the mining sector for reskilling of ex miners?
8. The impact on family, community etc..
9. Please suggest any other relevant documents and policies to read on reskilling of ex mine workers.

Retrenched/ex mineworkers

1. How long have you been retrenched from the Mining sector? Whilst still employed how would you describe the skills content of your previous job?
2. How familiar are you with the general features of social and labour plans? Were you ever briefed about it by your union or company?
3. What is the level of worker's involvement in the social and labour plans? This is in terms of the processes and programmes offered through the SLP
4. What are the skills training programmes that you have been exposed to? How long did the programme last? Is it relevant for your future employment in Mining ? or beyond the Mining industry? (elaboration: some documents and previous research show that some of the training is largely benefiting private providers and makes minimal impact on the future careers of the mineworkers, the questions here were designed to get to the point of what types of training have been done or should be done to enhance the retrenched workers' future economic prospects)
5. What training would you require now in order to get re-employment or for entrepreneurship? Would formal academic programmes work for you? Or would you opt for short courses that provide you with practical skills that you could use beyond the workplace

6. How would you describe the skills needs of the general community of other retrenched workers from your previous company? Do many other workers seek retraining/ re-skilling?
7. Are there any other experiences you could share with us to assist our research?