



**PROCEEDINGS REPORT**  
**The Presidential Employment Stimulus:**  
**Research Opportunities**  
as part of The Panel Discussion held at  
the Science Forum South Africa 2020



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The Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAf) was inaugurated in May 1996. It was formed in response to the need for an Academy of Science consonant with the dawn of democracy in South Africa: activist in its mission of using science and scholarship for the benefit of society, with a mandate encompassing all scholarly disciplines that use an open-minded and evidence-based approach to build knowledge. ASSAf thus, adopted in its name the term 'science' in the singular as reflecting a common way of enquiring rather than an aggregation of different disciplines. Its Members are elected based on a combination of two principal criteria, academic excellence and significant contributions to society.

The Parliament of South Africa passed the Academy of Science of South Africa Act (No 67 of 2001), which came into force on 15 May 2002. This made ASSAf the only academy of science in South Africa officially recognised by government and representing the country in the international community of science academies and elsewhere.

This report reflects the proceedings of The Presidential Employment Stimulus: Research Opportunities panel discussion held virtually at the Science Forum South Africa 2020.

Views expressed are those of the individuals and not necessarily those of the Academy nor a consensus view of the Academy based on an in-depth evidence-based study.





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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This proceedings report is a product of the Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAf) and the Department of Science and Innovation (DSI) on the panel discussion held virtually at the Science Forum South Africa 2020 on 10 December 2020, titled **The Presidential Employment Stimulus: Research Opportunities**.

The Presidential Employment Stimulus was launched in parliament on 15 October as part of government's Economic Recovery Strategy. It directly funds 800,000 employment opportunities that are being implemented within the current financial year, but it is anticipated that it will also become a medium-term programme. The stimulus includes public employment programmes, job retention programmes and direct support to livelihoods. The single largest programme is run by the Department of Basic Education, which, in the last fortnight, recruited 300,000 young people as school assistants, to assist schools to deal with the setbacks faced as a result of the pandemic. The stimulus supports employment in the environmental sector and over 75,000 subsistence producers are receiving production grants through an input voucher scheme. There is a once-off grant to assist over 100,000 registered and unregistered Early Childhood Development Practitioners back on their feet, as well as a significant stimulus to the creative sector.

The session set out to provide an introduction to the Presidential Employment Stimulus Programme (PESP), a key programme within government's economic recovery plan led by Dr Kate Philip. The key objective was to get input from the research community on how the work that they are already doing and future work could contribute to the M&E efforts and be augmented in such a way that the PESP could become a medium-term programme. The DSI plans to hold further engagements in 2021 to mobilise the wider research community to provide evidence-based research in order to shape the research agenda that would support the M&E work and identify short-term issues that need to be factored into the department's work plans, under the guidance of Dr Philip.

ASSAf greatly acknowledges the DSI, all the speakers and participants. The contributions of the session moderator and co-organiser, Ms Busisiwe Ntuli from DSI and the session co-organiser, Dr Tebogo Mabothe from ASSAf are hereby acknowledged and appreciated.



**Prof Himla Soodyall**  
**ASSAf Executive Officer**

## WELCOMING REMARKS

### Ms Busisiwe Ntuli, Director, DSI (Moderator)

Ms Ntuli welcomed everyone to the session and explained that this important conversation would be the start of many engagements that the Department of Science and Innovation (DSI) wished to have with the research community, in order to shape the research agenda that would support the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) work led by Dr Philip from the Project Office in the Presidency, under the Presidential Employment Stimulus Programme (PESP). The session aimed to provide an introduction to the PESP, a key programme within government's economic recovery plan, and the M&E work being done within that programme to extract lessons learnt and explore possible research questions to support the M&E work.

A number of contributors will share the work they are doing and further explore how they believe their work ties in with the M&E work to be presented by Dr Philip. Dr Maphosa from the Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAf) will share the work the Academy is doing on behalf of the DSI around policy dialogues that can also support the M&E work.

## THE PESP: BUILDING A SOCIETY THAT WORKS

### Dr Kate Philip, The Project Office in the Presidency

The title, 'Building a Society that Works', has an intentional double meaning to 'works' because it looks at forms of employment and public employment that also contribute to a society that works for the people and that creates public goods and services that contribute to a wider development agenda.

The starting point of the stimulus was the recognition that there is no shortage of work to be done to solve the problems in society and yet a shortage of work is one of its defining features. Part of the strategy is how to close this gap. There is also the recognition that this is an opportunity for reconstruction on new terms, transforming rather than merely recovering. In line with the global call, this is a call to 'build back better' and the approach to the employment stimulus has tried to do exactly that. The components of the stimulus (public employment, livelihood and enterprise support, and job retention) each have different elements but they all support public funding for employment, including self-employment.

The concept for an employment stimulus was first mooted by President Ramaphosa when the R500 billion package to fight the Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) pandemic was announced. A concept was developed and went through many

structures in government, and an amount of R19.6 billion was allocated to the PESP as part of the special appropriation budget. The work on programme design began in June 2020. The funding came with serious constraints, namely, that the budget had to be spent on implementation programmes in the remaining months of the current financial year with no security of forward funding beyond that. This meant that hostile timeframes had to be put in place for planning, stakeholder engagement and implementation, as well as M&E. The announcement of the final allocations was made in October 2020. Although R14 billion for 800 000 directly funded opportunities was announced, the subsequent decision was made to cut some of the stimulus in order to contribute to funding the extension of the special COVID-19 grant. This meant that R12.6 billion has been allocated for 694 000 directly funded opportunities and some of the most innovative programmes had to be cut. Since then, programme implementation has progressed to varying degrees.

The following programmes illustrate some of what can be achieved through this mechanism:

- Provincial Roads Maintenance Grant and the innovative and strongly pro-poor approach of the Zibambeke Rural Roads Maintenance Programme: Funds have been made available to replicate these approaches.
- The Department of Cooperative Governance: Working on municipal infrastructure
- The Department of Trade, Industry and Competition (DTIC): Supporting the business processing outsourcing incentives with 8000 opportunities already confirmed.
- The Department of Health: Expanding community health workers, but this faces serious implementation challenges.
- The DSI: Innovative and interesting graduate programmes that contribute to qualitative outcomes of the PESP.
- The Department of Public Works and Infrastructure: Graduate programme.

Although there have been challenges and limitations, South Africa has been innovative in the public employment programme space and is the first country in the world to start public employment in the social sector providing social and economic value to care work typically undertaken by women as unpaid labour in the home. The country's environmental public employment programmes were way ahead of their time. There has been a very strong focus on gender, including in the construction sector with contractor training, and there have been innovative programmes at the level of cities and provinces. The ambition of the Community Work Programme (CWP) was to unlock and enable community agency in the public employment programmes. At the same time, the PESP is seen as an opportunity to focus on enabling better outcomes from public investment in this space and the allied spaces of the other components of the stimulus.

The Basic Education Employment Initiative is the biggest programme in the stimulus and has to do with the appointment of 300 000 teacher assistants by the Department of Basic Education (DBE). The department has embraced this as an opportunity to augment the challenges it faces in the curriculum in the context of COVID-19. There are many levels of innovation in this programme. A key feature is that it is the first scale use of *sayouth.mobi*, a free mobi site and platform that is part of the Presidential Youth Employment Intervention and the Network of Networks that brings together all the players that are working on matching supply and demand in the labour market to create a youth platform that is about pathway management. The network provides a range of support services and geo-spatially locates everybody who registers on the platform and crowds-in opportunities within a radius of their location. The DBE decided to use it for recruitment purposes and this process has had fascinating outcomes. The fact that the programme pays the national minimum wage has made it possible for it to have a strong partnership with the teachers' unions and to be embraced by stakeholders in the sector. The department also had a concerted process of briefing and informing communities through the school governing bodies before recruitment took place. Initial outcomes of the Basic Education Employment Initiative include:

- Over 800 000 youth from almost all the provinces applied for teacher assistant positions through the platform.
- Over 70% of those appointed are young women.

The DBE has utilised the time of school closures and funds from the PESP constructively. There has been a concerted process of partnering with the non-state sector to deliver training to all the teacher assistants and for school maintenance and upgrading to take place.

Another programme is the Agricultural Relief Fund for smallholder farmers, which targets 74000 beneficiaries with a budget of R1 billion. Applications were launched recently. The fund supports four categories in agriculture and each package has different components. It serves as a once-off voucher for production inputs and builds on an initiative that was undertaken earlier in the COVID-19 crisis to focus on subsistence farmers. It will be interesting to see how this programme links to forms of transfer that are asset based and based on building back the capacity to join value chains that were disrupted in the crisis.

An extensive suite of programmes is run in the public employment portfolio as part of the environmental programmes, but budget cuts have forced a 45% decrease in these programmes. A very interesting programme to support catchment management is run through the DSI. A key question is how the environmental

programmes contribute to Just Transition, the green agenda and the climate change agenda.

Another big part of the stimulus is the support to arts and culture through the biggest one-off stimulus that the sector has ever had, managed through the National Arts Council and the National Film and Video Foundation. Calls for proposals closed not long ago and awards would be made soon. This is intended to support many (primarily self-employed) opportunities with the arts and culture sector on the understanding that the sector is best placed to identify opportunities and employ itself with public support. Around 15000 opportunities are supported using the national minimum wage as a benchmark. It is evident from the scale of applications made that over 200 000 opportunities could be created. This package also has job retention components that apply to arts and culture institutions as well as sports federations.

Provision has been made for a once-off grant to restore provision of Early Childhood Development (ECD) services that were seriously affected by the COVID-19 lockdown. Support would be given to around 111 000 beneficiaries from the non-state sector, including registered centres as well as unregistered practitioners, early in 2021.

Social employment is one of the components that was cut from the PESP, but it is interesting that it has developed its own momentum. It is argued that there are limits to state capacity and that a whole-of- society approach is needed to take public employment to scale and to unlock capacity, creativity and community agency to create new forms of public value by creating work for the common good. In the process of programme design, it was decided to locate this as part of social economy strategy in DTIC with the Industrial Development Corporation (IDC) as the fund manager. Even though this component has been cut from the PESP, serious institutional development work has been done. The support from DTIC and IDC has been commendable and the process is going forward. Part of the vision was always to mobilise non-state funding for social employment to supplement funding from the fiscus, and this process is underway.

Examples of 'social employment' are limitless. There is no shortage of work to be done in communities to improve quality of life, social outcomes and outcomes on every level. This is what social employment aims to support in ways that build on past experience while improving the models and deepening community engagement and ownership in the process. A lot of emphasis is being put on new forms of public value, moving beyond the stereotypical models of public employment and public works. Such new forms include digital opportunities that are youth-oriented with

career path opportunities and links to market development. Current examples of 'work for the common good' that should be supported through a public employment model include a community radio station that provides information to over 100 villages in a remote area of the Eastern Cape, a programme that addresses the backlog of title deeds in the Western Cape, and a programme that has trained youth to undertake detailed surveys of economic activity in township economies in Gauteng. The challenge is to think in new ways about what is meant by 'work for the common good' and 'work that creates public value'.

The stimulus also provides scope for government-wide innovation. Interesting new opportunities are emerging from *sayouth.mobi* as this recruitment mechanism provides fascinating data about who applied and who was appointed. Those who applied but were rejected remain on the system and are getting other forms of support in a targeted way. The teacher assistants will remain on the network after their work ends and it will be possible to track their pathways forward. Currently, a baseline survey is being conducted using mobile data. Taking advantage of technological opportunities is opening new windows for research for impact evaluation and so on. One of the big constraints in this process is the ability of departments to pay people. There are opportunities to create much more effective new government-to-person payment systems. This work started with the special COVID-19 grant and has gone forward into the employment stimulus. New mobile digital mechanisms for government-to-person payment systems that hugely enhance the auditing capacity as well as efficiency and effectiveness are being looked at.

Some of the strengths of the PESP include:

- It does not only target unskilled labour and there is a strong focus on graduates.
- It has been very successful in targeting youth.
- There is very good spatial equity through the Basic Education Employment Initiative, mainly due to the fact that every community has a school.
- It has a strong focus on public and social value creation.
- The use of the national minimum wage in the new programmes is a game changer that has a variety of implications.
- There has been an embrace of technological innovation in implementation.

It seems unthinkable that the PESP will be closed down at the end of March 2021. Although there are political commitments, there is no confirmed medium-term budget as yet and the R100 billion necessary to fund the PESP in the medium-term would have to be found. This is a critical challenge to the continuation of the PESP.

A framework for M&E research and learning has been developed. A team including the Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME) and DSI has been supporting this process. The three levels of the framework are:

- Reporting
- Evaluation and implementation support
- Impact evaluation

It is proposed that this forum should focus on impact evaluation along a number of different dimensions. The critical areas and some examples of these are:

- The impact of the incomes earned on poverty and inequality: The focus has tended to be on the poverty and inequality impacts, which are crucial, but the stimulus effects of local spending are neglected. Contrary to some of the criticism received, the PESP does support small enterprise and is arguably one of the most effective ways of doing so, particularly in terms of reaching township, rural and informal businesses. More research is needed on the outcomes of that. Several players have shown interest in supporting a big research agenda that looks at the employment and economic effects of the stimulus measures – the trickle-up effects and the indirect and induced effects on wider employment creation and economic development.
- The impact of participation in work on participants: This has not been well studied in the South African or global contexts and yet there is so much work that shows that long-term unemployment negatively affects people psychosocially across a variety of dimensions, and that participation in work contributes to networks, capabilities, structure, self-worth, community recognition, inclusion, behavioural changes and much more. Participation in work impacts people's forward trajectory and has an influence on their pathways, and the interface with their participation in economic activity and enterprise development. These crucial questions are currently under-explored.
- The impacts of the assets and services delivered in communities: *The Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSV) has done a series of studies on the impacts of CWPs in communities that found that these programmes contribute to violence prevention and the 'peace architecture' at local level. These unanticipated outcomes are profoundly important. It will be important to look at the local, social, economic and environmental impacts of many of the other goods and services that are being delivered through this kind of process.*

Dr Philip appealed to participants in this session to communicate with the PESP Project Office about how the work that they are already doing and future work could contribute to M&E efforts and be augmented insofar as the PESP could become a medium-term programme rather than ending in March 2021.

## Q&A, DISCUSSIONS AND COMMENTS

### **(Comment)**

The spirit of this stimulus package is incredible and it is in line with what I personally think about what we need to do to overcome the crisis of youth unemployment. The Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) was recently awarded a project that evaluates the impact of government programmes that are meant to assist young people with employment and finding ways into the labour market. Listening to Dr Philip, I thought we may need to integrate the PESP and its impact into this project. The HSRC could perhaps find a way to contribute to this important national initiative.

### **(Comment)**

It is encouraging to hear about the initiatives that have already been launched. I am pleased to see that the PESP recognised the importance and opportunity of the waste sector in building back better.

### **(Question)**

Does creating social employment equate to the universal basic income grant concept?

### **(Response) Dr Kate Philip, The Project Office in The Presidency**

No, social employment is not the same as a universal (or targeted) basic income grant. I would argue that we need to move beyond seeing these issues in binary policy terms and that the amount of a basic income grant (even the most ambitious of them) does not come to the level of the *Expanded Public Works Programme* (EPWP) minimum wage. It is for immediate relief of poverty distress and a crucial part of public policy. This does not mean that complementary policies are not needed for public employment and employment support. Employment provides a different set of opportunities. The whole point is that public employment programmes are not about the income alone. The impact of participation on participants in terms of networks, inclusion, participation, respect, capabilities and so on, and what these mean for their pathways forward has not been unpacked. It is when we do not focus on the value of the assets and services that these are poor.

### **(Question)**

What is the role of agricultural research and development, and farmer support programmes run by science councils and research organisations (in relation to the PESP)?

**(Response) Dr Kate Philip, The Project Office in The Presidency**

The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development has drawn on a lot of the resources that are available to support them in the design. They have teams of economists doing the work on the packages of support that are being provided through the stimulus. Those agencies could have a crucial role to play in the impact evaluation. I would be very interested in what they think they are able to contribute to that process.

**(Question)**

Would it be interesting to frame employment impact in terms of a wellbeing framework?

**(Response) Dr Kate Philip, The Project Office in The Presidency**

Absolutely.

**(Question)**

Would you be looking at how long participants had been employed before the PESP and understand the reasons for that?

**(Response) Dr Kate Philip, The Project Office in The Presidency**

We would prefer to look at as many dimensions as possible. As indicated, we are dealing with hostile timeframes in respect of the PESP right now. Even though we think we can pull off the baseline study for education, we cannot do this across the whole portfolio because the timeframes are too hostile and funding has not been in place for that. We are trying to see what can be done in the timeframes. The conversation will be very different if this becomes a medium-term programme with a three-year horizon, in which case there would be a rolling process of recruitment and new programmes, and much more time for the planning and engagement that should be happening.

**(Question)**

Given the issues around corruption in the country, do you think that adequate ethical and moral buffers have been put in place so that the poorest of the poor benefit from the PESP?

**(Response) Dr Kate Philip, The Project Office in The Presidency**

It is a challenge and nothing is perfect, but it is fascinating how technology allows us to deal with some of these issues. For example, the special COVID-19 grant was the first time that government had joined up all its datasets so that an ID number can be run past a joined-up dataset to find out whether an individual is getting a child support grant, is on Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF) and

so on. A first level of screening of participants against those datasets is now very easy and becoming the norm. This makes it easy to pick up whether someone is moonlighting. This is also why we are focussing on a government-to-person payment system with centralised, auditable mechanisms but accountability at the local level and payment happening separately to avoid money being transferred from national to province to district to school. Solutions are still work in progress. There are risks across all kinds of programmes but the data now provides much more solid mechanisms for screening and preventing the old obvious forms of corruption.

**(Question)**

Has there been a measure of the number of people from rural settings who have been integrated into the programmes, particularly with regard to making opportunities available for skills development and infrastructure support in those communities?

**(Response) Dr Kate Philip The Project Office in The Presidency**

The stimulus was approved on 28 October 2020 and after only six weeks of implementation over 300 000 people have already been placed in jobs. The DBE programme is spatially referenced and we do have a sense of the spatial distribution of the programmes, but we do not have all the data on all the programmes at this stage. We would welcome any help with this and we are encouraging the departments to themselves encourage research and engagement on these issues.

## **HOW CAN THE RESEARCH COMMUNITY CONTRIBUTE TO THE PEST AGENDA AND SUPPORT THE M&E WORK: SELECTED RESEARCH PROGRAMMES**

### **Mr Stewart Ngandu, Senior Research Manager and Ms Shirin Motala, Chief Research Manager, Human Sciences Research Council, HSRC**

Based on the HSRC's work in evaluating some of the public employment programmes including environmental, social and infrastructure EPWP and CWP these are some of the lessons learnt:

- The blind spots in intervention design: More often than not, the strategic objective is very good at framing the goal objective (reducing unemployment). If there is a sense that outcomes are being created by the outputs, there is often failure to measure the effectiveness of the interventions.
- The critical role that theories of change play in successful M&E.
- The need to define expectations in terms of the ultimate goal of the programmes (whether it is employment, social protection or skills development).

In doing impact evaluations it is found that there are most programmes lack a theories of change that defines the outcome indicators, especially the short-term outcome indicators that arise from the outputs that are produced. Implementers will always claim that the programmes have been successful with respect to the implementation objective simply because they produced outputs, but it is often difficult to measure the strategic success of a particular intervention. This means that there is often failure to grasp the total success of an intervention.

The short-term outcomes related to poverty, basic livelihood needs and so on generally do happen and the programmes do tend to have transitory impacts. Pathways relating to objectives such as skills acquisition are usually poorly defined and articulated such that the subsequent impacts of the interventions are not visible. In some instances, even the exposure to work and experience does not necessarily create a better understanding of whether labour market participation has been achieved.

Articulating theories of change definitely assists in exposing what the outcomes are that need to be measured and what impacts need to be assessed.

Reliance on wages and grants, and the fact that they serve as motivation for employment programmes, are evident when assessing income diversity.

There is an absence of baseline data to enable the assessment of whether changes have been brought about as a result of the interventions. In order to overcome this, in one study the researchers built a track and trace study after about 18 months of implementation and found that just under 50% were still working on the programme and about 50% were unemployed. This highlights the differential poverty outcomes with respect to people who had been participating and at exit they then experienced subsequent drops in income.

The gender impacts of the programmes need to be well understood. It was found that regardless of how gender is disaggregated, women face disproportionately higher levels of poverty.

An effort was made to find indicators that give a better understanding of the social value that these programmes create. A perception-based indicator was used in the assessment of the social value created by the programmes. People were asked about the differences they perceived between before they worked, while they were working and after they had worked. There was a substantial decrease in the number of people who perceived themselves as 'poor' and a subsequent increase towards being 'rich' due to participation. As soon as people

stop participating in the programmes, there is deterioration in their perceptions of their wellbeing status.

With regard to the expectations in terms of the ultimate goal of the programmes, another impact study asked people to give their views on why they were unemployed and found that the issue of jobs not being available was an important factor in explaining some of the employment outcomes. With regard to the EPWP programmes, the employment effect of the intervention was a reduction of about 17%. The question therefore was whether improvement in employment status would be sufficient to constitute a successful outcome for these interventions.

**Prof Linda Godfrey, Manager, Council for Scientific and Industrial Research, CSIR**

The PESP identifies opportunities in food waste strategies, in addressing backlogs in waste collection in communities, in institutionalising sustainable waste management solutions, and unlocking sustainable economic opportunities from recycling.

Scaling-up city cleansing and waste collection is a clear place to start in terms of service delivery in the country's cities and towns because these are very labour intensive and low-skilled activities.

The PESP also provides a unique opportunity to transform the waste sector in South Africa and to fast track the uptake of alternative waste treatment technologies. South Africa is about 20 to 30 years behind developed countries in managing waste. There is the opportunity to drop appropriate technologies into South Africa immediately, with some level of adaptation and localisation. Municipal waste management could be transformed through this initiative and with it create significant jobs.

Public-private partnerships and the role of the private sector are key in the transformation of the waste sector as a way of reducing risk, in terms of leveraging new investment, accessing capability and technologies, developing entrepreneurship, and ultimately creating long-term sustainable jobs.

A lot of the focus to date by government has been on packaging waste, but this forms a relatively small percentage of municipal solid waste. Immediate low-hanging fruit opportunities include the diversion of organic waste and industrial biomass into alternative waste treatment technologies, such as composting, biogas and bioenergy, or higher value bio-refinery products and opportunities.

The evidence clearly shows that moving up the waste management hierarchy away from landfilling towards waste prevention, reuse and recycling, creates orders of magnitude more jobs than waste disposal to land. Yet, according to the latest state of waste report for South Africa, the country still sends around 80% of all waste generated to uncontrolled or controlled dumpsites that then present very real environmental and human health impacts.

Looking to the PESP to transform the municipal waste sector would involve improving city waste collection and city cleansing (and everything to do with these), fast-tracking the uptake of alternative waste treatment technologies across all municipalities, and shifting away from controlled and uncontrolled dumpsites through the development of regional engineered landfills for residual waste in partnership with the private sector.

There is a separate discussion to be had on the opportunities for improved waste management in industry, which leads to the bigger circular economy discussion, and the opportunities that the broader, sustainable resource management thinking presents for South Africa, from agriculture to energy, mobility, manufacturing and much more. The economic, social and environmental opportunities that the circular economy provides for South Africa are only starting to be uncovered.

In the context of this recovery programme, there is certainly a role for the research community – in the social and technological innovations that need to be deployed into the waste sector, in finding alternative high-value end-use markets to create viable business cases and demand, and in evidencing the new kinds of policy that are going to be required to create the enabling environment for this to happen. Much of this is already being done under the DSI's Waste Research, Development and Innovation Roadmap, which is hosted by the CSIR, but a lot more can and should be done in terms of moving forward on this issue.

Beyond March 2021, the question that needs to be addressed is are we being ambitious enough in our thinking around the waste sector and the economic recovery opportunities it provides for South Africa.

### **Dr Kobus Herbst, Director, South African Population Research Infrastructure Network, SAPRIN**

SAPRIN is one of the DSI funded research infrastructures hosted by the South African Medical Research Council (SAMRC). It is made up of four nodes in poor, rural, peri-urban and urban communities of at least 100 000 whole populations being followed up longitudinally, with just under half a million-total population. The nodes are located in Mpumalanga, KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo and Gauteng Provinces.

Although historically the nodes have been involved in health research, some employment and labour related research has also been done. This research has found that cash transfers to elderly South Africans lead to increased employment amongst prime-age members of the households, that these have significant effects on labour migration among these members upon pension arrival, that the pensions' impact is attributable both to the increase in household resources it represents (which can be used to support migrants until they become self-sufficient), and to the presence of pensioners who care for small children thereby allowing prime-age adults to look for work elsewhere. This longitudinal study is in contrast to some cross-sectional studies that have shown a larger number of unemployed prime-age members in households with a pensioner, but it shows that they reside in the household temporarily using it as a means to access labour opportunities elsewhere.

As a government supported research infrastructure, SAPRIN is an open access platform that researchers can use to pursue the kind of research questions raised by Dr Philip. For example, the platform could be used to look at the multi-level impact at community, household and individual levels longitudinally of these programmes, the future success and job acquisition and retention, and to address the blind spots in intervention design observed by the HSRC team. The SAPRIN platform has been in place in at least three of the nodes for more than twenty years making it possible to have baseline information without the need for a particular baseline study being done prior to the implementation of this programme.

There are exciting opportunities, particularly if the SAPRIN population databases can be linked to the SA Youth database and to individual beneficiaries of the PESP, and to look longitudinally at the longer-term and medium-term impacts of those individuals at the multi-levels.

Researchers are invited to make use of the SAPRIN platform to answer these research questions.

### **Mr Saul Levin, Executive Director, Trade and Industrial Policy Strategies, TIPS**

TIPS has been doing general economic research in order to understand what has been changing in the economy. The benefit of this is seen through research done on the COVID-19 pandemic and the economy during the peak of the pandemic, which given the threats of a second wave, might have to be resuscitated. This work provided a better understanding of what has changed and what needs to be prioritised. One of the key challenges is the tendency to resort to what the problems were a year or two ago, while the situation in the country has changed fundamentally.

TIPS has just brought out its latest Real Economy Bulletin. One of the key observations made is that much of the economy has rebounded with the exception of employment, which shows a declining trajectory. The risk is that there will be a lower employment trajectory. This is why employment interventions are absolutely critical. One of the biggest risks is that these interventions will be halted at the end of the current financial year or sooner. TIPS has recognised that all of these measures, including the latest employment measures, are absolutely critical in keeping the economy going and in helping the rebound, which has shown to have been better than was predicted by the Reserve Bank, National Treasury and the World Bank.

Other research that TIPS has been involved in is about trying to better understand what has been going on in key aspects of the economy. Lots of work was being done on electricity because it is a priority area and the reality is that the problems at Eskom do hold back the economy. The shift to renewables and using renewable energy a lot smarter in line with the latest technologies start to present an opportunity to think about how to use the grid differently at community level.

In the next year, TIPS will look at the Just Transition. What is important is the involvement of communities and giving them agency, rather than people outside of communities deciding what the problems are and coming with solutions. This approach is harder and more labour intensive, but, is being taken in the Just Transition work on the exit from coal, for example.

Another area of research that TIPS will focus on in the new year is around technological change. The institution has already done much work on the topic which was the theme of its 2019 annual conference, and several papers on the topic are available on the TIPS website. Issues around technological change dovetail with some of the thinking around community programmes and public employment programmes, particularly with regard to the youth as most of them are technologically enabled. The technological element also needs to be brought into areas such as smallholder and subsistence farming as a means to make them more interesting and attractive to young people.

### **Dr Stanley Maphosa, Manager, Academy of Science of South Africa, ASSAf**

ASSAf has been working with the DSI to convene the Innovation for Inclusive Development (IID) Seminar Series since 2018. Eight seminars were held thus far on a variety of topics. A number of stakeholders within the research area, including private companies and non-government organisations (NGOs), have been mobilised to come together and discuss the innovation space and how researchers, civil society and policymakers can work together on issues that need

critical attention. With regard to the subject introduced by Dr Philip, the DSI has asked ASSAf to convene more of these seminars in the coming year.

Besides the IID seminars, ASSAf also coordinates the District Development Model (DDM) for the entities that report to the DSI. ASSAf will mobilise its members (who are currently close to 600 in total) located throughout the country to work with and support the DDM activities. The Academy is also coordinating the Smart Cities Initiative that brings together different entities involved in this research and its implementation.

## **Q&A, DISCUSSIONS AND COMMENTS**

### ***(Comment)***

The emphasis on environmental management is critical and it needs to be said that historically, rural areas were relatively clean due to lack of industrialisation. Today though, we are experiencing wide scale environmental pollution largely due to virtually absent waste management systems. The result is that water sources and other natural sources of life are polluted and no longer of great value to rural inhabitants. There is also illegal sand mining which poses a huge threat to natural and cultural ecosystems. We therefore need to prioritise rural environments as well.

### ***(Response) Dr Kate Philip, The Project Office in The Presidency***

The initial PESP proposal had a strong focus on the waste issue, but this changed when the city and provincial components of the stimulus were cut because a lot of the waste management emphasis in the proposed package was in the city and provincial budgets. However, there is still a strong component of that in the DEA's allocation in the stimulus. Certainly, for the medium-term, we would want to look at both rural and urban opportunities in relation to this issue.

### ***(Comment)***

The HSRC definitely supports Prof. Godfrey's call for scaling up environmental waste management interventions. The DEA EPWP study demonstrated the need for significant potential for greater integration between the Working for Waste programme with the recycling intervention particularly as they support some of the poorest workers in the informal economy.

### ***(Comment)***

The findings (of the research done by Stewart Ngandu and Shirin Motala) about the impacts on beneficiaries illuminates the personal and psycho-social outcomes of participation including gender agency, self-empowerment, child school attendance, dignity and even small shifts in household debt.

**(Response) Dr Kate Philip, The Project Office in The Presidency**

Mr Stewart Ngandu and Ms Shirin Motala provided a very useful analysis. We certainly hope to close some of those gaps but I am sure some will remain.

**(Comment)**

The agricultural intervention is a neat circular economy model with a crowding-in assumption for the stimulus. However, how does the mechanism reduce leakage effects that result in the benefits flowing out of local economies?

**(Response) Dr Kate Philip The Project Office in The Presidency**

There is that risk. We have not managed to solve the problem entirely in the timeframe or the context. This is the kind of issue that would be useful to analyse to understand how much of a problem it is. There are limits to how far we would have managed to reduce those leakage effects in this round.

## **CLOSING REMARKS AND WAY FORWARD**

### **Mr Imraan Patel, Deputy Director-General, DSI**

The DSI has worked under oppressive time frames in terms of getting the projects up and running and a similar situation has arisen with respect to the research and monitoring work. The gravity and the opportunity, the importance and historical significance of what needs to be done are evident. There will be further opportunities for engagement and the DSI with ASSAf will consider how best to structure this over time. Since people have a sense of the kind of research questions that are possible, it is hoped that they will be able to help the DSI structure future programmes that would include discussions not simply about the PESP but also highlighting some of the useful insights, such as the work done by the HSRC around the EPWP. It is necessary to get a sense of who is doing what research so that research evidence can be put forward in the communities of practice sessions that are organised with implementing agencies. In the meanwhile, the DSI will begin to compile 'to do lists' to help organise the way forward.

Budgets are tight and this is why there is a risk of the PESP not continuing even if there are opportunities for making a transformative change. It is therefore important for the research community at this point in time to use the crisis to re-organise how research work is done. Where necessary, there will be pressure to build this development into current work plans and to get what is needed by way of data and so on. The DSI will look at how it can provide further funding support as well as how to leverage its existing interventions. The department will also want to continuously understand where big new pieces of work are happening and ensure that these are not compromised when it comes to budgets. The DSI is very



committed to the PESP and is open to discussing the important issue of resourcing. Participants are encouraged to find opportunities to enhance their research agenda.

The main point is about mobilising a constituency behind the employment stimulus. Participants are encouraged to begin to use the public media to talk about the opportunities and put forward the issues raised around previous studies that have shown the benefits of employment programmes in the public space. A strong research community is needed to play an activist research role (where the value is seen), to help raise the debate in a way that is informed by evidence and guided by the need for transformative change and create momentum around the discussion on employment creation.

Mr Patel invited Dr Philip to guide the DSI with respect to the short-term issues that are identified and that need to be factored into the department's work plans.

## **CONCLUDING REMARKS**

### **Ms Busisiwe Ntuli, Director, DSI**

Ms Ntuli thanked Dr Philip for providing useful insights into the PESP and the M&E work, and the other presenters and participants for their valuable contributions to the session.

## ANNEXURE A: ACRONYMS

ASSAf	Academy of Science of South Africa
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease
CSIR	Council for Scientific and Industrial Research
CWP	Community Work Programme
DBE	Department of Basic Education
DEA	Department of the Environmental Affairs
DSI	Department of Science and Innovation
DTIC	Department of Trade, Industry and Competition
EPWP	Expanded Public Works Programme
HSRC	Human Sciences Research Council
IDC	Industrial Development Corporation
IID	Innovation for Inclusive Development
M&E	Monitoring and evaluation
PESP	Presidential Employment Stimulus Programme
SAPRIN	South African Population Research Infrastructure Network
SFSA	Science Forum South Africa
TIPS	Trade and Industrial Policy Strategies





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A. Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAf) Publications

B. ASSAf Workshop Proceedings and Other Reports

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2021

# The Presidential Employment Stimulus: Research Opportunities

Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAf)

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