

## **Executive summary**

### **Debate on jobs and informal work between political society and civil society**

**7 April 2009, 10h00 – 14h00, Arthur Smith Hall, DUT, Smith street campus**

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The Democracy Development Programme and the Durban University of Technology's School of Journalism co-hosted a panel debate on jobs and informal work between representatives of various political parties and civil society analysts. The purpose of debate was to make critical sense of the manifesto promises on job creation and retention and to establish how political parties intend to address the conditions of informal workers.

The political party representatives were Mr. Dion George from the DA, Mr. Velaphi Ndlovu from the IFP, Mr. Wayne Thring from the ACDP, Mr. Lucky Mthethwa from NADECO, Mr. Nthlathla Buthelezi from COPE and Mr. Bongani Msomi from the UDM. Unfortunately, we received an eleven hour apology on behalf of the ANC representative, Mr. Mike Mabuyakhulu. The civil society panellists were Dr. Mariam Altman from the Human Science Research Council, Professor Frances Lund from the University of KwaZulu Natal and Women in Informal Employment Globalising and Organising (WIEGO) and Ms. Lebohang Pheko from Trade Collective. The discussion was chaired by Mr. Terry Bell.

The inputs of each of the three civil society panellists in the beginning of the discussion raised some challenging questions. Lebohang Pheko charged that opposition parties tend to recreate the policy positions of the ruling party instead of positing alternative paradigms. She argued that the liberal model of politics laces democracy with the market and therefore undermines the socioeconomic rights of the poor and marginalised.

Frances Lund wanted to know how political parties intend to create a million +jobs. She accused political parties of causing insult to injury by promising poor people jobs in the face of unsustainable job policies. Politicians need to appreciate that in the context of stubborn high levels of unemployment poor people are creating their own economic activities in the informal economy, she argued. She indicated that approximately 20% of South Africa's work force operates in the informal economy, which contributes about 10% of the national Growth Domestic Product (GDP). Incomes are extremely low in the informal economy. According to Frances Lund, two thirds earn below one thousand rand per month. She asserted that local government interventions are more effective to address conditions in the informal economy than those of the national government. Hence, the policy paradigms of local government have a direct impact on the social and economic conditions of those operating in the informal economy.

Mariam Altman indicated that most South Africans move regularly between paid jobs, unemployment and informal work. She contended that the employment challenge is not only about the number of jobs that are being created or retained, but also the social pressures of work. For example, the sorry state of the transport system poses a major challenge to people's ability to move around. She scoffed at the "decent work" idea, arguing that it's simply jargon and does not refer to jobs per se. According to Altman, it's about the creation of a decent working environment that's conducive to work and provides enough opportunities for people to engage in multiple ways of raising income. She indicated that the human rights perspective raises concerns about the conditions of work and not more wages. The idea of decent work is thus similar to the sustainable livelihoods concepts. She argued that the things to be done to mitigate the effects of the global economic crisis on labour are not special, as they need to be done anyway. For example, it's about increasing basic infrastructure like, transport, health, water, electricity, etc. The Expanded Public Works Programme needs to be expanded greater than what it was two years ago, she said. Altman asked the political party representatives to indicate what is going to be different after April 22.

Overall, the responses of the different political party representatives were laden with affinities. They registered similar concerns about the ANC's macro economic measures like, BEE, affirmative action, procurement, skills and education, etc. The DA and the ACDP argued for labour deregulation. The DA, IFP, COPE, NADECO, UDM and ACDP all supported the development of entrepreneurs and all of them (bar the DA and the ACDP) mooted rural economic development proposals.

The party representatives were put through their paces by an ebullient and vocal audience. They fielded tough questions about the viability of their policy proposals and the implementation strategies. They were bombarded with a litany of criticisms and negative sentiments. Speaker after speaker accused the opposition parties of being fixated with the ANC's policy failures without providing concrete alternatives! Opposition parties are mouthing broad general statements about what should be done, they charged.

Frances Lund observed that the political parties failed to acknowledge the economic activities of self employed or own account workers in the informal economy and didn't give enough recognition to the role of local governments. Mariam Altman noted that the opposition parties didn't mention anything new, and so failed to explain how they will be different after April 22. She criticised the DA for proposing deregulation without specifying which aspect of the labour law they want to deregulate. She accused the DA of making contradictory policy statements. The DA wants to reduce corporate tax, but implement a basic income grant! Lebohang Pheko said she heard nothing new.

