

Lack of qualified artisans a constraint to SA's economic growth

By [Zizile Lushaba](#)

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A functioning economy must have a sufficient number of artisans if it is to fulfil its economic potential. From energy and water to transport and logistics, all key sectors of the economy are dependent on a ready supply of artisans.



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Although South Africa remains woefully short of artisan skills, this reality is no stranger to the South African government. In November 2022, the minister of higher education, science and innovation, Dr Blade Nzimande, warned that South Africa needs at least 60% of school leavers to pursue training in a trade to meet the country's demand for scarce skills.

Dr Nzimande, at the 2022 Centres of Specialisation (COS) Artisan Graduation Ceremony, stated: "We honestly need to do more to encourage school leavers to pursue technical trades, as government expands technical and vocational education. This is amongst the reasons why there is a continuous need for suitably qualified artisans to sustain industries and support economic growth in South Africa."



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Critical skills list

The Department of Home Affairs has also made a concerted effort to attract critical skills to the country by adding seven trades to the latest critical skills list which was released in August 2022. The inclusion of trades in the critical skills list highlights the shortage of these skills and affords foreign nationals with these skills an opportunity to apply for critical skills work visas.

This may appear contradictory when considering the country's unacceptably high levels of unemployment, however, the issue is that these are skills the economy urgently needs and are not readily available locally.

The president in the State of the Nation Address in February 2023 stated: "One of the key ingredients for economic growth and competitiveness is the ability to attract skills which the economy needs. Having completed a comprehensive review of the work-visa system, we will move quickly to implement the recommendations put forward."



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12 Sep 2022



Achieving the 'Decade of the Artisan'

According to the requirements of the government's [National Development Plan \(NDP\)](#) and [White Paper for Post-School Education and Training](#), South Africa should be producing 30,000 qualified artisans per year by 2030. This will remain a pipe dream if there is no synergy, strategy and agreed action plan between the main role players to see the 'Decade of the Artisan' campaign being achieved.

South Africa faces two main problems when it comes to the shortage of artisans. Firstly, older experienced artisans who are over the age of 55 are retiring while those in their 30s and 40s are taking advantage of the global portability and demand for their skills and immigrating. In addition, the 36.5% decline in the total number of learners who enter artisanal learning programmes during the 2020/21 financial year is also a major concern.

Inadequate maths, science literacy

Secondly, and compounding the problem further, is that younger newly qualified artisans lack the experience to substitute the leavers. Moreover, the appalling formal education system produces matriculants who lack the maths and science literacy required to get to grips with the demands of many trade programmes.

This leaves the country with a gap in the market of about 20 years and no pipeline of younger suitably qualified artisans ready to join the workforce, build their careers and contribute to economic growth.



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28 Jul 2022



Exposure to theory and experiential learning

For the country to produce what the National Artisan and Apprenticeship Development Strategy 2030 dubbed as the 21st Century Artisan (A21), there needs to be: a functional system that ensures exposure for learners in artisanal programmes to the theoretical aspect of their trade; simulation (practical) and experiential learning (on-the-job training); and a clear acknowledgment that one or two parts of these components is simply inadequate – all artisans in training need immersion in all these aspects to eventually become A21 Artisans.

For this process to succeed, a strong ongoing partnership between three crucial role players must be mapped, implemented and monitored on an ongoing basis:

- Industry/workplaces,
- Sector Education and Training Authorities (Setas), and
- Skills development providers and reputable training centres, such as the Seifsa Training Centre.

The government also plays a major overarching role - it needs to be the glue that binds these three important stakeholders together by providing the necessary regulatory and enabling framework.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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