



Unemployment and poverty in South Africa: Assessing the National Development Plan 2030 predictions

Mandisi Matyana ^{1*}, Xolani Thusi ²

¹ Department of Public Administration, University of Zululand, South Africa

² Department of Public Administration, University of Limpopo, South Africa

Abstract

In 2012, the South African government adopted the National Development Plan (NDP) as a main plan to transform the state by 2030. The NDP has indicated that by 2030 South Africa will be a better country, free from poverty and with low unemployment rates. Therefore, this study is conducted to assess the current rates of unemployment and poverty in South Africa. To achieve the objective of this study, the qualitative method has been used to collect data, particularly secondary data. The findings of the study prove that unemployment and poverty rates are very high in South Africa. They are higher than what the NDP has indicated or predicted in 2012. Challenges such as poor education systems, poor health systems, etc. are contributing to the failure of NDP predictions. Therefore, the study has recommended a strong intervention of the Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME) to strengthen its assessments and advise quickly where there is a need for improvement. The study also recommends the enforcement of good governance by the relevant mandated institutions.

Keywords: National Development Plan; Poverty; Socioeconomic Issues; Unemployment

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Cite this article as: Matyana, M. and Thusi, X. (2023), "Unemployment and poverty in South Africa: Assessing the National Development Plan 2030 predictions", *International Journal of Development and Sustainability*, Vol. 12 No. 6, pp. 212-226.

* Corresponding author. E-mail address: MatyanaM@unizulu.ac.za

1. Introduction

South Africa as a developing state is faced with many socio-economic issues. In 2012, the South African government of the ANC has adopted the National Development Plan (NDP) as a strategic development blueprint to develop the state by 2030. This plan aims to eliminate poverty and reduce inequality by 2030. It is a long-term strategy that requires government officials and other relevant stakeholders to work closely and with dedication to ensure its success. In support, Selebi (2019) observes the NDP as a recent economic plan of the South African government that aims to ensure better transformation of the state and ordinary citizens. Furthermore, Selebi indicates that this plan requires political leaders of the government to be determinant and effective toward achieving this plan. The NDP outlines a couple of actions and predictions that the South African government must achieve by 2030. These actions were divided into key priority areas and allocated to relevant state departments, entities, and municipalities to handle the implementation process. In relation to this study, the following predictions are aimed at by the plan:

- *Unemployment*: at least by 2030 the unemployment rate in South Africa should be at 6%. In achieving this millennium plan, the government has planned to ensure that at least 2 million people should be employed in the public employment programs, at least 61% of adults should be employed. Furthermore, ensure that the gross domestic product per person or per capita is raised to R110 000 by 2030 while ensuring the maintenance of prices or constant inflation. The NDP has also planned to ensure that the South African government has increased ownership of assets, such as ensuring that there are more exports than imports in the state.
- *Poverty*: again, in terms of poverty, the South African government has noted that by 2012 and prior, there was a high rate of citizens and households who are receiving the income of R419 per month or even less. To overcome this tragedy by 2030, the government has planned to adopt the above-outlined strategies (plans to combat unemployment) and further introduce new policies that are responsive to the stubborn rising unemployment rate of South Africa, ensure the strengthening of access to health care services, expand the public economic schemes that enables the support of local communities, develop nutrition programs to support pregnant women and young children, invest in public transport which empower the middle working class and low income households, and ensure strong investment to sectors such as agriculture and tourism.

One can notice that the South African government has adopted the NDP 2030, to combat various socioeconomic issues facing the citizens and ensuring that there is an economic transformation in the state as well. Of which some of these socioeconomic issues are caused by the existing apartheid era in South Africa (Ndinga-Kanga et al., 2020). The most dominant socioeconomic issues facing South Africa include poverty and food insecurity, unemployment and low-income rates, inequality, crime and corruption, and high levels of illiteracy (Taylor and Yu, 2009; Bayat et al., 2014; Mbunge, 2020). However, for the purpose of this study, attention is given to unemployment and poverty. Mohammad and David (2019) indicate that unemployment and poverty are twin issues which are difficult to separate. They need governments to understand their link patterns and come up with strategic measures to overcome them so as to enhance the living conditions of the ordinary citizens of the state. The effects and concerns of unemployment and poverty have been evaluated by various scholars. Mseleku (2022) indicates that South Africa is having a high rate of unemployment, which mostly affects the youth and therefore above 60% of them are not working. The most affected age group is between the ages of 15-35 years. Some of them have never worked their entire life. These claims are also

supported by Dawson and Fouksman (2020); Wakefield et al. (2022) that South Africa is having high rates of unemployment due to limited employment opportunities available and developed by the government and other stakeholders such as the private sector. Therefore, it is very important to ensure that poverty is at the center of sustainable development. Gnangnon (2021) indicates that economic complexity is the best trajectory of poverty reduction, which states must adopt and maintain. Therefore, the study aims to assess the current rates of unemployment and poverty in South Africa in relation to the predictions of the NDP. The paper is outlined as follows, the theoretical framework, methodology, findings and discussion, recommendations, and conclusion.

2. Theoretical framework

This study is based on the theory of public choice. According to Shaw (1996), public choice theory arose as a distinct topic of public administration and economics in the early 1960s. Focuses on finding solutions to problems and obstacles that prevent the delivery of better services and development. The use of economic resources is highlighted in this theory as a means of improving government efforts to provide better services to the population. Public choice theory provides an understanding of how government decisions take place while also ensuring the collective decision approach. It also provides an emphasis on how and why government should direct the use and distribution of resources to some key priority areas that allow the best output and impact to the community living standards (Tullock, 1962). According to Buchanan and Tullock (1962: 11), 'public choice theory substitutes idealistic and imagined ideas about government mechanisms with ideas that symbolise scepticism'. According to public administration and economics researchers, public choice theory is best suited to policymakers and decision-makers who have the great responsibility of making educated decisions on behalf of their constituency and making firm reflections on the contents of the policy documents. This theory fits into this study because it helps to assess how the South African government and policymakers have implemented and managed the NDP since its establishment in 2012. Researchers want to understand how the NDP is realistic in solving the needs of the people, particularly in reducing unemployment and poverty.

3. Methodology

The research approach used for the study is described in this section. The research technique, according to Matyana and Mthethwa (2022a), describes how scientific research will be carried out in a certain study. Additionally, sound research procedures or requirements must be followed and understood in order to generate a variety of reliable results for a given study. The research technique acts as a manual for interpreting the findings of the proposed study. To achieve the objective of this study, the researchers have adopted the qualitative method to collect the required data. Qualitative method gives a better chance of getting in-depth information required for a particular study. The study has relied more on secondary information data, which means that the study has reviewed existing or published information from other scholars or relevant organizations. To be specific, the study has reviewed pushed articles and reports on socio-economic issues, particularly employment and poverty. NDP documents and publications have also been reviewed. To arrive at a specific conclusion that meets the major objective of the article, the information was organized chronologically and thematically (Anderson, 2019; Mamokhere et al. 2021).

4. Findings and discussion

The findings of the study have focused on the employment and poverty rates in South Africa, challenges facing the NDP. They are presented as follows:

4.1. Unemployment rate in South Africa

In the international arena, unemployment remains a serious problem for many governments. In developed countries such as the United States of America, England, Germany, etc. unemployment does exist, but it is not that much compared to developing countries such as South Africa (Ghavidel et al., 2011; Zemtsov, 2020). This is due to the nature of economic activities and technological advancements available in these countries. For example, developing countries are more focused on developing raw materials, while developed countries are more focused on manufacturing. Africa is one of the continents that is affected by high rates of unemployment (Metelerkamp et al., 2019), meaning that most countries and regions including South Africa are affected by this socioeconomic issue. According to Pasara and Garidzirai (2020: 01) 'South Africa continues to face stagnant economic growth, decreasing investment and high unemployment.' Nkhumeleni et al. (2022) support that unemployment rate in South Africa remains a major issue for the government. It is one of the major contributors to poverty. The lack of skills and knowledge required for the labour market contributes mainly to the unemployment rate in South Africa (Maisiri et al., 2019; Maijama'a et al., 2019). Over the years, the unemployment rate has been increasing in South Africa. During the Covid 19 pandemic, the rate increased significantly. In 2021, South Africa was ranked as the country with the highest unemployment rate in the world. The jobless rate was 34.4 percent when considering people who are actively looking for jobs only, but when considering or adding people who are not actively looking for the jobs by the unemployed, the situation was too bad as the unemployment rate was 44.4 percent (Naidoo, 2021).

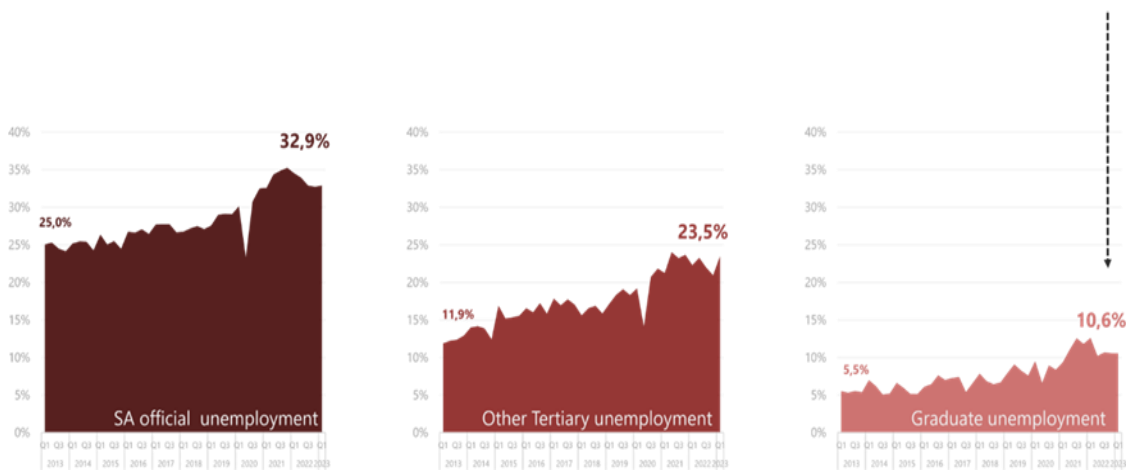


Figure 1. South Africa unemployment rate in 2023 (Source: Statistic of South Africa website)

A recent report released by Statistic of South Africa shows that 32.9% are currently unemployed in South Africa according to the first quota of 2023 and this percentage is very high compared to other countries

worldwide. This percentage is 29,6% more than what NDP is hoping to achieve by 2030, which is to achieve a 6% unemployment rate. The high inflation rate, slow economic growth, and lack of viable employment opportunities in the state are causing this high percentage. This assertion is also supported by Sekwati and Dagume (2023) that South Africa is facing high rates of unemployment with no quick means to overcome them, so the government must come up with very strategic measures to respond to this dilemma.

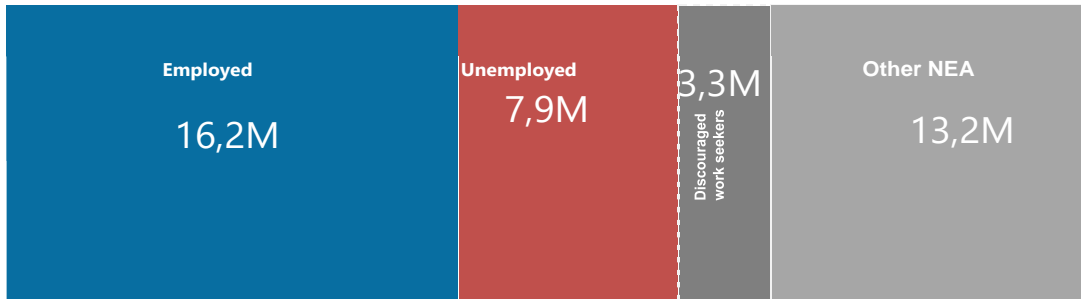


Figure 2. Clarity of 2023 unemployment numbers (Source: Statistic of South Africa website)

In terms of numbers, can be concluded that 7,9million citizens are unemployed in South Africa while 3,3 million are discouraged to seek for employment due to prolonged unemployment status they are under. This assertion is also supported by Kwenda et al. (2023) that discouraged work seekers in a national issue that affects most of the ordinary citizens.

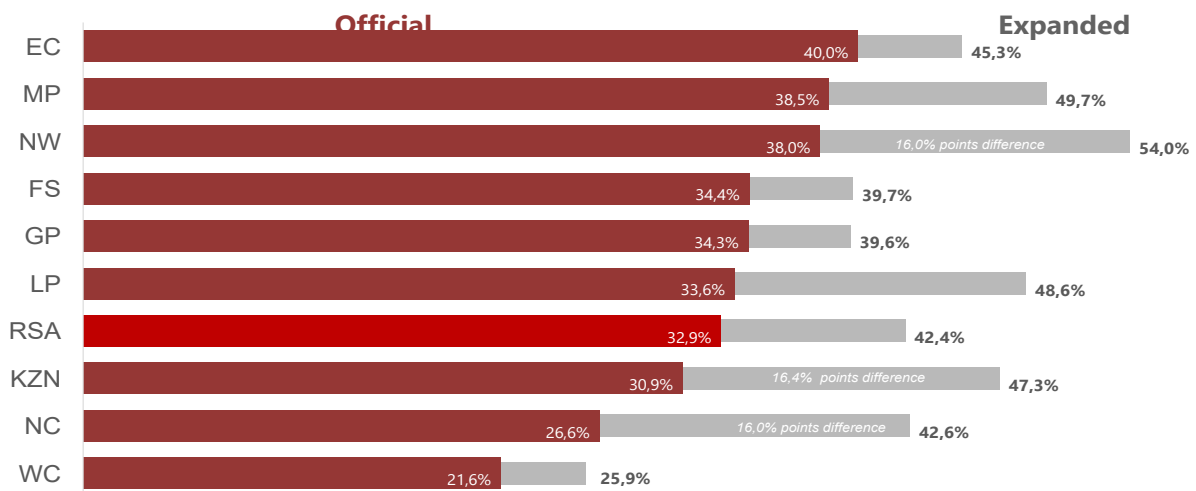


Figure 3. Unemployment by provinces in 2023 (Statistic of South Africa website)

Zooming to unemployment at a provincial level, the North West Province is the most affected province with a 54, 0% unemployment rate, followed by the Mpumalanga Province with 49,7 %. Provinces that have low rate of unemployment are Free state, Gauteng, and Western Cape.

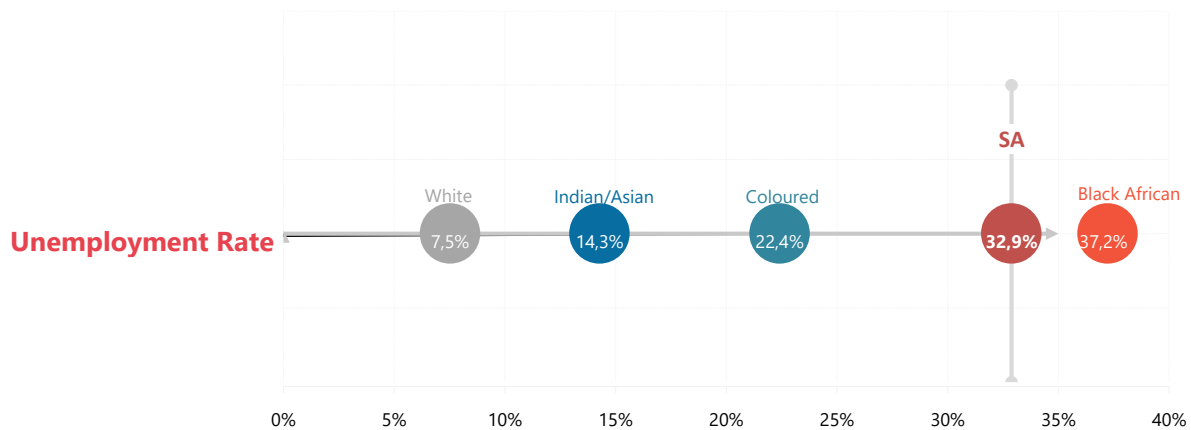


Figure 4. Unemployment by race in 2023 (Source: Statistic of South Africa website)

The black African population continues to be the most affected rate by unemployment. According to various scholars such as Wakefield et al. (2022); Mseleku (2022) that black African population has high numbers of unemployment, due to exercised apartheid policies, which purposely excluded this rate in participating in various economic activities. This injury has not yet been recovered since the country proclaimed its freedom from the apartheid government.

4.2. Poverty rate in South Africa

One can declare poverty as a crime against the normal living standard of an individual. Poverty forces people to live a life that is not in line with their desire due to the lack of affordability. Poverty is a process whereby individuals are unable to afford basic living necessities such as food, shelter, clothes, etc. As with unemployment, poverty is affecting many countries across the African continent (Dang and Dabalen, 2019). Sub-Saharan Africa is the most affected region. Azzarri and Signorelli (2020) emphasise the importance of fighting poverty in a particular state, indicating that a fight against poverty promotes a better standard of living for the citizens. In South Africa, poverty is a serious problem; therefore, 50% of citizens live under poverty restrictions (Francis and Webster, 2019; Mdluli and Dunga, 2022). In South Africa, poverty has existed more during the apartheid era, hence the black population was deliberately denied a fair chance to participate in the economic affairs of the state; however, the situation was slightly better in the freedom era. Since 1994, the South African government has tried to introduce programs to overcome poverty such as the Reconstruction and Development Program (RDP), Growth, Employment and Redistribution Africa (GEAR), Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and NDP as the current programme. These programs have focused more on the provision of free basic services such as water, health, and education. The government has also tried to provide social security programs which aim to provide financial support to certain groups within society, who are vulnerable and unable to financially support themselves. These include people with disabilities, child and old age grants, etc. In 2017, the South African Statistics has noted that the poverty rates in South Africa have been increasing constantly since 2011. Economic inequality is considered one of the most exacerbators of poverty in South Africa. According to Francis and Webster (2019), the reason why poverty and inequality continue to face South Africa is due to the lack of attention paid to the current economic structures of the state, political

reforms that continue to give rise to poverty within societies, particularly inequality. Fighting poverty in South Africa demands improved living and health conditions, particularly in rural regions, as well as new and effective ways of looking at total household income.

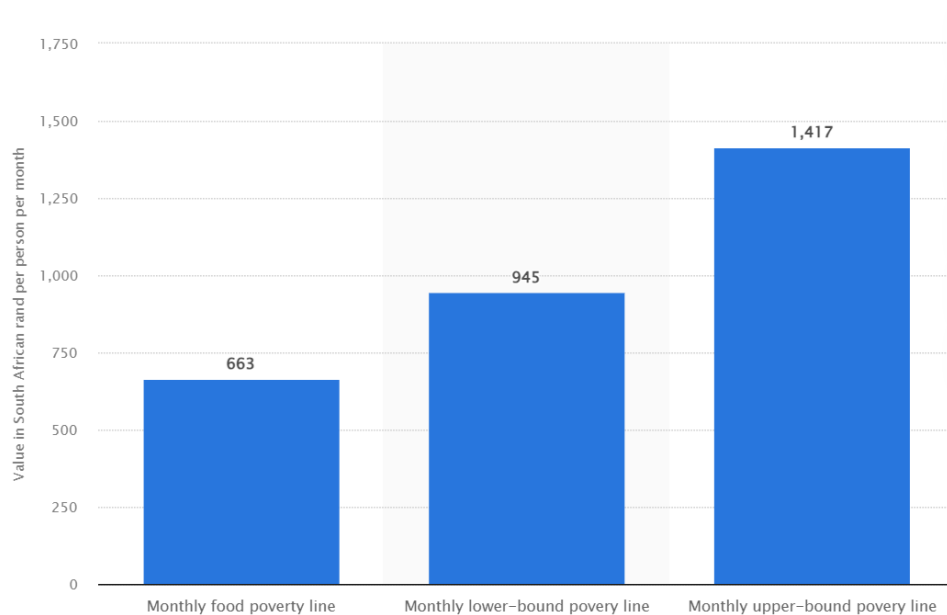


Figure 5. Poverty lines in 2023 (Source: Statistic of South Africa website)

According to the statistics released by Statistic SA (2023), a person with a monthly income of 945 (about 51.02 dollars) was deemed to be poor in 2022. Furthermore, people who had 663 South African rand (about 35.80 US dollars) available for food each month were considered below the poverty level according to South African official criteria. It is also noted that 50% of the citizens do not have an income of R1417 per month; therefore, they are automatically affected by poverty. This effect gives serious threats to food security, so most of the affected citizens cannot afford the basic needs such food (Daily Maverick, 2021). Furthermore, the high rates of poverty in South Africa lead to increased income inequality. In other words, the gap between people who are powerful and those who are rich is increasing.

5. Challenges facing the NDP

Among the challenges that hinder the success of the NDP are poor education systems, poor health systems, corruption, and poor infrastructure. They are discussed below:

5.1. Poor education systems

Education and training are critical to the building of the principles of a democratic development state. It is stated that without a strong framework that gives universal access to sustainable lives and productive labor,

the chances of reaching the requisite national social development goals are slim (Akoojee, 2016). The NDP expressly recognizes the unique characteristics of the situation to which it is reacting. "Redressing past injustices" requires, among other things, improving the inadequate quality of education received by most black leas (Fourie, 2018). Systematic efforts to restrict black education under apartheid, as well as failed post-apartheid efforts to promote black education and training, have influence on the alternatives open to contemporary industrial policy in its attempts to decrease unemployment (Altieri et al., 2016). Inequality in South Africa's education system is not limited to post-secondary institutions; it also exists in basic education and vocational training. This is exacerbated by the fact that postsecondary education in South Africa provides extraordinarily high returns, resulting in a cycle of privilege that reinforces inequality. Furthermore, there is evidence that post-secondary education mainly excludes the poor and very poor; more than 80% of students who qualify to apply for degree studies come from the top two income deciles (Francis and Webster, 2019).

5.2. Poor health systems

South Africa prioritised health care reform after apartheid ended in 1994. Over the past 20 years, progressive policies favoring low-cost primary health care and significant fiscal developments have transformed the centralized, curative, and hospital-based public health care system. To improve access for the poor and marginalized, the administration extended the network of health care facilities and eliminated primary health care user fees. Notwithstanding these efforts, health outcomes remain polarised, uneven, and unjust (Burger and Christian, 2020). Although South Africa is generally renowned for having a progressive constitution that strongly protects human rights and the rights of all its inhabitants to obtain adequate health care, obstacles remain in providing quality health care (Maphumulo and Bhengu, 2019). South Africa exemplifies this, as the national government continues to face historical systems of spatial manipulation that have resulted in discrepancies in healthcare access more than two decades after the introduction of democratic elections. While the country has made tremendous progress, government agencies have followed international healthcare decentralization policies and focused on local primary care delivery to expand healthcare access (Winchester and King, 2018). The inequality of South African society is evident both in its health system and in how individuals access it. However, in terms of healthcare, HIV/AIDS, a disease based on inequity, has placed a great strain on the healthcare system during the last two decades. Inadequate budget, poor facilities, low worker numbers, and a shortage of medicines are all examples of these consequences. But the difficulties of the healthcare system are not the only problem with access to healthcare in South Africa (Neely, 2019). According to Gordon et al. (2019), socioeconomically disadvantaged faces discrimination throughout the entire spectrum of access in the South African health system. Socioeconomically advantaged and underprivileged are disproportionately clustered in both good and bad health needs. Compared to the relatively poor, the relatively rich experienced a higher demand for care. However, the socioeconomically disadvantaged are more likely to delay seeking treatment, have unmet needs, and have difficulty affording healthcare. The socioeconomic gap between the use of public and private health services remains very noticeable. Economically disadvantaged people are less pleased with the quality of healthcare services. The main causes of disparities in healthcare utilization are affordability and capacity to pay. According to Kelly et al. (2019), residents in high-income areas reported little difficulty receiving quality care or support services; however, services in low-income areas were far less responsive and participants demonstrated low trust in the healthcare system, believing that their needs were ignored.

5.3. Corruption

The prevalence of corruption in South Africa's public sector is thoroughly documented in a variety of official, academic, and grey literature. To combat corruption, the country has implemented a law enforcement/organizational control approach that includes a mix of legislative, policy and institutional measures (Naidoo 2013). Corruption undermines public trust and discourages honest people from entering the public sector. As a result, the South African government has enacted anticorruption measures and is working to develop an ethical culture in government entities. This is reflected in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, which was approved in 1996. Chapter 10 of the Constitution defines the essential ideas and values that drive public administration and encourage and ensure moral behaviour in all government entities (Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2022). As a result of the destabilising practises of the former apartheid system, the post-1994 South African government was widely anticipated to be a driving factor in rebuilding the nation's economy. Yet, corruption has emerged as a roadblock to the nation's development strategy after 25 years of democracy (s). From its inception in 1994, the African National Congress (ANC) government has been linked to and entangled in numerous corruption scandals that have enriched a select group of friends at the expense of the less fortunate (Mlambo, 2019; Thusi et al., 2023a). The objective of the 2030 National Development Plan (NDP) is a state free of corruption and corrupt practices. This ideal seems to be rapidly becoming a dream. South Africa, like many other nations that have transitioned from an undemocratic to a democratic administration, has not been spared from the increase and prevalence of acts of corruption and other corrupt actions. There is an ever-increasing incidence and proof of the epidemic of corruption and other self-serving behaviours, particularly within the higher echelons of political authority (Lekubu and Sibanda, 2021). Public administration should function under democratic prescriptions that impact the execution of public sector operations and the adoption of normative governance procedures. Despite the South African government's attempts to promote openness and accountability, unethical behaviour of many types has continued in recent years. Corruption is often perceived to have risen since the time of political and economic upheaval (Thonzhe and Doorgapersad, 2017). South Africa is highly ranked on the corruption index due to the level of corruption. According to the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI), a renowned leading global measure of public sector corruption that scores and ranks 180 nations and territories worldwide, South Africa has a CPI of 44/100, indicating that corruption is widespread in the country's public sector (Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2022).

5.4. Poor infrastructure development

In the case of South Africa, the country invested substantially in numerous infrastructure sectors during the 1960s and 1970s to establish adequate and efficient infrastructure. However, in recent years, the lack of adequate and efficient infrastructure has been viewed as a limitation of socioeconomic development in many parts of the country (Aiyetan and Das, 2021). Infrastructure development is largely seen as critical to South Africa's economic recovery strategy and future growth prospects. However, infrastructure expenditure has been dropping at all levels of government in recent years, despite a continuous growth in public debt and state-owned enterprises bailout (Ramokgopa, 2021; Thusi et al. 2023b). According to Makhathini et al. (2020) South African Finance Minister Tito Mboweni cautioned in his 2019 budget that state-owned enterprises (SOEs) were a "very serious hazard" to the economy and a huge liability impeding infrastructure development. According to. Infrastructure development falls under state-owned enterprises in South Africa. Government guarantees for SOEs increased by R51.5 billion in 2018. The government provided R50 billion to Eskom, R1

billion to Denel, and R6.2 billion to South African Airlines (SAA). SOE bailouts have damaged local economic growth. SOEs cannot facilitate infrastructure development due to corruption and financial mismanagement. Much of South Africa's infrastructure is in poor shape, particularly in the sectors of health, water, sanitation, and secondary and tertiary roads, according to the NDP, the Diagnostic Report, as well as the Infrastructure Report Cards finished in 2006, 2011 and 2017 (SAICE 2006; 2011; 2017). These issues are brought about by several things, such as lack of financing to manage, plan, and maintain infrastructure assets; a shortage of qualified resources that compromises institutional capacity; and a lack of suitable technical solutions for infrastructure-related issues, preparation, supply, creation, building, maintenance, and use (Rust et al., 2021). Townships are an integral element of the South African corporate landscape, although they were established during the apartheid era. The impact of apartheid is still visible in townships due to abandonment, poor investment, overpopulation, distance from urban regions, and a severe lack of infrastructure and critical resources. A significant proportion of the unemployed (60%) live in townships and informal settlements. Townships are complicated and interwoven, with impoverished and middle-class neighborhoods coexisting. The government has been attempting to jumpstart the economy while also increasing employment through small enterprises and job creation in townships. However, this process is impeded by several problems, including a lack of infrastructure (Cant, 2017). With well-functioning infrastructure and national assets, good maintenance of municipal infrastructure can reduce poverty and boost economic development. Sufficient infrastructure is a development pillar, a critical component of a favorable environment for investment and livelihoods, fostering economic growth, alleviating poverty, and improving the delivery of health and other services. The country suffers from a lack of infrastructure in rural areas, where a major proportion of the population lives and works (Emily and Muyengwa, 2021).

6. Recommendations

In ensuring better combat of unemployment and poverty in South Africa, more especially with respect to the management of NDP, the study recommends the following actions.

6.1. The enhancement of DPME role

In 2009, the South African government established the Department of Planning, Monitoring, and Evaluation (DPME). This department is established to coordinate government, planning, monitoring, and evaluation processes to address poverty, unemployment, and inequality. When NPD was adopted in 2019, DPME became the primary player to monitor and evaluate it. The main aim of this monitoring and evaluation is to measure the success or the failure of the plan, ensure that there is a reduction in corruption practices, staff training, etc. Given this importance of DPME in the NDP, the study recommends strengthening DPME in the evaluation of government programs and services, more especially with regard to the NDP, and quickly providing strategic recommendations where necessary. DPME must ensure that the daily activities of relevant stakeholders, such as state departments and municipalities, are in line with the NDP objectives. DPME must also provide strategic measures to ensure that the NDP predictions are achieved or at least near achieved by 2030. Other key functions that must be combated by the DPME in ensuring the NDP are:

- Persistence of wealth, income, and gender inequality
- Imbalance between redistribution and productive capacity

- Low growth rates, economic contraction, and decrease in revenue.
- Insufficient reach and impact of government programmes and public expenditure
- Imbalance between redistribution and productive capacity
- Continued inequality in accessing quality public services, education & health systems, and service delivery at local level.
- Eradicate absolute poverty to zero.
- Reduce the unemployment rate by creating 11 million jobs.

6.2. Responsible good governance and combating corruption

Good governance remains a vital action to create a developed state. It helps to ensure that a good use of state resources and the achievement of efficient and effective service delivery for the citizens (Matyana and Mthethwa, 2022b). The South African government has been confronted by many governance issues. These include corruption, lack of political will, cadre deployment, favoritism in service provision, etc. These issues have caused a slow provision of services to the people, while also affecting the overall development of the state. Due to these issues, the quality of government service has been compromised; therefore, the study recommends that the South African government must ensure responsive governance and fight against corruption government practices. Both the Auditor General and the Public Protector of South Africa must play a crucial role in this regard. They must use their constitutional authority to eliminate corruption and improve responsive governance. AG and PP should not accept any bribes where the public law has been violated and compromised by a particular government official.

7. Conclusions

In conclusion, this study finds that unemployment and poverty remain major concerns for the government and ordinary citizens. The current poverty and unemployment rate in South Africa is much worse than what was predicted by the NDP. It is slightly evident that the government will fail to achieve the NDP 2030 predictions for these two socioeconomic issues. These socio-economic issues are rising yearly while it is evident that there are few attempts to address them. Issues such as corruption, poor health and education systems, and poor infrastructure development are exacerbating unemployment and poverty in South Africa. The South African government must work tirelessly to ensure that the NDP achieves or approximately achieves its mission by 2030. This calls for the proper implementation of government programs and projects to address poverty and unemployment. This will help ensure that living conditions and the standard of living of many citizens are improved and improved. This will also help improve overall state development and reduce poverty and unemployment.

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