Building System Capacity to Create Jobs: A Social Action Learning Model for All Job Creation Initiatives

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This proposal has been developed within the National Environmental Skills Planning Forum by Rhodes University ELRC (Environmental Learning Research Centre) in partnership with Wits REAL (Centre for Researching Work and Learning) and other civil society partners. The NESPF is chaired by the Department of Environment Affairs and provides a hub for a number of social partners including other government as well as academic and civil society actors with an interest in environmental skills, individual and organisational capacity development and achieving social-ecological sustainability through just transitions and decent work.

1   Problem statement

The impediments to job creation that exist and how the proposal will meet the challenges.

Our research over the past 5 years in particular (www.greenskills.co.za) show that despite various green economy and job creation compacts, strategies, policies and programmes, roleplayers find and will find it difficult to unlock (green) jobs because of the following:

1.   Lack of policy and procedural alignment between various spheres (national, provincial and local) and also within spheres

2.   Lack of conceptual or ideological clarity about development pathways resulting in role confusion, internally conflicted roleplayers and initiatives working against each other; in particular, lack of clear pathways for integrating economic, social and environmental goals and few initiatives with clear lessons to learn from

3.   Inadequate horizontal and vertical coordination and limited trust between parties who have to cooperate, as well as inability to manage vested interests

4.   Socio-economic lock-ins, path dependencies and barriers that are hard to unlock

5.   Organisational and institutional capacity limitations (quality and quantity)

6.   Lack of widespread buy-in and support at all levels of government, industry and broader society

7.   Technically innovative initiatives with little attention to the social processes necessary to make them work in practice and at scale

8.   Extensive supply chain and procurement requirements that become obstacles while they unsuccessfully aim to guard against fruitless, wasteful and illegal expenditure

9.   Inadequate monitoring and evaluation to guide formative development of existing and new initiatives.

2   Jobs impact

The impact on employment of the proposal and what is required to make sure that there will be a positive impact on employment. Please also indicate other anticipated benefits from the proposal, if any.

In light of the nine well-known challenges outlines in (1), any initiative to create jobs is likely to (and many have already) hit snags big and small. Examples are the renewable energy initiatives (REIPPPs) that are facing lack of full stakeholder buy-in; Natural Resource Management and Restoration (public works) programmes challenged by lengthy procurement (institutional) processes; and Mine Rehabilitation initiative prevented by lock-ins in the way mining is financed and mine closures seldom result in the required rehabilitation.

This proposal aims to strengthen all job creation initiatives with a model for organisational and system learning. It will have an impact on jobs not on its own, but by making all other job creation initiatives more likely to succeed. This is illustrated below in relation to Mine Rehabilitation, an important and critical opportunity for job creation in South Africa.

3   Theory of change

Half a page that indicates in practical terms, how the proposal would work – what has to be done, what the outputs would be, how that would lead to the desired outcomes.

Example: Mine rehabilitation. The Deputy Minister of Mining recently noted in Parliament that:

"Another major opportunity for job creation in the mining sector is the rehabilitation and environmental restoration of previous mining operations. It is common knowledge that South Africa has over 6000 derelict and abandoned mining sites. It is reasonable to suggest that the rehabilitation of these sites could well offer opportunities for creating jobs and livelihood. It is also easy to imagine that a national programme of environmental rehabilitation of the old mines could well generate 1000s of job opportunities. In many of these mining sites, the rehabilitated land could be further used for agriculture and other economic activities.
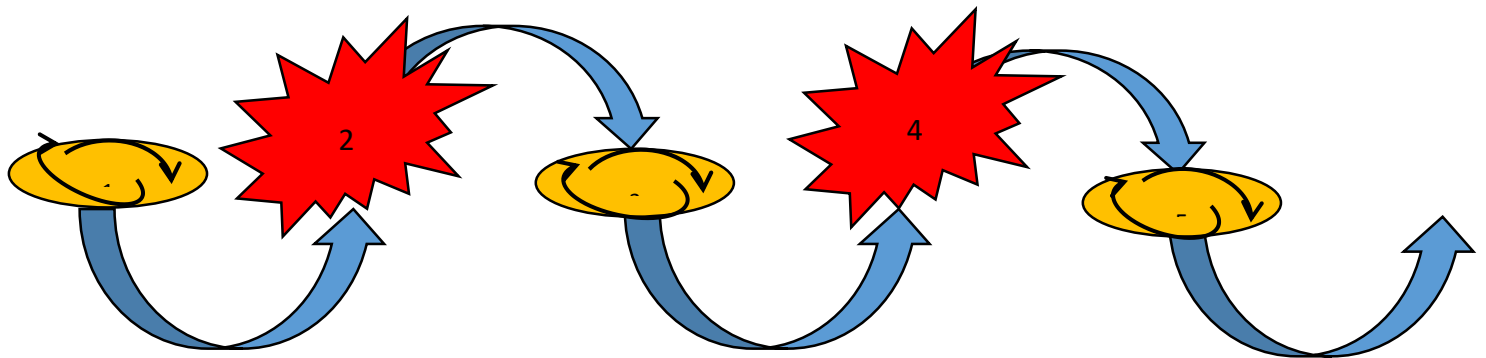
At the same time, a shift towards concurrent rehabilitation alongside mining operations will significantly expand employment creation and future skills development in the sector. The Minister has given the greenlight to get going in this regard and we are preparing to roll out pilots in certain areas with a view into a festival of Rehabilitation activities around the country." (http://www.dmr.gov.za/news-room/post/1712/address-by-the-deputy-minister-of-mineral-resources-honourable-godfrey-oliphant-mp-on-the-occasion-of-the-debate-on-budget-vote-29-mineral-resources-e249-parliament-of-the-rsa-15-may-2018)

For this powerful proposal to proceed, a "social action learning" model can address the inevitable challenges along the way. This could unfold as follows:

1. Identify all the relevant stakeholders – mine owners, DRM, DEA, DWS, DTI, DAFF, insurance industry, banking industry, unions, disenfranchised communities, MinTek, universities and private sector with rehabilitation, remediation and restoration expertise

2. Plan and start implementation including a suitable monitoring, evaluation and learning system.

3. Already at this point conflicts may be experienced. It is important to identify shared values/common ground, and where and why there are contradictions. Social learning processes should be used for this (i.e. facilitation with an understanding of how to support learning across multiple stakeholders with powerful interests).

4. Move to implementation on small scale (pilot projects as identified).

5. Ensure these are adequately monitored and evaluated. Citizen scientists, environmental and social monitors could be used to collect data (creating jobs).

6. Bring parties together periodically to review what has been learnt, what is working and why, what is not working and why, what needs to be changed going forward.

7. Repeat the process, identifying opportunities to scale out and scale up.

8. A thought-through but nonetheless implementable M&E system is necessary to support organisational and system wide learning, that is, it needs to be of requisite simplicity and requisite sophistication.

The "social action learning" process would not look exactly the same in each job creation initiative, but would broadly be as follows:

| 1. **Project starts with a new network and social learning process**: How will our actions create jobs? What is our theory of change? Our respective roles? Our common ground? Potential conflicts? | 2. M&E able to show when challenges arise: Why are we not creating more jobs? Who else should be involved? Why is the community not interested? | 3. **Social learning and networking process**: Identify lock-ins, path dependencies, barriers, contradictions in roles and approaches, hidden interests and knowledge gaps. Resolve conflicts, manage vested interests, seek new information, expand networks. | 4. M&E able to show successes and new challenges: What are we learning together? What has worked, and why? | 5. **Social learning process**: Reflect together on lessons learnt, apply them in project, share widely and inform the design of new job creation initiatives nationally or sector wide. |

In Summary, **the proposal is to build a social learning network into all Job Creation projects** linked to M&E, to strengthen organisational institutional capabilities that will enhance the system's capacity to unlock more jobs. **The innovation is a profound shift from implementing blueprints, to ongoing, intentionally designed learning to address wicked problems**.

Requirements would include skilled facilitators, and because few facilitators understand a transformative approach to social learning ('*learning what is not yet known*'), one investment could be a course or courses to develop such learning enabling expertise, and providing a pool of facilitators that projects can draw on; some projects may need dedicated facilitators.

4   Existing initiatives/experience

Indicate if the proposal has been attempted or piloted, and broadly what was learned.

We are not aware of a similar proposal being implemented in relation to job creation, but the social learning process has been used to address environmental and sustainability challenges (e.g. case study from the North Sea where residents and oil companies developed mutually satisfying solutions to seemingly intractable challenges). And, where roleplayers in the energy sector took an action learning process to challenges (REIPPPP case study documented by Eberhard) they were able to introduce improvements that led to one of the most successful case studies on the continent.

5 Constituency participation in implementation

What is the potential for constituencies to participate in the implementation of the proposal?

All constituencies can participate, in fact are required to participate. This includes the financial and banking industries, along with employers, who need to learn how to make new financing, investment and insurance models work; government who needs to develop better procurement, monitoring and evaluation systems; all partners who need to develop trust; communities and community factions who need to learn how to engage the other partners and each other constructively and to their own advantage; etc.

6 Benefits

What social/economic groups would benefit from the proposal directly and indirectly? Please use the following table, and do not list more than 5 groups. Please describe the benefits as precisely as possible.

Group	Job creation	Other benefits	Time frame for success
Coal mining	Successfully implementing the planning mine rehabilitation programme can create thousands of jobs for retrenched (coal) mine workers	Environmental restoration of mined lands, become available for decent housing, agriculture, tourism; less impact on human health and livestock; improved image of the mining industry; opportunity to lead internationally in mine restoration and social benefits	As little as two years, given the political will expressed by the minister
Natural resource management programmes	Ironing out procurement delays will result in more people employed to restore wetlands, clear invasive aliens, protect water resources, restore degraded range lands and conserve biodiverse areas	Environmental restoration of degraded lands; more productive land; greater chance of land redistribution initiatives in rural areas succeeding; greater water security; less chance that future jobs are jeopardized by land degradation	As little as one year, given that systems are in place, but functioning sub-optimally – requiring system wide learning
Renewable energy initiatives	Jobs created in association with existing and future solar, wind and bio-gas initiatives, by overcoming the obstacles associated with lack of stakeholder engagement and buy-in	Climate change co-benefits as renewable energy is implemented; benefits in particular for rural and under-developed areas e.g. the Northern Cape; likelihood of future foreign investment; less risk of losing current infrastructure and investment opportunities	As little as one year given that projects and partnerships are already in place; but partners need to learn how to engage all stakeholders

7   Cost and potential sources of funding

What social/economic groups would bear the cost of implementing the proposal directly or indirectly? Please use the following table, and do not list more than 5 groups. describe the costs as precisely as possible. In the case of financial costs, who would pay them?

Group	Anticipated costs	Potential sources of funding to implement the project	Time frame for impact
Employers	5% of project budget for learning facilitation; 5% of project budget for monitoring and evaluation	SETAs (Sector Education and Training Authorities, in this case the Mining Qualification Authority) through their Discretionary and Mandatory grants, drawing on the Skills Levy	Two years
Government	5% of project budget for learning facilitation; 5% of project budget for monitoring and evaluation	National Skills Fund, in addition to above; National School of Governance	Two years

8   Risks

What are the main risks that would prevent the proposal from achieving the anticipated outcomes? Describe *at least* two.

The importance of organisational learning not taken seriously.

The assumption that once a technical solution or opportunity has been identified, it is enough to unlock jobs, that is, inadequate investment in the social dimensions of innovation.

9   Risk mitigation

What should be done to mitigate the identified risks? Which stakeholder would be responsible for the risk mitigation activity?

This proposal is an attempt to address exactly these risks. There are very few if any risks associated with the proposal itself, other than that the extent to which this is required, is underestimated, and inadequate resources are made available. For example, the learning facilitators need to be suitable skilled and experienced, rather than school leavers or recent graduates.

10 Additional comments

The (institutional, organisational and systemic) capability to more effectively unlock sustainable green jobs in South Africa, requires organisations, government entities and industries to develop:

1.   Aligned policy and procedural frameworks

2. *Ideological clarity on the nature of our development path and role clarity for key roleplayers: What does radical social-economic transformation mean in practice? How do we bring a diversified economy about when we have such powerful lock-ins?*

3. Ability to better coordinate at all levels

4. Ability to build trust, find common goals, form partnerships and collaborate for the common good

5. Widespread social buy-in and participation from all relevant parties in government, industry and broader society – facilitated processes to achieve this

6. Mechanisms for ongoing learning from own and others' implementation efforts

7. Suitable monitoring and evaluation mechanisms that afford both accountability and *ongoing learning* in order to adapt and change course where necessary, towards real impact rather than tick box indicators.

How do we build the capability of the social partners for green job creation, or indeed all job creation? A social learning process should be built into all initiatives, that is …

- Intentionally designed for learning and formative evaluation (not leaving learning to chance)
- Used to apply lessons in the ongoing shaping and improvement of the initiatives
- Used to tackle and collectively resolve the inevitable challenges to be encountered as parties try to create new jobs under difficult socio-economic conditions
- Designed to deal with potentially lethal process issues like lack of trust and vested interests
- Informed by international and local research into (expansive, transformative) social learning processes
- Facilitated by skilled persons who understand social learning principles and processes.