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Young Unemployed Graduates Celebrating Freedom Day

On 25 April 2022, I met a group of 18 young unemployed graduates. The purpose for the meeting was to explore the possibility of engaging them on short term projects. These young professionals are currently candidates in various disciplines within the built environment namely, civil engineering, construction management, building science, quantity surveying, etc.

During my short engagement with them, I saw a group of young people eager to commence with the careers that they had chosen. I saw fear and anxiousness. I saw desperation and jitteriness. I saw hopelessness in their eyes. I saw a group of young South Africans on the verge of losing hope.

These young people had chosen careers in the built environment. It dawned on me that the group before me was just a sample of a much, much bigger problem. Young people in South Africa are unemployed. Young people in South Africa feel excluded and ignored. Young people in South Africa feel like no one cares, either about them or their plight. There are thousands of young people yearning for opportunities. They are trained and are ready to serve their country; yet they are sitting at home.

There are many young professionals in a similar situation who have submitted numerous applications only to be disappointed time and time again. It dawned on me that we have a mammoth task ahead. When we talk youth unemployment we are not just talking about numbers, we are talking about our brothers, sisters, cousins, nephews, nieces, aunts, mothers, fathers, friends etc. We are talking about people with aspirations, dreams, and a calling for the career they have chosen.

In our case, we are talking about professional colleagues. Colleagues who chose a career in the built environment with the hope that it will provide them with opportunities to better their lives and the lives of their families. These young professionals have been struggling for a long time to obtain gainful employment to complete their candidacy for professional registration.

We do not comprehend the privilege we have of being employed and the package that comes with financial freedom - social acceptance, self-confidence, and dignity.

Freedom Day, celebrated annually in South Africa on 27 April, honours the day that changed the nation, changing over three hundred years of colonialism, segregation and white minority rule and established a new democratic elected government.

As we prepare to celebrate Freedom-day: are these unemployed graduates happy about Freedom Day? Are they optimistic about what this freedom has brought for them?

Are they happy about their socio-economic positions? Or is it just another holiday that has no meaning?

Yes, we can reduce Freedom Day just to the issue of employment, but it is a critical aspect of basic human rights. But for the young graduates in this country, Freedom Day has no significant meaning as their cries for jobs have not been answered.

Imagine yourself in the position of one of these young graduates, you have concluded your built environment degree, honors and post graduate study with high achievements. Their future is bleak and dull without any possibility of being gainfully employed to fulfil their calling, their dreams and their hopes of making a difference in society.

We must therefore ask ourselves the following questions: what must we do differently to assist these young people?

Let us rescue our young graduates. Let us remember our young graduates in this time and make haste to create opportunities for them to enter the adult work environment and act on their calling. Let us not just remember but commit to a course, a pragmatic and systematic programme to respond to their plight.

I hope in 2023, Freedom Day for the group of young unemployed graduates I met will be better and prosperous.

Members of the media are welcome to quote and publish this article.