Developing a framework for collective community-level economic solutions that result in sustainable livelihoods for young people and their households in Makhanda

REPORT

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Written by

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Foreword

The Eastern Cape, as a region, bears historical scars of wars from colonial conquest and resistance. For indigenous people of the region, these wars came with oppression, subjugation, and unparalleled scorch-earth policies. For the settlers or invaders, the venture into the African continent brought "civilization" to the "uncivilized". The strife between the settlers and the indigenous groups culminated in the total subjugation of generations of amaXhosa, worsened by the disastrous cattle-killing event. AmaXhosa lost their lands, cattle and fields and became labour tenants, moving from farm to farm to earn a livelihood. The latter is captured in the autobiography of former Rhodes University Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Professor Peter Mtuze, *Indlel' Ebhek' Enkudleni* (Mtuze, 2022).

It is by no coincidence that most of the wars of resistance were fought in the Eastern Cape and that these transformed into vibrant liberation struggles that spread throughout the country. Furthermore, the mission to "civilize" Africans saw imprints of missionary stations, first in the Eastern Cape and later countrywide, that invariably planted a seed for education. The mission to "civilize" saw them, at least those who converted to the Western norms through Christianity (*amagqobhoka*) debased from their roots and way of life. This is how, among other things, a people lost their power to economic, self-determined economic independence.

The combination of these historical events left an indelible imprint on the psychology of the people of the Eastern Cape. It shaped the future trajectory of development and underdevelopment. For instance, despite being blessed with at least four public institutions of higher learning, the province remains fraught with the migration of skills to the industrialized provinces of Gauteng, Western Cape and KwaZulu-Natal (This is confirmed by the latest census data from Census 2022). What appears to be educational and political capital has not had the positive expectations of supporting the development and uplift of the province. The province remains poor and fraught with social problems associated with underdevelopment. It is now characterised by net outmigration of human resources and talent.

This report captures the personal opinions of participants' lived experiences of unemployment and the efforts by social partners to cultivate youth agency to mitigate it in the impoverished City of Makhanda, in the Eastern Cape.

The **direct quotations** used in this report are a symbolic representation of the elevation of young voices in the employment-unemployment-sustainable livelihoods debate. It is a break from the past when all that young people had to do was to get an education and get employment without considering their opinions. Similarly, the direct quotations from social partners acknowledge their efforts and experiences as people who have responded through practical engagement and application of young people's views to shape their response to the challenge of unemployment, and under-education.

These opinions are represented here by the exhaustive use of direct quotations to compliment the elevation of voices in the subject matter. As it is, all participants wrote this report in the sense that their voices have been sewn in the arguments that are made in this report. Those voices determined what direction the arguments would take instead of a preoccupation with arguments or quotations to support or disprove existing theories.

As writers, our main role was to guide and facilitate the course of co-learning, co-creation collect data, and stitch together all participants' views, perceptions, experiences and opinions. In short, the participants delegated the writing to us. This meant that once the writing was completed, we mirrored back to them what we stitched together (wrote) to confirm that their opinions were captured and interpreted correctly.

The narrative in the foregoing paragraphs contextualizes the historicity of employment and its undercurrents in the Eastern Cape, and perhaps throughout South Africa. It reminds us that what we see today is historically explicable as the foundations of the current structures were laid in our turbulent past. In the post-1994 period, the current government is struggling to untangle those stubborn structures. The challenge now is to reconceptualize what work is and perhaps work towards a model of sustainable livelihoods.

From the collaboration between Rhodes University's Environmental Learning Research Centre (ELRC), the youth, the Special Employment Fund (SEF), The Learning Trust and a consortium of local Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) the new path to be followed has become very clear. The process of expansive learning revealed that the Change Laboratory method created a platform for dialogue where the youth shaped the nature of the future of "work".

It is now a critical consideration to consider the youth voices to cultivate an environment of sustainable livelihoods. Engaging the youth and the social partners who work with them daily exposed deeper insights and appreciation of a new approach that focuses on equipping them with skills, that not only improve their chances for employment but generally make them better people who can use their skills to sustain a livelihood.

The expansive learning process created a platform for networking, which is very critical considering the background of the participants. Not having networks to scout for opportunities signified almost futile ventures into the work environment. The networking happened between and across the local government departments and NGOs, they interacted with. Some young people even extend the scale of the networking to national level. In short, the expansive learning process allowed participants to appreciate the complexity of the issue and through the Change Laboratory method co-created solutions.

We hope that you will enjoy this report as much as we enjoyed writing it.

Executive summary

The Social Employment Fund (SEF) and Transforming Education for Sustainable Futures (TESF) provided an opportunity for a collaborative project between Rhodes University's Environmental Learning Research Centre (ELRC), the Centre for Higher Education Research, Teaching and Learning (CHERTL), The Learning Trust (TLT) and a host of local non-governmental organisations. These organisations worked together to address the endemic challenges of unemployment and lack of sustainable livelihoods among the youth of Makhanda. These NGOs have an established track record working with youth and supporting its empowerment – for example after-school care, skills development, post-matric development, etc. The NGOs support those who have passed matric to ensure they are skilled. They provide skills and workplace experience to unemployed graduates, support entrepreneurship and engage them with community work.

Understanding that unemployment, under-employment and lack of skills are multi-dimensional, ELRC facilitated interactions between the youth and those organizations that employed and engaged youth. Those interactions took the form of a research methodology called the Change Laboratories, which is a multi-stakeholder forum representing various stakeholders that discussed barriers and solutions to unemployment and sustainable livelihood issues. The research distinguished itself from other research approaches by elevating the voice of the youth to shape the solutions and the multiplicity of voices from the stakeholders around the same issue. The methodology focused on the co-creation of solutions and co-learning towards change and a better future.

Furthermore, the unemployed youth we engaged as research assistants thus getting intimately involved with the research process. They were trained in data collection methods and interviewed other young people thus gaining experience and a skill that is indispensable in the surrounding academic community in the university town of Makhanda (e.g., Rhodes University). The methodology requires continuous engagement as the *status quo* is constantly questioned and re-questioned, trying out and testing the new solutions and continuing the process as an expansive learning process.

We found out that, as expected, unemployment and lack of sustainable livelihoods are a huge psychological burden on the youth, their friends, parents and relatives. It diminishes their self-confidence and sense of self-worth. It is even more of a burden in an African community that defines progress as supporting children to gain a better education. Gaining an education and certification are regarded as the safest and most noble way out of poverty. It is also perceived as an elevation of social status. Those who complete their formal education are expected to continue the goodwill demonstrated by parents by supporting siblings and other relatives to get a better education and a better future. Failure to gain meaningful employment then means failing the family and therefore a lower self-esteem and strong sense of failure.

The collaboration, regarded as the first of its kind in Makahnda by the stakeholders, is an initial step towards innovative rethinking of the unemployment-employment dichotomy. It is a journey that centres around promoting sustainable livelihoods to support and empower the multitudes of unemployed and disillusioned youth. It looks at the historical aspects that could explain diminished agency whilst realizing that there are young people who have been spurred by the very situation to unleash their agency. The latter explains why the unemployment-employment debate should be nuanced and leverage the positive outcomes of human agency for the benefit of collective action.

The research captures the tensions that arise between youth and employers (as various stakeholders). Chief among these tensions are generational tensions (youth vs old), perceived poor leadership, lack of accountability, transparency and inaccessibility of available opportunities (such as employment, learnership, internships, etc.). Proposed solutions to these issues were discussed in the multi-stakeholder forum (Change Laboratory). Through facilitation by ELRC researchers, action plans were drawn, prioritized and later reflected on by the group (feedback). The three issues around which the action plans were drawn by stakeholders were:

1. Addressing the issues of skills mismatch as it made job opportunities inaccessible for young people.
2. Local empowerment or economic development. The young people of Makhanda had a strong sense that opportunities existed within the municipality but were not made accessible due to a lack of political leadership, corruption, nepotism, etc. They advocated for more transparent administrative processes.
3. Accountable leadership that listens to the needs of the youth and residents The kind of leadership that monitors and follows progressive programmes. Young people demanded selfless leaders whose heart is the development of young people and their communities.

All stakeholders were appreciative of the collaboration despite teething challenges during the implementation phase. Though there is an appreciation of cash injection in the form of stipends, all stakeholders emphasized the need to focus on the sustainability of these initiatives. Most members of the coalition of local NGOs felt that such initiatives must focus on skills development and entrepreneurship to support beneficiaries beyond the life span of an intervention. More focus must also be placed on vocational skills despite the social pressure that focuses on academics.

Local economic development was recognised as a possible solution that could stimulate the local economy. For example, the deficit in infrastructural development in the townships, lack of service centres, and lack of entrepreneurship and business support centres provide an opportunity that could be leveraged to unleash the potential of young people in these areas. Already existing programmes by the NGOs working with youth have yielded promising results that need further support, financially and politically.

Participants concluded that the key ingredients to challenge youth unemployment and engaging them in sustainable livelihoods demand that there must be collaboration among stakeholders, promotion of youth voices, and focus on the sustainability of each initiative.

1. Introduction

Unemployment is a huge challenge internationally (Grierson & McKenzie, 1996). The often quoted rates of unemployment, argues Grierson & McKenzie (1996) "do not convey the fear, anger, poverty, insecurity, and hunger of those without an adequate means of livelihood"(p13).

In South Africa, it is a topical issue that is covered by the mainstream media daily (See Figure 1). The newspaper articles below, from South Africa and the Eastern Cape specifically, demonstrate this point and the fact that even small drops in the trend are celebrated as an achievement by those in power and responsible for crafting policies to alleviate unemployment. It appears that the issues of unemployment are structurally embedded in the economic and social system. Whatever form of reform that has been implemented has hardly yielded positive

Figure 1: High unemployment rate as a topical and emotional issues in South Africa

In South Africa, 60,7 % of young people in the age category of 15-24 years old are not employed (Statistics South Africa, 2023). Together with the youth unemployment rate in the age categories 25-34 years old (39.8%), these rates are above the current national average of 32.6% (Statistics South Africa, 2023). The situation is compounded by the deep-seated socio-economic inequalities that continue to worsen poverty. In the Eastern Cape, the unemployment rate has consistently been above the national average even during some dips in the trend (See Figures 2 & 3).

This dire unemployment situation requires a new approach towards the creation of sustainable livelihoods. The unemployment rate has been consistently increasing over a long period, as shown in Figures 2 and 3, below.

A specific focus on the marginalized marginalised youth is needed. The marginalization is borne out of the oppressive history of the country and inadequate socio-economic transformation. The situation, as discussed, is worse in Makhanda.
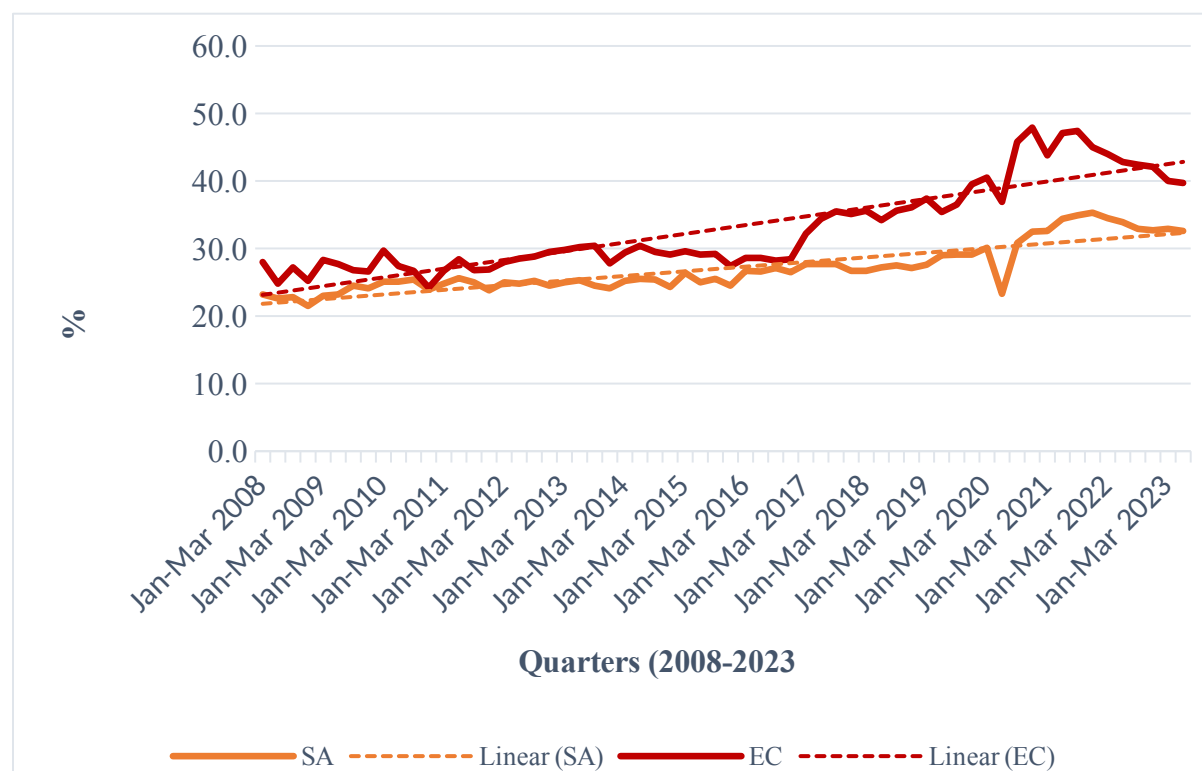
Figure 2: Official unemployment rate in SA vs Eastern Cape (Statistics South Africa, 2023).
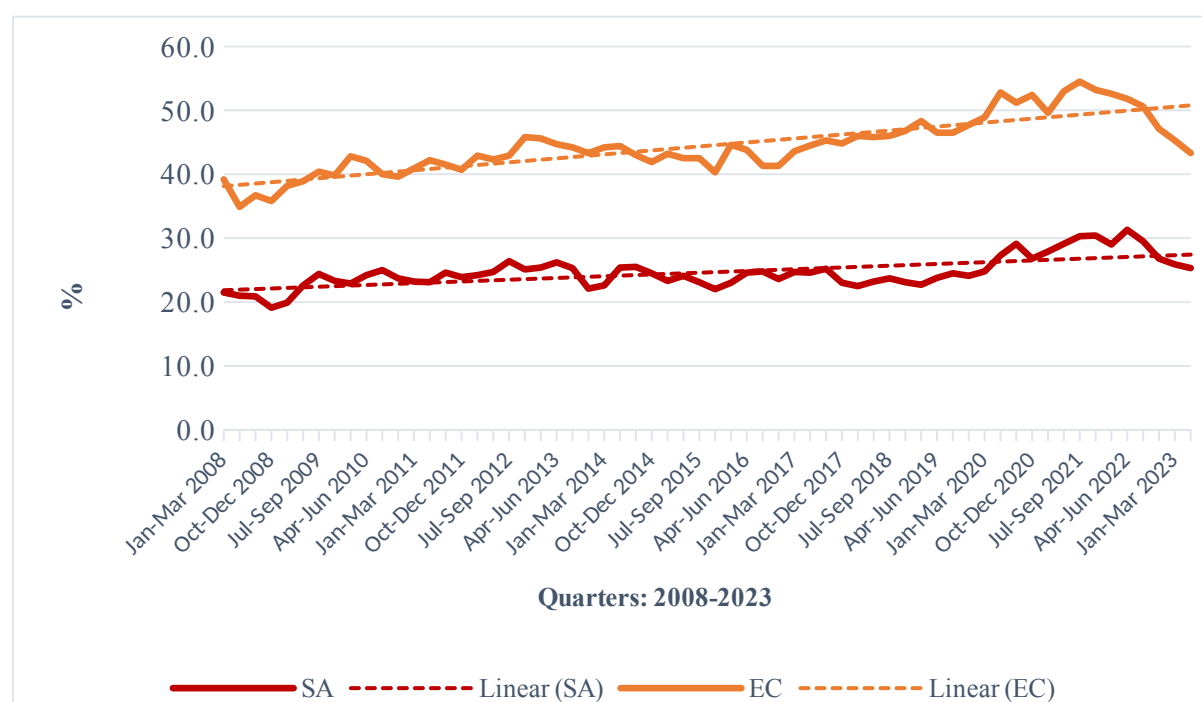
Figure 3: The constantly increasing trend of the unemployment rate (expanded definition) in South Africa in the economically active sector of the population (15-64 years): 2008 – 2023 (Statistics South Africa, 22023)

Responding to this challenge as outlined in the previous paragraphs, this research project sought to create a framework around the factors, partnerships and processes that can enhance community-level solutions to youth economic marginalization and support young people's economic agency.

The challenge of unemployment deprives young people of meaningful livelihoods. Community-level collaborative actions centred around the voices of young people could develop ecologically and socially responsible economic agency among the youth. The stated approach can improve sustainable livelihoods and enhance household income security. To this end, the research process examined the collaboration of different stakeholders and established an ongoing collective expansive learning process that generated some novel insights and actions. The latter are presented in this report in the form of a guiding framework to support youth economic agency towards sustainable livelihoods.

In this study, the youth who were engaged in Makhanda co-created the knowledge that was produced in the research process. The economically marginalized youth, some of whom are beneficiaries of extended learning programmes and the Social Employment Fund, participated actively in the research data collection process as research assistants as well as participants thus enriching the insights into the subject matter – the lived experience of unemployment among the youth. The research data collection process also provided a learning platform to both the marginalized youth, the social partners and other stakeholders whose interest is youth development and empowerment.

1.1. Contextual background

Makhanda is a frontier city, previously called Grahamstown whose history is well documented. It is a city, in its current form, that was established and founded by Colonel Graham in 1812 and settled by the 1820 Settlers. It formed a frontier where colonial wars of dispossession of the land were fought between the settlers and local indigenous groups (mainly amaXhosa). These wars, dispossessions, subjugation, missions by British religious societies, post-1994 government failures and false starts, as well as cultural and social conflicts, underlie the complex socioeconomic conditions experienced in the area.

The Eastern Cape, where Makhanda is located, is a microcosm of a broken society where political strife and socioeconomic conditions add to social strife. Makhanda is a university town located within a largely rural and impoverished province. Most people in the town are employed in the public service and thus making the government a dominant economic sector (51.5%), followed by trade (15.6%), finance and business, 15.3%, manufacturing (7.1%), agriculture (4.4%), transport and communication (2.9%) and construction (2.1).

The high unemployment rate in the Makana Local Municipal area has led to widespread poverty. The local government has been dysfunctional for some years. The dysfunction forms a backdrop to the huge challenge of young people finding it difficult to break through the cycle of poverty by earning sustainable livelihoods.

With the challenges highlighted above, it became clear that extraordinary steps are needed to alleviate the impact of unemployment among the youth and specifically create an environment for sustainable livelihoods. The research sought to establish how youth economic agency could be collectively supported for improved access to sustainable livelihoods.

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2.   Methodology

The Change Laboratory methodology was developed by Engeström *et al*.(1996) with the idea of analysing challenges within an activity and thus formulating new ideas or models. These new models or ideas carry the power to transform the activity beyond its initial state. In other words, through the Change Laboratory, new ideas emerge.

The methodology informed the collection and making sense of the data. It centres around the idea of re-mediation and double stimulation arising from Vygotsky's work (Engeström *et al*., 1996). The methodology outlines a transformative approach by putting participants at the centre as innovative agents. The knowledge production process is therefore that of co-creation. It is a process that dialogically co-creates solutions that emerge to improve an object of focus. Participants learn from each other and develop a better and deeper understanding of the issues.

The collected data was then collated and mirrored back to the participants in the following session. Participants confirmed whether it reflected what they discussed or that it was the outcome of their Living Lab session.

The Environmental Learning Research Centre (ELRC) provided an interventionist. These were researcher(s), who became the analysts, analysing the actual data from the workshops. The researcher(s) were, therefore, formative interventionist(s) who acknowledged, rightfully, that participants within the activity were agents that possess the transformative power of rethinking and reformulating ideas and attitudes about unemployment and job creation. The stated approach recognizes that the voice of the unemployed needs to be heard and can transform how people view livelihoods. The Change Laboratory (Living Lab) methodology offers a stage that cultivates the transformative collective and individual agency.

The rising unemployment requires that we adopt the concept of sustainable livelihoods as it is empowering and goes beyond looking at work as the key livelihood strategy. More so, as Blaug (1973) argued youth unemployment "is also educated unemployment" (p79) as borne out by the levels of unemployment among graduates. Work has always been viewed as the major livelihood source and success in life has always been measured by a linear progression from getting an education (sometimes qualified as a good education) to securing employment. The sustainable livelihood approach offers a more realistic approach.

The Living Lab created a space where participants could learn from peers and other participants about emerging ideas that could help them provide solutions to unemployment. The methodology enabled a constructive engagement of all key stakeholders with the issue of sustainable livelihoods that transcends current economic policies about unemployment and job creation. It created a stage where the unemployed youth voices, social partners, local government representatives, etc interacted, shared and interrogated challenges and solutions facing young people in Makhanda.

This methodology elevated the voices of the marginalized youth compared to the macro-economic approach that expects people to climb the ladder of success or economic empowerment if they have accessed education and other support. It is noteworthy that the dominant policy on the challenge of economic empowerment of youth has not ameliorated the gradually increasing unemployment rate (as demonstrated in Figure 2 and 3) among youth. The approach in this research calls for this new approach. This new approach recognizes the persistent structural challenges that face young people.

2.1. Data collection

2.1.1. Interviews: Focus group discussions & in-depth interviews

First, data on the lived experiences of the unemployed youth were collected. This collection of data followed the co-creation approach as unemployed youth were trained in data collection and thus directly contributed to the research process. They were recruited as research assistants. They received training on recruiting research participants, conducting focus group discussions, recording the process (note-taking and voice or video recording), moderating, and transcription. They were then allowed to moderate focus group discussions.

Interviews were conducted in the language participants were comfortable with – *isiXhosa* and English. Participants were allowed to express themselves in whatever way they wanted to deliver their views in the interviews and workshops. During the interview or workshop, therefore, participants would often speak two languages or mostly the language they were comfortable with. All data was translated into English for analysis. To ensure all information was captured for analysis later, all sessions were either video and/or voice recorded.

Mobile data was provided to the research assistants to enable them to send the collected data to researchers at Rhodes University. After completing the data collection process the research assistants were requested to reflect briefly on the experience and what they have learned.

Secondly, social partners were interviewed by the researchers to deliberate about their collaborative work through the Social Employment Fund. These are social partners who accommodated various young people to give them work experience. Face-to-face personal interviews were conducted with six social partners who gave insights into their work and their experience of the collaboration. These interviews, with unemployed youth and social partners, provided insights into their lived realities.

2.1.2. Change laboratory workshops (Living labs)

Lastly, the Change Laboratory was a multi-stakeholder stage where the unemployed youth, social partners, local government representatives, etc were represented and interacted. It is where challenges and solutions to unemployment were discussed. It was a space for the co-creation, reflection and evaluation of solutions for the provision of sustainable livelihoods in Makhanda. The youth led these discussions.

The participants discussed youth challenges and how they can overcome unemployment. They discussed alternatives towards sustainable livelihoods as a solution among youth. Researchers from the ELRC mediated the process by acting as analysts. They analysed the contribution of the participants and mirrored gathered information back to the participants to confirm and further refine and prioritize.

The participants further identified the actions needed to develop the framework. These actions by the participants provided the key components of the framework. Participants were able to identify other stakeholders and platforms that are critical in this process – for example, within the government sector, it was emphasized there were intergovernmental meetings (broadly known as IGR) whose engagement could enhance the process. This lends itself to the expansive nature of this learning platform.

This methodology elevated the voices of the marginalized youth compared to the macro-economic approach that expects people to climb the ladder of success or economic empowerment if they have accessed education and other support. Notably, this approach has not ameliorated the unemployment situation as demonstrated in Figures 2 and 3, thus calling for a new approach. This new approach recognizes the persistent structural challenges that face young people.

2.2. Data analysis
This section describes the methodological framework used to analyse the data. The first step of the data analysis used Nvivo software to manage and analyse the qualitative data. The corpus of the qualitative data is first composed of focus group discussion data with unemployed youth and secondly in-depth interviews with project leaders whose organisations have worked with the youth in Makhanda for a sustained period. Themes were extracted from the data by following the try-and-tested methodology advocated Braun & Clarke (2006).

2.2.1. Thematic analysis
First, a thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) of the focus group discussions and in-depth interviews were conducted. The thematic analysis gives the reader, in a very neat and logical way, the most common themes derived from the lived experiences of the youth as well as the key themes coming from the in-depth interviews with the social partners.

The insights from the latter provide key pointers to key actions that could be integrated into the proposed model for sustainable livelihoods. The social partners have a track record of working with the youth in Makhanda for a sustained period. They, therefore, possess useful insights on what worked, is working and potentially what could work in the future. Furthermore, their recent collaboration as a consortium of non-profit organisations working with youth in Makhanda could provide key lessons from which some elements of the model could be drawn from.

2.2.2. A discursive analysis of the manifestation of contradictions
Secondly, an analysis of the discursive manifestation of contradictions in the corpus of the qualitative data of the workshops was undertaken. The Change Laboratory workshops were a multi-stakeholder stage where the unemployed youth, social partners, Makana Local Municipality council representatives and ELRC's researchers exchanged views and discussed the challenges. Ideas and solutions that emerged were organic reflecting the robust and honest discussions.

This methodological framework is advanced by (Engeström & Sannino, 2011). The process of analysing the data included the identification of discursive contradictions arising from the discussions among participants. Using linguistic cues, the framework identifies four types of discursive manifestations: Dilemmas, conflicts, critical conflicts, and double binds.

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Table 1: Types of discursive manifestations of contradictions (Engeström & Sannino, 2011)

Manifestation	Features	Linguistic cues
Double bind	Facing pressing and equally unacceptable alternatives in an activity system: Resolution: practical transformation (going beyond words)	"we", "us", "we must", "we have to" pressing rhetorical questions, expressions of helplessness "let us do that", "we will make it"
Critical conflict	Facing contradictory motives in social interaction, feeling violated or guilty Resolution: finding new personal sense and negotiating a new meaning	Personal, emotional, moral accounts narrative structure, vivid metaphors "I now realize that[...]"
Conflict	Arguing, criticizing Resolution: finding a compromise, submitting to authority or majority	"no", "I disagree", "this is not true" "yes", "this I can accept"
Dilemma	Expression or exchange of incompatible evaluations Resolution: denial, reformulation	"on the one hand[...] on the other hand"; "yes, but" "I didn't mean that", "I actually meant"

Using this methodological framework has the advantage of identifying the organic emergence of solutions as participants are mainly faced with the dilemmas of the challenges confronting them. The linguistic cues, as described above, were used to locate the manifestation of the contradictions. The transformation of the activity is signified by the articulation of what they would like to see and thus beginning the much towards a new model.

3.   Results and analysis

This section presents data as analysed through the methodological frameworks described in the previous chapter. First, the results of the thematic analysis are presented and later the results of the analysis of the contradictions are presented. The evaluations of the impact of unemployment are expressed as double binds, critical conflict, dilemmas and conflict by the participants. The Change Laboratory method offered a platform where all these could be resolved through dialoguing.

3.1.   Thematic analysis

3.1.1.   The voices of the youth

3.1.1.1.   Lived experience of unemployed youth

This section gives a summary of the expressed feelings of the actual experiences of the unemployed. Using NVivo, themes were drawn from the data to identify the main pain points expressed by the youth. These main points are presented in paragraphs (a) – (g) below.

A cursory look at the most common words (Figure 4) coming out of their discussions is summarized in a word could below. The word cloud demonstrates the words frequently used during the discussions such as people, employment, opportunities, work, business, etc. There was a lot of reference to "people" as a way of contextualizing the problem of not having a livelihood. In other words, even though the lack of unemployment and accompanying lack of making a livelihood were experienced individually, there was wide recognition by all participants that it affected them as a group in the townships, especially youth. It was also used frequently to point towards those in power who were perceived to collectively abuse

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their position to advantage those close to them. The actual context of how their words may have been used is captured in the verbatims captured in the thematic analysis.

As an example, the word "people" was frequently used to describe the phenomena of unemployment or employment and how it is somehow a relational issue. The latter means it affects the individual, as well as her or his relationship with others. Unemployment, therefore, stokes emotive sentiments as it often taints relationships due to a lack of resources to reciprocate good gestures from friends and family, diminishes self-sufficiency and stalls the ability to contribute to household livelihood.

For example: *"I have seen people taking the future into their own hands, you look at this group of young people called `amaphara` (drug addicts who rob people to feed their addiction) these guys are trying to make a living. You see other people selling drugs that's how they want to live it's their livelihood because the opportunities are not there for them, so they are forced to look for other ways of supporting themselves. I do not condone this but if there could be job opportunities who knows things can change."*

Figure 4: Word cloud from youth focus group discussions

Young people experienced a huge dilemma as they felt discouraged from securing any employment due to specific job requirements. They perceived these requirements as unfair job recruitment practices and lack of transparency. They were disappointed that the drilled routine standard of getting an education, applying, and interviewing for jobs had not borne any fruit, for a very extended time. Some even experiment with illegal activities to try to make ends meet but this has had bad consequences. This sentiment is captured here: *"Here there are many prostitutes in Grahamstown because people do not have money, they are unemployed, so they want to support themselves and this is how they see is the best way to support themselves. People are prostitutes not by choice, but because they must eat."*

a)   The psychological burden of lack of livelihood on the youth

The unemployed youth are psychologically scared by the difficult circumstances they find themselves in regarding not having means of making a living [*"Being unemployed is very painful we all need money so that we can get basic things that as a human being needs to live. Well, it is painful if you cannot get what you need to live."*]. What exacerbated the situation is the over-reliance on what appears to be a crumbling model of expecting a job after attaining academic qualifications. The lack of access to job opportunities has proven to be a great disappointment to young people and those around them. These disappointments led some to consider crime as a way out: "*Young people, young men and young women - we end up getting into things that we were not supposed to get involved in. Take for example drugs: We use drugs, and those drugs are destroying young women and young men.*"

Participants mentioned engaging in anti-social behaviours such as stealing [*"I had to steal things from my own home because I wanted money so that I can buy things that I personally need."*], and alcohol abuse [*"I was unemployed, I was drinking alcohol a lot not only over weekends but during weekdays and that is how it affected me."*]

Some participants claim that their unemployment situation has affected the health of their parents so much that parents '…*are sinking into alcohol They drink the whole week because they are so stressed about the unemployment of their children.*"

The above quotations demonstrate that the mental well-being of the unemployed youth as well as their parents and those around them is negatively affected by the lack of a livelihood. Some young people face the dilemma of their parents supporting them, through thick and thin, only to be disappointed by the lack of employment for someone they have invested in. To escape this disappointment some young people, end up abusing alcohol and drugs, stealing including from family.

b)   Access to opportunities

The youth felt that their unemployment situation was made worse by the lack of access to available opportunities: [*"… Let's look at what skills people have acquired over years and recognize that even if people do not have degrees, they might have the skill to do a certain type of a job so those people must be given the opportunity."*]. Among the youth, there is the perception that access to employment opportunities is tempered by corruption, generational tensions, nepotism, lack of transparency and fairness in employment selection processes, and lack of appropriate skills and job requirements that they cannot meet. All these factors tend to push them into the margins of employment opportunities and expose their vulnerability as unemployed youth. The following quotations demonstrate their point inaccessible opportunities:

"I also want to earn some money but I can't because some places such as ShopRite, Pick n Pay and Checkers employ people who have grade 12. I`m currently doing grade 12 and computer skills."

" … Another issue that doesn't seat well with regards to employment opportunities, is the need for experience for example if they can't see might be open and they will require had two years' experience and grade 12 say you finished the grade 12 12 this year where are you going to get the two years' experience they require."

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They also spoke about the accommodation of diversity of schools and education. Current job opportunities were perceived to be biased towards academic achievement than on technical skill. The following quotations captured this sentiment:

" ..Where someone did not pass grade 12 so that he can go to university, you know to study towards a particular degree or a particular skill to be someone in life. Some people will never be able to go that route. Those people need to be accommodated, people should be given opportunities to pursue what they are passionate about. Other people are not passionate about academia and they are passionate about skills, using their hands, all those opportunities should be given to those individuals."

"...Some job opportunities instead of requiring degrees should also need people who have skills who can work with their hands. they do acknowledge that other people can work well with their own hands but there's nothing that shows, what they are saying they understand. That is why you have lots of people, especially young people who can do a lot with their hands sitting at home doing nothing."

"Employment opportunities must be given to everyone they should not starve the youth of employment."

It appears that some of the youth feel marginalized by the expectation for academic performance in almost every advertised employment opportunity. They point out that some jobs require skilled hands and thus skills development and empowerment can be very useful for such people.

The contradictions especially regarding employment opportunities created dilemmas for the young people. For instance, some acquired their qualifications but still, that did not translate to securing employment. Other job requirements related to prior experience which they questioned and felt contributed to the high rate of unemployment.

i)   Generational tensions (Old vs young)
There is an established tension between the old and young generations. The older generation is perceived to be hogging jobs, inflexible and prone to corrupt practices of unfair treatment, disregarding transparency protocols, and lack of interest in championing matters relating to youth. The tensions have led to mistrust between young and old, instead of creating a climate of support, mentorship, guidance, and leadership.

"... Old people must get out of parliament and young people must take over then there will be change."
In the proposed actions to be taken to resolve this tension, participants resolved to create a climate where experience (old) guides and mentors the youth. The old must give the youth the space to express their creativity and energy to find solutions that respond to the current times. These will be discussed in depth later.

ii)   Lack of transparency and fairness
The youth tended to focus on the Makana Local Municipality as their target of frustration and criticism. The perceptions are fuelled by the expectations of employment by the municipality as the government sector dominates as the employer in Makhanda. It is responsible for 51% of employment. However, the local council attracts strong criticism as its employment processes are regarded as opaque [*"... Municipality is not transparent those who get*

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employed at municipality are connected to people who already working there."] and influenced by nepotism: [*"Let me talk about myself I went to the municipality and when I heard about an available position, I went to HR to get the forms and I was notified by an HR person that this post had already been filled and yet the post was advertised the same day. How?"]*

This assessment is made worse by the perceived lack of accountability of the leadership and the council to youth and the residents.

iii)   Political meddling in development
The youth were exasperated by what they perceived to be interference by politicians in developmental projects [*"What am I trying to say that politics are closing job opportunities or employment opportunities I do not want to go deeper."[The respondent is insinuating there is more information on the issue]*. Officials and councillors are viewed as interfering in selection processes, nepotism and corruption.

iv)   Nepotism
Nepotism is cited by the youth as one of the leading misfortunes that befell the local municipality [*"Unfortunately, our municipality has favouritism, it favours others over other people.]*. Young people are despondent, out of their experience of unsuccessful applications, about any chances of being considered for work or entrepreneurship support opportunities [*"I'm not satisfied because many times you can see if you have to apply to the municipality, you get employment if you have a relative within the municipality."*]. They feel strongly that such opportunities are retained for families, friends, exchange of favours, etc [*"...When job opportunities open, the councillor will only get people that he or she is related to those jobs."*] [*Corruption starts when they employ each other when they employ their family members, for example, you get to a certain municipality where there's only one surname that is employed a particular surname is a majority."*]

v)   Skills development
The lack of appropriate and technical skills for a specific job, mismatch of skills and jobs, over-qualification and focus on academic qualifications over artisanship are perceived to block the youth's access to existing and potential opportunities. Some of the participants also point out that there is evidence that, among young people, there is a tendency to look down on artisanship and a similar focus on academic qualifications to secure office-based positions. In other words, there is a strong preference for jobs that require academic skills and qualifications over those that demand technical skills. The preference for the former is viewed as contributing to blocking youth from existing positions and potential areas of entrepreneurship.

"I would encourage the kind of employment that goes with training and skilling people, and issuing of certificates that prove that you have been trained for this skill."

"Schools should provide skills, skills that will equip young people to open their own businesses skills that will assist them to be able to earn money. I'm thinking of sewing classes, you finish grade 12 you open a sewing business not all of us can go to the academic route."

Figure 5: Local Eastern Cape newspaper articles illustrating the topical nature of finding solution to unemployment.

c) Local economic development

The youth voiced strong opinions that the local municipality must empower the local population both at a personal level, through a local jobs preference system and at a business level where local businesses are given preferences [*"As people of Makhanda we need support from the municipality. Government officials should be giving us support so that we can start better business opportunities."*]. There was a strong disillusionment about a perceived nepotistic preference of people outside the jurisdiction of the Makana Local Municipality. This bias towards outsiders was thought to be deliberate and political, however, it was limiting their access to job opportunities.

d) Crime and unemployment

Some of the unemployed youth felt that the unemployment situation compromised their moral obligations: *"I have seen people taking the future into their own hands, you look at this group of young people called `amaphara` these guys are trying to make a living, You see other people selling drugs that's how they want to live it's their livelihood because the opportunities are not there for them so they are forced to look on other ways of supporting themselves. I do not condone this but if there could be job opportunities who knows things can change."*

They resorted to illegal activities to sustain their livelihoods: *"...I tried selling weed, but that didn't go well because the community members were not happy, they would call the police to*

come to my house. I was doing this because I wanted to make a living, I'm not saying this is a good thing but how many opportunities are there for me? Therefore, I ended up selling marijuana. My business failed because community members did not approve it so I had to stop it." Some of the young people have adopted measures they picked up from the mainstream media to advertise themselves (See Figure 6).

Figure 6: Mainstream media headlines confirming some of the measures young people adopt to try to face the unemployment issue.

Being unemployed exposed their vulnerability to making poor choices. The psychological impact of not earning a livelihood change how they perceive common crime and "other societal ills": *"There are many prostitutes in Grahamstown because people do not have money, they are unemployed, so they want to support themselves and this is how they see is the best way to support themselves. People are prostitutes not by choice but because they must eat."*

The manifestation of the dilemma is demonstrated by the unemployed youth's acknowledgement of upholding moral codes that prohibit them from dealing drugs against the painful urgency of finding ways to make a living. The situation compromises their moral standing as they feel compelled to do anything to earn a living.

e)   (Youth) Economic agency
Among some of the youth, the unemployment situation stimulated creative ways of sustaining their livelihoods. For instance, as one participant pointed out: *"Some will be using The Child Support grant to open a business. They all sell different products, chips or bones, or anything that can be bought by community members so that you know they can put food on the table."*
They used whatever income available to them to start a small business selling commodities that were in daily demand and low priced. These trends are acknowledged in the columns of mainstream media (See Figure 7).

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Figure 7: Newspapers highlighting some of the creative ways young people explored to earn a livelihood.

These efforts demonstrated some economic agency even though participants admitted that running a business may not be their best skill: *"In most cases, the businesses that we embark on are not businesses that we went to school for, or we were trained for, and you just see and decide that yeah maybe if I can try this business. This is exactly what happened to me, I saw other people lending money and I decided I would follow that route. Because I could see that the interest was much higher they would charge 50% interest and what motivated me was the profit was substantial, especially at the beginning when I started the business I could see the difference. I could see the profits. I had a loyal base of clientele but as the time moved on there were hiccups there were difficulties."*

The latter demonstrates the need to support those who venture into small businesses with appropriate training and skills. It also demonstrates that there may be good programmes that the state has devised but at the grass-root level, the intended support is not accessible.

The youth agency manifested in various ways. Even though they do not describe doing market research to gauge the feasibility of their intended income-generating ventures, they base their decision on observing what is happening around them. As one participant mentioned: *"I started my own fish and chips business it's hard, people in the Township are stingy, but I persevere. Sometimes there are few customers but it's better than nothing. At least I have food on my table. I don't sleep on an empty stomach."*

Some cited similar examples, where the decisions are based on what they observed in their community: *"I also tried to open up my own business and sell alcohol. Alcohol business is not easy, but the good thing is that I don't sleep on an empty stomach."* Some of the participants were not deterred by the challenges that arose when venturing into the small

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business world. For instance, one participant demonstrates the daunting task of getting into the loan shark business: *"I tried to lend money to people, but it did not go well because people would come and borrow money but when they had to come back and pay they gave me the run-around, which killed my business."*

The paragraphs above, demonstrate that some of the young people refused to be curtailed by lack of employment to earn a living. They understood that if they could not find work to practice as qualified graduates, they must be entrepreneurial about the next available option. Often, they would end up selling goods that they thought were in demand where they lived. This sentiment is captured below:

f)   Leadership and accountability

Participants felt strongly that poor leadership and lack of transparency and commitment to accountability were worsening the unemployment situation in Makhanda. Participants felt that the leadership and management of the municipality failed to hold service providers accountable: *"The construction companies also should be accountable to the community, they should tell the community that out of what we were given as a budget for this road construction so far, we have used this much. If such reports can be given regularly it will be difficult to steal the money but because there are no measures they do as they please."*

They felt the responsible managers and political leadership were not holding service providers to account. Furthermore, the youth are sceptical about a perceived lack of action to stimulate employment by the political leadership in all three spheres of government. One participant said: *"... Youth unemployment is nothing new it has been around it has been known for a very long time. My question is what is being done about it? What provincial, local and national governments are doing about youth unemployment?"* This exposes the dilemma faced by youth and probably the political responsible for crafting policies. This dilemma may well point to the reality that youth must be engaged and be integral in finding solutions. Thinking out of the box holds a promise if young people are engaged to find possible solutions.

g)   Collective action or collaboration against unemployment

The representatives of the consortium of non-governmental organisations (NGOs), as well as the young people – all who participated in the interviews and the Change Laboratories, expressed their view that supporting sustainable livelihoods for unemployed youth needs a collaborative effort.

Citing existing efforts, based on their lived experience, they argued that some of those efforts have borne fruit. As an example, one participant suggested that: *"Government departments such as Department of Education, Department of Social Development, Arts and Culture, should work in partnership with organizations such as ADC* (a local NGO well versed with working within the community of Makhanda and located in the centre of the township) *and Awarenet, so that if there are any ideas with regards to community development this will assist in bringing in different inputs and inputs that matter to people that are living here."*

The collaboration between ELRC/Rhodes University, SEF, and the local NGO is perceived to have worked very well based on observed practical outcomes. A participants drew the attention of participants to what he perceived as an important outcome of the collaboration: *"I can see more young people are being employed in that project [SEF] which is based at the monument. More people are employed you can see it in town. Now we don't get any people that are just loitering in the Township."* Some projects were observed and perceived to have

contributed to alleviating the sad reality of unemployment in the townships: *"There's a project that is called ambassadors where young people are involved in 50 crèche. I am satisfied because we are busy."*

Being engaged and involved in the local NGOs seems to have released the psychological pressure that comes with being unemployed and not making any contribution to the household income. Just being allowed to be involved changes the mindset as demonstrated in this quotation: *"I can say there are opportunities in front of young people now! These opportunities are coming from places such as Awarenet, and ADC. Giving opportunities for employment to young people."* The release of psychological pressure of unemployment and the positive outcomes of being engaged via the collaboration is also confirmed by another participant, citing a practical example: *"Talking Technology to Power Project got me out of this frustration. This is the project which is for the youth of Makhanda that have a vision and want to see a change and employment opportunities rise."*

It is clear from their articulation that collective action has worked very well in alleviating the pressures of unemployment. This approach could be a vehicle towards sustainable livelihoods in Makhanda. These engagements have manifestly improved the self-confidence of the participants.

So confident were the participants with the collaboration that it was proposed that the business sector must engaged too. For example, a participant mentioned that: *"I would like big businesses to work with young entrepreneurs and support them, teach them how to manage a business. Support people who want to do that business."* In other words, established institutions, organizations, corporations, etc could engage youth to expose them to their operations and areas of competence.

The Change Laboratories gave the youth a platform where they raised their frustrations, engaged with other responsible organisations and found space for proposed solutions. The youth specifically expressed a renewed hope for a better future. The renewed hope was based on the SEF programme and the collective work of the NGOs working with youth in Makhanda.

3.1.2. Exploring social solidarity towards sustainable livelihoods: The lived experience of social partners working with youth in Makhanda.

This research project covered interviews with local social partners [non-governmental organisations (NGOs) or non-profit organisations (NPOs)] and representatives of the Makana Local Municipality (NLM) officials. These organisations have an established record of working with young people. They are working with young people in diverse programmes that seek to empower them and provide work experience. These programmes include after-school, arts and culture, sports and recreation, literacy, numeracy skills, small business development and technology.

The Learning Trust (TLT) worked with these organisations under a consortium to utilize the Social Employment Fund to support these novel solutions for unemployment. Rhodes University's Environmental Learning Research Centre (ELRC) was the research partner, whilst the Centre for Higher Education Research, Teaching and Learning (CHERTL) coordinated the SEF initiative through the Awarenet Programme.

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These organisations formed a consortium of NPOs or NGOs that are working together to empower youth (see quotation below). They embark on various youth empowerment programmes that tap into and nurture the agency of young people to overcome the stubborn impact of unemployment in the townships.

"And I see a lot of organisations are focusing on helping youth and helping schools, especially youth. Helping with education, which is great, you know, like we have, like you know, a great institution like Gadra which is doing great there for getting people into university etc but that's more like helping people on the initial basis to get better opportunities to be further up on the line ... in the queue to get them employment but it's not really solving the local employment situation in every town. In fact, you can even say that when you help someone with ... to get a better education, you know ... the university, that some of the learners maybe get university degrees and wouldn't have got it before. So maybe then they get to move to Joburg and get a job there afterwards but it's not really doing anything in the current area [location]. So, ja, that's something that we would try ... it's difficult but this is something ... I think so I think we should and when I look at what all the things that we're not doing so much for like attacking local unemployment."

These organizations have taken a new look at the challenge posed by unemployment and are looking beyond the traditional macroeconomic solutions for unemployment. They are infusing a new approach which is based on solidarity, collaboration and the acknowledgement and nurturing of young people as change agents who are empowered to change the course of their lives. Some of the sentiments below capture these innovative thoughts: *"The issue of unemployment especially among the youth is much deeper than we think. For example, we grew with the mentality of being employed and even the schools groomed us in that direction - the way children are taught is to be office-bound employees."*

These sentiments capture the reality that employment, as we know it from designed macroeconomic policies is hamstrung by embedded structural issues. These structural issues have made it difficult to solve the rising unemployment rate over the years. Some of these issues, in the context of South Africa, are reflective of its historical past such as deliberate unequal education, underdevelopment and many other oppressive laws. It is also reflective of the failures of the current government to transform the economy in line with current demands. Some of these insights are captured by what the participant said: *"It is so structural, there is no money to employ people locally it is a difficult situation. Like we have people to ... like we have a lot of work that needs to be done here actually. Everyone, see, let me not mention the potholes, but also we know there is a lot that could be done locally, just in terms of ... in the municipality around, in terms of the township, for instance, there are things that could be done, there could more construction, could be more parks, there could be cleaning up, there are lots of things that could be done - just from that perspective."*

In the following paragraphs, themes from the interviews are presented. The themes point towards challenges that the social partners faced and the approaches they used to design programmes they viewed as having worked for them.

3.1.2.1. Themes emanating from the lived experience of NGOs working with youth in Makhanda

Representatives from six NGOs were interviewed to assess how they have been approaching the challenge of unemployment and how they have experienced working together to collectively challenge the issue. Such data were collected through personal interviews that

lasted between 30-40 minutes. The interviews were further designed to identify areas for improvement and the impact of the intervention (SEF collaboration).

Participants expressed dilemmas, double binds, critical conflicts and conflicts that could be discerned from their expressed views. This, perhaps, indicates the complexity of the unemployment conundrum and the fact that it is not only a local problem, but it is a global problem. It is a problem that the developing world has been grappling with for a long time. There was a clear identification of the problem of unemployment as mainly a structural issue. One of the respondents mentioned that the problem of unemployment is so structural: "*It [unemployment] certainly has a big structural component it is not something that it's not just that we can ... if you upskill our youth, they we'll get jobs. They will yes in some cases, of course, someone if you get a better degree and better education you might be further up in the queue but still the queue is a long queue! I think it's you know it's a little bit of a problem when people think that I think it's just about our workforce is not skilled enough, if you just skill our work force unemployment will go away. It's not as easy as that obviously it's good to still have a skilled workforce most certainly but we see in the people that we try to employ that work for us it's people that sometimes people don't have much education but often to it is who have degrees also. So, it's not like that. Unemployment [is] among all different kinds of groups of people. Ja we see it really where we working in Joza, we see all the people who come to use of computer lab for instance you are not in school anymore but are looking for jobs. So, it's kind of in our face.*"

Comparing the success of entrepreneurship in Germany and other countries could be futile in that those economies were structured around the model of entrepreneurship. Furthermore, as one participant put it: "*The issue of unemployment especially among youth is much deeper than we think. For example, we grew [up] with the mentality of being employed and even the schools groomed us in that direction - the way children are taught is to be office-bound employees. Even if you ask them what they want to do after school, they will tell you they want to work for the government! The schools tend to reinforce that direction in their training, parents do the same.*

Even the positive action of promoting entrepreneurship to counter unemployment in South Africa often hits a snag because of complex structural issues: "*It's always nice if there is some entrepreneurship, one cannot be against that. But again, it is one of the reasons why Germany, that's how the economy has been set up historically. We have quite a high concentration of big companies and they also have a sector with a lot of smaller companies. So sometimes you have to look at the structure of the economy not just necessary that if our youth are being trained as entrepreneurs, they probably solve unemployment. It is also a question of capital like you can talk so much about being trained in entrepreneurship that you need to have the money. You can have the greatest idea, but you need to [have money]. So, it's it has to ... they have to put the money where the talk. It's not just training and emulating that through to getting our youth to be more you know not waiting for handouts but to be entrepreneurs yes that's a good thing in itself but I don't think that's ... ja there has to be some money behind that and obviously money that is used in a transparent and efficient way which we know about this.*

The summary of the themes is presented below:

a)   Factors contributing to unemployment

Social partners highlighted what they perceived to be complex contextual factors contributing to the current unemployment conundrum in South Africa. Their response to a question asking them to expatiate their experience of the impact of unemployment on the youth they so closely work with demonstrates people who are determined to equip the youth who are faced with a very complex existential problem.

i) Structural economic challenges

Most respondents highlight the fact that unemployment is a structural problem as one of the respondents said, *"you cannot run away from the fact that there are structural elements that contribute to unemployment - the skills that are produced are not aligned to our economy."* Those problems must be overcome or challenged through strong partnerships between governments, non-governmental organisations, civil society, the private sector, youth, labour and other sectors of society. It is mentioned that unemployment has its deep roots in how the economy was historically structured and thus the challenges we experience today are structural. The whole capitalist economic model is itself under question as the source perpetuating historical inequalities. Furthermore, unemployment is growing as a global problem reflecting shortcomings in the current economic models of capitalism.

The problem is structural and goes beyond upskilling the youth. Skilled people also suffer a similar fate of being unemployed even though their skill puts them ahead in the queue: *"…it [unemployment] certainly has big structural component it is not something that it's not just that ... we can ... if you upskill our youth, they we'll get jobs."* Often the interventions are not transformative in their makeup and often end up assisting those they target to secure employment when an opportunity strikes. This approach reinforces the very same model that appears to be under tremendous pressure.

The real issue is equipping individuals who can secure and sustain their livelihoods beyond the normal channel of being educated and then waiting for secure employment.

Ultimately, to make a bigger dent into the issue, transformative approaches must target these structural issues as even entrepreneurship is touted as the *panacea* for unemployment as demonstrated in countries like Germany. Such countries structured their economy around the SME model that worked with the bigger companies with support from the government: "*It's always nice if there is some entrepreneurship, one cannot be against that. But again, it is one of the reasons why Germany … that's how the economy has been set up historically. We [Germany] have quite a high concentration of big companies and they also have a sector with a lot of smaller companies. So sometimes you have to look at the structure of the economy not just necessary that if our youth are being trained as entrepreneurs, they probably solve unemployment].*

ii) Supporting environment

The various levels of society must support transformative approaches that enhance the agency of young people to make and sustain their livelihoods. There must be a collaborative supporting environment between government, civil society, labour and institutions of higher learning and training (See Figure 8). All these levels must, as a matter of common cause, elevate the voices of the youth in all strategies that seek to support youth to make sustainable livelihoods.
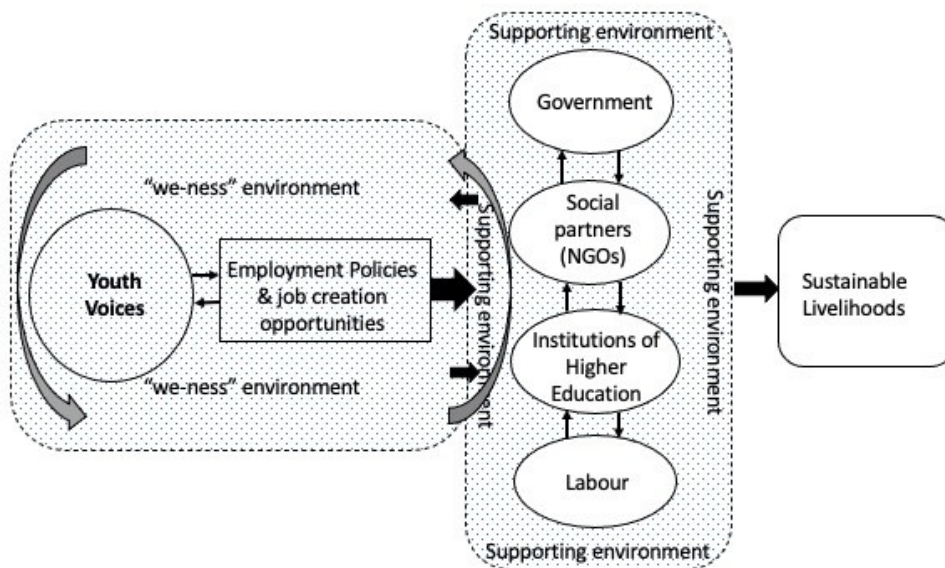
The Dialogical Model for supporting livelihoods among youth

Figure 8: A dialogical model to engage all stakeholders.

Entrepreneurship is one of those strategies that holds a big promise in this regard, but it is diminished in South Africa by the structure of the neo-apartheid economy that tends to reduce young people from poor backgrounds to perpetual "hewers of wood."

As the provision of entrepreneurship is strengthened in the institutions of higher learning, for instance, such upskilling of the youth rings hollow if their efforts and attempts at entrepreneurship are not supported, by for instance, providing capital to SMEs: "*It is also a question of capital like you can talk so much about training entrepreneurship, but you need to have the money. You can have the greatest idea, but you need to [have money]. So, it's it has to ... they have to put the money where the talk [is].*"

iii) Challenging entrenched employment pathways
The lack of auditing skills demanded by the economy is also seen as a contributory factor to unemployment. Youth are flooding professions that are already exhausted and often do not have interest in artisan jobs even though there is a huge demand there. So, the challenge of unemployment is complex as "*the issue of unemployment especially among the youth is much deeper than we think.*" The respondent explains further that "*for example, we grew with the mentality of being employed and even the schools groomed us in that direction - the way children are taught is to be office-bound employees. Even if you ask them what they want to do after school, they will tell you they want to work for the government! The schools tend to reinforce that direction in their training, parents do the same.*" Even in this instance access to resources allocated by the government to support entrepreneurs appears to be inaccessible to the grassroots level.

iv) Challenging entrenched negative attitudes towards certain vocations
One of the challenges that are perceived to somehow contribute towards unemployment is the entrenched negative attitude towards certain vocations such as artisanship. As one respondent from the social partners mentioned: "*Young people are running away from jobs that require technical skills such as artisans. I am not sure whether that attitude is informed by the attitude from some families who prize university education more than artisanship.*"

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The participant argued that there appears to be a lack of artisans. From his practical experience, he cited an instance where he had to source a plumber from town as there was none in the township. His argument seems to be confirmed by what ministers, experts and other commentators say in the mainstream media (See Figure 9).

Figure 9: Newspaper headline that captures the vocation vs academic pursuit conundrum.

Perhaps what explains the rebuffing of certain vocations is that young people tend to mirror parental and societal values. They pursue what their parents and society attach the most value hence the youth are pressured to value obtaining a university education more than vocations or technical skills. This enhances their social acceptance and status. As one of the young social partners working with high school pupils mentioned: *We live in a society that has invested a lot in education and we are puffed up by getting these qualifications and not doing research about the market needs of these qualifications and how much these qualifications are produced by universities each year. We are not finding out what is the demand of teachers out there. We have qualifications that do not tap into… because we do not have [that] information.*

v) Challenging historical education inequalities
One of the historical legacies that burdened Africans was the legislated provision of inferior education that was calculated to reduce them to "hewers of wood" as the once erstwhile Prime Minister of the Republic of South Africa, Mr Hendrik Verwoerd once said. The modern economy needs certain skills and yet the education system in most township schools does not provide them. A participant demonstrates this by saying: "*There are skills that are needed by our economy such as coding. However, if you go to the townships, our schools there don't have resources whereas if you compare for instance with St Andrews College, those youngsters are doing coding at a very young age.*"

b)   Strategies to alleviate unemployment

The social partners were encouraged to share their lived experiences with empowerment programmes for the youth. They were probed on strategies that they think have and could work to alleviate unemployment based on their engagement with youth in empowerment programmes.

(i)   Youth agency as a driver for sustainable livelihoods

Social partners agree that there must be a change of approach in how livelihoods must be approached. First, that approach must focus on sustainable livelihoods that transcend the narrow provision of employment as the sole form of gaining a livelihood: *"… at some point as a youth, we need to be the change drivers ourselves and if we are going to be dependent on the government to create job opportunities for us, we must forget."*

The significance of this new perspective becomes even more important considering that the participant is a university graduate who is grounded in community engagement. In the absence of work opportunities, instead of depending on securing a job placement, he started an NGO that supports youth development. He goes on to express his passion for solutions by stating: *"So I think as much as there are other opportunities as young people, we are not fully aware of those opportunities. So, we need to change tact and be change drivers in a way that we come and create the opportunities ourselves."* In simple terms, the participant advocates for youth agency which he exemplifies.

(ii)   Collaboration for sustainable livelihoods

One of the social partners highlighted that unemployment has deep historical roots in Makhanda. When his organisation consulted the community, *"the majority of people highlighted the high rates of unemployment and suggested that a place that will assist them to secure jobs or a centre that could support their efforts to secure funding when they want to start small businesses."* The product of those consultations gave birth to that NGO which has been crucial in empowering and supporting youth.

Collaboration is given a lot of credence by the various not-for-profit organisations. The credence is a product of fruitful youth engagement towards finding solutions to entrench sustainable livelihoods and cultivating youth agency. The local NPOs have been collaborating on various fronts to support the youth. Through collaborations, the economy of the townships could be stimulated, and financial resources mobilized thus creating an environment where people could secure livelihoods.

Together the NGOs have accumulated experience in sourcing funding and putting it to good use for the development of young people. The *"non-profit organisations are actually used to apply for funding from outside so that could be at least it's kind of a temporal fixed anyway 'cause you cannot do it forever and get money from outside. However, it, on a short-term basis, at least is something that we could try and so when we get funding from outside to help with employment locally it's kind of stimulus for the whole time. It's kind of like the same as South Africa's foreign direct investment because if someone is enlisting money from outside it is stimulating the local economy. So, you know if we get money from the outside, it does not need to be foreign, you know it can be from outside the municipality. It is also stimulating some work. So that's one, obviously, there's also possible to try and create that funding to make it long-term. Having businesses that generate their own money themselves [revenue] that's kind of a long term. So, if you manage through that funding we can get up and we can*

establish some projects of businesses that need them stuff them self-generate funding through selling things etc to creating something ..."

(iii)   Decentralizing development towards the townships
Townships are dormitory suburbs located far away from the centre of town, business or industries. There are hardly any services and people must commute to get basic services such as shops, work, school, etc. This has further contributed to the impoverishment of the township folk as they spend most of their salaries on commuting.

Some of the social partners view this challenge as an opportunity to expand and establish economic activities in the townships. This will bring services closer to the people and at the same create livelihood opportunities. A participant captured this succinctly, stating that "*our vision though is to grow Township Economy so that young people can access job opportunities, locally in the township instead of commuting to town for everything, in light of Makhanda being very small with few employers like the University, and the Municipality who hold the employment fort.*

The failing infrastructure within the municipality somehow presents an opportunity to leverage this challenge to overhaul a dire situation by adopting a transformative approach to livelihoods. As one of the social partners put it; "… *there is no money to employ people locally it is a difficult situation. … Like we have a lot of work that needs to be done here actually, everyone see let me not mention the potholes, but also we know there is a lot that could be done locally just in terms of in the municipality around, in terms of the township for instance there are things that could be done, there could more construction, could be parks, there could be cleaning up, there are lots of things that could be done - just from that perspective. At the same time, there's a lot of people who could do the work but because we don't manage [afford] to employ them.*"

(iv)   Focusing on sustainable livelihoods
From their own experience, the social partners are convinced that any form of handouts is not good for the unemployed as that is perceived to lead to a cycle of dependency. Any solution to the challenges of unemployment must focus on sustainability by addressing the needs of the youth through listening to and understanding their needs. As one of the social partners argued, "… *people know what they want and what they want is ... it is sustainable - in terms of ... people talk about ... employment, they talk about skills development, upskilling and then from upskilling then creating employment and then that is sustainable in a sense that the skills that they attain will continuously them.*" In other words, focusing on the immediate gratification of short-term financial benefit is not favoured compared to equipping the youth to be able to overcome their challenges of making a livelihood over the long term.

The social partners felt that the SEF intervention was welcomed but were emphatic that such an initiative must have sustainability as their core principle. The emphasis was more on securing skills for the youth as a more sustainable form to counter raising of expectations created by short-term injection of employment for a limited period: "*Because I think they should have been like you know the funds should have been transferred to a skills-based project it doesn't have to be hard you know hard skills, it can be like soft skills you know you know it's happening partly in terms of the tutoring and in in in the journalism, I think.*"

c)   Perceptions about the collaboration for unemployment

In search of a model that will advocate for sustainable livelihoods, elevate youth voices in the formulation of policies for employment and empowerment, and build solidarity (and thus collective action) around youth employment, it was prudent to source the views of the social partners. Their views shed light on the key ingredients needed to shift the paradigm of employment and sustainable livelihoods. They are NGOs or NPOs that have worked with youth and are exposed to the preferences and views of mainly young people they work with in Makhanda.

The Social Employment Fund (SEF) provided an opportunity for collaboration with the NGOs in Makhanda. The following paragraphs summarize their views on how they experience the collaboration between themselves.

The NGOs were complimentary of the collaboration, citing that it is the first of its kind in Makhanda within an NGO sector. They mentioned that the latter is characterized by fierce competition for financial resources. Despite the latter, they managed to pull together an admirable working relationship.

They perceived the collaboration as an action that transcended narrow competition and focused the local NGOs on the common challenge(s) faced by the youth of Makhanda. The collaboration further demonstrated that working together has a far greater impact than working in silos.

However, members of the NGO coalition mention that *"obviously, there are small challenges which always happen when you build new relationships or start novel ventures. Those are mainly administrative."* The SEF project was perceived as *"short-term"* but *"very useful."* Given how it was implemented, they felt that it would have a more profound impact and it is a working relationship that could be improved on.

Below are some of the useful inputs that were delivered by participants:

(i)   What worked well

Igniting a collaborative spirit

The idea of bringing the local NGOs together for a common cause has been received with great appreciation and admiration. One of the participants described it as one of the highlights as it got *"like-minded organisations especially NGOs to work together. It is a recipe for success! It is for the first time it has been realised here in Makhanda. The nature of NGO is such that they always compete. Now that's different, we are working together."*

The collaboration has ignited a collaborative spirit among these NGOs and their higher education partners. This is envisaged as a model for future collaborations: *"I am hoping that's the start of a long-term collaboration on different issues. For instance, Inkululeko, one of the organisations which is part of the coalition is already planning to fund-raise and work with ADC to assist with the support of our small business programme, for instance, on issues like accessing seed capital for businesses.*"

Non-obligatory experiential training for young people

The placement of the youth with different NGOs to experience the work environment is also seen as having worked well. The flexibility of the programme to allow them to release them without any obligations once an opportunity arises was complimented. The focus is to expose

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the youth to work such that when they live their CVs are enhanced as one of the youthful social partners remarked: "*... we are allowing people to move, you know, so that they get out being exposed [to work]. The exposure enhances their CVs because they are being exposed to different things.*"

Solid coordination structure for collaboration
The various partners and the coordination of the programme were viewed positively as: "*The Learning Trust as a partner played a huge role and the WhatsApp group was used for relaying information between partners. We have been working together well and wish this collaboration could outlive the current funding window.*"

The collaboration is perceived as a tool for tackling common goals and supporting the efforts of each of the partners – collaboratively. For example, CHERTL's Awarenet, as an implementing and coordinating structure, could have the sole role of implementing the programme but did that with the local NGOs. This approach is perceived as having played a much-needed decentralization role in the recruitment of participants in the SEF programme: "*... we actually managed to recruit all these people and relatively they are decentralised, so it's not just us Awarenet recruiting all these people which would be more, but other organisations doing things that are different connections.*"

(ii) Areas of improvement
Teething problems
As one of the respondents from the NGO coalition lamented about the initiative of local NGOs collaborating: "*as a new initiative in Makhanda it does have challenges, just like any new project.*" However, such teething problems are outweighed by the collective good and intention of a commitment to stimulating youth agency and addressing a better approach to sustainable livelihoods beyond the single focus of securing employment from corporations or the government.

The social partners expressed an appreciation of the collaboration of Mkhanda's institutions like the NGO sector working with youth, Rhodes University as an academic institution of higher learning (Through CHERTL's Awarenet and ELRC) and The Learning Trust (TLT). The SEF is viewed in a positive light as a much-needed stimulant for allowing the youth to contribute to livelihoods at home. These contributions restore the dignity that they expressed as having lost due to unemployment.

Short-termism of interventions
However, the consensus emanating from the interviews is that the SEF from the Presidential Stimulus Fund is short-term. It is understood that it sought to alleviate the great distress caused by the Covid pandemic.

Hurried implementation
However, there was scepticism on what was perceived as its hurried implementation and the fact that it is targeted for six months. A participant lamented that: "*... this consortium [the collaboration of the NGOs through the SEF), as much as it was a good thing, it was rushed through and not properly planned.*"

Instituting a learn-and-share platform
Some felt that such collaboration through a consortium of different social partners must be characterised by "*... an opportunity to **learn** and **share** as we implement the programme.*

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Currently, there is no such. Unfortunately, this is the unfortunate reality that the focus is on the stipend - that people get paid."

However, this criticism is tempered by the realization that the nature of fluid collaborations is that *"... when you have a little bit of cooperation with a lot of partners"*, hiccups arising from the coordination efforts are bound to arise. These were teething problems during the implementation phase. Hence, such collaborations, according to one social partner, must be centred around learning because *"it's not easy but we are learning as we go."*

Flexibility of programme goals
Consistent with the theme of establishing a learning and sharing platform in the coalition of NGOs, some NGOs proposed a flexible programme that could adjust its goals as it unfolds.

The learning and sharing platform could then iron out these challenges that organically arise during the implementation, for example, *"you might find that an organisation limited itself you ... and requested a lesser number [of young people eligible for stipend and placement] now it needs more."* The learning and sharing platform, then, could be used collectively to review the original decisions and milestones. For example, *"We must have a three-month or months review to say that okay this is where we started. You know some people, maybe other organisations too were doubtful and did not trust the coalition as you know there will be always doubts, which would have led to the limited request for support but now they might want to increase their numbers. All I am saying is that let us have periods where we come back and sit and review."*

Consensus building on roles and responsibilities
Some NGO coalition members were of the view that roles and responsibilities must be discussed and explained upfront at the beginning of the collaboration agreement. Otherwise, the dynamic and organic path of the implementation of the project created *"a sense of shifting goalposts – where you agreed on this and there will be a shift to something else."* That created an uncomfortable sense of unpredictability.

However, the participant admitted that this situation cleared organically as the project progressed, but such a predicament must be mitigated upfront. The sense of unpredictability is also quoted as having arisen from the perceived rushed implementation of the project as one of the respondents mentioned that *"this particular project I think in as much as they initially introduced the project [at] last moment ... I don't think any organisation got to really understand what they're getting themselves into."*

The social partners strongly proposed a collective decision-making mechanism. It would allow the NGO coalition to facilitate wider consultations because *"once you move with a suggestion of one organisation and implement that without the consultation of other organisations you are going to find yourself in a tight spot, you know, because when we formed it together you know there was a consultation there was an agreement among these organisations to form part of it and we further explained why we want to be part of it you know. So, consultation is something that is very much important. Communication is key anywhere, you know, so we must not lose that particular point.* Taking this point further, one respondent suggested a formalized governance structure such as *"a board that would work closely with Awarenet. The Board must include representatives of the organisations that are participating in this collaboration."*

Sustainability of interventions

Social partners, without dismissing the impact on livelihoods of the initiative, were sceptical about its long-term impact. They thought that in initiatives that are funded to support young people, *"the starting point should be what skills are lacking and what are the needs of the different organisations rather than saying just employ as many young people as you can.* Skills development is therefore regarded as a useful ingredient for sustainable livelihoods.

They were scathing on what they perceived as side-lining sustainability considerations. They felt the focus was more on spending the allocated budget *[on stipends]* and *"then it's only later that it would be noticed there are gaps."* The tight timelines for the implementation of the programme were interpreted as a rushed job as, *"for example, most people that were employed did so without a contract and were not even clear about their responsibilities, but the focus was on enrolling them in the programme to fulfil the required quotas."*

Prioritizing skills development through experiential learning

Among the members of the coalition or consortium of local NGOs, learning and skills development were considered strong foundations. Some participants advocated *"for programmes that will have a focus on developing the skills of young people or unemployed. For example, our focus at AMP is music teaching and education, we can focus on them being the teachers in the future so that we don't ask teachers from public and private schools. Such students could benefit as teachers by earning the money those teachers earn as they will also be employed full-time as teachers."*

Furthermore, some respondents among coalition partners felt that *"the funds should have been transferred to a skills-based project - it doesn't have to be hard skills, it can be like soft skills you know you know it's happening partly in terms of the tutoring and in in the journalism, I think."* So there was a consensus among the coalition partners that *"as much as they [participants] receive the financial benefit they must also benefit in terms of skills development."*

Teething problems during implementation

There were frustrations with the teething problems of the implementation of the SEF programme. However, such frustration was tempered by the recognition that this initiative is *"something that doesn't often happen"* and such teething problems are *"kind of typical when there's a lot of different people when they're working on the same project"* and it *"takes a bit more time to get everything from everyone. And it's kind of when you work with 15 different partners it's not as easy because you must communicate here and there, and you know sitting in different places."* In other words, challenges that arose are understood as natural manifestations of coordination challenges associated with working with different stakeholders. The concerns, therefore, do not negate the positive outlook of the efforts.

The social partners continued to emphasize sustainability as a cornerstone of programmes that seek to address the employment and livelihood issues of young people. Some, therefore, emphasized that *"in the long run we should find a space whereby we are allowing people to move, you know so that they get out being exposed. The exposure enhances their CVs"* as they would have been exposed to the different aspects and diversity of work environments. Some felt that skilling up participants should be the foundation of projects like the SEF programme to allow participants to exit such programmes with relevant and marketable skills when they exit such programmes. As one of the partners put it, he told participants in his

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programme that *"one thing I do not want is for them to exit the program being the way that they came."* Such upskilling should also include educating young people about investments such that what they receive as stipends is not consumed but invested: "P*erhaps it should be made mandatory that a portion of the income that you are going to get from this is going to be invested (addressing beneficiaries of SEF funding at SYDP).*

Among the challenges with the implementation of the SEF programme was *"the minor challenges which we had in terms of the payments, which is understandable as well because it's a new thing you know. We can't be hundred per cent on the get-go, but it is just that we are starting, hoping as we progress a person is assured of the exact date when they will be paid.* The delays in the payments were quite a huge issue with the NGO coalition partners as it questioned their repute among the participants.

However, some NGO coalition partners were even more worried about *"how do we ensure that the compensation that the participants are currently getting is not going to be spent in a situation we find stories like those of when people receive their NSFAS funds - those who benefit go and buy liquor."* In other words, the respondent here emphasizes the need to equip participants with financial management and investment skills so that they can start saving and growing their stipends. This approach is seen as more sustainable than just making payments without exposing them to financial literacy.

One of the key challenges was communication as some coalition members *"were puzzled when they [participants placed in the SEF programme] said they don't get any communication from the programme. The participants felt they were now left behind even though they were among the first recruits."* The paucity of communication in the coordination efforts by coordinating entities was therefore perceived as impugning the repute of the coalition members as "*in the space that we operate in [NGO sector], once you create an expectation and decide to discontinue the person you need to inform that person. So, constant communication is critical. It was disappointing to realise that some of the participants dropped out because of lack of communication."*

The coalition members were worried that in their sector *"your word is everything! If you have verbalised a promise when you can no longer do it, you must communicate accordingly because our word is everything! When we have made a promise, and we can no longer deliver on it we always go back to those we promised. So, I was disappointed by how some of the participants dropped out [i.e., due to lack of communication]."* The paucity of communication is pinned down to the challenges that face people in poor neighbourhoods – for instance, lack of resources such as access to the internet and data.

The respondent understood that "*the miscommunication arose from the reality that the coordinator responsible for the communication assumed that everyone has access to the internet. Communication was always via email. Of course, even us we take emails in our registers, but we follow that by calling them. Access to data in the township is very limited, especially for the unemployed."*

(iii) Lessons learnt
Establishing a coalition of local NGOs - collaboration
The biggest lesson mentioned by coalition partners was that of local NGOs working together for the first time to solve local challenges.

They found synergies among these organisations and capitalised on the experience of working with young people on the ground. For the first time in history, the local NGOs identified the common goal of community upliftment as a strength and rallying point for collaboration to cultivate an environment of sustainable livelihoods. The partnership created an environment that embraced young people and their challenges and cultivated the spirit of "we are all in this together."

The coalition of local NGOs broke the silo mentality approach that has characterised this sector and thus *"made a huge difference in that we are no longer working in silos, we are able to come together, share information and raise questions and other organisation are able to share their experiences too. It has many benefits as we can now come together and advise each other."*

The collaboration, in the form of local NGOs working together as a coalition to address the challenge of unemployment, through SEF drew great admiration from coalition members. As one member said, *"for the first time ever since working in the NGO sector here in Makhanda, it is my first time to work with same-minded organisations, working together. I think TLT has done a great job of organising these organisations to work together. We are now able to share ideas instead of working in silos."* The collaboration transformed the relationship between competing organisations demonstrating the power of collective action for common and big social challenges.

As a city with probably the biggest concentration of NGOs cooperation between the NGOs through the coalition became a key lesson, *"so maybe there should be more common initiatives ..."* Coordinating these collaborative efforts is recognised as a strong challenge as that is the *"nature you have when you have a little bit of cooperation with a lot of Partners [coordination]. It's not easy but we are learning as we go."*

Skills development
Based on the emphasis on the sustainability of initiatives, respondents from the local NGO coalition thought that skills development must always form the foundations of such programmes. So, *"the starting point should be what skills are lacking and what are the needs of the different organisations rather than saying just employ as many young people as you can. We are here to reduce unemployment ... but our focus as the consortium is mainly young people."* Coalition partners felt that if the SEF programme wanted to solve the problem of unemployment in the long-term it *"need to look beyond the SEF funding period!"* The strong belief in skills development is enhanced by the *"the fact that there are structural elements that contribute to unemployment –* [and] *the skills that are produced are not aligned to our economy."*

 The key lesson from the collaboration between local NGOs, as one of the respondents from the coalition, puts it was *"that we are all here to serve people regardless of whether we may compete for the same funding. This programme is not about us so we must remove our personalities from it because that will create problems and focus on the job of helping the community."* The collaboration is perceived as having transcended competition for resources as coalition members started working together for the first time.

Resilience
The collaboration is considered to have shown strong signs of resilience as *"implementation challenges with different ideologies"* were surmounted for the good of the collective

initiative. These implementation challenges were considered to be just the *"clash of personalities and stuff but it is something that can always be improved on in any functional organisation."*

d)   Perceptions on the impact of the collaboration

The overall collaboration, through the coordination of Awarenet, is perceived as having been *"great",* and impactful as "it's *actually directly impacting the livelihoods [in Makhanda]."*

The impact is measured through the perceived impact of the cash injection to impact on local livelihoods, even though*"some people will look at this and say no man this money is too little but to some to put the bread on the table ... speaks about dignity. It's not a drop in the ocean - it's a huge thing! So, because of what I believe or what we believe as an organisation if you are able to change the life of one individual you are actually impacting that particular family. If you are impacting that particular family, you are impacting a community on its own ... because that particular person now wakes ups a different person who no longer wonders what his next step would be today and just busking and following the sun because he's got nothing to do."* No matter how small the stipend *"we cannot deny people are putting something on the table - to some it's big, to some it's little but it is something and I think that's what matters. It is changing so many livelihoods. In terms of the impact, it directly impacts the livelihoods of Makhanda youth and not just youth but other people that might not fall in the category of youth.*

The immediate impact of SEF programme is widely acknowledged by all members of the NGO coalition, despite their reservations about its sustainability. There is an acknowledgement of the sheer size of the investment, as *"there are so many people working that side. Even if you look at Awarenet there are many people employed, over 300 people working meaning that fewer people who are staying at home [unemployed],* meant that unemployment was temporarily alleviated.

The SEF investment into Makhanda stimulated the local economy by injecting about R4 million into Makana Local Municipality's economy, *"that's actually ... that money is actually stimulating a little bit of the economy. People are using that money so that's just a little small - so that's something."*

Furthermore, such cash injection into the economy via the stipends meant that young people who had never contributed to their homes' livelihood basket did so, perhaps for the first time. This was a huge boost for their low self-esteem triggered by being unemployed as "*we must not underestimate how unemployment has wreaked suicidal thoughts on so many young people."*

As unemployment wreaked havoc by discouraging and demotivating young people, the SEF intervention facilitated the upliftment of their self-esteem and self-confidence and served to give direction to "the *youth ... actively looking for employment."* For example, young people found an opportunity to be engaged through SEF programme via placements in the various local NGOs. In this regard, some who were withdrawn were so motivated after joining one of these organisations that one lady *"changed her behaviour, she's [now] willing to further engage."* The programme made employment opportunities to be accessible albeit in the short term. The excitement and level of engagement that was shown by this specific person spoke *"to the reality that this person was not exposed to any opportunity, [and] now the opportunity is being presented", she is grabbing it.*

e) Envisioning an alternative livelihood model for youth

The local NGO coalition members were convinced that the current conception of work complicates finding solutions to a complicated economic problem. Currently, people are expected to get an education and that good education equates to a job or employment: *"The issue of unemployment especially among the youth is much deeper than we think. For example, we grew up with the mentality of being employed and even the schools groomed us in that direction - the way children are taught is to be office-bound employees. Even if you ask them what they want to do after school, they will tell you they want to work for the government! The schools tend to reinforce that direction in their training, parents do the same."*

However, employment has been declining for a long-sustained period (See Figures 1 & 2), pointing to a troubled economic model. There are structural problems with the economy. People are starting to call for the revision of the conception of work. In this regard, the sustainable livelihood approach may appeal more and be of much assistance in the efforts set to alleviate unemployment. Discussions with the NGO coalition members elicited responses that indicate that a multi-prong approach is necessary to promote sustainable livelihoods.

The core idea around the proposed sustainability considerations is that sustainability must be underpinned by views from the bottom up. That means it must be a people-driven approach informed and aligned with their views. It, therefore, must be preceded by meaningful community engagement *"because it is through engagement that then some of the elements of development can be truly achieved."*

There was broader recognition that handouts diminish human agency and that *"if we don't engage, we come from a messiah perspective to say here is manna! That is not sustainable but if you engage with the masses to say how can we build then whatever they are going to suggest the likelihood of it becoming sustainable is high.*

Sustainability, collaboration and engagement are viewed as the fundamentals for creating sustainable livelihoods that will slow down the scourge of unemployment. Short-term cash injection in the form of stipends was largely criticized on the basis that it should be tied to sustainability as *"paying them the stipend must not be the end."*

These ideas are presented below.

(i) Sustainability of initiative

The following quotation captures the broad sentiment of coalition partners that the best approach to alleviate unemployment is to look beyond short-term projects or use short-term projects to stimulate sustainable livelihood endeavours, like upskilling, coaching and mentoring of participants.

"We must think beyond now and think about their future because we want to be a coalition that says that we played the part in that human being. Now to say that to an individual I paid you for 12 months and claim to have played a role - what did you do with the money? If you are not following up in terms of how you used that money, it becomes a pointless and fruitless exercise."

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Sourcing the views of the youth is considered critical in that "*people know what they want, and they want [something] that is sustainable in terms of employment, [as] they talk about skills development, upskilling and then from upskilling then creating employment and then that is sustainable in a sense that the skills that they attain will continuously them.*'

The emphasis on sustainability does not diminish the deep appreciation of the SEF intervention that alleviated unemployment. However, coalition members were unequivocal about sustainability as the foundation of a more lasting solution.

That it is known that the intervention was short-termed (ends in March 2023) was a source of scepticism among members and hence the suggestion that local organisations participating in the SEF programme must start thinking about ways to accommodate some of the participants as per their capacity and need: "*So we don't expect this to go on after that. But we should try to, as this Consortium organisation, do something to continue with at least some of the participants or at least a large part of them in, maybe, in similar jobs [and] try and somehow get funding for that.*".

There is a strong feeling that the organisations must find ways of sustaining the momentum that has been created by this opportunity brought by SEF: "*... in the long-term, we have to try and create some long-term employment full-time long-term employment for people.*" If the opportunity is not maximised by finding creative ways of sustaining the momentum, coalition members are concerned that "*as soon as it comes to an end people will be sitting at home doing nothing as before and they have benefitted nothing.*"

With this concern in mind some proposed a learning and sharing platform to cross-pollinate ideas: "*We are different organisations working with young people, and apart from the fact that they get financial benefits, there are also other areas we are supposed to be learning and sharing with one another in terms of how we are experiencing this.*

The coalition members ceased with the rhetorical question "*what will assist them after the programme so that they can be employable or start their own business?*" The response to that rhetorical question always pointed towards skills development [inclusive of coaching and mentoring] as the core of the proposed sustainability of the programme *[I think that as much as they receive the financial benefit they must also benefit in terms of skills development.]*. Though "*mentoring and skills development is time-consuming on staff, but it can help a lot for sustainability and development.*" This demonstrates that skills development is at the centre of the sustainability proposal.

Related to the skills development proposal is a proposal for financial and investment education that will help young people make sensible and beneficial financial decisions to sustain and grow the income they receive. This could perhaps be in the form of "*some short courses on short skills [10:08] being given to them and some investment opportunities because they're getting paid.*"

So, a financially literate young person is perceived as having the potential to invest income and find ways to extend financial resources to sustain livelihood ["*... we have a problem and the mentality of saying I've got the money and then how do I spend it and what is done left. So, we do not prepare for the given day when your contract ends. So, we're looking into those areas of saying mass unemployment is real, you know, this thing is not a permanent thing you*

need to grow as an individual but how do we then try to sustain the little that you have and how we try to grow as well the little that you have."].

Similarly, practical proposals to inject sustainability into the programme were suggested. Other organisations are leveraging their proximity to an academic institution such as Rhodes University to maximize upskilling and empowerment of the youth, in the form of short courses *[What's nice is that we have also partnered with RUCE - Community Engagement - there are free accredited courses that they do. They will do that during this December because if they don't work in December, they don't get paid."*

The strong sentiment that the participants must sustain their livelihoods and engagement through some form of work beyond the SEF initiative is persistent. Other coalition members understand that the situation is challenging and needs people to think outside of the box. Guided by the question *"What happens after this programme"*- one shared they *"have placed people strategically so that by the time it [SEF initiative] ends there is something that is sustainable that comes out of it because, at the end of March, the SEF stipend comes to an end."* Therefore, putting systems in place to sustain the momentum is important and that includes mentoring and coaching that will enable the absorption of some of the participants ["We are *meeting with some of the beneficiaries over the summer holidays to find out who wants to teach].*

The emphasis on skills development was supported by proposals of practical steps to attain sustainability. The steps could include broader collaborations, financial literacy and investment education, coaching and mentoring, establishing and running co-ops or own business *["... Train them, talk about investment here and there, talk about investing the money by starting your own business or even this collaboration you know some of the people that are within here find a way of grooming [youth] and opening co-ops in terms of these people, partner up with Makana (Municipality) you know - we are in Makana as their problems within the municipality but we've got young people you know we must not be excluded because young people have ideas].*

(ii)   Collaboration

The collaboration of the local NGOs is considered to have broken new ground in tackling local issues. It brings a wealth of experiences, perspectives, resources, learning and sharing to solve common challenges. Collaboration is also conceived broadly to include *"government and private sector work[ing] together to [make accessible] available learner-ships and internships."*

The kind of collaboration that is proposed is an inclusive one where people come together, co-learn, unlearn and co-create solutions. This approach is informed by the realization that people must drive the initiative and *"not always defer solutions to the government."*

The significance of being proactive and collaborating is considered a positive attribute that tends to reward handsomely to achieve common goals. The current SEF programme is considered to have been borne out of the strength of collaboration as "*it is always good when the government meets you halfway through your own initiatives because if these organisations did not collaborate this programme (Coalition against unemployment) could not have taken place."*

The benefit of the collaboration is beyond ensuring that people are employed and providing labour to the coalition members *"but it is also valuable to see that it is actually necessary to cooperate to try and do something with these problems."*

The proximity to an institution of higher learning is considered capital to be leveraged to overcome the fragmentation of efforts to surmount the challenges. There is, therefore, a yearning for more *"more common initiatives."*

To overcome the challenges of skills mismatch and access to opportunities broader collaborations are perceived as critical. *The solution* to the challenge of unemployment and the creation of sustainable livelihoods requires the involvement of *"many people [partners] and also demands a willingness on the part of the youth."* Considering the multi-disciplinarity and trans-disciplinarity of the challenge of unemployment, collaborations are perceived as the *panacea* as *"funders, even government and other financial institutions want people to come together instead of working in silos."*

The coalition members as well as other participants felt that there must be a general skills audit to determine available skills and the shortage thereof. That approach would then allow skills programmes to be aligned to available and needed jobs. Currently, there is a belief that *"government or youth agencies or even organisations that work with young people and … don't even do what we call skills audit to check what skills are available within communities and which training programmes we can introduce to the community to empower young people so that they can be employable or create employment themselves."*

The broad collaboration could include skills and knowledge transfer, collaborative efforts with other organisations such as Setas, Rhodes University, and Eastcape Midlands College and tailor certification to address local skills' needs ["*… why don't we transfer that knowledge? And where possible find other collaborative relationships. Talk to your Setas, how do you talk to Rhodes University, Eastcape Midlands College, how do we talk to local institutions to find out what kind of certification is best suited for the locals?"*

Local economic development was perceived as a strong ingredient for sustainability too. First leveraging the failing infrastructure to revitalize the town could create employment opportunities if funding and investment become available. Secondly extending development to stimulate economic activities in the townships. Thirdly establishing a local employment preference system as "e*mploying locals is even better because you can ask them contextual questions and hold them accountable! Even institutions like Rhodes University must do more in terms of local economic development.* This sentiment is driven by a strong sentiment that most of the jobs in the council go to outsiders aligned with political principals. Political interference through lack of transparency and nepotism is deemed to make opportunities inaccessible to the general public.

3.1.2.2.   Building solidarity for unemployment: Envisioning alternative model for sustainable livelihoods

In this section, the authors present the outcomes of the *expansive learning cycle*. During the *expansive learning cycle*, stakeholders interacted via the change laboratories to question the *status quo* regarding employment and unemployment. They formulate suggestions that re-imagined solutions for the future. The Change Laboratory method provided a co-learning platform where new solutions were co-created.

It is a social learning space where, according to Muro & Jeffrey (2012) different stakeholders "collectively learn about and develop an understanding of each other's interests, concerns, and preferences through dialogue and deliberation." In this case, those interests were reduced to the scourge of unemployment. Reports indicate that 70% of Makhanda youth are unemployed.

The initial phases of the *expansive learning cycle* of the project explored the *status quo* of employment/unemployment by engaging the youth to assess their views. The Change Laboratory methodology provided the platform where the youth, local NGO coalition members, local municipality and other stakeholders interacted and shared their views. This interaction took the form of 3-hour workshops. Two workshops took place. The two workshops were facilitated by researchers from the Environmental Learning Research Centre (ELRC), Rhodes University and coordinated by The Learning Trust (TLT).

Parallel to this process the youth were engaged as research assistants that collected data among their peers (other unemployed youth in the townships). The results of the latter are presented in the previous sections. Those results dovetail with data collected during the Change Laboratory sessions. The unemployed youth highlighted their plight and how they have experienced being unemployed. It was for the first time they found the platform to pour their feelings, questioning the *status quo* and putting forward some suggestions, especially with regards to the management of the situation and putting in place considered policies.

The co-learning and co-creation platform created through the Change Laboratory sessions allowed all stakeholders to assess and analyse the situation (unemployment specifically) as determined by their roles or how it affects them. They then engaged each other towards finding alternatives – that is through dialogue, questioning the situation, re-questioning the situation based on the ongoing debates and revisiting their positions. It allowed them to reflect on their predicament and start challenging the situation and their positions.

The space offered a platform where they could discuss not for the sake of finding consensus but, according to (Engeström & Sannino, 2011) "thirdness" – something new that resonates with all of them. This thirdness bears the hallmark of new vision, new insight or perspective – trying something that has not been tried or tried extensively. It includes innovative ideas for looking at the problem and finding solutions. The resolutions are collective and reflective of a spirit of "we-ness" (collective and collaborative).

In this section, we start by sketching, briefly, the historical context of this challenge. There is a broad acknowledgement that, generally, the Eastern Cape was a melting pot of wars of conquest and subjugation. Employment and unemployment are deeply rooted in that history reflecting the breaking down of indigenous societies and their enslavement into an exploitative relationship with an extractive capitalist system.

a) The historicity of employment-unemployment in Makhanda

The unemployment conundrum in the Eastern Cape is best understood by looking at the history that unfolded here. The broad issues that encapsulate the poverty and underdevelopment of the Eastern Cape are, therefore, located in a sociohistorical context.

The wars of conquest more commonly known as Frontier Wars and subsequent colonial policies provide such socio-historical context. (Peires, 1982) in his book the House of Phalo,

gives a comprehensive history of amaXhosa and how they lived during pre-colonial and colonial times.

He described what he called a crisis – when amaXhosa were dispossessed of their lands and later forced into farm labour and work in industries in the metropoles.

Employment relations in the region are embedded in this history. The black population is largely a reserve of labour to an economic system that was never designed to serve their interest. Those relations have been self-perpetuating till this day. This history has shaped the economic model (neoliberal) that has hardly transformed which largely defined most of the population as labourers serving the economic interests of the former white elite class.

The system was perpetuated through oppressive laws and reinforced by the Bantu education system. The post-94 democratic government has been grappling with the transformation of the whole system. However, all the transformative agendas are structured around the old economic model which has embedded structural issues that tend to go against empowering the majority.

The state of being employed and thus earning a decent livelihood and the state of being unemployed is, therefore, deep-rooted in South Africa's unjust laws of apartheid and the colonial period. The lacklustre performance on the transformation of society by the post-94 government has not alleviated the situation.

Much has been written about apartheid South Africa and its laws such that in this report we will just contextualize its relevance to this report and perhaps how much of that history has an impact on agency – either or both diminishing and enhancing it. The Cultural-Historical Activity Theory provides researchers with a clear understanding of how culture and history impact communities at individual and collective levels as well as learning to adapt their activities around the challenges they face.

b)   The activity of employment in Makhanda

As one of the social partners pointed out the challenge of unemployment reflects badly on governments and the private sector. They are not able to create jobs and that points to serious issues and questions about the capitalist economic model that has been in operation for a long time. In essence, unemployment is not only a specific problem for South Africa but also a global problem. It has been flagged as a serious issue for developing countries decades ago and continues to be to this date.

The resolution of the issue lies in multi-stakeholder engagements (See Figure 14) and the adoption of new policies that focus on sustainable livelihoods. Stakeholders came together to trash out the challenges around the shared object of sustainable livelihoods. Figures 10 – 13 demonstrate sketches of the activity systems that influence unemployment.

Figure 10: Sustainable livelihood champions as an activity system
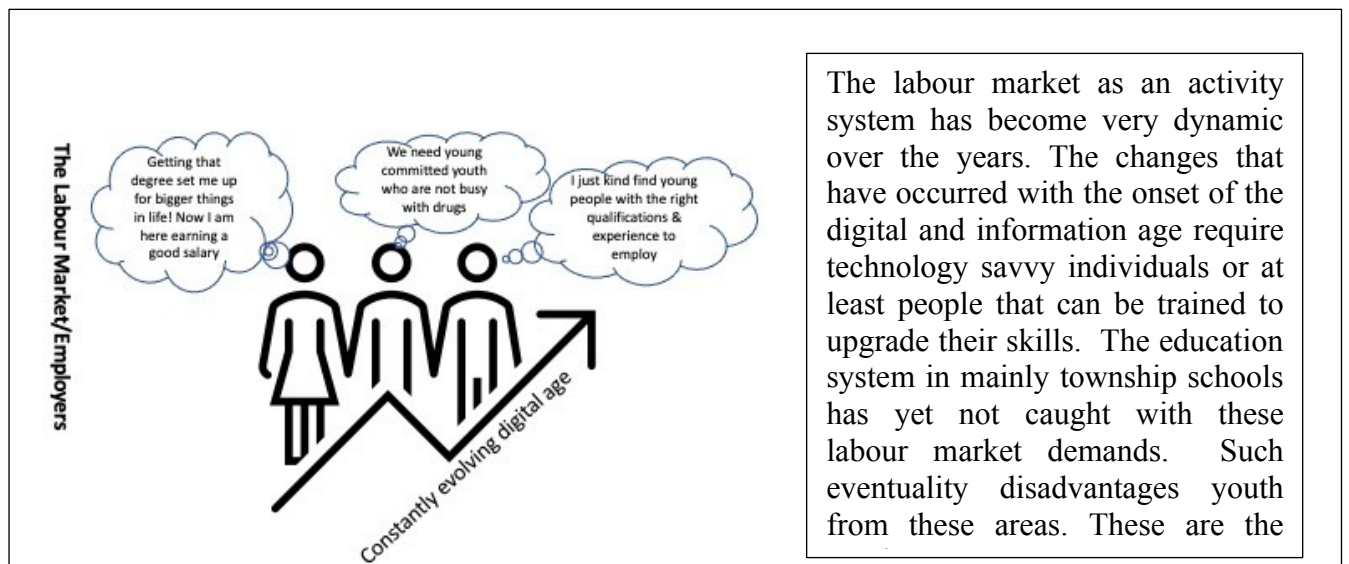
Figure 11: The Labour market activity system

The education system is entrusted with producing well-rounded individuals. These individuals are expected to play a meaning role in the socio-economic development of the country. However, this activity is still characterized largely by inequalities of social, class, geographical and racial nature – reflecting historical past. Those who are mainly from the middle and upper classes and can afford good education for their children, multiply their good chances in life. Whereas the working-class struggles are replicated through poor schools. This is the system that churns out the qualifications.

Figure 12: The education system activity system

Local non-governmental organizations have worked with young people of Makhanda to equip them with skills, workplace experience and after school care such they are better prepared for the work environment. These organizations operate in the townships, and some provide after school tuition.
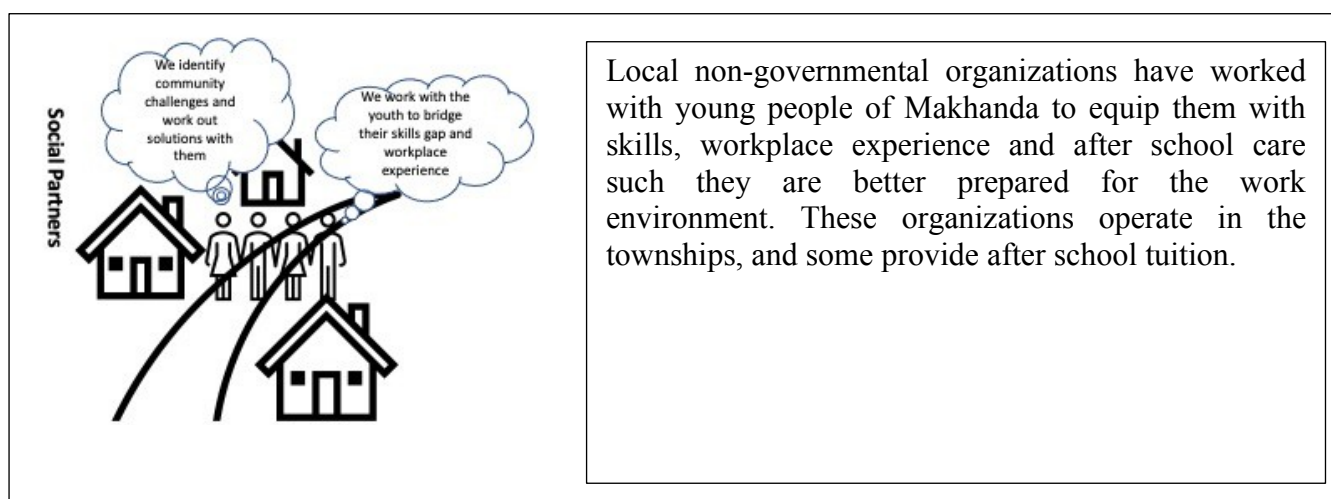
Figure 13: The activities of social partners

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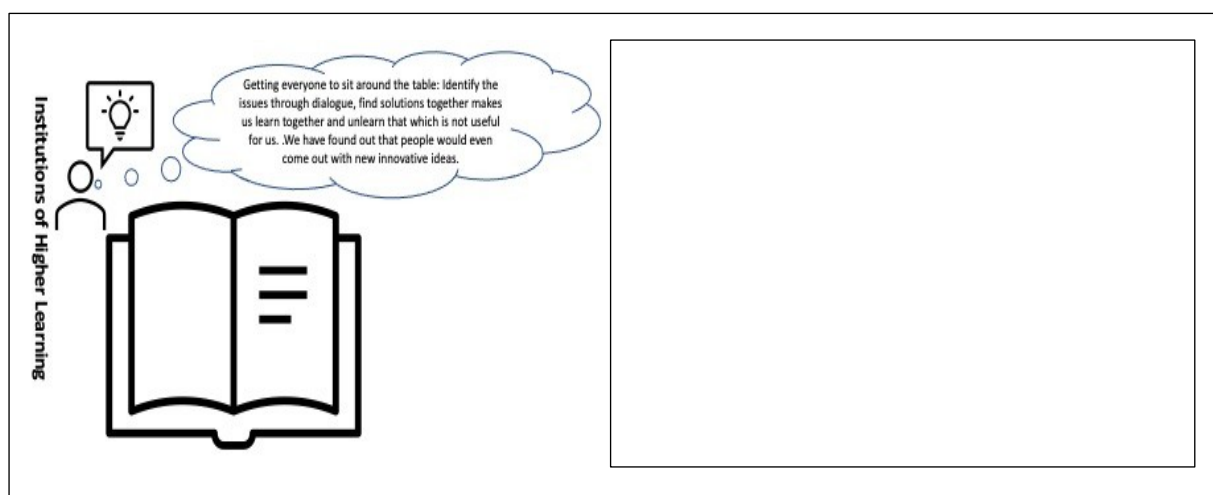
Figure 14: Institutions of higher learning as activity system
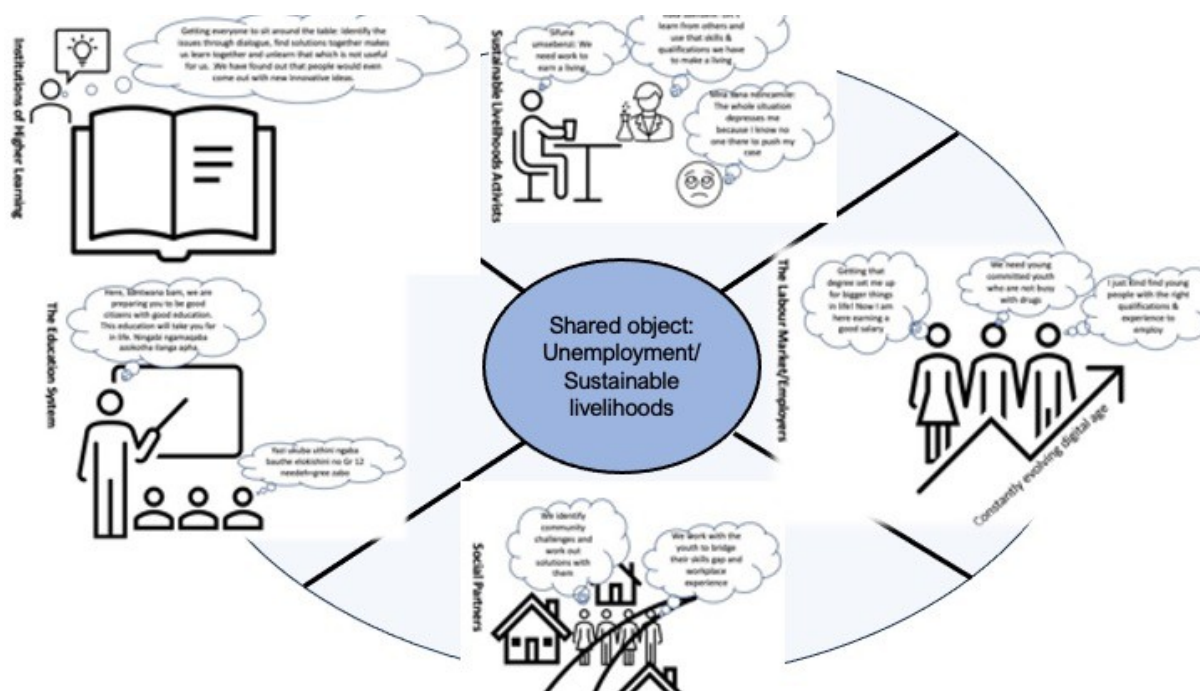
Figure 15: Stakeholders discussing the shared object in a change laboratory session.

Making a livelihood has been largely centred around employment thus making employment a huge part of our lives. Education became a means towards employability. The better the education the better the chances for employment.

The quality of education and social class became another layer that could determine how far a person could go down the road of employability. In the context of South Africa, such dynamics were influenced further by the racist discriminatory policies of apartheid. Africans were the sole reserve for manual labour and their education system was tailored as such.

The historical model of job-seeking or unemployment involved getting some decent education, competing for a job opening through interviews and if successful then gaining employment. Employment became the main source of livelihood. This model influences the

everyday actions of the unemployed as they engage in job-seeking and thus creates a tension which we shall call "the routine expectation of education-employment-retirement. Within the context of a bad economy that has stalled, this model has ceased to work as employment has constantly risen over time.

Tensions within the given model
Advanced economies require different skills that demand technologically savvy individuals. Further tensions exist between the education system – what it offers and what the market (employment) demands. Further tensions are found in the transformation of the education system in the townships, in terms of how well-equipped the teachers are to initiate and sustain meaningful transformation towards today's demands.

Furthermore, there is tension between the stated rules or policies for employment and the actual application of those rules or policies. The youth feel that the rules or policies discriminate against them and that *"employment opportunities must be given to everyone. They should not starve the youth of employment."* The youth also perceive recruitment policies as discriminating against them through gatekeeping, ageism, favouritism, nepotism and corruption.

Such discrimination is informed by different factors such as nepotism, favouritism and corruption. The rules or policies do not speak to the youth's needs as their voices are not often canvassed and heard.

These tensions prevent the youth from accessing employment opportunities. For example, some of the recruitment criteria are perceived by the youth to be discriminating against them as described by one of the young participants in this quotation: *"... Another issue that doesn't sit well with regards to employment opportunities is the need for experience for example if there is an opening [vacancy] and they will require that you must have had two years' experience and grade 12. Say you finished Grade 12 this year where are you going to get the two years of experience they require."*

Social and family pressures also deny access to available opportunities to some of the youth as they tend to value tertiary education more than vocational training (trades). Young people felt that holding a degree has become a standard bearer for job recruitment whereas some of them may not have matriculated or graduated and yet they still could work as unskilled labour *["I also want to earn some money but I can't because some places such as Shoprite, Pick n Pay and Checkers employ people who have grade 12. I`m currently doing grade 12 and computer skills."].*

Skills development is, therefore, valued as a way of upskilling youth to meet the demands of the job market, instead of purely focusing on academic achievements *[" ... Let's look at what skills people have acquired over years and recognize that even if people do not have degrees, they might have the skill to do a certain type of a job so those people must be given the opportunity."].*

There is an entrenched perception that causes tension between education, vocation and skills. There is a general acknowledgement that not everyone will follow the academic route to secure employment and livelihood. Skills development is perceived as the route to close that gap by ensuring that people are skilled for the jobs they take up *[" ... Where someone did not pass grade 12 so that he can go to university, you know, to study towards a particular degree*

or a particular skill to be someone in life there are people who will never be able to go that route. Those people need to be accommodated, people should be given opportunities to pursue what they are passionate about. Other people are not passionate about academia and they are passionate about skills, using their hands, all those opportunities should be given to those individuals."]. This assertion, perhaps, also indicates the difficulty of those who are unskilled to access skills opportunities, perhaps due to the sluggish economy. South Africa enacted a skills development legislation that has been in operation for some years and yet unskilled youth are still yearning for the opportunity.

There is also a tension between economic and employment opportunities that are available and access to skills development opportunities. There is ample evidence that people perceive skills development opportunities as inaccessible. The latter is demonstrated by this comment from one of the participants *"I would encourage the kind of employment that goes with training and skilling people and issuing of certificates that prove that you have been trained for this skill."*

South Africa enacted the Skills Development Act 97 of 1998, nevertheless, young people still speak about skills development as a wish, indicating a schism between its existence or implementation and application or take up. One of the young respondents captures this sentiment as follows: *"... Some job opportunities instead of requiring degrees need people who have skills who can work with their hands. They do acknowledge that other people can work well with their own hands but there's nothing that shows, what they are saying they understand. That is why you have lots of people, especially young people who can do a lot with their hands sitting at home doing nothing."*

Tensions between school curriculum and the economic demands in the digital and information age. Again, participants question the adaptability of township schools to these demands. The incongruency between the education system, the economy and the job market shut down access to available opportunities. As one of the social partners puts it *"schools here in Makhanda should really offer other areas of learning rather than focusing only on academics such as universities. We should have colleges here that offer skills training."* To sustain livelihoods people must be skilled, innovative and adaptive. Such characteristics are believed to be sustainable for survival and probably success in earning a livelihood.

The education curriculum and job market or economic demands incongruency can be overcome through the provision of relevant skills development to upskill the labour force. Social partners believe that, as organisations on the ground working with young people, *"schools should provide skills. The skills that will equip young people to open their businesses. The skills that will assist them to be able to earn money."* Making an example about sewing, the participant elaborated *"I'm thinking of sewing classes, you finish Grade 12 you open a sewing business. Not all of us have the ability to go the academic route."*

Technical and vocational skills are appreciated to contribute to a positive and meaningful life as well as setting the foundation for sustainable livelihoods. Social partners were concerned that the education system doesn't seem to accommodate or promote these skills and is mainly geared towards streamlining every pupil towards academic achievements. To change the situation, as one participant proposed, towards the promotion of vocational skills, *"skills offerings should start at the school level, for example, courses such as agriculture, here in Makhanda. You don't have any schools that provide or offer agricultural courses. This*

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[agriculture or vocational] will enable people, you know, to choose and pursue what they are passionate about.
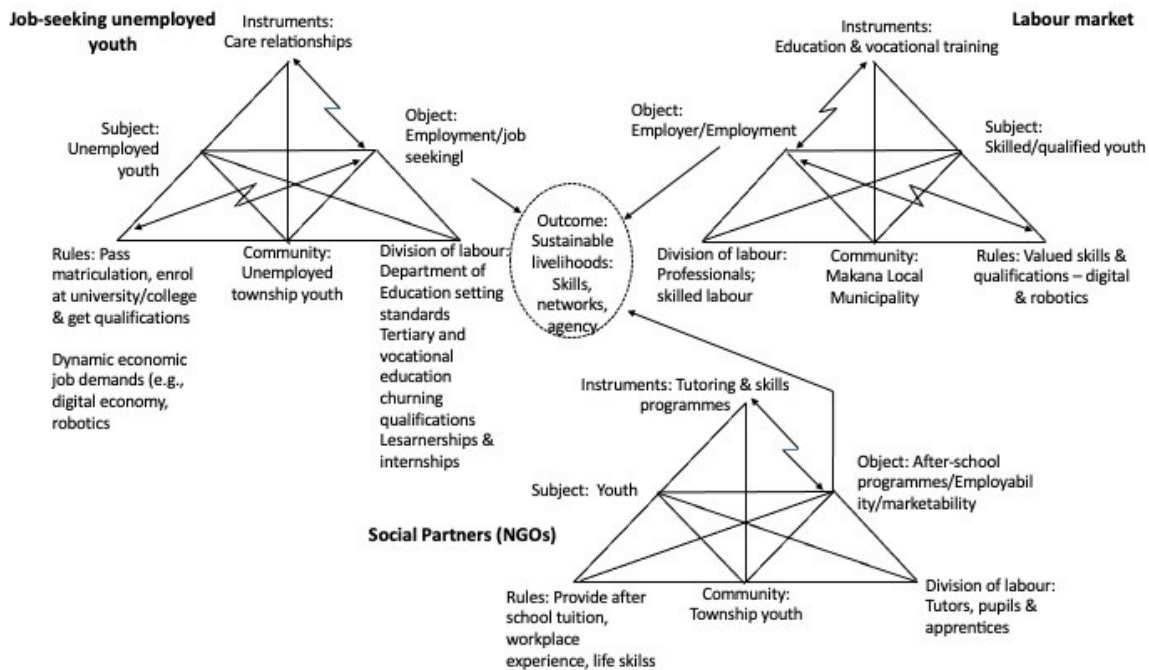
Figure 16: Demonstration of the links and interaction of the activity systems

Once the contradictions or challenges were identified as raised by the participants, the researcher mirrored back the data during the workshops so that it reflected or confirmed the outcome of the dialogical process at that time. It is the resolution of these challenges that the researcher facilitated such that participants came up with novel ways that are not based on pure concessions but new ways or patterns of an activity (Engeström & Sannino, 2011). The research team then presented the challenges in each first half of the workshops, as an introduction. Participants were then allowed to discuss and resolve the contradictions, without focusing on compromising or backing down but rather finding a novel solution. They were then asked to find a way forward or to map out the actions that needed to be taken to resolve the contradictions.

The challenges (contradictions) collated from the workshops and interviews, and their resolutions, including the actions towards the new novel framework, are presented and discussed in the next sections of the report. Direct quotations from the corpus data are cited as supporting evidence of evidence in the analysis and discussions.

4. Cultivating agency and community solidary against unemployment: Towards a model for sustainable livelihoods

The study demonstrated that through local collaborations, young people's livelihood needs could be attended to simultaneously with the provision of skills and earning a livelihood. Some of these key ingredients are discussed below.

4.1. Cultivating agency

Supporting individuals' skills development has proved to enhance their self-confidence. The latter has a ripple effect that stimulates their agency. The local NGOs played a very critical role in supporting young people in this regard.

4.2. Elevating the voices of unemployed youth

The Change Laboratories was a platform where the voices of young people were elevated. Young people not only were heard but were listened to – what mattered to them and what were the real issues behind the ire of being unemployed.

The current mood or state of mind was captured by their exact words. Their mood reflects disappointment, disillusionment, desperation and waning hope. Their sense of worthiness is tested to the limit. The opportunity to participate in a programme that engages them is appreciated and welcomed. It motivated many.

Unemployed youth challenged what they perceived as a lack the transparency and fairness in the recruitment and hiring processes and procedures in the local government sphere. These are cited as barriers to access to the limited opportunities of earning a living. The barriers to access to available opportunities included perceived nepotism, favouritism, political meddling, skills mismatch, lack of access to skills development, internship and learnership opportunities, and many other factors.

The Change Laboratories provided an open platform where these views were exchanged and challenged, and solutions emerged through meaningful engagement. The engagement went beyond seeking compromises, but the best solutions were mutually agreed upon among the stakeholders. It was a stage where the different stakeholders co-learned from the deliberations and co-created solutions.

From the interviews and the Change Laboratory sessions, what became apparent was the requirement that these initiatives must be sustainable and forward-looking.

4.3. The role of collaboration

The SEF programme was underpinned by the collaboration of local NGOs who are well experienced in working with the youth in Makhanda. This collaboration was coordinated by TLT and Awarenet.

The participants and social partners concluded that collaboration with different stakeholders has produced more rewarding outcomes for the youth. Generally, it creates a supporting environment that nurtures the interests of the youth. The co-learning and co-creation of solutions by government institutions, social partners, labour and institutions of higher learning promotes a dialogical space that advances the interests of young people regarding their livelihood concerns. The solutions were multi-dimensional and required collective action support and understanding of the deeply embedded issues that affect youth empowerment.

The collaboration of local NGOs as social partners that address young people's needs was widely applauded. It is perceived to have yielded positive motivation for young people. The collaboration with the SEF fund is regarded as a stimulus that must be viewed as stimulating a positive future for young people. It was emphasized that it must not be viewed as an end on itself.

The collaboration was perceived to be ground-breaking. It broke new ground by collaboratively tackling the stubborn local unemployment issue. The collaboration brought together experience, different perspectives, co-learning and sharing. The collaboration was conceived broadly to give access to existing opportunities that were perceived to be inaccessible. It was considered as *"government and private sector work[ing] together to [make accessible] available learner-ships and internships."*

It is a collaboration centred around the cultivation of *agency* – individually and collectively. It is a collaboration conceived of independence from handouts. The SEF programme was considered to have been borne out of the strength of collaboration as "*it is always good when the government meets you halfway through your own initiatives because if these organisations did not collaborate this programme (coalition against unemployment) could not have taken place.*"

4.4. Sustainability

The main concern of all stakeholders was the sustainability of initiatives that seek to support young people to be independent and able to sustain themselves. Participants were sceptical of short-term initiatives that do not outgrow the project cycle.

It was articulated that such initiatives must go beyond employment and provision of labour. Such initiative must put sustainability as a core value by equipping participants with relevant skills. The proximity to an institution of higher learning was considered capital that was leveraged effectively by the coalition of social partners in Makhanda. It facilitated a co-learning and co-creation space to overcome the fragmentation of efforts to address the challenges of unemployment. The collaboration created more appetite for future collaborations.

Attending to local economic development needs was considered a strong element for the sustainability of future initiatives. For instance, the revitalization of Makhanda's collapsed infrastructure and extending development to upgrade townships could support livelihoods by creating employment. In turn, the economy of the city could be stimulated. These initiatives must be grounded in strong governance, leadership and accountability. Political interference through lack of transparency and nepotism was considered a hindrance to existing opportunities as it made them inaccessible to the public.

5. Modelling sustainable solutions through dialoguing

Stakeholders discussed the challenges in two Change Laboratory sessions. The object of the discussions was the unemployment/employment conundrum among young people.

In the first meeting, the challenges were debated among all stakeholders (See Figure 16). The sustainable livelihood champions, who are unemployed youth led the discussions. They tabled their perspective as young people who are on the receiving end of the lack of a livelihood. Drawing attention to the absence of their voices in the policy-making mechanism, the inaccessibility of perceived opportunities, inaccessible skills development programmes, and the mismatch of skills. Figure 16 summarizes some of the issues that were discussed and prioritized so that they can fit into a doable action plan. These issues are also fully discussed in the previous sections of the report.

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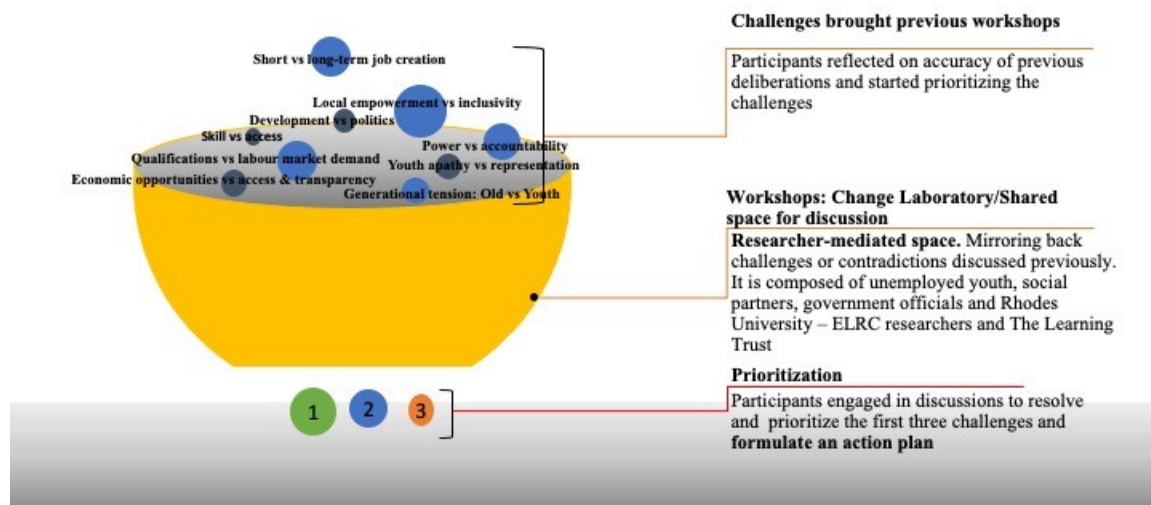
Figure 17: Modelling solutions: Outcome of the first laboratory session

In the last Change Laboratory session, the issues were prioritized and the first three that were reached through "thirdness" became the key focus to feed into the action plan (See Figure 17). The three issues around which the action plan was drawn by stakeholders were:

4. Addressing the issues of skills mismatch as it made job opportunities inaccessible for young people.
5. Local empowerment or economic development. The young people of Makhanda had a strong sense that opportunities existed within the municipality but were not made accessible due to a lack of political leadership, corruption, nepotism, etc. They advocated for more transparent administrative processes.
6. Accountable leadership that listens to the needs of the youth and residents The kind of leadership that monitors and follows progressive programmes. Young people demanded selfless leaders whose heart is the development of young people and their communities.

At the beginning of each session, the collected data on the challenges and solutions was mirrored back to the stakeholders for confirmation. In other words, each session will only proceed if participants confirm that what they articulated has been captured correctly by the researchers.

The stakeholders discussed extensively the action plan which would be shared with all stakeholders. This action plan is presented in Figures 18 – 20. It is a detailed action plan that states the proposed action, processes and the expected outcome.

1 ADDRESS SKILLS MISMATCH	2 LOCAL EMPOWERMENT OR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT: LOCAL IS LEKKER	3 ACCOUNTABLE LEADERSHIP
ACTIONS: • Audit current skills • Employment Agency –analyze the market to identify skills needed • Link people to employment • Job shadowing • Psycho-social support for rejections • Objective & inclusivity for minority groups	**ACTIONS**: • Local preference – up to 80% • Preference for local human capital • Bias towards local procurement • Selection policy • Development characterized by inclusivity, mainstreaming, integration and partnerships • Local economic development • Municipality must create a conducive environment • Outreach programmes • RU, MLM, Private Sector stimulate economic growth • Strategy to stimulate economic activity: Tourism, halfway house for the motor industry	**ACTIONS** • Bottom-up leadership – against lack of consultation • Fight abuse of power • Transparency • Transparent employment processes (apolitical) • Meritocracy to trump nepotism, favouritism, cadre deployment

Figure 18: The three priorities that were identified and their actions.

Key issues	Proposed action	Proposed process	Expected outcome
Address skills mismatch	Audit current skills Link people skills to employment Offer job shadowing Provide psycho-social support for rejections Objective & inclusivity for minority groups Establish an Employment Agency –analyze the market to identify skills needed & create a transparent & fair recruitment environment	• Convene a multi-stakeholder engagement to address skills needs and demands in Makhanda • Establish a multi-stakeholder Sustainable Livelihood Steering Committee to lead and champion the promotion of sustainable livelihoods in Makhanda • Identify resource needs to support the promotion of sustainable livelihoods • Identify partners across all spheres of government and establish private-public partnerships	• Recruitment of competent young people to jobs matching their competency to promote and improve service delivery • Recruitment that is transparent, equitable, fair and credible

Figure 19: Addressing the skills mismatch.

Key issues	Proposed action	Proposed process	Expected outcome
Local economic development and focus on empowerment of local residents	Promote local business – up to 80% must be local	• Convene a participatory engagement with the Executive Council of the Makana Municipality to discuss the outcomes of the workshops • Establish existing interventions by the Municipality and propose a multi-sectoral approach • Propose a Steering Committee responsible for the promotion of sustainable livelihoods and give guidance to sustainable livelihood processes • Collectively identify partners to pull resources together across all spheres of government and private-public partnerships	• Promotion and utilization of local skills and businesses • Leveraging the geographical location of Makhanda (between two metros with thriving motorcar industries) to create value-adding supporting local industries
	Preference for local human capital		
	Establish procurement processes that favour local sourcing		
	Development characterized by inclusivity, mainstreaming, integration and partnerships		
	Develop a strategy to stimulate economic activity: Tourism, halfway house for the motor		
	Makana Municipality must develop a Selection Policy that is biased towards residents		
	Municipality must create a conducive environment		
	RU, MLM, Private Sector stimulate economic growth		
	Outreach programmes		

Figure 20: Addressing issues of local economic development.

Key issues	Proposed action	Proposed process	Expected outcome
Accountable leadership	Entrench bottom-up leadership – against the lack of or poor consultation	• Convene a participatory engagement with the Executive Council and Executive Management of the Makana Municipality to discuss the outcomes of the workshops • Collectively identify processes and appropriate feedback mechanisms to young people on their concerns • Collaborate with the municipality and the Executive Council to establish institutional development space to change the culture towards a people-centred municipality	• Elevated leadership accountability • Use of communication mix to keep residents updated about service delivery in Makhanda • Collaboration with key institution to promote a better life for all citizens and sustainable livelihoods for young people. • Keeping young people of Makhanda engaged and inspired
	Fight abuse of power		
	Promote transparency		
	Establish and support transparent employment processes (apolitical)		
	Promote and support meritocracy to fight nepotism, favouritism, and cadre deployment		

Figure 21: Prioritizing accountable leadership to focus on youth issues.

This project is ongoing and has dealt with some of the expansive learning cycle stages. It has addressed or went through specifically the first three, namely:

1. Need state – that is questioning the status quo of employment and unemployment and focusing on sustainable livelihoods.
2. Analysing the contradictions – the Change Laboratories that offered a dialogical platform around the shared object. Stakeholders discuss the challenges and solutions to those challenges and come up with action plans.

3. Designing a new model and testing it. The discussions by stakeholders led to the prioritization of the key issues. There were key success variables that led to this stage, for example, collaboration, elevating the voices of the youth, etc.

More interactions are expected to move towards the other stages of the expansive learning cycle. It can be argued that the new conceptualized model is at a testing stage as all stakeholders are currently being engaged.
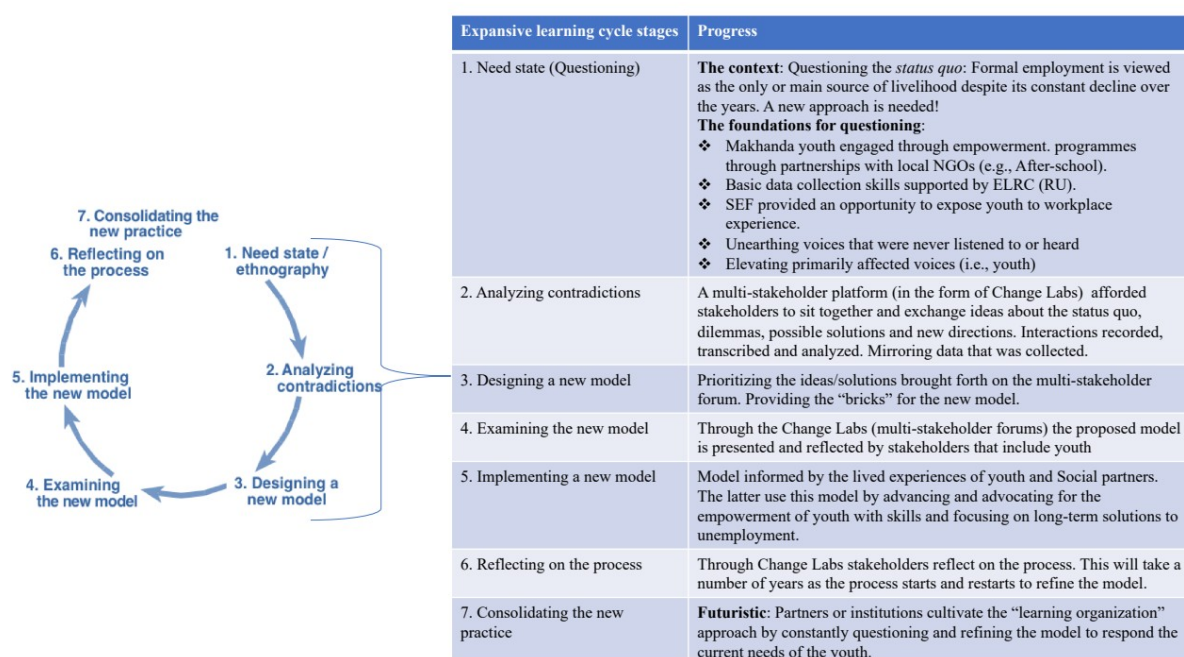

Expansive learning cycle stages	Progress
1. Need state (Questioning)	**The context**: Questioning the *status quo*: Formal employment is viewed as the only or main source of livelihood despite its constant decline over the years. A new approach is needed! **The foundations for questioning**: ❖ Makhanda youth engaged through empowerment. programmes through partnerships with local NGOs (e.g., After-school). ❖ Basic data collection skills supported by ELRC (RU). ❖ SEF provided an opportunity to expose youth to workplace experience. ❖ Unearthing voices that were never listened to or heard ❖ Elevating primarily affected voices (i.e., youth)
2. Analyzing contradictions	A multi-stakeholder platform (in the form of Change Labs) afforded stakeholders to sit together and exchange ideas about the status quo, dilemmas, possible solutions and new directions. Interactions recorded, transcribed and analyzed. Mirroring data that was collected.
3. Designing a new model	Prioritizing the ideas/solutions brought forth on the multi-stakeholder forum. Providing the "bricks" for the new model.
4. Examining the new model	Through the Change Labs (multi-stakeholder forums) the proposed model is presented and reflected by stakeholders that include youth
5. Implementing a new model	Model informed by the lived experiences of youth and Social partners. The latter use this model by advancing and advocating for the empowerment of youth with skills and focusing on long-term solutions to unemployment.
6. Reflecting on the process	Through Change Labs stakeholders reflect on the process. This will take a number of years as the process starts and restarts to refine the model.
7. Consolidating the new practice	**Futuristic**: Partners or institutions cultivate the "learning organization" approach by constantly questioning and refining the model to respond the current needs of the youth.

Figure 22: Reflection on the expansive learning cycle of the project

6.   Conclusions

We concluded that the high level of unemployment among young people in Makhanda requires collaboration from all sectors of society. The Change Laboratories allowed more stakeholders to come on board as the project unfolded. Other stakeholders would need to be pursued, for example, the private sector in Mkahanda. The collaboration among NGOs in Makhanda to focus on sustainable livelihoods has been applauded by all stakeholders. Collaboration is therefore a success factor for sustainable livelihoods.

There is a clear indication that a more sustainable intervention for unemployment is to focus on sustainable livelihoods. Such an approach empowers the individuals and builds their confidence to be self-sufficient. There was a census among participants that short-term employment goals defeat the goal of sustainable livelihoods.

The proposed solutions, we learned, must be modelled around the expressed voices of the youth. New policies must express and accommodate the voices of young people. The cycles of policy formulation must always be embedded in the voices of the youth.

Employment, skills development and business development programmes are acknowledged to exist but are highly inaccessible to young people. Young people therefore found it hard to sustain their livelihoods and access economic opportunities. This has a ripple effect of diminishing their self-confidence.

The multi-stakeholder fora (Change Laboratories) are critical cogs for finding solutions that drive sustainable livelihoods. These are platforms where multi-voices are heard and where the voices of the youth are elevated.

Interventions must be founded on sustainability that focuses on sustainable livelihoods and self-sustenance over the long term instead of short-term projects meant to provide financial reward only. Furthermore, the sustainability component must include a skills development element all the time.

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