

Pic: Elmord Jiyane



Workers campaign to save jobs.

loss in utilities was relatively small, but is representative of a sector that employs under 100 000 workers. Ultimately then, at the sectoral level, the growth data for 1995 to 1999, reveal that the employment losses that occurred were predominantly in the public sector, with all other sectors, barring agriculture, reporting a rise in employment levels.

These results are a manifestation of the new government's intention to reduce inefficiencies within government, reduce

50 000 over the same period – representing a 4,5% decline in employment over the period. The second poorest performers were technicians, whose employment essentially remained constant over the period. In terms of increased labour demand, the largest increases were recorded for professionals (73%) and managers (38%), who together accounted for close to 450 000 new jobs created over this period. Interestingly, the third largest increase was recorded for

the size of the public sector wage bill and finally to drive its restructuring plan around the notion of outsourcing non-core functions at all tiers of government. The result of this extensive and rapid public sector restructuring programme therefore, has been significant employment losses within the sector.

The important point though is to try and determine which occupations within each of these sectors bore the brunt of the overall employment losses, or as the case may be, gained most from intra-sectoral employment growth.

Table 1 reveals that the demand for all occupational groups increased, with the exception of clerks. The number of clerks fell by just over

craft workers, whose employment rose by about 25% since 1995. The employment of sales staff also increased over this period, at an average rate of 17% across all sectors.

Two categories of workers have been omitted from Table 2, namely workers in domestic services and individuals categorised as skilled agricultural workers. The reason is that the numbers presented for these categories are difficult to interpret and deserve special, if not separate, attention. For example, one of the strange things the data reveals is that domestic services gained some 127 000 skilled agricultural employees, while lost close to 770 000 labourers. This is a change that is very hard to explain, and may be purely due to altering definitions of the skilled agricultural worker category from 1995 to 1999.

One of the factors that may have influenced this definitional change could be, for example, the fact that many individuals ostensibly doing domestic work in rural areas, are in fact primarily farmworkers. By the same token, the huge increase in the aggregate demand for this occupation of some 395 000 workers yielding an increase of 344% over the period, is simply too large as to represent a pure employment shift. It may rather be the changing definitions used in the two survey years, combined with the implicitly amorphous nature of the occupation, that has resulted in these numbers.

Given the uncertainty around these figures, it is probably fair to assume that the figures for elementary employees within agriculture, better reflects the changing pattern of farmworker employment. In turn, the change in domestic services employment is probably more accurately reflected by the reduction in employment of elementary employees, rather than the aggregate shift, which reports a rise in domestic service employment.

Conclusion

The data reveals various trends that have emerged in the post-apartheid period. The notion of 'jobless growth' for the South African economy, is clearly erroneous. The important caveat to this reasoning though, is that the labour force has simultaneously grown at a higher rate.

In net terms then, employment expansion has been relatively poor. In addition, it is evident that across the different sectors, semi-skilled and skilled workers are gaining – a fact contrary to the long-run labour demand analysis, which suggested that it was primarily skilled employees who were gaining. Indeed, some of the sectors, such as wholesale and retail trade, revealed a rise in demand for unskilled workers as well. But the data continues to suggest that skilled workers are still undoubtedly gaining more than those below them in the occupational ladder.

The one result that is directly representative of state policy is the process of public sector restructuring. It is the set of initiatives that have characterised this downsizing of the sector, which have resulted in some 145 000 jobs being shed over the five-year period. It is clear then that the key domestic employment shift since 1995, has been the high rate of attrition amongst public sector employees. This would seem to be the dominant trend in explaining a number of the figures observed above. They reveal a public employer attempting to drastically shrink its workforce.

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