

COMMENTS ON THE DRAFT NATIONAL POLICY ON COMMUNITY COLLEGES

(Republic of South Africa.Government Gazette.

Vol. 593, No. 38158. Pretoria, 7 November 2014)

Introduction

The crux of this submission is that the conceptualisation, rationale, principles and language of the draft policy negates its intended purpose, as it is constructed around the logic of the dominant education institutions, structures and modes of separation.

This breaking away from the logic and language of the dominant academic discourse has to be reflected in the name of the ‘institution’. We therefore argue for **Community Education Centres** in place of Community Colleges (Community Education Centres).

We propose that the Community Education Centres

- Should be established as multifaceted and multipurpose community education centres, based on active community engagement, community participation, community control and ownership.
- Should be located within the framework of life-long learning and Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), not only as an access mechanism, but also for redress and transformation.
- Should serve to claim, facilitate and support the recognition, validation (and accreditation) of experiential knowledge and alternative forms of knowledge production, education and education practices and traditions.

This means that the Community Education Centres

- Should not operate as modified versions of the Public Adult Learning Centres (PALCs) or mini\quasi TVETs.
- Should not be constructed to fit in with or along the lines of the current education council whose logic, modes, codes and structures already have several rigid, constraining, exclusive and marginalizing effects that have led to the challenges and problems that the Community Colleges (Community Education Centres) seek to address.

The composition, outlook and practices of governance structures should be informed by community engagement, community ownership, democratic participation and give recognition to appropriate competencies and experiential knowledge.

The composition, outlook and practices of management structures should be based on competency, accountability, and commitment to the values and practices of participatory and democratic community development approaches.

Individuals who are part of governance and management should adhere to social, political, economic, gender and environmental justice.

The staff of the Community Education Centres should be selected on the basis of their competencies, experience and commitment to working with communities and their respect for people.

All staff, management and governance structures should adhere to egalitarian, participatory, collective, and cooperative values.

Section 1: Background and Context

1.1 The draft policy on Community Colleges (Community Education Centres) is still locked only in the human resource logic that perceives the key objective of education as addressing the challenges of poverty, inequality and unemployment through the enhancement of skills and competencies that are concomitant to scientific and technological developments and the demands of the economy and the world of work (Section 1: Article 1.1 – 1.4 and elsewhere in the document).

1.2 This places the burden on Community Colleges (Community Education Centres) to address and resolve problems that are essentially systemic and structural, arising from seismic developments in the political economy of the neoliberal capitalist globalized world. Therefore, such problems should be effectively addressed by a broad agenda of radical transformation of the economy, social policy and the education system.

1.3 Community Colleges (Community Education Centres) are essentially a response to gender, class, racial and other disparities with regard to access to educational opportunities and formal employment., and that their key and central focus and target will be the “adults and young people who are outside the formal economy and formal workplaces, who are not in educational institutions, who have little access to first or second chance learning.” (*Report of the Task Team on Community Colleges (Community Education Centres and Training Centres)*)

1.4 This puts the emphasis on access to formal education and formal employment, which implies that the agenda of the establishment of Community Colleges (Community

- Education Centres) is to deal with the inadequacies, backlogs and deficiencies of the mainstream education.
- 1.5 Despite reference to some programmes that go beyond access to mainstream education and employment, this seems to mainly move in the direction of similar community college policies and programmes in Southern Africa that are not providing community development courses in a broader or emancipatory sense but actually serving to provide the corporates with a reserve army of semi-skilled unemployed workers .
 - 1.6 A case in point is the Community Skills Development Centres (COSDECs) in Namibia, examples of which are referred to substantively in this submission due to similarities between the two countries. The undertones of this draft policy, if left un-amended has the danger of taking the Community Colleges (Community Education Centres) in South Africa down the Namibian route.
 - 1.6.1 The CODESCs declared vision and mission are to “provide focused, practical skills training that incorporates business skills, entrepreneurship, and life skills” and to “relate the training programs to opportunities in the local economy in terms of demand for goods and services.” and to “assist young people find employment in the local economy, either in the formal or informal sector.”
 - 1.6.2 The training provided at the Centres is “competency-based”. In essence COSDEC provide market-oriented training for businesses at the lowest entry points in terms of formal education. Also, the training is of short duration and essentially provides lowly skilled workers with basic marketable skills. In practical terms, such workers are often used for construction projects as they can be paid substantially less than workers who graduate from vocational training centres (VTCs).
 - 1.6.3 VTC students undergo systematic vocational training and are then entitled to better wages and conditions of employment in terms of the gazette minimum wages for the construction industry.
 - 1.6.4 A careful study reveals that COSDECs are not providing community development courses in a broader or emancipatory sense but are wholly oriented towards the labour market in terms of providing skills that might enable participants to find a job or start an SME.
 - 1.6.5 Thus notions of development, economic and social structures are not interrogated but merely accepted as a given. Finding work and making a living is seen as the responsibility of the affected individuals who have to make themselves marketable.
 - 1.6.6 For businesses, COSDEC are a welcome route to find workers with some basic skills without having to provide training themselves.
 - 1.7 If the Community Colleges (Community Education Centres) in South Africa are established primarily as part of an agency towards pursuing the agenda of a developmental state (1.2 of Section 1) rather than part of consolidating the traditions and cultures of popular, liberatory and emancipatory education practices that are not

beholden to the dictates of the state and capital, then they are in danger of going the route of CODSEC and others.

- 1.8 It is therefore necessary to amend the rationale for the establishment of Community Colleges (Community Education Centres) and locate it in the context of strengthening democratic participation, knowledge production and information dissemination processes beyond state machineries, and liberate it from the human capital development paradigm.

We propose that:

- 1.1 Education at the Community Colleges (Community Education Centres) should be based on the vision of a non-alienated life in which education is a key part of the multifaceted processes of life. It should focus on building the competencies, values and practices required to advance collaborative and collective ways of living, active citizenship, activism for social, political, economic, environmental and gender justice. Such education should acknowledge, validate, reaffirm and enhance existing knowledge, resources, structures and leadership within the communities, with skills and competencies for access to employment, further education and participation in the economy being located within this context.
- 1.2 While such education should have the potential to lead to employment or access to established/mainstream education institutions, it should be given recognition and value on its own and based on the imperatives determined by the specificities and particularities of each community and the agenda and pace set by the community itself, without continuing with the arbitrary and artificial formal-informal dichotomy.
- 1.3 Recognition of the experiences and competencies gained from social justice education as well community and labour activism, are as crucial to the functioning of society and to sustainable communities and workplaces as the so-called formal programmes perceived as crucial to gaining employment;
- 1.4 The target of Community Colleges (Community Education Centres) should not be just youths and adults who don't have access to education and employment but to everyone in the community with the view of re-orientating, re-socializing and re-educating them to be part of the agency for liberatory and egalitarian practices;
- 1.5 There should also be programmes that cater for employed people, professionals, public servants, business people with the aim of imparting to them values and competencies that are required for social, political, economic, environmental and gender justice. Such programmes must also be geared to combat many of the ills facing society such as crass materialism, individualism, corruption, maladministration, lack of participatory democracy, and lack of service delivery in both civil and public institutions;
- 1.6 The Community Colleges (Community Education Centres) should be informed by, and anchored in collective and participatory processes and practices of knowledge

production. They should also be geared towards inculcating and entrenching the egalitarian principles of equitable access to information, knowledge, resources, social services and amenities and human dignity. They should engender the culture of sharing, caring and compassion.

- 1.7 There must be a concerted effort to create an articulation between the values and practices that inform the Community Colleges (Community Education Centres) and those values and practices that prevail in the primary and higher education institutions;
- 1.8 To this end a nationally embraced egalitarian value-system centered on the notion of education for transformation, liberation and justice should be developed and adopted as a guideline and code of ethics for both mainstream education institutions and the Community Colleges (Community Education Centres).

SECTION 2: PRINCIPLES UNDERPINNING THE ESTABLISHMENT OF COMMUNITY COLLEGES (COMMUNITY EDUCATION CENTRES)

We propose that

2.1 (a) be replaced with “Expand the **right and access** to resources, competencies and platforms for democratic and egalitarian community-based education, knowledge-production, training and development practices to all.

2.2 Amend (b) to be in line with the spirit of our proposals above (1.1 to 1.8)

SECTION 9: GOVERNANCE

Community Colleges (Community Education Centres) must be governed by the people themselves, drawn predominantly from the communities where they are located:

- The people who are in governance, management, teaching and administrative staff must have a background of community activism, involved in community development programmes and projects, not necessarily academia.
- Leadership structures in the community education centers must be based on a rigorous process of community engagement.
- There must be a collective process of designing programmes.
- The Community College (Community Education Centres) must be freed from the rigidity of formal structures.
- There should not be over reliance on people who are qualified.

- Community Colleges (Community Education Centres) should encourage multiplicity of disciplines and concerns.

3. PROPOSALS

3.1 The Community Education Centres shall have a national umbrella body, the Community Colleges(Community Education Centres) Trust

3.2 The Community Colleges (Community Education Centres) Trust shall be a registered Trust, governed by a Board of Trustees (BOT), with the Minister of Higher Education being the chairman of the board.

3.3. The Board's mandate includes:

3.3.1 Providing guidance to the Community Colleges(Community Education Centres) Forums in terms of their activities and management;

3.3.2 Raising funds, allocating funds to Community Colleges (Community Education Centres) and monitoring Community Colleges (Community Education Centres) expenditures;

3.3.3 Developing, implementing and enforcing training and skill testing standards; and

3.3.4 Receiving and assessing individual requests from other communities for the establishment of new skills training initiatives.

3.3.5 The Community Colleges (Community Education Centres) shall be under democratically elected Board of Trust (BOT) based on nominations from the local community.

3.3.6 The BOTs shall be responsible for the overall management of the Community Colleges (Community Education Centres), including formulating annual work plans, supervising the management and also liaising with the local community.

3.3.7 The BOTs shall report to the Community Colleges (Community Education Centres) on a quarterly and annual basis.

3.3.8 The day-to-day running of a Community College (Community Education Centre) shall be the responsibility of the Head of the Centre or Coordinator, depending on the size of the Centre.

3.3.9 Constitutions of the institutions should enshrine the democratic values of free speech and welcome all opinions.

4 GENERAL COMMENTS

4.1 Definition of ‘the community’:

4.1.2 Given the legacy of apartheid capitalism, resources for the establishment of CECs should prioritise working class communities; with “the community” being defined as either those living in a local area, or as an ‘interest community’ (this would allow some centres to take the form of a workers’, or women’s, or musicians’ etc education centre);

4.1 Purpose:

- 4.1.1 The policy does not display sensitivities to the differences in need and experience between rural and urban environments
- 4.1.2 CECs should primarily provide non-accredited, social purpose forms of education. CECs could offer the NASCA, but formal qualifications on the whole should rather be delivered by TVET colleges and other institutions.
- 4.1.3 CECs should primarily be viewed as a resource – to be used/accessed by a local community. There may be some educators employed by the CEC to run programmes, but it should also offer NGOs and CBOs and other organisations a space where they can access venues, equipment and materials/information (including access to ICTs) to support the running of their own programmes.

5 CURRICULUM

- 5.1 The curriculum offerings of the CEC should be debated and guided by a local governing structure made up of representatives of key organizations in the area/sector, plus individuals elected by the community. Its functioning should also be guided by the principles outlined on p. 2 of this submission.
- 5.2 There should be space for relative curriculum autonomy
- 5.3 The CEC staff themselves (center manager and educators) should have some relative autonomy to shape a curriculum that is pedagogically ‘sound’, participatory and learner centered (something that those sitting on the governing structure might not have the expertise to determine).

6 EDUCATORS

- 6.1 The questions that require attention to is whether the current educators have the values and competencies required to practice a liberatory, emancipatory pedagogy and how they can be retrained and reoriented to have competencies and values concomitant to a progressive, radical emancipatory pedagogy.