Article

Affirmative action and disability in South Africa

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Abstract
Disability is the Cinderella of the historically disadvantaged groups targeted by affirmative action (AA) in South Africa. The Employment Equity Act identifies people with disabilities as one of the targets of the act. Government set the numerical goal as 2 per cent – a goal not yet achieved. Within the achievements so far, the trends noted for the general population of working age hold for the disabled population of working age. Proportionately, more disabled men are employed than disabled women, more disabled white people than disabled black people, and more disabled white men in the more senior positions. The focus of the paper is thus on understanding this lag in achieving the numerical quota and how to move forward.

People with disabilities experience significant disadvantage in the area of employment, which, in turn, has significant repercussions on their psychological, social and economic wellbeing. It is, therefore, important to look further at the barriers that hinder the employment of people with disabilities. These include physical accessibility of the environment and information, transport, attitudes of others (e.g. employers and co-workers) and additional costs of managing one’s disability. The factors such as levels of employment, political will, policies and provision of services (e.g. health, welfare and employment) are those that create more context specific experiences. The lack of skills and basic education were reported by many South African disabled respondents as being a major factor in their status as unemployed. The delivery, nature and structure of the education that one receives is one of the initial formative steps determining one’s socialisation into society. There is a complex interplay between poverty, disability and social assistance programmes which can have a significant impact on the employment of and job seeking by people with disabilities. South Africa is unusual in combining high unemployment rates with good social assistance programmes. There is a strong business, social, psychological and political case in increasing employment of people with disabilities.
The policy of affirmative action is good but we are not meeting the targets. The situation in South Africa is a complex interaction including a number of confounding factors – high unemployment, good social assistance, and people with disabilities with low levels of skills. Pro-active and constructive approaches need to be adopted to ensure that people with disabilities are fully included in the labour market. It is the right and good thing to do, not only for disabled people but for all people.

**Introduction**

Disability is the Cinderella of the historically disadvantaged groups targeted by affirmative action (AA) in South Africa. The Employment Equity Act (EEA) (South Africa 1998) identifies people with disabilities as one of the targets of the act. Government set the numerical goal as 2 per cent – a goal not yet achieved. The Commission on Employment Equity (CEE) estimated that, in the 2007/2008 reporting period, the proportion of the workforce who were disabled was 0.7 per cent overall, with 0.6 per cent for the public sector and 0.7 per cent for the private sector (CEE 2009). This is a mere 35 per cent success rate. This paper reviews issues of relevance to understanding why people with disabilities are part of the target groups for affirmative action, defining the target population who are disabled, and discussing barriers to employment of people with disabilities. The different approaches to increasing the economic participation of disabled people are briefly presented and the paper concludes with the political, business, social and psychological case for employment of disabled people and some thoughts on the way forward.

Within the achievements so far, the trends noted for the general population of working age hold for the disabled population of working age. Proportionately more disabled men are employed than disabled women, more disabled white people than disabled black people, and more disabled white men in the more senior positions. The focus of the paper is on understanding this lag and how to move forward.

**Defining disability**

There is no single definition of disability – definitions vary according to their intended purpose and ability to be operationalised. The United Nations’ Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities defines disabled persons as those ‘who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.’ (UN 2006: Article 1). The purpose of the Convention and, hence, the focus of the definition, is ‘to promote, protect and ensure the full and equal
enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities, and to promote respect for their inherent dignity.’ (UN 2006: Article 1). This definition is reflected in part in the definition of people with disabilities in the EEA (South Africa: chapter one) as ‘people who have a long-term or recurring physical or mental impairment which substantially limits their prospects of entry into, or advancement in, employment’. The crucial part missing in this definition is the UN reference to the ‘interaction with various barriers’ which emphasizes that the disadvantage arising from being disabled is not only a feature of the individual, but, importantly, also a feature of the environment in which the person lives and works. Thus the focus of the EEA definition is the individual.

The importance of recognizing the role of environmental factors is in determining the locus of the problem and hence the focus of intervention. If a wheelchair user is confronted by a workplace that is physically inaccessible, the barriers to employment have little to do with the person’s impairment (e.g. spinal cord injury), and much to do with the problem in the physical environment – the locus of the problem is the physical environment and, hence, the focus of the intervention is the environment. No amount of rehabilitation of the individual will change that person’s ability to go upstairs. In terms of employment, much of what needs to be addressed to increase the employment of people with disabilities is the accessibility of the physical environment, provision of reasonable accommodation and the attitudinal environment of the workplace. Vocational rehabilitation is traditionally seen as the remedy to increasing the employment of people with disabilities. This can be useful but tends to be limited to preparing the person as far as possible before employment rather than supporting the person into and during employment.

Definitions are closely related to the measures used to determine disability status and labour market participation. These identify a common measure of disability and then use that measure on surveys such as labour force surveys, censuses and general household surveys (Hernández-Licona 2005, M Schneider et al 2009, M Schneider 2009, Washington Group 2008). They will start providing accurate data for country comparisons. The broader the definition the less the gap in employment rates for people with disabilities compared to the non-disabled population (Hernández-Licona 2005) as these broad definitions are generally very inclusive. The stricter the definition (e.g. only including people with severe impairments and activity limitations as in the current EEA definition given above) the more the
disadvantage of being disabled is shown in the statistics on labour market participation.

Disability and employment
A major and consistent disadvantage experienced by people with disabilities in both the developed and developing world is a high level of underemployment, unemployment or economic inactivity compared to the non-disabled population as shown by a few examples in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Labour market participation by disabled and non-disabled working age populations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Employed Disabled people</th>
<th>Employed Non-disabled people</th>
<th>Unemployed Disabled people</th>
<th>Unemployed Non-disabled people</th>
<th>Economically inactive Disabled people</th>
<th>Economically inactive Non-disabled people</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>South Africa 2001 (StatsSA 2005)</td>
<td>18.6%</td>
<td>34.6%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Africa 1998 (Schneider et al 1999)</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US (Schur 2002)</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK (Goodley no date)</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>16.1%</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK 2005 (Shima et al, 2008)</td>
<td>±35%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>±4%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>±61%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In general, people with disabilities earn less than non-disabled people. Schur (2002) estimates that, in the USA, they earn up to 10 – 25 per cent less than non-disabled people with similar demographic characteristics. Low levels of employment lead to low levels of household income with all associated difficulties. These factors combine with low education levels to perpetuate social isolation (Schur 2002). In South Africa, as in some other developing countries, lower levels of employment are also evident. In the national survey of disability of 1998 (Schneider et al 1999) and the Census of 2001 (StatsSA 2005) disabled people are less employed and more likely to be economically inactive. Disabled people are also more likely to have no education than their non-disabled peers (StatsSA 2005).
Social isolation is reflected in lower levels of membership by people with disabilities in civil society and recreational organizations such as religious, sports, cultural, political and other similar groups (Schneider et al 1999, Schur 2002). Related to this social isolation and poorer socio-economic conditions, people with disabilities tend to report lower life satisfaction (Louis and Associates 2000, cited in Schur 2002).

A review of factors that are significantly associated with employment rates for the general population (disabled and non-disabled) in the United Kingdom suggests that the most important ones are age, sex, and whether a person is living in an area with few job opportunities. Within the disabled population, specifically, disability type and severity are more important than any other demographic characteristics (Berthoud 2006). Education and living in a prosperous area are, however, important in determining employment for people with severe disability. A person with low education and living in a poor area is much less likely to be employed if they also have a severe disability compared to a non-disabled person in a rich one (Berthoud 2006). Similarly, the disability survey in South Africa in 1998 (Schneider et al 1999) concluded that disability seems to be the first criterion implicated in disadvantage, followed only then by the effects of sex and race. The impact of sex and race were found to be similar in the disabled and the non-disabled populations, and continue to be evident in the reports on employment equity in South Africa (Committee EE 2002, 2009).

The above discussion suggests that the situation for people with disabilities is bleak. However, there is some glimmer of hope based on evidence of increasing levels of employment for people with disabilities. In South Africa, the proportion of disabled employees rose from 0.25 per cent in 2002-2003 (CEE 2003) to 0.7 per cent in the 2008/2009 reporting period (CEE, 2009). In the UK public sector, there was a growth of employment of people with disabilities by one third between 1998 and 2004 (Hirst and Thornton 2005) as well as a faster rate of employment growth of disabled than non-disabled employees.

Type and severity of disability is significant in determining employment levels as indicated above. People with mental health problems or learning difficulties (intellectual impairments) are least likely to be employed in the public sector in the UK while people with hearing difficulties and chronic illnesses are most likely to be employed (Hirst et al 2005). These trends are affected to some extent by the nature of the questions asked and should be interpreted with some caution. People with mobility impairments also have
lower rates of employment than those with sensory problems (Hirst et al 2005). Hirst et al (2005) conclude that people with disabilities 50 years or older or from ethnic minorities are the least likely to be employed among the disabled population.

In relation to severity of disability, the trend is for people with mild difficulties to be employed more than those with severe or multiple difficulties (Hernández-Licona 2002, Schneider et al 1999, Schur 2002). This is not unexpected as people with fewer difficulties will require less accommodation within the workplace. However, what this does bring to the fore is the importance of being clear as to who is counted as disabled or not. Including people with mild disabilities in the definition will inflate the employment rate and possibly miss the point of affirmative action.

In South Africa the pattern in the 1998 disability survey indicated that disabled men were more likely to be employed than disabled women, and people in the age range 30 to 49 years were more likely to be employed than younger or older disabled people. People with early onset of their disability (by age of two years) were less likely to be employed (7 per cent employment rate) than those with later onset of disability (19 – 65 years of age) where 17 per cent reported being employed (Schneider et al 1999).

In summary, people with disabilities experience significant disadvantage in the area of employment. This disadvantage has significant repercussions on their psychological, social and economic wellbeing. It is therefore important to look further at the barriers that hinder the employment of people with disabilities.

**Barriers to acquiring and sustaining employment**

The nature of the barriers experienced by people with disabilities all over the world are similar focusing on physical accessibility of the environment and information, transport, attitudes of others (e.g. employers and co-workers) and additional costs of managing one’s disability. The factors such as levels of employment, political will, policies and provision of services (e.g. health, welfare and employment) are those that create more context-specific experiences. This section reports on two studies carried out in South Africa. The first is the 1998 national disability survey already referred to above (Schneider et al 1999), and the second is the study on strategies for skills acquisition and work for people with disabilities undertaken in 2006 by the International Labour Organization (ILO 2006). The national survey was a population-based sample survey of just over 9000 households across the
nine provinces. The ILO study included a survey of 300 purposively selected people with disabilities with half being employed and half unemployed and covering the different types of disabilities.

Lack of skills and basic education were reported by many South African disabled respondents as being a major factors negatively affecting strategies for skills acquisition and employment in South Africa (ILO, 2006). The 1998 survey (Schneider et al, 1999) confirms this with a clear trend of poor transition from primary to high school. While only 5 per cent of disabled respondents reported not attending school in primary school, this increased to 47 per cent reporting being out of school during high school. While a high proportion of respondents were attending primary school, this does not mean they received quality education. In fact, the small number progressing to high school suggests quite the opposite. Respondents were only asked about schooling if they had their disability since childhood. The delivery, nature and structure of the education that one receives is one of the initial formative steps determining one’s socialisation into society. It is widely understood by disabled people’s organizations that the South African government has failed to bring inclusive public education into being. Hence, government’s lack of political will and subsequent failure to implement the Education White Paper 6: Special Needs Education (Department of Education 2001) is the first point at which disabled citizens are disadvantaged.

The issue of poor basic education affects people with early onset of disability predominantly. However, people who grow up in poverty and become disabled in adulthood are also often affected by poor education that compounds the impact of disability. The ILO Study findings suggest that there is a big difference between onset before and after 11 years of age. Of those with later onset (after 11 years of age), 58 per cent were employed compared to 43 per cent employed among those with early onset (before 11 years of age) (ILO 2006).

Lack of awareness on the part of employers was reported as one of the major barriers in the ILO study together with the lack of job opportunities and skills training. This lack of awareness (as reported by disabled respondents) is closely linked to negative attitudes about disabled people’s ability to be as productive as non-disabled workers and the assumptions made about the cost of employing a disabled person. The majority of the ILO study respondents indicated that they earn less than their non-disabled counterparts as expressed by one deaf employed respondent (ILO 2006: 33): ‘Managers in other organizations earn consistently more than I received;
generally people take advantage of Deaf people because they are considered as stupid; the term Deaf and Dumb implies Deaf and Stupid’.

Attitudes at the workplace are a significant barrier to employment. An example of lack of awareness was noted by one respondent who said that he was not given any orientation to his new workplace and had to undertake this in his own time prior to starting his employment. Another respondent had to bring his own computer into work to show how he can use a computer, as his colleagues and employer would not believe that he could work using a computer. Inaccessible workplaces were reported as being a problem primarily by people with physical disabilities. However, on the whole respondents indicated that they were being reasonably accommodated. People with intellectual disability noted in particular the importance of having a job coach or support in the workplace. Those that had this found it useful and instrumental in making their employment enjoyable and manageable (ILO 2006).

Disabled employees in the ILO study reported that employers took advantage of them because they (the employers) think that the disabled person does not understand what is going on as far as the workplace norms, culture and employees’ rights are concerned. Disabled people are also desperate to work for financial, social and psychological reasons and are, therefore, reluctant to rock the boat when employed or accept any job when offered.

Recruitment practices mirror the issues faced when in employment. The barriers include not accessing information (blind people cannot read printed newspapers), not being taught how to apply for advertised positions and how to manage disclosing their disability. The dearth of these taken-for-granted aspects suggest the presence of poor socialisation. If shortlisted, further barriers arise in accessing the workplace and being accommodated during the interview. The ILO study participants reported finding employment largely through social networks and their families. Few reported finding employment through advertisements or recruitment agencies. The social isolation (i.e. limited or no social networks) experienced by many disabled people creates an important barrier to finding employment.

Assistive devices, such as hearing aids, prosthetic legs, wheelchairs and medication, are generally available through the public health system. However, if a disabled employee earns more than a certain amount they are precluded from receiving a Disability Grant (DG) in South Africa and, are not eligible for free or assistive devices at reduced cost. This engenders
additional costs for the person. The provision of reasonable accommodation is the responsibility of the employer. However, there are grey areas where people are provided with employment but who cannot access transport to take up that position. Whose responsibility it is to provide the transport remains a difficult point (Tshabalala, 2008). If transport is not covered by the employer, it becomes another additional cost for the people with disabilities to bear – a cost which is often higher than for non-disabled people.

A number of aspects of reasonable accommodation are not costly or concrete in nature but require flexibility in attitudes and management in the workplace. For example, a person (e.g. with quadriplegia), who needs a lot of time to get up and get ready in the morning could be given a flexible working schedule. This flexibility pays off not only for the disabled person but for other employees with children, sick relatives or who have a chronic illness. The benefits of creating a workplace that is sensitive to individual needs and finds a way to accommodate these goes a long way towards ensuring loyal and productive employees. This is an example of how disabled people are just one of the groups requiring accommodations.

A number of respondents in the ILO study raised the importance of personality and their own approach to meeting challenges in their ability to find and sustain employment. Participants talked about having a positive outlook and, by showing their competence in a positive way, changed people’s attitudes towards their disabled colleague. Being employed also enhanced the disabled person’s own self-esteem and confidence making them able to stand for their rights. Support from families was also seen as an important component of finding and sustaining employment. These are factors common to all people and not just disabled people.

On the other side, people with disabilities experience the perception of others in the workplace as being negative and rejecting, generating a sense of failure and a risk of depression for the disabled employee (DBSA 2005). Thus the role of managers in the workplace in creating an inclusive and accepting environment is very important. Emotional validation for the person with disabilities is not always present. Reasons for this could be a by-product of being an ‘affirmative action appointment’ rather than being appointed purely on merit, and/or negative attitudes and fear towards disability. In summary, there are a number of barriers within the environment and attitudes of others that have an impact on whether people with disabilities find and sustain employment. The presence of a facilitating policy context goes some way to ensuring that their rights are realized in relation to
employment. However, there remains much to be done at the level of implementation.

**Poverty, social assistance and disability**

Poverty and disability are closely linked. Disability engenders poverty as shown above through poor education, additional costs and loss of employment. Poverty engenders disability through poor nutrition, lack of access to health care services leading to mild and curable conditions becoming more severe and permanent. The relationship is complex. The provision of social assistance in the form of cash grants is a way to manage this complex relationship and provide safety nets.

People with disabilities are a significant group of beneficiaries of social security provisions. These take the form of contributory or non-contributory social assistance programmes, and/or tax benefits for the additional costs of disability, (e.g. assistive devices, transport and medical care). The social security system has generally been separate from the employment incentive programmes across countries providing social assistance (the non-contributory pillar of social security). The outcome is that a person is either employed or on disability or illness benefits (J-A Schneider 2009, Shima et al 2008) with very little or easy movement between the two systems. This discourages disabled people from moving off a secure social security benefit to potentially insecure employment.

Historically South Africa has had a strong social assistance programme which is non-contributory (i.e. where benefits are not based on contributions prior to application for assistance). This includes, amongst others, the Disability Grant (DG) for adults who are unable to work or maintain themselves because of disability. The DG was for a long time the only cash benefit available for adults between 18 and 60 years of age. Because of the lack of other broader poverty alleviation mechanisms, coupled with a strongly medical assessment of disability, the DG has become a de facto poverty alleviation and chronic illness grant (Swartz and Schneider 2006). The importance of these developments is that disability has been incorrectly understood as being synonymous with chronic illness. The outcome has been, amongst others, a large increase in DG beneficiaries in the period 2001 – 2004 responding to the increase in people living with HIV/AIDS as well as high unemployment levels. (CASE 2005).

The significance of these developments for affirmative action are multiple. Firstly, the lack of a clear definition of disability as different from chronic
illness has yielded a lack of clarity as to who counts as disabled for employment equity targets. Disability is the consequence of living with a chronic illness or impairment. The chronic illness or impairments, if severe, result in activity limitations. Not all chronic illnesses and impairments give rise to disability.

The tendency could be to include people with chronic illnesses as disabled even if they do not have activity limitations. As shown above, people with mild difficulties are more likely to be employed and require less accommodation. These are also likely to be people who do not experience significant disadvantage in employment but who are counted as part of the ‘disability’ quota. The outcome is that the spirit of affirmative action is not fulfilled even if numerical goals are, highlighting the limitations of focusing only on the numbers and not what lies behind the numbers.

A second feature of the social assistance programme is that it is implemented largely as an independent vertical programme with its own administration. There is little or no cooperation and coordination with employment programmes. If a person loses their DG because of finding employment, it becomes difficult and time-consuming to re-apply for the DG, should the employment opportunity not work out after a few months. There is no smooth transition between work and social assistance. The DG provides a regular dependable income which makes people feel secure and be able to plan from month to month. Employment is often not as secure and hence people are reluctant to come off the DG. In addition, many disabled people find employment in low skilled and low paid jobs (ILO 2006, Schur, 2002, Shima et al, 2008) or as casual labourers. The level of earnings may not always be secure or sufficient. This creates a disincentive to come off the social assistance programmes and be employed. In South Africa the context of high unemployment has meant that finding employment is made very difficult for people with disabilities, especially in rural contexts. People with disabilities are very reluctant to give up their secure disability benefit. People who receive disability benefits usually receive other benefits for free (e.g. Free assistive devices, free health care, subsidized transport, etc.). These benefits are often lost when a person is no longer a beneficiary. These costs however, remain significant. Thus, even if a disabled person is employed at a salary that is higher than the social assistance grant, these additional costs may reduce the actual income to less than when on benefits.

Despite fears of creating dependency on disability benefits (eg J-A Schneider 2009, Schur 2002, Shima et al 2008), it is clear that disability
benefits in the form of cash grants do provide a safety net not only for the disabled person but their whole household (de Koker, de Waal and Vorster 2006). Social assistance grants provides a means to buy food, pay for transport to access health care and other services to buy clothes and wash in order to present oneself for employment, buying newspapers to look for job opportunities, making a phone call to ask about a possible job opportunity and so on.

In Europe there has been an increasing number of beneficiaries (Burns et al 2007, J-A Schneider J-A, Shima et al 2008) to the point where the fiscal strain has led to a number of revisions of these disability and illness benefits. The main revisions clarify and narrow the criteria for eligibility and provide a more multi-layered approach to supporting people with disabilities and people who are ill. These propose a much closer working relationship between the social security system and employment sector.

The aim of these approaches is to ensure integration or re-integration into the labour market rather than receiving long term disability or illness benefits. Some of the approaches include welfare to work (UK) (Goodley 2005) and Individualized Placement and Support (Burns et al 2007). The main foci of these approaches are to ensure a smooth transition between work and social assistance programmes, meeting individual needs, and ensuring that the person is provided with the necessary information to make choices about their employment. In addition, people are not placed and left to their own devices – an ongoing programme of support for the disabled individual and the employer is provided (J-A Schneider 2009). In addition, these approaches require effective collaboration between social development and labour services allowing for smooth transition between work and social assistance. While one of the main purposes of these approaches is to reduce the fiscal load, it remains an approach that is more flexible, tailored to individual needs and includes the individual as part of the decision-making team. J-A Schneider (2009) points out that the role of the professionals as sole assessors and decision makers is reduced restoring the agency of and initiative taking by the disabled individual.

In summary, there is a complex interplay between poverty, disability and social assistance programmes which plays and important role in the employment of and job seeking by people with disabilities. The combination in South Africa of high unemployment, a relatively large DG contribution, vertical administrative programmes and lack of a clear operational definition of who counts as disabled makes for a distinctive response to meeting the
numerical targets for employment of people with disabilities. South Africa is unusual in this regard as it combines high unemployment with good social assistance programmes. Developed countries usually have a good social assistance programme coupled with low unemployment, and developing countries usually have unemployment but no social assistance programmes (Swartz and Schneider 2006).

The business, social, psychological and political case for employment of disabled people

The preceding discussion has highlighted the context and challenges facing people with disabilities in South Africa in relation to employment and, hence, the achievement of the numerical target set out by government. However, there is a strong case for stimulating affirmative action efforts in relation to disabled people and this case can be made at a business/economic, social, psychological and political level.

The business or economic case is based on the following advantages created when people with disabilities are employed as summarized in the Development Bank of Southern Africa’s 2005 report (DBSA 2005):

- Contributing to the economy rather than taking from it.
- Ensuring the use and retention of skilled persons; this is particularly relevant for people who are disabled while in employment.
- Improving the workplace environment with effective management of diversity and sensitisation to and managing of individual needs. The benefits of successful diversity management are flexible practices and employees feeling appreciated.
- Accommodations provided for people with disabilities often assist other employees such as ramps for people with sore backs or knees.
- Employing disabled people attracts disabled people to the business creating new markets.
- Reducing the income gap between disabled and non-disabled sectors of the population.
- Repetitive tasks are often done very well by people with intellectual impairments if provided with the necessary training and support.

The social case for employment of people with disabilities is, firstly, their integration and inclusion in all spheres of society, thus reducing the gap between life satisfaction measures of people with disabilities and non-disabled people (Schur 2002). Schur (2002) goes on to describe how
employment ‘increases civic skills and exposure to political recruitment and has other resource and psychological effects that can increase the likelihood of political participation…[and] may increase life satisfaction through increased resources, decreased isolation, and a greater sense that one is filling a valuable social role.’ Mainstreaming of disability and changing of attitudes by non-disabled people creates a strong disability visibility which in turn makes the inclusion of disabled people more common and ‘normal’. Fears of non-disabled people are reduced by ongoing contact with disabled people.

The psychological case focusses on the development of the individual. Realization of the rights of disabled people means that they should have access to opportunities to develop as large a capability set as possible (Sen 1999). Employment provides a context for practicing a professional role in society, being financially independent, able to provide for one’s household, and developing a sense of being a productive and meaningful role player in society. Employment increases measures of psychological well-being and increases feelings of being useful and needed and decreasing feeling of being ‘downhearted and blue’ (Schur 2002). However, it is true also that potential negative effects of employment on a person’s psychological wellbeing are feelings of failure and rejection within the work context.

An estimate of 6 per cent to and 12 per cent of the adult population in South Africa have a moderate to severe activity limitation (Schneider et al 2009). This number represents a significant sector of the population, whose issues may be transformed from policy intentions to daily practice. The advantage being that government has immediate access to disabled people’s organizations reaching out to this large group. Keeping this significant sector of the country’s population either disaffected or disenchanted affects their own and their families’ view of the country’s political mechanism – the government is seen as being indifferent. Consequently, ignoring them leads to a growing number of unresponsive would-be voters.

The case made for employing disabled people is strong for employers, governments and disabled individuals. The points raised above are, however, largely articulated by disabled people and their organizations. Little information has come from employers themselves on these benefits. There are a few anecdotal examples of good practice from employers, who make a point of employing disabled people, but little is provided in a coherent written format. The reasons for this are not clear. But the anticipated costs (not always real) of employing a disabled person and persistent negative
Strategies for moving forward
Shima et al (2008) divide approaches to employment strategies as being either passive or active. The passive approaches are ones described above where the social assistance programmes and labour market are seen as separate unrelated sectors. The trend in developed countries is one of moving towards more active approaches where the transition from work to benefits and back again is smooth (J-A Schneider 2009; Shima et al 2008; Goodley 2005). This latter approach has arisen in part in response to the need for supported employment programmes to succeed in increasing the employment of disabled people, as well as for economic reasons where the cost of providing disability benefits to an ever growing group of people is proving to be prohibitive. The benefits of such an approach is the element of choice on the part of employees (i.e. being an active agent in their own life) leading to better adherence to and motivation on the programme. The outcomes in terms of long term employment are better (Burns et al 2007) and the multi-sectoral implementation of the programme ensures that there is no ‘double dipping’ by beneficiaries.

Conclusions
Disability is a complex phenomenon requiring management involving disabled people’s organizations, a range of government departments, employer organizations, and trade unions. There is no simple link between disability and employment. Given current world trends of high levels of mechanization and reduction in employment opportunities, implementing affirmative action is not an easy matter. The notion of social development presupposes a comprehensive and multilayered approach to the provision of social security and more broadly, social protection. The aim is to create inclusive policies and programmes by putting in place the prerequisites that allow people with disabilities (and any other sectors of the population) to access equal opportunities. Efforts to manage diversity should become the norm rather than simply meeting specific numerical goals.

The policy of affirmative action is good but we are not meeting the targets in South Africa. Proactive and constructive approaches need to be sought out to ensure that people with disabilities are fully included in the labour market. It is the right and good thing to do not only for disabled people but for all people.
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