

Daily Dispatch

OUR OPINION

Hey, Sadtu, leave those kids alone!

HOW much is a matric certificate worth? For the class of 2010, the answer is probably the value of a Zimbabwean dollar.

At face value it appears to offer some worth, suffixed with all those multiple zeroes. But intrinsically, it's as precious as a peanut.

And it gets even worse if you were a black pupil in Grade 12 this year. That's because the South African Democratic Teachers' Union (Sadtu) in KwaZulu-Natal wants to engineer social equilibrium in such a cock-eyed way that being black with a 2010 matric certificate is a surefire combination to achieve exactly the opposite.

For what this most degenerate of all unions wants is for the Education Department to inflate the scores of black pupils to compensate for the disruptions children had to endure this year.

Let's not forget, pupils were hit with a double whammy mid-year when the month-long Fifa World Cup was followed by weeks of civil unrest, the prime agitator of which, in the latter case, was Sadtu.

So now the union that caused most of the problems in the first place wants a convenient solution to save face.

Sadtu thinks a gentle nudge northwards of black results will fix the damage it has inflicted on the education system in this country. Where is the logic in this absurd idea? Just what is supposed to happen to these artificially elevated children once they leave school?

And hasn't the government banished the selective criteria of race in its transformation of education? Or is this a perverted appropriation of Black Economic Empowerment which has served South Africa so dismally?

Like the stigma of being called a quota player, black pupils from 2010 will always be seen as the charity class if this proposal is entertained, their legacy forever stamped on their matric certificates.

The result will be disastrous, and will only hamper employment equity. For why should a business hire a candidate whose matric certificate may mask that person's actual achievement?

It's grossly unfair on both parties. And Sadtu blithely hopes the market will absorb this anomaly without any ructions.

Furthermore, what of the black pupils who succeeded, without the aid of aggregate manipulation? Will they not suffer by association?

All this does is deflect from the real issue at hand and that is the egregious grip Sadtu has on education. We have seen how detrimental the organisation is to the Eastern Cape. At a time when South Africa desperately needs academic excellence to fuel the market's needs for skill, Sadtu slithers in its own slime.

Surely the time has come for us to shout: "Hey, Sadtu, leave those kids alone."



Tackling old age poverty – why Brazil is racing ahead of SA

BRAZIL is often hailed as Latin America's success story. Looking at the country's track record in taking on the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) certainly lends support to this accolade. Reports indicate the country is well on its way to achieving all eight of the goals (which include targets concerning poverty, child mortality and environmental sustainability), by the 2015 deadline. Meanwhile, South Africa has yet to achieve a single target and can only confidently be said to be on track to meeting five out of the eight goals at this time.

There are no MDG targets specifically aimed at tackling the issue of old age poverty. But findings from a recent study indicate that Brazil may be racing ahead of SA in this respect also. The reasons why, however, are not necessarily straightforward.

According to data collected by a multi-country project involving researchers from universities in SA, Brazil and the UK, the sampled Brazilian pensioners and their households fared better, on average, than the rest of the population between 2002-08. Poverty rates, calculated using household income and consumption data, indicate that Brazil is not just seeing a significant reduction in old age poverty, but could be on track to eliminating it altogether.

Meanwhile, the Eastern and Western Cape pensioners sampled in the study have not experienced the same rise in living standards relative to the South African population as a whole.

This difference cannot simply be attributed to the Brazilian economy's better performance. Firstly, Brazil experienced a similar rate of economic growth to SA between 1993-2008, averaging out

INSIGHT Julia Mase

at an increase in GDP of about three percent a year. Furthermore, even if the Brazilian economy had grown considerably more this could not, in itself, explain why the elderly appeared to fare better than the rest.

Role of contributory pension schemes

When comparing old age poverty in Brazil and SA we must bear in mind the differences in contributory pension coverage. While contributory social insurance pensions reach around 14 million Brazilian elderly people, in SA just a fraction of older citizens are covered by such pensions.

Only five percent of the older South Africans who participated in the Ageing, Wellbeing and Development study were benefiting from some sort of contributory pension in 2008 (slightly less than in 2002) while a little under 70 percent of the older Brazilians were receiving at least some income from a contributory pension scheme (marginally more than in 2002). This can help explain why the Brazilian elderly appear to be faring better than older South Africans but still doesn't account for the significant improvements in Brazil between 2002-08.

Reaping the benefits of social pension 'coverage' and 'value'

Unlike the old age grant in SA, Brazil has two non-contributory pensions, the Previdencia Rural (BR), which is accessible to workers in informal employment in agriculture, fishing, and mining; and the

Beneficio de Prestacao Continuada (BPC), a means-tested grant for older people in very low income households in both urban and rural areas.

These two programmes currently reach somewhere in excess of six million people. In 2002, the BPC pension was still being fully implemented at national level. The value of the BPC pension benefit (which is linked to the Minimum Wage), has also risen well above the rate of inflation in Brazil, around 50 percent in real terms in the 2002-09 period.

Some of the improvements in Brazilian old age poverty rates since 2002 can, therefore, be attributed to greater coverage and increases in value of the old age pensions.

In comparison, SA has seen an increase of about half a million in the number of old age grant beneficiaries between 2002 and 2009, reaching some 2.2 million households, while the value of the benefit has only risen by around 18 percent in real terms in the 2002-08 period.

Differential changes in social pension coverage and value are undoubtedly important in explaining why Brazilian pensioners have seen considerable improvements in their wellbeing while their South African counterparts seemingly have not. However, it is unlikely to be the full story.

A vital role in preventing poverty

So why then do pensioners in Brazil appear to have done so well while pensioners in SA have not? Well, it seems likely that the strong poverty reduction trends seen for the Brazilian population as a whole have reinforced the positive effects of the social pensions through, for example, improvements to employment

and labour earnings. Meanwhile, in SA where we haven't experienced the same high levels of poverty reduction nationally, we have not been able to benefit from this positive reinforcing effect on old age grant payments.

Social pensions are crucial for tackling old age poverty. The results from this study indisputably support the findings from numerous studies before it, that old age social pensions play a vital role in preventing many older South Africans, Brazilians and their families from falling into much deeper poverty than they are currently experiencing. In SA in particular, where a larger proportion of the population is poor regardless of the poverty line imposed, and where the old age grant is often the main source of income for poorer households, the importance of the grant cannot be overemphasised.

Perhaps the main message to be taken away from these findings, however, is that social old age pensions alone are unlikely to ever be enough to tackle old age poverty and eliminate the link between old age and an increased likelihood of being poor. The evidence suggests that a broader, multidimensional anti-poverty effort is essential if we want to see older households getting out and staying out of poverty.

Julia Mase is PhD researcher at Brooks World Poverty Institute, University of Manchester. This article is based on a lecture she delivered at Rhodes University recently. For more information on the Ageing, Wellbeing and Development: A Comparative Study of Brazil and South Africa project see www.sed.manchester.ac.uk/research/ageingandwellbeing or contact the writer at julia.mase@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk



SANDILE MEMELA
His Master's Voice

Breaking with the past

AS THIS year draws to a close it is important to note that it marks the end of the first decade of the 21st Century. What we need to do now is take stock of what we have done and how far we have come in this time.

The number of people who are becoming disillusioned with the concept of freedom as espoused by the former liberation movements seems to be growing. We need to exchange views and critical perspectives on the true meaning of freedom, to redefine it in practical terms, if need be.

And if we want to make headway, we must separate what happened in the last 200 years from what we want to see happen in the next 100 years.

What this new century requires from all of us is to replace rhetoric, slogans and clichés with well thought out practical plans. We need to move away from outdated notions of liberation that tell us we are still oppressed and exploited.

In the new century we have to acknowledge and recognise that we are in charge and, as a result, responsible for what happens to us and what does not.

In the last 10 years I have listened a lot to people talking about what has gone wrong, and most tend to blame

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from leading figures, especially in the black community.

Yet the new situation demands that we come up with substantive answers and reasoning. We are to blame for what has not been corrected and achieved in the first 10 years of this new century.

We need the voices and fresh ideas of young people regarding the issues that confront this very young century. There is a possibility they will not be confronted by the predictable dilemma: whether to blame colonialism and apartheid or to be pragmatic and take responsibility for what should be happening.

Most of us will not be eager to let go of our 'apartheid and colonialism' excuses. However, these are beginning to sound hollow and disingenuous.

We must make up our minds quickly: do we want to be haunted by the past or do we want to move into a new bright future of self-responsibility?

No doubt not everyone will be happy with the notion of a clean break with the past. They will say it is letting whites off the hook too easily and it smacks of bourgeois talk.

Well, we have to decide whether we wanted to hold on to thoughts and ideas that were relevant 200 years ago or do we genuinely want to do the right things that take us forward.

At the end of 2009, nobody will be interested or remember what happened in 1912. It will be a footnote in history. The question will be: what did they do to make the 21st century successful and happy for all people in this part of the world?

We need to garner up the courage to begin to make break with the past.

And we have not done much in the last ten years.

Sandile Memela is a civil servant. He writes in his personal capacity

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WikiLeaks gives public information it has right to know

IVO Vegter's criticism of WikiLeaks (*One day, we'll all hate WikiLeaks*, DD, December 1) refers. Diplomats sometimes lie to each other and hope not to be found out.

More often, they try to tell the truth to governments which then lie to the people who elected the governments who pay the diplomats' salaries. In the case of WikiLeaks' latest tranche of information, for instance, it turns out that American diplomats were apparently secretly supporting organisations which their government declared to be terrorists. It also turns out that American diplomats gave their government information about a military coup which it then pretended not to have because it secretly supported the coup. This is information which the public deserves to have, because it gives them an opportunity to check their government's honesty. The reason why the US government hates WikiLeaks is simply because it is dishonest, particularly in a way which is not only hypocritical (because the US government turns out to publicly pretend to wish one thing, and then actually do the opposite) but also incompetent (because the US government is not actually fooling anybody who doesn't want to be fooled).

What Vegter is saying, truthfully, is that large corporations behave in this regard like the US government. Large corporations lie to the public on a grand scale, just as corruptly and incompetently as the US government. Therefore, if there were an organisation which exposed such corporate corruption (as when, for instance, the lies which Enron had told to their shareholders were exposed when, following that company's bankruptcy, the US Justice Department seized Enron's e-mail records and the company's officers were revealed to have bragged about their criminal activities) large corporations would hate it. What Vegter is saying is that corrupt, criminal corporations should hate WikiLeaks, and therefore such corporations should mobilise against it.

We must all thank Vegter for pointing this out, and also for admitting that he supports corporate corruption and criminal practices. Those of us who are not employed by large corrupt corporations, however,

must hope an organisation like WikiLeaks arises to smoke out corporate crime before it causes too much damage (as Enron did, and as the local endless corporate price-fixing scandals do in South Africa). — **Mathew Blatchford, Alice**

Cheap journalism

THE recent dragging of Khanyi Mbau (pictured below) onto e.tv's *3rd Degree* reminded me of my grandma's saying "When a coward sees a man he can defeat, he becomes hungry for a fight". Why give chase to a lizard when crocodiles are staring at you?

The poor girl was at sixes and sevens trying to explain a lifestyle she barely can afford. Therefore I say to e-tv, if you want to eat a toad, go for a fat and juicy one in the form of Patrice Motsepe of African Rainbow Minerals, or Saki Macozoma of Liberty Group and Standard Bank or Cyril Ramaphosa



Khanyi Mbau

of Shanduka. These individuals do not live on Mars but among the society living in abject poverty. To drag lizards on to the programme in the name of alerting the public to crass materialism is but cheap journalism. — **Kabelo Maduna, Mthatha**

N2: Dangerous potholes

I HAVE to travel the N2 between Mthatha and East London about once a week. This road is notorious due to the dangerous driving (high speed, reckless overtaking) and stray animals. After the rains it is even more dangerous as there are numerous deep potholes for about 80km out of Mthatha. Complaints to the roads agency and the Mthatha KSD municipality fall on deaf ears. I have seen so many people suffering blow-outs and skidding after hitting potholes. I fear being hit. — **David Julies, via e-mail**

I AM pleased Roads and Public Works MEC Pemmy Majodina has been replaced by Thandiswa Marawu. Hopefully we will get better service. Last year I wrote to the Dispatch to warn readers about the dangers of driving to Mazinga Bay as the potholes were so deep a vehicle could be badly damaged.

Just before Easter I again reported the road was worse than ever but nothing has been done despite there being a large hospital 35 kilometres down this road.

I feel desperately sorry for patients transported to the Tafalofefe Hospital over this terrible road, especially when tyres burst after hitting potholes.

Besides this the buses which normally take foreign visitors to Mazinga Bay Hotel are refusing to use the road until it is skimmed properly.

Now it is nearly Christmas again and only a few kilometres have been done by a grader presently working on the road. Surely Public Works could hire a contractor to send out three graders and water carts to get the work done before the holidays? Each team could skim 20km in a short time.

With fewer tourists going to Mazinga Bay the local community will not get much income over the peak season. Hopefully things will change in 2011. — **Name withheld, Eastern Cape**

Drawing daggers

I FIND it strange that this newspaper has allowed itself to be used by Ongkopote JJ Tabane and Phillip Dexter as a tool for their conversation about the Congress of the People which is sinking in deep waters like the Titanic. The Daily Dispatch is not Facebook for Cope.

During our tertiary education, I knew Tabane as a good ANC loving leader and I fail to understand how he could have been misled. We elected him as president of a national religious grouping based on his leadership qualities. I beg the editor not to entertain him and Dexter drawing daggers against each other any further. — **Mbulole Qotoyi, Qebe, Ngcobo**

NOTE TO WRITERS | Please include your name, telephone number and address. Letters should not exceed 200 words. The editor reserves the right to edit or reject letters. Preference will be given to readers writing under their own full names.

FROM OUR FILES

December 2, 1980: Mrs Alice Sutherland narrowly escaped injury when her flat in Russell Square East London, was struck by lightning on Sunday night.

A bolt of lightning burnt its way diagonally through a roof tile, the wooden roof prop and the ceiling, burst through the bedroom wall and blasted plaster, cement and pieces of brick around the room.

Mrs Sutherland, entering her bedroom from the adjoining dressing room, was sprayed with debris and confronted by a "blue-red light and a sulphur burning smell".

December 2, 1960: Reports of extensive police activity on the ground and in the air filtered out of East Pondoland last night. This is despite a complete ban on journalists in the five prohibited areas of Bizana, Flagstaff, Lusikisiki, Tabankulu and Mount Ayliff.

Travellers reported that the situation is extremely tense and it is feared that the original leaders of "The Hill" movement have lost ground to a militant group known as "Ikongo". From early this morning, military Harvard spotter planes circled wide areas of the region, while the vehicular police patrols continued along main and secondary roads.