

Inequality among the informally wage-employed in South Africa – implications for the impact of exogenous shocks on lives and livelihoods

DERICK BLAAUW¹,
DEREK YU², RINIE SCHENCK³

ABSTRACT

South Africa's business cycle saw the end of a 99-month upswing in November 2007. Average real GDP growth was three per cent between 1995 and 2005. However, the formal labour market was unable to absorb the increasing labour supply. Thousands of unemployed men resorted to informal wage employment as day labourers. Day labourers are particularly vulnerable to exogenous shocks such as the COVID 19 pandemic. We critically reflected on and analysed the spatial inequalities in the socio-economic circumstances of day labourers at provincial level and contemplated the impact of exogenous shocks on their lives and livelihoods. We used the only nationally representative database on day labour activities in South Africa as well as the latest available micro-studies. Whilst the empirical findings indicated that gardening, loading and unloading, bricklaying assistance, construction and painting were the most common activities of these day labourers, focusing on provincial differences and inequalities, we found that day labourers in the Western Cape and Gauteng on average enjoyed shorter work hours, shorter tenure as day labourers, but higher wages than those in South Africa's economic weaker provinces. Since 2007, economic shocks and a new wave of migration have led to increased unemployment as well as declining real and reservation wages among day labourers across all provinces in South Africa. The COVID 19 pandemic's long-term implications are not yet clear but there may be a worsening of the livelihood and provincial inequalities of the day labourers. However, the short term implications for day labourers in the whole of South Africa are nothing short of disastrous. As a result of declining demand for their labour because of COVID 19, day labourers face economic hardships and even starvation. Government's relief efforts may not be sufficient in terms of their depth and reach. New countrywide research is urgently required to provide coordinated policy responses to the plight of the informally wage-employed in South Africa.

Keywords: informal economy, casual employment, day labourers,

¹ Professor, School of Economic Sciences, North-West University, Potchefstroom Campus, Fax: +27(0)18 2991398; E-mail: Derick.blaauw@nwu.ac.za

² Professor, Department of Economics, University of the Western Cape, Private Bag X17, Bellville, 7535, South Africa. Phone: +27 (0)21 959 9301. E-mail: dyu@uwc.ac.za

³ Professor, DSI/NRF/CSIR Chair in Waste and Society Department of Social Work, University of the Western Cape, South Africa. E-mail: cschenck@uwc.ac.za

Introduction

November 2007 represented a peak in the business cycle in South Africa, marking the end of a 99-month upswing that is considered to be the longest upward phase of the South African business cycle on record (Venter 2009). This upswing coincided with an average real GDP growth rate of three per cent and one per cent per capita between 1995 and 2005 (Venter 2009). This was also the time of preparation for the FIFA Soccer World Cup of 2010 with the construction of new stadiums, which started in 2006. The South African Government stated that 66 000 new jobs were created in the construction industry as a result (Du Plessis and Venter 2010:12). Yet, the formal labour market was still unable to absorb the constantly increasing supply of labour (Bhorat and Kahn 2018) – with scores of workers seeking employment in the informal economy or the shadows of the formal economy (Sidzatane and Maharaj 2013; Fourie 2018). South Africa's urban informal economy accounts for a significant share of the labour force (Sidzatane and Maharaj 2013). In fact, the broader informal sector provides livelihoods, employment and income for approximately 2.5 million workers and business owners (Fourie 2018).

In the grey area between the formal and informal sector, many unemployed men (and more and more women) try to access informal temporary wage employment by availing themselves as day labourers on the street corners of South Africa's cities and towns. Here, they would wait for any job in the form of construction work, gardening, as well as loading and off-loading of trucks, for example. It was estimated that in 2007/08 at the very least 45 000 to 50 000 day labourers congregated in more than 1 000 places in South Africa, where they hoped to obtain informal temporary employment (Harmse et al. 2009). Day labourers in different provinces often experienced different socio-economic realities in terms of income and work opportunities. Income

earned was low and uncertain with most day labourers unable to meet the basic needs of their dependents without additional income (Blaauw et al. 2006; Harmse et al. 2009). Harmse et al. (2009) also established that the number of day labourers showed definite spatial differences between the nine provinces, with Gauteng and the Western Cape having the highest numbers. These provinces had the lowest unemployment rates and the highest GDP per capita – indicating both internal and external migration of day labourers into provinces where better economic opportunities were seen to exist at the time.

Since the peak in the business cycle in 2007, the South African economy has seen an unfortunate turnaround in her economic fortunes. Events and shocks such as the 2008 global financial crisis, the destruction and looting during the tenure of then President Jacob Zuma, rising debt levels and junk status downgrades by all three leading rating agencies left the economy stagnant and vulnerable to exogenous shocks. Several commentators referred to the country being on the edge of a fiscal cliff – referring to the danger that the South African government might run out of income to cover growing government expenditure (Rossouw et al. 2014:144; Okoye 2019). The COVID 19 pandemic of 2020 is the type of exogenous shock that economists, National Treasury and workers feared. Estimates from Business for South Africa (B4SA) were that a contraction of between eight per cent and ten per cent of GDP was expected in 2020 with as many as a million people losing their jobs (Omarjee 2020). The impact of this will reverberate throughout the economy – including the informal economy as well as those operating on the margins of the formal economy such as day labourers.

Rakabe (2020) makes the important point that activities in the informal sector and informal work, by their very nature, need uninterrupted daily activity to generate an income. Day labourers do not live in a world of legal employment contracts, unemployment insurance and access to savings to mitigate against

unforeseen economic risks. They are extremely vulnerable to work stoppages as they live from hand to mouth.

In an effort to place the impact of the current state of the South African economy on the informally employed day labourers on the research agenda, critical reflection is needed on our present knowledge of this informal labour market in order to appreciate the changing socio-economic dynamics within this sector. Our approach is to use the only available nationally representative database on day labour activities in South Africa to reflect on and analyse the spatial differences in the socio-economic dynamics of day labourers at provincial level at the time of the study. Our focus on the nine provinces is for good reason. In South Africa (as all over the world), the socio-economic circumstances of the population vary spatially, and economic activities tend to be concentrated in a few locations (Harmse 2007). The South African space economy is characterised by an uneven distribution of economic activities (Harmse 2007; Harmse et al. 2009). Levels of socio-economic development vary from very high per capita level in the metropolitan areas to very low levels in the rural areas (Harmse et al. 2009). Participants in informal temporary employment, such as day labourers, can expect to experience these differences in fewer opportunities and lower earnings in rural areas.

Our aim is to explore the socio-economic dynamics and inequality at provincial level within the context of the changes of the last decade. This process will provide us with a snapshot of the day labour phenomenon at the peak of the upswing. This is then compared to the available subsequent micro-studies in specific urban areas – enabling us to comment on the possible impact of the deteriorating macro-economic conditions of the economy on this vulnerable and often marginalised section of South Africa's urban labour force.

The rest of the article is structured as follows. The article commences with a brief discussion of day labour as an informal employment activity to provide context for the research methodology that follows. The data analysis is presented and discussed in view of recent micro-studies and their conclusions. The paper ends with an acknowledgement of limitations and areas for a future research agenda arising from the results.

Day labouring: Perspectives from developed countries, developing countries and South Africa

Day labouring in various forms is a phenomenon that occurs in the Global North and South and in both developed and developing countries. In Japan, pools of day labourers are called *yoseba* (Masami 2000; Harmse et al. 2009). In Brazil, they are called “The people who eat cold food” (Louw 2007: 13). Namibians refer to them as “street unemployed” (Gonzo and Plattner 2003:41). Day labourers are also active in countries such as India (Loop 1996; Singh 2002). In India's urban centres, there are squares where daily-wage job seekers gather in the mornings (Singh 2002). Other countries where this phenomenon has been reported are Egypt, Greece, Hong Kong, United Arab Emirates, Canada, Russia, Kazakhstan and El Salvador (Theodore et al. 2009:423). Fierce competition exists among the day labourers – driving the supply price of their labour power down. They are hired for a day's work or for a few days only (Singh 2002).

From the perspective of developed countries, the literature on day labour in the United States is particularly well developed (Valenzuela et al. 2006; Theodore et al. 2009; Visser et al. 2017). Day labouring in the United States is especially prevalent in the construction industry where many, especially Latin American, immigrants find temporary work (Theodore et al. 2015). Valenzuela et al. (2006) conducted a comprehensive study across the country on day labour in the USA. They found that, on any

given day in 2004, around 117 600 workers either sought day labour jobs or worked as day labourers (Valenzuela et al. 2006: iii). Several later studies that analysed different aspects of the phenomenon in depth were conducted in the USA. Theodore et al. (2009), Visser et al. (2017) and Theodore (2020), for example, looked at the important role of worker centres in improving the labour market conditions of day labourers. Meléndez et al. (2016) had the risk and workplace injuries of day labourers in the USA as the subject of their investigation.

In the context of developing countries, day labour studies are often less formal. Labour unions in Pakistan estimated that around 75% of the country's total 65 million strong labour force is unregistered (Latif 2020). Many of these workers are day labourers who wait on the pavements of the country's cities wondering if the day will be wasted with no one stopping to hire them (Khan 2020). The impact of COVID 19 on Pakistan's labourers is severe. Pakistan's Ministry of Planning estimated that 12.3 million to 18.5 million Pakistanis will lose their jobs. The economy was expected to suffer a loss of 2-2.5 trillion Pakistani rupees (US dollars 12.42-15.52 billion) (Latif 2020). Informal labourers are the worst hit. They are not formally registered and have no social security or legal cover (Latif 2020).

Day labouring is also widespread in Africa. Examples include Egypt, Libya, Algeria, Gabon, Tunisia, Namibia, Lesotho and South Africa (Gonzo and Plattner 2003; Beratto 2018; InfoMigrants 2020). In Tajoura (a suburb of the Libyan capital Tripoli), migrant labourers from countries in sub-Saharan Africa line the sides of the streets, hoping to be hired for the day. Migrant day labourers, with no legal recourse, often report that they are badly treated by their employers (InfoMigrants 2020). Beratto (2018) reports that day labourers in Algeria often find work on construction projects. They can earn around 1500 dinars (12 US

dollars) a day. These men are often immigrants from sub-Saharan Africa with dependents in their home country (Beratto 2018).

Gonzo and Plattner (2003) conducted a study on day labourers in Windhoek, Namibia, reflecting on the low incomes they earn. Gonzo and Plattner (2003: 64) state: *“The financial situation of Namibian 'street unemployed' can best be described as desperate ... Three quarters of the investigated “street unemployed” earn less than N\$30 per job, a shocking result, especially in light of the fact that the majority of the respondents either get only one job per week or nothing at all. In addition, 83% of the respondents declared that they have no other means of income. These income figures are better understood when one considers that Windhoek is one of Africa's most expensive cities and N\$30 per week is by far not enough for food, let alone accommodation and other basic needs”*.

Mosala and Blaauw (2009) conducted a micro study among day labourers in Maseru, Lesotho, during 2008 and found similar fluctuations and uncertainty in the income levels of day labourers there. They earned a median of ZAR 30 during the previous 12 months. The median highest daily wage was ZAR 35. Both of these figures were lower than the median of ZAR 40 minimum daily wage day labourers in Maseru were willing to work for in 2008 (Mosala and Blaauw 2009:4).

In South Africa, research on the day labour phenomenon has also gathered momentum in the last 15 years since Schenck and Louw's (2005) first exploratory study conducted in a suburb in Pretoria. Schenck and Nell (2009) followed this up with another study in Pretoria, in which people's views regarding the activities of day labourers were investigated. They found that there were opposing views as to the desirability of the presence of the day labourers.

Schenck and Louw's (2005) study paved the way for a more complete socio-economic study of the whole of Pretoria (Blaauw et al. 2006). Day labourers in this study were mostly young African men, generally low skilled and often working in harsh conditions. On average, these men were not able to earn enough to support their family and other dependants (Blaauw et al. 2006; Louw 2007). The next phase in the literature was the country-wide study of Blaauw (2010) in collaboration with Prof Rinie Schenck. While confirming and expanding on the results of the work in Pretoria, the study pointed out the presence of mainly Zimbabwean migrants in the South African day labour market, and resulted in a strand in the South African literature focusing on this aspect in particular.

Blaauw et al. (2012; 2017) explored the determinants of the wages of Zimbabwean migrant day labourers. The results showed that Zimbabwean day labourers in the study did not necessarily work for lower wages than their South African counterparts – as was often suggested. Furthermore, Zimbabwean day labourers endured similar experiences as regards vulnerability than other migrants in South Africa.

Theodore et al. (2015) compared the overall day labour market in South Africa and the USA. They emphasised the long-term nature of the day labour market in South Africa. In the USA, the day labour market is often a stepping stone or entry point into the broader labour market for migrant workers. The day labour market in South Africa is much more long term in nature (Theodore et al. 2015). If a worker loses a job in the formal sector and becomes a day labourer, there is very little opportunity of re-joining the ranks of formal employment (Theodore et al. 2015).

Two recent master's degree studies reported on the daily lives and struggles of day labourers in two South African cities. Mapendere (2019) investigated the risks and resilience of day labourers at a

hiring site in Cape Town. Xweso (2019) did the same for East London. Both studies confirm the levels of vulnerability and exposure to economic and other shocks endured by day labourers in the two cities (Mapendere 2019; Xweso 2019). However, the available job opportunities in East London were significantly less frequent than that in Cape Town – accentuating the broader inequalities of the two provincial economies and the resultant inequalities within the day labour market. The provincial differences in the South African day labour market may have marked implications for the levels of vulnerabilities of day labourers and presents an important research gap in our understanding of the impact of exogenous shocks on the lives and livelihoods of day labourers in different provinces.

Reflection on the provincial differences and inequalities in the day labour market is therefore imperative in order to improve our appreciation of the vulnerabilities of day labourers to recent economic shocks in South Africa. With this as aim, the data from the thus far only comprehensive day labour study in South Africa are used as a point of departure for our analysis and reflection. This is then compared to some of the latest available information to bring our reflection to the present. The source of the dataset is discussed in the next section.

Data and methodology

The data used for the empirical analysis come from the only stratified representative countrywide study of day labourers in both rural towns and cities across all nine provinces in South Africa. A multi-phase cross-sectional research design was used for the study. A cross-sectional study looks at the research phenomenon at a particular moment in time, and takes a snapshot of a proportion of individuals in the research population (Alexander et al. 2015). At the time, little was known about the nature of waged labour (including day labour) in the informal

sector (Olofin and Folawewo 2006:180). The use of a thorough multi-phased approach was therefore the appropriate research design. The research design followed the work in the United States by Valenzuela Jr. et al. (2006) in their countrywide study - allowing for important comparisons to be made. The South African countrywide study was executed in three phases.

The first phase, which took place in 2005 and 2006, was used as a reconnaissance phase. The Department of Labour, municipalities, churches and other welfare organisations were contacted in an attempt to obtain an idea as to how many day labourers there were. This effort did not yield much useful information. It was clear that there were no solid data base and structures for the collection and / or administration of information on day labourers. The research team had no option but to travel around South Africa in 2005 and 2006 and physically count the number of day labourers they could find in each of the cities and towns they visited (Blaauw 2010). All cities, larger towns as well as most of the smaller towns were covered during this endeavour to find the best possible census representation of day labourers in South Africa (see Blaauw (2010) for a detailed discussion of the counting procedure and other efforts to achieve reliability). The census effort suggested that at the time between 45 000 and 50 000 day labourers engaged in this activity.

The second phase consisted of the development of the survey instrument (see Blaauw 2010 for an extensive description of the different stages of the development, trialling and finalisation of the questionnaire) and the sampling procedure. The survey instrument used in the United States study was adjusted for use within a South African context. A structured questionnaire with both quantitative and qualitative questions was designed for use in the envisaged South African study (Bless et al. 2013). The capital cities of each province as well as other important rural centres formed part of the sample. The sample was proportionate to the

number of day labourers identified in each city or town in the first phase. In line with the work of Valenzuela Jr. et al. (2006), hiring sites were categorised as small, medium and large. Availability and snowball sampling were the main sampling techniques used to obtain a stratified sample of between five and 10 per cent.

The third phase was the actual fieldwork that commenced with the recruitment and training of fieldworkers. Fieldworkers able to speak the predominant languages (South Africa has 11 official languages) of the particular areas were recruited from universities in the big cities. The interviews took place in the following languages: English (in Gauteng), Afrikaans (in Western and Northern Cape), Sesotho (in the Free State), isiZulu (in Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal), Setswana (in North West province) and isiXhosa (in Eastern Cape). The fieldwork commenced in February 2007 and was completed in November 2008.

The interviews took place in all nine provinces (later in Table 1 it will be shown that the sample size was relatively larger in four provinces – Gauteng, Western Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and Eastern Cape. This was the result of the sample being stratified to be representative of the size of the research population in each province. The sample in each province therefore proportionally reflects the number of day labourers found in each province during the first phase of the study). All appropriate ethical principles were adhered to during the fieldwork. No interview was conducted without informed consent and respondents were able to stop the interview immediately if an employment opportunity presented itself. Ethical clearance for the project was obtained from the University of South Africa. The researchers and fieldworkers were able to complete 3 830 interviews. Questionnaires that were not completed or not properly completed were discarded as part of the data cleaning process. The eventual sample used for analysis was 3 808. This represents approximately 8.5 per cent of the known

research population at the time – enabling statistically meaningful analysis at the 99% confidence interval. This dataset is therefore a reliable departure point for reflection and further analysis.

Results and discussion

Demographic and education profile

Table 1 represents the personal and educational characteristics of the 3 808 day labourers in the national sample in all nine provinces. As expected, Gauteng represented the largest provincial share (25.79%), followed by the Western Cape (16.07%) and KwaZulu-Natal (14.21%), while the Limpopo share was the smallest (3.13%). The sample was male-dominant, as they represented a share of more than 90% in all provinces. Blaauw et al. (2006) found similar results in their 2004 survey in Tshwane. The distribution in that study was 97.5% male and 2.5% female at the time. The unprotected and vulnerable nature of the lives of day labourers can to a large extent explain this trend. The findings of Saunders (2005) on the racial composition of the informal economy in South Africa are also reflected in the racial composition of day labourers in South Africa. As expected, Africans accounted for the greatest racial share, from as low as 60.47% in the Northern Cape to as high as 99.60% in North West. In addition, nearly two-thirds were aged 21 to 35 years at the time of the interview, i.e. they can be classified as youth according to the definition used by the South African government.

With regard to other characteristics, approximately 56% of the day labourers were unmarried, whereas 26% were married. However, the unmarried share was most dominant in KwaZulu-Natal (71.72%), but the lowest in Northern Cape (44.59%). Given the earlier finding that the sample was dominated by Africans, it makes sense to conclude that the majority of the day labourers spoke African languages (86% overall). Furthermore, 85% of the workers in the sample originated from South Africa, whereas

Table 1: Personal and educational characteristics of the day labourer

	WC	EC	NC	FS	KZN	NW	GAU	MPU	LIM	All
Provincial size and share										
Sample size	612	431	296	303	541	248	982	276	119	3 808
%	16.07	11.32	7.77	7.96	14.21	6.51	25.79	7.25	3.13	100.00
Gender										
Male	95.75	94.43	91.89	99.01	93.53	98.79	98.47	94.93	99.16	96.19
Female	4.25	5.57	8.11	0.99	6.47	1.21	1.53	5.07	0.84	3.81
	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00
Race										
African	82.52	93.50	60.47	93.40	96.67	99.60	99.29	97.83	99.16	91.99
Coloured	17.48	5.34	38.85	6.27	1.48	0.00	0.31	0.72	0.84	7.30
Indian	0.00	0.23	0.34	0.33	0.18	0.40	0.31	1.45	0.00	0.32
White	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.74	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.11
Unspecified	0.00	0.93	0.34	0.00	0.92	0.00	0.10	0.00	0.00	0.29
	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00
Age cohort										
<20 years	3.43	1.86	2.36	1.65	5.36	0.40	2.04	1.45	0.84	2.52
21-25 years	16.34	6.26	11.82	16.83	27.17	14.11	25.05	35.87	27.73	20.30
26-30 years	21.90	13.69	14.19	22.44	28.10	21.77	31.36	25.00	26.89	24.11
31-35 years	16.67	19.03	21.96	19.14	18.11	20.16	19.14	13.04	19.33	18.43
36-40 years	17.32	20.19	18.24	14.52	10.91	14.92	11.61	7.25	11.76	14.05
41-50 years	18.46	29.70	18.24	20.79	8.88	20.16	8.66	13.04	9.24	15.44
>50 years	5.89	8.35	11.82	4.29	1.48	8.46	1.83	2.18	4.20	4.68
Unspecified	0.00	0.93	1.35	0.33	0.00	0.00	0.31	2.17	0.00	0.47
	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00
Marital status										
Unmarried	54.41	46.40	44.59	53.14	71.72	52.42	54.79	63.41	65.55	56.07
Married	23.53	25.06	19.93	32.01	16.82	21.37	35.03	20.29	30.25	25.95
Other	22.06	28.54	35.48	14.85	11.46	26.21	10.18	16.30	4.20	17.98
	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00
Home language										
African language	66.51	93.50	55.06	90.76	95.37	97.97	89.30	97.82	99.16	85.92
Afrikaans	18.79	5.34	43.24	8.25	0.00	0.40	0.41	0.72	0.00	7.83
English	7.19	0.23	1.01	0.66	4.25	0.00	2.65	1.45	0.00	2.70
Other/Unspecified	7.52	0.93	0.68	0.33	0.37	1.62	7.64	0.00	0.84	3.55
	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00
Country of origin										
South Africa	84.48	98.61	96.96	97.36	94.09	92.34	60.29	95.65	98.32	84.95
Zimbabwe	11.60	0.23	1.35	0.33	1.11	2.42	27.19	0.72	0.84	9.43
Other	3.91	1.16	1.69	2.31	4.80	5.24	12.52	3.61	0.84	5.61
	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00
Highest educational attainment										
None	8.82	3.02	12.50	6.93	1.66	5.65	3.87	14.49	0.84	5.96
Incomplete primary	22.71	16.94	31.08	21.12	13.86	25.00	15.27	13.77	18.49	18.78
Incomplete secondary	49.67	74.02	46.62	64.03	60.62	56.05	56.52	51.09	73.95	57.93
Matric	17.32	4.64	8.78	7.92	20.89	12.50	18.64	19.20	5.88	14.78

Post-Matric	0.82	0.23	0.00	0.00	2.03	0.40	5.09	0.36	0.84	1.84
Unspecified	0.65	1.16	1.01	0.00	0.92	0.40	0.61	1.09	0.00	0.71
	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00
Province of birth										
WC	22.22	0.00	0.34	0.00	0.74	0.00	0.10	0.36	0.00	22.22
EC	54.41	97.22	3.04	7.59	19.59	4.03	4.89	1.81	3.36	54.41
EC	1.80	0.00	71.28	0.66	0.00	0.40	0.41	0.36	0.00	1.80
FS	0.82	0.46	14.86	82.18	1.48	8.87	3.87	3.99	1.68	0.82
KZN	2.78	0.00	0.68	1.65	70.06	1.61	9.98	5.07	0.84	2.78
NW	0.65	0.00	5.74	0.00	0.00	72.58	3.56	1.45	7.56	0.65
GAU	1.31	0.46	0.34	2.97	0.74	1.61	13.24	3.99	0.00	1.31
MPU	0.16	0.00	0.34	1.65	1.48	0.81	7.33	63.77	0.00	0.16
LIM	0.16	0.00	0.00	0.33	0.00	2.02	15.89	14.86	84.87	0.16
Unspecified	0.16	0.46	0.34	0.33	0.00	0.40	1.02	0.00	0.00	0.16
Not born in RSA	15.52	1.39	3.04	2.64	5.91	7.66	39.71	4.35	1.68	15.52
	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

9.43% came from Zimbabwe. The latter share was particularly higher in Gauteng (27.19%) and the Western Cape (11.60%). It is important to note that this picture seems to be changing radically. Recent case studies by Theodore et al. (2017; 2018) reveal that, in Tshwane, Zimbabwean immigrants made up 50% or more of the day labour population in 2015/16. There is a clear possibility of increased competition and conflict between South African and foreign-born day labourers. The debate in term of the role of migrant workers in the day labour market and broader informal sector in South Africa is therefore intensifying as well. Lastly, the table shows that approximately 85% did not have matric (they did not complete grade 12). In fact, most of the labourers had not completed their secondary school education. Interestingly, the level of schooling of day labourers at the time almost perfectly matched that of the broader informal sector labour force at the time of the study.

It can also be seen from Table 1 that in all provinces, except the Western Cape and Gauteng, the proportion of the day labourers whose current province of residence was the same as their province of birth was most dominant (at least 60%). In the Western Cape, 54.41% of day labourers were originally from the Eastern Cape; in Gauteng, nearly 40% of day labourers were not born in South Africa and approximately 16% came from Limpopo.

This pattern of international and internal migration is a key characteristic of the South African day labour market, with significant changes in the aspects taking place since the survey was completed. These changes present an important backdrop for analysing the impact of possible exogenous shocks on the lives and livelihoods of all day labourers (local and foreign migrants) in South Africa.

Work activities

Table 2 shows the kinds of jobs the day labourers were involved in during the month before being interviewed. Note that they could be involved in more than one type of work during the period. The results from the table show that, in the overall sample, a relatively high proportion of day labourers worked in gardening (63.63%), loading and unloading (51.47%), bricklaying assistance (31.59%), construction (31.20%), digging/shovelling (31.12%) and painter assistance (29.36%).

Table 2: Work activities of day labourers in the past month (%)

	WC	EC	NC	FS	KZN	NW	GAU	MPU	LIM	All
Gardening	60.95	51.97	54.73	63.70	57.30	85.89	68.13	61.96	90.76	63.63
Digging/Shovelling	53.27	17.17	16.55	29.04	11.09	42.74	41.34	25.36	5.04	31.12
Loading and unloading	56.37	51.28	29.05	53.14	45.29	77.42	52.65	34.78	81.51	51.47
Construction	43.14	18.79	17.23	37.95	9.98	38.31	47.76	18.48	6.72	31.20
Bricklaying	15.03	8.12	9.46	4.29	4.81	16.53	4.48	17.03	0.00	8.56
Bricklaying assistant	31.05	30.16	13.51	30.36	24.40	41.53	41.65	26.45	28.57	31.59
Roofing	1.31	1.16	1.69	3.96	0.92	13.31	1.63	4.71	0.84	2.57
Roofing assistant	2.29	2.78	3.04	5.28	1.11	17.74	5.91	10.14	0.84	4.94
Carpentry	3.10	2.55	1.69	3.30	1.85	15.32	1.53	14.49	0.00	3.89
Carpenter assistant	3.59	4.18	4.73	3.63	2.22	23.39	9.78	11.96	3.36	7.04
Painting	16.99	15.08	19.59	17.82	5.73	36.69	14.36	18.48	1.68	15.68
Painter assistant	18.14	28.77	17.57	28.05	22.92	56.45	34.83	32.97	41.18	29.36
Plumbing	3.43	4.41	3.04	4.95	3.14	10.89	3.67	8.70	1.68	4.46
Plumber assistant	4.74	5.80	8.45	6.27	5.36	18.55	8.35	8.70	5.04	7.48
Car wash	10.29	9.98	21.96	8.25	6.65	40.32	14.87	8.33	1.68	13.21
Farming activities	9.15	2.55	22.97	9.90	0.74	28.63	2.65	5.43	0.84	7.41
Electrician	2.45	0.93	2.36	0.33	0.92	7.26	2.75	5.80	0.84	2.47
Electrician assistant	4.25	3.48	3.04	2.31	2.40	12.50	5.80	6.16	5.04	4.75
Domestic work	5.07	4.41	5.41	3.96	5.91	39.92	7.54	11.59	2.52	8.35
Plastering	8.01	6.03	6.42	8.91	9.80	30.65	6.42	7.97	13.45	9.22
Other	9.97	16.47	9.80	23.10	16.82	16.94	10.79	22.46	34.45	15.05
	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00
Mean number of jobs	3.63	2.86	2.72	3.49	2.39	6.71	3.87	3.62	3.26	3.53

In terms of the provincial results, gardening (essentially an unskilled activity) was the most popular activity in all nine provinces (this share was above 50% in all provinces). Next, painting and being a painter's assistant occurred mainly in North West, Gauteng, Mpumalanga and Limpopo. Furthermore, car wash and doing plastering seemed to be popular activities (exceeding 30% in their respective shares) in North West only. In fact, the North West day labourers were involved in a variety of activities as, on average, they were involved in about seven types of work in the month preceding the interview, as shown in the last row of Table 2.

Table 3 shows that, in the overall sample, only approximately 15% claimed they were often hired by the same employers more than three times, with the provincial share exceeding 20% in only four provinces. On the contrary, the 'seldom hired by the same employer' category was most dominant (49.16%); it was extremely high in Limpopo (95.80%) (reflecting the limited number of jobs

available in that province), but was the lowest in the Northern Cape (27.70%).

Table 3: Frequency of being hired more than three times by the same employer (%)

Table 3: Frequency of being hired more than three times by the same employer (%)

	WC	EC	NC	FS	KZN	NW	GAU	MPU	LIM	All
Often	23.04	4.87	20.61	8.91	20.89	6.85	12.53	20.29	0.00	14.68
Sometimes	31.70	29.93	28.72	21.78	17.01	31.45	20.88	18.84	2.52	23.74
Seldom	39.22	46.17	27.70	65.35	45.10	59.27	50.51	55.07	95.80	49.16
Never	4.74	18.10	21.28	2.97	14.42	2.42	13.85	4.35	0.00	10.79
Unspecified	1.31	0.93	1.69	0.99	2.59	0.00	2.24	1.45	1.68	1.63
	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Table 4 shows that approximately 40% of day labourers claimed that job opportunities at their current site were better than expected. However, at provincial level, this proportion was extremely low in Limpopo (6.72%) and the Free State (16.17%) – again reflecting the overall economic performance of the province at the time; this proportion was above 50% only in the Eastern Cape and Gauteng. Table 4 also shows that the 'still hoping/looking for work' was the most dominant reason in the overall sample for staying at the current site (30.26%). This share was the highest in Mpumalanga (60.71%), but lowest in the Northern Cape (6.02%). Interestingly, the 'need to support family/breadwinner' and 'financially struggling' shares were relatively high in North West (31.43% and 33.57%, respectively), compared with other provinces.

Lastly, Table 4 shows the mean and median daily hours for seeking work at the current site. Note that the hours were derived by comparing the time of arrival at the site and time leaving the site. The results indicate that, on average, the sample spent slightly more than seven hours per day looking for work at the site. The provincial mean was the highest in the Eastern Cape (8.15 hours), but the lowest in the Western Cape (5.50 hours).

Employment history

Table 4: Work activities at the current site

	WC	EC	NC	FS	KZN	NW	GAU	MPU	LIM	All
Job opportunities at the current site (%)										
Better than expected	41.01	56.38	34.80	16.17	35.49	40.73	53.36	33.33	6.72	41.05
Worse than expected	42.81	39.21	43.24	74.92	53.97	54.84	39.61	57.25	90.76	49.08
As good as expected	13.56	3.02	12.84	2.64	6.65	1.61	3.97	3.62	1.68	6.12
Unspecified	2.61	1.39	9.12	6.27	3.88	2.82	3.05	5.80	0.84	3.76
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00
Main reason for staying at the current site (%)										
still hoping/looking for work	24.93	42.31	6.02	20.85	30.49	17.86	35.05	60.71	33.64	30.26
No other option / nowhere to go	6.38	8.24	27.71	15.32	7.93	1.43	3.50	0.00	0.00	7.71
Things may improve in future	0.29	2.75	1.20	0.43	0.61	0.00	1.40	0.00	0.00	0.81
Overall still better than previous site	1.16	4.95	4.82	17.87	1.83	0.00	3.04	4.17	0.91	4.28
Need to support family / breadwinner	10.14	8.79	4.82	14.89	16.16	31.43	27.10	6.55	22.73	16.32
Financially struggling (e.g. to move)	3.77	1.65	2.41	4.26	8.54	33.57	2.34	1.79	10.00	6.14
Need money	17.68	2.75	6.02	5.96	1.52	1.43	7.48	7.74	7.27	7.14
Other reasons	10.14	17.58	24.10	16.60	8.54	9.29	8.41	13.10	25.45	12.99
Unspecified	25.51	10.99	22.89	3.83	24.39	5.00	11.68	5.95	0.00	14.37
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00
Usual daily hours looking for work at the current site										
Mean	5.50	8.15	7.58	7.36	7.69	7.46	6.70	7.62	7.54	7.07
Median	5.00	8.50	8.00	8.00	7.50	7.50	6.50	8.00	7.50	7.00

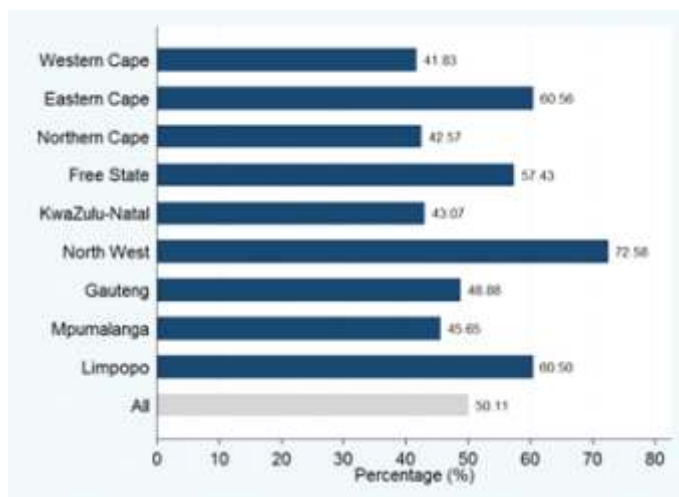
Figure 1 shows that, surprisingly, half of day labourers in the sample claimed they had a full-time job before becoming day labourers. A comparison with available data from comparable studies in Windhoek, Namibia, and the United States reveals similar results. Gonzo and Plattner (2003: 52–53) found that around 61% of the day labourers in Windhoek had some previous formal employment. More than half (57%) of the day labourers in the United States held a permanent job previously. This was mainly in the construction industry, restaurants and the manufacturing industry (Valenzuela Jr. et al. 2006:20).

In South Africa, the share of those who had previous formal employment was the highest in the North West (72.58%), but lowest in the Western Cape (41.83%). The high percentage in the North West Province reflects the declining level of employment in the mining sector. The low percentage in the Western Cape can be

traced back to the impact of internal migration. Many of the day labourers residing in the Western Cape are originally from the Eastern Cape and moved to the Western Cape for precisely this reason, i.e. they were not able to find formal employment in the Eastern Cape. While not shown in the figure, the day labourers in the overall sample had their last full-time jobs for 3.5 years (ranging from as short as 3.32 years in KwaZulu-Natal to as long as 4.45 years in the Northern Cape).

Figure 1: Proportion of day labourers who ever had a full-time job (%)

Table 5 shows the main reason (for those who had ever worked full-time) for leaving their last full-time job. The predominant reason was 'laid off business closed' was the predominant reason, followed by 'laid off business downsizing'. Note that the 'disciplinary reasons' share was particularly higher in Gauteng (26.88%), while the 'quit the job due to medical reasons' was also somewhat higher at about 20% in the Northern Cape and North West. At the time of the survey, 94% of the day labourers were looking for a full-time job (the provincial share exceeded 90% in all provinces, except the Northern Cape at 89.53%). This provides a clear indication that for a day labourer in 2007/08, even at the



peak of the business cycle, informal employment was often hard to find and did not provide the level and certainty of income needed to support their families and other dependants (also see Table 7). A full-time job was still the preferred option – which was obviously extremely difficult to find for these men.

Table 5: Reason for leaving the last full-time job, if ever worked full-time (%)

	WC	EC	NC	FS	KZN	NW	GAU	MPU	LIM	All
Laid off business closed	38.28	24.90	13.49	35.06	22.75	21.67	32.71	34.92	38.89	29.45
Laid off business downsizing	29.69	26.44	22.22	24.14	24.89	15.56	17.08	19.05	18.06	22.01
Laid off business moved	4.69	9.96	6.35	8.62	5.58	7.22	2.71	10.32	4.17	6.08
Disciplinary reasons	11.33	13.03	8.73	12.07	7.73	7.22	26.88	12.70	4.17	14.36
Quit the job - low wage	5.47	8.05	6.35	9.20	7.73	8.89	5.63	7.94	9.72	7.18
Quit the job - medical reasons	4.69	11.11	20.63	4.60	15.88	20.00	6.67	4.76	16.67	10.38
Other/Unspecified	5.86	6.51	22.23	6.32	15.45	19.44	8.34	10.31	8.34	10.54
	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Table 6 shows that, on average, the overall sample had been working as day labourers for slightly more than four years. The provincial mean was the lowest in the Western Cape and Gauteng (3.45 years), but the highest in the Eastern Cape (5.87 years). The median was three years with four respondents indicating that they had been day labourers for more than 40 years.

The difficulty in finding day labour employment and the length of time these men had been day labourers illustrate the inability of the economy and labour market to absorb and allocate surplus labour over a period of 20 years or longer. Arguments regarding the persistence of long term unemployment in South Africa are based on the progressive growth in the labour supply, the change in the nature of the demand for labour and insufficient economic growth in South Africa (Schoeman et al. 2010:1). The debate as to the structural reasons for this situation often reverts to the move to more capital-intensive production methods. This may be ascribed to the friction in the pricing mechanism or more fundamental reasons such as the effect of modern technology, globalisation,

declining levels of tariffs and trade restrictions or even poor labour relations (Schoeman et al. 2010:18–20). While the academic debate is continuing, the day labourers' precarious existence continues unabated.

Table 6: Mean and median years of working as a day labourer

	WC	EC	NC	FS	KZN	NW	GAU	MPU	LIM	All
Mean	3.45	5.87	4.81	4.62	3.95	4.67	3.45	4.56	3.95	4.15
Median	2.25	4.42	3.08	3.00	3.00	2.79	2.50	4.00	2.00	3.00

Income patterns

Table 7 shows that the day labourers in the Western Cape fared the best in both lowest and highest daily wages received in the year before they were interviewed (R150 and R307, respectively, in December 2019 prices), followed by the Gauteng day labourers. Western Cape day labourers came out top in the data regarding the mean weekly total wage earned in a good week and also in a bad week (R1 098 and R960, respectively). Furthermore, the average lowest wage (reservation wage) the day labourers were willing to work for was also the highest in the Western Cape (R263).

Table 7: Mean and median wage levels in different circumstances (Rands, converted to December 2019 prices)

	Lowest daily wage		Best daily wage		Lowest daily wage before willing to work		Good week's wage		Bad week's wage	
	Mean	Median	Mean	Median	Mean	Median	Mean	Median	Mean	Median
WC	150	134	307	288	263	192	1 098	960	462	384
EC	86	77	207	192	186	192	664	576	251	192
NC	88	77	157	134	136	115	478	384	219	192
FS	86	86	161	154	152	144	411	384	190	154
KZN	107	96	267	192	190	192	798	518	324	154
NW	109	96	177	169	173	154	633	432	355	173
GAU	121	96	251	230	205	192	793	768	303	288
MPU	96	77	169	154	207	192	704	768	317	288
LIM	96	96	175	134	190	173	263	192	111	96
All	111	96	230	192	200	192	741	576	313	192

With regard to the results in Table 8, the Eastern Cape was associated with the highest proportion of day labourers claiming their income was better than expected (53.73%), followed by Gauteng (53.13%). This proportion was the lowest in Limpopo (2.52%) and the Free State (16.4%). Surprisingly, despite the result in Table 10 showing that the Western Cape day labourers earned the highest on average, a relatively high 45.42% of them claimed they earned worse than expected.

Table 8: Actual income earned compared with expectations (%)

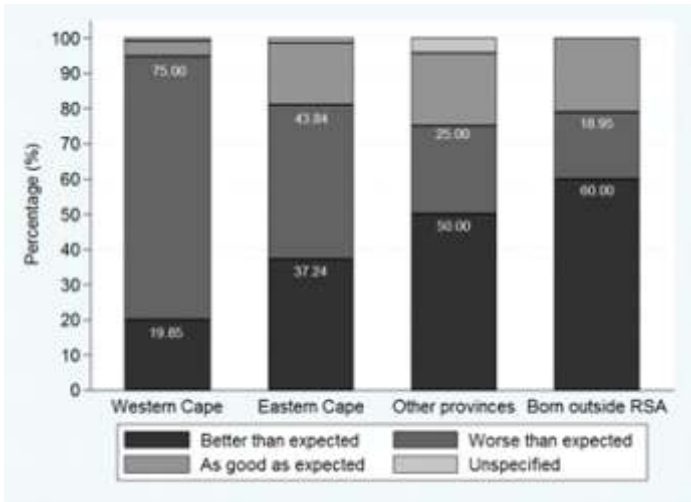
	WC	EC	NC	FS	KZN	NW	GAU	MPU	LIM	All
Better than expected	37.91	53.13	28.72	16.50	26.62	35.89	51.73	32.25	2.52	37.53
Worse than expected	45.42	39.44	61.15	79.87	58.23	58.47	42.16	60.87	95.80	53.23
As good as expected	15.52	4.64	5.07	1.65	7.21	2.42	3.77	3.26	0.84	5.96
Unspecified	1.14	2.78	5.07	1.98	7.95	3.23	2.34	3.62	0.84	3.28
	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

This observation again brings internal migration to the fore. The scores of day labourers who were born in the Eastern Cape and then migrated to the Western Cape in all probability had high hopes of a better life and economic opportunities. Even though the economic outcomes of day labourers were relatively better in the Western Cape, they still may have been disappointed. Conversely, the day labourers in the Eastern Cape who in 2007 felt their income was better than expected were those who chose to stay in the province and may have had very few expectations to begin

with – hence their income (although smaller in comparison) was not as bad as they thought it might turn out. Figure 2 investigates this hypothesis further.

Reporting on the results in the Western Cape in greater detail, Figure 2 shows that the 'better than expected' share was the highest for migrant workers from other countries (60%), followed by those born in provinces other than the Eastern Cape (50%) and Eastern Cape-born day labourers (37.24%). Most of those born in the Eastern Cape, who were now day labourers in the Western Cape, perceived their income to be worse than expected. In addition, it is interesting that the 'worse than expected' share was the greatest (75%) for the Western Cape-born day labourers. This finding may be attributed to the fact that day labourers who were born in the Western Cape also had higher expectations on what they would be able to earn given that they lived in a richer and more developed province. The perceptions of day labourers on their income were also closely linked to overall issues of subjective well-being, which is an important area for further study.

Figure 2: Actual income earned compared with expectations in Western Cape, by province of birth (%)



This snapshot of the South African day labour market as a whole, at the peak of the longest economic upswing, reveals that day labourers were still facing significant uncertainties in their daily lives. Volatile earnings with little certainty left them vulnerable to any exogenous shocks that may threaten their meagre earnings. In South Africa, important socio-economic factors are at play that constantly change the dynamics in the day labour market since the “as good as it can get” time at the business cycle peak.

Trends and exogenous shocks in the South African day labour market since 2007/08 and the resultant implications for day labourers' lives and livelihoods

Macro-economically, the stagnant South African economy for most of the last decade and the decline in the construction industry had a marked influence on the day labour market. This market reflects the implications of these shocks as adjustments in the demand for day labour work. Lower demand for informal workers in the construction industry led to declining employment opportunities for day labourers. At the same time, 2007 heralded significant demographic changes in the South African day labour market as a result of the economic meltdown of Zimbabwe.

The land reforms implemented by the Mugabe government since the late 1990s destroyed the agricultural export sector and led to the large-scale displacement of farm workers in that country (Potts, 2011; Theodore et al. 2018). Politically, turmoil in the form of attacks against the government's critics and political opponents followed. Consequently, a whole new wave of migration to South Africa commenced around 2006 (Makina, 2007; Crush et al., 2012, 2015; Theodore et al., 2018). The outcome was a significant increase in migrants' activities in the informal economy because of the difficulty to enter the formal labour market as a result of a slowing economy and immigration regulations (Theodore et al., 2018). These exogenous events also had major implications for the South African day labour market and the livelihoods of its

participants. Day labourers in all provinces were suffering the consequences of these events.

The first consequence was that the overall share of foreign day labourers in the major urban centres of Gauteng and the Western Cape increased significantly. Comparative data for the city of Tshwane (including Pretoria) is an illustration of this. In 2004, nine out of ten day labourers in Pretoria were born in South Africa. The data from this study showed that by 2007 three out of ten day labourers in Tshwane were from Zimbabwe. In a recent study by Theodore et al. (2018), this figure grew to five out of 10.

The second consequence was a change in the wage gaps between South African and foreign-born day labourers. Extracting the Tshwane data from the countrywide survey of day labourers reported on in this study reveals that day labourers from Zimbabwe in 2007/08 earned less than their South African counterparts. In terms of the lowest daily wage indicator in Table 7, Zimbabweans earned ZAR 102 as opposed to the ZAR 173 of the South African-born day labourers. The same applies to the best daily wage indicated in Table 7, i.e. ZAR 230 versus ZAR 284. These are December 2019 prices and the difference is statistically significant at the 99 and 95 per cent confidence levels, respectively. This gap was not to endure.

Theodore et al.'s (2018) findings for the 2015 day labour market in Tshwane reveal that, with some small statistically insignificant differences, wages for foreign and South African day labourers in Tshwane were approximately equal and had become extremely low. If their findings are expressed in December 2019 prices, day labourers' daily earnings in Tshwane varied from R144 to R180. Increased levels of migration into this market coupled with a weakened economy brought a double whammy in the form of lower real wages and limited opportunities. The dire implications for lives and livelihoods are obvious.

In 2015 day labourers on average were hired just 1.2 times per week. Unemployment rates among the Tshwane day labourers were extraordinarily high in 2015 at a daily unemployment rate of 79.5 per cent (Theodore et al. 2018). The day labour market in Tshwane was not the exception, with day labour markets in Cape Town (Mapendere 2019) and other urban centres also displaying more and more foreign-born participants.

The implications of continuous declining economic activities for the day labourers in the poorer provinces in South Africa are also undeniable. Xweso (2019) did a once-off study among day labourers in East London (Eastern Cape) in 2016 and found that although all of the 131 respondents were born in South Africa, their economic outcomes were equally grim in one of South Africa's poorer provinces. It would seem that the provincial inequality apparent from the results of the 2007/08 study still applies in this province too, with even higher levels of daily unemployment and daily incomes that could be as low as ten rand per hour if and when temporary employment is obtained.

The implications of exogenous shocks on the day labour market in the form of increased competition on the supply side and a lower demand for day labourers will have a devastating effect on day labourers' lives and livelihoods. Reservation wages will be driven even lower as day labourers' desperation to escape the hardships and poverty caused by high unemployment rates, sporadic employment and low income increases. They may be forced to accept employment at extremely low wages out of sheer desperation – making them even more vulnerable to possible exploitation and infringements of their human and worker rights.

As pointed out by Theodore et al. (2017), the increased levels of competition for jobs and housing indicate that the outbreaks of

xenophobic violence targeting migrants living in informal settlements and working in the informal economy is not going to abate any time soon,

Day labourers over the last decade have become more and more vulnerable than ever before to exogenous shocks that may impact on their ability to use day labouring as an employment finding strategy. Any event that prohibits them from searching for temporary employment may be disastrous for their lives and livelihoods. In South Africa, 2020 brought such an exogenous shock in the form of the COVID 19 pandemic.

The most recent exogenous shock – COVID 19 and its implications for day labourers' lives and livelihoods

On 27 March 2020, the South African government announced a national lockdown (i.e. lockdown level five) of 21 days in response to the COVID 19 pandemic. This was subsequently extended by another two weeks and was scheduled to last until 30 April 2020. The lockdown level dropped to four on 1 May 2020, level three on 1 June 2020, level two on 18 August 2020 and finally level one on 21 September 2020. At different lockdown levels, physical distancing as well as restrictions on leisure and social activities were enforced to prevent a resurgence of the virus, with the restrictions being most stringent at level five. In December 2020, concerns were raised about the possibility of a second and third wave of infections with more stringent restrictions (e.g. hours of curfew and the selling of alcohol) being announced for hot spot areas such as the Nelson Mandela Bay Metro in the Eastern Cape province. The first round of vaccines will hopefully arrive in SA in mid-2021.

The impact on the economy is devastating, as the real GDP dropped abruptly by 16.3% between the first and second quarters of 2020 (or an annualised rate of -51%) (Statistics South Africa 2020a). The impact on businesses is immense and even more

severe on the informal economy. The negative impact on the labour market is also huge, as employment declined by 2.2 million between the above-mentioned two quarters. A total of 640 000 jobs were lost in the informal sector (Statistics South Africa 2020b), and the day labour markets were no exception. The full set of long term implications of the COVID pandemic will only be visible in the future as we are still in the midst of the pandemic. In the medium and long term the impact of the pandemic may lead to a worsening of the current livelihoods and provincial inequalities of workers in the day labour market. While this will be established as true or not in the future, the dire short-term implications of COVID 19 for the day labour market are visible (in all nine provinces) on the country's street corners. These are discussed below.

With nobody to hire them, no income is earned by the day labourers. Mutandiro (2020) interviewed six day labourers in Industry Road, in Springs, Gauteng. One said that at the beginning of the lockdown, he and his six fellow day labourers tried to stay at home as indicated, but after a week their food ran out. He used to earn a ZAR 150 per day once or twice a week when hired to do odd jobs. This had now disappeared (Mutandiro, 2020). The implications are dire. Not qualifying for any of the relief schemes set up via e.g. the Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF) for formal workers, day labourers like these will be forced to use up any meagre savings (if they have any) or obtain short-term cash loans from loan sharks at racketeering interest rates that may be as high as 50 or 100 per cent per month. They may be forced to incur debt levels that they may never be able to repay. Dependants, for example children (who previously benefitted from a school feeding schemes), are left in a desperate state of deprivation.

On 21 April 2020, President Cyril Ramaphosa announced a total stimulus package of 500 billion rand in an attempt to mitigate

against economic hardship resulting from the pandemic. Specific measures for the unemployed were announced, such as grants of ZAR350 per month for six months for the unemployed who do not qualify for any other social grant (Ramaphosa, 2020). Commendable though it is, the question remains whether those living on the margins such as day labourers will be able to access these. Literature suggests that social protection systems in southern African countries maintained a citizenship stance (Chereni 2018:55). These measures therefore immediately excluded foreigners who often did not have the required identification to access the relief programme. Recently, Xweso (2019) pointed out that day labourers in East London regarded political interference in the form of favouritism along political party lines and access to information as important factors preventing them from accessing temporary employment programmes such as the extended public works programmes (EPWP) of the local government. Access to information can be critical if most of the relevant information only appears, for example, on websites to which many day labourers do not have to access. The more remote and rural a day labourer's province of residence is, the more of an issue this becomes.

Conclusions and a future research and development agenda

For day labourers in South Africa's nine provinces, 2007/08 was as good as it could get as far as South Africa's macro-economic performance and resultant economic opportunities went. For those seeking temporary employment as day labourers, these opportunities were not spread equally in South Africa's provincial space economy. Results from the only country-wide study among day labourers in South Africa confirm that day labourers in the Western Cape and Gauteng could be considered as the most privileged. On average, they enjoyed shorter daily work hours, shorter tenure as day labourers but higher wages than day labourers in South Africa's weaker economic provinces. Yet, in spite of these relative advantages, even day labourers in the

strongest possible position were still vulnerable, with low and uncertain income levels and the inability to plan ahead in any way as a preparation for any possible future economic shocks.

These shocks have indeed come. The world financial crisis, a decade of looting and mismanagement of the South African economy as well as a third wave of cross-border migration led to a worsening of fortunes in the day labour market in the last decade. The advent of the COVID 19 pandemic created the perfect storm in the day labour market. The full set of long term implications of the COVID pandemic will only be visible in the future as we are still in the midst of it. However, the combined short term implications of these exogenous shocks (exacerbated by COVID 19) are leaving thousands of day labourers facing the real prospect of starvation and in desperate need of assistance. Unemployment in the day labour market is rife and reservation and actual real wages are declining. Day labourers' vulnerability have worsened and their existence together with that of their dependents has become increasingly precarious and perilous. In fact, day labourers are in some ways worse off than the informally self-employed, e.g. waste pickers, who at least have a voice through industry organisations such as PlasticsSA or the South African Waste Pickers Organisation (SAWPA). The dire short-term implications of COVID 19 for the day labour market are visible on the country's street corners daily. Hunger and desperation are common among the scores of day labourers who had no safety net to negotiate the immediate short-term implications of the COVID 19 pandemic – let alone the long-term implications not known currently. The psychological implications for the day labourers themselves can also be severe. Malinga (2015) found that the notion of essentially being unemployed and unable to provide money and food for their families and dependents has an effect on their identity and commitment as breadwinners and caretakers. The implications COVID 19 have for the psychological well-being of these men

thus needs urgent research attention.

The South African government announced measures to mitigate against the socio-economic impact of the pandemic. Relevant to the day labourers are the monthly pay-outs to the unemployed – the first of its kind in South Africa as announced by President Ramaphosa on 21 April 2020. The so-called Covid-19 Social Relief of Distress grant of R350 a month will be paid for six months to individuals who are currently jobless and do not receive any other form of social grant or Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF) payment (Business Insider SA, 2020). Two issues emerge. Firstly, the practicalities of reaching the intended beneficiaries are not yet spelled out and, given that day labourers are often excluded from access to information on issues such as temporary employment programmes (Xweso 2019), the question remains whether all day labourers who urgently need this assistance will be able to get it. Secondly, the monthly payment of R350 is exactly ten per cent of the minimum wage (around ZAR3 500) in South Africa (Business Insider SA 2020) and just more than 60 per cent the amount of money a person needs to stay alive in South Africa (the monthly food poverty line is ZAR561).

The long-term impact and implications of the COVID 19 pandemic on the informally employed can be nothing short of disastrous. South African society needs to reflect urgently on issues of social assistance in general and how best to provide relief for day labourers who are out of the general safety net of the UIF. The important role (as highlighted by Muzvidziwa (2018) and Chereni (2018)) of informal social protection in allowing the individual migrant to navigate an often hostile reception environment (see e.g. Sibanda and Sibanda (2014)) demands research attention. Furthermore, the debate on the issue of a basic income grant (BIG) must be reopened. The notion of a BIG has been promoted for a long time (since 2000) by elements of civil

society as a necessary step to provide relief to the unemployed in South Africa.

Countrywide research into all forms of informal employment and self-employment is required to inform this debate. New country-wide data (using a similar methodology) as well as other forms of participatory research is needed to understand the impact of events of the last ten years on the lives and livelihoods of the informally wage-employed. In the medium and long-term the impact of the pandemic may lead to a worsening of the existing livelihoods and provincial inequalities of workers in the day labour market. A crisis such as the COVID 19 pandemic has again highlighted the plight of the marginalised and vulnerable in South Africa's unequal society. The advent of the pandemic is indeed a call to arms for social researchers to renew our efforts to give a voice to the men and women silently sitting on South Africa's street corners (even in a state of lockdown), wondering where their next meal will come from.

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