

Shortage of artisans hampers SMME growth

The shortage of skilled artisans hampers South Africa's small medium and micro enterprise (SMME) sector growth and employment, Eastern Cape MEC for economic development Mcebisi Jonas told a media briefing. This comes as the Eastern Cape hosts a jobs summit at the East London International Convention Centre (ICC).

By [Siya Mti](#) 7 Jun 2012

Jonas said the shortage of artisans threatens South Africa's competitive edge in the global economy, when viewed against other emerging economies such as China and Brazil. "In South Africa the SMME sector is less skilled and poorly integrated into the national and global economy," Jonas said.

"Success in other countries is driven by a long history of skills and artisan based development, so they can have sustained growth of the SMME sector."

Economist Dawie Roodt said the extent of the artisan shortage was so big South Africa imports artisans to build its infrastructure.

Skills have to be imported

A case in point, said Roodt, was the construction of power stations and the controversial e-tolls, which required foreign artisan skills at a high cost.

Roodt said South Africa should shift its skills development focus away from the "fixation" on low quality matriculation and university degrees and more on technical skills development.

According to recent studies, the average South African artisan is nearing retirement age at 55.

The number of registered apprentices in 1975 was 33 000, a number which has shrunk in this decade to about 3000.

Jonas said a (building) contractor development programme initiated through the Coega Industrial Development Zone was part of the provincial government's bid to boost artisan skills and enterprise development.

It would boost brick laying, plumbing and electrician skills, he said.

Source: *Daily Dispatch* via I-Net Bridge