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Go green ... for career and industry growth

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We must create more jobs. Everybody says so, while neglecting to tell us what kind in what industries. Clearly, not every industry is a net job creator. Manufacturing and mining have shed jobs for years. So the first task is to identify a jobs incubator that will rapidly generate thousands of jobs at all levels, from top managers to unskilled workers.

On June 5, World Environment Day, the industry and the opportunity stare us in the face.

Jobs for 'green-collar' workers and executives are growing massively worldwide. In our market, green industry is still in its infancy, but potential is huge, given greater awareness and stronger focus by policymakers and entrepreneurs.

Any green industry definition indicates the scale of the opportunity.

According to the UN Environment Programme, a green job is work in agricultural, manufacturing, research and development, administrative and service activities that contributes to preserving or restoring environmental quality.

This includes jobs to protect ecosystems and biodiversity, reduce energy, materials and water usage through greater efficiency, work to decarbonise the economy and steps to combat waste and pollution.

Admittedly, renewables and energy efficiency are integrated into South Africa's energy plan, we now have a solar-powered airport and we recently launched the R5 billion Bokpoort concentrated solar power project.

But we've got a long way to go. Global numbers show we're only scratching the surface.

Even back in 2008, the UN estimated there were four million direct and indirect jobs in energy efficiency in the US and some European countries.

The International Renewable Energy Agency says there were 7.7 million jobs in its sector in 2014, covering biomass, liquid biofuels, biogas, geothermal, small

hydropower, solar photovoltaic, concentrated solar power, solar heating/ cooling and wind power.

With opportunities in so many areas it is little wonder green entrepreneurs are emerging, inspired by the mantra 'start a business and save the planet'.

Turning trash into cash through collecting, sorting and recycling attracts start-up entrepreneurs as barriers to entry are low. Some small-scale South African initiatives have already made progress in this area.

But grassroots projects don't deliver big gains at pace. Greater scale is needed.

Perhaps the DTI's Black Industrialists (BI) programme can provide a boost.

BI is designed to expand the industrial base and foster greater economic participation by black entrepreneurs. This programme could help kick-start the green economy and create the jobs we so desperately need – sorters and drivers, scientists and technicians, executives and new business owners.

But it is not enough to simply give BI 'the green light'. Any intervention should be part of a holistic strategy.

Tertiary education could be 'greened' by offering qualifications that prepare young people for a career in a range of green specialisations.

We would address the scandal of graduate unemployment by ensuring students qualify in areas where new jobs growth is greatest.

Government incentives and tax breaks could be introduced to encourage the growth of the green economy. Efforts to foster innovation could be widened to include special green categories.

The scope is boundless ... just like the green economy itself.

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Company Info:

Talent Africa is a world-class company, based in Sandton, the business hub of South Africa. They offer integrated talent solutions to clients nationally and in sub-Saharan Africa. Talent Africa is proudly a level 2 BBBEE contributor.

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