

# **South Africa Addressing Youth Unemployment – the Most Pressing Post-Apartheid Development Challenge for Youth**

**Prepared by the Youth Development Network (YDN)  
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## **Introduction**

South Africa is currently celebrating 10 years of democracy. With successful elections in April, the country is often looked to as a shining example of democratic transition. South Africa also has a large youth population. And youth unemployment has emerged as a major developmental challenge for a post-apartheid South Africa. This paper attempts to explore the various policies and programmes that South Africa has put in place to address the challenges of youth unemployment. Some of these policies and programmes are explored from the municipal level but the emphasis is on the national level. The paper comments on the lessons learned and provides some insights into the complexities and challenges of these initiatives.

During the period 1994-1999, post apartheid South Africa has been characterised by a policy formulation phase. During this time major policy frameworks were developed from macro-economic policy to national youth policies. The challenge since 1999 has been one of implementation. Therefore this paper has a bias towards programme implementation, rather than policy, as the major issue. The content of this paper is based on the collective experience and insights of the Youth Development Network, a national network of seven non-governmental organisations working in the field of youth development in South Africa.

## **Understanding the Background to the Youth Development Challenge**

According to the Community Agency for Social Enquiry (CASE) Youth Survey 2000, 35% of the South African population are between the ages of 16 and 35. This accounts for approximately 14.4 million people. When the African National Congress (ANC) came into power in 1994, it was faced with the task of addressing the needs of young people in South Africa. Providing a response to the youth issue was imperative for 3 reasons. Firstly, young people were integrally involved in the liberation struggle both internally and externally. These “young lions” fought in the ANC liberation army and formed the nexus of cadreship within the internal Mass Democratic Movement. It was therefore “payback time” for young people in relation to their contribution to the liberation struggle. Secondly, the youth development challenges of young people increased as a result of their involvement in the liberation struggle. Young people sacrificed their educational needs and aspirations under the motif of “liberation first, then education”. Young people also had very little

skills and in some instances were highly militarised. The growing incidence of teenage pregnancies and HIV was prevalent. As a result, the new government had to respond to these escalating youth development challenges. Thirdly, young people have a significant stake in the outcome of elections. This is due to the sheer numbers of young people that meet the voting age requirements. International trends indicate that young people become apathetic about voting if they feel that their lives have not improved. Therefore any new government has to be seen to be doing something for youth in order to retain and capitalise on the youth vote.

For the new government to provide a response, the issues facing youth in a post-apartheid South Africa needed to be located within a public policy framework. Youth were a vulnerable group within South African society, and the previous government did not have any policy relating to youth. Therefore, the ANC government had to formulate policy, and in turn this policy would shape and inform a systematic and comprehensive government response.

### **Profiling the Employment Situation of Youth**

Youth in South Africa are defined as the segment of the population that falls within the 15-35 age bracket. (This definition is currently being redefined as 15-28.) South Africa has a working population of about 27 million people between the ages of 16-64 (Bhorat, 2004). Youth (within the definition of 15-35) account for close to 60% of the working age population. In absolute terms, youth aged 15-34 number 16.3 million individuals. However, youth form 70% of all unemployed persons in South African society. This point is critical, as it is a powerful reflection of the significant over-representation of youth amongst the unemployed. In terms of absolute numbers, of the close to 8 million unemployed people in the South African labour market, just over 5.5 million of these individuals are between the ages of 15-34.

### **Municipal Responses to Youth Employment**

South Africa has three tiers of government: national, provincial and local. Of all these tiers, local government is the most underdeveloped. It has been only in the past few years that emphasis has been placed on local government. This is due to new municipal demarcations as well as a recognition and emphasis of local government as a key nodal point of service delivery. Despite this recent emphasis on local government, a youth policy framework does not exist at the local or municipal level. Given this lack of policy, municipal initiatives around youth employment have largely tended to be ad hoc, unstructured and short term. The National Youth Commission, a statutory body with a mandate for developing youth policy and advising government accordingly, is currently developing a local youth policy framework for adoption by municipalities. In the interim, however, there have been some interesting initiatives between municipalities and civil society actors in advancing youth employment.

**Example 1:**

The **Tshepo Themba Multi-Purpose Centre** in Etwatwa represents a partnership between the local municipality and the Southern African Association of Youth Clubs (SAAYC). The municipality gave SAAYC a piece of land which included a dilapidated building no longer being used by the community. SAAYC engaged young people in a project to refurbish the building and turn it into a multi-purpose centre. Subsequently, SAAYC received provincial sponsorship for a second phase of the project which involved building a community hall on the property. The provincial sponsorship stipulated that SAAYC work with a community management steering committee in the building and maintaining of the community hall. This ensured the integration of community interests and encouraged long-term partnerships within the community. In addition, the young people were sent to the building federation for training in plumbing, electrical wiring and bricklaying to ensure that the buildings met quality standards. Today, the Tshepo Themba Multi-purpose Centre is used as a meeting place for youth clubs, civic associations, and religious groups, and serves as a distribution point for pension cheques.

**Example 2:**

The **Reach Out Inner City Project**, run by the Joint Enrichment Project (JEP), engages young people from the inner city of Johannesburg in life skills and technical skills training and community service. Many of the young people in the project have been homeless and/or in conflict with the law. In order to address the wide range of needs of the young people in an integrated fashion, JEP works closely with other service providers and stakeholders. A particular partnership with the local municipality, through the Johannesburg Development Agency (JDA), resulted in jobs for some of the young people in the project. Several of the young people, who had been trained in tourism and hospitality, were recruited by the JDA to work as tour guides on Constitution Hill (the historic prison that has been renovated and reopened as the Constitutional Court and a museum).

In order to ensure that the above examples become more deliberate and widespread, it is essential to develop local youth policy. With a policy framework in place, municipalities will be given direction in terms of:

1. Resource allocation
2. Programme direction and strategy
3. Nature of and intensity of engagement with civil society actors
4. Co-ordinative mechanisms and institutional collaborations needed

**Major Initiatives by National Government for Youth Employment**

Since 1994 the South African government has embarked on several large scale initiatives aimed at increasing the labour absorption capacity for young people. Some of these initiatives include:

**Learnerships**

Learnerships are a structured programme integrating theoretical learning with workplace experience. The Skills Development Act, aimed at developing the

overall skills base in the country, guides the implementation of the Learnerships programme, and targets young people as a key beneficiary. Young people receive theoretical training in an identified area through an accredited training service provider. In addition, they are placed in a structured workplace in order to experience what it really means, and what is required, to work in a company/organisation. A crucial element of Learnerships is the partnership between government, training service providers and the private sector.

### ***National Youth Service***

The National Youth Service programme (NYS) is administered by a Project Partnership Team comprised of the National Youth Commission, the Umsobomvu Youth Fund, the South African Youth Council, the National Department of Labour, the National Department of Education and other relevant government departments (depending on the specific project). The goal of NYS is to increase the quality and scope of government service delivery by harnessing the potential of young people. And in turn, to increase the employability of young people. The NYS model reflects an integrated approach to community service, skills development and access to employment opportunities. Young people are trained in a technical skill (e.g. HIV/Aids counselling), and then have an opportunity to apply and reinforce the learning by providing community service. At the same time, young people receive personal development (life skills) training and focus on developing a career path. National, Provincial and Local government departments are key to determining the community service projects, and to providing the infrastructure to support the programme (the materials, equipment, supervision, etc.). Accredited training service providers are responsible for ensuring that the young people are adequately equipped to carry out the service and that they receive the appropriate qualifications (formal recognition). A key element of the NYS programme is the integration of the different programme components and coordination among the multiple programme partners.

### ***Expanded Public Works Programme***

The expanded public works programme (EPWP) by the Department of Public Works is seen as a key short-term mechanism to increase employability, provide work experience and create value chains through entrepreneurship. Young people have been identified as beneficiaries in major public works programmes designed to be labour intensive.

### ***Youth Entrepreneurship***

The drive to develop young entrepreneurs is largely being spearheaded by the Umsobomvu Youth Fund (UYF), and builds upon the work that is done by NGO's. The UYF is a government created development finance agency for skills development and employment creation for youth. In fulfilling its mandate, the UYF has spearheaded the following initiatives to stimulate and promote youth entrepreneurship:

- Micro loans for young entrepreneurs
- Creation of a venture capital fund underwritten by a mainstream bank, with the UYF providing guarantees

- Development of a voucher programme to access business development services

In addition, the Department of Trade and Industry has stimulated entrepreneurship through its Ntsika Enterprise Promotion Agency and their accreditation of local business service centres and the Khula Guarantee Fund.

### ***Youth Advisory Centres***

The Youth Advisory Centres (YAC's) are largely funded by the UYF and implemented by NGO's. The YAC's are located in communities with large youth populations. YAC's were developed to promote contact, information and counselling services to young people. Each YAC has computers and online connectivity as well as vital information relating to careers and job opportunities. YAC's also provide training workshops on life skills and job related skills e.g. CV writing, interview techniques etc. There is also an outreach component to the YAC.

## **Lessons Learned**

There have been a number of lessons learned from each of the above initiatives. However, an overall review makes it possible to identify particular themes and patterns. The following factors have lent themselves to successful partnerships and alliances:

- Involving a wide range of community stakeholders
- Tapping into existing municipal provincial resources (asset-based approach)
- Involving young people in the design and implementation of the project
- Ensuring adequate training and skills development (accreditation)
- Meeting quality standards (quality assurance)
- Demonstrating sustainable impact

## **Constraints and Challenges**

### ***Lack of Integration across Departments***

Many of the above initiatives depend upon significant collaboration between and across government departments (at the National, Provincial and Local levels). The bureaucratic nature of government does not lend itself easily to integration and high-level collaboration. Particular processes and policies are being designed to alleviate this challenge. For example, all municipalities are required to develop an Integrated Development Plan (IDP) for service delivery. This ensures that the various services provided by the municipality are aligned to each other, and that points of intersection are considered. The IDP also includes requirements around stakeholder involvement and ensures appropriate and balanced budgetary allocations.

### ***Developing and Managing Multiple Partnerships***

Implementing the types of programmes discussed above requires managing a set of complex relationships within an overall programme management

framework. It requires keeping your eye on the goal while working with partners who generally have different and competing interests. While there is no “fool-proof” answer to this challenge, it is useful to engage with the issue directly and constructively. It is important to: clearly identify how your goals and objectives are related to those of the other partners; explicitly identify specific roles and responsibilities and timeframes; regularly follow-up and renegotiate the roles, responsibilities and timeframes; ensure that agreements are in writing; and wherever possible, ensure that the appropriate persons (decision makers) are at the relevant meetings and discussions.

### ***Finding Appropriate Service Providers***

There is a large pool of NGO's in South Africa providing services to youth. As programmes begin to get more demand driven and veer towards market-related skills, youth development NGO's are finding it difficult to meet these needs because of their supply driven programme approach. Hence other service providers, who have never worked with youth before, begin to emerge. These service providers have a particular experience in a selected field, e.g. construction, but they lack the vital experience and understanding of what it means to work with young people within a developmental context. Hence finding appropriate service providers who have the technical capacity and the experience of providing developmentally appropriate services to young people is a challenge.

### ***Lack of Support from the Private Sector***

Many of the initiatives that are promoted by government need private sector support and engagement to be successful. For example, the Learnerships initiative is dependant on young people accessing work experience through companies and organisations. Companies in South Africa have not really come to the table in terms of supporting these initiatives. Government incentives to enhance private sector involvement have largely gone untapped by the companies because of the bureaucratic nature of these incentives. In addition, incentives are more attractive for large companies and not for medium or small companies, which are seen as the growing employers of people.

### ***Integrating HIV/Aids***

In South Africa, young people are our most vulnerable target group with regard to HIV/Aids. In the CASE Youth Survey 2000, young people identified their primary concerns as unemployment, crime and HIV/Aids (in that order). Clearly, for young people, the issues are “how do I get a job; and how do I survive?” Employment and HIV/Aids are the two development issue that Africa will be grappling with for the next 20 years. The implication for youth development and youth employment is an urgent need to integrate HIV/Aids into the initiatives that we run. For example, we cannot conduct workshops on how to start a small business without asking questions about how the entrepreneur's HIV/Aids status will impact on the business; how the HIV/Aids prevalence in the community may impact on the type of business and its success; how to manage employees who may be infected or affected by HIV/Aids. The Youth Development Network (YDN) has developed a toolkit called *Integrating HIV/AIDS in Life Skills and Employment Training*

*Programmes.* This toolkit reflects the programme learnings of the seven YDN member organisations, and provides a practical approach to beginning to engage directly with HIV/Aids in the context of youth development.

### ***Capacity within the Sector***

Youth development, including youth employment, is a dynamic field. We now advocate for an integrated approach to youth development and denounce “old-school” methods of learning. For many youth workers they have had to move from being workshop presenters and peer-counsellors to being project managers, community researchers, partnership builders, curriculum/materials developers and facilitators of learner-centred learning. Moreover, many youth workers have made this shift without the necessary capacity building and support. There is an urgent need to further legitimise and professionalise the field of youth work, in order for youth development practitioners to access appropriate training and skills development. In South Africa there has been some progress in establishing standards on the National Qualifications Framework for youth practitioners. This will help to facilitate the provision of professional development for youth workers and to provide quality assurance.

## **Conclusion**

The anniversary of 10 years of democracy provides the opportunity for both celebration and reflection. It is with pride and a sense of achievement that we acknowledge the journey of young people as political activists to young people as community builders. We must also, however, acknowledge the very real and very painful challenges facing young people today: Unemployment; Crime and HIV/Aids. As in the past, our ability to conquer these challenges will depend on building meaningful partnerships and alliances on a local, national, regional and global level. The Expert Group Meeting presents an excellent opportunity to build and further develop such partnerships.