



SSACI NEWS

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This newsletter aims to keep SSACI's partners informed about what the Initiative is doing, and why.

It seeks to give sponsors and project implementers a better understanding of one another's perspectives.

It highlights issues in the fields of education, training and skills development that affect SSACI's work.

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Drumming Up Support

Trainees from the National Peace Accord Trust's Ecotherapy Trail-Guide Project practise traditional drumming on a wilderness trail (see story on p3)



Why Are So Many Youths Unemployed?

Around the world, in developed and developing countries alike, unemployment amongst youths is about double that of adults. South Africa is no exception to this "two-times rule", as it is sometimes called. According to the Development Policy Research Unit at the University of Cape Town, the unemployment rate amongst 15-30 year-olds here is about 51%, while that for adults in the 31-65 year-old age-group is just over 26%.

Amongst the factors commonly blamed for youth unemployment internationally are :

- **Decline in aggregate demand.** Many firms stop recruiting during a recession and this affects youths (who make up the majority of new entrants into the job-market) more than adults. Moreover, when retrenchments become necessary, it is usually cheaper to get rid of young workers than older ones, especially if the last-in-first-out principle is adopted.

- **Residence in high unemployment areas.** This is especially true of South Africa, where Apartheid led to an artificial concentration of young Africans in poverty-stricken peri-urban "townships" and rural "homelands".

- **Statutory minimum wages,** which discourage the employment of young workers whose limited work experience often makes them, initially at least, less productive than experienced older workers.

- **Low levels of technical and vocational skills,** more common amongst youths than adults, many of whom have benefited from on-the-job training programmes.

- **Low levels of self-employment amongst youths,** often attributed to a lack of start-up capital.

With 42% of the nation's economically-active population aged 15-30, unemployment amongst them is a national priority.

New Directions in Skills Development for Disadvantaged Groups

So accustomed are South Africans to using the term “disadvantaged communities” with reference to ethnic groups that we may be surprised to hear it applied to people in industrialised countries. Yet a recent international conference in Bonn, with the theme “*Rethinking Skills Development*”, highlighted the existence of disadvantaged groups in every country and revealed an urgent need for governments and NGOs to devise new approaches to technical and vocational education and training (TVET) for such groups. The four-day conference, jointly hosted by the German Technical Co-operation Agency (GTZ) and the Swiss Agency for Development & Co-operation (SDC), was attended by TVET specialists from around the world. SSACI’s programme manager, Ken Duncan, accompanied the SDC delegation.

In a keynote address, Dr Wolfgang Schlegel, an international development consultant, noted that for most donor organisations (including GTZ and SDC) poverty reduction has become the overriding objective of TVET. This has led to a focus on the special needs of disadvantaged groups both at home and abroad. The German federal government, for example, spends two billion Euros per year on TVET programmes for disadvantaged youths in Germany. The European Commission and the World Bank have likewise identified TVET for disadvantaged youths as high priorities for their development programmes.

What makes the needs of disadvantaged groups any different from those of mainstream social groups? Experience gained from the limited success of many one-size-fits-all programmes in the 1970s and 80s points to several factors, including:

- The tendency for poor and marginalised groups to be excluded from formal-sector enterprises, which in turn denies them access to “classic” TVET programmes, such as apprenticeships and technical training colleges.
- High levels of voluntary and involuntary migration amongst the disadvantaged, as they pursue seasonal employment, flee war or unrest, seek temporary help from relatives or compatriots, take on unexpected family responsibilities and, often enough, run into trouble with bureaucracy.
- The nature of poverty itself, which is increasingly being recognised as not merely a lack of wealth but a complex syndrome including low (or no) income, poor health, little education, reduced physical security, and high vulnerability to risks and unforeseen demands - all of which

make it difficult for a person to undergo lengthy or continuous training. Clearly, if TVET programmes aimed at disadvantaged groups are to have any impact, they must take account of these grim realities. Dr Schlegel argued that four elements are critical to their success:

- **Careful selection** of target groups and programme participants
- **Accessibility** and **affordability** for the target groups
- Skills that lead to **immediate economic activity**
- Training that opens up **long-term career paths**.

For training to be **accessible** and **affordable** to disadvantaged groups, it must:

- be conducted in decentralised locations, i.e. wherever the prospective trainees are
- have low fees
- have relaxed admission requirements in terms of formal qualifications, previous work experience or age limits
- be flexible in timing, to accommodate shift-workers and seasonal employees
- be modularised, so that trainees can leave and re-enter at intervals
- recognise uncertificated prior learning

To lead immediately to **gainful economic activities**, the training programmes must:

- focus on skills currently in demand by employers or consumers in the local economy
- incorporate job-placement or enterprise development services for newly-qualified graduates
- be embedded in the local environment, including business linkages, information channels, community networks and local authorities

To **open career pathways**, training must:

- certify partial competencies, which are portable between programmes, thereby promoting step-by-step acquisition of high-level skills over time
- have credibility in the private sector, owing to its job-relevance and high exit-standards
- link to other providers of formal or informal training
- include life skills (such as information-gathering, decision-making, problem-solving, goal-setting, relationship-building, communication, conflict management and leadership) that provide a foundation for life-long learning and employability

A review of training programmes funded by SSACI shows that most of them tick all these boxes – indicating that our selection of projects has been in line with best international thinking and practice.

Focus on a Project: Eco-Therapy Trail Guides

“Young lions, the warriors of the barricades – yesterday’s heroes, today’s embarrassment”.

So wrote Charlene Smith, in the *Mail & Guardian* newspaper on 24 March 2000, of youths who made up the Self-Defence Units and Self-Protection Units affiliated to the ANC and IFP during the 1990s. Having fought as irregular paramilitaries in the sprawling urban townships of Gauteng in the run-up to South Africa’s first democratic election in 1994, these young men and women found themselves disavowed shortly afterwards, when their violent methods became anathema to political leaders and the public at large. Now shunned by their communities, many of these youths turned to crime and substance abuse - and might have stayed there had it not been for a groundbreaking initiative launched by the National Peace Accord Trust (NPAT) in 1995.

NPAT is a non-profit organisation that seeks to bring about social healing and reconciliation in South Africa, thereby restoring stable, peaceful and healthy community life. To this end, it implements restorative training and development programmes in communities torn apart by conflict, with a particular focus on formerly-militarised youths, victims of trauma and youths at risk. Central to many of these interventions is the eco-therapy trail – a guided trek through a wilderness area during which participants are assisted by a trained therapist to reflect upon their lives, come to terms with traumatic experiences and take a more positive, pro-active view of themselves and society.

A skeptic might consider NPAT’s approach to be mere wishful thinking. But there is strong evidence that the eco-therapy programme works. A long-term study conducted by independent researchers between 1996 and 2002 of 90 young offenders who had participated in an eco-therapy trail programme revealed that 80% of them did *not* return to crime. This is in striking contrast with the normal rate of recidivism – or return to crime - for young offenders in South Africa, which stands at over 80%. The researchers found that the wilderness therapy intervention brought about significant positive changes in the participants' perceptions of themselves and others, which in turn led to changes in their behaviour, particularly a discontinuation of crime. Moreover, 75% of the participants were able to find gainful employment in the wake of the eco-trail experience, suggesting that they had indeed turned over a new leaf in life.



Ecotherapy Trail Guides in Training

Recognising the value of eco-therapy trails not only as a catalyst for individual and community healing but also as a source of employment to youths with leadership potential, SSACI is currently sponsoring the training through NPAT of forty youths from six provinces as eco-therapy trail guides. Critical outputs of the project include:

- Certification by THETA (the education and training authority for the tourism industry) of at least 30 formerly-unemployed youths as assistant eco-therapy guides, registered with the South African Qualifications Authority and able to find employment on trails run by the government departments of health, justice and social development, or through their own enterprises
- Certification by THETA, again to SAQA standards, of at least 10 graduates from tertiary institutions as fully-qualified eco-therapists
- Establishment of community support structures around six trail-sites to refer people to the guides and serve as marketing channels
- A drop in the level of conflict and violence in communities from which trail guides are selected.

The SSACI-sponsored project commenced in January 2002 and will run until March 2003 at a total cost to SSACI of R 930'000. To date, 8 trainees have been registered with Psychological Society of South Africa as ecotherapists, 16 have been selected for training as Restorative Community Workers and 6 are in full time employment. It seems that SSACI’s investment in the NPAT’s eco-therapy guides training project will make a difference not only to skills development and job creation but also to the goal of nation building through restoration and healing.

How Do Donors Benefit from SSACI?

SSACI sees itself not as a charity but as a productive partnership between its corporate donors, SDC and development NGOs in South Africa. But for any partnership to succeed, it must bring benefits to all the partners. So how do corporate donors benefit from their contributions to SSACI? In at least **four** practical ways:

1. **Support for SSACI counts on all measures of corporate social investment.** With CSI now a business imperative driven by shareholders' concerns, industry charters, BEE scorecards, accountability benchmarks and the like, companies need to be sure that their CSI programmes are recognised as such, and not dismissed as advertising or "charity". From that perspective, SSACI is an excellent investment. Our focus on a stated national priority (youth unemployment) and our demonstrably effective programme of skills training and enterprise-development for historically-disadvantaged communities mean that support for SSACI scores highly on any objective measure of CSI.
2. **Contributions to SSACI are tax deductible in South Africa.** This is not true of all spending on CSI. In fact, the current tax regime offers few incentives to either CSI or private philanthropy. But SSACI's 18A tax status means that corporate donors can deduct their contributions to SSACI from their taxable income, to a maximum of 5% of their pre-tax profits.
3. **SSACI projects are a potential source of learners, interns and staff.** SETA-funded learnership programmes offer significant advantages to companies in terms of refunds on their skills-development levies, tax rebates, training subsidies, and a supply of inexpensive labour. But many companies shy away from young learners, who represent an unknown quantity in terms of their levels of technical skill and compatibility with the culture of the workplace. SSACI-supported learnerships solve this problem by enrolling only learners who have been screened and selected on the basis of their training-potential and suitability for employment. Prior to entering the workplace, learners are given extensive training to NQF-registered standards in technical skills *and* life-skills by reputable service-providers. Their performance during training and in the workplace is monitored by external assessors and mentors. All of which takes the risk out of signing on a SSACI-project participant as an in-house learner, intern or new member of staff. With programmes currently running in fields as diverse as mechanical and electrical engineering, accounting, ICT, business administration, call-centre operations, catering, security and general maintenance, SSACI is producing a wide range of skilled and disciplined young workers for companies to draw on.
4. **SSACI is an efficient, cost-effective, value-for-money operation.** In fact, the value of corporate donations is doubled by the matching SDC grant. In addition, SSACI's lean structure, low organisational overheads and professional expertise mean that the money is well spent on productive projects that are externally monitored and evaluated. So a corporate donor does not have to divert staff away from their core functions within the company to attend to concerns or problems relating to external CSI projects. With SSACI, you know matters are in hand.

On top of all this, companies that give to SSACI are ultimately helping to grow the economy and develop the future wealth of the nation – its youth. That must be good for everybody. As John F Kennedy put it: "When the tide comes in, all the boats rise."



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