

LEVERAGING PUBLIC EMPLOYMENT AND AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAMMES TO DELIVER MULTIPLE OUTCOMES FOR LEARNERS, YOUTH, AND SOCIETY

This briefing note demonstrates that when After School Programmes (ASPs) can access public employment programmes (PEPs) to scale and strengthen their work, they contribute to solving multiple complex challenges. It argues that government spend on PEPs is an efficient and impactful investment, and outlines recommendations to maximise this opportunity.

It is based on research¹ commissioned by The Learning Trust (TLT) to understand the experiences and achievements of ASPs participating in the Social Employment Fund (SEF).

The [full report](#) is available on the TLT website.

After School Programmes: critical support for learning

After School Programmes (ASPs) offer additional support beyond the classroom to children and youth. They build key academic skills, help children catch up, and support socio-emotional learning and development. They are critically needed in South Africa, a nation plagued by poor academic achievement and severe educational inequality.

The Social Employment Fund: an opportunity to scale and strengthen ASPs

The Learning Trust (TLT) is a grant-making and capacity support provider that champions the After School Sector in South Africa. It supports extended learning programmes by building quality practitioners, sustainable organisations, and platforms for sharing and collaboration.

TLT wanted to test whether it was possible to simultaneously improve learning outcomes and tackle unemployment by helping community-based organisations (CBOs) access public funding.

TLT's SEF Phase 1 and 2 Impact Summary:



The Social Employment Fund (SEF): fast facts

- Part of the Presidential Employment Stimulus (PES), launched in October 2020 to catalyse economic recovery and reduce unemployment
- Supports non-state actors to create “work for the common good”
- Part-time (16 hours a week) at minimum wage
- Minimum of 1,000 jobs per Strategic Implementing Partner (SIP)
- 80% of budget is allocated to wages and 20% is for non-wage costs
- Created 65,000 work opportunities in Phase 1 (July 2022-July 2023) with 27 SIPs
- Will create at least 50,000 work opportunities with 37 SIPs in Phase 2 (Aug 2023-May 2024)
- Part of the Department of Trade, Industry and Competition (DTIC)
- Managed and implemented by the Industrial Development Corporation (IDC)

¹ Research comprised a survey of TLT's SEF implementing partners; 10 semi-structured interviews with key informants; and a review of key documents and data.

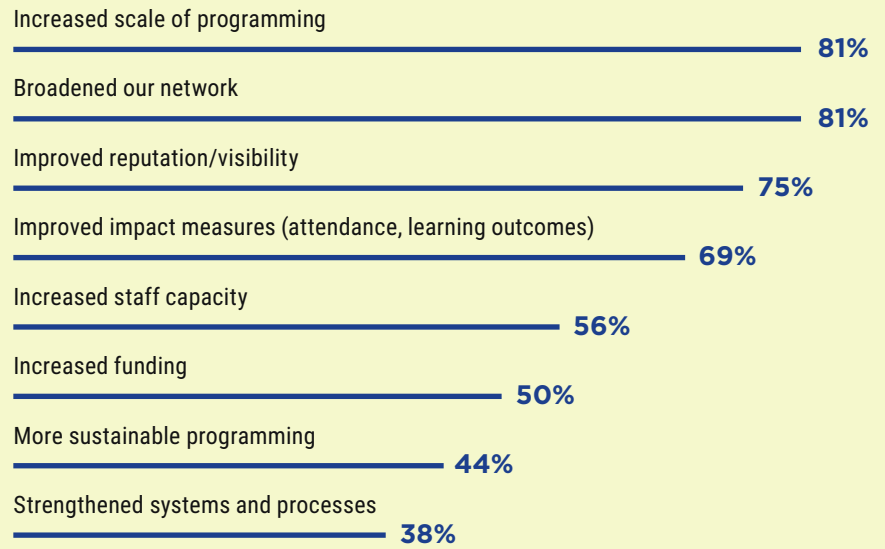


A cost-effective investment: how the SEF helps ASPs deliver multi-pronged impact

Research commissioned by TLT found that ASPs' participation in the SEF led to positive results in three key areas: **learning outcomes, youth employment, and a stronger civil society.**

This demonstrates that when ASPs can leverage public employment programmes to scale, it is an effective government spend. These partnerships harness ASP's agility, creativity and experience to tackle multiple complex problems in a nimble, cost-effective manner.

What outcomes has the SEF enabled for ASPs?



LEARNING OUTCOMES

ASPs have reached more children, scaled proven models, deepened programme quality and increased impact.

✓ Grew reach

- 81%² of ASPs scaled up programming
- Half of partners took on 120+ participants

✓ Deepened quality

- Reducing child group sizes increased attendance, individualised attention, and dosage
- Paying volunteers improved retention and consistency

✓ Increased impact

- Two-thirds of ASPs saw improvement in measures like attendance and learning outcomes



YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

Young people have increased household income; gained work experience; developed skills, confidence and connections; and accessed new opportunities.

✓ Improved work readiness

- 94% of ASPs offered in-person skills training
- Work experience developed confidence and agency

✓ Accessed opportunities

- ASPs helped participants find and apply for jobs, enrol to study, and start businesses
- Income helped participants invest in side hustles

✓ Grew networks

- Participants made new connections in their organisations and communities



CIVIL SOCIETY

CBOs have strengthened organisational capacity, built networks, improved visibility and reputation, and attracted more funding.

✓ Built capacity

- CBOs strengthened HR (75%), admin (75%), M&E (56%) and project management (50%) capacities

✓ Grew networks

- TLT-driven learning platforms helped CBOs connect and learn from each other
- CBOs identify as part of a broader After School Sector

✓ Accessed additional funds

- 5 of 16 participating CBOs raised extra funds specifically for SEF

Key enablers: how the SEF's design enables ASPs to achieve positive outcomes

The SEF drew on lessons from other public employment programmes to design a PEP that harnesses civil society organisations' expertise and experience. It intends to enable bottom-up community development, and to bolster CBOs' capacity to work at scale.

SEF design features that enable ASP participation and outcomes



INVESTING IN CIVIL SOCIETY

- SEF works through civil society organisations with existing programmes and infrastructure.
- It prioritises partners with proven models, strong track records, community knowledge and relationships, and co-funding.



CAPACITY BUILDING

- 20% of SEF budgets are for non-wage costs.
- Partners can hire a few full-time administrative roles.



FLEXIBILITY

- Partners can allocate the 16 hours per week flexibly.
- Partners can allocate the 20% non-wage budget according to programme needs.



INCLUSIVITY

- The SEF supports coalitions of small CBOs that could not otherwise access government funding.
- Adults ages 18 to 60 can participate.



STRONG SYSTEMS

- Digital platforms support participant registration, background checks, attendance tracking, and monitoring and evaluation.
- Wages are paid directly to participants.



ADAPTIVE GOVERNANCE

- The SEF regularly gathers and acts on partner feedback.
- The Social Employment Network (SEN) meets monthly to support learning and collaboration between SEF partners.

ASP agility: how ASPs adapted to the SEF opportunity

It was not always easy for ASPs to meet the SEF's stringent administrative and reporting requirements. Most ASPs had to build capacity, adapt their approach, and mobilise additional resources.

81%

of ASPs adapted their operating model to participate in SEF

75%

of ASPs used their own funding or in-kind resources

However, ASPs have demonstrated that they have the agility, capacity and commitment to work through challenges to deliver.

How ASPs have adapted to leverage the SEF

- ✓ Adopted new systems
- ✓ Collected new data
- ✓ Adapted models
- ✓ Developed strategies to mitigate high turnover
- ✓ Built human resources and administrative muscle
- ✓ Mobilised additional funds and resources

And despite the challenges, they have found it worthwhile:

100%

of ASPs would participate in the SEF again, given the opportunity

100%

of ASPs say the SEF had a positive impact on their organisation

Recommendations: what would maximise the opportunity of ASP-PEP collaboration?

As shared in this brief, when ASPs can leverage the SEF and other PEPs to scale and strengthen their work, there is enormous potential to deliver on multiple government objectives.

To realise this potential, ASPs, funders and government should work towards the following:

Recommendations for ASPs

- **Collect standardised outcomes and cost data.**

Better data, including the cost of achieving key outcomes, can help make the case for continued public funding.

ASPs should adopt standardised measures – such as number of learners who can read for meaning, can do basic arithmetic, reach matric, achieve a Bachelors’ pass, and access post-school opportunities – and track the per-learner cost of achieving these.

- **Share best-practice models for common needs.**

Sharing tested curricula, approaches to building work readiness, and impact measurement tools can improve cost-effectiveness and reduce duplication.

Recommendations for funders

- **Fund ASPs’ non-wage costs.**

Bolstering ASPs’ non-wage SEF budgets is a cost-effective investment for philanthropy and business: as a top-up to government spend, modest funding can deliver significant returns.

Instead of piecemeal, fragmented support, funders should pool resources, and consider innovative models like a collective impact approach or an employment and learning outcomes fund.

Philanthropy and business should also support convening organisations like TLT that build smaller CBOs’ capacity, and invest in research and advocacy.

Recommendations for government

- **Confirm long-term political and budget commitment to the SEF and other PEPs.**

Longer time horizons allow ASPs to plan, retain some participants, hone models, and generate evidence of impact.

Short- to medium-term opportunities may harm ASPs’ long-term sustainability if volunteers who grow accustomed to being paid are unwilling to volunteer after SEF contracts end.

- **Increase funding for non-wage costs.**

While government ratios are unlikely to shift in the face of highly constrained budgets, the SEF can advocate for co-funding and seek to increase non-wage budgets over time.

It should also consider modest budgets for convening organisations like TLT that facilitate SEF participation and build capacity in smaller organisations.

- **Continue prioritising and enabling small organisations’ participation.**

The SEF already does this intentionally and well. To improve this, it should consider:

- **Allowing students who receive NSFAS³ funds to participate**, which would help academic ASPs recruit the right skills and improve programme quality. This could be adjusted at a high-level or on a case-by-case basis.
- **Aligning SEF phases to school calendars.**

- **Adopt enabling recommendations across other PEPs.**

The SEF has built wisely on the lessons learned by its predecessors, including the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) and Community Work Programme (CWP).

Its enabling design features, and these recommendations, can make other PEPs more accessible and effective for ASPs and other CBOs.

- **Explore the role Education Assistants (EAs) employed through the Basic Education Employment Initiative (BEEI) might play in expanding ASP access.**

The BEEI, which is also part of the Presidential Employment Stimulus (PES), has placed 860,000 Education Assistants at 23,000 schools between 2020 and 2023.

Involving ASPs more systematically in upskilling, resourcing and mentoring EAs could significantly increase catch-up programmes’ reach and impact.

This briefing note was written by Katie Huston, edited by Kristen Thompson, and based on research commissioned by The Learning Trust and conducted by Katie Huston and Kristen Thompson. It was funded by Allan and Gill Gray Philanthropies South Africa.