



THE
**LEARNING
TRUST**
BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

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



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About this document

This position paper is based on research commissioned by The Learning Trust (TLT) and conducted by Katie Huston and Kristen Thompson to understand the experiences and impact of After School Programmes (ASPs) that are using the Social Employment Fund (SEF) to scale and strengthen their work.

It draws on a survey with TLT's Phase 1 SEF implementing partners; 10 semi-structured interviews with key informants; follow-up queries; TLT monitoring and evaluation data; and sector workshops. TLT is grateful to everyone who took time to participate in this research.

Acronyms

ASP	After School Programme	NSFAS	National Student Financial Aid Scheme
BEEI	Basic Education Employment Initiative	NPO	Non-Profit Organisation
CBO	Community-Based Organisation	PEP	Public Employment Programme
CSO	Civil Society Organisation	PES	Presidential Employment Stimulus
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019	SEF	Social Employment Fund
HR	Human Resources	SEN	Social Employment Network
IDC	Industrial Development Corporation	SIP	Strategic Implementing Partner
LTSM	Learning, Teaching and Support Material	TLT	The Learning Trust
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation		
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation		

OVERVIEW

After School Programmes (ASPs) play a critical role in improving educational outcomes, tackling inequality and supporting child well-being. They build key academic skills, help children catch up, and support socio-emotional learning and development. These interventions are critically needed in South Africa, a nation plagued by poor academic achievement and severe educational inequality.

When ASPs are able to access Public Employment Programmes (PEPs) to scale and strengthen their work, government investment in job creation ultimately contributes to solving multiple complex challenges: it improves learning outcomes, reduces youth unemployment, and strengthens civil society.

As an implementing partner for the Social Employment Fund (SEF), part of the Presidential Employment Stimulus (PES), The Learning Trust has convened **50 community-based organisations (CBOs)** to create **9,029 paid work opportunities** in the after-school sector that have **reached over 100,000 children and youth.**

Research commissioned by TLT found that **participating in the SEF has led to substantial gains across three key areas:**

- **Learning outcomes:** ASPs have been able to reach more children, scale proven models, and deepen programme quality.
- **Youth employment:** Young people have gained work experience; developed skills, confidence and connections; and accessed further opportunities.
- **Civil society:** Community-based organisations have strengthened human resourcing, administrative, and monitoring and evaluation (M&E) capacity; built networks; and attracted additional funding.

In the context of highly constrained budgets, this means public funds are able to deliver more “bang for their buck” by tackling multiple social issues at once.

The case of the Social Employment Fund has shown that **when public employment programmes are set up to invest in and develop community-based organisations (CBOs), they have huge potential for scale, quality, and sustainability.** Building on the lessons of past PEPs, the SEF was designed to be implemented by civil society organisations, and to build their institutional capacity through participation. It embraced a part-time, flexible model that lets non-governmental organisations (NGOs) deliver a variety of programmes, and it invests in coalitions that enable smaller CBOs to participate. It also adopted an adaptive governance model with open communication, regular feedback loops and shared learning opportunities.

While not without its challenges, **this approach has enabled ASPs to scale their work, pay existing volunteers, strengthen programme quality, and cover non-wage costs** such as training, materials and administration. Despite some challenges, 100% of survey respondents would choose to participate in the SEF again and said it has had a positive impact on their organisation.¹

After School Programmes have demonstrated that they have the agility, capacity and commitment to work through challenges and deliver on high-level government objectives. To reap the benefits of more foot soldiers, they have worked hard to adopt new systems, collect new data, adapt their models, build human resources (HR) and administrative muscle, and mobilise additional funding.

However, to fulfil that potential, government needs to ensure that PEPs meet key conditions that make it possible for ASPs - and other NGOs - to deliver. These include:

- A confirmed, long-term political and budget commitment to PEPs;
- Increased funding for non-wage costs; and
- Continued commitment to enabling community-based organisations’ participation.

After School Programmes also need to continue to adapt - by collecting data that makes the case for continued public funding, adjusting their models to deal with the inescapable reality of high turnover, and collaborating to find leaner and more effective ways of working at scale.

Opportunities for greater impact should be explored, including:

- Mobilising co-funding at scale to support non-wage costs, including the costs of training and mentoring youth, as well as collaboration and shared learning;
- More widespread and formalised sharing of best-practice models to address common needs, including work readiness, learning, teaching and support material (LTSM), training and monitoring and evaluation; and
- Exploring the role education assistants in the Basic Education Employment Initiative (BEEI), another public employment programme, might play in expanding access to ASPs and integrating ASPs into schools and classrooms.

WHAT ARE AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAMMES, AND WHY ARE THEY IMPORTANT?

After School Programmes (ASPs) offer additional support beyond the classroom to children and youth.² While many focus on academic support and catch-up, they provide a diverse range of programmes, including arts and culture, sports and recreation, life skills, psychosocial support and career guidance. Globally, ASPs have been shown to accelerate learning and support catch-up,³ and evaluations of many individual local programmes show improved learning outcomes.⁴

ASPs fill a critical gap in the highly unequal South African education landscape, where the majority of children start school without key skills they need to thrive and need additional support.⁵ Just 1 in 5 children can read for meaning by Grade 4,⁶ and just a third of Grade 5 learners have some basic mathematical knowledge.⁷ Before the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) outbreak, 44% of learners in quintile 1 to 3 schools dropped out before Grade 12, and just 14% achieved a bachelor's pass.⁸

As a result, South Africa's public spend on education fails to produce an appropriate return on investment in learning outcomes: the state spends an estimated R2m per bachelor's pass, and an estimated R29m per matric Maths mark of 65% or higher.⁹

In this context, ASPs are a cost-effective investment.¹⁰ They can help children reach grade level by providing targeted support - often in smaller groups - that meets learners where they are instead of marching through the curriculum, as schools are required to do. They also allow children to develop relationships with caring adult role models, which supports socio-emotional development, improved school engagement and better school performance;¹¹ offer opportunities for children to nurture their talents and express themselves; and develop grit and resilience that can help young people cope with adversity.

Although ASPs are often viewed as a relatively small, auxiliary part of the education landscape, their reach is significant. National data on learner enrolment in ASPs is not available, but in 2019, 85% of Grade 9s at no-fee schools had attended out-of-school Maths lessons in the last year.¹²

ASPs are accustomed to navigating uncertainty, and tend to be innovative, agile and resilient. While a few work nationally or in multiple provinces, they are often highly localised, with programmes developed in response to local conditions and children's needs. Most are reliant on donors, and struggle to access significant funding from government.¹³

WHAT IS THE SOCIAL EMPLOYMENT FUND, AND HOW DOES IT ENGAGE WITH COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANISATIONS?

About the SEF

The Social Employment Fund is part of the Presidential Employment Stimulus (PES). The PES was launched in October 2020 to mitigate the devastating economic effects of COVID-19, catalyse economic recovery and tackle unemployment.¹⁴ While it was South Africa's most ambitious public employment programme to date, it builds on a long and rich history of PEPs locally and internationally, including the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) and the Community Work Programme (CWP). By November 2023, the PES had created 1.5 million work opportunities for 1.27 million people,¹⁵ through job creation and livelihood support programmes implemented across 16 government departments.

As one of these work programmes, the Social Employment Fund supports non-state actors¹⁶ to create “work for the common good”. It recognises that the state alone cannot solve South Africa's many social, economic and environmental challenges: South Africa needs to take a “whole of society approach” that draws on civil society's capacity, creativity and experience to uplift communities.¹⁷ SEF is part of the Department of Trade, Industry and Competition's social economy strategy, and is being managed by the Industrial Development Corporation (IDC).

“ 16 hours a week is not a full solution [to unemployment], but it makes a difference to people's sense of structure, access to networks, development of work skills - all of the good things about work experience can be provided within that two-day-a-week model. And it allows for greater scale and outreach - it's more affordable than a full-time model.”

Kate Philip, Programme Lead, Presidential Employment Stimulus, The Presidency

In Phase 1 of the Social Employment Fund, which ran from July 2022 to July 2023,¹⁸ 27 organisations, known as Strategic Implementing Partners (SIPs), were contracted to create a target 50,000 paid service opportunities. Phase 2, which will run from August 2023 to May 2024, enrolled 37 SIPs to reach the same target of 50,000. The programme has exceeded its targets: it had created 65,000 opportunities by March 2023¹⁹ and a total of 89,000 across both phases by September. The Learning Trust has been one of the SEF's Strategic Implementing Partners since the project launched.

Demand for the programme is high. In Phase 1, the 27 SIPs were selected from approximately 300 applicants. The Presidency declared that “based on the scale of submissions, SEF could have created 300,000 jobs instead of 50,000.”²⁰ The submissions likely under-represent interest from civil society: the detailed, technical and time-consuming application process with very limited lead time likely deterred many organisations.

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
- Part-time (16 hours a week) at minimum wage
- Supports non-state actors to create “work for the common good”
- 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)

Key design features

The Presidency’s primary objective with the SEF is to create employment and reduce poverty at scale. Its design is shaped by this agenda, with key features including:

- Eighty percent of the SEF’s budget is allocated to wages, which are paid directly by the IDC to participants.
- Implementing partners must employ at least 1,000 people (though they can do so by forming a coalition of organisations that employ fewer people, as TLT has done).
- The SEF is part-time (16 hours a week) at minimum wage, so it can afford to reach more people and so participants have time to pursue other income generation or self-development opportunities (like studying or volunteering).
- Participants are only paid for the days they work - a “pitch and pay” model (as opposed to a monthly stipend or salary).
- The SEF prefers to employ new people in each round to spread work opportunities among as many people as possible. (However, where participant continuation is needed to maximise impact and output - such as in ASPs - consideration is given for this).
- Exiting to pursue a new opportunity is viewed as success, and a high degree of participant “churn” is expected.

“ We have to get to scale, all over the country, deep into marginalised areas. And we need to find institutional mechanisms that can cascade from the centre to the margins in ways that are enabling rather than just top down. ... What we’re seeing in SEF is that scale has helped incentivise partnerships, incentivise outreach, to bring in organisations that might not have been part of the fold.”

Kate Philip, Programme Lead, Presidential Employment Stimulus, The Presidency

“ Bigger funders trust [intermediaries like] The Learning Trust. It’s about visibility for the smaller players. The people who are doing the actual work on the ground are just as worth funding as TLT is. But they are too small to make a case to funders, or to be appealing to districts and provinces.”

Sibongile Khumalo, Executive Director, The Learning Trust

Within these parameters, the SEF has drawn on lessons from other public employment programmes to design a PEP that enables civil society organisations to play to their strengths, and explicitly seeks to strengthen their institutional capacity.²¹ Intentions underpinning SEF’s design include:



INVESTING IN CIVIL SOCIETY:

- SEF creates jobs through civil society organisations with existing infrastructures and footprints. This means it is a highly efficient government spend.²²
- NGOs are contracted to do what they are good at, rather than expecting them to implement multi-sectoral programmes in one geographic area (as is the case with the Community Work Programme, where one organisation may be expected to roll out health, education, infrastructure and environment programmes).
- NGOs set their own targets, and work collaboratively with the IDC to refine these.



CAPACITY BUILDING:

- Twenty percent of the budget is allocated to non-wage costs.
- SIPs can hire a few full-time administrative roles, provided at least 90% of participants are earning the national minimum wage.

“The IDC has been flexible and open to feedback, right from the start, across all implementation areas. They take a developmental approach. What works, what doesn’t work?”

Charlene Petersen, Special Projects Manager, The Learning Trust



FLEXIBILITY:

- Implementing partners can allocate the 16 hours per week flexibly, based on programme needs. (This is helpful for after-school programmes, which often run for a few hours each day.)
- NGOs can allocate the 20% non-wage budget based on programme needs rather than prescribed ratios (although the IDC has to approve their proposal).



INCLUSIVITY:

- The SEF encourages implementing partners to build coalitions with smaller organisations that could not employ 1,000 people on their own. This enables bottom-up community development at scale. In Phase 2, the 37 SIPs are partnering with more than 1,000 community-based organisations.²³
- While the majority of participants are youth, people over 35 are also eligible. This allows NGOs to pay existing volunteers and recruit keen and qualified people, even if they fall outside the “youth” category.



STRONG SYSTEMS:

- Kwantu, a digital app, enables remote timesheet and attendance tracking. It can also verify that IDs and bank accounts are real by cross-checking with Home Affairs and the banking system.



ADAPTIVE GOVERNANCE:

- The SEF uses an adaptive governance model, with regular communication and feedback loops between the IDC and SIPs (discussed further below). The IDC has been receptive to partners’ suggestions and has implemented some of them in Phase 2.

When selecting partners, the SEF looks for organisations that understand the communities they work in; are good at what they do; balance established methodologies with innovation; involve other grassroots CBOs; and bring co-funding or income generation to the table.

HOW ARE AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAMMES LEVERAGING THE SEF AND OTHER PEPS?

Background to the the TLT SEF project

When the Social Employment Fund was launched, The Learning Trust (TLT) saw a significant opportunity to leverage the SEF to scale up and strengthen After School Programmes. After 11 years of supporting community-based extended learning programmes with funding and capacity support, TLT was keen to test whether it was possible to improve learning and child development outcomes and tackle unemployment at the same time, by accessing public funding to hire young people from local communities.

TLT had also recently formed the Catch-up Coalition, a network of NGOs, researchers, funders and other stakeholders that are committed to reducing learning backlogs, which were exacerbated by COVID-19. One of the Coalition's objectives is to leverage youth and the employment stimulus to deliver catch-up programmes.

When the SEF was announced, TLT saw an opportunity to enable small organisations to access government funding. In Phase 1 of the SEF, TLT convened a network of 42 organisations²⁴ to create 3,339 work opportunities and ultimately employed 6,089 people. In Phase 2, it is working towards a further 2,750 jobs and has already met this target and grown its network to 50 organisations.

How are ASPs using the SEF?

TLT invited its 25 SEF Phase 1 implementing partners to complete a survey about their experience. These survey questions were intended to explore the binding constraints that impact ASPs' participation in the SEF and other PEPs. This paper draws on feedback from the 16 organisations that responded (64%).

Implementing partners took on a range of participants: the smallest organisations employed fewer than thirty people, and the largest employed more than 400. Half of the respondents took on more than 120 participants, enabling them to add much-needed capacity to grow and sustain their operations. Some recruited from scratch to bring new people into their organisations, while others chose to pay existing volunteers.



Everyone works in their little corner with their 10 practitioners and 100 learners. Even when we look at everyone together, we're not making a dent in this problem. But if we can bring this capacity in, and reach more learners, and we are building a cohort of quality after-school practitioners - it is about reach, and being able to shift the dial in terms of learning outcomes."

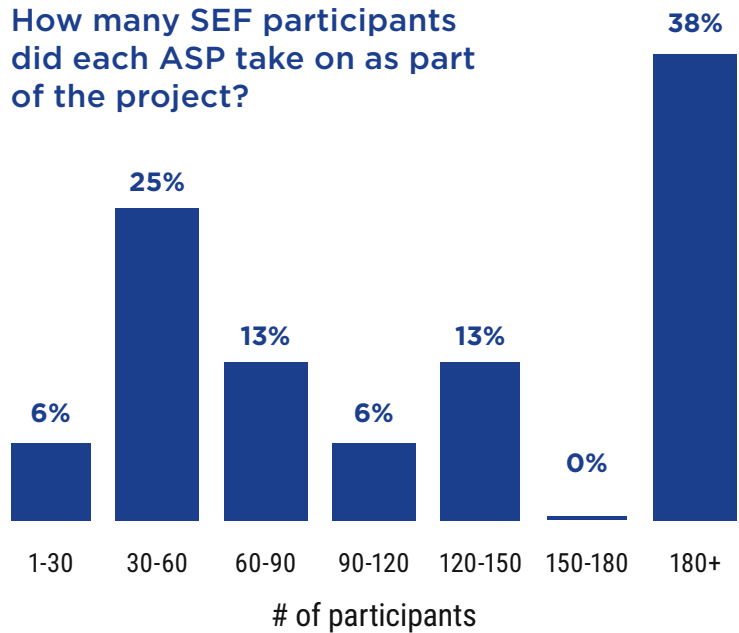
Charlene Petersen, Special Projects Manager, The Learning Trust

ASPs have used the SEF opportunity to increase scale and reach, and to improve programming and outcomes in a resource-constrained environment.

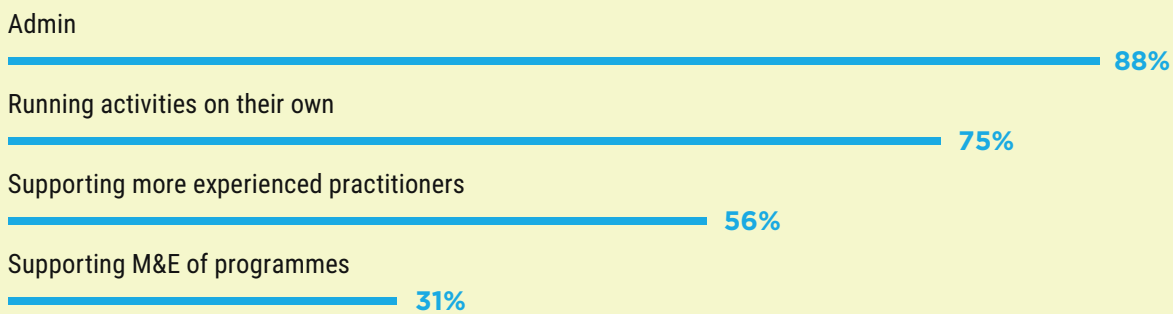
Almost all ASPs are using SEF participants to provide administrative support, and most use them to run programmes on their own.

ASPs noted the importance of onboarding and supporting SEF participants. The majority provided in-person training and support, and materials to support implementation. Some also offered virtual training and support.

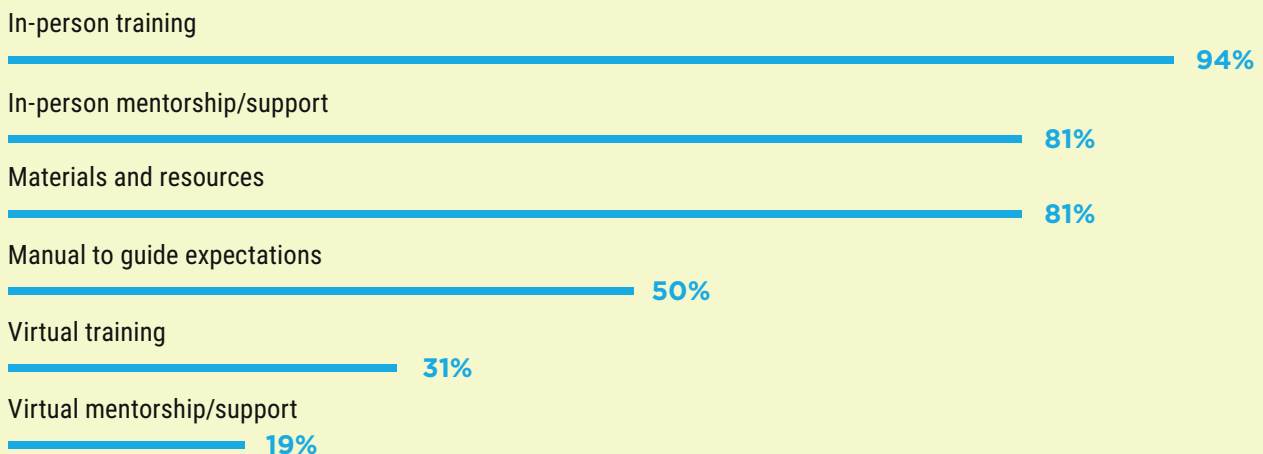
How many SEF participants did each ASP take on as part of the project?



What types of work are SEF participants doing in ASPs?



What kind of support did ASPs provide to SEF participants?



CASE STUDY

IkamvaYouth

IkamvaYouth offers tutoring, tertiary application support and other holistic programmes to high school learners in five provinces. Since it was founded in 2003, it has relied on volunteer tutors - many who are themselves alumni of the programme.

When it joined the SEF programme, Ikamva Youth took on 430 SEF participants. They used the SEF primarily to enrol eligible volunteers and pay them for the first time, although they recruited some new tutors as well. While unpaid volunteers simply give whatever hours they can, after joining the SEF they had to work at least 16 hours a week, which increased programme capacity, reach and impact and improved young people's work readiness.

CASE STUDY

Awarenet

Awarenet is an e-learning and social networking platform in Makhanda, Eastern Cape that equips learners with technical skills and uses technology to support academic development. Awarenet has both used the SEF to run its own programmes, and convened a coalition of 16 organisations in Makhanda that employ 240 SEF participants.

Awarenet's 40 SEF participants provide a range of support, including robotics tutoring and overseeing their community computer lab facility (which extends lab hours and frees staff to do other more skilled tasks). It has been able to pay existing volunteers, and one participant serves as a cook so that learners can now receive a nutritious meal.



WHAT OUTCOMES HAS THE SEF MADE POSSIBLE FOR ASPs?

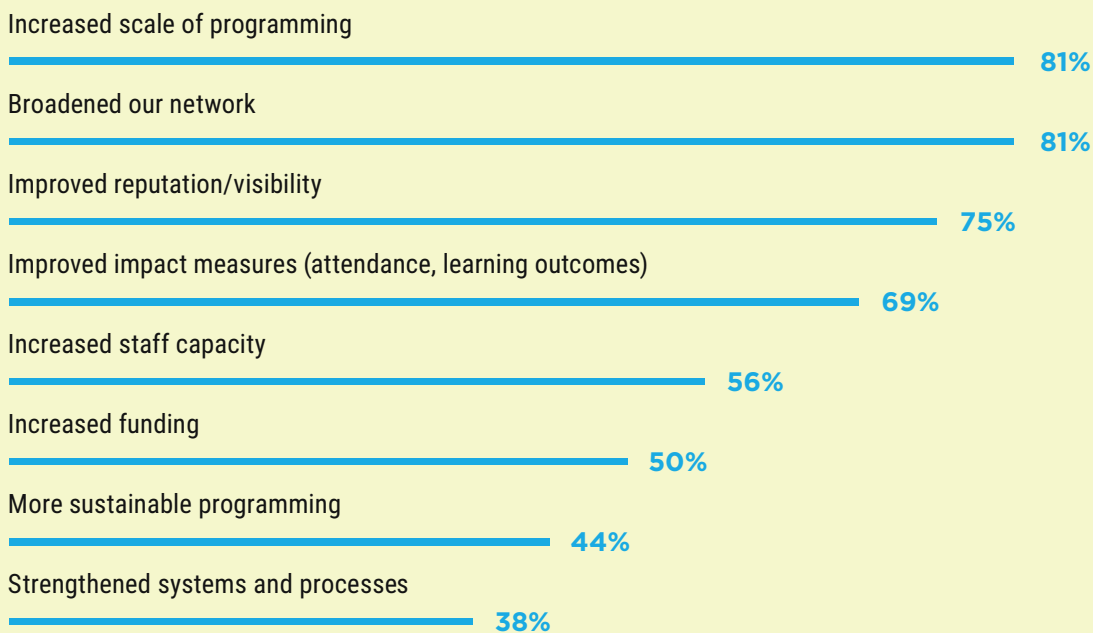
The survey and interview data indicate that participating in the Social Employment Fund has enabled ASPs to contribute towards three pressing societal goals: whole child development and learning outcomes, youth employment, and strengthening civil society.

When public funds can be used to tackle multiple social challenges at once, this offers greater value for money. Participation in the Social Employment Fund also helped TLT and its implementing partners to attract additional funding from private philanthropy.

These strategies are particularly important in the context of South Africa's highly constrained fiscus, where austerity and budget cuts are required.

Findings related to each of these outcomes are discussed below.

What outcomes has the SEF enabled for ASPs?





Learning outcomes: ASPs have been able to reach more children, scale proven models and deepen quality

Participating CBOs have been able to significantly **increase the reach** of their programmes: 13 of 16 survey respondents said they grew in size thanks to the SEF. Half of TLT's partners took on 120 or more participants, and 38% took on 180 or more. In some instances, the growth was exponential: Lefa (see case study) grew from 10 to 410 paid personnel, and Maboneng Township Arts Experience grew from 12 to 150. At least one organisation was able to start new programmes.

Taking on SEF participants also allowed CBOs to **deepen the quality** of their programmes by using extra capacity to improve or enhance their offering. They achieved this by paying people who were previously volunteering (which can improve consistency and retention); using SEF participants to support more experienced practitioners; and reducing child group sizes to offer more individualised attention, which increased learner attendance (and thus improved dosage).

Evaluating the learning outcomes of TLT's SEF partners is outside the scope of this research. Some local partner models, such as IkamvaYouth and OLICO, have been evaluated and show positive results. The Catch-up Coalition is also connecting implementing partners to apply tested and working practice education models with scale potential, such as Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL). Other models are in a more nascent stage or rely on internal M&E data to track outcomes and hone their approach. Furthermore, some learning outcomes including socio-emotional learning and development are more difficult to measure, but remain deeply connected to the work of ASPs²⁵.

CASE STUDY

Lefa Cooperative Ltd

Lefa Cooperative Ltd is a social enterprise that uses the app Telegram to provide virtual tutoring to high school learners in eight provinces. Programme ambassadors and activators visit schools to raise awareness and help learners sign up, and tutors provide remote support.

Before joining the SEF, the Lefa team had 10 core staff and about 20 volunteer tutors. Onboarding 400 SEF participants enabled them to grow their direct reach from ~70 schools in Tshwane to ~2,000 schools nationally; to increase the number of learners supported academically twelvefold, from ~780 to ~9500; to grow the reach of its school-based awareness programmes from 10,000 to 140,000 learners; and to expand into 7 additional provinces.

However, 11 out of 16 organisations reported that participating in the SEF has **improved their impact measures** (such as academic results or learner attendance). Going forward, there is an opportunity to adopt common metrics to more rigorously measure learning outcomes that the SEF is enabling.

Implementers' programmes straddle all pillars of after-school programming, including academic support, life skills, e-learning, arts and culture, and sports and recreation. As such, they are enabling a range of **other learning benefits** beyond academic outcomes - including those that are more difficult to measure, like grit, resilience, creativity and empathy.



Youth employment: Young people have gained work experience and developed skills, confidence and connections

Through TLT's SEF programme, 6,089 people accessed work opportunities in Phase 1, and 2,940 had accessed Phase 2 opportunities by November 2023.²⁶ Seventy-nine percent of Phase 1 participants were youth under age 35.

As a result of these opportunities, young people have:

- **Increased household income:** Regular, predictable part-time work helps people balance consumption and savings and achieve a higher standard of living.
- **Improved work readiness:** Fifteen of 16 survey respondents offered face-to-face training, and 13 offered in-person mentorship and support. Participants were trained on a variety of skills, including working with children, administration and monitoring and evaluation (M&E) - tangible skills they can apply in future work. Several organisations have adopted additional strategies to help young people prepare for and access jobs and further study, including career mapping, sharing job opportunities on WhatsApp, help applying for jobs, help starting businesses, financial literacy workshops, and partnering with stokvels to promote saving.
- **Accessed other concurrent opportunities:** Because the SEF is part-time, some participants have pursued entrepreneurial side hustles, including making and selling beadwork, baking cakes to sell to schools and NGOs, growing and selling food, and opening a hair salon. In many cases, the income from the SEF enabled them to save up for and invest in these nascent businesses: for example, one group of SEF participants formed a bulk buying club to launch a catering business. Others are pursuing their studies while working, or applying to study in the future.
- **Accessed other opportunities within host organisations:** Some ASPs also promoted participants into more senior roles at their own organisations when they noticed particular strengths or initiative.

- **Grown their networks:** SEF participation brings young people into contact with NGO professionals, other participants and new stakeholders in their communities, which can help them access other opportunities. A recent Youth Capital survey found that 6 out of 10 young people accessed work or study via connections.²⁷ A few organisations reported intergenerational learning as an unexpected benefit: because the SEF allows over-35s to participate, younger and older people have opportunities to learn from and support one another.

Many participants leave the programme to access other opportunities. While high turnover can make things challenging for ASPs (as discussed below), ultimately the SEF is designed as a stepping stone into economic activity. When people exit to a better opportunity, it is a win for employment and society.

Crucially, these work experiences do not only move young people temporarily out of the pool of people that are NEET - not in education, employment or training. They build young people's *employability* - their ability to access work opportunities in the future - by building skills, confidence and networks. This reduces long-term dependence on the state.

“When they volunteer, they give whatever hours they can, without a set minimum or maximum. But the structure that SEF gives - having a job description, having to come in for a certain number of hours, signing in, signing out - has enabled them to get real-life experience of what it's like to be employed.”

Shuvai Finos, SEF project manager, IkamvaYouth

CASE STUDY:**Maipfi Nengovhela,
30, IkamvaYouth SEF
Participant**

Maipfi was unemployed before becoming a tutor at Ikamva Youth. This experience has taught her valuable lessons on workplace behaviour, creating a healthy and enjoyable work environment, and how to address challenges in new environments. Each day brings new learning opportunities in her interactions with learners, which contribute to her growing confidence. The income from SEF has empowered her to start a skincare business where she makes and sells beauty products. She hopes to pursue studies in education and continue earning income from her beauty business.

CASE STUDY:**Koketjo Mvundlela, 30,
Olico Maths Education
SEF Participant**

Koketjo has a passion for learning. His work as a tutor with Olico has given him a better understanding of applying different learning strategies to meet learners' needs and he plans to pursue a teaching degree to take this learning into a career path. He also says the income from SEF has helped his family significantly because he is the sole breadwinner.

CASE STUDY:**Masifunde Learner
Development**

Masifunde Learner Development offers academic support, life skills and extracurricular activities to children in Walmer Township in the Eastern Cape. It took on 50 SEF participants in Phase 1.

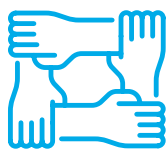
All participants attend training on child safeguarding, computer skills, facilitation, job readiness, goal setting and preparing for future employment. Masifunde covered these costs outside of its SEF non-wage budget.

Each participant is assigned to a workplace mentor amongst Masifunde's full-time staff. They also work with Masifunde's youth support agent, who helps them further clarify their interests, develop exit plans and apply to study. Young people who start businesses are linked to Masifunde's business coach, who helps them hone their idea, register their company and apply for seed funding. The youth support agent and business coach were part of Masifunde's model before joining the SEF - demonstrating how SEF participants can benefit from other non-SEF programmes and services once they are part of an NGO team.

This approach has yielded impressive outcomes. Of its 50 Phase 1 SEF participants, 33 (66%) are employed, and three (6%) have been accepted to tertiary institutions. Another 13 (26%) are still part of the programme in Phase 2, where they are supported to find the next opportunity. There was also some attrition: six participants left for unknown reasons and two were dismissed.

“SEF enables them to work. After they start working they get encouraged and motivated to continue working; it pushes them.”

Mdu Menze, CEO, Waumbe Youth Development Centre



Civil society: CBOs have strengthened HR, admin and M&E capacity; built networks; and attracted additional funding

The “whole of society approach” on which the SEF is built recognises that government alone cannot solve South Africa’s complex social challenges or meet all its residents’ needs. A sizable, well-capacitated and innovative civil society is critical to economic and social development.

Community-based organisations (CBOs) in particular play a key role in grassroots service delivery, job creation and innovation - and the sector is growing. As of February 2023, 270,313 non-profit organisations (NPOs) were registered with the Department of Social Development (DSD), up from 221,000 in October 2019.²⁸ In 2020, the non-profit sector employed almost a million people²⁹ - accounting for an estimated 6-7% of all jobs in South Africa.³⁰

However, the majority of these organisations are not highly formalised or well-capacitated. USAID’s annual civil society organisation (CSO) sustainability index for sub-Saharan Africa rates South African civil society organisations as “emerging” overall.³¹

To address this, the SEF explicitly set out to strengthen implementing partners’ institutional capacity, and to push them to think and work at scale. It did this by:

- Requiring its Strategic Implementing Partners (SIPs) to adopt **standardised digital systems** for administration, HR matters, and monitoring and evaluation.
- Allowing SIPs to use SEF participants to create **administrative roles** as well as programme implementation roles (including a few full-time roles paid at a slightly higher rate).
- Adopting an **adaptive management approach**, characterised by open communication and regular feedback loops between SIPs and the IDC, and iterative changes to programme and system design in response to SIPs’ feedback.
- Creating a **community of practice**. In the Social Employment Network (SEN), which meets monthly, SIPs interact with and give feedback to the IDC, share best practice, and build relationships that enable peer-to-peer support and problem solving. In Phase 2, the SEN has established mentoring relationships, where new SIPs are paired with experienced SIPs for additional support.



The adaptive governance approach is completely unique to any other public employment programme. The IDC takes into consideration the learnings and wants to adjust and do things right. I love seeing the learning from both ends. It’s not just SIPs learning - it’s the IDC too. They also communicate their own flaws and obstacles.”

Margo Paterson, Programme Lead,
Western Cape Economic Development
Partnership (which convenes the
Social Employment Network)



[Our organisation’s participation in] SEF made sure that I took time to consider growth opportunities.”

Mthandazo Khumalo, Executive
Director, Phakamani Young
Minds Academy

HOW HAVE ASPs ADAPTED TO THE SEF OPPORTUNITY?

The research found that while most of TLT’s partners needed to build capacity to meet the SEF’s demanding administrative and reporting requirements, they were able to rise to the occasion. While the journey has been challenging (as discussed further below), they have found it beneficial and worthwhile.

Eleven out of 16 implementing partners felt that they were “somewhat prepared” to participate in the SEF, but needed to **develop institutional capacity** in a variety of areas - most notably HR, administration, M&E, and project management.

And 13 out of 16 implementing partners had to **adapt their operating models** to be part of the SEF. This included creating new management systems, developing enhanced or new training approaches, increasing administrative support, changing working hours, and shifting from volunteers to paid personnel.

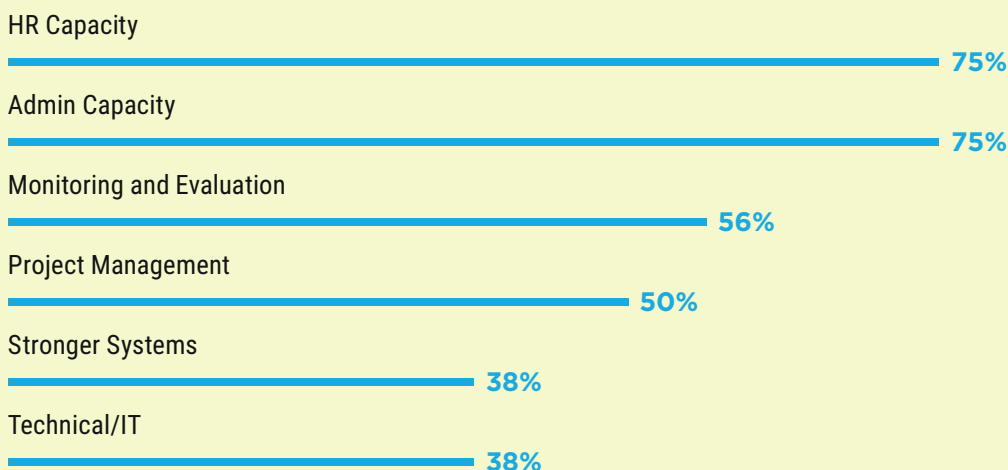
This was not always easy. TLT’s partners struggled with the SEF’s high administrative burden and stringent reporting requirements. In particular, they mentioned:

- **The HR workload.** Recruiting large numbers of people, updating participant lists to keep pace with frequent dropout and re-recruitment, and

the SEF’s “pitch-and-pay” approach create an almost constant need to update records.

- **Monitoring and evaluation requirements**, which have increased in Phase 2 with the introduction of a common M&E framework and a baseline and endline survey.
- **Quick turnaround times** that were at times disruptive.
- Challenges adapting to the **digital administration and payment platform** (Kwantu). Sometimes these challenges led to payment delays or errors, causing financial strain for participants.³² That said, many noted that the challenges of the payroll platform were more significant in the first phase of the SEF and have improved in the second phase, thanks to SIPs’ feedback, enhancements to the system, better training and improved SIP preparedness.

What additional capacities did ASPs develop during SEF implementation?



On the whole, organisations were able to creatively adapt and grow stronger in the process. However, the SEF's non-wage budget was not always sufficient to cover the costs of doing so.

TLT mobilised **additional funding from private philanthropy**.³³ This allowed TLT to hire new staff, make operational grants to CBOs, and provide intensive monitoring and support to all its implementing partners. TLT worked with the CBOs to help them understand the SEF's rationale and requirements, build capacity, collaborate and learn from one another, meet M&E requirements and problem-solve. TLT also gave all partners mobile phones for attendance and time tracking.

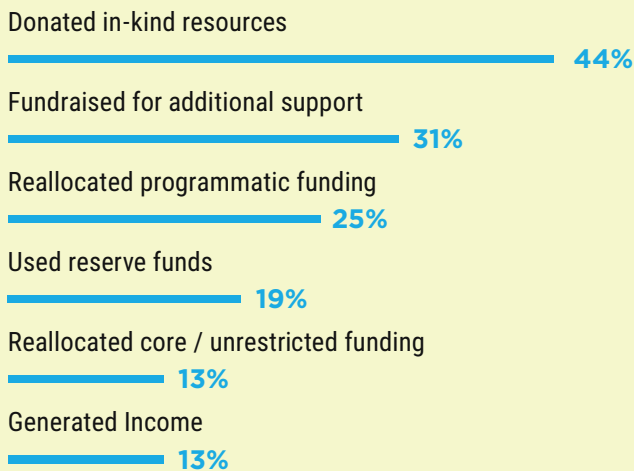
Twelve of the 16 survey respondents also **used their own funding**, over and above the SEF non-wage allocation and TLT's support, to deliver the project. The supplementary funding came from additional fundraising efforts; reallocating project, core or reserve funds; and generating income. The value of the additional funding allocated per CBO during Phase 1 ranged from an estimated R35,000-R50,000 in total to as much as R150,000 per month. They also provided in-kind resources (mobile phones, stationery, learning resources) to support the project, ranging in value from R10,000 to nearly half a million rand.

TLT's partner CBOs used these additional resources to provide tools and materials, transport and train participants, hire new staff not covered by the SEF, support HR and admin, and reallocate existing staff members' time to support the project.

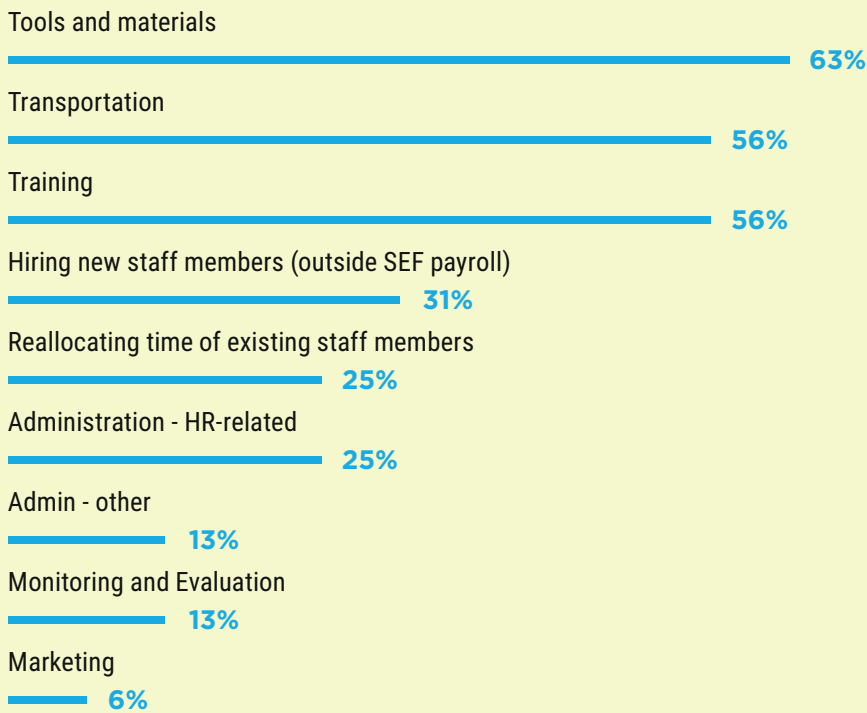
This highlights that the SEF's 20% non-wage budget is generally insufficient to deliver fully on ASPs' potential for impact. It also highlights that in a coalition model, where a strong convening organisation contracts with the IDC and works with smaller, community-based organisations - one of the SEF's explicit goals - additional resources are needed to support the capacity needs of the convenor as well as the implementers.

This organisational strengthening has helped ASPs improve their visibility and reputation; access more funding; and strengthen systems and processes across their organisations. The community of practice has also broadened their networks and enabled sharing and collaboration. All of this contributes to a more capacitated, connected and agile civil society.

What types of additional funding or resources did ASPs use to implement SEF projects?



How did you use the additional/reallocated funds?



Continuing to reap the benefits of the SEF and other PEPs may require some mindset shifts among ASPs. For example, traditionally ASPs prize retention. It is expensive to re-train new personnel, and it is easier for children to form caring, supportive relationships when they work with the same adult over time.

Yet the TLT SEF project has seen extremely high turnover: 6,089 people participated in 3,339 work opportunities in Phase 1, a churn rate of more than 100%. This is consistent with other SIPs' experiences.

Although it is challenging for ASPs, from an employment perspective, leaving the programme to access a better opportunity is in fact cause for celebration. Youth employment and poverty alleviation - not NGO staff retention - is the driving agenda behind Treasury priorities and PEP budget allocations.

To reap the benefits of scaling via public employment, NGOs need to develop models that can recruit high numbers of people rapidly; find and hire the right skills; and plan for and mitigate high turnover.

ASPs are already adapting to the realities of public employment at scale: they are recruiting through the national pathway manager, as well as personal connections and using incentives; making retention a performance metric for coordinators; maintaining lists of alternative candidates before they are needed; providing virtual training opportunities to incorporate participants at a distance and when turnover results in new participants joining at short notice, and topping up stipends (although the IDC does not recommend this due to the wage distortion it can introduce).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This research set out to examine the binding constraints that impact ASPs' participation in the SEF and other PEPs. Yet ultimately, we found that none of the constraints or challenges were binding. We found common challenges with real potential solutions, which are discussed below.

The after school sector tends to be agile, responsive and resilient. ASPs have adapted in a number of ways to align to the SEF's design and requirements, and have contributed to learning outcomes and youth employment at greater scale while strengthening their organisations.

Even in light of the challenges, 100% of survey respondents would choose to participate again, given the opportunity. And 100% said the SEF has had a positive impact on their organisation.

In order to fully realise ASPs' potential to deliver learning outcomes and provide meaningful work experiences for young people, while building their capacity to work effectively at scale, three key conditions need to be in place:

- A confirmed, long-term political and budget commitment to PEPs;
- Increased or augmented/matched funding for non-wage costs; and
- Continued commitment to enabling community-based organisations' participation.

Each of these is unpacked below.

Furthermore, implementing partners should continue to refine and widely share learning experiences to scale working models for greater impact. Additionally, exploration into the role education assistants in the BEEI might play to potentially expand access to ASPs and integrate ASPs into schools and classrooms can open more pathways for impact.



[The SEF is a] brilliant opportunity for this country. We needed it to keep young people motivated and hopeful. It makes them active citizens, not sitting at home. It gets them to realise their purpose in life - they find themselves."

Mdu Menze, CEO, Waumbe Youth Development Centre

RECOMMENDATION 1:**A confirmed, long-term political and budget commitment to PEPs**

In the short term, when ASPs are able to pay existing volunteers and grow their teams, this contributes to programme and organisational sustainability. However, if PEPs only provide short- to medium-term opportunities, with little clarity on prospects for renewal, this makes planning difficult for ASPs and can harm sustainability in the long-term and limit ASPs' opportunities to innovate and collaborate for long-term and sector-wide impact and scale.

To date, the SEF has secured a three-year budget commitment in the medium term expenditure framework. A one-year extension of the PES was announced in the 1 November 2023 budget speech, and the IDC has confirmed that the SEF will continue for at least a third phase.

When government funding ends, ASPs must either raise funding from private philanthropy to sustain scaled-up programmes (a tall order, as few philanthropists are willing to pay for roles that were previously funded by government) or scale back their operations.

And people who once volunteered, but grew accustomed to being paid, may no longer be willing to volunteer after a PEP contract has ended. Young people in particular are motivated by progression and a sense of upward progress in their careers, and are often unwilling to take what feels like a “step backwards” to accept lower pay (or no pay).³⁴ In a worst case scenario, the number of people delivering ASPs may ultimately shrink if a culture of volunteerism becomes less attractive next to the opportunity to earn a minimum wage stipend (even if it has ended).

Long-term commitment also offers sufficient time to hone and iterate models and to generate meaningful evidence of impact.

RECOMMENDATION 2:**Increased funding for non-wage costs**

As discussed above, three-quarters of TLT's SEF partners had to use their own funding and resources to top up SEF's non-wage allocation - even in light of additional support from TLT.

While the IDC recognises that it is challenging to implement programmes within the current budget ratio of 80% wages, 20% non-wage costs, this ratio is unlikely to shift given unemployment rates and fiscal austerity.

However, supporting ASPs to scale up via PEPs presents an appealing investment opportunity for private philanthropy and business: because the vast majority of costs are covered by government, modest top-ups have the potential to deliver significant social returns, notably - as discussed in this paper - learning gains, youth development opportunities, and strengthening civil society. Dedicated investment to further amplify youth training and mentorship through ASP implementers and improve mechanisms for sharing and scaling best practice models has potential to create even greater impact. And 5 of 16 survey respondents raised additional funds for their SEF programmes, indicating appetite to support this type of programme.

To achieve gains at scale, these efforts should not be piecemeal and fragmented. They need to be concerted, ambitious and strategic. Private funders and business should pool funds to maximise PEPs' potential, and should consider innovative approaches such as:

- A collective impact approach, where funds are pooled, a “backbone organisation” coordinates across partners, and impact is measured consistently across organisations using standardised tools and impact measures;
- An employment and learning outcomes fund, where payments are tied to delivering on key metrics;
- Funding convening organisations, like TLT, which has helped 50 community-based organisations access large-scale government funding, but needs additional capacity to do so effectively;

- Recognising and funding the cost of collaboration and shared learning in addition to direct programme implementation,³⁵ and
- Investing in research and advocacy, which are not covered by SEF non-wage costs.

RECOMMENDATION 3:

Continued commitment to enabling community-based organisations' participation

Design choices made by the SEF's architects have successfully involved and capacitated CBOs, including small organisations that are not necessarily well-networked. This community-first approach has allowed it to leverage the infrastructure, learnings and networks of existing CBOs.³⁶

However, TLT's partners still struggled at times to deliver on expectations. Challenges included sub-optimal and volatile time frames, struggles recruiting the right people, barriers to poor people's participation, and insufficient resources to cope with admin demands.

The SEF can continue to enable participation of ASPs by:

- **Maintaining enabling design features.** The SEF's flexibility, inclusivity and adaptive governance model have worked well for ASPs and other CBOs.
- **Changing time frames.** 100% of survey respondents would prefer it if SEF phases aligned to school calendars, with a kickoff in Jan, Feb or March. Paying participants over December is also important for retention.
- **Allowing participants to work and study at the same time.** Several ASPs reported that it is difficult to attract people with the right skills into SEF roles. High school academic programmes, in particular, often rely on tertiary students as tutors, but people currently receiving funding from the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) are not eligible to participate in the SEF. However, if the SEF's design is built on the idea of allowing people

to pursue complementary livelihood strategies, including personal development, people who are studying part-time should not be excluded from participation.

- **Considering modest convening budgets for organisations leading coalitions.** One of the SEF's explicit goals is to involve small, community-based organisations. TLT is doing this effectively, but it had to mobilise co-funding. Allocating additional non-wage budget to convening organisations, on top of the 20% to each implementer, could incentivise stronger NGOs to boost organisations that could never access PEPs on their own.

After School Programmes also need to continue to adapt - by collecting data that demonstrates learning outcomes and clarifies the cost of achieving those outcomes; by systematically tracking PEP participants' post-programme access to jobs and further studies to make the case for continued public funding; by adapting their models to deal with the inescapable reality of high turnover; and by collaborating to find leaner and more effective ways of working at scale.

SUGGESTED IMPACT METRICS FOR SECTOR-WIDE FOCUS

1. Number of learners able to read for meaning in any language by grade 4.
2. Number of learners able to do basic arithmetic by grade 5.
3. Number of learners demonstrating achievement at the minimal level for grade 8 Maths and Science by grade 9.
4. Number of learners that reach matric.
5. Number of learners that achieve a Bachelors' pass for matric.
6. Number of learners achieving above 50% for Maths in matric.
7. Per learner cost for achieving these metrics.³⁷
8. Number of PEP participants who go on to access jobs and further studies.

Crucially, the above conditions should not only be applied to or sustained within the Social Employment Fund. Where possible, they should be adopted across other public employment programmes that target or employ large numbers of youth, such as the Basic Education Employment Initiative (BEEI), the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP), the Community Work Programme (CWP) and the National Youth Service (NYS). The SEF has built wisely on the foundations laid by and lessons learned from its predecessors. The BEEI programme - which employed 860,000 young people at 23,000 schools between 2020 and 2023,³⁸ an unprecedented scale in South African PEPs - has also been fertile ground for iteration and learning.³⁹ Government needs to rapidly apply these lessons across PEPs to ensure these critical programmes are achieving their full economic and social potential.

Opportunities to explore further

In addition to the above recommendations, ASPs, the SEF and other PEPs should explore:

- **Sharing best-practices to address common needs** (e.g. youth development and work readiness). This is already happening to some degree, both within the Social Employment Network for SIPs (which TLT participates in), and via TLT's convening of its ASP partners. In Phase 2, the SEN began pairing new SIPs with more experienced SIPs for mentoring. However, there is an opportunity to refine, elevate and widely share models that meet needs across programmes, such as work readiness curricula, training design and materials or impact measurement tools.
- **Exploring the role Education Assistants (EAs) employed at schools via the Basic Education Employment Initiative (BEEI) might play** in expanding access to ASPs (understood as all extended / beyond-the-classroom learning opportunities, regardless of whether they happen during or after the school day). While EAs report to schools and are employed by the Department of Basic Education, they could be seconded to CBOs that might play a role in upskilling, resourcing and mentoring EAs to deliver catch-up programmes such as small-group literacy support for foundation phase learners.

ABOUT THE LEARNING TRUST

The Learning Trust (TLT) is a grant-making and capacity support provider. It is championing and developing the After School sector in South Africa by supporting extended learning programmes that work to improve educational outcomes of young people living in poverty and exclusion. Its support focuses on developing quality practitioners, building sustainable organisations, and providing platforms for sharing and collaboration.

ABOUT THIS POSITION PAPER

This position paper was commissioned by The Learning Trust as part of the advocacy work of the Catch-up Coalition, which is funded by Allan and Gill Gray Philanthropies South Africa (AGGPSA). The research was conducted by Katie Huston and Kristen Thompson.

To inform the position paper, the research team⁴⁰:

- Conducted **10 semi-structured interviews** with key informants.⁴¹
- Ran a **survey** with TLT's Phase 1 SEF implementing partners. 16 of 25 Phase 1 implementing partners (64%) completed the survey.
- Collected **follow-up data** via WhatsApp, phone and email with 10 of the 16 survey respondents.
- Drew on internal **TLT monitoring and evaluation** data.
- Attended collaborative **sector workshops** about youth employment and learning outcomes.

We are grateful to everyone who took time to participate in this research.

LIMITATIONS

This research was funded by Allan and Gill Gray Philanthropies South Africa and commissioned by The Learning Trust.

The survey focused on after school programmes' experience of using the Social Employment Fund (SEF) to scale and strengthen their programmes, and qualitative insights related to the SEF's intention, design and implementation. While it drew on monitoring and evaluation data collected by The Learning Trust, it did not collect quantitative data about the SEF's impact.

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ENDNOTES

- 1 15 of 16 organisations said SEF has had a ‘significant’ positive impact on their organisation, while 1 organisation said it has had a ‘somewhat’ positive impact.
- 2 “After School Programmes” is an umbrella term that includes any programme that takes place outside classroom instructional time (including before and during the school day) where new actors (not teachers) provide additional academic support or enrichment.
- 3 Education Endowment Foundation 2023
- 4 See e.g. Bohmer et al 2014; Olivier & Harris et al 2022; Western Cape Government 2019; YearBeyond 2019; Spaul et al 2012; McLean & Van der Berg, 2016
- 5 Giese et al 2022 2022; Hofmeyr et al 2022
- 6 Dept. of Basic Education 2023
- 7 Reddy et al 2020
- 8 Olivier 2021
- 9 Olivier 2021
- 10 Olivier 2021
- 11 Cantor et al 2019
- 12 Olivier 2021
- 13 A 2022 exploratory review by the Independent Philanthropy Association of South Africa that asked 49 ASPs about their top five funders found that only 7% of that funding came from government. See Olivier & Khumalo et al 2022
- 14 Industrial Development Corporation (IDC) 2022
- 15 Presidential Employment Stimulus 2023
- 16 Both non-profit and for-profit organisations, including social enterprises, are eligible to be SEF implementing partners. However, for-profit entities face a higher level of scrutiny to ensure work undertaken serves the common good and no part of SEF funding accrues to profits.
- 17 IDC 2022
- 18 Phase 1 was originally scheduled to run from July 2022 to March 2023. It was extended to July 2023 to allow SIPs to meet their targets, and to offer a seamless transition between Phase 1 and Phase 2 for organisations continuing their programmes.
- 19 March 2023 was the initial end date for Phase 1 before the four-month extension was implemented.
- 20 The Presidency 2023, cited in Youth Capital 2023
- 21 IDC 2022
- 22 Youth Capital 2023
- 23 Youth Capital 2023
- 24 This included 25 direct TLT partners; 16 organisations that formed a consortium under one of the partners; and TLT, which used SEF roles to bolster its admin capacity.
- 25 Olivier 2021
- 26 This includes some overlap between Phase 1 and Phase 2.
- 27 Youth Capital 2022
- 28 Bizcommunity 2023
- 29 Trialogue 2020
- 30 Calculations based on Quarterly Labour Force Survey for Q4 2020. See Statistics South Africa 2021
- 31 The USAID civil society organization sustainability index uses survey data and expert input to evaluate the sustainability of the civil society sector based on the legal environment, organizational capacity, financial viability, advocacy, service provision, sectoral infrastructure, and public image. See USAID 2022.
- 32 DGMT 2023
- 33 Allan and Gill Gray Philanthropies South Africa made a grant to the Catch-Up Coalition that supports aspects of TLT’s SEF project.
- 34 YearBeyond 2024 (forthcoming)
- 35 In Phase 1, the Social Employment Network community of practice was part-funded by DGMT. It is fully funded by the IDC in Phase 2.
- 36 Youth Capital 2023
- 37 Olivier 2021
- 38 Youth Capital 2023
- 39 See Youth Capital 2023 for an overview of lessons from the SEF and the BEEI
- 40 Katie Huston and Kristen Thompson (independent consultants with a combined 26 years’ experience in the education and after-school sector) conducted the research. The researchers have both led after-school organisations, and one participated in Phase 1 of the SEF as a SIP; their experiences informed analysis.
- 41 Interview participants were chosen to provide diverse and close-up perspectives on SEF, and the broader after-school and public employment landscapes. They included representatives from the Presidency, the IDC (Industrial Development Corporation, the government agency responsible for implementing SEF), private philanthropy, the Western Cape Economic Development Partnership (which convenes the Social Employment Network, a community of practice for SEF implementing partners), and TLT implementing partners and staff.

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