

AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAMMES: A PATHWAY TO EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

The intersection of education and unemployment has long been a critical area of focus in South Africa. With a persistently high youth unemployment rate and educational outcomes lagging global standards, innovative solutions are necessary to tackle these challenges, writes THE LEARNING TRUST

The Learning Trust (TLT) is an intermediary grant-maker providing funding and capacity support to emerging After School Programmes (ASPs) in South Africa, focusing on improving educational outcomes in underserved communities. Through the Social Employment Fund (SEF), TLT is demonstrating how strategic interventions can deliver multifaceted benefits for learners, youth and society at large.

OVERVIEW OF THE SOCIAL EMPLOYMENT FUND

The SEF is an initiative under the Presidential Employment Stimulus, designed to create meaningful work opportunities while addressing societal challenges.

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Managed by the Industrial Development Corporation, the SEF operates on a model that creates work for the common good, enabling organisations to scale their impact while providing participants with income, skills and experience.

The emphasis on 'work for the common good' means that these opportunities do not just serve as temporary relief from unemployment, but also contribute to long-term societal benefits.

RESEARCH INSIGHTS

One of the standout features of our SEF project is the collaboration with ASPs. These programmes, which provide additional support *beyond the classroom*, play a crucial role in improving educational outcomes.

Through the SEF, TLT has expanded the reach and impact of ASPs. The results have been remarkable: over 100 000 learners reached, 50 community-based organisations convened through the Catch-up Coalition and more than 10 000 paid work opportunities created.

Research commissioned by TLT highlighted that ASPs participating in the SEF have improved learning outcomes, expanded access to quality education and developed more resilient organisations.

IMPACT ON YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

The SEF has proven to be a much-needed tool for combatting youth unemployment. Young people participating in the SEF have gained valuable work experience, developed new skills and increased their confidence and employability. This, in turn, has had a ripple effect, as participants have been able to contribute financially to their households, further their education or explore entrepreneurship opportunities.

The work experience provided by ASPs is particularly valuable because it is grounded in real, community-focused initiatives. Participants are contributing to efforts that have a tangible impact on their communities.

The collaboration between SEF and ASPs has also had a deep impact on community-based organisations. Many of these organisations have seen their capacity strengthened, their networks expanded and their visibility and reputation enhanced. This has enabled them to attract additional funding, scale their programmes and deliver even greater impact.

LOOKING AHEAD

South Africa cannot afford to continue with high dropout rates, low literacy levels, and widespread unemployment. After School Programmes offer a powerful solution, addressing educational challenges while creating employment opportunities.

By integrating ASPs into the education ecosystem, South Africa can turn the tide on inequality and social exclusion and build a brighter future for children and young people in underserved communities. Now is the time to invest in after-school programmes, leverage the talents and energy of our young people, and ensure that every child has the opportunity to succeed. ■

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