

Can business make a difference in schools?

Lessons from
EQUIP



"I call upon the entire nation to recommit ourselves to alleviating the skills shortage in our country. We all have power beyond our measure. If we each do a little, South Africa will be a different place."

Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka,
Deputy President of South Africa

Why business involvement in schools?

The business of business is business. Yes, but...

South Africa is a country in transition. The involvement of all its citizens – corporate and ordinary people – is critical in achieving accelerated and shared growth, developing people and skills, and strengthening democracy. Widespread poverty in South Africa continues to challenge this vision and persistent inequalities threaten to undermine future prospects for national development and social cohesion.

Throughout the country there is agreement that a severe shortage of skills hampers long-term, sustained economic growth and the effectiveness of service delivery.

Schooling is the starting point for the country's talent pool and a sustainable development foundation. Companies depend on hiring people who are competent and confident, and who have the skills and experience required for the workplace.

Many companies are thus increasingly seeking to identify those components of education that need support, and looking for opportunities that can leverage business skills and resources to best advantage. This guide aims to provide some direction to that process.

"The EQUIP programme is a prime example of how essential and powerful social strategic partnerships between government, community-based organisations and the private sector are in providing long-term sustainable solutions which empower communities."

Lungile Dumsa, former Head of Corporate Affairs, ENGEN.

The schooling landscape

Major changes have been made in schools since 1994, many of which have resulted in improvements in schooling access, improved infrastructure and improved teacher: learner ratios. At the same time there are persistent challenges, which point to the need for all sectors of society to become more involved to ensure that schools improve their performance and output.

FACTS AND FIGURES

- 26 292 schools in South Africa including 1 098 private schools
- Approximately 6 000 high schools (Grade 8 to Grade 12)
- The rest are primary schools (Grade 0 to Grade 7)
- Approximately 12 million learners in the system
- Approximately 386 600 teachers in the system
- Teacher learner ratio = 32:1. This has been reduced from more than 50:1 since 1994
- At present number of overcrowded schools stands at 24%
- The number of schools with electricity stands at over 90%
- 5% of schools still have no access to water
- Less than 1% of schools still have no access to toilets
- Primary and intermediate phase school attendance rate stands at 97%
- An overall improvement in qualifications of black African youth has been attained.

PERSISTENT CHALLENGES

- Of the 1 million learners who enter primary schools and proceed to secondary level:
 - ◇ Only 7% of learners go on to higher education after school
 - ◇ About 10% go on to vocational education
 - ◇ The rest (83%) face unemployment
- Up to 60% of learners leave school before Matric
- These low numbers are a result of:
 - ◇ Poor literacy and mathematics competency at primary school level
 - ◇ Low output of higher grade mathematics and science at high school level
- In 2004 5.1% of learners passed mathematics on the higher grade. Only 3% of these were African
- Only half of learners participating in Further Education and Training vocational complete their studies
- 22% of learners completing a degree do so within the standard three to four year period
- Poverty and HIV/AIDS contribute to negative factors affecting young people continuing their education.

This snapshot shows that there is huge scope for companies to get involved in improving South Africa's education system.

The task of producing high-quality education in South Africa requires more than the national and provincial Departments of Education can achieve on their own. It requires the active support of a range of government agencies, civil society and the private sector. Schools cannot be separated from society in which business must be both a social and economic player.



Why private sector investment has not delivered optimally in schools

Since 1994, the private sector has made substantial investments in schooling and continues to do so. However, research shows that most of these investments are not having a lasting impact on the quality of the schooling, for the following reasons:

- A lack of cohesion between private sector investments in education
- Non-alignment with government priorities.

This results in piecemeal and sporadic initiatives that have little chance of making a lasting impact or having a multiplier effect.

Clearly there is a need for more regular engagement between senior business representatives and the Department of Education at national and provincial levels so that senior players in business can become better informed about provincial priorities and plans for schools.

Making public-private partnerships work in schools

WHAT TO DO

- ✓ Work within an agreed policy framework to promote joint action. For example, the Department of Education's Adopt-a-School strategy, designed to solicit private sector support for the Dinaledi schools that focus on improving learner performance in mathematics and science.
- ✓ Ensure lessons learnt, good practice and obstacles to progress are shared with government and other stakeholders.
- ✓ Take a long-term view. Experience shows that a five to ten year commitment is required for sustained change.
- ✓ Establish a joint governance structure between the private sector and government, right from the outset.
- ✓ Take time to understand the capacity needs in the company and the education department.
- ✓ Formalise the partnership through an agreement.
- ✓ Identify champions at local level.
- ✓ Clarify the motives, roles and responsibilities of each of the parties.
- ✓ Create space for innovation in support of government priorities.
- ✓ Pool resources (financial resources or expertise).
- ✓ Focus on a bottom-up approach to ensure that the needs of different schools shape the interventions.
- ✓ Bridge the trust gap between government and business.
- ✓ Follow through on how initiatives are implemented at all levels – at provincial level, in the districts and in the schools.
- ✓ Jointly address the hard questions:
 - > What will the partnership achieve in the medium to long term?
 - > How can the private sector investment stimulate innovation?
 - > How will the partnership improve the quality of education in schools?
 - > What are the risk factors in the venture?
 - > Where does accountability lie?

WHAT NOT TO DO ...

- ✗ Don't invest in schools without taking into account whether they have the capacity to use the equipment and training in support of teaching and learning.
- ✗ Don't make sporadic donations of equipment without a proper needs assessment.
- ✗ Don't provide bursaries on an ad hoc basis. Rather award bursaries in support of talent, need, special programmes (e.g. the Dinaledi schools) or helping learners to access higher quality schools.
- ✗ Don't engage schools without establishing a partnership through which a programme can be shaped and monitored.

Lessons from the NBI EQUIP programme

Whole school development involves improving school management and strengthening the quality of teaching and learning in schools by working at different levels in a school, and responding to the specific needs of the school.

The National Business Initiative launched its Education Quality Improvement Partnerships (EQUIP) programme in 1995, working in partnership with schools,

provincial education departments and companies.

Since 1995 EQUIP has:

- Been involved in more than 500 schools in 8 provinces
- Drawn up to 50 companies into public-private partnerships
- Secured corporate investment of approximately R 45 million in schools.

Impact of the EQUIP model

An impact assessment conducted in 2006 showed the EQUIP model can increase the quality of education in schools. This will happen when the programme works with schools that are functioning at a basic level and are keen to respond to their internal problems; the school leadership is proactive and motivated; teaching and learning activities are taken seriously; the school is keen to develop its teachers; and planning is prioritised.

Through a careful needs analysis, the whole school development programme is designed in relation to the school's culture and its environment. It ensures that the school development plan is geared to solve the problems unique to that school.

The partnership involves the school, its communities, the business partner and the provincial Department of Education. It can generate additional resources, draw in district and provincial support, and create effective inter-school and community networks. Those schools that can leverage the partnership for the benefit of their learners are most likely to get results.

The research shows that improvements may take place at different levels at different times. For example, there may be a lot of progress in regard to the relationship between the school and its community, but slower progress in respect of learner achievement. This means that each school needs different types of support at different times, which makes close monitoring a priority.

Change in schools cannot happen overnight. Schools need flexible and long-term support if their improvements are to be sustained over time.

ABOUT EQUIP

- A public-private partnership between schools, provincial education departments and companies, coordinated by the National Business Initiative
- Operates in disadvantaged schools that show the potential to move forward
- Is currently implemented in over 145 schools in Gauteng, Western Cape, KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo, Mpumalanga, North West Province and the Northern Cape
- Responds to the specific needs of individual schools to strengthen:
 - ◇ the quality of learner performance
 - ◇ school leadership and management
 - ◇ school governance
 - ◇ teachers' subject knowledge, teaching methodology and curriculum management
 - ◇ school development planning
- 334 educators have participated in the accredited two-year teacher development programme and graduated from leading South African universities
- Provides participating schools with an annual incentive grant over a period of three years.

EQUIP MAKES AN IMPACT ON...

- Primary schools in particular
- Schools that are moving forward and want to improve
- Schools that are proactive and work for the benefit of their learners.

"EQUIP has been a catalyst in making our school accept responsibility for its own development. It has evoked a holistic understanding of quality, efficiency and relevance in education. We have become conscious that we will only be successful if we work as a team and in partnership with the community."

Ms N Selem, Principal of Vukukhanye Primary School.

Options for business involvement in schools

South African schools can be divided into three types according to a typology of schools adapted from Hopkins & MacGilchrist (1998) and Rosenholtz (1989) and different interventions are required in each case.

- **Schools performing well** make up a minority of approximately 10%. The best intervention business can make at this type of school is to raise the level of cognitive demand, support declining infrastructure and provide bursaries to support the efforts of schools that are enrolling increasing numbers of poor children.
- **Under-performing schools** function well enough to absorb additional resources, but need to increase their output. This category makes up another 10% of the schooling landscape and includes many of the 'Dinaledi' schools. Possible interventions include strategic planning, management development and on-site mentoring, resources to increase output, and introducing incentives to increase learner performance.
- **Non-performing schools** make up 80% of the schools in South Africa. Here there is a dire need for a collective effort that expands the pipeline for engagement by business in this sector. The most critical factor is to take a developmental approach that is flexible and long-term.

Research shows that any attempt to apply a 'blueprint' programme to these schools is destined to fail since it will not take their specific needs and circumstances into account. 'Quick-fix' projects are also unlikely to succeed and donations to schools can aggravate the problems schools face.

Restoring basic functionality in schools is a prerequisite for improving learner performance. Research on the EQUIP programme shows that through a developmental approach, schools can get the basics right before tackling more advanced initiatives.

An informed partnership and long-term sustained commitment are critical success factors if companies are to be sure that their investments of time and money will make a difference. Developmental programmes launched in partnership with education districts can provide important levels of support.

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