



# NBI NEWS UPDATE 2019

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## Evaluation of the National Business Initiative's Solar Water Heater Installation and Maintenance Project

One of the key national priorities in the South African context of high youth unemployment is the need to provide a springboard for young people to transition from school or college to the world of work. Job opportunities in the green economy driven by solar energy projects provide an ideal framework for preparing young people for entry level employment in spheres such as the installation and repair of solar water heaters.

**Singizi Consulting Africa** recently completed an evaluation of the **National Business Initiative's (NBI's) Solar Water Heater Installation and Maintenance (SWH) Project**. The evaluation, with a participatory design format based on interviews and focus group discussions with participants, was designed to elicit key project insights from the various role players against the envisaged project outcomes.

The SWH project was developed in partnership with **Harambee Youth Employment Accelerator** and the **Nedbank Foundation** to train an initial 29 Technical and Vocational and Education and Training (TVET) college graduates in the installation and maintenance of solar water heaters to enable them to access entry-level employment and possible self-employment later in their careers.

After a structured selection and matching process, the successful candidates underwent work-readiness and entrepreneurial training conducted by Harambee. The participating TVET college provided technical bridge in plumbing and solar water heater installation and maintenance through an accredited unit standard-based skills programme.

Host employers then took on the candidates for the pivotal component of their training: the workplace-based learning component for the critical phase of integration of their theoretical and practical knowledge in the real work environment.

The Singizi evaluation of the SWH project conducted on behalf of the NBI demonstrated clearly that rigorous, evidence-based evaluation is vital since it casts a spotlight on the successes and challenges encountered and provides guidelines for improvement in future iterations of the project.

The overarching insights and lessons that emerged from the evaluation of the SWH project included the following:

- The cornerstone of the project's success is careful recruitment, selection and matching of the young people who participate.
- TVET colleges have a central role to play in providing the technical training and work-readiness elements, but they need active support to deliver an innovative, demand-led and employment-focused initiative of this nature.
- Host employers providing work placement for the trainees need encouragement and assistance in liaising with the other project role players.
- The golden thread that underpins the project is the effective integration of institutional training and workplace-based learning.
- Mentors within companies who are responsible for the training, monitoring and supervision of the young people have an important role to play in providing a first work placement experience that is both nurturing and challenging for the trainees.
- Entrepreneurial training to provide participants with the option of later self-employment requires careful management based on the stepping stone of focused work experience.
- Regular interaction of all the role players in the project implementation team is essential and any challenges encountered need to be identified and dealt with in a flexible and transparent manner.

The project outcomes in terms of the progress of the 2018 cohort of trainees were encouraging: of the twenty five candidates placed, ten secured employment; four embarked on further training outside of the project and nine were placed with a host company, **Burgess and Partners**, for a further six-month period of extended placement. Only two of the trainees left the project for various reasons.

An innovative project of this nature to provide entry level training for young people for the green economy inevitably throws up a number of challenges arising from the need to develop new linkages across organisations that differ greatly from one another in terms of size, culture, approach and funding requirements. The Singizi evaluation report of the SWH project demonstrates that a flexible, responsive and innovative framework is needed. The project has to be anchored by good coordination and communication between the role players. Broad agreement on project goals and outcomes is needed to ensure that a significant contribution is made to an important youth employment creation initiative that prepares young people for the world of work with the skills, knowledge, attitudes and confidence to ensure their future success.

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