

UK GOVERNMENT BOOSTS OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUTH EMPLOYMENT IN SOUTH AFRICA

British High Commission in South Africa works with local partners to train unemployed youth in technical skills.

Johannesburg – 3 November 2021 – The role of trade apprenticeships in helping to solve youth unemployment has been given a significant boost by the investment of the British government in South Africa. This investment works to increase access for marginalised youth to the right skills to gain sustainable work, move away from poverty and help position themselves for prosperity.

The British government will invest up to £75 million of Official Development Assistance (ODA) globally on skills development, operating across nine fast-growing economies. In South Africa, its investment is dedicated to addressing skills gaps, skills mismatch, and quality training for unemployed youth and youth in Post School Education and Training (PSET) to align with South Africa's priorities on improving technical and vocational education and training.

In partnership with Harambee Youth Employment Accelerator and implementation partners, the Institute of Plumbing of South Africa (IOPSA), the National Business Initiative (NBI), and BluLever Education, the programme aims to skill 200 marginalised young people for income-earning opportunities using technical skills. Additionally, a further 100 underemployed young people will be assisted in gaining a formal qualification, which will improve their earnings and career prospects.

TVET graduates require the right skills employers need for technical or trade occupations. Historically, there has been a disconnect between the outputs of the TVET system and the needs of potential employers. As a result, young graduates exit TVET colleges to find themselves with limited pathways into work. Together with the partners, the UK supports the work being done to reorganise the TVET system and increase employment prospects for these young graduates.

This innovative approach to setting young work-seekers up for success starts with Harambee selecting candidates through the sayouth.mobi platform, based on the attitudes and aptitudes most valued in trade work. SA Youth is a zero-rated, data-free network that matches work-seekers to earning and learning opportunities. Often young people arbitrarily choose trade jobs because they offer a faster route to earning a stipend. However, if a young person is not suited to the work, they will not succeed, regardless of how determined they are to earn a living.

Two newly developed learning models by BluLever and NBI offer different but equally successful pathways into employment. One is a three-year apprenticeship programme that prepares graduates to work on their own. The other is a short, high-impact route to work through a nine-month programme that supplies the industry with the entry-level skills it needs.

"Harambee stresses the importance of partnerships," says Sherrie Donaldson, Sector Lead Water and Plumbing, at Harambee. "When these partnerships focus on inclusive growth and mutual interests, barriers can be reduced, and sectors can create jobs to be filled by young people who would otherwise be locked out of the economy."

She comments that the UK support has allowed Harambee and its partners to demonstrate that sector-wide collaboration can, and does, result in real impact on systems-change and effect which can be adopted at scale.

These two pathways address the need for the SA government's 2020 National List of Occupations in High Demand, which identifies a shortfall of 30,000 trained artisans annually to fulfil strategic infrastructure projects and Covid recovery plans.

This new approach to sourcing and the transformative training these young people receive – which critically includes a focus on work-readiness components in addition to technical skills - sets them up to succeed in these high-demand jobs.

Brendan Reynolds, Executive Director of IOPSA, adds that: “A collaborative approach by the partners in this programme means we can focus on addressing systemic problems in vocational training. The funding provided by the UK government is an essential part of the improvements we're making, meaning employers will be able to employ TVET college graduates with confidence.”

Ruth Lukoto, a 22-year old from Soweto, began her studies in electrical engineering and achieved her N4 qualification. She was unsuccessfully looking for work when she registered on sayouth.mobi from where she was selected to join the general repairer training programme to obtain technical skills and work experience through the programme. Ruth lives at home with her parents, and her stipend is a welcome contribution to the family's day-to-day financial subsistence.

As the only female on her site, she works hard to prove that she is as able and competent as her male counterparts and says that, “When they see I can do the job as well as them, they become more supportive in helping me to learn.”

The partnership contributes to several of the UN’s sustainable development goals, not only the obvious ones like poverty reduction and quality education, but also gender equality. Globally, it prioritises women, and in South Africa, it has an unequivocal mandate to prioritise female inclusion.

Technical occupations are proving to be a viable career for women, not least because gender-specific traits give them certain advantages in the field. These include an eye for detail, patience when working in challenging situations, and an ability to communicate comfortably with customers.

"A job is a job," says Ruth. "It doesn't matter if you're a woman or man; if you believe in yourself and don't let anyone downgrade your abilities, you can do anything you want."

The first cohort of trainees began their career journey in 2020, and now that they're in the on-the-job training phase, the programme's coordinators are receiving nothing but positive feedback from their employer partners.

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NOTES TO EDITORS

ABOUT SKILLS FOR PROSPERITY

Skills for Prosperity (S4P) is an innovative and ambitious programme that supports education and skills systems across nine fast growing economies by equipping young and marginalised groups, including women, with the skills needed by industry.

For the young and marginalised, the programme works to remove barriers and increase access so they have the rights skills to get a sustainable job, move away from poverty and help position them for prosperity. Ultimately, this will lead to sustainable and inclusive economic growth across nine partner countries – with the right workforce to meet current and future labour market needs.

The programme works to improve the affordability, quality, relevance and inclusivity of provision in each partner country.

ABOUT HARAMBEE YOUTH EMPLOYMENT ACCELERATOR

Harambee Youth Employment Accelerator is a not-for-profit social enterprise building African solutions for the global challenge of youth unemployment. In South Africa we work with many partners who are committed to results that can work at scale – including government, the private sector, civil society, and over 1.5 million youth.

We are committed to changing the system by removing the barriers that keep millions of young South Africans locked out of opportunity. Our vision is of a growing economy and a society that works, powered by the potential of young people.