

Here's how we can get SA's youth in jobs

By [Larisha Naidoo & Zaheera Soomar](#)

17 Jul 2023

World Youth Skills Day is observed on 15 July and it's particularly apt for South Africa, which is reeling under a youth unemployment catastrophe that leaves around six out of every 10 young people jobless. To fix this, we need unprecedented levels of partnerships between government, South African corporates, and civil society to not only give young people the necessary skills but to ensure those skills get them into a job.



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Matric isn't enough

The first issue is education. Right now, young people are often not ready to tackle the job market environment, particularly after completing high school because of low levels of literacy and numeracy. This impedes the ability to effectively participate and contribute to the economic activities of the county.

To provide real employability and a meaningful future for our youth, simply getting children through matric isn't enough.

The problem is that a lot of our youth aren't completing school, as Stats SA's General Household Survey 2021 reveals that 29,3% of 18-year-olds and 46,3% of 19-year-olds dropped out of school in 2020. This results in an unskilled and jobless population.



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14 Jul 2023



This means that the youth finds themselves in a disadvantaged position when it comes to accessing opportunities, be it entrepreneurial or employment, or even to further their education. Giving young people skills bridges the gap to get them to

a point where they can actively participate in the economy.

While “hard skills” are still relevant for a developing country like South Africa, the nature of jobs and required skills are changing globally. Modern employers are seeking transferable skills like problem solving, critical thinking, conflict resolution, communication, and teamwork. What is referred to as “soft skills”.

Upskilling to match actual jobs

The second big issue we must address is to ensure that we are not just upskilling but doing so with actual jobs in mind. In August 2022, the Department of Home Affairs released a list of over 100 critical skills that South Africa is in need of. Although these skills require tertiary education, there are some that can be acquired with just a matric certificate. This list should be used as a guide to skills development in the country.

What we need right now is actual jobs and economic activity. We must not only focus on creating a supply of skilled people but also work on the demand side. There needs to be a demand for every skill, and employment opportunities available for it.

To do this, we must engage with sectors that are ‘future facing’ and growing, like tourism and technology, and understand their specific needs, and skills for those jobs. At Anglo American, our youth projects focus on training and exposing young people from mining communities to economic opportunities in various growing sectors, especially in the ‘future facing’ industries.



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An example of this is Zimele’s tourism & hospitality programme in partnership with Summit which aims to train and place around 3,000 young people from Anglo American’s mining communities in jobs. To date, nearly around 800 have completed the training and nearly 500 have been placed in jobs, including an opportunity to work on luxury cruise liner, Silversea.

The social impact of jobs

It’s important to understand the social impact of jobs. They don’t just give the young person an income. Being able to earn a living gives young people hope, inspires, and encourages personal development.

More than that, these young people become role models for their friends and families back home, who previously would not have seen a path out of a community or a situation. Now they see a path.



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14 Jul 2023



Along the way, though, we must deal with a range of structural issues and obstacles which make it incredibly difficult for young people to get economically active. Many lack access, both from a networking and geographical perspective, which has a major impact on how they can access economic opportunities to start with.

Networking is critical

Networking is a critical element in getting young people into jobs. A network is simply something that opens your way forward, whether in the form of information, specific skilling, the knowledge of opportunities, and the means to take advantage of them. It's often not who you are, but who you know. Studies show that friendships between wealthier and poorer individuals are linked to increased earnings later in life for poor children. Our challenge is to forge these networks.

Another skill that we can never have enough of is entrepreneurship. Many young people have the energy and drive to run their own businesses, but don't know where to start. Give them the tools and access to opportunities that will widen the net of employment. Nothing brings joy to an entrepreneur than creating a job opportunity or making a difference in other people's lives.

Ultimately, though, what our country needs is responsible skilling that gives people meaningful working experiences, and invests in their ability to access opportunities and progress in life. To do this, we need industries and development partners to engage on an unprecedented scale. It's a big ask, but it has to be done.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Larisha Naidoo is head of Anglo American Zimle. Zaheera Soomar is Anglo American's global lead for education and community skills.

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