

iTOO lays down learnership challenge to corporate SA to tackle youth unemployment crisis

Issued by [Ambani Reputation Management](#)

17 Nov 2023

South Africa's socio-economic landscape remains generally challenging and is especially tough for the country's booming young population, which is faced with one of the highest youth unemployment rates in the world and a lack of access to proper skills development opportunities.



According to Statistics South Africa, the country's overall unemployment rate is 31.9% and 35% for high school graduates, while a staggering 61% of people aged 15 to 24 are out of work. This number rises to 70% if the nearly one million young people who've given up looking for employment are included.

To contribute towards solving the unemployment crisis, iTOO Special Risks is laying down a challenge to corporate South Africa to adopt its iTOO Learnership Programme model that each year equips unemployed graduates and matriculants with skills and provide them with work experience and employment opportunities.

Tove Sithole, head of brand and talent at iTOO Special Risks, explains that learnerships improve the long-term career prospects of participants, arming them with on-the-job experience. At the same time, businesses can grow their talent pool by enlisting top-performing learners into their teams once the learnership period has ended.

"Hosting learners is a win-win for all parties. It makes financial sense to host learners, particularly if your business needs staff but lacks the capital and administrative resources to hire. We would therefore like to call on all corporates in South Africa to introduce learnership opportunities and contribute to rebuilding our economy," says Sithole.

"The iTOO Learnership Programme is an initiative that aims to address youth unemployment in today's extremely challenging socio-economic climate. The programme has been designed to help iTOO's broker partners who want to play a part in solving the unemployment crisis, but do not have the resources to run programmes such as learnerships."

Since its inception, the learnership programme – which runs from 1 February to 31 January each year – takes in unemployed youth who receive a Certificate in Short-Term Insurance (NQF Level 4) at the end of the course. Of the candidates who successfully complete the programme each year. Because of the high calibre of candidates that iTOO employs and the training, mentorship and coaching offered throughout the year, 90% of the learners that have gone

through the programme have been employed within iTOO's value chain, mainly with participating insurance brokerages, law firms and loss adjusting companies.

Sithole explains that while the iTOO Learnership Programme is focused on the insurance industry, iTOO would like to issue a challenge to all other corporates across South Africa to adopt a similar model within their sectors.

"This is a model that can be replicated by any business, in any sector. Any host employer can employ as many learners as they need once they've completed the programme. The rest can be absorbed by the organisation's value chain, such as suppliers, partners and other stakeholders," she says.

"We invite all corporates to adopt similar learnership programmes and give a young person the opportunity to get work experience, as well as skills that may make them much more employable."

As part of its programme, iTOO funds all costs relating to recruitment, assessment, background checks, qualifications, training materials and supplementations, and exam fees. The host employer is required to pay a monthly stipend to learners and to register them on its payroll. Stipends paid to learners can be claimed back from the SETA. The country's top corporates are urged to develop a similar approach.

Sithole notes that closing the skills gap is a complex issue, as it requires various stakeholders to work together. However, the corporate sector can collectively play its part in addressing the crisis-level of unemployment by finding unique solutions to the youth unemployment challenge in South Africa.

"Many young South Africans are finding it hard to gain the skills needed to find employment as they come from communities that do not have access to crucial skills development opportunities," she says.

"Learnerships are recognised as one of the best mechanisms available to stimulate job creation and are an effective means to promote the inclusion of unemployed, inexperienced youth into the formal economy, further bolstering social development. Together, we can be a valuable part of the unemployment solution in South Africa."

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