

How to support youth development: A holistic approach

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Youth empowerment is a critical problem and getting our young people in decent and sustainable jobs is fundamental to our success as a country.

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There is no question that South Africans need to pull together in building a better country, and many organisations are looking to their corporate social investment initiatives to leverage greater social contributions and to participate more meaningfully in the development of our people.

This raises the question of what focus areas will allow corporates to do the most good, and what methods to employ to be most effective.

Our country has deep and varied needs and there are wide-ranging areas where companies can make a difference to people's lives.

However, a look at many of these areas of social hardship reveals the urgent need at the heart of our progress as a nation – the upliftment of our youth and young people.

However, the key is to identify youth development initiatives that operate sustainably and lead to measurable results – real jobs, careers, profitable businesses and community benefits.

The best youth employment non-governmental organisations operate with a clear, systematic employment pathway.

They provide people not just with technical skills, but with skills that will help them to gain access to employment, whether that is mentoring, internships or work experience.

It's crucial to ensure that young people not only have the skills to work, but that they have the ability to sustain the opportunities they gain access to.

This requires a holistic approach.

It's also important to understand that the youth are intimately part of their communities, and that their success both affects and depends upon the success of their social environment and their networks.

An effective non-governmental organisation will try to generate localised economic benefits for young people and their communities.

Rhiza Babuyile is one such organisation, and Ubuntu Pathways is another.

For these initiatives, employment training strives to address the needs of local industry. Entrepreneurship programmes focus on

filling gaps in the local market.

A holistic approach to youth development will also provide psycho-social support for young professionals and new entrepreneurs earning salaries for the first time.

Financial literacy training is indispensable. There should be support with healthcare, childcare and even legal aid for young people, if necessary.

Practitioners of corporate social investment should look to become involved with the new breed of youth employment initiatives that set out to build entire business ecosystems.

According to this model, the entrepreneurially minded are placed in business incubation hubs that are in turn part of a sustainable network of economic activity that young people can become part of.

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Statistics South Africa reports that the percentage of black African women between 15 and 24 who are not in education, employment or training is at 34.7%.

The figures for male youths not working are a similarly catastrophic 27.1%.

Our youth employment initiatives are thus urgent, but they must also be sustainable.

A positive approach can be to set project sustainability as one of the goals of a corporate social investment relationship from the outset.

The funder can make it clear that they plan to exit the project after a specified period and that by then it will need a sustainable income stream.

This will encourage partners to develop business models to make their project viable.

If a corporate social investment project can be developed into a sustainable business model that can be rolled out in communities across the country the potential benefits are exponential.

Youth empowerment is particularly suited to such approaches. The energy and vitality of the youth is a national asset that should benefit all in the community once it is directed.

<https://city-press.news24.com/Voices/how-to-support-youth-development-a-holistic-approach-20180524>

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