

HOW TO GET SOUTH AFRICA'S YOUTH WORKING

Why this evidence-based learning exchange is crucial for improved youth employment

THE YOUTH EMPLOYMENT CRISIS

Youth unemployment is one of South Africa's most critical and urgent challenges. While this is a growing problem globally, South Africa has one of the highest youth unemployment rates in the world, which is consistent with the country's general employment problem. About 3,6m young South Africans between the ages 15-29 have no work, accounting for 71% of the unemployed population. Critically, the majority of people in this age group have never had a job. Many who are trapped in multi-generational cycles of poverty and exclusion, compounded by poor education, have neither the social networks, access, funds or functional competence, to find and keep first jobs.

On the other side of the equation, employers struggle to access a sufficient pool of work-ready youngsters even for entry-level roles. Harambee focuses on addressing this demand-supply mismatch thereby propelling youth employment and inclusive growth.

Research indicates that there is a critical window period, after young South Africans complete their schooling to get them working and staying in work before they fall into long-term unemployment and economic exclusion. On the other hand, there is significant evidence that young South Africans who get and keep a first job for a year, are very likely to stay employed for the rest of their lives, allowing them to contribute to the social mobility and economic well being of their families.

While there are numerous debates about the reasons and contributing factors to South Africa's high levels of youth unemployment, it is clear that getting more young people onto the jobs ladder is the essential first step to tackling youth unemployment.



SO, IS THERE A SOLUTION?

If we want to increase the absorption and retention of young people into the economy, we need to prioritise pragmatic, demand focused and solutions driven interventions. These need to be short, medium and long term solutions that focus on sustainable jobs and processes that address both the access barriers that thwart young work-seekers, and the challenges employers face in finding and keeping entry level employees with the work-readiness and skills required.

A key component of the short and medium term solutions require that we, at the very least, address the structural constraints of a large pool of poorly educated, mostly black, youth without the social capital to build workplace skills and access job opportunities.

This is possible. There are a few initiatives that have made inroads in addressing youth unemployment. The Harambee Youth Employment Accelerator is beginning to receive attention as one of the country's most effective youth employment facilitators.

ABOUT THE HARAMBEE YOUTH EMPLOYMENT ACCELERATOR

An initiative of Yellowwoods Investments (a member of Business Leadership South Africa) and its investee businesses; Hollard, Nando's and others, Harambee now functions as an independent not-for-profit company, with nearly 50 employer partners, and is a Jobs Fund recipient.

Harambee partners with employers across the private and public sector to facilitate the placement of young work-seekers from poor households, into sustained employment. Harambee sources and selects young people who exhibit demonstrated potential but who have gaps in work readiness, and puts them through an intensive bridging programme that helps them cultivate the skills and personal development needed for success in the workplace. They are then "matched" and placed in preselected, permanent, and formal sector jobs. Harambee has achieved admirable success. To date, Harambee has placed almost 5 000 young people into jobs, with retention rates that beat industry benchmarks.



THE TIME IS RIGHT TO START THE EXCHANGE

Through its volume-driven processes on both the supply and demand side, Harambee has accumulated significant data and is now in a position to share its extensive empirical information and insights with stakeholders and other researchers focused on youth employment.

The important issue of youth unemployment is beginning to get the attention it deserves from key corners of the public and private sectors, including the ANC and National Planning Commission who have also emphasised the need to address the dire work and skills gap, by addressing the issue. This represents an important pivot in South Africa's youth development narrative and tells us that the time is right for those of us passionate about overcoming this social and economic barrier, to elevate the conversation into real action.

As Harambee embarks on further significant scaling of its model, it will provide a platform for others working to meet youth employment goals. The challenge now is to develop strategic relationships that can facilitate ongoing learning and discovery. We anticipate that this learning exchange will provide the podium that will not only guide, but propel practical action and policy to effectively facilitate first time employment and create the platform for scale and strategic impact.



WE LOOK FORWARD TO YOUR VALUABLE CONTRIBUTION AT THIS IMPORTANT EVENT.



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