



The Presidential Employment Stimulus

Building a Society that Works

2,5 million jobs, opportunities and more

February 2026





The Presidential Employment Stimulus (PES) is funded mainly from the fiscus and is implemented by participating departments. Strategic oversight is provided by the Project Management Office (PMO) in the Private Office of the President. The PMO is grateful for support from development partners to the PES team, that allowed for its rapid establishment in a context in which no such function had been envisaged. Development partners continue to provide invaluable technical and research support for the PMO's role.



With support from the EU's facility on Inequality and Poverty, the **Agence Française de Développement (AFD)** has supported a research agenda on the stimulus effects of this intervention and is supporting the design of public employment programmes as part of the Just Transition.



The **DG Murray Trust** has provided vital support to technical capacity in the PES, as well as to research, institutional lesson-learning and communications.



As a development partner, the **European Union** provided invaluable support to the Presidential Employment Stimulus team in earlier periods of the programme. In Phase 1 and 2, this was through Capacity Building Programme for Employment Promotion (CBPEP), housed in the Government Technical Advisory Committee (GTAC) of National Treasury. Support has also been provided through DNA Economics, and the Education for Employment Programme.

Publication issued by the Presidential Employment Stimulus.

See <https://pres-employment.dev/> for more.





CONTENTS

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT.....	2
PROGRAMME OVERVIEW	4
CURRENT PROGRAMME HIGHLIGHTS	
The Basic Education Employment Initiative.....	6
Social Employment: work for the common good	12
Creative Sparks: Investing in the heartbeat of South Africa	18
Storytelling: taking South African film from local streets to the global stage	22
National Youth Service: unlocking opportunity, serving South Africa.....	24
Creating social value in the Metros.....	28
NEXT FRONTIERS FOR THE PRESIDENTIAL EMPLOYMENT STIMULUS	
Next Step Exchange	30
Supporting a Strategy of PEP Reform.....	32
The Added Value of Work: A Research Agenda for PEPs	34
Jobs, Justice and the Energy Transition.....	36
LESSONS	38



A nation that works for all



MESSAGE FROM PRESIDENT CYRIL RAMAPHOSA

South Africa is turning a corner. After some very hard years where our people have shown remarkable resilience, we are now beginning to see signs of progress. The lights are staying on, goods are moving more reliably through our ports, businesses are beginning to invest again, and our public finances are improving. These improvements are the result of determined effort across government and society. They are early steps, but they show what is possible when we work with unity and purpose.

We know that economic recovery only becomes meaningful when it is felt in people's daily lives. That is why the Presidential Employment Stimulus has been such an important part of our commitment to build a nation that works for all. The investment we have made into the stimulus has created over 2.5 million work and livelihood opportunities since 2020. It ensures that the progress we are beginning to make can translate into improvements that matter at the local level: in the lives of people, in their communities in local economies, and in the environment.

Today the stimulus continues to close the gap between the people searching for work and the work our communities urgently need. It shows that when people are given the chance to contribute, they do so with commitment and creativity.



In 2025, through the Basic Education Employment Initiative, nearly 200,000 young people stepped into schools to support teachers and children. Through the Social Employment Fund, thousands of community organisations are strengthening food systems, supporting early childhood centres, creating after-school programmes, and offering vital support for victims of gender based violence and child abuse. In the creative sector, artists backed through the stimulus have produced award winning films, theatre, and music, taking South African stories onto global stages and opening doors for young talent at home. And across our metros, workers supported by the stimulus have helped improve the everyday functioning of our cities.

For many participants, these work opportunities matter because unemployment affects more than income. It can shake a person's confidence and weaken their sense of belonging. The stimulus helps restore that connection by offering work that is purposeful and recognised and by placing people in spaces where their contribution makes a difference. It also provides something that is often missing in the lives of the unemployed: the experience of being part of a workplace, and the stability of a predictable income. Together, these create the kind of scaffolding that allows people to move forward again. Some search for work with renewed determination. Others keep small enterprises alive or start new ones. Or they are inspired to study further. Many regain the footing needed to support their households.



The stimulus also helps the economy grow inclusively from the ground up. When participants earn an income, that money flows into small businesses and stokvels, supporting township and rural economies. The social impacts of work and income also create virtuous cycles of longer term productivity gains. When families have enough to eat, when children learn better, when households feel more stable, the whole country becomes more productive and more hopeful.

This report tells the story of that work. It shows what becomes possible when government departments, public bodies, and partners across society pull together. Most of all, it shows the creativity and determination of the South African people. In every classroom supported, every food garden planted, every film produced, every child reached through art or after school programmes, every survivor of gender based violence assisted and every public space restored, we see the beginnings of the better future we are working toward. As long as we keep creating more and better chances for people to contribute, we will steadily realise that future.

The stimulus also helps the economy grow inclusively from the ground up.

The investment we have made into the stimulus has created over 2.5 million work and livelihood opportunities since 2020.

Background to the Presidential Employment Stimulus

The Presidential Employment Stimulus (PES) was launched in October 2020 as part of South Africa's Economic Reconstruction and Recovery Plan, in response to the economic impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic. Building on a long history of support to public employment through the Expanded Public Works Programme, the PES has provided an 'innovation sandbox' for scaling up publicly-funded jobs and livelihood opportunities. It has done so at unprecedented scale, creating over 1,7 million jobs and livelihood opportunities since inception in October 2020.

The PES is part of an integrated and mutually-reinforcing suite of programmes coordinated by the Project Management Office (PMO) in the Presidency, to drive structural reforms and enable employment creation. This includes Operation Vulindlela, which addresses the structural barriers that hinder the private sector from creating more employment in the economy. It also includes the Presidential Youth Employment Intervention (PYEI), which seeks to coordinate, accelerate and enhance existing programmes while driving innovation and creating pathways to earning for young people at scale. The PES supports the goals of the PYEI by directly delivering employment opportunities for youth. In turn, the PYEI supports the PES through mechanisms such as its National Pathway Management Network.

The programmes that form part of the Employment Stimulus undergo a rigorous evaluation process against agreed criteria, with budgets allocated by National Treasury. These funds are transferred directly to approved programmes in participating departments and public bodies. The PMO in the Private Office of the President provides design input and strategic oversight.



Presidential Employment Stimulus

Total Opportunities Created October 2020 – December 2025

Departments	Opportunities supported
Basic Education	1 449 543
Trade, Industry and Competition	355 873
Sport, Arts and Culture	180 700
Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development	166 030
Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities	136 444
National Treasury	87 229
Social Development	64 476
Forestry, Fisheries and Environment	29 088
Cooperative Governance	19 106
Transport	10 245
Higher Education	7 935
Health	5 825
Science and Innovation	3 409
Public Works and Infrastructure	1 881
Tourism	1 163
Employment and Labour	215
Total jobs and livelihood opportunities delivered	2 519 162

ACHIEVED



95,3% of total target

DEMOGRAPHICS



82% youth



66% women

TOTAL BUDGET

R53,34 billion

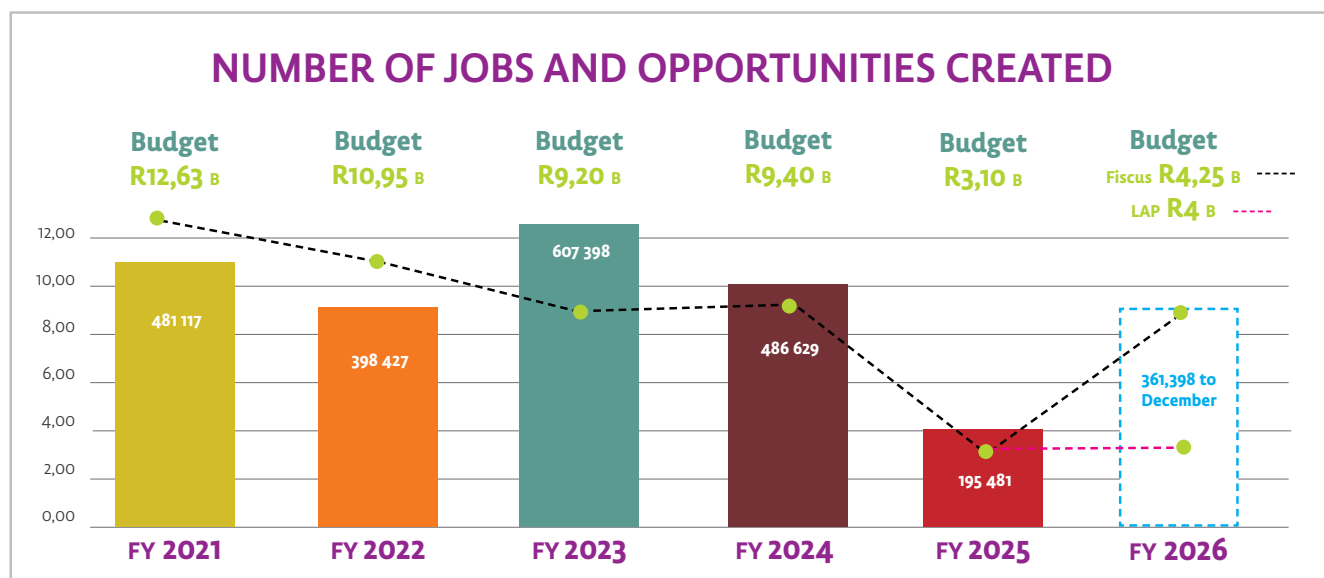
This includes R4b from the Labour Activation Programme of the Unemployment Insurance Fund.

As not all programmes report provincial data these figures will not align fully with overall totals.

In the early years of the Presidential Employment Stimulus, many departments stepped up to contribute to creating a mass employment strategy as part of economic recovery from the Covid pandemic. Since then, fiscal constraints have meant that the Presidential Employment Stimulus has been pared back to the core of programmes covered in this report, funded in FY 2026.



PERFORMANCE SINCE INCEPTION



Performance in Financial Year 2026: April – December 2025

Departments	Budget	Target	Opportunities created	Percentage of target
Basic Education Employment Initiative (DBE) R4 billion (UIF LAP); R1,6 billion (National Treasury)	R5,6 billion	204 676	199 724	97,58%
Social Employment Fund (dtic)	R1,3 billion	50 000	88 433	176,87%
PESP Creative Sector Stimulus (DSAC)	R350 million	30 860	26 954	87,34%
PEPs in Metros (NDPP, National Treasury)	R450 million	13 852	9 206	66,46%
National Youth Service (DWYPD)	R550 million	40 000	37 081	92,70%
	R8,25 billion	339 388	361 398	106%



Work that matters

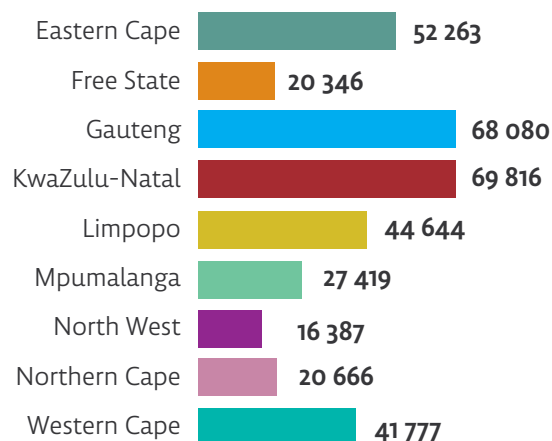
The PES began in the unique context of the Covid-19 pandemic. With high societal stress, all implementing partners stepped up to go the extra mile to take public employment and livelihood programmes to unprecedented scale – delivering high quality work experiences and meaningful forms of social value in the process.

This was never business as usual. This was work over and above existing mandates – for all who participated. It mattered, not only as a response to the pandemic, but as part of ramping up our response to the crisis of unemployment that already existed – and that has not gone away.

It's a crisis with huge social and economic costs, which is why, as a society, we need instruments that can enable economic participation even where the economy is unable to absorb people at the scale of need. That's what these programmes do.

This matters, because people matter and access to work matters to people. And while certainly the income matters, participation in work is about more than just the income.

Number of Opportunities by Province Financial Year 2026: April – December 2025



Participation is fundamental to people's sense of self-worth, to hope, purpose and inclusion. Where these are absent, social stability is placed at risk and in the process, the conditions required to break this cycle are too, because social stability is a requirement for the seeds of inclusive growth to take root and grow.

Participation in work also gives people a myriad of skills and capacities that are foundational to productivity in the economy – in the workplace but also for the success of self-employment and small enterprise endeavours. If the economy can't provide such experience at the required scale, then society must find other ways to do so – as part of breaking current cycles.

That's the role these programmes play. They're circuit-breakers, that can shift the trajectory not only in the lives of participants, but in their households and communities – with impacts in the wider society and economy too.



The Basic Education Employment Initiative

Building opportunity pathways, strengthening schools

In June 2025, nearly 200,000 young people arrived at schools across South Africa – not as learners, but as contributors – joining Phase V of the Basic Education Employment Initiative (BEEI).

In 21,796 schools, in remote villages, townships, dense inner cities, special needs classrooms and farm schools, they brought a surge of energy and support into places where resources are thin and teachers are stretched.

The BEEI is the largest youth employment programme in South Africa's history but it is far more than just a stopgap in a crisis of missing jobs. It is giving young people their first foothold in the world of work while strengthening the foundations of learning in the schools that need it most.

Your positions are not just about fulfilling duties – you are shaping destinies. Your dedication brings hope to every child stepping into a classroom.”

President Ramaphosa, addressing the new BEEI intake in June 2025.

Background to the BEEI

Since its inception in 2020, the BEEI has created over 1,3 million posts for young people as assistants in schools. It is implemented by the Department of Basic Education and the Provincial Education Departments. In 2025 Phase V was funded mainly by the Labour Activation Programme of the Unemployment Insurance Fund, alongside national government funding.

The BEEI recruits youth in two categories: Education Assistants and General School Assistants. Education Assistants require at least a Grade Twelve matric certificate, while General School Assistants have to have completed Grade Nine.



Work experience breaks barriers

Young people waited impatiently for Phase V and when recruitment opened, 1,8 million people applied for just over 200,000 posts. That's nearly a third of all unemployed youth, which illustrates just how much they are ready to work, to learn, and to contribute. What holds them back is not a lack of willingness but a lack of opportunities.

Statistics South Africa reports that 58.7% of unemployed young people have never had a job. Many are excluded from work because they have never worked before – a harsh Catch-22 in our labour market. This is a cycle the BEEI can help to break, because it gives young people real experience in real workplaces: managing time and tasks, planning work, solving problems, using IT systems, engaging professionally, learning teamwork, communicating and understanding how organisations function. These are the very skills employers say they need - and the skills young jobseekers struggle to acquire without a first meaningful opportunity.

Nearly one third of all unemployed youth applied for the BEEI Phase V



SA YOUTH

SAYouth – making opportunities visible to youth

Recruitment for each phase of the BEEI has been done on SAYouth which is a digital platform run by Harambee Youth Employment Accelerator. Young people can register on the network for free via SAYouth.mobi, a mobi-site that is zero-rated by all mobile operators, or at any of the 127 labour centres and National Youth Development Agency centres in all nine provinces.

SAYouth is part of the National Pathway Management Network (NPMN) of the Presidential Youth Employment Intervention, which aims to provide a single network for stakeholders supporting youth employment to share opportunities so that information is accessible in one place.

I'm a qualified teacher for Foundation Phase, so being placed was incredible as I gained work experience. This taught me how to work in a team, because often the solution comes from dialogues. This opportunity is amazing and it's not just about work but about how to learn and gain first-hand experience – this is the job I want to grow in!"

Asisipho Kewuti, Sivuyiseni Primary School, Kwamagxaki, EC



The platform aggregates opportunities for learning, earning and volunteering so that every young person – no matter where they are or what their circumstances – has a place to go for information and support. This reduces the cost of searching for work which is a crucial barrier for young people hoping to get a foot in the labour market.

For those not immediately successful in securing a position through the BEEI programme, the platform provides an avenue to other forms of support and opportunities. This includes comprehensive resources for CV writing, job readiness, entrepreneurship, and wellness support, paving the way for a comprehensive development of career and personal growth. Those that are appointed into the BEEI can access the same resources when they leave the BEEI programme too.



School Assistants support education priorities

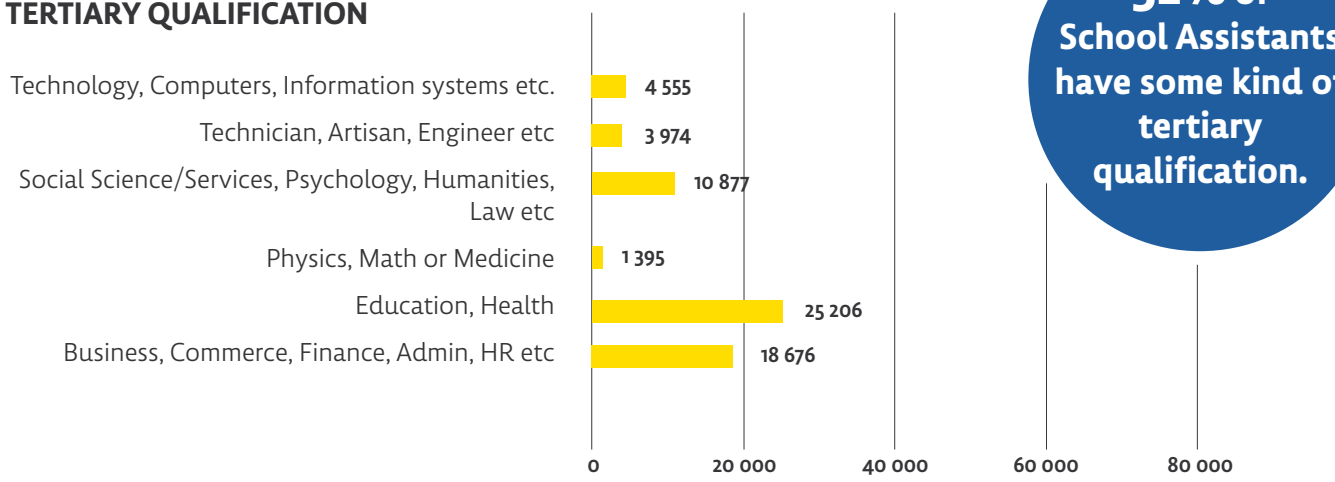
The BEEI offers opportunities for young people at all skill levels– with graduates prioritised for work in the classroom, where their tasks allow teachers to spend more time on teaching and lesson preparation. Others support IT and school administration. They also tackle essential maintenance, such as fixing doors, painting peeling walls, maintaining school vegetable gardens and playgrounds. In extracurricular activities, assistants promote engagement in sports, art, and music – inspiring learners, uncovering their talents and building pride in communities.

14%
of participants
in Phase V had
a teaching
qualification.

Bringing their skills into the schools

The majority of School Assistants bring skills into the schools – skills they have often not had the opportunity to apply.

TERTIARY QUALIFICATION



32% of
School Assistants
have some kind of
tertiary
qualification.

SOURCE: DBE Placement Report, September 2025.12.09

67% of
School
Assistants are
female



School Assistants are all appointed to specific roles, aligned with DBE priorities and designed to strengthen teaching, learning, wellbeing, safety and school functioning. Each role is supported by the relevant branches in DBE, who provide the framework of priority tasks and relevant training:

- **Reading Champions:** Promote bilingual reading and a culture of reading for enjoyment. They are placed mainly in the Foundation Phase of 19,000 no-fee primary schools.
- **Curriculum Assistants:** Support literacy and numeracy in Foundation and Intermediate Phases.
- **ICT & Communications Assistants:** Support digital learning, help manage devices, and maintain IT systems, with one per no-fee school.
- **Care & Support Assistants:** Work with School-Based Support Teams to assist at-risk learners, with one per no-fee school.
- **Laboratory Assistants:** Prepare materials and equipment to bring science learning to life.
- **Workshop Assistants:** Support practical and technical subjects.
- **Handypersons:** Maintain facilities, gardens, repairs and small-scale renovations, with one per school.
- **Sport & Enrichment Assistants:** Lead after-school sport, arts and cultural activities, with one per school.

Building Skills for the Classroom and Beyond

Each province was responsible for co-ordinating training to support assistants to perform their roles effectively while also building transferable skills for future work. This was augmented with a range of national programmes, including the following:

Compulsory trainings for all assistants:

- BEEI Phase V Orientation
- Digify Afrika's Kitso Online Safety
- National School Safety Framework (NSSF)

Additional training options available to all:

- Digify Afrika financial literacy
- Microsoft Learn Pathways and AI Fluency Certificate
- Coding and mentoring through Code Club with the Raspberry Pi Foundation

Strong institutional frameworks from DBE

The DBE has built strong institutional frameworks for the programme. This includes Guidelines on a range of critical policy elements that include the following:

- A recruitment and interview guideline for schools
- An implementation framework
- Guidelines on conditions of work and a code of conduct for assistants
- Guidelines for project teams supporting the assistants
- Guidelines on finances and procurement of training.

For the first time, a central national payment mechanism was introduced. While there were challenges initially – the logistics of uploading daily attendance registers from 21,796 schools were not simple – payments ran smoothly by the end of Phase V, with significantly enhanced auditability that allows for participants IDs to be vetted and verified, reducing the scope for ghost workers and other forms of payment fraud.



Education Assistants support early literacy outcomes in schools

The 2021 Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) data showed that 81% of Grade 4 learners in South Africa are unable to read for meaning in any language. This decline doesn't affect all areas equally, with northern rural provinces such as North West, Free State, Mpumalanga and Limpopo experiencing the largest declines.

However, international research confirms the relationship between letter knowledge and reading abilities. In South Africa, Funda Wandé developed an Education Assistant programme, selecting, training and supporting unemployed young people from the community to support teachers with a structured programme to enhance foundational literacy and letter recognition – with positive impact. Based on these remarkable improvements, Zazi iZandi was piloted in 2022. Now in its third year, Zazi iZandi continues to demonstrate that Education Assistants, when properly trained, supported, and equipped with data, can drive meaningful, system-level improvements in early literacy outcomes at scale.

“We’re just beginning to explore how Education Assistants can become a really important resource in the transformation of South Africa’s education. We know that the early years are really fundamental in creating the building blocks of effective learning, and Education Assistants have a very important role in creating an environment that is necessary to build a strong and robust education system.”

Prof Brahm Fleisch, Wits School of Education, University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa

In 2025, the Nelson Mandela Bay Department of Education, spearheaded by District Director Mr Ernest Gorgonzola, partnered with Masinyusane Development Organisation, to provide training to BEEI Education Assistants to deliver Zazi iZandi, a mother-tongue, play-based, small-group intervention to help learners reach the grade 1 benchmark. Education Assistants were also trained to conduct digital assessments to measure learners’ letter-sound knowledge, and track their progress over time. Approximately 300 Education Assistants

Grade 1 learners meeting the 40 letters per minute benchmark increased from 12.3% to 32.4%



implemented the programme over a six-week period between September and October, delivering daily literacy sessions to over 10,000 learners across Grade R and Grade 1, in public schools across the district. As part of the implementation, the learners were assessed through a letter sound app, creating the largest letter-sound focused literacy datasets collected in the district to date.

“Zazi iZandi means know the letter sound – it’s important because if you know your Zandis, you know your sounds, you can start building a word and be able to read. Doing this work enabled me to show up for these kids.



Being a mentor has been one of the most meaningful parts of my journey. It’s helped me see my own experiences in a new light and recognize the value in lessons I once took for granted.”

Anelisa Kimbili, Zazi iZandi mentor

“If you can read, you will survive all the grades because you will be able to help yourself. It’s important to start at an early age. So then when they come to grade three, four, they’ll be able to do their subjects.”

Magdalene Plaatjies, Grade One teacher





“Through Zazi iZandi, I have witnessed first hand the difference the programme has made in children’s learning ability. How they went from knowing little to succeeding. As a qualified ECD practitioner, gaining work experience as an Education Assistant in a school is vital because it builds practical classroom skills, deepens understanding of student needs, and strengthens collaboration with teachers and support staff. This experience has helped me develop confidence, adaptability, and professional insight.”

Charmica Moodley, 2025 Zazi iZandi Education Assistant



“Supporting Education Assistants in schools is not only creating a generation of change makers but it’s also creating an ecosystem for future teachers and leaders. These EAs are walking into these classrooms as their first job; this is an act of service into their own community, creating a sense of purpose for them. As a young teacher myself, I saw how mentoring and coaching helped me grow in my profession and I am proud to have contributed to something this huge and watch them grow in their respective careers. Big ups to the government for creating these opportunities.”

Stanford Ndlovu, Masinyusane Development Organisation



The results speak loudly

Research data shows that over the six-week period, Grade R learners improved from a median of 2 letters correct per minute (LCPM) at baseline to 7 LCPM at endline, demonstrating rapid gains in foundational literacy skills. At the same time, Grade 1 learners improved from a median of 15 LCPM to 28 LCPM.

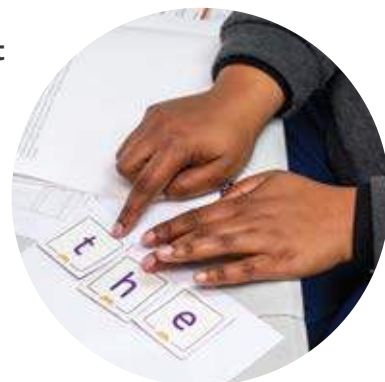
The proportion of Grade 1 learners meeting the 40 letters per minute benchmark increased from 12.3% to 32.4%, indicating substantial movement toward grade-level reading fluency.

Perhaps most importantly, the implementation significantly reduced the number of children most at risk of never learning to read. The proportion of zero-letter learners fell by more than half in both grades: in Grade R, from 38.1% to 17.1%, and in Grade 1, from 11.1% to 5.74%.

“The programme has offered an invaluable opportunity and experience to both learners, teachers and Education Assistants. At Malabar Primary School, learners’ vocabulary and reading showed a huge improvement.

Taking small groups everyday, doing different letter sounds and incorporating games into each session have made learning fun and encouraged all learners to participate.”

Patula La Reservee, Malabar Primary School Principal



Social Employment: work for the common good

The Social Employment Fund (SEF) demonstrates the impacts that are possible when communities drive their own development agenda.

By backing organisations that create work “for the common good”, the SEF helps unlock local agency and build the capacity needed to tackle real, everyday challenges — from hunger and learning gaps to environmental stress. The mandate is deliberately broad, allowing communities to set their own priorities and contribute to a wide spread of Sustainable Development Goals.



CREATING MEASURABLE VALUE FOR SOCIETY

The Social Employment Fund has a robust digital reporting system. It measures 640 indicators across its seven themes. This allows for in-depth measurement of the social value being created by the work undertaken. Below are sample indicators per theme, along with the estimated monetary value of these outputs, using a triple-tested impact financing methodology for value estimations.

ARTS & CULTURE — R120.7 million



People attending events/performances
268,152

EDUCATION — R443.5 million



Children receiving after-school support
739,147

FOOD & AGRICULTURE — R483 million



Total meals served to learners
1,789,067

HEALTH & CARE — R360.4 million



Beneficiaries with increased access to healthcare
514,816

PLACEMAKING — R612.5 million



People benefitting from improved public spaces
1,331,514

GREENING & ENVIRONMENT — R416.6 million



Total area of alien invasive species cleared (hectares)
193,747

SAFETY & GBV — R348.6 million



Women receiving psychosocial support
290,523

The measurable social value of all work outputs is estimated as ten times the direct budget for the programme.

SEF provides support scaffolding for livelihoods and micro-enterprise

The Social Employment Fund offers part-time work of two days a week, but with participation of longer duration than many other PEPs. Yes, this part-time model allows for more people to participate. But its rationale is also to provide people with support scaffolding that enables them to engage in complementary livelihood activities, particularly in contexts in which jobs are particularly scarce. Access to regular and predictable income helps to 'de-risk' experimentation with complementary livelihood activity. In addition, while the capabilities built from participation in work can enable transitions into the workplace, they also matter for building sustainable livelihoods and self-employment trajectories – during and after the programme.

The results from SEF indicate the powerful potential this PEP model has to enable and support these trajectories – in an area in which policy and public intervention are largely weak.

This potential is illustrated by SEF outcomes in FY 2025:

SOCIAL EMPLOYMENT LIVELIHOOD SUPPORT OUTCOMES IN FY 2025:

- 12,691 participants engaged in complementary livelihood activities
- 5,835 micro enterprises were established
- 6,162 existing micro-enterprises were supported and mentored through SEF
- 1,651 participants left the programme for full-time self-employment.

The Social Employment Fund supports 42 Strategic Implementing Partners with deep on-the-ground experience. Using a hub-and-spoke model, these partners support more than 4,000 community-based organisations, providing resources, skills and problem-solving capacities where they matter most, rebuilding networks of mutual support and strengthening the social economy.

The SEF is supported by the Department of Trade, Industry and Competition (the dtic) as part of their social economy mandate. The Fund is managed by the Industrial Development Corporation (IDC).

Participants work 16 hours a week at the National Minimum Wage. This part-time model provides regular and predictable income to participants. Part-time work provides support 'scaffolding' that allows participants to get key benefits from participation in work, while also enabling complementary livelihood, work-search and/or skills development opportunities.

The stories here provide just a glimpse of the energy and innovation going into creating work that makes a difference – to participants and communities.

Go to socialemploymentfund.co.za for more!



Food Security – a bridge to sustainable livelihoods

Many partners in the Social Employment Fund are engaged in agricultural interventions that combine immediate food security needs with support to livelihoods, skills development, sustainable farming practices – and access to markets.

Implementing partners **Solidaridad, Lima** and the **African Conservation Trust** support community gardens, smallholder farmers, and agro-ecological training nationally. Solidaridad has created more than 1,600 jobs among smallholder farmers in Gauteng, Eastern Cape, and North West, linking employment directly to food security.

In urban areas, SEF works with the Community Organisation Resource Centre (CORC) and the Federation of the Urban Poor (FEDUP) to establish Urban Farming Hubs. In Grasmere, Johannesburg, the Meriting hub cultivates vegetables, strawberries, and peanuts, providing nutritious food to disadvantaged households. Workers at the hub also engage in small-scale pig farming, generating additional income for families.

Siyavuna Abalimi trains smallholder rural farmers on growing chemical free vegetables, getting older farmers to mentor younger ones and supporting monthly Farmer Associations meetings. They have a social enterprise – Kumnandi – that buys surplus produce to sell to local restaurants and health shops.



ISIQALO ORGANIC FARM, PART OF SERITI'S AGRI-NODE IN HAMMANSKRAAL

The **INMED Aquaponics** model combines soilless farming with fish cultivation in a solar-powered, closed-loop system. This approach yields more food than conventional agriculture while using no soil or fertiliser and reducing water usage. INMED has partnered with another SIP, Assitej, to launch a 'Kasi Sellers Network'. This equips unemployed youth with an upgraded trike with cooler storage, stocked with fresh fish and vegetables for sale in Diepsloot, Orange Farm and Soweto, and Bultfontein in the Free State.





Feeding the Future: Seriti's Multi Functional Agri Nodes

Seriti Institute's Multi Functional Agri Nodes (MFAN's) are community based hubs that combine training, ecological farming, and enterprise development to turn food production into a sustainable, long-term livelihood.

These Agri Nodes offer small scale producers access to training in agroecological farming methods, soil health, composting, irrigation, seedling production, and sustainable farming techniques. Farmers at the nodes also benefit from access to essential inputs: tools, irrigation equipment, seedlings and infrastructure that support not only vegetable production, but also value added agro enterprises like poultry, seedling nurseries or composting – transforming farming into a viable business rather than subsistence.

Seriti has just launched Community Fresh – an app that creates a digital market-place connecting smallholder farmers directly with consumers and retailers, promoting fair pricing and reducing post-harvest losses.

We are not just growing vegetables; we are growing independence.”

Caroline Molokela, chairperson of Ladies First Cooperative, part of Seriti's agri-node in Deelpan.



All hands on deck supporting education

With support from the Social Employment Fund, the Learning Trust has worked with 50 community-based organisations (CBOs) to create over 10,000 paid work opportunities in the after-school sector, reaching more than 100,000 children and youth

After School Programmes (ASPs) can improve educational outcomes and support child well-being. They build key academic skills, help children catch up, and support socio-emotional learning and development. They also provide safe spaces and stimulation, with sports and arts activities helping young people to connect with positive peer networks. Making this happen creates work opportunities for thousands of young people, in the process.

Early Childhood Development is a game-changer

The first five years shape lifelong learning, health and prospects. Yet many young children still miss out, and most ECD centres are informal, under-resourced, and financially unstable.

Strategic Implementing Partners like Impande help to change this. Impande has worked with more than 1,000 previously unfunded ECD centres, assisting them to meet the criteria enabling them to qualify for the government ECD subsidy — turning fragile, underpaid work into more secure livelihoods and improving the care children receive.

Impande has worked with more than 1,000 previously unfunded ECD centres

Centres also receive fortified porridge, toys, books and learning materials, while practitioners are supported to attain their NQF Level 5 qualification. Where possible, Impande helps unlock finance for infrastructure upgrades, improving safety and learning conditions.

Together with other SIPs, SEF-supported work now reaches over 50,000 children in ECD centres.





Artists at work bringing imagination to life

The Arts4Youth programme of Assitej employs artists part-time to deliver arts and theatre experiences to children and young people across South Africa, reaching tens of thousands of children monthly and providing employment for hundreds of artists all across the country - and ensured access to the arts for close to a million children, mainly in marginalised communities.

Sisterhood Advocates: The Power of the Pinkies

Hlanganisa Sisterhood Advocates employs more than 2,050 women as community-based paralegals to combat gender-based violence (GBV) across the Free State, Limpopo, Mpumalanga and North West. Many participants have gained their first formal work experience, building skills in communication, leadership and basic legal processes.

Known locally as “Pinkies,” the Sisterhood Advocates guide women through the complexities of the justice system, including how to lay charges, get protection or maintenance orders, and access social workers, forensic nurses and shelters. They also offer psychosocial support and lead awareness campaigns on GBV, child abuse and community safety.

They have assisted tens of thousands of women – creating employment that gives participants income, purpose and paralegal skills.



Creative Sparks:

Investing in the heartbeat of South Africa

South Africa's creative sector has always been a place where imagination meets possibility — a space where new voices emerge, young talent takes root, and communities find connection through shared expression.

With support from the Presidential Employment Stimulus (known as PESP in the sector), the Department of Sports, Art and Culture continues to unlock these possibilities at scale.

Across the country, artists, writers, directors, filmmakers, musicians and storytellers are gaining resources they need not only to create powerful work, but also to build sustainable pathways into the cultural economy, with further research into the PESP reaffirming how strategic investment in the arts generates meaningful jobs, unlocks additional revenue streams for participating artists, builds skill and has a range of multiplier effects beyond the sector.

**Over
180,000
opportunities
created since
2020**

YOUNG DIRECTORS AT THE NATIONAL CHILDREN'S THEATRE

With PESP support through the National Arts Council, **the National Children's Theatre (NCT)** scaled up its annual Young Directors' Festival, offering more jobs for newly graduated directors, designers, choreographers and musical directors — while creating joyful performance opportunities for young actors from NCT's Saturday workshops.

Working from African folktales and the theme “*Afro-futures: looking forward, looking back*”, five directors created original plays reflecting on 30 years of democracy and imagining the next 30. Productions ranged from *The Hyena's Tuckshop*, a satirical take on school nutrition, to *Threads*, a reimagining of the Lion and the Mouse exploring bullying. *The Great Race* by Naleli Mercy won overall best production, while *Mapula the Rain Queen* by Jayson Tsebe took the audience choice and best musical direction awards.

Director Tamara Guhrs describes the festival as deeply affirming:

“It was heart-warming to see how the children and artists celebrated one another. Theatre can be tough to break into, and these young artists now have a solid production in their portfolio, while the children have memories to treasure forever.”





WOMEN IN POWER: TURNING UP THE VOLUME

The **Women in Power Programme**, supported through the National Arts Council and PESP, set out to build a more inclusive and equitable music landscape by opening doors for women in both urban and rural communities. Through workshops, masterclasses, a conference and a culminating concert, the programme equips women with the tools to pursue music as both an artform and a business.

Community outreach formed a key pillar, reaching women with limited access to music training and highlighting the therapeutic benefits of creativity, especially for mental health.

Founder **Mashadi Modise** emphasises the programme's employment impact:



"Through the support of the National Arts Council, our organisation created job opportunities for music artists, industry leaders, services and many more."

By pairing skills development with practical exposure, the initiative is helping women claim space in an industry where opportunities have historically been unevenly distributed.

Across the country, artists, writers, directors, film-makers, musicians and storytellers are gaining resources they need not only to create powerful work, but also to build sustainable pathways into the cultural economy...



MOBILISING MEN AGAINST GBV THROUGH THEATRE

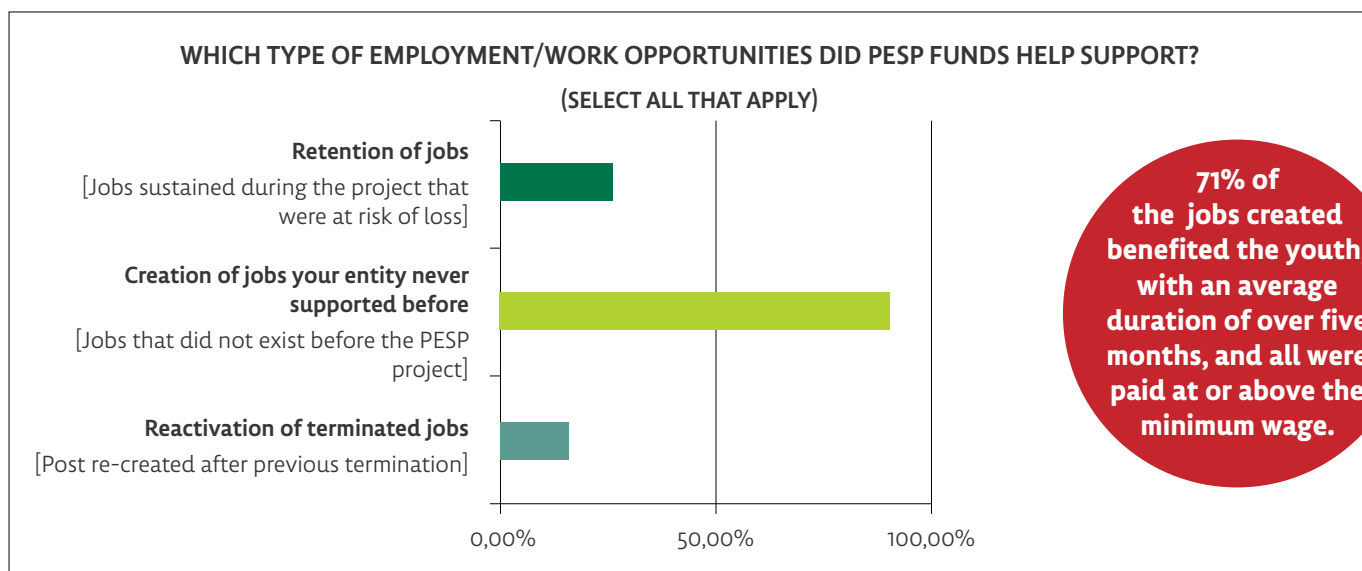
The **Men Against GBV: National Awareness Initiative**, funded through the National Arts Council and PESP, used theatre, dance and artistic installations to confront one of South Africa's most urgent social crises. Focused on men's perspectives and accountability, the programme created safe spaces for dialogue-challenging stigma, encouraging responsibility and fostering deeper understanding.

Performances were staged primarily in the Eastern Cape, with pop-ups in the North West and Gauteng to broaden reach. By unpacking themes of patriarchy, misogyny and the objectification of women, the works exposed the social structures that perpetuate abuse. The emotional power of theatre enabled audiences to engage deeply with these issues, sparking conversations that continue beyond the performance space.



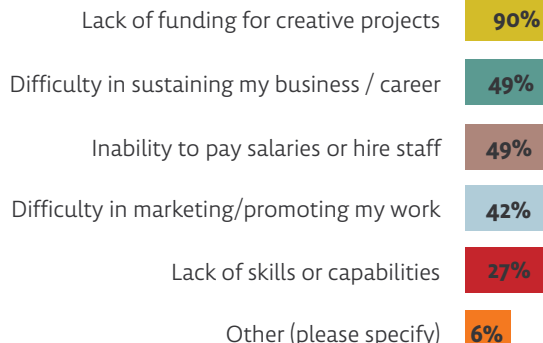
Impacts of the creative sector stimulus of the PES

In FY 2024 and FY 2025, the Presidential Employment Stimulus Programme (PESP) supported **1,611 projects in the creative sector**, through the National Arts Council and the National Film and Video Foundation. This enabled new creative work and created **83,115 direct job opportunities**. As survey research highlights, the PESP has also had a range of wider multipliers and stimulus effects, with sustainability effects beyond the life of the programme.



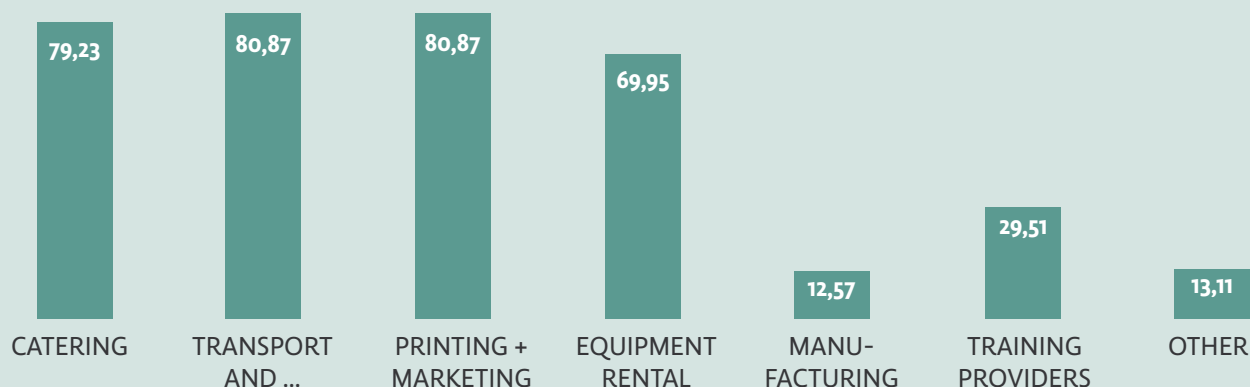
WHAT CHALLENGES DID THE PESP FUNDS HELP YOU ADDRESS?

(Select all that apply)



89% OF RESPONDENTS SAID THAT PESP-FUNDED ACTIVITIES SUPPORTED JOBS IN OTHER SECTORS TOO.

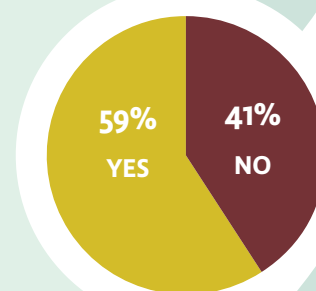
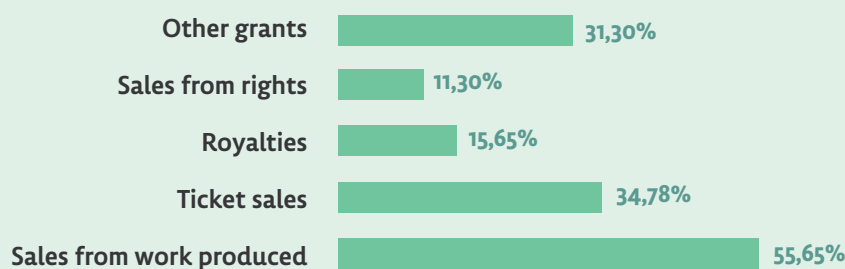
Below are the **sectors that benefited**.



Respondents could select multiple categories.

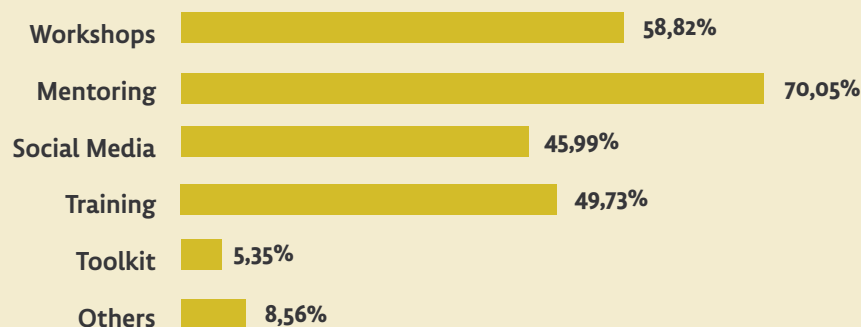
Did PESP unlock additional revenue beyond the PESP project timeline?

ADDITIONAL REVENUE STREAMS UNLOCKED BY PESP



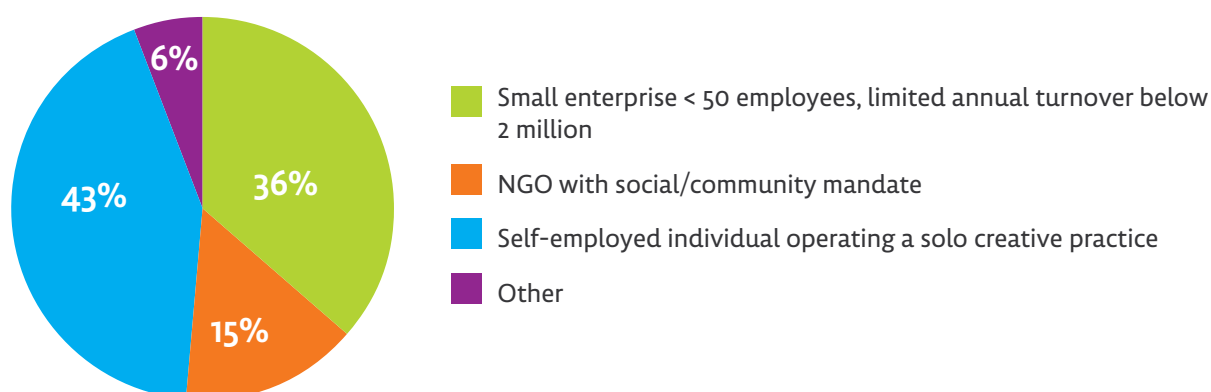
BEYOND DIRECT EMPLOYMENT:

ANALYSING THE MULTIPLIER AND SPILLOVER IMPACTS OF THE PESP IN THE CULTURAL AND CREATIVE SECTOR.

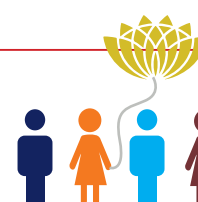


95% of recipients developed knowledge or tools that were applied beyond their teams. This is how they were shared.

WHAT WAS YOUR STATUS AS AN APPLICANT/BENEFICIARY?



Research by Mokgadi Mataludi, TIPS 2025.



Storytelling: taking South African film from local streets to the global stage

The Presidential Employment Stimulus is supporting the National Film and Video Foundation to enable filmmakers to tell bold new stories while creating meaningful work for emerging talent.

The growing list of PESP-supported films earning major local and international accolades shows what happens when South African creators are resourced to realise their visions: excellence, impact, and jobs.

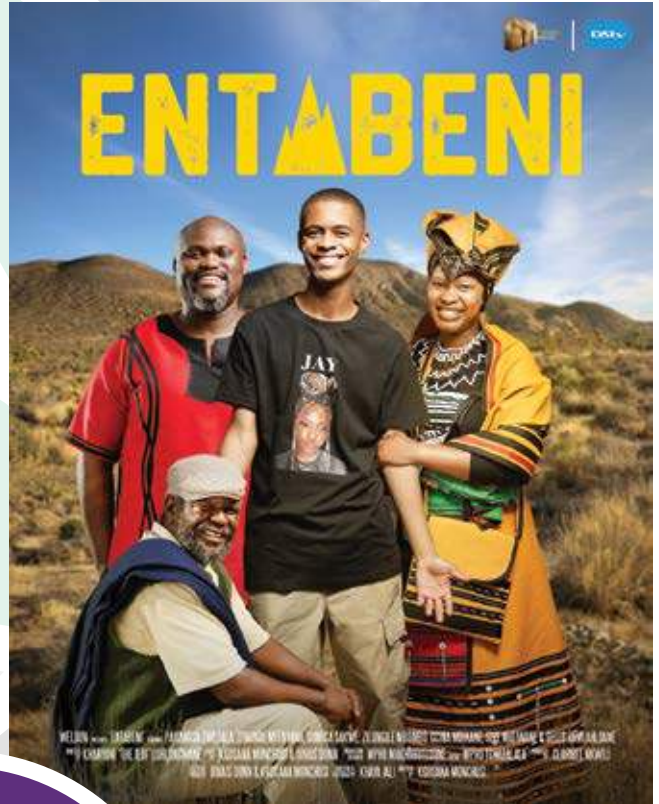
AMAZEZE (FLEAS)



South African voices are resonating globally too. **Amazeze (Fleas)**, a raw and intimate short tackling xenophobia, premiered at Clermont-Ferrand in France and has become a critical favourite.

Director **Jordy Sank** describes it as an invitation to “find humanity so we can recognise it in others.”

Across
genres and
provinces, PESP is
unlocking South African
creativity, generating
work, telling local stories
here at home – and on
the global stage,
too.



ENTABENI

Entabeni, a coming-of-age short exploring the Xhosa initiation journey, recently won big at the Simon Sabela Awards. Director **Kagiso Latane** says the film

“continues to resonate with audiences and highlight the impact of authentic South African storytelling.”

LUBUNYU

Lubunyu won the **Best African Film Award** at the World Film Festival at Cannes.

This gripping rural thriller is based on a true story about tradition, leadership and fear, rooted in the landscapes and histories of Ha-Khakhu Makuleni in Limpopo.

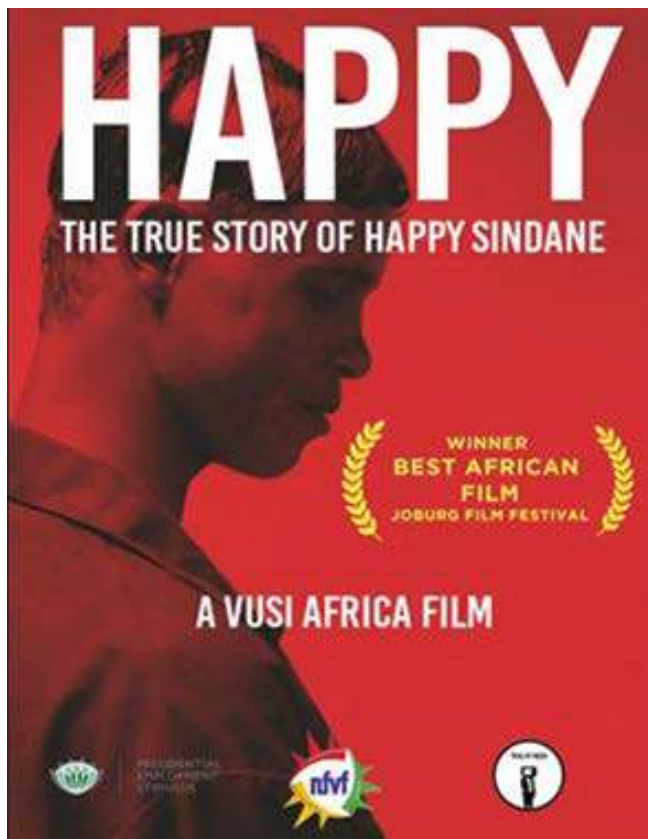
“I planned to save to tell the story maybe when I am 50 years old – however, PESP enabled me to tell the story sooner.”

Murena Netshitangani, Director



HAPPY

Winner of **Best African Film** at the Johannesburg Film Festival, **Rereading Happy: The True Story of Happy Sindanehas** sparked national debate on identity, media ethics and the legacy of apartheid. Director **Vusi Africa** emphasises that PESP support “created meaningful work opportunities for a young, majority black crew,” building long-term careers.



BAKING WITH THE REYS

Television hits are emerging too: With PESP funding, **Baking with the Reys**, created by sisters Holly and Mimi Rey, has grown from a lockdown pastime made on their phones to an Amazon Prime success, winning US Taste Awards and the **Best Children's Show** at the SAFTAs.



BEN MADE IT

A community-rooted drama following a father's desperate search for a cure for his daughter during a deadly outbreak.

Community impact is at the heart of Ben Made It, selected for the Joburg Film Festival. Nearly half the crew came from the Mohlakeng community – blending seasoned and emerging talent.

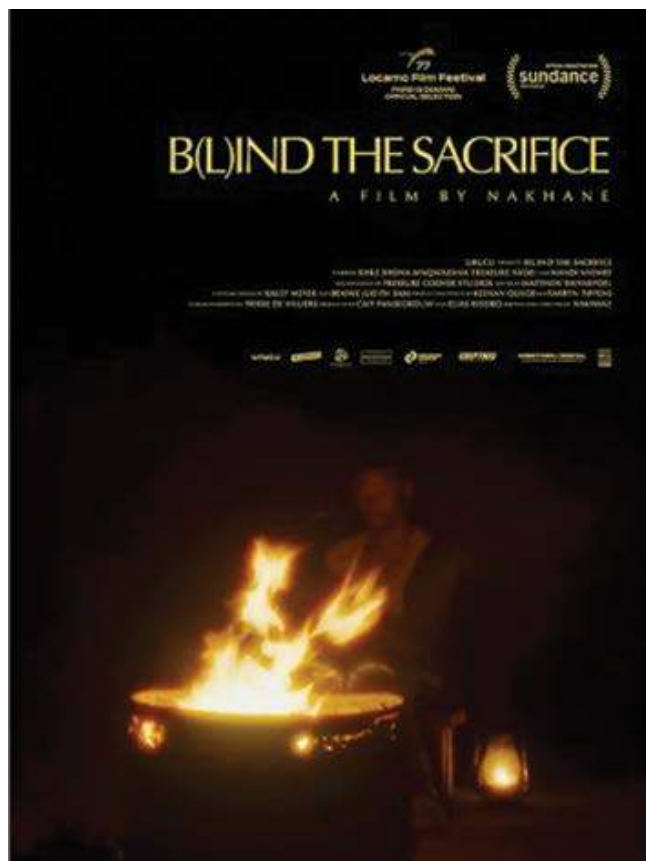


Our primary objective was to ignite hope and motivate the youth in communities where film making is not prevalent or widely known.

We created a space where first-time filmmakers from Mohlakeng could learn, grow, and see their dreams take shape.

Thapelo Dikhutso: Production member

B(L)IND THE SACRIFICE



PESP also enabled **B(l)ind The Sacrifice**, the striking directorial debut of artist **Nakhane**, screened in competition at Locarno, premiered at Sundance and later won **Best South African Short Film** at the Durban International Film Festival. Producer **Cait Pansegrouw** notes that the PESP grant allowed the team to “employ the best possible crew,” elevating the film to world-stage quality.



National Youth Service:

Unlocking Opportunity, Building Agency, Serving South Africa

South Africa's young people stand at the centre of the country's future, yet for millions the pathway into work, income, and meaningful participation remains uncertain. Persistently high youth unemployment continues to shape daily life across communities, limiting not only economic opportunity, but also dignity, confidence, and hope.

The revitalised National Youth Service (NYS) programme is supported through the Presidential Youth Employment Intervention (PYEI) and implemented by the National Youth Development Agency (NYDA). It is included here because of the close partnership between the PES and PYEI and its contribution to the total opportunities reported through PES.

The NYS responds directly to the challenge of youth unemployment by creating paid opportunities for young people to serve their communities while gaining practical experience, skills, and exposure to the world of work.

At its core, NYS is not only about employment. It is about agency and service, enabling young people to contribute meaningfully to society while preparing for longer-term participation in the economy.

At a community level, the impact is visible and immediate. NYS participants strengthen local service delivery, support educators and caregivers, expand access to sport, culture, and recreation, and contribute to community-based development initiatives. Stipends earned through the programme circulate within local economies, supporting households and small businesses in areas that are often economically marginalised.



Across the country, NYS participants are actively strengthening frontline services and addressing urgent community needs through innovative and high-impact service opportunities.

Since inception, the Presidential Youth Employment Intervention has unlocked over 125,000 paid National Youth Service opportunities for young people across South Africa.

These opportunities have generated extraordinary demand, with more than 1,76 million applications received through SAYouth.mobi, highlighting both the depth of youth unemployment and the critical value of accessible, national pathways into work.

From these opportunities, over 126,000 young people have performed paid community service, many for the first time earning an income while gaining workplace experience and contributing directly to schools, early childhood development centres, community works programmes, sports and recreation initiatives, and other essential local services. Importantly, more than 24,800 young people have transitioned from youth service into further opportunities, including employment, education, training, and self-employment, demonstrating the role of NYS as a bridge into longer-term livelihoods rather than an endpoint.



Since inception, the Presidential Youth Employment Intervention has unlocked over 125,000 paid National Youth Service opportunities for young people.

NYS participants in action

Across the country, National Youth Service participants are actively strengthening frontline services and addressing urgent community needs through innovative and high-impact service opportunities.

One such initiative is **Bana Pele**, which places young people at the centre of early childhood development support. Through this programme, NYS participants assist with ECD registration drives, support compliance processes, and help centres improve their readiness to deliver quality early learning. In many communities, this work has expanded access to registered ECD services, improved care environments for young children, and supported practitioners who operate with limited resources. By strengthening ECD at a foundational level, Bana Pele demonstrates how youth service can deliver long-term social returns while building valuable administrative and community engagement skills among young participants.

In the area of life-saving and water safety, young people have been deployed as lifeguards in high-risk drowning areas, providing critical safety support during peak seasons and strengthening municipal capacity to protect communities.

Within the health sector, NYS participants are supporting cleaning, portering, laundry, and patient navigation services at Chris Hani Baragwanath Hospital, easing pressure in severely under-resourced facilities and helping restore dignity, efficiency, and care within the public health system.



In **Eldorado Park**, young people have been placed in safe homes for vulnerable and abandoned children, ranging from infancy to matric age. Beyond daily care, participants are offering arts programmes, psychosocial support, and establishing food gardens to strengthen long-term food sustainability. The social cohesion emerging from this work has been profound, with young people actively reshaping the narrative of the area through compassion, service, and active citizenship.

NYS participants are also additionally engaging in waste-to-toy innovation, learning how to convert waste materials into educational toys for early childhood development centres. This work builds practical skills linked to the circular economy while creating opportunities for youth to generate income and support learning outcomes for young children.

Collectively, these examples reflect not only the scale of the National Youth Service, but its growing maturity as a programme that delivers meaningful community impact while equipping young people with skills, confidence, and pathways into future opportunity.

Strengthening transitions and inclusive pathways

As the programme has scaled, youth transitions have become an increasingly deliberate focal point. While recruitment into NYS has been highly successful, the central challenge remains ensuring that participants move into meaningful and sustainable opportunities beyond their service period.

The Integrated Transitions Framework guides this work, supporting participants to access employment opportunities, further education, skills training, or ongoing civic engagement. Strategic partnerships including with the Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF) form a critical part of this approach, strengthening post-service support and access to opportunity.

Equally important is the need to ensure that these pathways are inclusive and representative. The programme is placing increased emphasis on the intentional inclusion of young people with disabilities, recognising that meaningful participation requires accessible placements, tailored support, and partnerships with organisations experienced in disability inclusion. Strengthening representativity is essential if the National Youth Service is to reflect the full diversity of South Africa's youth and deliver on its social justice mandate.

Equally important is the need to ensure that these pathways are inclusive and representative.





The Integrated Transitions Framework guides this work, supporting participants to access employment opportunities, further education, skills training, or ongoing civic engagement.



A cumulative national investment in young people

Taken together, the NYS represents a cumulative investment in South Africa's young people and communities. Since inception, the programme has unlocked large-scale opportunities, mobilised young people in service of their communities, and supported growing numbers to move onward into work, learning, and enterprise.

At the same time, the programme reinforces an essential truth: youth unemployment cannot be solved through a single intervention. Sustainable progress requires coordination across education, skills development, public employment, and inclusive economic growth. Within this ecosystem, the National Youth Service plays a vital role ensuring that young people are not left waiting for opportunity, but are actively building the country while building themselves.

As South Africa looks to the future, the National Youth Service stands as a practical expression of dignity, contribution, and social justice in action affirming young people not only as beneficiaries of development, but as active citizens shaping the country's democratic and economic future.



Creating social value in the Metros

Implemented by the Neighbourhood Development Partnership Programme (NDPP) under National Treasury, the cities have created over 22,000 work opportunities in FY 2026. Below are some highlights.

Ekurhuleni: Libraries as Living Community Hubs

Ekurhuleni Metro has transformed more than 37 libraries into vibrant, multi-purpose community hubs. PEP participants play a central role, providing ICT support, literacy programmes, and development assistance to residents.

The initiative has also sparked creativity and local storytelling. Participants have launched the Ekurhuleni Podcast Channel, creating a platform to share impactful stories from across the city and amplify community voices.

Each library functions as a dynamic centre offering a range of specialised programmes, including:

- The Kids Corner, which nurtures young minds through music, poetry, coding activities, and the Born to Read programme, promoting early literacy programmes.
- Arts and culture programmes supporting creative expression.
- The Manzi Corner, assisting with school and university applications and ICT support.
- Digital skills development through expert-led sessions on AI, cybersecurity, and networking.

Libraries are further equipped with live-streaming studios and free Wi-Fi, expanding access to educational resources and community programmes.

Working in this programme has given me so much confidence and valuable experience, which I will carry beyond these library walls.”

Michele Malehu, PEP participant



Call to Action: Partnering for a Cleaner City in Buffalo City

The Call to Action is a collaborative initiative led by Buffalo City Municipality to address waste management challenges. Participants reduce landfill waste, create livelihoods through recycling, and empower communities through inclusive infrastructure.

Eight Buy-Back Centres and a Materials Recovery Facility enable community members, particularly waste pickers, to trade recyclable materials through voucher-based systems. Partnerships with PROs such as Polyco and EWASA, facilitated by the Border Kei Chamber of Business, provide technical expertise and industry support to divert packaging and e-waste from landfill.



Over
87,000 work
opportunities
supported since
2020.



Supporting spazas in the City of Johannesburg

As part of its efforts to formalise informal businesses and enable economic inclusion, the City of Johannesburg has implemented Digital Innovations for Modernising the Independent Economy (DIME) to strengthen township retail oversight, compliance, and economic inclusion through digital registration, AI-enabled inspections, and community-based youth support. This project, as part of ongoing food safety efforts, also supports the livelihoods of participating businesses and has gained momentum. Among its key functions is the deployment of Digital Youth Ambassadors on the ground, providing direct support to spaza shop owners in many surrounding townships of Johannesburg.

Title Deeds in Nelson Mandela Bay

In Nelson Mandela Bay, this project supports housing security by verifying and numbering structures in informal settlements. This enables better service planning and creates a pathway to formal title deeds, unlocking property rights and economic opportunities.

Across all eight metros, PEP-supported projects contribute to informal settlement upgrading strategies.



Transforming Urban Landscapes: The Mangaung Urban Greening Project

In Mangaung, the Urban Greening Project is transforming underutilised spaces into hubs for food production and enterprise development. Participants receive hands-on training in vegetable cultivation and urban agriculture, enabling both household food security and small-scale farming enterprises.

Through tree planting, landscaping, and biodiversity initiatives, the project contributes to cooling urban heat, climate adaptation, and healthier neighbourhoods. This investment in human capital has unlocked new income-generating opportunities and fostered local entrepreneurship.

The project is creating a dual legacy: strengthening food security while advancing economic development and environmental sustainability.



Rethinking transitions in a crisis of missing jobs

Public Employment Programmes are often imagined as “bridges” that allow people to cross directly from unemployment into sustainable work. That assumes, however, that on the other side of that bridge, sustainable jobs are waiting – and that with a bit of work experience, some skills development and support to polish a CV – participants exiting PEPs will find employment.

South Africa’s crisis of missing jobs means that this is simply not the case. Less than 10% of the unemployed are absorbed into the labour market each year. What future awaits the rest?

It’s complicated. A series of webinars held in partnership with PYEI in 2025 highlighted that in practice, transitions are not linear – and transition support cannot be a once-off activity: it has to be a process. Pathways out of poverty don’t happen in a single step, but through a combination of support interventions. PEPs are an important part of this picture, providing “support scaffolding” that gives people skills and capabilities to take their next step. For some, this may be into a formal job; for many, it is into a ‘hustle,’ into livelihood activity or self-employment. Others may choose to pursue further education or training.

None of these pathways are easy. How can we best assist participants to use their experience in PEPs to find their next opportunities? Actually, the real experts in this regard are participants who’ve had to do this for themselves. The platform Next Step Exchange amplifies their voices.



Next Step Exchange

Next Step Exchange is a new platform providing peer support, motivation, advice and tips for people looking for their next opportunity - whether their aim is to find work, to study further, or to start a business or a hustle. Its aim is to support participants in Public Employment Programmes to create their own opportunities after their placement is over – but in fact, it’s a resource for anyone trying to navigate their way in South Africa’s tough economic conditions.

Next Step Exchange is brought to you with great enthusiasm by the Presidential Employment Stimulus, in partnership with The Start-Up Tribe and the Youth Innovation and Entrepreneurship Development Institute.

From Teacher Assistant to HR intern in the automotive industry.

Sibongile Joni, a participant in the Basic Education Employment Initiative, shares her journey from working as a Teacher Assistant at her local school in the Eastern Cape to becoming a supervisor at Masinyusane Development Organisation. She learned how to show up in a new environment, complete her degree, unlock the power of mentoring and stand out in her graduate internship interview. Her lessons are of growth, confidence and progression.

Pathways out of poverty don’t happen in a single step, but through a combination of support interventions.



Your next step begins here!



Starting a community

centre. Young people are taking ownership of their ideas, projects and spaces. Cultural dynamo Tshi Malatji shares his experience of founding a vibrant film collective and independent cinema hub, CineBA!, in Bloemfontein, leveraging the Presidential Employment Stimulus Programme. The success of the festival showed Tshi how young people in their community want to share ideas and spaces; together with their friends, they created 56 Tambo community centre, a place where young people are bringing opportunity and agency back to the city. Follow Tshi's experience to start your own!

The power of local stories.

Murena Netshitangani grew up in a household where storytelling was part of everyday life; drama classes at school taught him that local stories can have universal meaning. He demonstrated this with his movie *Lubunyu*, produced with support from the Presidential Employment Stimulus Programme. *Lubunyu* won the Best African Film award at the Cannes Film Festival in 2025. On Next Step Exchange he shares his journey from a village in Limpopo to the world stage.

Managing your money so that your future self will thank you.

Mzingisi Benekane, a member of the Federation of the Urban and Rural Poor – part of SEF – shares his experience with community saving strategies. A community member, entrepreneur, husband and father, Mzingisi breaks down the basic building blocks of money management that meet the everyday realities and needs of South African families.



Agriculture business.

After completing the SEF programme with the Seriti Institute, Lesedi and Nomtha followed two distinct paths. Nomtha co-founded Isiqalo Organic Farm, an organic farming cooperative with five friends. Lesedi launched an agribusiness focused on processing. In their videos, Nomtha and Lesedi share practical tips on managing the business finances, finding new customers, developing their niche market, and learning the skills their businesses need to grow.

Platform opportunities. There are many online opportunities for people to learn, earn and gain work, but they're often scattered and difficult to navigate. Next Step Exchange brings these platforms closer: learn how to look for jobs on SAYouth and JobJack, build graphic design skills through the Canva Design School, and give your business idea a real chance with Heavy Chef.

Explore Next Step Exchange here:

<https://www.thestartuptribe.org/pages/nextsteps>



How to study and run your own business

📖 Course

Studying and doing business at the same time? Here's how Mmakgauda makes it happen.

Free



Unpacking the Township Economy

📖 Course

A short introductory course that will help up and coming business owners looking to grow their businesses in the local

Free



On telling own stories

📖 Course

In this conversation, filmmaker Murena Netshitangani discusses his journey in the creative sector, the impact of the ...

Free



How to improve profits: a course for spaza shop owners (and anyone with their own shops)

📖 Course

This great short course will help explain to up and coming small business owners on how they can improve their profits in ...

Free



At the heart of the agenda is a commitment to enhanced quality of outcomes in which PEPs offer decent work, create quality work experiences and actively support pathways out of poverty and unemployment.

Supporting a Strategy of PEP Reform

In 2025, the Presidential Employment Stimulus collaborated with the Expanded Public Works Programme and the Community Work Programme to agree an overall strategy for reform of public employment programmes, which was endorsed by the Inter-Ministerial Committee on Public Employment Programme (the PEP IMC) in November.

This strategy positions PEPs as a central instrument of economic inclusion, with a strong focus on the quality, relevance and sustainability of outcomes for participants and communities.

At the heart of the agenda is a commitment to enhanced quality of outcomes in which PEPs offer decent work, create quality work experiences and actively support pathways out of poverty and unemployment. This requires a move away from fragmented, short-term projects towards more coherent, programmatic designs that enable learning, progression and meaningful transitions.

A key pillar of the reform agenda is the recognition that unemployed people are not a homogeneous group. PEPs must therefore be designed to support differentiated pathways across the unemployment spectrum. For those who are furthest from the labour market, the emphasis is on longer-term, part-time programmes that combine income support

with the gradual development of capabilities. These programmes provide structured scaffolding — including mentoring, social support and exposure to productive activity — to enable transitions into complementary livelihoods over time.

For participants who are closer to the labour market, PEPs can play more of a role as part of Active Labour Market Policy (ALMPs). In these cases, the focus is on providing relevant work experience aligned to private-sector demand, alongside CV development, job-search support and other transition services that improve employability and labour market attachment.

Across all pathways, the IMC has prioritised socially and economically valuable work. PEPs should generate tangible public value while also serving as sites of learning, where skills are both built and applied. This includes deliberate skills transfer on worksites and stronger, more intentional interfaces with the formal skills development system.

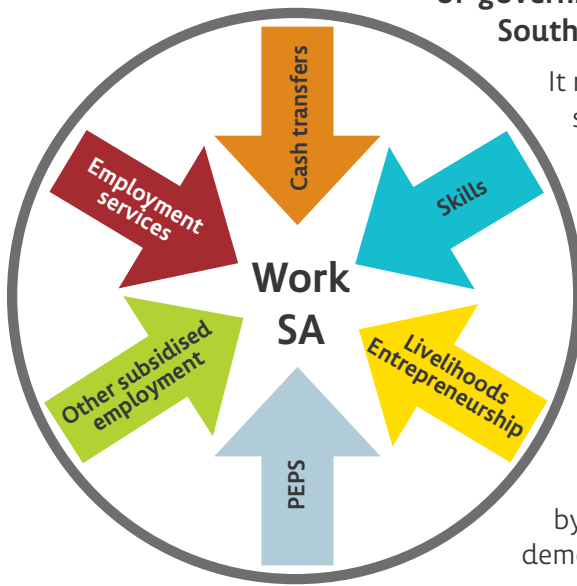
The reform agenda also emphasises the need to strengthen linkages beyond the duration of PEP participation. Improved interfaces with livelihood support and small enterprise systems are essential to ensure that participants can access follow-on opportunities, finance, and business development support where appropriate.

Finally, the IMC has underscored the importance of fairness, transparency and accountability. This includes the development of digital systems, a single PEP reporting framework, and the use of qualitative outcome indicators to better capture real impacts and restore public trust in PEPs.

Implementation will be driven through stronger collaboration across existing programmes — including EPWP, CWP and PES.

WORK SA: BUILDING A COHERENT SYSTEM OF ECONOMIC INCLUSION

Reform of public employment programmes (PEPs) forms part of a wider Work SA agenda: a whole-of-government framework to bring greater strategic coherence to South Africa's fragmented economic inclusion ecosystem.



It recognises that no single instrument — whether cash transfers, PEPs, skills initiatives or enterprise support — can address unemployment and poverty on its own. Instead, Work SA seeks to align these instruments so that they work in synergy, combining their strengths.

Within this approach, PEPs add value for participants by providing access to work, complementing the foundational role of grants and enabling a 'next level' of economic inclusion. Work SA aims to improve outcomes by strengthening programme design, enabling clearer pathways between interventions, and embedding collaboration across departments, spheres of government and social partners. Crucially, it emphasises learning by doing: applying reform in practice, building partnerships, and demonstrating progress that can be scaled over time.

WORK SA, PEPs AND THE WASTE SECTOR

The PEP IMC has approved a proposal for the waste sector to be used as an initial proof of concept for operationalising more collaborative approaches between PEPs, as part of PEP reform and within a wider Work SA framework, in support of the National Waste Management Strategy. Waste systems are in crisis in many municipalities, despite strong policy frameworks and substantial public investment. Service delivery failures are highly visible, environmentally damaging and socially costly, making waste a compelling priority for applied reform.

EPWP, CWP and the PES all operate in the waste sector to varying degrees, and a significant share of municipal work opportunities are concentrated in this area. However, interventions are often fragmented, delivered through different modalities with limited coordination even between PEPs, resulting in sub-optimal social, economic and environmental impacts. This makes waste a strong candidate for a more integrated, collaborative approach.

Focusing on waste also enables transversal coordination in practice, because it requires partnerships between municipalities, provinces, national departments, public entities, research institutions, SMEs, civil society and the private sector. It provides a concrete opportunity to align PEPs with skills development, enterprise support, innovation and private investment, while delivering an essential public service.

The waste sector also offers credible pathways into sustainable jobs, with a range of forms of innovation demonstrating this potential, in relation to recycling and circular economy initiatives, with links to green jobs, the Just Transition and climate finance initiatives.

The aim is to use waste to test integrated design, build institutional capability and demonstrate how applied reform can improve outcomes, creating a model that can be adapted to other cross-cutting priorities over time.



A key pillar of the reform agenda is the recognition that unemployed people are not a homogeneous group.

The Added Value of Work

A Research Agenda for PEPs

Public employment programmes have social, economic and environmental impacts relevant to a wide range of policy priorities and are an important lever for inclusive growth and development.

Yet, despite their scale and policy significance, key dimensions of these impacts remain under-explored. Internationally, much of the existing research has focused narrowly on income and poverty effects, with limited attention to their potential for wider developmental impacts. This evidence also focusses mainly on workfare-type programmes, in which PEPs are a form of proxy for social assistance, designed with weak labour standards and little focus on the added value of work. South Africa's Presidential Employment Stimulus was a deliberate departure from such models, seeking to re-imagine public employment as a more active development instrument.

The Presidential Employment Stimulus is partnering with:

- the Southern Africa Labour and Development Research Unit (SALDRU) at the University of Cape Town,
- the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), with support from the Department of Science, Technology and Innovation (through the National Research Foundation),
- the DG Murray Trust, and
- Harambee Youth Employment Accelerator.

A postdoctoral researcher and PhD student will provide additional support in partnership with the NRF Chair in Decent Work and Sustainable Livelihoods.



A research partnership has been established that connects academic research with policymakers and practitioners.

This Research Facility is intended to generate policy-relevant evidence on the difference it might make when public employment programmes are designed to do more — and to do better — in a context in which these employment interventions are complementary to a foundation of social assistance.

To support this goal, a research partnership has been established that connects academic research with policymakers and practitioners. The goal is to revitalise debates across government, academia, and civil society about the role and relevance of publicly-funded employment in South Africa.

Main Research Themes

THE VALUE OF PARTICIPATION IN WORK FOR PARTICIPANTS

While participants certainly value the incomes earned through PEPs, participation in meaningful work brings other benefits also. Linked to a wider international literature on the psycho-social impacts of participation in work, this research will explore impacts of participation in PEPs on mental health, self-esteem, social relations, social inclusion, and overall wellbeing. It will also explore the extent to which participation also builds skills, capabilities, and networks that support pathways into labour markets and/or other forms of economic participation.



“The DSTI, through the NRF, is privileged to be a knowledge partner to the Presidency with respect to the potential of publicly funded employment in South Africa. The Community of Practice add to the portfolio of efforts by the DSTI and its entities to place science, technology and innovation at the centre of government, industry, education, and society.”

Imraan Patel, Deputy Director General at the Department of Science, Technology and Innovation

THE VALUE OF THE WORK UNDERTAKEN BY PEPS FOR SOCIETY

This theme will focus on the social, economic and environmental value created by the work undertaken in PEPs, on its social and economic multipliers and their relevance across the spectrum of the Sustainable Development Goals: for example, in relation to food security, early childhood development, education, environmental outcomes and more.

PEPS AND INCLUSIVE GROWTH

Inclusive growth requires both social and economic policies. This research theme will focus on the impacts of PEPs in raising aggregate levels of employment and on spillover effects in the economy from their economic multipliers, and will explore the role of PEPs in relation to both demand and supply in the labour market.

A panel study of the BEEI

With support from the Department of Basic Education, the first panel study of the Basic Education Employment Initiative (BEEI) is underway. The study follows both successful and unsuccessful applicants over time, to analyse the difference participation in the programme makes. The study looks beyond income alone, tracking changes in wellbeing, confidence, sense of belonging and young people’s hopes and plans; alongside their livelihood prospects and household economic conditions.

The research team is a partnership between the HSRC, SALDRU, Harambee Youth Employment Accelerator, and the NRF Chair for Decent Work and Sustainable Livelihoods.

“For the HSRC, our participation reflects our commitment to ensuring that public employment programmes for young people are shaped by credible evidence and grounded in the lived realities. This work helps to inform policy and programme design in a way that is responsive, impactful and aligned with national priorities.”

Prof Sarah Mosoetsa, CEO of the HSRC

THE ROLE OF PEPS IN THE CLIMATE CRISIS

The Just Energy Transition is a social process as well as an environmental one, with this theme focused on the role of PEPs in relation to the social justice, equity, and environmental goals of this transition. Research will build the evidence base on the impact of work in public employment on the

air we breathe, the water we drink, the energy we use and food we eat; on how work in PEPs contributes to the protection of ecological systems, enables adaptation to climate change and builds resilience for vulnerable South Africans.



Jobs, Justice and the Energy Transition

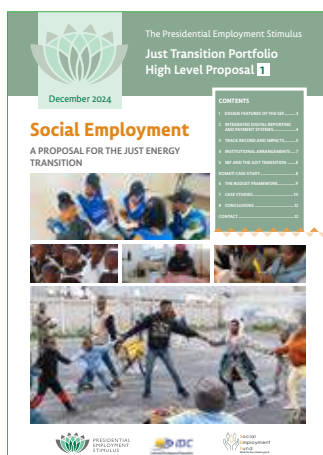
If the energy transition is seen as worsening South Africa's already deep crisis of unemployment, its legitimacy will be at risk. This danger is already visible in public debate. A Just Energy Transition that is experienced as socially unjust will struggle to maintain political and social support, regardless of its environmental necessity.

This poses a serious challenge, because even under the best of circumstances, market-led investment in renewable energy is unlikely to generate new jobs at the scale, speed or in the locations needed to absorb losses in coal-dependent regions. Nor will such investment easily replicate the employment multipliers currently sustaining local economies. This reality is recognised in South Africa's Just Transition Framework; but much of the discussion on the social dimensions of the transition has focused on social protection, often understood narrowly as income support through grants. These are vital and must be safeguarded. Yet without credible strategies to address employment, it will be neither socially nor politically sustainable.

Public employment programmes therefore need to be part of the mix in the Just Energy Transition. Publicly funded work can inject income, opportunity and hope directly into communities facing economic disruption, while buffering local economies, small businesses and informal livelihoods from the shocks of transition and are able to extend support beyond those directly displaced from energy-related jobs.



This is why, over the last year, with support from **Agence Française de Développement**, the Presidential Employment Stimulus has worked with existing implementing partners to develop proposals in support of the Just Transition. While green jobs are, of course, part of the mix – including proposals for catchment management, waste recycling and community rangers – this also includes proposals to support the film sector in Mpumalanga, tourism, craft, digital, Animation and more – because these all contribute to diversification away from dependence on coal.





Perhaps most striking is how people are re-imagining their working lives.

Case Study: Komati – Building New Livelihoods After Coal

When the Komati Power Station closed its doors, it marked the end of an era. For decades, the plant had anchored the local economy, drawing workers from across the country and sustaining jobs linked to energy, mining and construction. Its decommissioning – a necessary step in South Africa’s Just Energy Transition – brought job losses, out-migration and a sudden slowdown in economic life. For many households, the future felt uncertain.

In this context, the Social Employment Fund (SEF) has played a vital bridging role. Funded by the Industrial Development Corporation and implemented by the Seriti Institute, the Komati SEF project was launched in early 2025 in Ward 4 of the Steve Tshwete Local Municipality. It has created structured work opportunities for more than 457 participants across six focus areas: food security, environmental greening, health and care, youth development, digital inclusion, and parenting support.

KOMATI – IMPACT AT A GLANCE

Total Contracted Participants 457

68% women

72% youth

	Skills and Training	300+ participants
	Better Job Opportunities	51+ participants
	Seedling production	60,000 seedlings
	Liquid fertiliser produced	250+ litres
	Health screenings	531+ individuals
	Sport activities	209+ individuals
	Digital courses	207+ enrolled
	Environmental awareness	235 individuals
	ECD supported	3 ECDs and 447+ parents

The emphasis has been on more than income alone. Participants gain work experience, build practical skills, and contribute to visible improvements in their community. Seven communal food gardens are now in operation, supported by a local seedling nursery supplying households and emerging markets. Tree planting and environmental awareness campaigns are greening public spaces, while health screenings, youth sport programmes and digital skills training are strengthening local social infrastructure.

Perhaps most striking is how people are re-imagining their working lives. Former mine and power-station employees are becoming farmers, caregivers, community health workers, coaches and environmental stewards. Their stories underline a core lesson of the Just Energy Transition: it is not only about new technologies, but about people, place and purpose.

Komati also highlights the complexity of transition. Participant turnover is high, reflecting both movement into better opportunities and the financial pressures faced by households used to higher industrial wages. Access to land and reliable water remains constrained, underscoring the need for coordinated action across government, state-owned entities and development partners.

Komati offers a grounded picture of the transition in practice – a community absorbing economic shock, testing new livelihood pathways, and showing why social employment is essential to a just transition.

FEBRUARY 2026 | 37

Lessons from the Presidential Employment Stimulus



The Presidential Employment Stimulus (PES) emerged from crisis, seizing a rare political and institutional moment to reimagine public employment beyond short-term relief. Rather than treating PEPs as peripheral “projects”, it positioned them as investments in social and economic infrastructure – strengthening frontline services, community systems, and local economies while simultaneously restoring dignity, confidence, and agency for participants.

This reframing matters. It recognises that participation in work has value not only in relation to the incomes earned – important as these are – it also builds skills, strengthens local institutions, repairs social trust, and enables people to contribute to collective wellbeing, with multipliers throughout the society and the economy.

Lessons for social protection and employment policy

PEPs and social assistance are complementary, not substitutes

The Presidential Employment Stimulus was introduced alongside the Social Relief of Distress (SRD) grant. While sometimes, social assistance and PEPs are seen as a binary policy choice, this context created the opportunity to demonstrate the extent to which public employment and cash transfers serve different but mutually reinforcing roles within a broader social protection system.

Where the primary objective is a foundational level of income security, cash transfers reach more people quickly and cost-effectively. But people’s aspirations for economic participation do not end there. Implementation shows that PEPs enable a next-level of economic participation, adding value where participation in work, the creation of public goods, and community development generate wider developmental benefits.

In a crisis of missing jobs, transitions look different

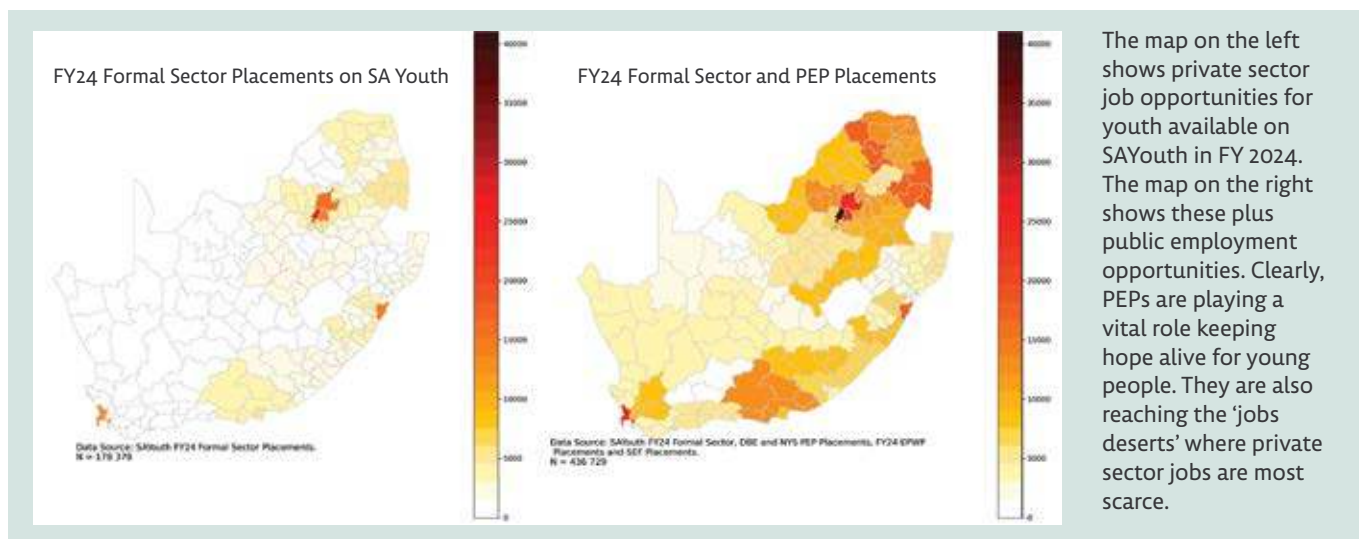
In South Africa’s crisis of missing jobs, in which less than ten percent of the unemployed are currently absorbed into employment each year, traditional assumptions that PEPs can serve as a stepping-stone into formal employment simply do not hold: even if PEPs can – and do – support a cohort of participants to access further employment.

For many, however, there is no such pathway. What, then, does support to their transitions look like? A key lesson is that pathways are not linear, and that support to transitions needs to be a process, in which public employment programmes are just one part of wider social support scaffolding, enabling people to access and engage in sustainable livelihoods.

The key benchmark has to be that people progress; that their participation puts them on a better trajectory, with stronger capabilities and networks to navigate the tough and complex labour market in which they find themselves – even when they face setbacks. Such progression involves multiple, complementary pathways. Some participants return to education; for some, continued participation in community activity matters to keep them connected. Others embark on hustle activity, or more formal micro-enterprise activity and self-employment. For those that need it, access to social assistance remains vital.

PEPs can provide support scaffolding for livelihoods and enterprise support

Particularly in the part-time programmes of longer duration, such as the Social Employment Fund and National Youth Service, lessons from implementation show that participation in PEPs can support transitions into complementary livelihood activity and pathways into self-employment. These are not easy pathways; it’s hard to build a sustainable livelihood in this way. But in the absence of alternatives, it matters to provide as much support scaffolding as possible, to strengthen the chances of success. Growing evidence illustrates that the flexibility of work coupled with the security of regular and predictable income helps de-risk these early-stage efforts. These effects are likely to be enhanced by access to capital, and experimentation with such add-on support is in design.



Already, though, PEPs have demonstrated all kinds of ways of providing support, from provision of access to facilities and tools, bulk buying of inputs, technical support, support to access to markets and more. This is certainly one of the 'next frontiers' for bigger impact, with design questions about how best PEPs can play this role.

PEPs cannot succeed in isolation – they require a Work-SA ecosystem

In a context of societal crisis, PEPs cannot do all the heavy lifting alone. Their impact depends on strategic alignment with the skills system, enterprise support, labour-market matching support, and social protection interventions. The scope to build such alignment is undermined by uncertain, stop-start funding cycles.

Lessons for Programme Design

Building institutional architectures for scale

While every little counts, the reality is that unemployment cannot be addressed through fragmented projects reaching a few thousand people at a time. The PES demonstrated what institutional architectures for scale can look like. This includes the use of distributed delivery networks – such as the 23,000 schools involved in the BEEI – that were able to absorb large numbers of unemployed people in every corner of the country, in a short space of time. What are the other such networks of capacity that can easily be activated to enable scale? Civil society provides one of these, with the hub and spoke model used by SEF enabling participation of deep networks of community-based organisation. Hub-and-spoke systems build shared management infrastructure rather than duplicating core capacities at each site.

These systems can also create feedback loops that facilitate design improvements to the programmes, as well as evidence-based insights to improve the programmes' impact.

Responses to calls for proposals were all significantly oversubscribed, illustrating the vast reservoir of social innovation and delivery capacity that exists – inside and outside government – waiting to be activated. Calls for proposals enable innovation against core criteria, rather than 'over-designing' from the centre.

Stop-start funding undermines quality and partnerships

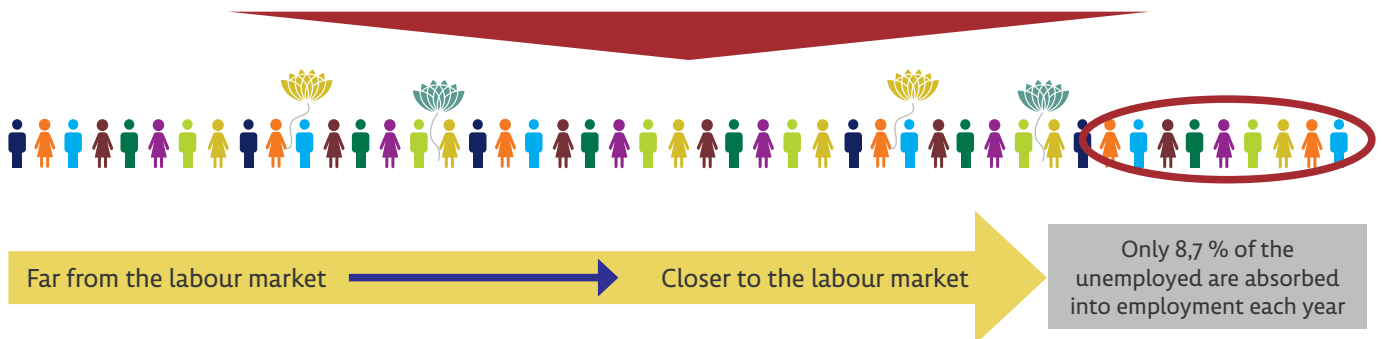
The one-year funding cycles for the PES have created 'hostile timeframes' that inhibit effective planning, the attraction and retention of high-quality staff and the development of durable partnerships – particularly with the private sector and civil society. Without predictability, organisations cannot justify investing in systems, staff, and long-term collaboration. Stability and multi-year horizons are prerequisites for systemic impact. This stop-start funding modality arguably sets programmes up for failure. What is remarkable is that they haven't failed – but they could achieve so much more with a proper planning 'runway'. Management is an investment in quality outcomes

Quality outcomes require strong management, systems, and learning capacity. Excessive cost-cutting of management is a false economy. Weak systems, oversight and planning compromise the value of every job created.

We have a crisis of missing jobs

Economic growth alone will not fix South Africa's unemployment crisis

Even if our growth strategies (structural reforms and other policies) are successful and labour market demand doubles or trebles over the next five years, we will still have unemployment at levels that constitute a social crisis – a significant risk to social stability – with instability in turn a risk to growth needed for sustainable employment.



To address this crisis, we need a multi-pronged approach. We need to optimize strategies for inclusive growth, to expand labour market demand, coupled with active labour market policies that reduce barriers to entry. PEPs have a role to play here. At the same time, for those unlikely to find jobs, we need to design support systems that nevertheless enable their economic participation. This starts with **social grants**, which are foundational; with PEPs and livelihood support strategies providing the next level of social and economic inclusion.

Youth matter

In South Africa, a third of the population are young – and they are bearing the brunt of deep socio-economic challenges, with youth unemployment a societal crisis. A focus on youth experience is critical. With 82% youth participation, the PES has been able to demonstrate that PEPs can offer jobs to which youth aspire – and in those jobs, they are making a difference to their society, strengthening frontline services and addressing community needs.

A focus on youth does not, however, mean only mean youth are targeted as participants. For some young people, the best support they can get is for one of their parents to have a job – allowing them the freedom to explore transitions that might not have immediate economic impact, such as studying further. Participation of youth alongside other age cohorts also promotes social inclusion and the creation of community networks.

Learning systems and research are essential

Despite growing evidence, major gaps remain – particularly on long-term, transformative impacts of the added value of work. The establishment of a dedicated research and learning facility is therefore not an add-on, but a core function of a mature public employment system.

Momentum and multipliers grow over time

A lot has been achieved but the really exciting ideas to take this work to the next level are now transpiring from experience, from success and failure, from light-bulb moments and opportunities for joined-up approaches. It's now, for example, that great ideas are emerging on how public employment programmes can seed market-based jobs and opportunities. It's now that transitions into self-employment and enterprise opportunities are manifesting, and we are able to identify enablers. It's now that opportunities as part of the Just Transition are becoming apparent and viable. It's also now that we're seeing the multipliers from investment in the creative sector in the wider community.

The PES has shown that public employment can be far more than a temporary response to crisis. When designed as part of an integrated system, PEPs become instruments for building a society that works: one that values contribution, invests in care and creativity, and recognises economic participation as a cornerstone of social inclusion.

A defining lesson is not to choose between work and income, between PEPs and grants, or between social and economic goals. It is to design systems that hold these together – building pathways out of poverty that are realistic, dignified, and transformative.



The last word goes to the grandmothers.

Artist Sanele Xaba

Title: Injabulo ka “khulu”

Work funded by Art Bank SA – as part of PESP

‘This work is an ode to the pure joy ignited by the presence of a grandmother. This tribute embraces her warmth, wisdom and endless love, inciting all to revel in the happiness they bring.’



Thank you

The Presidential Employment Stimulus
thanks everyone who contributed to compiling this overview and to all those who gave us
permission to use their photos and graphics:

Assitej
Art Bank SA
Binding Constraints Lab
Buffalo City Metro
Brownie Points
City of Johannesburg
Department of Basic Education
Funda Wande
Harambee
Industrial Development Corporation
National Arts Council
National Film and Video Foundation
National Youth Development Agency
Mangaung
Social Employment Network
Seriti
Year Beyond

And to m&m for the layout – and their unlimited willingness to make changes.

The Presidential Employment Stimulus

Building a Society that Works

2,5 million jobs, opportunities and more

February 2026

