

4 initiatives providing ICT skills training to SA youth

A recent report commissioned by Siemens revealed that the adoption of digitalisation in industrial sectors, ranging from transport to manufacturing, could potentially add R4-trillion to the African economy by 2026. And South Africa emerged as the country with the highest potential to drive this innovation. What lacked however, is the skilled workforce needed to tap into this market.



Siyakhula Computer School graduates

Professor Wiseman Nkuhlu, chair of the Datatec Foundation notes, “The vast lack of technical skills in the country is partly because of poverty among South African youth which leave millions unable to pursue secondary and tertiary education or training.” South Africa’s unemployment rate is 27.5%, accounting for 6.21 million people; the unemployment rate among young people (aged 15-34 years) is a very worrying 38.2%. Not surprisingly, many youth are despondent and discouraged by the lack of opportunities available to them to acquire skills through education and training. It’s this gap that the Datatec Foundation intends to fill, supporting programmes that can help upskill the youth and enable them to gain the necessary skills to become economically active through employment and entrepreneurship.

Sponsored enterprises

One of the initiatives supported by the Foundation is the Siyakhula Computer School, which offers low-cost, high-quality computer-literacy training. “The majority of students remain first-time computer users looking to acquire end-user computer skills. Our goal is to reduce computer illiteracy in South Africa and help previously disadvantaged youth get the opportunity to enter the job market,” says Andrew Barrett, co-founder of the school. The Datatec Foundation has been a key enabler and initiator of the school and has been supporting them for over 15 years. The school trained 1700 students during the course of 2018 across its five centres in Gauteng including Ivory Park, Diepsloot, Zandspruit, Thohoyandou and Soweto. Training is provided in Microsoft Office products like Word, Excel and PowerPoint. The school sustains employment for 11 local community members.

An initiative in the Nelson Mandela Bay region of the Eastern Cape is VMite, a non-profit IT training organisation, providing technology skills training to unemployed youth in the region. “We offer vendor-accredited programmes that are in demand

in the IT industry which helps eradicate youth unemployment specifically in Uitenhage,” says VusiNcwadi, founder of VMite.

Afrika Tikkun, established in 1995, implements a holistic development model that provides sustainable care and development programmes for vulnerable and orphaned children from birth to 25 years of age, operating on a national level, out of community centres in the townships in which Afrika Tikkun is active. The Datatec Foundation has played a role in providing technology infrastructure to these community centres providing community members and learners with access to technology for a variety of purposes including Internet research, job applications and IT skills training. In July 2018, Afrika Tikkun launched its first ICT Academy which forms part of their Career Development Programme. The Academy teaches basic IT skills as well as coding skills. “Many school leavers and graduates are unable to find employment due to a lack of experience. We enable young people to become economically empowered by giving them work-readiness training and industry specific skills to make them employable or start their own businesses, states Onyi Nwaneri, group executive, Partnerships and Marketing for Afrika Tikkun.”

Code4Change, an NPO that is working to bring coding to secondary schools in the country. Code4Change recognises that the language of the future is code and gearing the youth with this must-have skill will have a massive impact on youth employment. Code4Change is currently working with 20 schools around Gauteng through their CodeJika school clubs project – a vibrant ecosystem of learner-run coding clubs. “Coding is a language and essential skill that enables individuals to create software, apps and websites. Every industry needs code; we give our learners computational thinking and problem solving skills which opens their worlds to so many possibilities,” says Jonathan Novotny, co-founder of Code4Change. It is inspiring to see how the learners are using their newfound skills to create change and help their own communities through practical websites and uplifting everyone in their surroundings.

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