



Prosperity Catalyst

2024

South Africa

Social Employment Fund

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- **DURATION**
Ongoing Since 2022
- **POPULATION 2024**
73,138,701 (Growth rate 1%)
- **URA SCOPE**
SOCIETY. Staying Human

ECONOMY Urban Prosperity Beyond GDP
- **TOPICS**
EMPLOYMENT, SKILLS DEVELOPMENT,
SOCIAL CONNECTIONS, SENS OF
PURPOSE
- **MAIN ACTORS**
Social Employment Fund
Civil Society Organizations

South Africa faces a deep unemployment crisis with corrosive effects on its communities. Yet, the work needed to achieve Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at the local level is abundant. The Social Employment Fund (SEF) bridges this gap by empowering local organizations to create publicly funded employment opportunities that address community challenges and serve the common good.

This flexible initiative supports diverse projects tailored to local needs, enhancing urban resilience and strengthening communal resources. In cities, SEF has enabled homeless individuals to establish urban food gardens, trained "urban rangers" to improve inner-city safety, and provided teacher assistants to boost learning outcomes in schools.

Beyond the cities, SEF's impact ripples through broader social landscapes. Paralegal "Sisterhood Advocates" offer vital support to survivors of gender-based violence, guiding them toward justice and healing. Public art projects brighten neighborhoods, fostering pride and a renewed sense of identity. Meanwhile, GPS address systems in informal settlements provide residents with access to essential services once beyond their reach.

Participants in the Social Employment Fund (SEF) commit to 16 hours of work per week, earning the national minimum wage. This schedule provides vital income while offering flexibility for additional opportunities. Advanced digital systems ensure efficiency by tracking attendance via biometrics, capturing performance indicators, and processing centralized wage payments, reducing administrative hurdles.

SEF's innovative hub-and-spoke model engages Strategic Implementing Partners (SIPs), who collaborate with grassroots organizations to cascade support and build local capacity. For example, the Joburg Inner City Partnership works with over 40 NGOs to drive impactful urban initiatives.

Through this multi-faceted approach, SEF not only provides employment but also strengthens the very fabric of society. By empowering local initiatives and promoting collective growth, it addresses urgent social and economic needs, proving that the power of communities, when supported, can transform lives and build a better future for all.





Impact

Health and Care: 3,300 patients have been supported with chronic medication adherence, along with education on maintaining a healthy lifestyle. Consistent medication routines significantly enhance both physical and mental well-being.

Education: 89,000 learners are receiving essential academic support, including tutoring and literacy programs. With 81% of South African Grade 4 learners unable to read for meaning, these interventions are critical. Sports and extracurricular activities further enrich the educational experience.

Arts and Craft: 41,530 school children have participated in arts programs. Research highlights that arts education reduces dropout rates and improves performance in STEM subjects, fostering creativity and resilience.

Action Against GBV: Over 25,000 GBV survivors have accessed para-legal support, counselling, and guidance for justice. With GBV rates five times the global average, these services provide vital pathways to recovery and empowerment.

Food Security: 1,995 community kitchen gardens are empowering local households with food self-sufficiency and income opportunities. These initiatives combat hunger, which affects 11.6% of South African households, while promoting enterprise and sustainability.

Cleaning and Greening: 2,300 hectares of invasive plants have been cleared, improving water availability and grazing conditions for communal farmers. The biomass is repurposed into materials for resale, adding economic value.

Placemaking: 760 informal settlements have been profiled, including utility repairs and household enumeration, contributing to safer and more organized communities.

These initiatives collectively address critical societal challenges, fostering resilience and self-reliance

The Challenge

Unemployment in South Africa is a deep-rooted crisis with far-reaching consequences, both economic and social. With an official unemployment rate exceeding 30% it ranks among the highest globally. Youth unemployment is particularly alarming, with more than 60% of young people aged 15–24 unable to find work, trapping an entire generation in a cycle of poverty and hopelessness.

The effects of unemployment extend beyond individual hardships, corroding the fabric of communities. High joblessness fuels inequality, social unrest, and crime, eroding trust and stability within neighbourhoods. Families struggle to meet basic needs, and young people, unable to envision a future, often turn to negative coping mechanisms. This creates a vicious cycle where economic stagnation and social fragmentation feed into each other.

Structural issues, such as a mismatch between education and market demands, declining traditional industries, and inadequate growth in emerging sectors, perpetuate this crisis. Addressing unemployment requires not only job creation through bold economic reforms but also community-driven solutions to rebuild resilience, restore dignity, and foster hope across South Africa.

Solution Proposed

In a place where unemployment often means wasted potential, the Social Employment Fund presents a bold vision: even when labour lacks market value, it holds immense social worth. This initiative turns that value into action, unlocking opportunities for individuals and communities to thrive.

The initiative provides unemployed individuals with meaningful work opportunities, fostering income generation, skills development, social connections, and a renewed sense of purpose. These benefits extend beyond participants, reducing the corrosive effects of unemployment on communities and promoting social inclusion.

Through this program, collective labour is channelled into creating assets, services, and infrastructures that serve the broader community and align with sustainable development goals. By prioritizing marginalized areas and people, the fund supports local actors to build capacity and address community-specific needs, empowering them to take ownership of their development.

The fund focuses on scalability and collaboration with diverse stakeholders to create systemic impacts and provide pathways out of poverty through integrated livelihood opportunities.

The goal is to integrate social employment into South Africa's employment policy to tackle inequality and unemployment, fostering resilience, inclusion, and opportunities for all.

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