



**National Youth Service,  
Employability, Entrepreneurship  
and Sustainable Livelihoods**

**National Youth Service Programmes in Sub-Saharan Africa:  
Strengthening National Youth Service as a strategy for youth  
employment, entrepreneurship and sustainable livelihoods**

## **The case of South Africa**

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**Acronyms**

CHESP	Community-Higher Education Service Partnership
CSO	civil society organisations
CRDP	Comprehensive Rural Development Programme
DRDLR	Department of Rural Development and Land Reform
EPWP	Expanded Public Works Programme
FET	further education and training
GEM	Global Entrepreneurship Monitor
NPC	National Planning Commission
NARYSEC	National Rural Youth Service Corps
NEDLAC	National Economic Development and Labour Council
NYC	National Youth Commission
NYDA	National Youth Development Agency
NYS	National Youth Service
NYSU	National Youth Service Unit
NGO	non-governmental organisation
RDP	Reconstruction and Development Programme
YES	Youth Environmental Service

## 1. Executive summary

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Youth unemployment is an on-going challenge in South Africa. Almost a third (31.4 per cent) of all youth aged 15 to 24 years in South Africa – or 3.3 million of 10.4 million – are not employed or in further education and training (Statistics South Africa 2013). Initiatives to address youth unemployment and disengagement have therefore received a great deal of attention in South Africa. One such initiative is the National Youth Service (NYS) Programme, which aims to engage marginalised youth in community service while equipping them with the skills and experiential learning they need to access economic opportunities and make the transition to adulthood.

Given the high levels of youth unemployment in South Africa and in Sub-Saharan Africa more generally, the question can be asked: How and to what extent are NYS programmes and policies intentionally designed to create pathways for youth who participate in them to transition into employment, entrepreneurship and sustainable livelihoods?

The MasterCard Foundation commissioned Innovations in Civic Participation (ICP), in partnership with Volunteer and Service Enquiry Southern Africa (VOSESA), to conduct a study with this as the primary research question. This case study is one of three case profiles aimed at providing insight into NYS programme design and implementation in Sub-Saharan Africa. The South African case study is based on a desktop review of existing literature as well as 12 interviews with government, civil society and private sector actors, and three focus group discussions with current NYS participants and alumni.

### Youth and work in South Africa

**Youth and unemployment.** Half (49.9 per cent) of all *economically active* youth aged 15 to 24 years are unemployed (Statistics South Africa 2013). A study by the World Bank (2012) found that the extent to which an individual's age contributes to inequality in employment status in South Africa is remarkably high when compared to other, similar middle-income countries, putting young people at a particular disadvantage when it comes to accessing work.

There are several contributing factors to these high levels of youth unemployment, including the quality of basic education in South Africa, the relatively low levels of skill amongst youth which does not match the demands of the labour market, and the inability of the economy to create sufficient employment opportunities.

**Youth, entrepreneurship and other forms of livelihoods.** Entrepreneurship is often cited as a solution to the challenge of youth unemployment. However it is argued that entrepreneurship should be driven by the identification of gaps and opportunities, rather than by necessity, which tends to be less sustainable (Mlatsheni and Leibbrandt 2011). Overall levels of entrepreneurial activity in South Africa are low, with only 5 per cent of 18 to 24-year-olds and 9 per cent of 25 to 34-year-olds involved in early stage entrepreneurial activity, according to the 2012 Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (Turton and Herrington 2012).

Given that young people in South Africa are far from homogenous, youth development initiatives such as youth service programmes should incorporate pathways to a broad range of opportunities that include employment, self-employment, entrepreneurship and other sustainable livelihood strategies.

**Efforts to combat youth unemployment.** The NYS Programme in South Africa is one of a range of youth-focused initiatives introduced by government as well as private sector and civil society players to address the challenge of youth unemployment. These initiatives have ranged from building knowledge, skills and experiential learning to providing opportunities for young people to enter the world of work. A unique aspect of the NYS is that through service it also aims to build social consciousness and active citizenship amongst young participants.

### **National Youth Service in South Africa**

Youth service programmes in South Africa have evolved in different ways since the advent of democracy in 1994. The late 1990s saw the introduction of compulsory community service for health graduates. The NYS Programme has its roots in the early days of democracy, but was formally launched as a voluntary, government-led programme in 2004. Over the years the NYS Programme has functioned as an umbrella for a variety of youth service programmes run by government departments and by civil society organisations.

**Policy framework.** A policy framework is in place to support the NYS Programme, but there is no formalised legislation on this. The key policies supporting the NYS programmes include:

- the *Green Paper on National Youth Service* (1998)
- the draft *White Paper on National Youth Service* (1999)
- the *National Youth Service Policy Framework* (2003)
- the NYS Programme was endorsed in the *Youth Policy 2000* (1997) and the *National Youth Development Policy Framework (2002-2007)*
- the *National Youth Policy 2009-2014* and the draft *Integrated Youth Development Strategy* (2011) identify the NYS Programme as one of six priority intervention areas.

**Programme aims and target groups.** The NYS Programme in South Africa aims to provide opportunities for the “involvement of young people in activities which provide benefits to the community whilst developing the abilities of young people through service and learning” (National Youth Commission 2003:8). The programme is aligned with government priorities. Unlike a number of other African countries where the focus is on graduates, the South African NYS Programme (in practice) targets primarily unemployed and unskilled youth aged 18 to 35 years.

**Programme design.** The NYS Programme in South Africa has adopted a hybrid approach that incorporates a variety of programmes and projects implemented by government departments and civil society organisations. The NYS Programme is structured around three broad categories of service (Mphahle 2009, National Youth Commission 2009):

1. Category 1 programmes involve unemployed, out-of-school and unskilled young people in structured programmes that comprise a) accredited learning and skills development, b) community development (service), and c) exit opportunities.

2. Category 2 programmes involve high school learners and university students in community service activities while they study.
3. Category 3 activities involve youth in ad hoc community volunteer opportunities.

Category 1 programmes tend to be longer-term, structured programmes and are intentionally designed to provide pathways for participants to access economic opportunities, although the extent to which these are implemented in practice varies across programmes. Category 3 programmes, on the other hand, tend to be short in duration and may involve larger numbers of young people, but are limited in the extent to which skills development can take place.

In recent years NYS Programme activities has tended to focus on category 1 and 3 programmes, with service activities in the further and higher education sphere developing independently.

**Institutional arrangements.** A National Youth Service Unit (NYSU) was established to co-ordinate and manage the operationalisation and implementation of the NYS Programme through a broad range of government departments, municipalities and civil society organisations. This co-ordination role is now located in the National Youth Development Agency (NYDA), which is a public entity accountable to the Minister in the Presidency and to Parliament. Some interviewees argued that the current institutional arrangements and the lack of a substantial, dedicated budget for the NYS Programme limit the role and leverage of the NYSU. There was support for stronger co-ordination of the NYS Programme from several civil society interviewees, on the basis that this would result in greater consistency and more proactive support for those implementing NYS programmes.

**Partnerships.** The NYS Programme in South Africa was conceptualised as a hybrid model that would be implemented through a range of stakeholders. In practice the NYS Programme has been implemented primarily through government departments and municipalities. Concerns have been raised that the alignment of government departments' NYS programmes with their Expanded Public Works Programme initiatives has undermined the service component, so that NYS programmes tend to more closely resemble public employment programmes.

South Africa has a vibrant civil society and there are several active civil society organisations engaging young people in service programmes. However a relatively small number are registered with the NYSU and more could be done to broaden the scope and increase the involvement of civil society. The private sector has played an even more limited role in the NYS Programme thus far, despite the recognition of the role the sector could play in supporting exit opportunities for programme participants.

**Programme financing.** The NYSU does not have a large autonomous budget with which to fund NYS programmes. Instead the NYDA receives public funding from the National Treasury for activities associated with its key performance areas, of which the NYS is one. The NYDA funds a small number of category 1 and 3 NYS projects directly, but in most cases the government departments and the civil society organisations must draw on their own resources.

**Measuring programme implementation and impact.** The NYDA monitors the number of participants in NYS programmes in a financial year and compares this with the targets set for that year. In recent

years this monitoring has been confined to NYDA-funded NYS programmes only. There is no centralised monitoring of the number of participants (or other output or outcome indicators) across all programmes registered with the NYSU.

Similarly, there is no centralised system for evaluating NYS programmes. A broad-scale evaluation of the NYS Programme has been undertaken by the Public Service Commission of South Africa, but the results of the study are yet to be finalised. At present the research evidence for the impact of NYS programmes on participants in South Africa is scarce.

**Engagement with alumni.** Levels of engagement with the alumni of NYS programmes vary from programme to programme, with post-service support limited in most cases.

**Challenges in promoting pathways for transition.** A number of challenges were identified, both in the practical implementation of NYS programmes, and in achieving the desired employability and livelihood outcomes for youth. These include:

- There are difficulties in linking participants with meaningful service experiences and exit opportunities.
- NYS programmes vary widely in the extent to which they are proactive in creating exit opportunities and the level of success they achieve.
- There is a danger that the concern with addressing youth unemployment can lead to a narrow understanding and implementation of NYS programmes.
- Linking participants to meaningful exit opportunities is especially challenging in the current context of high unemployment and insufficient economic growth.
- At times participants have unrealistic expectations which must be addressed from the outset.
- Linking participants to accredited training can also pose challenges, particularly in under-resourced and remote areas.
- There is little post-service support, whether financial or in terms of networking, that assists young people to address obstacles that may prevent them from successfully accessing the economic opportunities that are available.
- In addition, employment tends to form the main focus of exit opportunities. Few programmes – with one or two exceptions – actively build entrepreneurial skills and there is little discussion of other potential livelihoods.

Several interviewees wished to see a stronger co-ordinating role across all NYSU-registered programmes.

### **Promising practices**

Little rigorous research has been conducted on the impact of youth service programmes on the employability or livelihoods of young participants in South Africa, but a number of promising practices are emerging that warrant further discussion. These include the potential for youth service programmes to:

- provide opportunities for youth to develop leadership skills and build confidence
- increase young people's social capital and connectedness
- act as a 'bridging programme' to support transitions from schooling to the world of work

- provide career guidance and practical ‘next steps’ for young people with limited access to such resources
- support choice and diversity of options in the pathways open to young people
- improve education and skills levels
- develop viable and sustainable exit opportunities that take into account the broader context
- ‘connect the dots’ by linking young people more proactively to existing opportunities and creating more clearly defined pathways for youth
- provide post-service support
- potentially contribute to building an asset base that will enable young people to more easily take advantage of the exit opportunities.

The NYS Programme in South Africa and category 1-type programmes in particular have the potential to play a vital ‘bridging’ role in providing pathways for young people to access employment, and to a more limited extent, entrepreneurship and other livelihood opportunities. However, further rigorous monitoring and research is required to provide evidence of this impact.

## 2. Introduction

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South Africa has a youthful population, with young people aged 15 to 34 years comprising almost 30 per cent of the population (Statistics South Africa 2012).<sup>1</sup> Young people represent a tremendous opportunity for the country, but they are coming of age in a challenging context. Almost a third (31.4 per cent) of all youth aged 15 to 24 years in South Africa – or approximately 3.3 million youth of 10.4 million – are not employed or in further education and training (Statistics South Africa 2013). This is more likely to be the case for young women than young men. This means that millions of young South Africans are disengaged from work and education, with negative consequences both for their chances of accessing economic opportunities later in life, and for the social and economic development of the country as a whole.

Initiatives to address youth unemployment and marginalisation have therefore received a great deal of attention in South Africa. A range of plans and programmes have been developed and implemented by government, civil society actors and increasingly the private sector with the aim of supporting youth employability and participation in the economy. Just one example of this is the National Youth Service (NYS) Programme, which aims to engage marginalised youth in community service while equipping them with the skills and experiential learning they need to access economic opportunities and make the transition to adulthood. The NYS was established in South Africa in 2004. Since then a number of youth service programmes have been launched that position youth service as a mechanism for youth development.

Many other African countries have established NYS programmes and invested a great deal of human and financial resources in them. In principle, the NYS is an example of an institution that can facilitate the transition of young people into adulthood by creating pathways to post-secondary education, employment and active citizenship. But persistent youth unemployment remains a pressing concern

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<sup>1</sup> Youth in South Africa are defined as those falling within this age range.

for much of Sub-Saharan Africa. This begs the question: How and to what extent are NYS programmes and policies intentionally designed to create pathways for youth who participate in them to transition into employment, entrepreneurship and sustainable livelihoods?

The MasterCard Foundation has commissioned Innovations in Civic Participation (ICP) to conduct a study on strengthening NYS programmes in Sub-Saharan Africa as a strategy for promoting youth employability, entrepreneurship and sustainable livelihoods. ICP partnered with Volunteer and Service Enquiry Southern Africa (VOSESA) to undertake the study.

This paper focuses on South Africa as a case study. Little rigorous research has been conducted on the impact of youth service programmes on the employability or livelihood outcomes for young participants in South Africa, but a number of promising practices are emerging that warrant further attention.

The case study firstly outlines the situation of youth in South Africa with a focus on challenges in employment, entrepreneurship and other livelihoods (Section 4). Section 5 provides an overview of the evolution of NYS and the form it has taken in South Africa. This includes a discussion of some of the challenges currently faced by the NYS in supporting young people's transitions from school to the working world. Section 6 presents selected promising practices and is followed by Section 7 that concludes that youth service programmes have the potential to play a vital role in developing socially responsible young citizens who are capable of accessing further economic opportunities. However, further rigorous monitoring and research is required to provide evidence of this impact.

### 3. Methodology

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A key output of the larger study on strengthening NYS as a means of promoting youth employability, entrepreneurship and livelihood outcomes was to produce three case profiles that take an in-depth look at NYS programme design and implementation in Ghana, Kenya and South Africa. This report forms the case profile for South Africa.

Information to inform the case study was collected from the following sources:

- A desktop review was conducted on the circumstances of youth and the youth employment context in the country, as well as on the policy environment in which NYS operates, the nature and form of the NYS and the challenges faced.
- Ten in-depth interviews were conducted with youth service practitioners in civil society and government departments or agencies, and other relevant stakeholders working in the youth development field. These were used to probe specific questions on the interface between inculcating a culture of civic service/citizenship and enhancing young people's employability or ability to establish enterprises or other forms of sustainable livelihoods.
- Two in-depth interviews with private sector actors were held to determine their expectations of young people who are seeking entry-level positions, and to determine what qualities these employers regard as being important for work readiness.
- Three group discussions – one with current service programme participants and two with service programme alumni (from different programmes) – were held to gather information

about their expectations of NYS, whether they have benefitted from the experience and, if so, how.

The research for the case study took place over the period April to June 2013. A list of interviewees can be found in Appendix 1.

## 4. Youth and work in South Africa

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South Africa is ranked as an upper-middle income economy by the World Bank but it remains highly unequal. GDP growth in South Africa has averaged 3.2 per cent a year since 1995, but this growth has not been labour intensive enough to absorb new entrants into the labour market (World Bank 2012). The country also continues to experience high levels of unemployment, with young people being most affected.

### 4.1 Youth and unemployment

A recent economic survey of South Africa described youth unemployment in the country as “catastrophically high” (OECD 2013:26). According to the Quarterly Labour Force Survey, half (49.9 per cent) of all economically active youth aged 15 to 24 years are unemployed (Statistics South Africa 2013).<sup>2</sup> When discouraged work seekers are included, this increases to almost two thirds (64.8 per cent) of economically active youth in the age group. The situation is slightly more optimistic for older youth – 28.7 per cent of economically active 25 to 34-year-olds are unemployed (or 38.9 per cent using the expanded definition).

While it may not be surprising that younger people are more likely to be unemployed than older people with more experience, a study by the World Bank (2012) found that the extent to which an individual’s age contributes to inequality in employment status in South Africa is remarkably high when compared to other, similar middle-income countries. The study found high levels of inequality of opportunity in South Africa, meaning that different groups have persistently unequal access to the limited jobs available. In particular, levels of education, where a person lives (location) and age have a strong impact on an individual’s likelihood of accessing employment. As the authors of the report (2012:xii) explain:

*The employment situation appears to be particularly challenging for young workers and residents of townships, informal settlements and rural areas. An individual’s age is an unusually large contributor to inequality in employment in South Africa, more than for many other middle-income countries, with the odds increasingly stacked against the youngest workers. Inequality of opportunity, the part of inequality attributable to circumstances that an individual has little or no control over, is also higher among young workers than among older workers.*

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<sup>2</sup> Of the approximately 10.4 million youth in this age group, some 2.6 million are economically active. Of these, approximately 1.3 million are unemployed, according to the Quarterly Labour Force Survey (Quarter 3, Statistics South Africa 2013).

Unemployment can have profound social and psychological effects and can lead to discouragement amongst youth, which may in turn negatively affect their future employment prospects. Unemployed youth are likely to find it difficult to gain the skills and experience they need to access employment and other economic opportunities, and may face a future of chronic unemployment. The potential long-term effects of unemployment are evident in the finding that if young people fail to get a job by age 24, they are unlikely to ever access formal employment (cited by the National Planning Commission 2012:105).

The sense of frustration that arises in this context was clearly articulated by a young service programme participant in a group discussion organised for this study. She explained:

*[Our parents] want us to go and study, get a job and everything, but where are those things that they want us to be and get? ... Yes, I would like to go and study but where are the finances, where is the help? And you are expected to go find a job and help out at home, but where is the job? And when you are not doing all of that, you are seen as failing.* (Group Discussion, Current NYS Participant, 2013)

Why are the levels of youth unemployment in South Africa so high? There are several contributing factors that relate both to young people themselves (supply factors such as low skills levels among youth) and limitations within the labour market (demand factors such as the inability of the economy to create sufficient jobs). Three key challenges are discussed below.

#### **a. Access to quality education is a critical challenge**

Education plays a significant role in determining labour market prospects. Therefore having access to high quality basic education is important for accessing work opportunities in adulthood and for social mobility. However, despite the relatively large budgets allocated to education and high levels of attendance at the basic education level, South African learners perform poorly on international educational assessments (Van der Berg et al. 2011). This is the case even when compared with mainly low-income countries in Africa. Some of the causes of these poor educational outcomes include inadequate training of teachers and principals, shortages of learning materials and textbooks and weaknesses in school management and accountability (OECD 2013, Van der Berg et al. 2011).

Access to quality education is influenced by socio-economic status. For example, the Joint Education Trust's analysis of the national school effectiveness study showed that by the age of eight, there was already a considerable gap between the performance of the richest 20 per cent of learners and the poorest 80 per cent of learners on the same tests (cited in Van der Berg et al. 2011). Researchers at Stellenbosch University (Van der Berg et al. 2011:3) argue that the low quality of tuition offered in schools in poor communities entrenches marginalisation:

*According to our research, the education system generally produces outcomes that reinforce current patterns of poverty and privilege instead of challenging them. Unsurprisingly, we find that the inequalities in schooling outcomes manifest via labour market outcomes, perpetuating current patterns of income inequality.*

In the interviews and group discussions for this study, almost all participants referred to the quality of education as a key challenge contributing to youth unemployment. An interviewee described the education system as “broken and fragmented” and doing little to provide young people with relevant skills, while young NYS participants in a group discussion raised concerns about the quality of education. One argued:

*I think the education system has failed us by lowering the pass rate [for the matriculation examinations]. Because they should have improved the quality of teaching, the quality of teachers [instead]; maybe give more support to the profession rather than lowering the pass rates, because the pass rate is a reflection of what they teach in class. So if [learners] still fail [at] the 30 per cent pass rate, then that means the government is failing the teachers that are failing the learners. (Group Discussion, NYS Participant, 2013)*

There was also a sense that, as one civil society interviewee put it, “a matric certificate doesn’t hold value anymore, so you need ... additional training essentially to get you further.” To tackle youth unemployment in South Africa, the quality of basic education for all young South Africans and levels of access to vocational education need to be improved.

#### **b. A mismatch exists between the skills available and labour market requirements**

Higher levels of education are strongly linked with better job prospects and higher levels of income. Achieving a matric certificate is the first step, with research showing that those who leave school with Grade 12 (matric) are significantly more likely to find work within the first few years of leaving school than those who leave school with less than Grade 10 (Lam, Leibbrandt and Mlatsheni 2008). However, many young people drop out of the schooling system without completing Grade 12. Of the slightly more than one million learners that started Grade 1 in 2001, most were still in school at Grade 10. By Grade 12 in 2012, however, less than half were there to write their matric exams, placing them at a disadvantage as they try to enter the world of work (Equal Education 2013).

But for most young people, even obtaining a matric certificate alone is not enough. The South African economy is increasingly being driven by the tertiary (services) sector and skilled labour is in high demand (World Bank 2012). Only a small proportion of young people access the further or higher education, with the costs involved acting as a barrier for many. This has resulted in an oversupply of unskilled or low-skilled labour. As private sector interviewees for this study argued, most young entrants into the labour market do not have the qualifications or the requisite technical and soft skills that employers are looking for and are unprepared for the demands of the workplace. This limits their access to the job opportunities that do exist. Little attention is paid to supporting the transition of young people from the education system to the world of work, whether into employment or self-employment.

Two thirds (65 per cent) of the unemployed in South Africa have been unemployed for over a year (Statistics South Africa 2013). This highlights the underlying structural nature of unemployment in which the kinds and levels of skill available do not match the requirements of the labour market. South Africa therefore faces the dual challenge of having to create jobs in the short term for unemployed

South Africans (often young and low-skilled), while at the same time upgrading skills and knowledge for a pre-dominantly high-skills economy in future (National Planning Commission 2012).

### **c. The economy does not create enough jobs**

The discussion has focused on 'supply' factors, but it is not enough to focus only on boosting the education and skills levels and employability of young people – all of which are areas that youth service programmes could play a role. On the other side of the equation is the inability of the South African economy “to create employment opportunities on a large enough scale” (World Bank 2012:16). A range of local and global factors have contributed to this situation.

This means that even well-educated youth are not guaranteed employment since the economy does not generate enough jobs to absorb either the existing pool of unemployed or the annual wave of new labour market entrants. With salaried employment continuing to be an unlikely possibility for many youth, many rely on the informal sector and often uncertain, low paying temporary jobs or piecework.

The National Development Plan (NDP) (2012) has identified the need to raise employment through faster economic growth and to improve the quality of education, skills development and innovation as two of the three immediate priorities for reducing poverty and inequality in South Africa. The NDP also recognises the “alarming” rate of youth unemployment and the importance of providing young people with broader opportunities (2012:26). Strengthening youth service programmes is one of several strategies highlighted in the NDP for achieving this.

## **4.2 Youth, entrepreneurship and other forms of livelihoods**

Much of the preceding discussion focuses on employment, but for many young people, access to formal employment is increasingly unlikely. Against this backdrop, entrepreneurship is frequently cited as a solution to the lack of employment opportunities. Most new jobs for youth in Africa as a whole are indeed generated through entrepreneurship, although these are generally in the informal sector (Mlatsheni and Leibbrandt 2011).

The 2012 Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) found that South Africa does not fare well in comparison with other emerging countries when it comes to creating new entrepreneurs (Turton and Herrington 2012). South Africa's pool of intentional entrepreneurs – those who intend to start a business in the next three years – stands at 14 per cent, well below the average of 27 per cent for comparable countries. The pool of potential entrepreneurs is slightly higher amongst youth, but at 20 per cent this is still markedly lower than the average of 60 per cent for Sub-Saharan Africa.

Only 5 per cent of 18 to 24-year-olds and 9 per cent of 25 to 34-year-olds are involved in early stage entrepreneurial activity, and those with higher levels of education are more likely to be involved. These low levels of entrepreneurship are influenced by low rates of perceived business opportunities and perceived entrepreneurial capabilities among youth.

As the largest economy on the continent, there is indeed scope for programmes (including youth service programmes) to promote greater levels of entrepreneurship and innovation. However, such

activities should preferably be driven by the identification of gaps and opportunities, rather than by necessity. The GEM 2012 study suggests that the level of necessity-driven businesses amongst youth in South Africa is surprisingly low, despite the high level of unemployment (Turton and Herrington 2012). It has been argued that entrepreneurship born out of necessity rather than opportunity tends to be less sustainable, and therefore youth development policies directed at such entrepreneurship may well fail to include youth in economic activity (Mlatsheni and Leibbrandt 2011).

The relatively low levels of youth entrepreneurship and research showing that most young people in the country rely on salaries and remittances for their income has prompted the National Youth Development Agency (NYDA) in 2013 to shift away from providing loan finance to young entrepreneurs (as many are unable to pay back loans), and towards an increased focus on education and skills development, and the provision of grants for survivalist youth entrepreneurship and youth cooperatives.

In a country that is largely urbanised, the focus on boosting employment opportunities for youth can be justified, but promoting broader opportunities for young people remains important. Many poor households – particularly but not only in rural areas – continue to rely on diverse livelihood activities to meet their basic needs. Neves and Du Toit (2013:93) describe how poor households in rural areas in South Africa typically adopt a combination of livelihood strategies that fall into four broad domains, namely land-based or agrarian activities; small-scale, informal economic activities; cash transfers; and “patterns of mutuality and social reciprocity”. In considering how NYS programmes can contribute to increasing young people’s access to economic opportunities, it is important to bear this in mind and to consider the potential pathways to a broad range of opportunities that include employment, self-employment and entrepreneurship, and other sustainable livelihood strategies.

### **4.3 Efforts to combat youth unemployment**

Any discussion of youth service as a vehicle for youth development in South Africa should take account of the range of youth-focused initiatives introduced by government, private sector and civil society players over the last two decades in an effort to promote youth participation in the labour market and the economy.

These initiatives have ranged from building knowledge, skills and experiential learning to providing opportunities for young people to enter the world of work. The broad categories of initiatives include:

- formal education
- vocational training
- public employment programmes such as the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) and the Community Works Programme (CWP)<sup>3</sup>
- entrepreneurship interventions
- job placement programmes
- skills development initiatives such as learnerships.

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<sup>3</sup> The EPWP and the CWP are not specifically youth-focused programmes, but they are expected to include young people. Both provide short-term, temporary work, but do not necessarily build skills or provide access to more sustainable employment or other economic opportunities.

However it has been argued that “outside of formal education (where qualitative issues loom large), the aggregate resources allocated to each programme and the scale of young people targeted are so inadequate that in their current form they have had little impact on the employability and employment of young South Africans” (Development Bank of South Africa 2011:24). Co-ordination of interventions also remains a challenge.

Efforts such as the establishment of The Jobs Fund (launched in 2011) have aimed to promote employment creation beyond public sector programmes. Other recent national strategies targeting youth unemployment in particular include the introduction of a possible youth wage subsidy (intended to encourage employers, through tax incentives, to employ more young people) and the Youth Employment Accord (signed by stakeholders in government, business and labour, it outlines a broad co-ordinated strategy for tackling youth unemployment).<sup>4</sup>

These strategies have been promoted and implemented with varying degrees of success, and it is beyond the scope of this case study to provide a critique of their effectiveness and impact. However it is worth noting the wide variety of initiatives in place to address the challenge of youth unemployment. In addition to national initiatives, South Africa has a strong and active civil society, with civil society organisations (CSOs) running numerous and diverse youth development programmes, often at the level of communities. Similarly, the private sector, usually through corporate foundations or corporate social responsibility programmes, has developed a number of programmes to address youth unemployment and improve skill levels such as through the provision of bursaries and workplace experience programmes.

In this context, the NYS operates as one of a range of initiatives intended to increase young people’s access to economic opportunities. A unique aspect of the NYS – compared to some of the other strategies outlined above – is that it aims to do so by involving young people in service to communities, thereby developing the social consciousness of young people who at the same time are equipped with skills and work experience. Another unusual aspect is the hybrid nature of NYS in South Africa, in that it is implemented through a variety of government departments and civil society organisations. In the following section, attention turns to the evolution of youth service and the NYS in particular, and the form that it currently takes in the South African context.

## 5. National Youth Service in South Africa

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Youth service programmes in South Africa have evolved in different ways since the advent of democracy in 1994. The late 1990s saw the introduction of compulsory community service for health graduates as a condition of professional registration. In 2004 the government launched the country’s NYS Programme, which runs on a voluntary basis and targets unemployed youth as well as young people who are studying further, and youth in conflict with the law. Over the years this programme

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<sup>4</sup> The Accord refers to NYS under the theme of *public sector initiatives* and recommends an increase in the “number of young people employed in the public sector, through coordinating and scaling up existing programmes under a ‘youth brigade’ programme coordinated with the NYS Programme”. The Accord also calls for the promotion of youth entrepreneurship and cooperatives and increased absorption of youth by the private sector.

has functioned as an umbrella for a variety of youth service programmes run by government departments and by civil society organisations. In late 2010, a National Rural Youth Service Corps (NARYSEC) was established by the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform specifically to develop young people in rural areas. The sections below describe the hybrid nature of South Africa's NYS Programme as it has evolved since 1994.

## 5.1 Origins of the NYS Programme

The NYS Programme has its roots in the early days of democracy in South Africa. Prior to the first democratic elections in 1994, youth formations and civil society bodies worked on building a youth development agenda to inform post-election policy. The Joint Enrichment Project (an NGO) organised a National Youth Summit in 1992 and a National Youth Development Conference in 1993 to provide a platform for young people to identify their primary development needs. During this process an NYS initiative was proposed as a way of potentially addressing many of these needs. The proposal was supported by a range of youth groupings, political bodies, CSOs and business institutions (Youth Development Network 2005).

The NYS initiative was promoted in the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP, African National Congress, 1994), the newly-elected government's socio-economic policy framework. Prior to 1994, the term 'national service' had been used to refer to the conscription of young white men into a repressive military under the apartheid government. Many South Africans associated the concept of a government-driven NYS with this experience and viewed the idea with suspicion. In contrast, the RDP advocated a non-military, partnership-based and primarily voluntary NYS initiative as a means to engage young people in bringing about transformation and reconciliation in the newly democratic South Africa.

The RDP (section 3.6.3) advocated an NYS initiative that "must better educate, develop, train and empower youth, and enable them to participate in the reconstruction of society through involvement in service projects in the community such as literacy, welfare, and improving infrastructure. All development and job creation programmes such as a national public works programme must address the problem of youth alienation and unemployment."

An independent body known as the National Youth Development Forum had emerged from the 1993 Conference, and in 1994 and 1995 it initiated a small number of NYS projects in partnership with the RDP and in consultation with relevant government departments (Youth Development Network 2005). The forum collapsed in 1995, but the projects indicated that the NYS Programme was viable.

In 1996, the government established the National Youth Commission (NYC) and mandated it to develop the NYS concept further. The NYC convened a task team to develop a broad strategy for implementation which resulted in the *Green Paper on National Youth Service* (1998) and a draft *White Paper on National Youth Service* (1999).

In 2003 Cabinet accepted the National Youth Service Policy Framework (National Youth Commission 2003). The plan proposed the establishment of a National Youth Service Unit (NYSU) within the NYC

which was accountable to the Presidency. The implementation of the NYS was to be achieved through partnerships with government, civil society and private sector stakeholders.

A further youth development body, the Umsobomvu Youth Fund, had been established in 2001 and became responsible for implementing demonstration projects in line with the criteria of NYS programmes for unemployed youth (Youth Development Network 2005). These included projects in the health, construction, environment, agriculture and community development sectors. The lessons learnt from these projects were to inform the strategy for scaling up the NYS.

After more than a decade of discussion, the NYS was officially launched as a government-driven programme in August 2004 by the then Minister in the Presidency, Dr Essop Pahad. The NYS initiative was aimed at engaging young people in activities of benefit to their communities while at the same time acquiring skills that would enable them to access economic opportunities for sustainable livelihoods.

The NYS was championed by the Office of the Presidency under former President Thabo Mbeki. During this time, an inter-ministerial committee on NYS was established and chaired by the then Deputy President Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka. The NYC (2007:2) noted at the time that this “helped to elevate the status of the NYSP in all departments and greatly contributed to the success of our recruitment drive.” At this time there was a focus on ‘massification’ or rapidly increasing the number of youth participating in NYS programmes. The NYS was driven primarily through government programmes, with some departments running NYS programmes within the framework of their EPWP initiatives.

In 2008, two youth development agencies – the NYC and Umsobomvu Youth Fund – were merged to form a single coordinating entity, the NYDA. The NYDA was formally launched on 16 June 2009 (Youth Day) as a national public entity funded by government and accountable to the Presidency.

In the South African youth service landscape there are several strong civil society organisations running youth service programmes, although over the years the NYSU-registered programmes have tended to be run predominantly through government departments and municipalities. For various reasons there has been a decrease in the number of NYSU-registered programmes in recent years. While the political commitment to the NYS Programme remains, a change in the Presidency and administration in 2009 led to a shift in focus and the inter-ministerial committee is no longer in operation. Government-driven programmes remain the focus of the NYS Programme, with civil society involvement being limited to a “handful” of programmes (Burnett 2013).

## 5.2 Policy framework

A policy framework is in place to support the NYS Programme, but there is no formalised legislation on this. The implications of this are discussed in a later section.

- The *Green Paper on National Youth Service* (1998) outlined the strategic framework for the NYS Programme in South Africa. A subsequent *Draft White Paper on National Youth Service* (1999) was also developed, but it was never formally adopted. These documents continue to provide the strategic framework for the NYS.

- The *Green Paper* conceptualised the aims and structure of the NYS, identifying potential target groups, programme areas and core operating principles. It also considered other policies and legislation that impact on the implementation of the NYS, such as the *National Qualifications Framework* (NQF), the *National Skills Development Strategy*, higher education policy and legislation and further education and training (FET) policy and legislation.
- A *National Youth Service Policy Framework*, was accepted by Cabinet in 2003. It outlined the implementation of the NYS, specifying that the NYS should be implemented through partnerships between government, civil society and private sector stakeholders.
- In terms of the wider context, the NYS Programme was endorsed in broader youth development policies such as the *Youth Policy 2000* (1997) and the *National Youth Development Policy Framework (2002-2007)*.
- The current *National Youth Policy 2009-2014* identifies the NYS Programme as one of six priority intervention areas, with a role to play in strengthening social cohesion and bringing excluded youth into the social and economic mainstream. In the longer term the policy recommends expanding the NYS (making service compulsory for all youth) and calls for the NYS to be mainstreamed and institutionalised. It also recommends that partnerships with government, state-owned entities and the private sector be realised “to ensure their significant contribution to NYS exit opportunities for youth graduates”. The need for adequate funding and monitoring and evaluation of the NYS are highlighted.
- A draft *Integrated Youth Development Strategy* (IYDS) was developed in 2011 and ‘social cohesion and NYS’ formed one of six thematic areas. The draft called for a review of the NYS policy framework to “ensure that it achieves the imperatives of social cohesion”; it also included an NYS project as one of 12 anchor projects.

### 5.3 Programme goals and objectives

As initially conceptualised, the NYS in South Africa aims to provide opportunities for the “involvement of young people in activities which provide benefits to the community whilst developing the abilities of young people through service and learning” (National Youth Commission 2003:8). The goals of the NYS are to:

- inculcate a culture of service by supporting youth to participate constructively in nation-building
- inculcate in young people an understanding of their role in the promotion of civic awareness and national reconstruction
- develop the skills, knowledge and ability of young people to enable them to make the transition to adulthood
- improve youth employability through opportunities for work experience, skills development and support to gain access to economic and further learning opportunities
- harness the nation’s untapped human resource and provide a vehicle for enhancing the delivery of the country’s development objectives especially to disadvantaged and undeserved communities.

As a government initiative, the decision was taken early on that the NYS Programme in South Africa would be aligned to government priorities. The service component of NYS programmes is therefore intended to support national and local development objectives.

## 5.4 Target groups

The NYS in South Africa was designed to reach a broad range of young people. This differs from a number of other African countries where the focus of NYS programmes is on graduates. The *Green Paper* (1998) on NYS identified the following specific target groups:

1. higher education students
2. further education and training (FET) students
3. unemployed youth
4. youth in conflict with the law.

In practice, much of the focus has been on programmes and projects targeting unemployed and unskilled youth. In terms of age, young people aged 18-35 years are eligible to participate in programmes registered with the National Youth Service Unit (NYSU), although some individual programmes have 25 years as their upper age limit. The specific age requirements vary across the programmes, as do the educational requirements.

## 5.5 Programme design

### a. Structure and implementation

While the NYS Programme can be discussed as a single entity, South Africa has adopted a hybrid approach to NYS and incorporates a variety of programmes and projects. Ad hoc volunteering projects as well as structured year-long programmes fall under the banner of the NYS. A small number of programmes are primarily funded by the NYDA, while others – both in civil society and within government – are registered with the NYSU, but operate independently. The NYSU has specific criteria that programmes must meet to be registered as NYS programmes or projects.

The NYS Programme is a voluntary, government-driven initiative and is structured around three categories of service (Mphale 2009, National Youth Commission 2009):

4. Category 1 programmes involve unemployed, out-of-school and unskilled young people in structured programmes that comprise a) accredited learning and skills development, b) community development (service), and c) exit opportunities.
5. Category 2 programmes involve high school learners and university students in community service activities while they study.
6. Category 3 activities involve youth in ad hoc community volunteer opportunities.

Category 1 programmes tend to be longer-term, structured and on-going programmes, and there are several strong examples of such programmes run by both government departments and civil society actors. Category 1-type programmes are most likely to positively influence young people's access to economic opportunities.

Category 3 programmes, on the other hand, are least likely to do so. They tend to be short in duration and may involve larger numbers of young people, but they are limited in the extent to which skills development can take place. Both Category 2 and 3 programmes are designed to increase youth

participation and citizenship and therefore contribute to facilitating the transition into adulthood, but on the whole they are less likely to impact significantly on the employability or entrepreneurial prospects of the youth who participate in them.

### **Category 1 programmes**

Programmes in category 1 generally target unemployed youth through structured service programmes that typically run for 12 months or more. They consist of three core elements – learning or skills development, a service component and viable exit opportunities such as employment or further learning. The learning component should comprise of life skills and accredited technical training, which one interviewee referred to as a “tangible return on [the participants’] time”.

Category 1 programmes are implemented through government departments and agencies, municipalities and civil society organisations, with the private sector playing a limited role. In some cases the implementing partner may receive assistance and advice from the NYSU on how to develop an NYS programme; in other cases the organisation or partner has developed their own programme which, if it meets the NYS Programme criteria, can be registered with the NYSU.

In the 2011/12 financial year, NYS programmes ranged across the construction, health, social development, education and rural development sectors. Below are selected examples of category 1-type youth service programmes that provide insight into the diverse nature of youth service in South Africa:

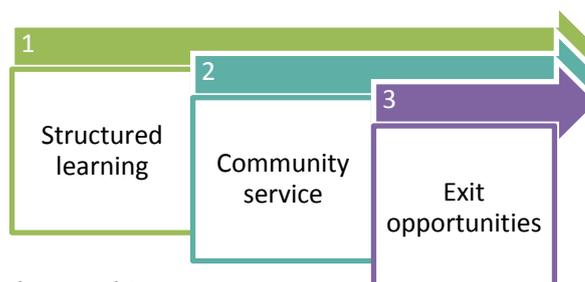
- **The President’s Awards for Youth Empowerment** is a non-profit organisation affiliated to the Duke of Edinburgh’s International Award. The programme consists of four pillars: skill development, physical recreation, community service, and the adventurous journey. Through these activities and with the support of mentors, the programme aims to change young people’s perceptions about themselves and the world. The programme is targeted at 14 to 25-year-olds and it may take several years to complete all three levels. In 2012/13, more than 5 700 youth participated in this programme (National Youth Development Agency 2013).
- **City Year South Africa** is an NGO that engages young people in leadership development and service in support of basic education. Affiliated to City Year in the United States, the 10-month South African programme provides an opportunity for young people aged 18 to 25 years to serve as tutors, mentors and role models to children in primary schools, while at the same time accessing accredited training and leadership development support. City Year SA has also been successful in linking participants with exit opportunities on completion of the programme.
- **loveLife** is a South African HIV prevention campaign that promotes healthy living and positive attitudes among young people. loveLife engages young people in a full-time year of service during which they run peer education programmes for young people at schools, clinics and community-based centres in their communities. Participants, known as groundBREAKERS, are selected on the basis of their commitment to civic engagement in their communities. They range in age from 18 to 25 years and are supported by a network of in-school and out-of-school ‘mpintshis’.
- **NYDA YouthBuild** is based on the YouthBuild International model which has been adapted to the South African context. Running for 8 to 12 months, the programme provides unemployed youth aged 18 to 35 years with access to leadership, citizenship and life skills training as well as training in technical construction-related skills such as electrical engineering, carpentry, brick-laying and plumbing. These skills are then applied to community service projects. Participants have access

to counselling and support and are encouraged to complete or upgrade their school-leaving certificates. A second, shorter version is implemented in partnership with (and primarily funded by) the Department of Human Settlements.

- **The Youth Environmental Service (YES)** is run by the Department of Environmental Affairs. Three NYS pilot programmes were implemented from 2008 to 2011 and then evaluated. Based on these findings, in 2013 the Department established the year-long YES programme which targets youth aged 18 to 35 years who have successfully completed Grade 12. The volunteers receive accredited training and will assist with environmental activities such as waste management, biodiversity management, removal of alien vegetation, and environmental education.
- **NARYSEC** is a multi-year programme run by the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform (DRDLR). It aims to address the high level of unemployment and lack of skills amongst rural youth by developing and equipping them with the skills they need to perform community service in their own communities. The programme targets unemployed, disengaged rural youth aged 18 to 35 years who have passed Grade 10. Rural development is the main focus and training is provided through FET colleges. By March 2013, a total of 12 881 youth were enrolled in the programme (Department of Rural Development and Land Reform 2013).

All of these programmes consist of the three core elements – learning or skills development, service and exit opportunities. In this way they are intentionally designed to provide pathways for participants to access economic opportunities, although the extent to which the components are implemented in practice varies across NYS programmes.

Category 1-type programmes in particular target unemployed and unskilled youth who are most likely to face challenges in transitioning from schooling to the working world, and provide them with a means to obtain skills and knowledge through structured learning as well as practical experience. The structured learning should be accredited to assist young people in obtaining recognised qualifications, while life skills or leadership training is included to promote personal development. The programmes also aim to build a sense of social cohesion and active citizenship through the community service component.



These programmes are therefore designed to play a ‘bridging’ role for youth between schooling and the world of work or further study, typically running for a year to allow youth sufficient time to acquire skills and implement them through service.

### **Category 2 activities**

Category 2 activities focus on young people in higher education and FET institutions, involving students in service activities while they are studying. While service learning and community engagement programmes are actively promoted in higher education, the NYS has had limited engagement with this component.

The importance of service and service learning has long been recognised in the education sector. The *Education White Paper 3 on the Transformation of Higher Education* (Department of Education,

1997:14) stated that a goal of higher education is to “promote and develop social responsibility and awareness amongst students of the role of higher education in social and economic development through community service programmes.” Community engagement is generally considered one of the three core functions of higher education, alongside teaching and research. In the late 1990s, JET Education Services initiated the Community-Higher Education Service Partnership (CHESP) with the aim of advancing community engagement in South African higher education institutions. Today community service programmes in these institutions range from structured service-learning components of academic programmes to informal volunteer activities.

Recognition of the role of service has also extended to the FET band. In 2006, the Department of Education introduced community service into senior secondary schools as part of the life skills orientation curriculum (Mphale 2012).

Reflecting on the NYS in 2009, Mphale (2009:1) noted that the NYS had made “major inroads in involving higher education institutions in service learning. To date, 9 000 students at higher education institutions have been involved [on a voluntary basis] in 88 innovative projects that have benefited communities and the students alike. A future goal is to expand this category of activities to schools and Further Education Training Colleges.” However, engagement on category 2 activities has been limited since then and on the whole, service activities at higher education and FET institutions tend to operate independently of the NYS.

### **Category 3 programmes**

Category 3 programmes involve youth in ad hoc or short-term volunteering opportunities. These activities include campaigns and short-term programmes and aim to mobilise a broad range of volunteers. Category 3 activities provide an opportunity for youth who may otherwise not be included in the NYS focus – for example, employed youth – to engage in service.

In recent years the NYDA in particular has focused on engaging youth in these shorter-term activities (Mphale 2012). Some examples of NYDA category 3 programmes include youth volunteering at the 2010 Soccer World Cup, the World Festival of Youth and Students, and the Climate Change Conference (Conference of the Parties or COP 17). The annual Proud to Serve Campaign is another example, with 12 133 youth taking part in volunteering and serving their communities in 2012/13 (NYDA 2013).

These programmes tend to involve larger numbers of youth than the category 1 programmes. While they do promote civic responsibility and interaction amongst youth, the short duration of category 3 programmes (often two to three weeks at most) means that the scope for skills development and increasing employability is limited.

### **b. Institutional arrangements**

As mentioned above, the *National Youth Service Policy Framework* (National Youth Commission 2003) called for the establishment of a National Youth Service Unit (NYSU) located in the former National Youth Commission. The role of the NYSU was (and still is) to co-ordinate and manage the operationalisation and implementation of the NYS Programme through a broad range of government

departments, municipalities and civil society organisations, incorporating both state-driven and 'bottom-up' approaches to support the diverse nature of youth service in South Africa.

This co-ordination role is now located in the NYDA and aligned to the agency's skills development focus. The NYDA is a public entity accountable to the Minister in the Presidency and to Parliament for its activities and expenditure.

The NYSU in the NYDA registers programmes that meet NYS criteria, provides technical assistance in the design and implementation of NYS projects, assists with training, and monitors the number of NYS participants annually. The NYDA also funds and manages some (category 1 and 3) service programmes directly. However, some interviewees argued that the current institutional arrangements – in which the NYS Programme has become one of several programmes in the NYDA stable, with a limited budget and human resources rather than a stand-alone entity with political and financial clout – has limited the co-ordination and driving role envisaged for the NYSU and made it challenging to effect a consistent approach to NYS programmes.

Interviewees indicated that in other countries such as the United States, Kenya, Ghana and Namibia (among others), the body responsible for overseeing the NYS Programme is an independent agency with its own budget and legislation defining its role and powers. They argued that in South Africa, the lack of a dedicated and sizeable NYS budget to 'back up' the programme requirements makes it difficult to encourage registration (since there is no promise of associated funding) and to ensure programme consistency. An interviewee explained:

*We can say: NYS programmes must look like this, right. What comes with that is ... nothing. Unlike [the Expanded Public Works Programme]: they'll say, this is an EPWP programme. Anything outside this box will not get funded. For us, we can set the box and say this is NYS. But it doesn't come with anything. So a department can look at that and just say, "Oh well, I will just do this and call it NYS, because at the end of the day I am paying for it. (Interview, NYSU, 2013)*

Given South Africa's hybrid model and the diversity of government departments and others implementing NYS programmes over the years, it is important to have a strong co-ordinating body that can ensure a common understanding of the notion of service as the foundation of NYS programmes. However the capacity to achieve this has been limited, and given the pressures to absorb more young people into the public sector, many government departments' NYS programmes have come to more closely resemble skills development or temporary employment programmes than youth service programmes.

Interviewees therefore argued – in an ideal world – for a dedicated agency for NYS that is responsible for both programme standards and funding arrangements, so that the funding can be used as leverage in establishing programme standards. In more practical terms it was noted that the inter-ministerial committee established by former President Mbeki's administration had gone a long way towards enabling the NYSU to hold various government departments accountable for meeting their targets and implementing programmes in a manner consistent with NYS criteria.

There was also support for stronger co-ordination of the NYS Programme from several civil society interviewees, on the basis that this would result in greater standardisation, increased interaction, and more proactive support for those implementing NYS programmes. As a civil society NYS interviewee explained:

*I would like to see that NYSU structured as a 'Corporation for National and Community Service' [American] style model where, as an implementer of NYS, we are audited to within an inch of our lives on an annual basis, we have our training material vetted ... but [in turn] they need to support us. They need to be a channel for [funding from various government initiatives] to enable the service work that we do. At the moment we claw, we fight, we cry our eyes out for every rand we can get for a stipend. And there's absolutely no support from the agencies that are there to do it [NYS]. (Interview, CSO, 2013)*

### **c. Partnerships**

As discussed above, the NYS Programme in South Africa was conceptualised as a hybrid model that would be implemented through a range of stakeholders, since “providing access and expanding opportunities for young people to serve is the responsibility of government in partnership with the private and non-governmental sectors” (National Youth Commission 2003:14). This partnership model has the potential to increase the reach of the NYS Programme significantly, but finding the institutional approaches that can achieve the scale required to impact on youth unemployment and disengagement remain a challenge.

#### ***Working across government***

The NYS Programme is a government-led initiative and is implemented primarily through government departments and municipalities. Five years after the official launch of the NYS Programme, almost 15 government departments ran NYS projects at national, provincial and local levels, compared to three or four government departments implementing NYS projects three years previously (Mphale 2009). This growth was attributed to a greater appreciation of the NYS Programme within government, and the approach of implementing the NYS in partnership with the EPWP. For example, the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry aligned its NYS Programme with the Working for Water Programme and the Departments of Health and Social Development aligned their NYS programmes with the Home and Community-Based Care Programme.

While this is one way of achieving scale, there are concerns that aligning NYS programmes with EPWP initiatives undermines the potential of NYS programmes to promote youth employability. While NYS programmes emphasise skills development, citizenship and service (for which participants receive a stipend only), these components are not a priority for EPWP programmes which are primarily intended to provide temporary employment and an income. Burnett (2013:1) argues that placing NYS programmes within the EPWP framework undermines their potential strength:

*Simply collapsing NYS programming into the Expanded Public Works Programme is a grave mistake: it has taken what could have been our greatest tool for youth empowerment and converted it into a something which neither develops skills nor permanently affects earning potential.*

### ***Working with civil society organisations***

As the *NYS Policy Framework* (National Youth Commission 2003:16) states “significant youth development resources have traditionally been located in civil society; these as well as private sector resources have to be leveraged for the NYS”. There are several active civil society organisations that are engaging young people in service programmes, but a relatively small number are registered with the NYSU and more could be done to increase the involvement of civil society in the NYS Programme.

The civil society actors interviewed for this study that are involved in implementing NYS programmes reported that interaction with the NYSU is limited. One interviewee explained that the NYS Programme “affords us as an organisation a purpose, it provides some sort of framework in which to operate”, but this is not accompanied by financial or other forms of support or further engagement. There was also a lack of clarity regarding the monitoring and ‘counting’ of NYS participants.

Several interviewees argued for greater civil society involvement in the NYS Programme. Arguing in favour of this, Burnett (2013) outlines the potential benefits and current challenges as follows:

*The missing ingredient in the NYS is civil society involvement. Thousands of trustworthy and committed NGOs across the country are ready and willing to take on youth service participants. The current NYS dispensation makes it very hard for them to participate in the programme, and yet they could be its greatest advocates and implementers. Successful youth service models elsewhere in the world allow for central government administration of youth service programmes linked to funding of NGOs who serve as hosts to the programme. Though our colleagues at the National Youth Development Agency are amenable to this idea, the current setup makes it hard to implement, and only a handful of NGOs currently participate in the programme.*

Achieving scale remains a challenge for the NYS in South Africa. While government departments (especially at the national level) have the resources and scope to mobilise large numbers of youth, there are also bottom-up, community-driven groups and projects that engage young people in service to their communities across the country which could assist the NYS to broaden its reach and create more diverse opportunities for youth participation. As one civil society NYS interviewee remarked, “We have the infrastructure to do massive youth service in this country; it’s about creating the facilitative infrastructure to enable it.” On the other hand, an NYSU interviewee pointed out the difficulties of working with community-based organisations, such as the lack of formalisation, the local (limited) focus, and the challenge that often these organisations do not view the work they do as engaging youth in service.

### ***Working with the private sector***

The private sector has played a limited role in the NYS Programme thus far, despite the recognition of the role the sector could play in creating and supporting exit opportunities for programme participants. The *NYS Policy Framework* (National Youth Commission 2003:21) states that “the private and donor sectors have a major role to play, not only in the conventional sense of funding, but in terms of the technical expertise and experience that reside in these sectors.”

In reflecting on the first five years of the NYS Programme, Mphale (2009:2) indicated that:

*The NYSU's research analysis has shown that active support from the private sector could result in many more young South Africans getting involved in the programme. However, private sector involvement is a challenge. Past engagements with a handful of companies has to date yielded zero results.*

Public-private partnerships remain a challenge for the NYS Programme at a national level. An NYSU interviewee argued that this is both because of how the NYS is structured in the public domain, and because many companies do not yet understand the contribution youth service programmes can make to developing confident and capable young citizens.

At a programme level, however, there are already examples of ways in which individual NYS programmes are engaging with the private sector in support of youth service and promoting youth employability. For example, City Year has developed relationships with private sector companies with regards to funding, but instead of being a recipient of funding only, City Year involves the staff of these companies in community service days as part of their corporate social responsibility activities. City Year has also developed relationships with private sector players as a means of proactively building exit opportunities. One example of this is the relationship with the JumpStart programme, a private sector programme that gives young people who have received life skills training from CSOs the opportunity to undergo a week of work experience and additional retail training at a clothing retailer (Mr Price). Depending on availability and performance, the retailer may take on the youth in casual or permanent positions, thereby providing a pathway to potential employment.

Other category 1 programmes have engaged private sector companies to provide skills development training or, more commonly, to provide practical workplace (service) placements for participants. The latter creates potential pathways for participants to continue to work with the private sector partners after completing the programme (either as employees or as service providers or sub-contractors).

This study also included interviews with two human resource managers at a large manufacturer and marketer of fast-moving consumer goods. Although not familiar with the NYS Programme activities, both were convinced of the value of (and eager to support) programmes that would “cook” young people and equip them with the soft skills, work readiness and basics of business etiquette that employers seek in potential employees. Their primary challenge in recruitment was having to “start from scratch” by putting young people through development programmes at considerable cost. One human resource manager argued that “what [youth] need is a bridging [programme] ... there's something missing between formal education and real life.”

Both recommended that if an objective of the NYS programmes is to support young people to find their way into the corporate world (or private sector more generally) after the NYS programmes, there should be more engagement with the private sector. The relevance of this will vary across NYS programmes, but there are several ways in which this could be done. At a basic level this could consist of making potential employers aware of the ways in which participation in youth service programmes ‘add value’ or increase the employability of participants. Other possibilities include NYS programmes making themselves known to private sector companies as a source for potential recruits (employees

or entrepreneurs), or engaging with relevant companies to strengthen the training and employability components of programmes. These strategies are discussed further in the section on promising practices.

## 5.6 Programme financing

As indicated, the NYSU does not have a large autonomous budget with which to fund NYS programmes. Instead the NYDA receives public funding from the National Treasury for activities associated with its key performance areas, of which the NYS is one.

The NYDA funds a small number of category 1 and 3 NYS projects directly. The NYDA YouthBuild programme is an example of a category 1 programme that is implemented and funded directly by the NYDA, with other partners (such as the municipalities) contributing to project costs such as bricks and mortar. On the whole, however, implementers of NYS programmes are expected to raise their own funding.

Government departments that implement service projects are expected to include them in their financial planning processes and allocate funds from their existing budgets. For example, the majority of funding for the NARYSEC Programme comes from the National Treasury as part of the budget allocated to DRDLR, while the skills development initiatives are funded by the National Skills Fund.

Civil society partners tend to be funded by donors, the private sector and, in some cases, the state. NGOs can access public-sector funding for NYS participants' stipends through the non-state sector of the EPWP, but must raise additional funding of their own to cover other operating costs.

## 5.7 Measuring programme implementation and impact

Measuring the extent to which programmes are being implemented as intended and whether or not they are having the desired impact and reaching their objectives is an important part of any programme. Of particular interest to this study is whether or not the NYS Programme is achieving the objectives of developing the skills, knowledge and ability of young people to enable them to make the transition to adulthood; and improving youth employability through opportunities for work experience, skills development and support to gain access to economic and further learning opportunities.

### a. Monitoring systems

The NYDA monitors the number of participants in NYS programmes in a financial year and compares this with the targets set for that year. The figures are published in the NYDA's annual report.

The table below presents these figures from 2009/10 to 2012/13. In most cases the targets set for each year have been achieved (with the exception of 2009/10). However, care should be taken when comparing the number of NYS participants across the years in this period as the way in which the figures are calculated has changed. In the most recent financial year, *only* participants in NYDA-funded

NYS projects are counted; in previous years, participants in projects and programmes run by government departments and NGOs that are registered with the NYSU, but not receiving funding from the NYDA, were also counted. These projects and programmes continue to be recognised as part of the broader NYS Programme, although they are no longer included in the count of NYS participants as it appears in the most recent NYDA Annual Report.

Table 1: Comparison of targets and results achieved for NYS indicators across four years

Year	Indicator	Target	Achieved
2009/10	20 000 participate in NYS projects	11 000 (category 2)	2 049 (category 2)
		9 000 (category 3)	16 093 (category 3)
2010/11	No. of youth enrolled in NYS Programme	50 000	66 063
	NYS projects registered with government departments	8	17
	NYS partnerships signed with national, provincial and local government	5	49
2011/12	No. of youth serving their communities through NYDA-funded projects	10 000	11 734
	No. of youth serving their communities through NYS Unit-registered projects	40 000	43 051
2012/13	No. of young people enrolled in NYS NYDA projects	15 000	17 225
	Number of institutions registered	15	17

Source: NYDA annual reports for 2009/10 to 2012/13.

Additional monitoring data is collected by the NYDA Monitoring and Evaluation Unit on NYDA-funded NYS projects, including the number of participants per programme (an example of this for 2011/12 is provided in Appendix 2) and the breakdown of participants by gender. However this information is not collected and centrally collated across all programmes registered with the NYSU.

To assess the effects of youth service programmes on youth employability and likelihood of accessing work or further studies, it would be useful to measure *output* indicators such as the number of youth undergoing skills training, and *outcome* indicators such as the number of youth accessing employment, self-employment or further studies in the year after completing the programme. This information is collected at the level of individual projects and programmes in some cases, but given limited resources there is again no standardised monitoring of this sort across all programmes registered with the NYSU.

#### **b. Conducting evaluations**

Similarly, the NYDA Monitoring and Evaluation Unit monitors project implementation and evaluates the achievement of NYS project outcomes against agreed objectives, but this is limited to NYS programmes (such as YouthBuild) that are funded by the NYDA. While programme level evaluations are useful in informing implementation, a systematic review of programme outcomes across the board is required to determine the extent to which the range of NYSU-registered programmes are contributing to the overall objectives and impact of the NYS in South Africa.

Such an evaluation has been commissioned and was undertaken by the Public Service Commission of South Africa, but the results of the study are yet to be finalised and released. A longitudinal study that tracks NYS Programme alumni to determine the extent to which they access exit opportunities, engage with their communities as active citizens, and transition into adulthood – and assesses whether this can be attributed at least in part to NYS programmes – would be ideal in providing evidence of impact.

### **c. Existing evidence of impact**

As in many countries, empirical data on the impact of NYS programmes on employability or to access other economic opportunities is thin. Programmes vary widely in the extent to which they link participants with exit opportunities and little data is available regarding the activities of alumni once they have completed these programmes.

According to Mphale (2009), about 33 per cent of young NYS participants in the first five years accessed exit opportunities, either in the form of formal employment, self-employment or further education. There is currently no formal tracking of this outcome across all NYSU-registered programmes, and it is likely that some NYS programmes are more intentional and proactive about this aspect than others. An example of this is City Year South Africa, which with its emphasis on multi-sector partnerships and accredited training – as well as a relatively small service corps – reportedly placed over 95 per cent of its service leaders in viable exit opportunities in the first year of operation in 2005 (Nogueira-Sanca, Mahuma and Read 2009). These placements included employment, learnerships, higher education, technical training or small business and micro-enterprise start-ups. The current placement rate continues to be high at an estimated 80 per cent of participants (City Year Interview, 2013).

Category 1-type programmes are more likely to be able to demonstrate positive impacts on employability and livelihood outcomes than the shorter-term category 3-type programmes. While this study was able to identify several process evaluations which considered the implementation of NYS programmes, few publicly-accessible impact assessments of NYS programmes were identified.<sup>5</sup> One example of such a study is the assessment conducted by Volunteer and Service Enquiry Southern Africa (VOSESA) of loveLife's groundBREAKERS Programme. The study aimed to measure impact by tracking alumni who had been out of the programme for two to five years. While the lack of a control group means that one must be cautious in attributing the outcomes to groundBREAKERS only, the findings suggest that the programme had a positive long-term influence on participants and their access to opportunities.

Based on self-reported behaviour, the study (VOSESA and loveLife 2008) found that groundBREAKERS alumni:

- were more likely to be employed and to have acquired post-matric qualifications than their counterparts of the same age nationally

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<sup>5</sup> Some programmes interviewed for this study indicated an intention to conduct impact assessments in the future. For example, the NARYSEC Programme is still in the early stages of implementation, but there are plans to conduct a baseline study in 2014 to allow for future tracking of programme outcomes over time.

- showed a commitment to being involved in volunteering and civic engagement
- displayed confidence in their own leadership ability – of those graduates who were members of organisations at the time of the study, about two thirds played a leadership role.

Overall, alumni indicated that the groundBREAKERS programme had strongly influenced their outlook on life in a range of areas, including their perceptions of their ability to succeed, their commitment to leadership and ability to lead others, their perceptions of health and health behaviour, and their self-esteem.

Ninety per cent of the graduates who were employed at the time of the impact assessment indicated that groundBREAKERS had strongly influenced their ability to secure employment. This is despite the fact that the programme does not directly link graduates with employment opportunities, but rather focuses on building self-belief and leadership capacity.

## **5.8 Engagement with alumni**

The NYDA does not currently have the capacity to provide post-service support to alumni of NYS programmes, and there is no NYS Programme-wide approach to this issue. The scope and nature of post-service engagement varies from programme to programme, with many not providing any follow-up support or networking.

The programmes interviewed for this study varied in their approaches and the support provided:

- City Year South Africa has an alumni association that is chaired and run by alumni. There is representation of service leaders from each year and support is provided by a City Year staff member. The aim of the alumni association aims to re-engage alumni in service. An advantage of being part of this association is that when City Year receives requests for candidates for potential employment that the current corps cannot meet, these will be passed on to the alumni.
- loveLife also runs an alumni programme with the slogan, “Once a groundBREAKER, always a groundBREAKER”. groundBREAKERS receive a smartphone and cellphone contract which runs for two years – one year of service and one year post-service, so that contact can be maintained. Contact is also maintained through social media platforms such as facebook. The alumni programme aims to link alumni with career and vocational guidance, jobs and entrepreneurial opportunities, and personal and leadership development opportunities.
- In a slightly different approach, NARYSEC has built a two-year ‘incubation’ period into the programme design, during which time NARYSEC participants will be supported to develop their own enterprises or access employment. NARYSEC also awards bursaries for those who wish to study further.

## **5.9 Challenges in promoting pathways for transition**

A number of challenges were identified in the course of discussions for this study, both in terms of the practical implementation of NYS programmes, and in achieving the desired employability and livelihood outcomes for young people. This section will focus on the challenges experienced in

promoting NYS programmes in South Africa as a strategy for increasing young people's access to employment, entrepreneurship and sustainable livelihoods.

- While category 1-type programmes are intentionally designed to provide pathways for participants to access employment, self-employment or further studies, in practice the programmes vary in the extent to which they link participants with **meaningful service experiences** and **exit opportunities**.
- Following on from this, NYS programmes are not consistent in being **proactive** about building exit opportunities. NYS programmes vary widely in the extent to which they attempt this and the level of success they achieve.
- On the other hand, in South Africa there is also a danger that the concern with addressing youth unemployment can lead to a **narrow understanding** of the scope of what national youth service programmes can achieve. The increasing focus on the potential youth employability and skills development outcomes of NYS programmes has in some cases undermined other outcomes that are important to NYS programmes, such as developing socially responsible young citizens. There is a danger that in practice there is a blurring of the lines between NYS programmes run by some government departments and their temporary employment programmes, despite the fact that the programmes have distinctly different objectives.
- It must be acknowledged that linking participants to meaningful exit opportunities is especially challenging in the current **context of high unemployment** and insufficient economic growth. There is also a fine line between being proactive about identifying exit opportunities and being expected to become a job placement programme, and at times participants have **unrealistic expectations** in this regard. Managing these expectations from the outset is essential in addressing this. As one interviewee put it, it is important for those managing NYS programmes to emphasise both during the recruitment phase and throughout the programme that the intention of NYS programmes is to prepare youth to make the most of opportunities that may arise, and not necessarily to provide employment.
- However, it is important to recognise the context in which these expectations arise, as young people must often meet not only their own **basic needs**, but contribute to supporting their

#### **NYS in the South African context**

The City Year experience of adapting a US service model to South Africa highlights some of the challenges of implementing NYS programmes in the South African context.

According to a report on this process (Nogueira-Sanca et al. 2009), the two biggest challenges related to the extent to which service leaders in South Africa were motivated and driven by youth unemployment; and embracing and complying with the NYS requirements, as there is no parallel programme in the US.

To address these challenges, City Year South Africa a) enhanced its cross-sectoral partnerships; b) directed more efforts toward generating concrete exit opportunities such as job placements or further training; c) doubled the time service leaders spent in training; and d) ensured that some of this training was accredited.

It was also noted that unlike in the US, the emphasis placed on linking participants to exit opportunities meant that "training must not only enable program participants to perform a service in a community, but also provide them with the necessary skills (and an opportunity for certification) for increased economic mobility upon completion of the program." This concern with the future economic mobility of service participants does not feature to the same extent in the US.

families as well. When asked if she felt her participation in an NYS programme would help her access economic opportunities in future, an NYS participant remarked: “Sometimes when I look at it, I feel like maybe they are not doing enough ... it is [about] self-growth and it is really beneficial to oneself; but then on the other hand it is like they are just giving you a gun and sending you out to war.”

- Category 1 programmes are designed to include **accredited training** so that young people obtain nationally recognised qualifications that can assist them in accessing economic opportunities or further study. Practical challenges related to this included linking youth in under-resourced and remote areas – where NYS projects aligned with government priorities are often located – with public FET facilities, and integrated a formalised FET curriculum with the often fluid needs and timing of NYS projects.
- Often NYS programmes focus on (hard and soft) skills development and experiential learning through service, on the assumption that these components will increase employability and lead to improved access to livelihood strategies. However this does not recognise the constraints in young people’s environments – such as limited financial resources or a lack of social capital and support – that often do not change despite youth involvement in NYS programmes and which may impact on their ability to put their skills and learning into practice. A concrete example of this was an NYS Programme graduate who had received skills training and workplace experience and felt capable of providing services in her community, but could not afford to buy the physical tools she needed to do so. There is little **post-service support**, whether financial or in terms of networking, that assists young people to address these constraints so that they can successfully access the economic opportunities that are available.
- Linked to the issue of exit opportunities is the concern raised by some participants that the NYS Programme is not well-known and participation in youth service programmes is not understood or valued by potential employers. More could be done to increase awareness of the ‘**value**’ that participation in youth service programmes adds to the employability of participants.
- In addition, employment tends to form the main focus of exit opportunities. Few programmes – with the exception of NARYSEC – have an active focus on building **entrepreneurial skills** in particular, and there is little discussion of alternative livelihoods such as agriculture, among others.
- Last but not least is the concern that more could be achieved through NYS programmes, but that a stronger co-ordinating role across all NYSU-registered programmes is required to maintain consistency across NYS programmes, measure overall impact, and promote learning and interaction between programmes as a means of building the sector.

## 5.10 Changes underway

The primary change highlighted in the course of the interview discussions was a recent change in the way in which the NYS Programme is monitored. In previous years, targets have been set for the number of NYS participants involved both in NYDA-funded programmes and in programmes run by departments or CSOs that are registered with the NYSU. Recently, the monitoring of the latter programmes has fallen away and the focus is now on monitoring targets for NYDA-funded projects only. The NYSU will continue to work with both government and civil society organisations involved in youth service programmes, but will not chase targets for these programmes.

For the 2013/14 year, the target for the number of NYS participants in NYDA-funded programmes has been set at 1 500 for participants in YouthBuild programmes and 5 000 for category one projects in the health and wellbeing sector. This will include programmes that focus on drug and alcohol abuse, teenage pregnancy, HIV and AIDS, wellness and nutrition. The target is lower than the 2012/13 target – the reason given for this is the desire to focus on impact rather than quantity. Lastly, the NYDA-funded programmes for the 2013/14 programmes will consist mainly of category 1 programmes; again, the reason for this is to strengthen impact (NYSU Personal Communication, 2013).

## 6. Promising practices

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The discussion above of the NYS Programme shows that particularly category 1-type youth service programmes have the potential to provide young people with pathways to accessing various economic opportunities. These programmes are not expected to address youth unemployment alone; rather, they form an important part of the matrix of initiatives to enable young people to take advantage of economic and educational opportunities. Little empirical data exists on the relationship between NYS programmes and employment and livelihood outcomes in South Africa (and in Sub-Saharan Africa more broadly), but in the course of the discussions for this study it was possible to identify a number of promising practices for linking young people with economic opportunities that warrant further discussion. These are discussed in more detail in this section.

### 6.1 Providing opportunities for building leadership and confidence

In a context of high structural unemployment, young people need the motivation, confidence and resilience to go out and search for economic opportunities, whether in the form of employment or self-employment. The importance of a sense of self-efficacy is supported by the finding of the groundBREAKERS' impact assessment that alumni were more likely to be employed or to have acquired post-matric qualifications than their peers, despite the fact that the programme focuses on building leadership, self-belief and motivation rather than linking alumni with employment opportunities.

Several interviewees argued that building confidence, motivation and resilience is important for assisting young people to make the most of potential opportunities:

*First and foremost is making young people believe in themselves ... [equipping] a young person to believe that they actually can achieve whatever they want ... [because they think] I am in a country where over half of us as young people are unemployed – so does this mean that it's over for me as well? (Group Discussion, NYS Alumni, 2013)*

*Self-belief, most fundamentally ... the education system in this country was designed to reduce people's expectations in what they could achieve ... [People talk about the youth having a 'sense of entitlement' but] young people are entitled to a great future, they are entitled to work, they are entitled to opportunity and wealth ... yes, there are some hard skills that are required to enter the economy, but I firmly believe they are only relevant if you have the right attitude to take advantage of those skills. And the attitude must come first before the skill.*

*And that attitude is basically: I can, I am an important person, my future is up to me. (Interview, CSO Interviewee, 2013)*

This was echoed in the private sector interviews, where the human resource managers reported that the qualities they look for in potential employees include confidence, motivation, resilience and perseverance.

A common theme running through the discussions with groundBREAKERS alumni and City Year service leaders was that their participation in the youth service programmes had given them the space to get to know themselves better, gain confidence in their abilities and believe that they can achieve.

*I didn't have a great high school experience. So [through this service programme] you have so much confidence, you are very bold and you trust yourself that I am a young person and I can do anything I want to do. And I think that's the biggest thing that you gain here. (Group Discussion, NYS Participant, 2013)*

*We wanted to be successful but we didn't have the right tools. So [this programme] was definitely quite instrumental in equipping us to know and believe in ourselves: personal development, leaderships skills ... because I mean when you are given the opportunity to be a leader, you start acting like a leader; and when you start acting like a leader you start to think like a leader and wherever you go, even after the programme, you still believe that you are a leader ... so that's what the programme instilled [in me]. (Group Discussion, NYS Alumni, 2013)*

These opportunities for building confidence and a sense of self-efficacy and autonomy are deliberately created through the methodology adopted in these youth service programmes. Programmes are purposely designed to incorporate experiential learning, training, mentoring, and entrusting young people with a significant level of responsibility. Therefore it is not simply about the curriculum of these programmes, but the methodology that both of these programmes adopt in their leadership development. As one CSO interviewee pointed out, nurturing autonomy and self-belief must be intentional:

*It's not something you develop by accident, you do it on purpose ... you need to see [young people] as full human beings and potential leaders of the country and address them in that way, involve them in that way. Don't think of them as beneficiaries. (Interview, CSO Interviewee, 2013)*

## **6.2 Increasing social capital and connectedness**

Several interviewees also spoke of the need to increase the social connectedness of young people and the role that NYS programmes can play in this. At a basic level, by simply engaging youth in service to their communities they have the opportunity to connect and interact with one another and gain a deeper understanding of these communities.

*And above all that you [become] conscious of what's going on in your world. When you go to all these schools and see what's going on, it ignites a passion in you to want to change and make a difference. (Group Discussion, NYS Participant, 2013)*

However, participation in youth development or service programmes does not necessarily change the situations that young participations return to on completion of the programme. Some youth return to situations of marginalisation where they are trapped in their geographic and social settings with little access to information or other social networks.<sup>6</sup> NYS programmes can go some way to addressing the challenge of limited social capital amongst marginalised youth by increasing young people's networks through active alumni programmes or linking them to other 'next step' programmes (such as Activate! and others, see footnote), thus opening new doors of opportunity and supporting their continued engagement.

Several spoke of young people needing role models and mentors, at a national level, but also more locally. NYS participants mentioned the value of connecting with other young people who have 'succeeded' and can advise them very practically on how to access a bursary from a township school or what steps to take in accessing financial support for an enterprise in a rural area. NYS alumni networks can play a role in this, both by providing alumni with information about opportunities and forms of support that exist, and by alumni themselves taking on mentorship roles and sharing their experiences with current participants.

### **6.3 Acting as a 'bridge' to support transitions**

Several interviewees spoke of how the formal education system – whether at the level of basic education or higher education – does not prepare young people for the working world. Potential employers look at not only the 'hard' skills that a person may bring to a position, but also the 'soft' skills such as being punctual, presentable, disciplined and committed, and knowing how to behave in a workplace. Private sector interviewees discussed the frustration of having to "cook" young people in development programmes before they can begin producing results in the workplace. One CSO interviewee remarked somewhat cynically, "I think 50 per cent of the [entry level] jobs are won just by pitching up on time." These skills and values would also serve young entrepreneurs well in building their own enterprises.

NYS programmes have the potential to play a bridging role between the world of schooling and the world of work:

*You go to a dysfunctional school, you come out of that school and the way you are inculturated into society and what is required in the world of work are two completely different things. Going for an interview, talking to a prospective employer in a way that makes them trust you – not there. So service gives you a bridge between those two things because in service you become part of an organisational culture, a culture that shifts you a little bit in the way you*

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<sup>6</sup> Programmes such as the Activate! network of young leaders (not an NYS programme) are intentionally designed to address this. Activate! aims to develop a network of young people who are committed to the public good and who, while working at a local level, can connect with others on a national level, allowing them to access information, interact with broader social networks, spark innovation and bring about change.

*think about being organised. So that experience of the inside of an organisation is extremely important.* (Interview, CSO Interviewee, 2013)

There were also discussions across the board about young people's perceived desire for instant success and their unwillingness to "start at the bottom" to gain experience. According to a current NYS participant, "A lot of young people think success is the flashy cars, having a credit card and sleeping on an empty stomach so that you can look good out there." In this context NYS programmes were seen as providing an opportunity to instil different values and a sense of social responsibility, while at the same time providing youth with practical experience and exposure to routine and structure that would improve their employability *and* strengthen their capabilities as entrepreneurs.

NYS participants frequently spoke of the potential bridging role of NYS programmes, using phrases such as "gap year after school", an "initiation school" and "being cooked":

*For me [the programme] is like a pot; it's a cooking pot. It cooks you for the challenges out there, throughout this year.* (Group Discussion, NYS Participant, 2013)

*With the training that we do here, for me it is a bit of an initiation school of some sort because they change, they cook your brain ... a lot has changed about me ... in [community] meetings I used to go there and just listen to what these people have to say and then go and complain with my friends. So now what's changed is that I feel like I have to raise my hand and say something. I am more confident; I know now I am good at this, [or] I can't do this very well so I need to improve.* (Group Discussion, NYS Participant, 2013)

*You know as popcorn, you need to have your oil, salt and whatever; [NYS programmes] should be that! The minute you start popping, then you pop into university ... you know exactly where you are going and you flourish.* (Group Discussion, NYS Alumni, 2013)

This 'cooking' function can be facilitated in many ways. For example the City Year programme has a clear, rigid structure and emphasises attendance requirements, discipline, physical training, mentoring young learners, and pride in the City Year red jacket and the values it represents. All of these elements are intentionally designed to instil a sense of responsibility, commitment and purpose, as well as other soft skills – such as punctuality – that are of value in the workplace.

In a different approach, the NARYSEC Programme has designed a character building component in which young people attend a residential course hosted by the Department of Defence to instil discipline and civic mindedness. Several other programmes also include simple work readiness courses, which include writing CVs, preparing for interviews, and presentation skills. For young people with little experience of the business world or running their own businesses, even short courses like these can prove useful.

## **6.4 Providing career guidance and practical ‘next steps’**

As well as work readiness components, several young people mentioned the value of having the space to reflect on their strengths and their future paths. Some noted the importance of receiving practical career guidance and being able to speak to mentors or programme staff about how to navigate their way towards achieving their goals.

Whether they want to become a successful professional or entrepreneur, having access to realistic and practical advice and guidance was seen as being a useful component in increasing young people’s access to economic opportunities.

A further point made by an interviewee at a CSO was that many young people do not fully understand what various jobs actually involve, and so may aim for or take up positions that do not suit them. He gave the example of young people saying they wanted to do merchandising without really understanding what it is. Such a mismatch is likely to impact negatively on their performance, and so the organisation is piloting a few days of job-shadowing to enable youth to set realistic goals.

## **6.5 Supporting choice and diversity of options**

Young people are not a homogenous group and they vary in their strengths and interests. As such, they should have some choice in the kinds of programmes they participate in and the exit opportunities available to them. While specific programmes may not be able to take individual participants’ aspirations into account, the strength of the hybrid nature of NYS in South Africa is that it can encompass a diversity of programmes.

In the face of high unemployment, it may be tempting to believe that young people should ‘take what they can get’. However, a one-size-fits-all approach tends to lead to frustration and a ‘lack of passion’ on the part of at least some participants, and can in turn lead to a less than effective investment. Lessons learnt by NARYSEC on this issue include being very clear upfront about the content of the training and service so that youth can choose whether or not to participate; and secondly, gradually increasing the range of subjects available in the training component of the programme to provide participants with more choice in developing their career path.

While not all programmes will be able to do this, another way to address this is for the NYS at a national level to broaden the options available to youth by facilitating the participation of a diverse range of government and civil society partners in the NYS programmes, and encouraging those partners in turn to explore a range of exit opportunities. More research is required to determine if (often voluntary) programmes in line with participants interests and aspiration have a more sustainable impact on long-term outcome than compulsory programmes, but encouraging diversity also has the added advantage of potentially increasing the reach of the NYS Programme.

## **6.6 Improving education and skills levels**

NYS programmes may also help to fill a gap created by a struggling education and training system. Some NYS programmes require participants to have a matric certificate, but others are open to young

people that hold a Grade 10. Several programmes encourage young people to complete their schooling – NYDA YouthBuild encourages young people to complete or upgrade their school-leaving certificates, while loveLife requires youth to complete their matric before they can become a groundBREAKER. Where NYS programmes provide access to accredited training, those youth who may have struggled to complete their schooling are able to obtain additional nationally recognised qualifications. Programmes that draw on FET colleges or even universities to provide technical training make use of existing resources and start to link young people to the educational and economic mainstream, improving their future economic mobility.

In addition to the accredited training, NYS programmes provide a training ground for developing other skills. NYS participants spoke of having gained or improved their communication skills, facilitation skills, presentation skills, networking, problem-solving, confidence, tolerance, teamwork and active citizenship, among others. Several made specific mention of improved personal financial management skills, often as a result of basic training around how to budget and manage their monthly stipends. Saving and not taking on unaffordable credit were also seen as issues that could receive more attention. In a slightly different approach to financial management training, NARYSEC participants are required, in terms of their contracts, to contribute half their monthly stipends to their households.

However, entrepreneurial skills and other potential livelihood strategies should be given more attention that is currently the case in most South African NYS programmes.

## **6.7 Considering the viability of exit opportunities upfront**

A challenging question is whether the technical skills obtained in NYS programmes are sufficiently relevant to enable young people to access viable economic opportunities. With exit opportunities forming a core component of structured NYS programmes, the learning and service components of the model need to be clearly and intentionally connected to meaningful economic opportunities for young people (Youth Development Network 2005). The NYS programmes should also take into account the longer-term development strategies for the country.

NARYSEC, for example, has aligned its focus to construction as a result of the large national infrastructure projects that are planned by the state over the coming years. However not all NYS programmes have a sector focus that is informed by a longer-term vision of potential exit opportunities. A number of government departments engage young people in programmes that meet departmental outcomes rather than promote exit opportunities for participants.

With this in mind, the starting point for an NYS programme should not only be alignment with government priorities, but also the identification of viable longer-term exit opportunities for the target group. A private sector interviewee argued that relying on the absorption of young people into the public sector would not drive the economic growth the country requires, and therefore more attention should be paid to equipping young people to enter the private sector, either as employers or entrepreneurs. She felt that NYS programmes should engage actively with the private sector so that companies have the opportunity to “input” into the training provided and can draw on NYS programmes as potential recruitment sources.

There is also scope for partnerships around the service component (work experience placements that are not remunerated) which could in turn open doors further down the line. However, given the debates around whether or not service can take place in private sector settings, such placements would need to be carefully designed and managed.

## 6.8 Connecting the dots to create more defined pathways

While NYS programmes may increase employability and prepare young people for the workplace, the NYS policy framework is clear that NYS programmes are not intended to guarantee jobs or other economic opportunities for youth. That said, there are a number of ways in which NYS programmes can be more proactive about creating clear pathways for young participants to access economic opportunities while staying true to the essence of service programmes. Some examples of ways to more intentionally 'connect-the-dots' include the following:

- The NYDA YouthBuild Programme employed a **job developer** in the first phase that was responsible for identifying potential exit opportunities and assisting participants to develop career plans. A final evaluation of the programme showed high levels of satisfaction with this role, but it was discontinued because of the associated costs. While this is an expensive model and requires skill in relationship building, it is a useful and proactive way of linking youth to available opportunities which they must then take forward themselves.
- The City Year Programme has developed a number of **multi-sectoral partnerships** which assist with building exit opportunities for service leaders. The partnership with JumpStart is one example of connecting the dots, since City Year is one of several 'feeder' CSOs through which young people receive life skills training and then have the opportunity to obtain work experience – and potential employment – at Mr Price (a clothing retailer). The partnership with the entrepreneurship incubator Awethu is another example. It is important to manage expectations so that NYS programmes are not seen as placement programmes, but these kinds of relationships open up a range of exit opportunities for participants. Establishing these relationships requires work as companies must be convinced that the youth coming out of the programmes will meet their expectations.
- Service leaders spoke of developing written **personal development plans**, while others spoke of career development plans or plans of action. These promising practices help young participants to identify their goals and outline the concrete steps they need to take to achieve these goals. For these plans to be effective they must be realistic and practical; they should be introduced early on in the programme and be revisited regularly. The mentors or supervisors monitoring the plans must also be knowledgeable enough to link young people to existing sources of support or opportunity.
- Aligning NYS programmes with **existing sources of support** would also be beneficial. For example, the NYDA provides grants for survivalist enterprise and cooperatives and has links to other state agencies that provide loans to entrepreneurs; it also has a career guidance programme and a Jobs and Opportunities Seekers' Database for unemployed graduates, although difficulties were noted with its implementation. As one interviewee put it, the NYS could do more to link NYS participants to these NYDA initiatives and others, making NYS programmes "a conduit or channel of opportunity for young people".

## 6.9 Providing post-service support

Post-service support is particularly important for marginalised youth, whose ability to access exit opportunities may be constrained by obstacles such as a lack of finances or limited social networks and a lack of knowledge about the 'next steps' to take.

- This post-service support can include a 'light touch' approach of maintaining contact with alumni via sms, email or social media, providing a platform for them to maintain their social network and alerting them to potential developmental opportunities that may arise.
- It could also include linking participants with (or at least making them aware of) 'next step' programmes. For example, a number of groundBREAKERS alumni have joined the Activate! network, which allows them to continue their community engagement at a different level.
- If programmes are serious about supporting entrepreneurs and cooperatives, more substantial support may be required. Again a more proactive approach to linking NYS participants with existing forms of support for youth (whether through the NYDA or other avenues) would go some way to providing the network of support they need to make a success of these ventures. A more 'hands-on' approach is the one taken by NARYSEC, which has built in two years of 'incubation' time to support youth to develop their enterprises.

One NYS participant also felt that an advantage of being part of an alumni network is knowing that "there is somebody just tapping your back and saying, hey, where are you? Are you still on [track]? And by doing so you also feel like, you know what, I am doing this not only for me, but also for other people who are looking and saying, that's my role model."

## 6.10 Contributing to building an asset base

While the NYS programmes covered in this study aim to build human capital and social capital (to varying degrees), few examples were encountered of programmes that build financial capital through, for example, encouraging savings initiatives or providing bursaries, loans or grants. A participant in a programme in the infrastructure sector described how she had obtained technical skills through the programme but did not have the physical tools to do the work and so was not able to use her skills to earn a living.

Several interviewees and participants spoke of the financial barriers to accessing further study options or starting a business, and recommended that NYS programmes provide access to educational awards or start-up capital for enterprises as a form of investment or acknowledgement of service. Participants recommended that these should be awarded based on performance – either acceptance into an education or training programme, or the development of a business plan. NARYSEC provides an educational award.

*And when it comes to the finances [awards or grants], I think it is necessary because it would show, it's a form of commitment to say that after this, you could go somewhere. Instead of like saying, we gave you the tools, you know what to do, go do it. You try to do it [but] you don't have the backup to do it. (Group Discussion, NYS Participant, 2013)*

One way to build financial resources would be for programmes to encourage participants to save part of their stipends, but there were mixed reactions to this suggestion when it was posed to the small group of NYS participants in this study. While some felt it would be a positive learning experience, others felt the stipend amount was too low for this to be successful.

## 7. Conclusion

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The NYS Programme in South Africa is a voluntary, government-driven programme that aims to inculcate a culture of service and civic awareness; develop the skills, knowledge and ability of young people to make the transition to adulthood; improve youth employability through opportunities for work experience and skills development and support access to economic and further learning opportunities; and provide a vehicle for enhancing the delivery of the country's development objectives to disadvantaged and underserved communities.

The NYS Programme therefore very much has the intention of providing pathways for young people to better access economic opportunities. The longer-term category 1-type programmes in particular – with the three core components of service, learning and exit opportunities – are designed to perform a “bridging” function between education (whether schooling or higher education) and the working world, and to support young people in their transition to adulthood.

The case study highlights some challenges in achieving this in practice. In recent years the scale of the NYS Programme appears to have decreased and civil society participation is limited to a handful of organisations. Individual NYS programmes vary widely in the extent to which they implement the three core components of the category 1-type programmes, and where attention is paid to exit opportunities, employment appears to be the main focus with entrepreneurship and other livelihoods receiving less attention. With the pressure on government departments in particular to address youth unemployment, there is a danger that the service, citizenship and personal development aspects that are central to youth service programmes are being overshadowed by the pressure to create (temporary) employment for young people in the public sector. These challenges are exacerbated by the NYS institutional arrangements and budgetary constraints.

Despite these challenges, the potential for youth service in South Africa to contribute to addressing the challenge of youth unemployment and providing youth with pathways to access a range of economic opportunities and sustainable livelihoods remains. However, further rigorous monitoring and research is required to provide evidence of this impact.

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## Appendix 1: Interview list

- Interview, Development Manager at Etafeni, Parktown, Johannesburg, 22 April 2013
- Interview, City Year Management, Illovo, Johannesburg, 3 May 2013
- Interview, loveLife Management, Sandton, Johannesburg, 7 May 2013
- Telephonic Interview, Researcher, Centre for Education Policy Development, 14 May 2013
- Combined Interview: a. Senior Programme Manager, b. Skills Development and National Youth Service Manager and c. General Manager: Strategic Programmes, National Youth Development Agency, 16 May 2013
- Group Discussion, City Year Service Leaders, Johannesburg, 17 May 2013
- Telephonic Interview, Catalyx, 21 May 2013
- Interview, YouthBuild Programme Manager, NYDA, Midrand, 22 May 2013
- Group Discussion, YouthBuild Alumni, Ivory Park, 22 May 2013
- Group Discussion, groundBREAKERS Alumni, Sandton, Johannesburg, 23 May 2013
- Interview, a. Human Resources Executive and b. Human Resources Manager at large consumer goods manufacturing company, Sandton, Johannesburg, 29 May 2013
- Interview, NARYSEC Official, Midrand, 4 June 2013
- Telephonic Interview, Activate!, 7 June 2013.

**Appendix 2: Number of participants in NYSU-registered projects, 2011/12**

<b>Project</b>	<b>No. of participants</b>
Limpopo Refurbishment and Maintenance of Public Buildings Project	407
Mpumalanga Department of Public Works	146
National Refurbishment and Maintenance of Public Building Project, co-ordinated by the Gauteng Department of Infrastructure Development. Participants were recruited from different departments as follows:	4 901
• Department of Infrastructure Development	561
• Department of Social Development	1 000
• Department of Community Safety	600
• Department of Agricultural and Rural Development	450
• Department of Roads and Public Transport	600
• West Rand	970
• Department of Health	720
Kha Rhi Gude Mass Literacy Project (Department of Education)	22 053
Northern Cape Information, Communication and Technology	300
Western Cape Department of Transport and Public Works Phase 4 Project	300
South African Youth Council	2 265
Youth Ambassadors Project	1 059
Sport and Recreation South Africa	3 956
Community AIDS Response Project	297
Presidential Awards	5 767
Bophelo-Impilo Campaign	1 600
<b>Total</b>	<b>43 051</b>

**Appendix 3: Examples of youth service programmes in South Africa**

<b>Name</b>	<b>NYDA YouthBuild Programme</b>
<b>Organisation</b>	NYDA <sup>7</sup>
<b>Criteria</b>	Young people between the ages of 18 and 35 qualify to participate
<b>Duration</b>	Traditional model: between 6 and 12 months
<b>No. of participants</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Approximately 200 youth enrolled annually</li> <li>• The NYDA's YouthBuild Programme falls under the NYDA's National Youth Service Programme which assisted 17 225 youth during the last year (2012/13 annual report)</li> </ul>
<b>Funding</b>	NYDA budgeted R 19 400 000 for YouthBuild in 2013/14

YouthBuild is a structured NYS programme based on the YouthBuild International model. Adapted to the South African context, the programme provides unemployed young people with access to leadership and life skills training, as well as training in technical skills such as electrical engineering, carpentry, bricklaying and plumbing. These skills are then put to use in community service projects. Participants are encouraged to complete or upgrade their school-leaving certificates.

The NYDA implements two types of Youth Build projects.

1. The first is the comprehensive 'traditional' model where 100 young volunteers spend 8 to 12 months in training and on-site learning the construction trade. These projects are structured around five components: 1) general education (including life orientation); 2) leadership, service and citizenship (known as 'ubuntu'); 3) technical training; 4) counselling and support; and 5) exit opportunities, whether further learning, employment or establishing enterprises or cooperatives.

This model was used in the first pilot phase, which involved a YouthBuild project in the township of Ivory Park (2009/10) run in partnership with the National Department of Human Settlements, the City of Johannesburg, the Institute for Education and Training for Industry (providing training accredited by the Construction SETA), and Habitat for Humanity. Eighty unemployed youth graduated from the training and worked with Habitat for Humanity to construct 100 houses in the area. The model has since been implemented in others areas and adapted further.

In the first phase in Ivory Park, a job developer was employed to assist young participants to develop plans and source exit opportunities, but associated costs meant this position was not carried over to other phases. The final evaluation showed that satisfaction with the role was high and a number of participants were placed in employment, but alumni noted that the placements tended to be short-term.

An adaptation to the pilot model involved building on the services already provided by FET colleges – nationally recognised training and student support services. YouthBuild in turn provides FET participants with opportunities for practical experience and personal development. The NYDA's role in the programme is to conduct project orientation, provide training in life skills and basic mathematics and English, and conduct 'job preparedness' workshops as they prepare to exit the programme.

<sup>7</sup> This profile is based on an interview and information available online at [www.nyda.gov.za/YouthBuildProgramme/Pages/default.aspx](http://www.nyda.gov.za/YouthBuildProgramme/Pages/default.aspx).

2. The second model is shorter in duration. The programme is hosted by the Department of Human Settlements, but youth are recruited and oriented by the NYDA, before going straight to site, usually to build houses. They receive training from the NHBRC for six weeks and participate in work preparedness workshops (NYDA). In 2013 the NYDA indicated that YouthBuild is targeted for 'scaling up' over the next few years.

<b>Name</b>	<b>National Rural Youth Service Corps (NARYSEC)</b>
<b>Organisation</b>	Department of Rural Development and Land Reform (DRDLR)
<b>Criteria</b>	Unemployed youth aged 18 to 35 years who are living in rural areas and have passed Grade 10 or higher
<b>Duration</b>	Four-year programme (two structured years, two years incubation)
<b>No. of participants</b>	12 881 participants as of 31 March 2013 (DRDLR 2013)
<b>Funding</b>	Almost R280 million in the 2011/12 financial year, R410 million for 2012/13 (DRDLR 2013)

NARYSEC was established in September 2010 by the DRDLR. The programme aims to address the high unemployment rate and lack of skills amongst rural youth by equipping them with skills needed to perform community service in their own communities. Rural development is the main focus. The key objectives are to:

- recruit unemployed youth in rural areas
- train the appointed youth through FET programmes linked to the identified developmental community projects in rural areas
- equip youth with multi-disciplinary skills through civic education
- increase the number of rural communities receiving support in their self-development through the Comprehensive Rural Development Programme (CRDP).

NARYSEC targets unemployed, disengaged youth aged 18 to 35 years with Grade 10 and living in rural wards. The first intake in 2010 included almost 8 000 youth; a second rolling intake in 2012/13 meant that as of the end of March 2013, a total of 12 881 youth were enrolled in the programme (DRDLR 2013).

The programme starts with a participatory community-level recruitment process (NARYSEC Interview, 2013). Youth are recruited from impoverished households (one per household) and receive a stipend of R1 320 a month, half of which goes back to their household. A three-week orientation programme is held to clarify expectations. Youth are trained in household profiling, which consists of conducting house-to-house assessment of the needs of rural households and communities. Through this exercise, young people are able to begin identifying gaps in their communities. DRDLR uses this data to inform its development planning.

Youth then take part in a 3½ month character-building programme hosted by the Department of Defence. This includes physical exercise, life skills, leadership, communication, first aid and discipline, amongst others. A NARYSEC official highlighted this as an important building block, similar to a component of the NYS in Kenya. This is followed by technical skills training at public FET colleges. The courses are generally NQF Level 2 or 3 and construction-related. They include building and civil construction, plumbing, welding, electrical engineering for construction, and community house building. Other courses relate to agriculture, disaster mitigation and business administration, with more to be included in the future. The technical training is intended to equip youth to create employment for themselves and others in their communities. It is supplemented by 'finishing skills training': basic administration skills, project administration and budgeting (in support of entrepreneurship).

Youth then engage in community service, although there may be an overlap between phases depending on available opportunities. Youth work on rural development projects. Where possible, a 'pipeline' approach is adopted so that young people are recruited from areas in which projects are identified and they are aware of the kind of training and service they can expect.

The programme is quite new and few participants have progressed beyond this stage. The final stage (incubation) is envisaged as a period of support for enterprise development in particular. If youth get a job or start an enterprise and earn more than the stipend, they are regarded as successful and released from the programme. The process up to community service should take about 24 months, with the subsequent two years acting as an incubation period. NARYSEC also awards bursaries for further study.

<b>Name</b>	<b>City Year South Africa</b>
<b>Criteria</b>	Youth aged 18 to 25 years who have passed Grade 12
<b>Duration</b>	Ten months
<b>No. of participants</b>	Approximately 120 service leaders annually
<b>Funding</b>	Funded by donors, private sector funders and government departments

City Year South Africa is an NGO that brings diverse groups of young people together for a year of voluntary service and leadership development. Affiliated to City Year in the United States, the South African programme provides an opportunity for young people aged 18-25 years to serve as tutors, mentors and role models to children in primary schools in Johannesburg and Soweto, while at the same time accessing accredited training and leadership development support.

Service and leadership development are key components of the structured ten-month programme. The programme begins with six to eight weeks of orientation and training that provides the participants – known as service leaders – with tools to prepare them for service and help them identify their strengths and weaknesses. There is also a short period of accredited training, usually in Project Management or Business Administration, through the University of the Witwatersrand. Non-accredited training includes training related to the service requirements and employability.

The main service component begins in the second term of the school year and consists of an after-school support programme focused on literacy, numeracy and life orientation. The service leaders also engage citizens (often employees of corporates or other NGOs that City Year partners with) in voluntary service through special Service Days that aim to help meet community needs.

To graduate from the programme, participants must have met the attendance requirements, completed the service and training requirements, participated in Service Days, and adhered to the disciplinary codes.

Since City Year South Africa was established in 2005. Approximately 1 200 service leaders have graduated from the programme. City Year assists service leaders with exit opportunities, usually linking them with potential employment opportunities or further studies. The current placement rate of service leaders is estimated at 80 per cent. For example, City Year has developed links with the clothing retailer Mr Price and is one of the CSOs that feed into their JumpStart Programme, a work experience programme with the potential to lead to employment. In another example, City Year has a partnership agreement with Awethu, an incubator for talented entrepreneurs from under-resourced communities.

<b>Name</b>	<b>groundBREAKERS and Mpintshis Programme</b>
<b>Organisation</b>	loveLife
<b>Criteria</b>	groundBREAKERS: Youth aged 18 to 25 years who have passed Grade 12
<b>Duration</b>	Twelve months
<b>No. of participants</b>	1 230 groundBREAKERS and 8 500 mpintshis (loveLife interview, 2013)
<b>Funding</b>	Funded by donors, private sector funders and government departments

loveLife is a South African HIV prevention campaign that promotes healthy living and positive attitudes towards life among young people. As part of its integrated multimedia, services and outreach campaign, loveLife engages youth in a full-time year of service, running peer education programmes for young people at schools, clinics and in community-based centres within their communities. The participants are selected to participate in the programme on the basis of their commitment to civic engagement in their communities.

Known as groundBREAKERS, these young people carry out loveLife HIV and AIDS and lifestyle education programmes. They are supported by a network of approximately 8 500 mpintshis (who may be in-school or out-of-school), who receive some basic training, but volunteer without compensation (although there are some areas that are exceptions). Mpintshis are encouraged to complete their matric so that they can qualify to become groundBREAKERS.

groundBREAKERS conduct outreach throughout South Africa. They mentor mpintshis and are expected to reach targets in terms of the number of schools they work with, events they run, or interactions with community media, among others. groundBREAKERS receive a stipend of R1 200 a month to cover basic needs during the year of service.

At the beginning of the year youth attend 'core one' training, a two-week intensive briefing on healthy sexuality and positive lifestyles, how to run loveLife programmes, and the skills involved in community mobilisation, presentation, facilitation and event and project management for effective outreach to other youth. They then return to their communities to recruit volunteers and implement loveLife programmes. They are supported by regional programme leaders, one for every 10 groundBREAKERS across the country. Approximately 1 230 groundBREAKERS are located in 900 sites countrywide, engaging with 6 500 schools each year.

Six structured on-site training sessions are held throughout the year. 'Core two' training – exit training – takes place towards the end of the year and aims to orient youth for the future. While career guidance is mainstreamed throughout the programme, this provides an opportunity for the groundBREAKERS to reflect further on their 'next steps'. They are assisted in developing personal goals and career plans, helped to develop their CVs and encouraged to look for jobs or other exit opportunities (e.g. bursaries) before they complete the programme.