

APPLICABLE TRAINING FOR RURAL ELECTRIFICATION

“LOCAL LABOUR JOB CREATION FOR SUSTAINABLE GROWTH”



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INTRODUCTION

I would like to introduce you to three people who, less than three years ago, were unemployed, without income and desperate to find something of worth to do with themselves. Each of these individuals is current role models in their society – they have picked themselves up from the throes of despair and poverty, and have elevated themselves to being people of substance and courage.

Catherine Selefo had completed her schooling, had gone on to acquire an N3 Diploma at a Technical college and was exposed to some practical work experience at Eskom. Then it all dried up – a reasonable qualification, some work experience BUT NO employment. She then joined a Rural Line training programme in the Shaleng village in Delareyville with IETI, completed the full career path, and worked on the Shaleng project. She proved her worth well enough to subsequently be employed by a platinum mine in the region, where she occupies the post of Senior Electrical Instructor. Her gross monthly salary is in excess of R 10 000-00.

Sepho Mphelo was unemployed when he joined the Rural Line programme in the Lichtenburg area. He worked on the project, and has subsequently decided to study further in this career option. He has recently completed his NTC 2 Certificate, and has aspirations to work towards an electrical Trade Diploma. His current income is in between R 2000-00 and R 4000-00 per month.

Daniel Masiga had completed his NTC 4 Certificate in electronics at the time of enlisting on a Rural Line course in Vryburg. He was unemployed at the time. He completed the career path training with IETI, worked on the project in Vryburg, and has subsequently been enlisted as a trainee trainer in similar projects in the area. His current income is in the region of R 4500-00 per month.

The people in these success stories enlisted on a programme similar to the one I will give you detail on a bit later, and started from scratch to empower themselves. The programme began as a Rural Line Electrification project with an electricity distributor, progressed to an entry-level electrical course, that culminated in a basic business skills programme.

The vast majority of entrants to the programmes completed is now either employed in the formal sector working for contractors or has started their very own lucrative and successful SMME business!

The irony of the programme was that it was introduced to electrify the very communities that these people come from – and in the process energized careers for themselves!

The strength of the programme is that it encourages growth from within a particular region, where territorially the immediate region is empowered.

Whilst the programme is not limited to rural areas, the outlying areas are the most under-resourced and are therefore primely positioned to enjoy the benefits of such interventions.

Let's look at the “domino” effect of this system:

- An area is electrified → people start using electrical power → there is a sudden demand for house wiring → appliances are bought and / or repairable → there are numerous electrified trading opportunities → services cascade to include SMME development → the cycle goes on and on...

There are many projects rolling out across the country which have similar deliverables as the ones that our three subjects participated in – it may be that they too can deliver the same results.

Unemployment in our country is not on the decline – in fact, it is growing at an alarming rate – with 60% of our current matriculants certain to end up unemployed. All the signs are there that the immediate job prospects are not encouraging, and that drastic, yet plausible and constructive methods need to be employed to turn the situation around.

Let me make a point to alleviate any concerns – what is being proposed is not a “butchered” or “half-baked” intervention that is intended to qualify people overnight. We do not intend setting people up for failure – rather we offer a proposal that meets current demands in society, whilst achieving the ultimate objective of creating sustainable work opportunities. Also, the interventions recommended are intended to aid or support legitimate training programmes, where the end result will be a formal or recognized qualification for the individual.

BACKGROUND

The Government is fully supportive (and in many cases insistent) on projects taking place in community areas where local labour is employed on such projects. However, in many instances, local labour are not skilled for such projects resulting in them either missing out on such an opportunity, or else being employed on menial work leaving them with no sustainable skills once the project is completed.

Our organisation has identified project-linked training as one of our priorities, and in doing so, has ensured the following:

1. All training is fully accredited; therefore trainees obtain skills that are linked to nationally accepted norms and standards.
2. On successful completion of training, trainees obtain a certificate that is nationally recognised and their name is recorded on a national register maintained by the Energy SETA.
3. Training is linked to an accredited career path, and on completion of the required modules, trainees may leave the training phase and commence work on a project.
4. On completion of the project, the trainee may become unemployed once again, in which case he/she may either elect to seek work elsewhere, or continue along the career path up until any stage, even as far as artisan status.
5. Training covered in our programmes are not just suited for employment in the “formal” sector, but is also ideally suited for “self employment” (SMME) due to them being exposed to business skills whilst in training.
6. Under certain circumstances, our Organisation is able to secure funding for the training and therefore no costs are incurred by the contractor, developers, local councils or the trainees.

POTENTIAL SPONSORS OR PROGRAMME UNDERWRITERS

There are various routes to funding for the training of unemployed individuals. One such sponsor is the Department of Labour, who are currently engaged in a sponsorship programme for training of the unemployed, under their Social Funding Window. Such sponsorship is conditional upon the establishment and proof of needs relating to each and every application.

Naturally, their ultimate objective on completion of the training is job creation and the more they are assured of this, the more chance there is for sponsorship.

Projects that are conditional upon the use of “local labour” (labour intensive projects) where contractors “guarantee” employment to the locals on their labour-force on that particular job, are exactly what our sponsors require and this almost always secures sponsorship. Such “guarantees” may be obtained by either or all of the following; Consultants, Local Authorities, Councils, Eskom, Project Co-ordinators, Contractors or Developers.

HOUSING DEVELOPMENT COUPLED TO RURAL ELECTRIFICATION

Throughout South Africa there is a growing demand for housing and infrastructure development. The government has set aside billions of Rands in various initiatives such as ASGI-SA and JIPSA for the fast-tracking and development of basic needs within communities. As part of their drive, they are encouraging job-creation opportunities, particularly in areas that have been neglected in previous years.

Municipalities are ideally placed to deliver such programmes and initiatives, by virtue of their infrastructure and internal mechanisms. Also, the government has placed a particular emphasis on using municipal projects as a resource for growing the Expanded Public Works Programme.

We have conducted many programmes linked to electrification, particularly in the North West Province, and in almost all cases the learners have been offered employment or participation in further projects.

A great opportunity exists for local people trained as a result of the demand created through electrification projects, i.e. electrical appliance repairs, domestic refrigeration and electrical repairs, maintenance and extensions.

An incentive to the programme is to donate a basic toolbox to each successful trainee on completion of a career path programme.

These programmes include:

- Overhead Line Construction
- Installation of pre-paid meters and ready-boards
- House-wiring
- Appliance repair
- Domestic refrigeration repair
- Business skills

Following a visit to such a series of programmes in the North West province, the Minister of Labour Mr Mdladlana initiated, under the auspices of the Department of Labour, a project in which further enhanced learners' skills. All earners who were exposed to practical workplace experience after their training were given the opportunity of being tested, and with a short advanced course, qualified for a single phase limited scope license.

Today, this new regulation has been promulgated and is in effect.

That is True Empowerment!

A feature of the programmes that we are promoting is that it has to be mobile. Full mobility in training, delivering the service wherever and whenever it is needed, is required whereby the trainers are taken to the learners in the remote areas of the country.

On offer to prospective learners is:

- ✚ Pre-training Assessment, where learners are matched to courses
- ✚ Recognition of Prior Learning, where an NQF Assessment is conducted with a view to the outcomes leading to credits on the NLRD
- ✚ ABET consideration, making the process all-inclusive
- ✚ Full Learnership opportunities

To this end, we will influence or attempt to influence the overall training mechanism in a positive manner, in order to fulfill the initiatives instituted by Government and the private sector.

WHAT DOES IT REQUIRE OF PLANNERS / CONSULTANTS / ENGINEERS / DESIGNERS / SKILLS DEVELOPMENT FASCILITATORS / TRAINING CONSULTANTS?

Here are some of our thoughts on the way the proposal can be implemented, as well as a few observations on the buy-in from all relevant role-players.

- Most projects have a base element of services that can be rendered by individuals with limited skills and expertise. These services, whilst built into the projects or contracts, can be assigned to local labour, with the proviso that the individuals are provided with appropriate training to be effective and productive after training to deliver the designated service. These training interventions are normally, but not exclusively, underwritten by the Department of Labour, utilizing their Social Funding window addressing Training of Unemployed Persons. The assignment of local labour further reduces additional costs to the project of transport and accommodation for people from outside the area.

- The programmes are Legacy-driven – it is not intended to train people for the sake of training – the motive behind the programme is to leave a legacy of learning behind after the programme. The participants will have acquired skills that will stay with them, enable them to offer these skills in other employment opportunities, and/or start their own business initiatives.
- Advanced or specialized technical services can also be built into projects, particularly those which are expected to rollout for longer than two years. Here the plan could include learnerships or longer skills programmes that will result in specialized services being rendered after completion of training. These training interventions can be underwritten by the appropriate SETA's.
- Enough rhetoric and conjecture has been publicized about South Africa's inability to deliver against its 2010 World Cup mandate. Most of this debate centres on the shortage of skills and skilled labour to be able to deliver the infrastructure required to offer an African World Cup of world-class proportions. Granted, there is a definite shortage of skills, and the government has introduced various vehicles to offset this, viz. ASGISA and JIPSA, all of which encourage broad and inclusive participation from all sectors of society.
- One obstacle to delivery is a change in mindset. There are various debates bemoaning the abolishment of the apprenticeship system in favour of the SAQA-aligned learnership model. These debates, whilst useful, are often used as an excuse to not participate by key role-players, whose influence can make or break the potential. The underlying effect of the proposed programme is that it is low risk and effort on the part of initiators – the burdens are few, but the benefits innumerable!

TRAINING FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF SMME'S

Due to the lack of formal employment, the Government has prioritized its support to assist in the establishment of small businesses. IETI has been actively involved in this programme, often having been the catalyst behind many newly established successful small businesses. Examples of these include electrical and appliance repair, TV and VCR repair, furniture, coffin-making, welding and catering.

The programme involves identifying previously disadvantaged community organizations willing to work with IETI in promoting the need for training and development. In most cases, the organisation provides a facility that can be upgraded into a workshop, which is run and managed by the community organisation.

The purpose of this programme is to address the need of local people who are unemployed and have no source of income. Although they are exposed to training, they are unable to start their emerging businesses, as they cannot obtain "start-up capital". In its endeavour to overcome this problem, IETI has developed the programme outlined below.

SMME Objectives

- To identify areas where training and development will have the most beneficial impact in order to develop small businesses.
- To create or assist in the creation of adequate follow-up support for learners after conclusion of training to effectively run a small business by incorporating organisations such as NGO's and/or Local Business Service Centre's.
- To concentrate our efforts on the establishment of small businesses in line with target groups identified by the Government i.e. unemployed (particularly women), youth and differently abled individuals.

The Extended Public Works Programme, initiated by the President of South Africa, commits the Government to the creation of one million jobs in ten years. Our proposal will go a long way towards assisting in the achievement of that objective.

There are many projects in the planning phase at national, provincial and local government level that can provide an impetus for ongoing training and development, especially for unemployed. Suppliers of basic infrastructure services are in the unique position of holding the key to redressing the unemployment crisis in our country.

CONCLUSION

What is required to make this programme work is a commitment from all role-players, in particular local authorities, power distributors and their contractors, to employ local labour on their projects for a minimum of 3 to 6 months, where employees are remunerated at Bargaining Council or negotiated rates

Make available to Service Providers, like ourselves, a rollout plan of where major and appropriate projects are to be phased in, when they need to be implemented as well as the size and scope of the project to ensure that relevant resources can be applied in them. Here the time factor is critical, as there needs to be a lead time of at least three months for Training Interventions to be introduced, funded and implemented in time for delivery of human capital at the point of development on site.

Training interventions need to be introduced that will create and foster sustainable employment or self-employment. Each entrant to a programme **MUST** be able to use the skills learnt well after the initial programme has completed. In fact, we would encourage further self-development post the programme.

If we want South Africa to be a world-class country, able to compete equally on the international technical front, we need to start somewhere. This is an ideal opportunity to kick-start the drive towards a successful Soccer World Cup 2010!