

Toolmaker training a great success story says TASA chairman

The Toolmaking Association of South Africa (TASA) Gauteng convened in Midrand earlier this month for its Annual General Meeting (AGM), at which newly re-elected chairman Vusi Mkhize highlighted the revitalisation of the training capability for toolmakers as possibly the biggest single success story in South Africa's training history over the past decade.



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Addressing the AGM, Mkhize said that more than R200 million has been spent nationally on a scientifically developed and managed seven-year artisan-training programme for the tooling industry. The TDM-powered training programme is based on international standards set by the National Institute for Metalworking Standards (NIMS) in Washington DC.

In April, 109 toolmaker artisans will graduate in Gauteng, while another 48 will qualify as machinists. Eighty Foundation Level and 290 Level 1 students will start their training in the province this year, while 100 qualified artisans are expected to enrol for the newly launched Master Toolmaker Programme.

A pivotal role

As the custodian of the technical content of the programme, TASA Gauteng has played a pivotal role in its success and the programme itself forms part of TASA Gauteng and the Gauteng Tooling Initiative's (GTI) pioneering and prototyping methodologies to revitalise manufacturing in Gauteng. "Our strategy is to bring jobs back from The East and other parts of the world where tooling that can be produced in South Africa is currently being imported from," said Mkhize.

He emphasised that in terms of the new paradigm for the revitalisation of the tooling industry, South Africa will have to focus strongly on inward investment to establish a premium tooling sector as well as clustering in the medium technology toolmaking sector to alleviate the pressure from Asian and Eastern European tools. "It is, for example, common knowledge that Toyota had purchased tooling to the value of more than R450 million outside South Africa in the latter half of 2013," said Mkhize.

A revolution needed

He went on to point out that the new toolmaking rules aimed at making South Africa globally competitive will require a revolution in productivity, production depth or specialisation and performance depth. The latter implies a broad-based capacity to enable the industry to design, produce and support tools throughout their life cycle. The turnaround will require significant investments in production facilities, technology, recapitalisation of local tooling entities and co-operation and clustering infrastructure.

According to Mkhize, enterprise development will be a key building block in the revitalisation of the local tooling industry. To this end, TASA Gauteng has already developed and implemented a pilot project aimed at developing a methodology to run a tool shop as a tool factory. A tool shop management programme based on Lean Production and Visual Management has also been developed and documented. In addition, value chain specialisation and specialised clustering are also promoted by TASA Gauteng.

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