

Unleashing the power of the collective: Relay effort needed to solve youth unemployment

By [Nkosinathi Mahlangu](#)

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The pandemic has picked an existing wound in our country's socio-economic skin. Stats SA recently reported that the youth unemployment rate in the country had increased from 52.30% in the second quarter of 2020 to a staggering 61.30% in the third quarter of 2020 - and that was before the arrival of the second strain in December 2020, which dealt the country's youth a further blow.



Nkosinathi Mahlangu, portfolio head: youth employment, Momentum Metropolitan

There are a number of reasons why youth are arguably the hardest hit by the pandemic.

Young people tend to be overrepresented in sectors most impacted by the lockdown - such as hospitality and retail - and more likely to embark in 'non-standard' and less stable forms of employment or 'gig work'.

In addition, young people are finding their youth to be a double-edged sword. They are at greater risk of having their salaries cut, given the fact that they typically have less experience than their elder counterparts, and because their employers know that they are also less likely to have extensive family to provide for at this point in their lives.



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How do we begin to fix this?

As finance minister Tito Mboweni flagged in his 2021 Budget Speech, the revival of our economy will take a concerted effort from all sectors of society, and involve the formation of new public-private partnerships.

There is also a significant responsibility on the part of big business to ensure that their CSI strategies hold up in a volatile new landscape, and that their NPO partners are on board with any change in the trajectory of their programmes.

As part of Momentum Metropolitan Foundation's Socio-Economic Development portfolio, which is mandated with driving youth employment, we are responsible for sourcing NPO partners that have demonstrated consistent success in job placement, establishing effective networks with roots that reach deeply into the communities that Metropolitan serves.

Selection of these NPO partners is congruent with our agenda of driving transformation; increasing access to strategic sectors for marginalised groups, with a focus on race, gender and disability. The ICT sector is naturally a key priority, given the acceleration of the digital economy and the ability to earn a competitive wage in this space, creating opportunity for candidates to build generational wealth for their families.



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Greater sense of community

In the past year, we've seen a greater sense of community arise between our NPO partners - while always far from competitors, they've now become collaborators, as they work together to harness the power of the collective.

We've seen each organisation take on different roles in advancing the agenda of youth employment along its entire pathway, ensuring that candidates are on a road towards sustainable employment.

This becomes a relay race of sorts, and one that Covid-19 may have inadvertently aided.

Previously, the majority of our youth participants would start the employment process with the same NPO that they began their journeys with, with limited access to the programmes of other NPO partners, which could potentially offer training in new skillsets or other fields.

While in the past, basic geography meant that it would be difficult to transition from one institution to another located within a different region, the remote nature of learning that Covid-19 has forced upon us has in fact proven to be a silver lining. Candidates can now access the programmes of more than one partner NPO, and easily 'relay' between the various institutions depending on where their unique talents and career preferences take them. At the same time, NPOs relay with one another; through working together to support and empower candidates at each stage of the employment process.



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Development of new eco-systems

We have also seen our partners engage around a host of pressing issues, including sourcing suitable virtual platforms and cost-effective mobile data options; while graduates from one of our NPO partners, Life Choices Academy, are revamping the website of QASA, another of our NPOs.

This collaboration also facilitates peer-to-peer learning and the development of new eco-systems.

Our NPOs now see each other as partners in the youth employment space - with a shared mission and vision - and peer-to-peer learning has opened opportunities for more structured collaboration.

This relay would have not have been impossible in pre-pandemic times, but what is true is that Covid-19 has carved new pathways for collaboration and shown that together we can.

What we have learned is that one should not seek to solve for all the challenges that South Africa faces - you can't be everything to everyone. Rather identify strategic NPO partners that will enhance your programme offering, and also be part of the building blocks to youth and community empowerment.

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