

How can companies invest in whole school development?

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Trialogue and Telkom have joined forces to promote whole school development through the Trialogue Knowledge Hub, the leading information resource for social investors in Africa.



South Africa's education sector faces enormous challenges, many of which are systemic and require sustained and collaborative efforts to address.

Although significant progress has been made since the advent of democracy, learners still grapple with unequal resources, poor infrastructure, overcrowded classrooms, inadequate sanitation, limited safety, a shortage of quality teachers, and limited access to technology, among other things.

The provision of electricity and sanitation has improved significantly over the past decade, but loadshedding, the current water crisis, and the fact that pupils in around 3,000 schools still use pit toilets, are major stumbling blocks to quality education – the key requirement of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4. The [Sustainable Development Goals Country Report 2023 South Africa](#) indicates that the lasting impact of apartheid education still hampers South Africa's ability to achieve SDG 4.

As we strive to create a better education system, it is important to acknowledge that learners must come to terms with not only spatial and socioeconomic inequalities but psychosocial ones. The effects of poverty, intergenerational trauma, and post-traumatic stress caused by both past and present challenges (including racism, violent crime, substance abuse and more) continue to be felt by learners, affecting education outcomes.

A holistic approach to education

Single-focus, isolated corporate social investment (CSI) programmes are useful, but they may have limited impact. For this reason, Telkom has broadened its interventions beyond supplying IT infrastructure and support to schools, which is much needed but doesn't address the emotional needs of learners who benefit from better-equipped schools.

Telkom's Connected Schools [programme](#), launched in 2017, not only ensures learners are connected to the internet – it also aims to foster resilience by making psychosocial support available to those who need it, removing much of the stigma around mental health and counselling.

Telkom is eager to facilitate partnerships and knowledge-sharing to improve outcomes in the sector through its sponsorship of the whole school development topic on the Trialogue Knowledge Hub, the leading information resource for social investors in Africa.

The topic explores how companies can invest in holistic school interventions that help to build thriving schools.

“What we need is an ecosystem of interventions that can improve outcomes for learners, teachers, parents, and school management,” says Judy Vilakazi, executive of corporate social responsibility at the Telkom Foundation.

“The Covid-19 pandemic proved that we could work together to solve complex problems in education – and whole school development is an area ripe for collaboration. We hope that our sponsorship of this vital topic on the Trialogue Knowledge Hub will assist social investors who want to make a meaningful difference in the sector, preferably with like-minded partners.”

Social investors can learn more about [why and how to invest in whole school development](#), explore cases studies and research papers, and gain insight into how existing investors, non-profit organisations and other stakeholders implement holistic programmes.

A key intervention is partnering with schools to help solve some of their challenges, collaborating with other social investors or non-profit organisations to achieve specific outcomes.

The [District Whole School Development model](#), rolled out by the Kagiso Shanduka Trust, a partnership between Kagiso Trust and the Cyril Ramaphosa Foundation, is a model that can be replicated and scaled by prospective partners and education development stakeholders. The programme was piloted in ten schools in the Free State's Thabo Mofutsanyana district in 2007, in partnership with the Free State Department of Education. The district has continued to perform well academically since the programme came to an end – testament to the success of the model.

The [Adopt-a-School model](#) has also proven popular. The Thari Programme, a five-year pilot project initiated by the Cyril Ramaphosa Foundation, is currently seeking additional partners to continue its work in Botshabelo. It has facilitated three pillars of support at eight schools in Botshabelo and one in Diepsloot in Gauteng: psychosocial support, safe park services, and a multi-sectoral approach to improving education outcomes.

[The Telkom Foundation's Connected Schools Programme](#) works with Childline to address the emotional wellness of learners, positioning social workers in schools to run supervised counselling for individual learners. This is in addition to providing ICT support for educators.

“We know investment in education is not reaching its full potential, and that models of collective impact can make a measurable difference,” says Trialogue MD Nick Rockey.

“The whole school development topic on the Trialogue Knowledge Hub builds on existing institutional knowledge while making it easier for companies to understand where some of the investment gaps are, and how these can be filled through holistic and in many cases collaborative effort.”

Rockey urges companies to visit the Knowledge Hub if they are considering a holistic approach to education or want to scale their interventions.

“It is heartening to see what can be achieved when investors take a whole-school view of the challenges in the education sector, and work together with other companies, non-profit organisations, and stakeholders to strengthen schools and

empower learners.”

To access the resource and explore the topic, visit: <https://trialogueknowledgehub.co.za/development-topics/education/whole-school-development/>.

To share learnings: Companies interested in sponsoring a topic or contributing learnings to and insights on existing topics should contact Lerato Ramoba on lerato@trialogue.co.za.

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