

Solidaridad launches employment fund to boost food security, employ youth

Solidaridad, in collaboration with the Industrial Development Corporation of South Africa (IDC) and the Department of Trade, Industry and Competition (DTIC) has launched the Social Employment Fund Project; a significant initiative that aims to tackle economic stimulation, reduce unemployment and enhance food security by engaging South Africa's unemployed youth.



Source: Supplied

In South Africa, unemployment remains a pressing issue, with particularly dire consequences for young people. According to [Statistics South Africa's Quarterly Labour Force Survey](#), the official unemployment rate was 31.9% in the third quarter of 2023. While this indicates some progress, youth unemployment remains a significant concern in South Africa, underscoring the need for targeted interventions and sustainable solutions to create more employment opportunities for young people.

A call for action

"The question presented by the Social Employment Fund is whether the smallholder sector can effectively absorb the unemployed population within rural and peri-urban communities. One significant barrier to scale for most smallholders is the substantial investment required for mechanisation, a benefit often enjoyed by commercial farmers. As a result, labour emerges as a critical input in the business case for scaling up smallholders.

Through initiatives like the Social Employment Fund Project, in 2023, we established one more soil lab and engaged 1,352 horticulture smallholder farmers in agriculture services, with the same number benefiting from digital inclusion initiatives. We also managed to involve 2,014 young individuals in agricultural projects. The project is spearing ahead at full speed in 2024," says Mohau Mailula, Solidaridad country manager for South Africa.

The Social Employment Fund Project, currently implemented in two provinces – Gauteng and the North West - is aligned with Solidaridad's thematic areas of focus: food and nutrition, greening and the environment, and support for digital inclusion. This holistic approach ensures comprehensive development and sustainable impact in the region.

"At Solidaridad, we define scale in two dimensions: increased production, which pertains to a farm's growth in hectareage, and intensification, which focuses on maximizing yield per hectare. This dual approach not only enhances farmers' revenue but also establishes a self-sustaining cycle. To maintain the heightened productivity levels, smallholders must retain their labour force, thereby, reinforcing the link between scale, productivity, and employment stability within the sector," asserts Mailula.



Source: Supplied

In the pursuit of “the common good”

“The Social Employment Fund also operates on the principle of work for the common good, advocating for enterprises and individuals to incorporate activities and decision-making processes that benefit the broader community over narrow self-interests. With a focus on rural and peri-urban communities, the project identified food security as a critical thematic area. This is due to the reality that rural resources provide the urban market with the nutritional diversity it enjoys, while rural communities often find themselves deprived of such variety.

"By leveraging our proximity to these communities, it became imperative to enhance their food security and ensure access to a nutrient-rich diet. To achieve this, we established 300 food gardens, strategically distributing 10% of their collective yield to school feeding programs, ultimately benefiting 9,100 learners. This not only addresses immediate nutritional needs but also fosters long-term community resilience and well-being." says Mailula.

As the African proverb goes, a river cuts through rock, not because of its power, but because of its persistence. As a river's persistent flow gradually shapes the landscape, so do our consistent efforts collectively pave the path towards local community progress. Every step counts. Every job matters. Each hungry stomach that is sustained is significant.

In this journey towards community resilience, job skills empowerment is crucial because individuals with job skills sustain themselves and strengthen our local food security. True to the Afrocentric cultural worldview of Ubuntu (humanity), we all need to unite and do our part for the improvement of all.

"As we move forward, we must work together to champion the horn of South Africa and our continent at large. The challenges facing our agricultural sector and workforce are multifaceted and require sustained commitment and collaboration from all stakeholders.

"Solidaridad remains steadfast in its dedication to empowering farmers, fostering job creation, and promoting sustainable livelihoods, and we call on all partners and stakeholders to join us in this vital endeavour. Together, we can build a more resilient and prosperous future for all," concludes Shungu Kanyemba, managing director at Solidaridad Southern Africa.

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