Samsa funds marine tourism skills training initiative

A multi-stakeholder initiative aimed at equipping unemployed young people with skills and opportunities to participate in the country's marine tourism sector has been launched in Port St Johns (PSJ), Eastern Cape.

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The initiative is in line with Operation Phakisa: Oceans Economy – Coastal and Marine Tourism sub-sector to boost employment and open new frontiers for marine tourism while creating much needed jobs. The partnership comprising South African Maritime Safety Authority (Samsa), as part of its corporate social investment initiative (CSI), together with the KwaZulu-Natal Sharks Board Maritime Centre of Excellence (KZNSB MCoE) and Port St Johns (PSJ) local municipality launched the first stage of the Youth Maritime Development Programme (YMDP) on 4 July.

Youths in the area are being offered a series of lectures and practical training in skills such as deep sea diving, spear fishing skills, lifeguarding (to include first aid) and commercial diving training. On completion of the project the trained youths will be in a position to be employed at other ports outside their local municipality.

Coastal and marine tourism

Marine tourism currently ranks among the top four sub sectors of the country's maritime economic pillars. It is projected to generate between 800,000 and 1m jobs by 2033. In economic terms, projections currently indicate yields as high as R44bn in 2020 and rising rapidly to R134bn in 2033.

Port St Johns is one of the coastal towns earmarked to benefit from the Small Towns Regeneration Plan of the national Department of Public Works.

The municipality had received R97m from the national Department of Tourism for the 2017/18 financial year to boost the local tourism industry.

"As the municipality, we have approved plans which seek to revive the local tourism industry and related industries such as the retail and hospitality industries. In these plans, lie the opportunities for the young people currently being trained through the YMDP," said Councillor Lindelwa Rolobile, mayor of the Port St Johns local municipality.

The CSI initiative meets Operation Phakisa's objectives. It was pivotal that more young people entered the marine tourism sector and for all the relevant stakeholders to open up the sector to allow skilled and talented youths an easier access into the sector, said Phumlani Myeni, SAMSA acting CEO.

"The marine tourism sector is a very large industry with an abundance of opportunities waiting to be explored. As SAMSA, we stand ready to support anyone who wants to participate in the sector and contribute in further developing it with the aim of propelling South Africa's ranking as a marine tourism destination."

The PSJ area covers a population of about 166,779 people. 33% of young people from the area are unemployed. The area has 12 beaches and the Umzimvubu River which require lifeguards. However, there are only five registered life guards currently operating in the area making the area one of the most compromised stretches of the coastline in terms of Safety of Life and Property at Sea.

Leadership and entrepreneurial skills

A total of 33 youths, who had passed the pre-screening tests conducted by the Sharks Board, were taken through the course outline and inducted into the YMDP.

The Sharks Board, which is facilitating the lectures and practical training, said the 33 youths are the first group of the 104 youths earmarked to receive training. Their training will take eight weeks to complete.
"The second stage of the project will thereafter kick off and be completed in December," said Vincent Zulu from the Sharks Board.

"We are not only equipping the youths with just skills of diving and lifeguarding. We are also teaching them leadership skills as well as entrepreneurship in marine and coastal tourism," said Zulu.

Sharks Board will work with Samsa to look for placement and career opportunities for youths who would successfully complete the training.