

## **GLASS SECTOR DEVELOPMENT CENTRE PROJECT: A partnership between CHIETA and PG Group in support of the establishment of a new skills centre located in Springs (Johannesburg) to provide entry to mid-level skills in the glass manufacturing and fitment industry.**

In a report published in 2014 by the Labour Market Intelligence Partnership (LMIP) through the Human Sciences Research Council (HRSC), a comprehensive documentation of the progression as well as regression of apprenticeships in South Africa over decades was made. For the purposes of this vignette a brief reflection of such developments pre and post-apartheid periods is highlighted. It may as well be common knowledge that during the apartheid years, black people were excluded from active participation in politics, economy and social programmes through a series of legislated policies some of which were passed into law, e.g. the Group Areas Act 41 of 1950, the Bantu Building Workers Act 27 of 1951 and the Bantu Education Act of 1953. An extract from the report reflects: “These Acts formally ensured the exclusion of black labour from technical training along spatial lines. While the Group Areas Act promulgated racial exclusion by geographical location, the Bantu Building Workers Act sought to achieve the same end via technical training. The main purpose was to secure white hegemony and black subservience by giving preference to white workers and prohibiting certification for acquired skills for any non-white person” LMIP 2014<sup>1</sup>.

The manufacturing sector was amongst the fastest growing sectors and that resulted in the rise in the demand for skilled artisanal labour which saw the recruitment and growth of black artisans for training as well especially around 1981. A decade later (1991) as this report suggests, the total number of artisans began to decline. The first attempts at trying to make apprenticeship training more structured on the job were reportedly recommended by the National Training Boards around 1985 and were incorporated into the Amendment of the Manpower Training Act 39 of 1990. However, the Act did not halt the decline of the training system from the 1980s through to the early 1990s although it made noticeable progress towards countering the exclusion of black trainees from the apprenticeship system and artisan employment. In summary, this report concluded that the 1980s ushered in an economic decline that impacted significantly on the country’s capacity for supplying technical skills.

This background shows a clear need for the government post-1994 to try and renew apprenticeships training efforts which necessitated it to enact the Skills Development Act 97 of 1998 which was subsequently amended. This Act ought to redress the past imbalances by improving, inter alia, the skills of workers by promoting education and training in the workplace as outlined in the National Skills Development Strategies I, II and III. As a result of these developments, Learnerships were introduced in South Africa in the Skills Development Act of 1998 to replace the existing apprenticeship system. The main difference between the two systems is that apprenticeships were limited to trades, while learnerships could be implemented in a wide range of occupations. Further differences exist in terms of duration, contract type, and assessment & evaluation methods. The learnership system never fully replaced the apprenticeship system, which is why apprentices still exist.

As supported by Goal 4.2 of the NSDS III (Increasing access to occupationally-directed programmes). This goal further elaborates that “South Africa’s pool of intermediate skills, especially artisanal skills, is too low to support national and sector development and growth. The workforce is not keeping up with the skills needed to remain competitive in an increasingly knowledge-based economy. There is a need to ensure the continuous upgrade of skills in the workforce, to help ensure a measurable increase in the intermediate skills pool, especially in artisan, technician and related occupations, attributable to increased capacity at education

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<sup>1</sup> Towards Understanding the Distinctive Nature of Artisan Training: Implications for Skills Planning in South Africa

and training institutions and increased workplace experiential learning opportunities. SETAs should play a prominent role in contributing towards these goals, especially through their discretionary funds. The strategy seeks to encourage and support large corporate employers and state-owned enterprises to cooperate with the relevant education and training institutions by providing needed training equipment and experienced staff to address specific needs. Government is committed to a comprehensive curriculum review in colleges and universities of technology. Urgent measures will be instituted to enhance this cooperation and provide necessary equipment. Workplace learning should be an integral part of all vocational programmes. Establishing effective partnerships between education and training systems and employers to provide for workplace training would ensure that skills have real labour market relevance and that young people gain an early appreciation of and exposure to the world of work.” NSDS III, 2011<sup>2</sup>.

In contributing towards the achievement of this goal, CHIETA entered into a partnership agreement in 2013 with PFG Building Glass/ PG Group to establish “a glass sector development centre”. The centre is located in Springs (East of Johannesburg) and attracts learners from the neighbouring and feeder townships such as Tsakane, Daveyton, Brakpan, Benoni. Learners from as far as Soweto, Limpopo and Durban have also been enrolled. The building had been donated by the PG Group CEO. The upgrade of the premises was championed by Mr L. de Jager, a now retired director at PFG Building glass. Some of the funds to renovate the building were donated by PFG Building Glass. CHIETA provided approximately R500, 000.00 towards setting up this centre as well as stipends up until 2017. The role of paying stipends has since been taken over by host companies (businesses that are responsible for the training of their own learners or employers at the centre) to ensure the sustainability of the centre. Further aesthetic enhancements were covered and applied at cost by PG Glass, Advanced Armour Glass, and PFG Building Glass. Energy efficient solar water panels and geysers were donated by Powerz-On, part of the CSI Group.

The skills centre officially opened its doors on the 14<sup>th</sup> March 2013. The idea for the centre was born at the CHIETA glass chamber meetings, where it was recognised that there was a gap in the education and training of young students who were entering the sector without any practical skills. Adding to this issue was the fact that most industries within the sector ‘ran a tight ship’ and experienced difficulties in releasing the students for practical training once they had been taken on as workers. Geraldine Hewitt and Anne Arnold, both employees of PFG Building Glass, a member of the PG Group, together with Bennett Kamanga of CHIETA, took on the challenge and had worked closely together since 2012 to ensure the idea became a reality.

During the opening of the centre, the Acting CEO of the CHIETA, Ms Ayesha Itzkin was quoted as saying “the centre will not only be providing valuable training to the youth, but will also be providing the entire glass industry with a ready source of workplace ready, competent individuals from which they can employ staff”. The majority of learners had been sourced from previously disadvantaged communities, and the centre concentrated on teaching students fundamental skills that would enable them to work more effectively and efficiently once placed in a working situation. The centre can accommodate 95 students per intake for training programmes that ranged from one year (mostly Skills Programmes and Learnerships) in various theoretical and practical disciplines, with NQF Levels between 1 and 4 being obtained and 3 years depending on the learners qualification requirements. The centre also provides development programmes for Supervisors and Managers.

The major objective of this project was to create a pool of qualified youth who can achieve their entry to mid-level technical and administrative occupations within the glass sector through

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<sup>2</sup> National Skills Development Strategy III, 2011

relevant Learnerships and Skills Programmes. The project targeted three categories of learners:

- Those who may have completed matric but couldn't afford to study further or who wished not to study further but wanted to enter the world of work.
- Those who may have completed further studies ranging from N4, N6, Diplomas, National Certificates in relevant fields, but needed to get workplace experience on their CV in order to gain employment or qualify for a Diploma, and
- Those who may be currently studying or had completed the theory part but needed workplace exposure in order to finalise their studies in a variety of fields such as Chemical, Mechanical, Electrical Engineering, Logistics, Audit, Finance, Sales, Office Practices, Laboratory Technicians, etc.

Upon enrolment, learners were to complete fundamental training programmes such as Health and Safety, First Aid, Fire Fighting, Business Writing, Customer Service, Business Savvy before moving into specific technical learning programmes such as Glazing, Auto Glazing, Production Processing, Production Manufacturing, etc.

When the centre opened in 2013, CHIETA records reflect that 68 matriculants were enrolled under its Youth Development Programme (YDP) and of these learners, 52 were placed into permanent positions either during or at the end of their training period, 7 went into employment outside of the group but still within the glass industry and 9 chose not to stay in the industry and looked for employment elsewhere. This was considered a major achievement for a newly opened skills centre.

In 2014, another training centre in Cape Town was opened. During that year 120 learners (both in Springs as well as in Cape Town training centre) which included about 16 Workplace Integrated Learning (WIL) learners in Engineering, Finance and Audit fields were enrolled into the YDP. On completion of the programme, 86 were offered permanent employment, 17 learners decided to secure employment elsewhere, 13 learners were either dismissed during the year due to poor performance or resigned and 4 left to join SAB who were recruiting Health and Safety trainees and Engineers.

In 2015 - 104 matriculants enrolled, 73 were appointed into various positions within the group after completion whilst 31 could not be instantly placed into positions at the time when they completed the programme but were absorbed into positions during the early part of 2016. During the same year, the centre recruited and trained 20 Production learners for Nampak. These learners completed 4 months of Fundamentals and Chemical Operations training at the skills centre and then went on to Nampak to complete their workplace experience. The centre also trained 18 SMME existing Glazing businesses on Glass Cutting and Glazing in the Tsakane community.

From 2016, the centre continued to train scores of learners under the Youth Development Programme as well as training small businesses in areas such Nelspruit on Glazing as well as Glass and Putty Distribution. Due to its technical nature, the centre has evolved to focus on training more apprenticeships instead of learnerships. In a recent interview that took place on the 13<sup>th</sup> of February 2018, the centre's Training Manager, Anne Arnold confirmed that they have 70% placement success rate which is growing every year as they don't take on learners if host companies cannot with a high probability commit to employing such learners which justifies this huge placement rate. The Training Manager elaborated that "The main objective is that learners are permanently placed and then they are monitored to see if they adjust in the workplace.

In 2017 another training centre in Midrand called the SmartGlass Academy was opened, mainly aimed for Installer Occupations. As explained by the Training Manager<sup>3</sup> herself “We take on learners that host companies need and our learners become master installers that service most of the businesses around including complexes that are mushrooming everywhere. Installers are trained crew who install shower doors, patio doors and windows in these complexes. Of the 20 learners, 16 have secured permanent employment, 1 was terminated due to poor performance and it is with absolute devastation that we lost 2 due to road accidents. Four have registered their own businesses and one has become a trainer in training at the Midrand training centre. The successful placement of learners to workplaces after training is the most important outcome of the NSDS III that has been achieved in this case as it yields the desired impact of workplace placements after completion of a training programme. There is a down side of only training what our industry needs in that many youth could benefit from the training and workplace exposure and this experience will help them gain employment elsewhere, but due to lack of additional funding, we cannot meet this need”.

What makes this initiative successful is that host companies sign commitment agreements with the centre which ensures that at the end of each training intervention, learners are successfully placed. Some of them get placed even before they finish their training. “Every host company provide us with numbers of learners they would like trained in the following year and the training centre will recruit those learners after ‘highly probable guarantees’ for employment have been secured by the host companies as we are not just training for fun. Some learners opt to continue their studies further instead of being placed which we have no problem with. We don’t have a lot of learnerships, as such, they are not fit-for-purpose in our industry. We have apprenticeships in all trades and Occupational qualifications in glass and product production, glazers, auto fitters, customer care and sales. We now work with Tsidi (CHIETA) and QCTO on their occupational qualifications as we started with learnerships that didn’t work and we have to give what industry needs”

Through this initiative, the skills centre has learnt to plan its training programmes to be fit for purpose, give what customers (industry) need and not what Learnerships or SETA discretionary grants prescribe. There is a huge cost involved in training and companies simply cannot afford it. Most manufacturing companies run very lean and their most important objective is to get employees occupationally competent and contributing to their revenue. Most employers offer employees further education schemes once employed, some of the learners who are now full time employed are doing further studies through UNISA for advanced qualifications, earning while they learn.

Another important lesson is that learners must be recruited as if they are recruited for a vacancy – the manager taking the learner as well as their coach must interview them. If they are part of the selection process they tend to ‘own’ their decision of the person they selected, an approach for which yields better success rates.

“Make sure your training providers you have partnered with are teaching and enforcing the same workplace values and principles we are teaching the learners. This way there is a constant thread of best workplace behaviours from everyone the learner meets before they enter the workplace at their host company. This includes: time management, dress code, manners, cleaning up after themselves etc.”

“At some point host companies won’t be able to give ‘highly probable but instead they will be employed guarantees’ as our industry is very dependent on the Rand exchange rate and we

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<sup>3</sup> The training manager had a lot of interesting views on why this centre was successful as punctuated throughout the vignette

are directly impacted on by 'Glass dumping into South Africa', our industry is sailing some very rough seas at the moment. But, things change and we would rather be ready for an upswing than try to catch up to it. I do believe, if I had more learners to give rather than only what the host companies' need, more could be absorbed. They are taking learners based on budget where I would like to include 'probability' as well. This way I could get more youth exposed to the working environment and better equipped to sell themselves confidently when applying for jobs anywhere, in any industry".

"In terms of the implications for future policy, if training is channelled through TVET's – we will lose 'fit for purpose' training, but may foster overqualified, too many 'bosses' and no skilled workforce. Learners are getting a much skewed picture of the world of work, where a qualification means more pay and management which come with unrealistic expectations. This is not always possible".