

Driving South Africa's economy through skills, enterprise and supplier development



The youth and entrepreneurs are the future of South Africa and as a developing country it is imperative that we foster young talent and small businesses.

This is recognised as a key tenant of the National Development Plan (NDP), together with better education and economic opportunities. BBD is actively contributing towards job creation by mentoring and nurturing young talent to drive sustainable growth and truly change South African lives for the better.

Skills development goes hand-in-hand with this, yet has been identified by the World Economic Forum as a key challenge due to the accelerated pace of change experienced in the workplace. This skills gap also serves as a major constraint in Africa's ability to compete in the global economy, particularly in light of the impact of digital technologies.

How BBD is addressing the skills gap

As part of our skills development drive and to assist in nurturing software development and contribute to job creation, we have partnered with and sponsored organisations that share our vision for a thriving and inclusive tech sector.

One such partner is WeThinkCode_ (WTC), a tuition-free programme educating the next generation of software engineers. Involved as a founding partner since their inception in 2016, of the nearly 500 future software engineers that have enrolled in the programme, 75 have been directly sponsored by BBD and provided with real work opportunities.

The programme is free to students, with no prior coding experience required and a matric certificate optional. Students undergo an intensive two-year programme, prior to completing internships with corporate sponsors. The BBD four-month internship programme starts with a thorough four-week bootcamp as the interns are exposed to Java, C#, C++, Agile and Databases – after which the interns are assigned to a project to gain real-life experience. During the programme, the interns work on different projects and are mentored to find the path that best suits them, all while seeing what's possible for their careers at BBD.

BBD has also supported GirlCode, a non-profit organisation aimed at empowering girls through technology, through the sponsorship and facilitation of coding workshops.

In 2019, BBD brokered a partnership with Umuzi, a South African organisation that supports skills development for talented young people to access high-value careers. Through this partnership, we are addressing the shortage of skilled female coders by supporting 18 previously un- or under-employed young women to become junior full-stack web developers.

Ensuring the youth are work-ready enables them to meet the demands of the fast-paced ICT industry, as South Africa needs to find innovative ways to increase digitisation and automation.

At BBD we've seen that there are many South Africans who have the potential but not the means. Working with disruptive programmes such as WTC, GirlCode and Umuzi has enabled us to expand our network and uncover and employ incredible minds, unleashing their potential at BBD.



How BBD is contributing towards sustainable enterprise and supplier development (ESD)

ESD is one of the B-BBEE sustainability pillars aimed at encouraging more black businesses by supporting and developing already-established EMEs (exempt micro enterprises) and QSEs (qualifying small enterprises). In BBD's case this has involved working with EMEs and QSEs to provide support ranging from development loans to business sustainability advice, office space and integration opportunities to work on BBD projects and develop their skills, together with software development assistance.

An example of this is our partnership with a training academy based in Port Elizabeth. BBD provided five new computers to enable their students to be work ready and contribute to the digital economy. To ensure that IT literacy starts early, we have also donated 20 new computers to a rural primary school in Limpopo, for use in their newly developed computer centre.

Enabling students to gain real work experience is integral to their learning. Hence BBD has partnered with a Johannesburg based foundation offering 12-month training programmes, to provide students with a three-month internship opportunity, to experience working in the real world. The training foundation is tackling the unemployment issue in the country by providing training ranging from web development to data science.

Benefits of working with BBD

Our skills development and ESD have played a large part in BBD's level 1 B-BBEE rating. We believe in not merely offering monetary assistance. Rather, we prefer to work with our suppliers as responsible partners, to provide the necessary support and ensure they grow and become sustainable businesses. They in turn can then employ more staff and enable South Africa to flourish and aid in transforming the economy.

We have found that true enterprise development requires strategies that will enable sustainable development, addressing some of the challenges that businesses face in the early growth phase. Effective ways to implement ESD programmes requires looking for interventions based on the different skills and resources that small businesses provide.

Procurement

Preferential procurement is now part of the ESD pillar and has been impacted by changes implemented through the Public Procurement Bill, which includes the 'empowering supplier' classification. This requires a business to be B-BBEE-compliant and a good corporate citizen, by adhering to all relevant laws and regulations.

For organisations wanting to leverage preferential procurement, we suggest reviewing existing procurement to ascertain the status of B-BBEE objectives, to see what and how much can be outsourced to local suppliers. Utilising black-owned enterprises, including women and the youth, has enabled BBD to assist in building a more inclusive economy, while reducing inequality. We have also sourced relevant IT equipment from the appropriate suppliers.

Being recognised as a B-BBEE supplier is also helpful in receiving preference as a supplier on municipality and government organisation databases. This is important to not only drive economic growth, but nurture a skilled and capable workforce.