Pilot project to improve teacher and learner skills

The Nedbank Foundation, the corporate social investment arm of the Nedbank Group, has unveiled a R4.1 million initiative to significantly boost maths and science teacher and learner training and education at Grade 10 - 12 levels. Entitled the Nedbank Fundisa Maths and Science Programme, the project is being piloted in the Limpopo and Eastern Cape provinces where maths and science skills are in particular need of improvement. These provinces recorded the worst maths and science matric results in 2009.

Importantly, the pilots are being carried out in both urban and rural areas in close cooperation with the Kutlwanong Centre for Maths, Science and Technology: in the Eastern Cape at King Williams Town and Tsolo Village; in Limpopo at Sekhukhune District, focusing on Motetema and Ragwadi.

The four main aims and objectives of the project are:

- To improve the core maths and science symbols of learners on the programme to a minimum D symbol to facilitate their entrance into tertiary education;
- To increase the number of successful black applicants to the commerce, science and engineering-related fields;
- To build capacity among maths and science educators in historically advantaged schools;
- To bridge the critical skills shortage in South Africa by increasing the size of the talent pool from which employers can draw graduates who are qualified in the maths, science and technology fields.

Two-prong approach

The two-pronged project addresses the poor quality of maths and science teaching - seen as one of the major obstacles to South Africa not producing enough school leavers with strong maths and science passes in matric - and also assists selected learners to achieve their potential.

"Education is one our major CSI focus areas and we see this intervention in the maths and science arena as vitally important for the development of our country," said Kone Gugushe, Head of Nedbank Foundation.

The teacher-focused element of the programme, expected to target around 40 teachers, combines a one-year Unisa programme with a classroom based support model. The Unisa course is aligned to the content of maths and science syllabuses adopted by the Department of Education. Classroom based support includes intensive planning and reflection sessions which enable teachers to carry out their responsibilities more transparently and effectively.

The learner-focused element of the programme involves school selecting learners to participate in the programme. It is expected that up to 600 learners will take part in the initiative during 2011 across the chosen areas in the two provinces.

While learners do not need to be top performers in maths and science, they need to demonstrate the potential, ability and attitude needed to benefit from the programme.

Under the programme, learners receive extra lessons using Pro Maths and Science, a concept currently adopted by Kutlwanong Centre for Maths, Science and Technology. Kutlwanong's well-versed facilitators conduct the learner extra lessons and provide support for the teachers.