

Gibela Rail invests in education and job creation

Train manufacturer Gibela Rail has picked up the baton to pioneer programmes that help learners close the skills gap and match the skills of the future labour force to the needs of the South African economy.



Dr Buyiswa Mncono-Liwani, corporate services and traction motors operation executive at Gibela. Image supplied

The need to invest in teaching Maths and Science at schools to prepare learners for future jobs in a changing world is well documented. South Africa is facing a serious skills shortage in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) skills.

The results of the 2019 Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), which assessed mathematics and science knowledge of Grade 5 and Grade 9 learners, showed that South Africa's performance in both subjects was among the lowest of the 64 countries surveyed.

Outlining its findings from the study, the Department of Basic Education stated that just over a third of South African learners demonstrated that they had acquired basic mathematical knowledge and 28% had acquired basic science knowledge. This meant that 63% of learners had not acquired basic mathematical knowledge and 72% had not acquired basic science knowledge.

Nobody should be left behind

"The Department of Basic Education stated it aptly in its Annual Performance Plan: 'We need to ensure that South African children do not get left behind with regards to acquiring basic skills that are required in the digital age'," says Dr Buyiswa Mncono-Liwani, corporate services and traction motors operation executive at Gibela.

Gibela's solution is to create a pipeline of opportunities, from grassroots level all the way up to employment level for South Africans, she adds.



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"We designed a programme for Grade 10, 11 and 12 learners to improve their marks at school level. We then created a bursary programme to help fund students to further their education at TVET colleges and universities. Thereafter, learners have an opportunity to become part of Gibela under our apprenticeship programme and, in time, full-time employees, depending on their diligence and performance as interns," she says.

"Our STEM programme nurtures a passion for and awareness around careers in science, technology, engineering and maths. We help learners to develop and grow their maths and science skills. This is greatly needed in our nation.

"As Gibela, we have taken up the responsibility to ensure that learners in Ekurhuleni and Tshwane are given a chance to improve their marks through the Math Centre. The main goal of the programme is to make sure that young people develop the competencies required for NQF levels so that they can get good enough grades to enable further studies at university level, TVET colleges and artisan academies," adds Dr Mncono-Liwani.

"We also want to increase the number of students who are interested in taking up and passing courses, and to improve industry confidence in TVET college graduates. This will be possible through driving better results in STEM subjects," she says.



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Gibela currently spends R6m a year equipping learners and educators through the maths and science programme.

Bursary programmes

It doesn't end there. The company has funded more than 1,200 learners through its bursary programme, which has already paid R100m towards funding TVET Colleges and University students.

"We established a bursary programme that helps address the skills gap in South Africa. It is about empowering students to pursue career paths that would otherwise be out of their reach. The programme is scheduled to run for 10 years and, during this time, we plan to award a total of 2 800 bursaries. The process is managed externally, and students are selected based on interviews, academics performance."



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Bursary recipient Boitumelo Ndlovu is one of hundreds of students who have benefited from a Gibela bursary.

She says she always had a passion for electrical engineering but did not have the funds to study. She applied to the Tshwane North TVET College and was accepted.

“I found out about the Gibela bursary from a friend who was a Gibela recipient the year before, and he advised me to apply ... I applied and was given the bursary. I’m happy to say that I completed my N6 in Electrical Engineering. Because of Gibela, I managed to excel in my studies and obtain my qualification.”

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