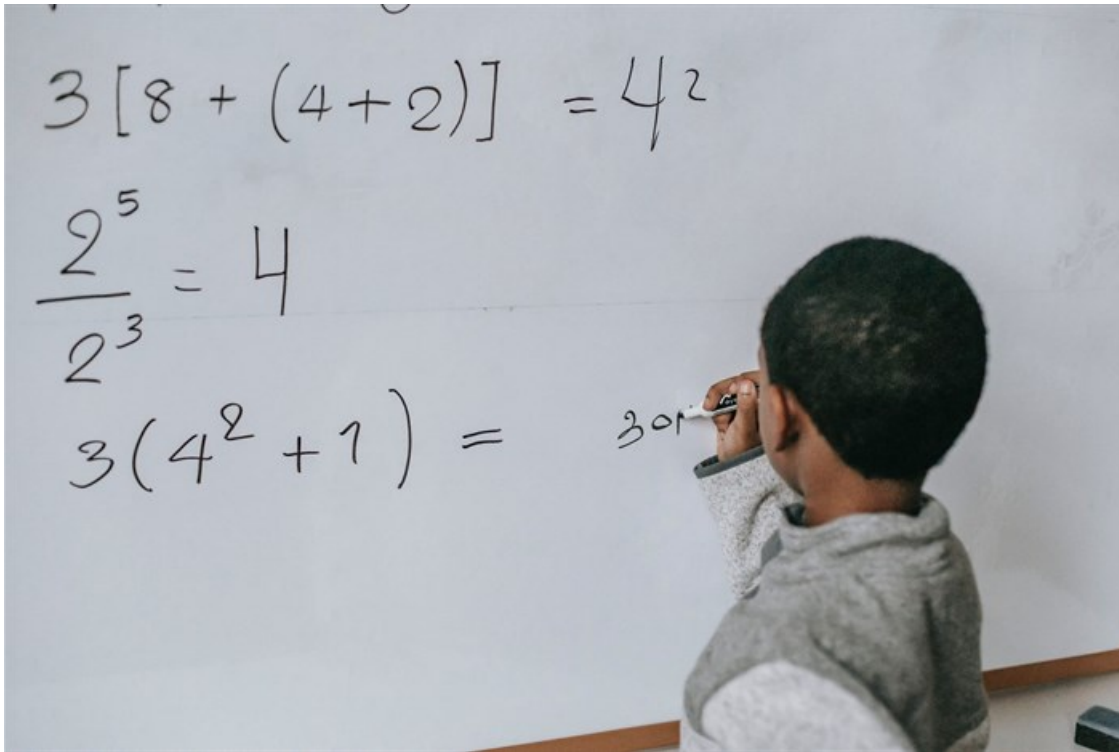


# Securing tomorrow's success: The investment in education

By [Lizelle Strydom](#)

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There's a widely quoted statistic that many are familiar with - that Africa has the [youngest population in the world](#), with 70% of sub-Saharan Africa under the age of 30.



Source: [Pexels](#)

The United Nations rightly comments that such a high number of young people is an opportunity for the continent's growth – but only if these new generations are fully empowered to realise their best potential.

However, across the continent, there are many young people who fall into the category of Neets – not in education, employment or training – and yet they are desperate to improve their lives and the lives of their families by finding ongoing employment opportunities.

So often, their circumstances are not of their own making. The high rate of youth unemployment often stems from limited access to education. Many young people are forced to abandon their education due to factors such as financial constraints, lack of education infrastructure, and insufficient resources.

This is a persistent problem – in its [Quarterly Labour Force Survey](#) (QLFS), Statistics SA data shows that over the last decade, Neet young people between the ages of 15 – 24 consistently exceeded 30%, representing a staggering number of more than three million young people. At the start of 2023, approximately 3,7 million (36,1%) out of 10,2 million young people aged 15-24 years were Neet.

The QLFS data reveals that the youth unemployment rate stands at 62.1% for those aged 15 – 24, and 40,7% for those 25-34 years. An ailing economy only compounds the factors making it harder for our youth to find employment, and those with a weak educational background face even bigger barriers to entry to meaningful employment.

Worryingly, girls are far more likely to discontinue their education, often due to reasons like early marriage, adolescent pregnancy, the expectation that girl children will shoulder the burden of domestic responsibilities, and cultural reluctance to invest in education for girls.

Of further concern are statistics showing that globally, and in South Africa, the [discrimination of women](#) in the labour market persists, with the unemployment rate for women remaining above the national average in 2022.

It is harder for women to find work compared to men. Women that find employment are often employed in low-paying jobs, where improvement prospects are limited.

## How can the BPO sector contribute towards creating opportunities for our youth?

One of the great advantages of the business process outsourcing industry is that this is a sector where individuals with varied educational backgrounds and qualifications all have an opportunity to enter the workforce. Youth with minimal to no experience or tertiary training can succeed and thrive in an industry where the right attitude, good communication skills and an aptitude for working with people are highly valued.

The industry also lends itself to supporting gender equity.

Ensuring equality in opportunities and potential to participate in the economy can be a strong driver of growth for more resilient, sustainable, and inclusive economies. Industry body BPESA notes that female contact centre agents and knowledge workers make up [about two thirds](#) of the South African global business services sector.



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This is particularly noteworthy when you consider that the International Labour Organisation (ILO) reports that the gender gap in South Africa between male and female labour force participation is 13.7%.

## We must help develop digital skills at an early age

Demand-led training and fast-tracked employment opportunities are an important step towards achieving sustainable economic growth. Introducing opportunities within the school environment to acquire digital skills is crucial to building the skills that young people can use to access the digital economy.

The harsh reality is that in many instances, governments face many competing needs for resources and providing the tools school children need to develop digital skills are not necessarily at the top of the list of priorities.

Looking at the challenges that face public education institutions in South Africa, it can feel overwhelming. How can one company hope to make a difference? Well, every great journey starts with a single step. Every great journey starts with a single step – and perhaps that one single step is donating a computer lab to a local school.

By harnessing their corporate social investment programmes to contribute technology devices and facilities within their sphere of influence, companies can change the trajectory for their local youth. Companies have a responsibility to give back to the communities that support us, and supporting education in our communities shows our commitment to working with local youth to ensure that they join the digital economy.

African companies must bear the responsibility of contributing positively to our youth to provide them with avenues to sustainable employment and careers. By working to establish long-term career paths, we can positively impact our youth while contributing to the growth of the digital economy across Africa.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lizelle Strydom is the managing director of CareerBox Africa, an impact sourcing organisation which identifies and recruits talented, underprivileged youth and women, equipping them with high-demand digital skills before placing them with corporate partners. Connect with Lizelle on LinkedIn or visit [<https://www.careerbox.co.za/>].

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